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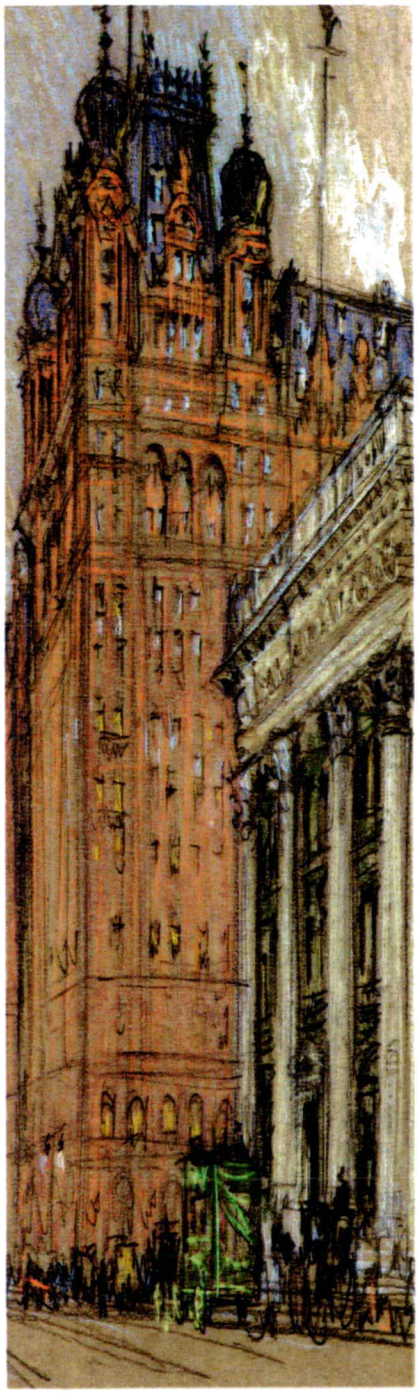

ÁGNES ZSÓFIA KOVÁCS

LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

READING AMERICAN NOVELS

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ESSAYS

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PREFACE

Not so many Fourths of July ago, a television reporter asked an unidentified elderly celebrant of two hundred thirty-odd years of American independence why she loved the Statue of Liberty, which at that moment was serving as majestic backdrop for the "woman-on-the-street" interview. Thus prompted and environed, the dear woman managed to get off this peculiarly liberating salvo: she loved the Statue of Liberty because it looked so much like Elvis Presley. How's that for a cognitive broadside, for a verbal volley improbably apt by reason of its very improbability to herald the grand pyrotechnical display that would light up New York harbor and the Manhattan skyline later that evening?

Only after our surprise begins to wear off slightly do we sense how difficult it is to characterize remarks and speakers like these. It is hard, for example, to imagine that the speaker intended to make a satirical point about the interchangeability of our national icons, even though her remark succeeds in doing just this. Thus, paradoxically, while the apparent absence of subversive intent enhances the remark's fresh and sudden quality, it would seem to point to the speaker's ignorance or inanity. And yet, who would level the charge of cultural illiteracy at someone who had just brought Lady Liberty and the King of Rock and Roll together in the same sentence? Similarly, granted that the proposed likeness most resembles a study in unlikeness, who would base his estimate of the proposer's mental capacity on the capacity of one face to resemble another?

In addition to the remark's initial resistance to analysis, what matters for our purposes as scholars and students of American cultural studies either in the US or abroad—though I may as well reveal here that our Central European colleagues are the fortunate few to whom the astute essays gathered in this volume are chiefly addressed—is how typical it is of similarly peculiar and liberating remarks made all the time in America. So regularly do we hear this sort of thing from so-called average folk that even the dimmest armchair critics of American culture must on occasion rouse themselves, take the hint, and ask themselves if average folk capable of such disarming remarks are really as average as the lackluster images and words that reliably flat-minded media-savants submit each news-cycle to a candid world.

But back to the stalled effort to say something critically useful about the "Elvis of Liberty" remark (as well as, it would now seem, an embarrassment of similarly rich re-

marks) as a way of saying something methodologically useful about the New American Studies. Fearful of making the "Count Dracula"-like generalization that will empty its subject-statements of their dynamism, I am tempted to work up a "test" for identifying all such verbal performances by adapting what a US Supreme Court Justice once said when he found he could not come up with a legal definition of pornography: "I know it when I see it." So much for any claim to disinterestedness. Still, we might avoid both the lethal generalization and the lethally subjective test by turning back to the difficult question of what motives drive successful utterances of the sort we are considering and the speakers who utter them. Notwithstanding more local and idiosyncratic motives—e.g., from childhood this Memphis-born citizen was flooded with "sacred" images of Mr. Presley so that all American celebrities whether living or dead or bronze now appear to her under the aspect of Elvis; the old lady so resented the patronizing newswoman and her condescendingly trite question that she framed an answer to curl her toes if not her clichés—we might acknowledge a strong penchant in Americans for the unpredictable and diverting statement one that barely hides a powerful imperative never to sound boring even at the risk of sounding ignorant or just plain dumb. Note that such a formulation harbors no claims about whether speakers are ignorant or just plain dumb, though it might be wise for the less charitable among you to consult my proviso a few paragraphs back on the hazards of rushing to judgment in such cases.

The late "high-brow" novelist Saul Bellow, who peopled his fictions with angst-ridden intellectuals only to beset them with wise-cracking tough guys armed with low talk and lower manners, might have been reflecting on the typical and typically American verbal motive just proposed when he said in a 1975 interview that most people "feel there's something wrong, unappetizing, unappealing in the ordinary, that they have to do something supererogatory, make themselves appeal; that the world is very boring; that they themselves are very boring and that they must discover some way not to be." Even in the act of speaking, Bellow the writer is clearly an adept of the mixed style. He lays out his sense of conflicting moral and aesthetic demands and competing calls for the nimble modulation of high and low matters with their accompanying high and low inflections. At the same time, he shows us how a writer might satisfy these demands and claims by learning how to juggle successfully his own serious and performative stances and the inflections that attend them. It is not clear whether Bellow actually satisfies the demands and claims he not only sets forth but also sets out to satisfy. It is clear that he enjoys the verbal performance through which he is able to suggest the possibility of such satisfaction, that he finds fun in its making.

If you don't believe me, consider how Bellow has discovered a way not to be boring with just a few playfully shrewd word substitutions and choices. Regard how quickly Bellow hops down from off the pedestal of the high moral and highly censoring term "wrong" in order to find himself and his way among morally neutral terms of gustatory

displeasure ("unappetizing, unappealing") that we might expect to overhear in a delicatessen or catering hall. Though he manages to sneak in a moralizing tone ("they have to") in his second clause—this time accompanied by no less than the suggestion in "supererogatory" that we go beyond the call of duty—he soon draws us back toward matters of non-moral displeasure and botched performance.

In the two preceding paragraphs, I gladly risked being called quaint for venturing to close read Bellow's remark as I tried to elucidate its usefulness for the discussion of one variety of the American style and, more generally, the place of style in American cultural studies. It was a risk worth taking if my reading suggests even the smallest fraction of the pleasure that attends a careful consideration of Bellow's verbal choices as well as the pleasure Bellow so obviously takes in his verbal choices. For if I've succeeded in this, it will require no imaginative leap to see why the writing of even such latter-day classical American authors as Bellow and Gaddis and Welty fairly compels us to ask questions about voice and tone and diction, to pore over turnings and shadings of phrase, to register and gauge in encountering a metaphor the resonant sustain of its tenors, the elegant energy of its vehicle. And then perhaps I may without reluctance suggest that even though this sort of stylistic analysis no longer occupies its former pride of place in recent studies of American literary culture, that scholars and critics under the new dispensation in American Studies would do well to develop as powerful a tool set for engaging the feats of language we encounter in the writing of far less formalist, sometimes postmodernist, but primarily multicultural or, if you like, postcolonial authors.

They could, as many already have, begin by granting the obvious: that the linguistic feats of this second group of authors—by "second," I mean only that one group appears after another in my discussion and in real time—generally display different features than those displayed by analogous feats in language typical of the first group comprised of Bellow and other modernists. They might then acknowledge, as some already have, that there is good reason why the second group's literary work in English as it is spoken and written in the United States will not betray the first group's ambition toward mastery of a language that does not represent what most "second-group" members consider their primary linguistic inheritance even or especially when many of these were forced by circumstances to make some version of Standard American English their primary mode of written if not oral expression. This phenomenon, incidentally, receives exemplary treatment by Dr. Kovács in her reflections on the linguistic crisis that animates Christina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban.*

Half a century ago, it was a rite of passage and a sign of successful cultural assimilation for some young urban writers such as Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Cynthia Ozick to achieve a prose style that positively shimmered with Jamesian elegance, subtle turns of mind, shifting shades of feeling, and, most importantly, the Master's cool and "WASPish" detachment. This is hardly surprising, of course, given

that the young urban writers named above were, after all, Jews. In the excessively polite discourse of cultural anti-Semitism in mid-twentieth century America, even well educated and urbane Jews were if not "racially" then at least "ethnically" disposed to restlessness inconsistent with the habits of mental repose, to vulgar sentimentality out of keeping with the calm enunciation of high sentiment and feeling. (Bellow's short story, "The Old System," is a valuable cultural document for the study of such biases among Jews.) It is not hard to imagine what the classical American prose styles of Henry James represented to many Jewish writers who began plying their craft shortly before or after 1950.

It is much harder to imagine how the lessons of the Master could play out in the fictions of contemporary Latina novelists such as Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez and Christina Garcia. No doubt, some modern-day version of the same "exotic" energies that James attributed to New York City masses, energies that terrified him and, in part, caused him to conclude that he was no longer up to the task of representing life in America—Dr. Kovács freshly takes up this familiar Jamesian episode—no doubt, some late transformation of some of these same energies invest contemporary Latina fictions with their tremendous vitality, with their tempos reflecting the accelerated pulses of lives lived passionately. Set down in these worlds of pure feeling, most of James's heroes and heroines, like James himself, would almost surely expire. The typical Jamesian dialects of reserve and repression would dissolve into silence once sifted by a survival-directed language whose speech acts serve as nearly physical gestures of "self-creation" in contrast to the imaginative feats of "self-expression" that fill James's fiction.

In several of the following essays, you will read about this crucial distinction between the self-creative and self-expressive uses of language in American writing. Here, I would only suggest that many of the general and local features of whatever conception of style emerges from the "self-creative" perspective are likely to remain indiscernible until authors writing from this perspective are submitted to analyses by linguistic tools analogous to those once developed and calibrated to register the soundness of thousands of small but painstaking linguistic choices, to measure the narrative pressures being brought to bear upon an authorial detachment born of the syntax of moral and emotional restraint. The development and calibration of a new and much needed set of tools, to be sure, will follow different paths and proceed on different assumptions both about what linguistic features of a text call upon us for sensitive measurement and about what it means to be a sensitive measure. Likewise, these tools will necessarily register different narrative pressures particularly since the aesthetic (though not purely so) value of authorial detachment has been largely displaced by the ideological (though not impurely so) value of critical engagement.

A few pages back, I quoted Saul Bellow for his insights into the possible motives underlying even the most casual public expressions in and about American life. It turned

out that the weirdly charming perspective on two American icons and the master stylist's reflections on the expressive impulse in human beings directed against the ordinary are both rooted in a desire to hold the interest of others, or, framed negatively, in a desire not to drive others to distraction through boredom. Both statements, it now seems, arose out of a typically American co-desire for both serious play and plain fun in creative as well as critical endeavors. To round things out and to show that such fun can even be experienced by an Englishman sufficiently immersed in American culture, I offer a third remark, this one by the late British scholar Tony Tanner who clearly had great fun lecturing on some of the same non-fiction materials by Henry James addressed here by Dr. Kovács. Tanner prides himself in having offered his audience "a James whose travel writing deliberately disdains information, ...whose literary criticism eschews consistent method or theory, [and who autobiographical work defies] chronology or conventional sequence." So playfully assertive and assertively playful a declaration could only emerge from the serious conviction to which Richard Poirier once gave voice: "that the style of a literary work can create a sustained interest primarily in itself."

Under the old dispensation in American literary studies, the "aboutness" of a work, as in "what's this about?", was rarely at issue at long as we could count on an author's style to do all it could to distract us, in ways we didn't merely not mind but rather enjoyed, from what was happening or what great notions were being laid out. Think of Melville's *Moby Dick*. Think of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom.* Think of Gertrude Stein's... well, I defy you to think of anything by Gertrude Stein and tell me what it is about without mentioning its style. Thus Tanner can suggest that when we read travelogue or criticism or autobiography by Henry James, it is safe to assume that James's style will do the lion's share of the work needed to sustain reader interest. It will be interesting to see if this formulation holds up under the new imaginative light Dr. Kovács shines on James's travel writing in her chapter devoted to the subject.

Did the old American literary studies ask too much of style and the forms of analysis associated with it? Perhaps, but only in the sense upon which practitioners of the New American Studies have rightly seized. It was never so much a question of what stylistic analysis could not do with canonical and non-canonical literary texts as a question of what a previous generation of critics seemed reluctant to let it do with non-canonical literary texts and other texts whose status as literature it deemed questionable. Tony Morrison's reflections on the state of American literary history two decades ago were highly influential in this regard. Even at the time, however, some of us felt, though we could not always articulate why, that many of Morrison's readers had taken the wrong message, or, to be generous, only half of the right message away from her critique. I would assert that the total force of her argument has finally been rendered accurately and persuasively through Dr. Kovács's demonstration of the deeply belletristic, almost Jamesian assumptions that inform Morrison's critical practice. She demonstrates that

while the most important African-American novelist was shrewdly critical of traditional American literary studies, Morrison was not willing to dispense with the aesthetic notions associated with them. Her unwillingness might serve as the core of a precautionary narrative for academics convinced that for sustaining interest the values and habits associated with literary style and the practical criticism grounded in these have been displaced if not discredited.

Of course, the new paradigms in American Studies in no way restrict us to working with words that make up the surfaces of texts. Presumably, one could approach vexing critical problems with a conception or set of conceptual practices that treat little of language or diction or syntax or matters of voice or tone, that is, questions about who is speaking and what attitudes the speaker holds toward what she is saying. Presumably, one could meet the challenge with a critical practice that takes up neither the stylistic features of traditional literary texts and the questions we associate with more belletristic forms of analysis on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, the feats of language characteristic of texts not traditionally classified as literature and questions we associate with multicultural forms of discursive analysis. As an example of the latter, we may cite those critical practices that successfully locate repressive ideological structures or energies in cultural texts ostensibly aimed at autonomy. Just remember that the cost of failing to develop an adequate approach toward oral and written cultural documents not based on some conception of manner in speaking or writing will be no worse than the failure to sustain your colleagues' and students' interest, that is, no worse than the production of boring, even very boring readings. There are worse things of course.

I am pleased to announce that Dr. Kovács's are not merely *not boring* but rather interesting interventions in the discourse concerning the future of American Studies. Somewhere, she suggests modestly that this collection might serve as an introduction to and overview of a few of the main currents in the field. Yet these essays will also be of great service to specialists who would learn how to frame pertinent discussions of how conceptions of what professors and graduate students of literature used to mean by 'style' have changed and been expanded, and will continue to change and expand within the disciplines and methodologies that make up the New American Studies.

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This book began as a project on nonfiction by Henry James. The chapters bear many marks of essays published on this project in diverse collections and journals. The essays themselves have all been substantially revised, some of them rewritten, and large sections have been added. For permission to use the original materials I would like to thank the following (in order of publication):

1. "Toni Morrison in Context" *Eger Journal of American Studies* 9(2008): 61–74.
2. "Jennie Kassanoff, *The Politics of Race in Edith Wharton.* (Camb.: CUP, 2004)" HJEAS 14(2008): 1, 193–195.
3. "Henry James's Project of the New American Novel" *Reading America: New Perspectives on the American Novel.* Boyle, Elizabeth and Anne-Marie Evans, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008. 6–22.
4. "Bevezető helyett Sandra Cisnerosról" *Híd* 71(2007):1, 62–69.
5. "Recanonizing Henry James: Colm Tóibín's *The Master*" *AMERICANA* 2(2007): 2. Proceedings of the 2004 HAAS Conference. Federmayer Éva, ed.
6. "Henry James's Experience of New York City in *The American Scene*" *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies.* Pécs: University Press Pécs, 2006. 114–125.
7. "Szempontok a kortárs amerikai irodalom olvasásához" *Híd* 70(2006): 6–7, 82–95.

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IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

This book is comprised of a collection of articles I wrote on diverse American Studies subjects between 2004 and 2009. The reason I have collected them is simple: in general, my objective was to compile a case-book for students in American Studies BA and MA programs on the making of a contemporary AS research project. In particular, these articles pave the way between my PhD research on the imagination in Henry James and my current post-PhD project on nonfiction by Henry James and Edith Wharton. Naturally, the essays also represent landmarks of changes of my interest and testify to a shift in theoretical point of view as well. This may even be an advantage if you consider that in these pieces I have to explain the reasons for changing a textually oriented strategy of reading into a contextually oriented one. A student may benefit form the stories of the personal "revelations" in that the shift is gradual and, hopefully, clearly articulated.

In *The Function of the Imagination in the Writings of Henry James* I analyzed a characteristically Henry Jamesian model of experience and understanding in various works by James expanding through his literary career. I explored works from three different genres: literary criticism, novels, and four articles on culture. My research investigated how the Jamesian model of understanding changed from early articles on criticism through the major novels to late articles on culture. I claimed that an early static model of experience in the critical writings is altered in the practice of the novels into a dynamic, interpersonal model of understanding and experience, which in turn is missed by James, quite critically, from American society as such. I could only study this third genre, the nonfiction pieces analyzing cultural issues, in four texts selected arbitrarily. My doctoral research has strengthened my presupposition that these writings are much more significant in James's work than they have been considered to be by James criticism, because the philosophical and culturally critical dimensions of James's work can be explicated from them. These dimensions appear implicitly in the novels as well, but they become explicit in the nonfiction texts only. During my doctoral research I could not investigate these aspects of James's nonfiction further, although the analysis of the four articles from the perspective of the model of understanding has posed the problem and would have necessitated such an inquiry. Because of this gap, I wish to investigate the philosophical and cultural aspects of James's work in a new project. This research focuses primarily on non-fiction texts, and this shift of perspective also makes it necessary to expand the scope of the investigation to nonfiction texts by Edith Wharton.

Having explicated the Jamesian model of experience, I could conceptualize the problem James faces in his philosophical writings and in his cultural criticism. In the major novels an interpersonal model of understanding is in process whereby experience and knowledge comes into being as a communal construct. Because this experience is communal, it also involves the need to make moral decisions. In other words, James considers one's knowledge about something to be one's chosen interpretation about something. As opposed to this, in his account and articles of his travels in the US in 1905, he encounters situations that manifest the complete lack of interpersonal experience and moral decisions. James not simply rejects these phenomena but because of the openness of his model of understanding he meditates on them with both interest and contempt. Analyzed from the perspective of the model of understanding, James's literary criticism and cultural criticism become commensurable to his novels and the well-known Jamesian themes can be recognized as having social relevance.

My recent research titled "Nonfiction by James and Wharton" focuses on James's articles on culture, travel writings, autobiographies, and Prefaces, i. e. products of his so called fourth phase. The term 'non-fiction' in the title of the project does not indicate an opposition between these and "fictive" texts. Rather, the term is used to indicate the genres listed above which are traditionally considered non-fictive. It is important to note that in the past few years these texts have been in the center of James reception. Until the 1990s, this phase had been considered insignificant, while today it provides researchers with proofs for James's intense interest in matters social and cultural. The figure of James as the master of Formalist criticism is being changed into the figure of James as an agent of cultural criticism.

I have expanded my new research to analyze not only Jamesian texts but also those aspects of Edith Wharton's nonfiction that concern the theory and criticism of culture. This expansion is necessary because the two authors share similar interests both in their literary criticism and in their major themes. These similarities also indicate the possible relevance of the Jamesian perspective in Wharton's texts. It is well-known that both authors wrote widely about the international theme, i. e. Americans in Europe, and had a preference for the novel of manners. In her work on literary theory, Wharton uses terms from James's critical vocabulary. Like James, Wharton published travel writings and an autobiography. Yet, her work on interior decoration, architecture, and gardens manifests a specific interest. In these texts Wharton takes upon the role of the cultural mediator: based on French and Italian examples, she tries to improve American tastes directly. Although James's and Wharton's non-literary texts evidence many similarities, they have not been subject to contrastive analysis. As far as I can see, although Wharton's nonfiction has an import comparable to that of James, Wharton criticism has not yet undergone the cultural turn clearly visible in the reception of James although the similarities of the two authors would indeed legitimate such a project. From the per-

spective of the Jamesian model of understanding, the question in Wharton's nonfiction is how she handles the lack of communal experience, and with what premises she considers cultural mediation viable twenty years after James.

In my work I apply the methodology of cultural criticism. According to this approach (cultural) texts are to be studied in their specific cultural contexts, in other words within the conceptual categories of their contemporary cultural contexts. In my research I interpret James's and Wharton's nonfiction as discursive contexts for their own work. The contemporary reception of these nonfiction texts will in turn indicate how cultural criticism and cultural mediation was interpreted by a contemporary audience. In contrast to the canonized image of James and Wharton as formal experimentators, in this context James and Wharton appear as devoted representatives, mediators, and transformers of American culture. At the same time, this approach can also be put into a historical framework. The central question of Howell's American Realism James is a wayward disciple of was what role the novel could play as an agent of social change in contemporary US. My working hypothesis is that in James's and Wharton's nonfiction the problem of the social mission of the novel comes up in a transformed manner in the form of cultural analysis.

The project has Hungarian connections, too. I think the main task is to modify Hungarian receptions of James and Wharton in the form articles published in Hungary. Work on James in Hungary concentrates mainly on his first three phases, only touch upon his last one and interpret it from a perspective before the cultural turn. In the case of Wharton, the research is to fill a gap, as Wharton's Hungarian reception handles her as a novelist only. Also, my project has repercussions for the teaching of literary history and theory. The integration of James and Wharton into the new canon can be the subject of courses on literary history, while the story of the changes of their critical fortunes can be used as a case-study in courses on literary theory.

The articles in this collection represent the first steps of my project in nonfiction. The first part surveys theoretical issues involved in studying 'nonfiction,' concepts like the cultural turn, the canon, genre and race, in order to draw the conceptual map of the readings to follow. Chapter one surveys three diverse canons of American literature: of New Criticism, Deconstruction, and Cultural Studies. Focusing on the changing concept of literariness these three orientations rely on, the essay aims at explaining the reasons for the contemporary turn towards issues of culture in the humanities and the social sciences, and then goes on to survey the results of this turn for the study of American fiction. The second essay investigates Toni Morrison's literary theory on the discourse of race in American literature as one voice in the articulation of a multicultural canon of American literature in the 1990s. Starting out from Morrison's book *Playing in the Dark*, the article analyzes the latent connections between this map of American literature and that of New Critics, and points out possible uses of Morrison's model on

the reading of race in American fiction. The third essay leads to an area normally left undiscovered by scholars of literature but one that appears fertile ground for scholars of culture: travel writing as a space between fact and fiction. Travel writing exposes cultural fault lines, anxieties and desires that play important roles in the construction of national identity. The question of how to study travel writing as a discursive formation that helps construct the author's and the readers' cultural identities is explored through examples.

In the second part, analytical essays of fiction and nonfiction by James and Wharton represent a shift of focus in terms of selection, in that my readings include not only "high literature" but "other" discursive formations as well. Chapter four deals with James' imaginative project of the new American novel and sketches James' critical and practical reflections on his literary forerunners and contemporaries. A post-Romantic, semi-Realist and proto-Modernist project of the novel emerges from the shrouds of James's elaborate prose that specifies the terms for the analysis of his nonfiction. Chapter five presents a glimpse at James's hottest text to date, *The American Scene*, a piece of travel writing about his experience of America and of being an American he relates from the perspective of the novelist-traveler. He is struggling to understand how phenomena of industrialization and modernization affect American culture, speech, behavior, and women. Chapter six and seven explore Wharton's model of culture in general and her views of American culture in particular in her travel writing on Italy and France in the first two decades of the 20th century. Wharton's travel writing and work on interior decoration and gardening evidence a conscious reflection of general issues like culture, cultural relativity, gender roles, and race in the making of a national culture.

The third part, metaphorically speaking, can be seen as the background of the previous readings in that the texts arranged here had a formative part in the way my current project evolved. Chronologically speaking, they came into being earlier than the other essays, yet logically they belong to the "contemporary examples" case-study section at the end of the book. Chapter eight compares Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004), a fictional rendering of Henry James' midlife crisis, to Leon Edel's *The Master* (1972), a biographical account of James' life in his major phase. There is a marked difference in the treatment of issues of gender in the two biographical pieces the chapter investigates. Chapter nine introduces ethnic author Sandra Cisneros to an uninitiated audience and explores questions of femininity and ethnic identity in her major works to date. Chapter ten reviews Kassanoff's *The Politics of Race* in Edith Wharton (2004) as a race oriented rereading of Wharton's work.

Undeniably, first steps and teething problems remain tightly connected, yet I hope this cluster of short texts, with their wandering viewpoint, reflect both an interest in changing concepts of American literature in the twentieth century and the process through which the terms and the narrative of a research project are constructed.

PART 1

CHANGING STRATEGIES OF READING: THE OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF NEW AMERICAN STUDIES

CHAPTER 1

CHANGING DISCOURSES OF AMERICAN STUDIES AND THE CULTURAL TURN

In 2003 Jon Roberts, my American friend teaching in Hungary told me he had never taught Toni Morrison at home: he had simply never had the chance to teach a course on contemporary American literature. The African-American author's literary fortune rose rapidly in the 1980s, at the time Jon was attending graduate school. The sudden success seemed suspect, it was difficult to decide to what extent Morrison's being African-American and a woman contributed to her quick professional career.[1] As Jon today comments: "I could not see the beauty of Morrison's prose through the fog of an American critical establishment that buried every work by an African-American woman in praise to which not even Shakespeare could live up." In the meantime, Morrison received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. After a dozen years or so, when, as a guest professor in Hungary, Jon had a chance to teach Morrison's work to students, he had to realize that Morrison's prose fitted his notion of literariness quite well, despite the fact that Morrison was a celebrated, an African-American, and also a woman.

The story offers the possibility of creating a meeting point between a traditional sense of literariness and the multicultural turn in contemporary American (US) literature. A major revolution has taken place in contemporary American literature as literary scholars have begun to focus on minority literatures. One could even say that so far marginal literatures and authors are now moving toward a disappearing center. Naturally, it is also possible to use a different conceptual map to describe a currently happening and therefore hardly narratable flow of events. As one example, New Regionalism conceptualizes the turn as related to the socio-cultural spaces that play a role in the creation of given literary texts, and brings together clusters of authors belonging

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[1] Danilo Kiš has commented on his Jewish origin in several interviews. He confesses he did not use to talk about this topic. In this respect, Kiš points out the very same problem our American professor has: "Yet I approached this topic with extreme care, because I dread books on minorities as they often entail the success of sects, the minority alibi that assigns to these books a quality of not being literary, and the audience receives them accordingly. By the way, with us, in the Jugoslavian, Croatian and Serbian literature the literary fame of some authors is based on exactly this kind of success; with these authors, the epithet is more important than the noun: they are, above all, *Serbian* and *Croatian* authors (by program), and are *authors* only after this. But this phenomenon characterizes other literatures, too." (Kiš 55) Trans. into English by Ágnes Zsófia Kovács.

to regions like the East Coast, the Mid-West, the South-West, etc. (Crow) At the same time one needs to be aware of the fact that the above shift in the location of literary interest has not deleted traditional conceptual tools of reading American literature: one still talks about diverse styles, dominant "American" genres one can rely on when reading contemporary multicultural literatures. In the present chapter, however, the change of interest remains the central topic as I am going to survey the effect of multiculturalism on contemporary American (US) literary canonization processes.

In what follows I wish to provide an introduction to how literatures related to specific racial, ethnic, class, or gender identities have become popular in (American) literary studies. The specific story I tell is that of American prose fiction because it provides one with a spectacular example of popularization. I am going to compare the multicultural interest to previous theoretical interests in modern and postmodern American fiction from three aspects: firstly, I look into its sense of literariness, then survey its canonized works, and finally show its strategies of reading. Therefore, let us investigate the history of the concept first, then survey areas of the newly emerging canon. Finally, I glimpse at the potential of multicultural literatures by analyzing one specific text.

I. Literariness and the canon

The change of the concept of literariness can be explained convincingly through the changing theoretical frames and strategies of reading applied at English departments of US universities.[2] The reasons for this change become clear after a brief survey of the history of the 'Department of English' in the US.

At a US university today the department of English, if it exists, is a strange mixture: it is a place where one can find very few scholars of literature surrounded by several scholars of diverse disciplines like African-American Studies, Asian-American Studies, Medieval Studies, Post-colonial Studies, Popular Culture, Film Studies, Iconography, Gender Studies, Sociology, Political Science, etc. (Leitch and Lewis 102) Based on the specializations of the faculty, the programs offered are also various: instead of a simple MA in English or American Studies most institutions offer MA programs in African-American studies, Asian-American studies, Gender studies, or Popular culture. Topics from the above areas of interests also dominate postgraduate and postdoctoral projects.

The transformation of the universities reverberates in other areas of the culture industry, too. Most importantly, in publishing one can notice a widening selection of

[2] According to Tamás Bényei, the target audience of contemporary novels has mainly been professors and teachers of literature and university students ever since the 1960s. (Bényei 36).

multicultural texts. The new focus is reflected in anthologized texts and titles of handbooks providing the core reading of university courses. One of the best known examples of the current multicultural anthologies is *The Heath Anthology of American Literature.* Its editor, Paul Lauter has invited more than forty experts to co-edit its volumes. The anthology represents a strong multicultural bias in the positive sense. Another major example from our field is *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch. The several volumes of this handbook have chapters on genres but one can also read about topics like professionalization, the literary marketplace, racial prejudice and so on. Furthermore, the success of Julie Rivkin's and Michael Ryan's *Literary Theory: An Anthology* can be fitted into the story of multiculturalism, too. In the first place, the objective of the volume was to survey classic texts of literary criticism together with the latest directions of study. The second edition of the collection contains new final chapters arranged around topics like Critical Race theory, Transnational studies, Cultural studies, and only a fraction of the articles is concerned with literary analysis in the narrow sense of the term. It is to the backdrop of such a theoretical production that the need to publish texts representing diverse minority literatures arises.

The new topics and objectives that spread from university curricula signal a change in the common sense of literariness. To understand the reasons for the change, let us make a detour and revise the history of the American literary canon that serves as the background of current events. Talking about American literary canons, one usually finds references to the canon of New Criticism followed by that of Deconstruction in American (literary) studies. Taking this simplified scheme as a starting point, one can try to fit the multicultural canon into the pattern.

It has been the most significant achievement of American New Criticism that it created the possibility for an institutionalized study of American literature in the 1940s–50s. Core texts were highlighted, textbooks were written on the methodology of reading, principles of literary theory were formulated. Form oriented rules of "close reading" made it possible to *interpret* texts. (Bercovitch 298) Interpretation entailed a decoding of the encoded American tradition from these highlighted texts. (Bókay 83–4) Remaining with the example of prose (but not forgetting the New Critic's primary interest in poetry), canonic texts included Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Henry James's *The Ambassadors.* From our perspective it is not so much the New Critics' specific strategies of reading but rather their sense of literariness and institutional background that are important. The attempt to decode an American tradition from canonized texts by prioritized authors presupposes a sense of American literature that is unified and exists before the act of interpretation. New Criticism had these principles accepted institutionally, thereby creating not only the concept of a unified American literature but also the space for its study and strategies for its reading.

At universities of the US, strategies of reading characteristic of New Critics have been challenged by so called deconstructive strategies of reading since the seventies. Deconstruction in the US draws on European, predominantly French, precursors, yet it has acquired a methodology of its own. The change involved the sense of literariness, the practices of reading, and ultimately the set of canonized texts as well. The most significant difference between New Criticism and Deconstruction in the US can be found in their respective concepts of language. Derrida's main representative in the US, Paul de Man, repeatedly highlights the linguistic ambiguities of texts, and thereby draws attention to the process and movement of signification: how the linguistic and conceptual creation of meaning always ends in the slippage of meaning. This linguistic movement of any a text is called its rhetoricity (Sándor Kovács 12), a central concept of deconstructive readings. In this sense any linguistic product, including "literary" ones, is studded with ambiguities and thereby becomes subversive. Texts are to be read not so much for their intended meaning but for the linguistic subversion that places that intended meaning under deletion mark, and for learning more about subversion or rhetoricity.—Even a simplifying and brief account like this indicates that from this perspective notions like authorial intention, the meaning of the text, and the unity of the text all prove to be rather problematic.

The challenge to New Critical assumptions ultimately resulted in a questioning of the sense of American literature as created by New Criticism, because Deconstruction foregrounded questions interrogating the basic presupposition of the New Critical enterprise. These questions are concerned with the notions surveyed so far: the sense of literariness, the creation of meaning, and the contents of the canon: Can specific authors be prioritized at the expense of others? Can a specific meaning be recreated or decoded from a given text? Also, can a specifically American tradition be decoded, then? And, last but not least, is it possible to think of American literature as a unified entity? Deconstructive readings produce meticulous and sophisticated analyses of how aporias create linguistic movement, i. e. slippages of meaning interposed onto each other. These analyses are interested in rhetoricity outside the framework of a national tradition, as it would presuppose a false sense of the unity of tradition. Yet there is one important point where Deconstruction follows the lead of its predecessor: on the level of institutions it has proved to be highly successful. As a result, literary theory has become a compulsory subject at American universities, and reflection on methodology and theoretical presuppositions expected in seminar work, too.

The way the American literary canon was created and changed provides an explanation to how the canon of multicultural literatures has come to the fore in the early 1990s. From this perspective, the (multi)cultural turn comes up with new answers to old questions and ultimately with new questions concerning the "literary" text. In this sense

one can also think of it as the third major canon in American literary studies. I am going to foreground two aspects of the changing perspective: firstly, that it happens as part of a paradigm shift in the social sciences and in humanities, and, secondly, that some of its features come from literary studies.

The first consideration means that the change, for once, concerns not only literary but also other social/art studies as it comes together with a growing concern for what we call cultural studies. Another way to put this is to say that according to the tenets of cultural studies, (any) literature becomes interesting as a subject of study only as one of the diverse products of contemporary culture, as one representation of social and cultural phenomena, placed beside and compared to other such phenomena. In the framework of a Department of English or American Studies (and at any research center so far dedicated to the study of some language and literature) this amounts to a basic devaluation of literary study. Literature ceases to be the dominant representation of a given culture and begins to score as one among other representations of the same, a representation to be analysed in comparison with its historical, social, ideological contexts, preferably by a multidisciplinary approach. At the same time, there are two distinct directions usually differentiated within the broad methodology of cultural studies: the culturalist and the structuralist orientations. (Hall 34) Very briefly, this distinction amounts to saying that cultural studies, on the one hand, use methods of anthropology, sociology, social history and conceive of culture as the whole of people's everyday social practices and aims at describing these practices. This is called the culturalist trend. On the other hand, the structuralist trend of cultural studies "thinks of cultural formations as semi-autonomous discourses" (Leitch 106), in other words, as linguistic discourses that can be analyzed by the methods of post-structuralism. A combination of these two trends characterizes the methodological shift in the human and social sciences that has left its mark upon strategies of literary studies. This leads to the notion of literature as a cultural product within the framework of other cultural discourses—this formulation can serve as the first step in trying to comprehend the conceptual change you call the multicultural turn in literary studies.

The second factor, within literary studies, comes from the direction of ethnic studies and post-colonial studies. Within English and American literature, the history of literatures in the English language was created in the nineteen sixties. In Britain, this happened simultaneously with the breaking up of the British Empire and the political and economic exchange of power connected to the process. In the US, this happened as the cultural product of the Civil Rights movement (Rivkin and Ryan 2004, 959). In Britain, literatures in English refers to literatures from the area of the Commonwealth, an interest in the local textual products of the former colonies written in English. In the US, the study of texts by African-American authors was encouraged and the study of Native

American culture became institutionally possible. The focus of interest shifted again, now to the oppressive nature of canonized literature and the subversive, resistant and hybrid qualities of minority literatures, so duality, bilingualism, and multiple identity became key notions (Rivkin and Ryan 1998, 854). The fact that post-colonial and ethnic literatures are directly situated in a given political and social context excludes the possibility of a solely formal analysis. This contextual method of reading in post-colonial and ethnic studies proved adaptable for cultural studies and eventually for the study of multicultural literatures (Żigmanov 73–85).

Narrowing our interest down to the story of the changes within the American literary canon, the above general change of perspective equals to a break with the formalist approach of the former two "stages" that showed no concern with the context of the texts interpreted. At the same time, the talk of American literature returns, but with a fundamental difference: one no longer can talk of American literature in the singular, it exist in the plural only, as American literatures, already presupposing the plurality of the notion. The reason lies in the focus on minority literatures as cultural products within the network of discursive formations practiced in culture. Similarly, the post-structural interest in textual difference, the production of meaning, aporias, the subversive potential of texts remains, thus inheriting the notion of language and discourse introduced by post-structuralism. On an institutional level, this results in the creation of new academic positions (African-American expert, post-colonial expert, gender studies expert) and in the need to reinterpret and reconsider previous readings.

Having sketched the theoretical and historical reasons for the appearance of the so called third canon, the multicultural one, of American studies and also its major presuppositions, let us concentrate on the representatives of this "tradition" and on the features of the trends within it.

II. The canon of multicultural literatures

As multicultural literatures emerged, their traditions have also been created or pointed out. Today one can witness the process of how a so far marginal topic moves into the foreground of academic interest: how its theoretical considerations are formulated, how its 'history' is created, and how its practitioners emerge and define the company they keep. As for multiculturalism in contemporary American literature, recent handbooks describe several trends in it according to the ethnic, racial or gender identity of the authors.

As the objective of this paper is to survey the network of reasons that led to the emergence of the multicultural turn and to consider some case-studies, there is no intention here to lapse into writing literary history. There is no pressing need for this,

either, as one can already find excellent surveys of multiculturalism in contemporary American literature in Hungarian. Firstly, in László Országh's history of American literature, the final chapter written by Zsolt Virágos contains an extensive list of multicultural authors in contemporary American literature (Virágos 282–310). It is worth a glimpse to see how Virágos introduces the multicultural issue in contemporary American prose: "The mainstream of American literature has been filled by energies from the peripheries, that of African-American prose and also of diverse other marginal ethnicities." (292) Virágos describes the work of contemporary authors according to these groups (Native American, Mexican American, Asian American). In addition, he lists the Southern Renaissance, Realism, and Minimalism, too. Secondly, Enikő Bollobás's current *Az amerikai irodalom története* [The History of American Literature] takes notice of the latest developments of contemporary American literature and also gives guidelines to how one can categorize them (695–729). In her discussion of fiction, she identifies six groups: African-American, American Indian, Asian American, Chicano/a, homosexual, against AIDS sections.

So one can locate excellent Hungarian sources that survey contemporary American literature. What remains to be explained is the treatment, the background of the phenomena, why these processes are taking place and what tendencies seem to determine them. To put it bluntly, there is a need for a problem oriented narrative frame that would envelope the list of themes and publications enumerated in a survey of literary trends. Therefore, in what follows, I only wish to show the tendencies of multiculturalist American prose as determined by the intellectual context outlined in the previous section. I am to point out major themes and representative texts of four minority groups: African-American, Native American, Asian American, Spanish or Chicano/a.

From among minority literatures (not counting Jewish American literature that had been discussed beforehand, too), African-American literature was the first to gain official recognition. Courses have been run on the topic since the 1970s. As a direct result of the Civil Rights movement, African-American authors from the past have been discovered for the reading lists. Readings included accounts of ex-slaves (F. Douglass, H. Jacobs), texts from the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s (W. E. B. DuBois, N. Larsen, J. Fusset, R. Ellison), writings by authors from the Civil Rights movement (R. Wright, J. Baldwin, A. Baraka), as well as contemporary work by authors of African-American origin. Of these the most widely known are: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ishmael Reed, Edgar Wideman. Handbooks usually list Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), a pseudo-detective story. Building on a homicide in Harlem as a starting point, Reed constructs a parody of the genre, and links the case to the murder of Osiris and the introduction of monotheism, the Egyptian Aton cult. His detective hero is Papa LaBas, a modern version of the voodoo god, Legba. The text draws heavily on Zora Neale

Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939). Wideman's *Brothers and Keepers* (1984) presents a non-fictive modern family genealogy. The relationship between a successful colored man and his brother serving a life sentence is displayed, indirectly mapping ways of racial discrimination. Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison relates realistic accounts of racial and gender conflicts merged with fantastic and mythic elements. Her most famous work, *The Song of Solomon* (1977), tells of the work of cultural memory: people repressed because of their gender, class or race rewrite the history of their ancestors repressed by whites. The text is saturated with magic, fantastic, and dream elements, and patterns from the African-American oral idiom. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) conqured US top ten books list and is still very popular. The text consists of a series of letters written by Celie, a Southern African-American woman. The letters describe the grievances she had to suffer from men physically and psychologically, and also give account of how her self-consciousness is fashioned through her relations to her women friends. Her internal liberation, if you like, equals to a series of changes in her behavior and actions: by the end of the narrative, she lives alone and has her own work as a seamstress. The discourse of the novel, the African-American oral idiom adds extra expressive quality to the text.

Recurrent themes of African-American literature include cultural and racial duality, the experience of the African-American woman (helplessness, rape, violence, abandonment). A mixture of discourses characterizes these texts: a mingling of several written or oral narratives. It is interesting to note that African-American authors excel at writing even sci-fi and detective stories, just to mention Octavia Butler, Samuel R. Delaney and Walter Mosley. Recurrent themes of African-American criticism include, similarly to feminist research projects, revision, cultural rebirth, racism and cultural answers to racism. You can find important representatives of refreshed African-American cultural productivity in the form of well known colored media intellectuals like Stanley Crouch (*Always in Pursuit*, 1999), James McBride (*The Color of Water*, 1996), Henry Louis Gates (*Colored People*, 1994, *Ten Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, 1998).

The Civil Rights movement also encouraged the study of Native American culture, including literature, at the end of the 1960s, beginning of the 70s. The starting point of the process is marked by the publication of M. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968). Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) also counts as a cultic text. The author has been raised on New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo reservation and in the novel she not only tells the story of WWII Native American veterans but also the history of the Pueblo Indians and the importance of Pueblo mythology. After the war, veterans on the reservation try to escape the past and also the present by heavy drinking. It is only the hero of the tale who succeeds in saving himself by relying on old rites and their modernized versions. Another fascinating author is Louise Erdrich, whose fame is due

to her Native Indian tetralogy (*Love Medicine* (1984), *The Beet Queen* (1986), *Tracks* (1988), *The Bingo Palace* (1994). In these novels Erdrich represents the disintegration of the Native community living in a reservation in North Dakota. Stories of individual members of the community are mixed with stories of their intricate family relations. Yet family relations prove to be an almost miraculous cohesive force against disintegration. Similarly to Erdrich, Thomas King also shows an affinity for both a realistic description of everyday humiliations of Native Americans and a postmodern kind of jumbled storytelling. From a younger generation of Native American authors, Sherman Alexie's work is most widely acknowledged, primarily his *Indian Killer* (1996). The novel relates the case of a serial killer out for Native American victims, case and investigation provoking the worst kind of racial prejudice.

Contemporary Native American criticism aims at interpreting texts in accordance with the latest methods of literary scholarship. An outstanding representative of this trend is Gerald Vizenor, active both as an author and as a theoretician. He combines detailed accounts of Native American cultural phenomena with a poststructuralist method of analysis.

The popularity of Asian American authors remains a basic trait of contemporary American fiction. The most widely known author in the field is Maxine Hong Kingston, whose *The Woman Warrior* (1976) plunges deep into problems of racial and gender identity. At first sight the book is composed of narratives concerning an Asian-American girl, who grows up in a society equipped with fixed gender roles and racial stereotypes. She is able to realize that language, expression, and the power of words is the key to link her American and Chinese cultural backgrounds. Kingston's subsequent works are also noted, her *China Men* (1980) serves as a companion piece to *The Woman Warrior*, because it is composed of stories about Chinese-American men, especially about the narrator's father, who claim America. The ironic, parodic, metafictive *Tripmaster Monkey* (1989) presents ethnic stereotypes, cultural and literary genres from a grotesque perspective. Another popular Asian American author is Amy Tan, whose literary fame began in the late 1980s with the publication of her *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). This is still considered her most important work to date. The novel relates the tale of four immigrant Chinese mothers and their four first generation Chinese-American daughters replete with conflicts, difficulties of adaptation, and eventually presenting a solution of the conflicts. Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996) shows a younger generation of Chinese-Americans declining to live up to parental expectations. As an extreme example, Mona adopts a Jewish-American identity instead of the obvious Chinese-American.

The umbrella term Asian-American remains an acute problem for Asian-American authors and critics alike. This comes as no surprise if you consider that the term is supposed to cover several subgroups: Philippino, Malaysian, Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese,

Korean authors all belong under the same hat. According to Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, the leading expert of the field, Asian-American studies is undergoing a crisis signaled by the debate on assigned texts and/or canonized texts (Geok-Lin Lim 2000). Dominant motifs of Asian-American writers include Eastern-Asian patriarchal familial and gender roles, cultural plurality and cultural frictions, the fragmentation of racial identity, the difficulties of assimilation. Asian-American literary criticism, therefore, tends to focus on issues like negative or positive racial stereotypes and the analysis of gender roles.

Chicano and Spanish-American literature remains bilingual. From our perspective, texts written in English by authors of Spanish-American origin in the US or about the US are relevant. It is worth mentioning that similarly to the term 'Asian-American,' the concept 'Spanish-American' is also an umbrella term, referring to Chicano (Mexican-American), Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominiquan authors alike. Thomas Rivera's *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* (translated into English in 1987) strings a set of short stories and vignettes together about an immigrant worker Mexican boy in the US around the turn of the 1940s–50s. The boy experiences humiliating and challenging human situations, and eventually grows up whilst learning how to tackle them. Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984) can be seen as the female companion piece of Rivera's text. The series of short stories tell about the everyday life of a Mexican American girl growing up in a working class environment in Chicago. Her objective is to leave this context and its limitations. When she eventually does leave, she finds her own voice, too. Conversely, finding and voicing her themes makes her realize that she belongs to her family and class and it is the expression of this belonging that forms the basis of her 'independent' voice. Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) relates the tale of a Cuban American girl whose impoverished parents found refuge in New York: she is busy fabricating an identity, and magical happenings help her along the way (see in detail later). It is also important to mention Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) that contains 15 stories about four sisters from Dominique, spanning 33 years of their immigrant life in the US. By moving to the States, their class, gender roles, and possible future career paths are all rewritten, and they are compelled to use diverse methods for handling this situation.

Characteristic themes of Spanish American literature and criticism show a slight variation on features seen so far. In Spanish American texts the role of family relations is usually foregrounded, one often finds language games resulting from bilingualism, the necessity of cultural survival against assimilation gets stressed, and you often meet the religious element (Catholic or Santería). As with all the previous groups, the biographical aspect remains emphatic. As for criticism, the most important theme of Latino and Chicano literary studies is the concept of the boundary: the border region between Mexico and the US forms the space of Chicano life, where crossing and making borders

is an everyday experience. Like the texts, their study and criticism also remain bilingual, prioritizing poststructural terms like territoriality and hybridity. One of the leading theoreticians of the field, Guillermo Bomez-Peña acts as a critic of contemporary American culture.

III. Cultural crashes: Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*

Because of the objectives of this essay, few words had to suffice for describing the novels mentioned so far, however challenging they may individually be. Now, let me compensate for this and for the list above by a detailed introduction of one arbitrarily selected text from among those mentioned so far: Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban.* Evidently, the text shows only a tiny segment of multicultural literatures and does not function as an example. When one gives an example, the particular little segment is supposed to represent the features of the bigger whole in a miniaturized form. Yet in the context of multiculturalism, giving an example for the whole would mean a contradiction, since in multiculturalism difference and plurality play a central role, the texts have various contexts and formal repertoires and therefore cannot be represented by an exemplary work. Even so, it seems important to highlight at least this one mosaic piece of American multicultural literatures—hopefully to create an interest for further pieces.

Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* relates the story of three generations of women whose family falls apart to the rhythm of the changes in Cuban domestic policy. You witness the coexistence of family and politics on three different time planes: first, Cuba before Castro facing American colonization, second, 1959 with Castro's coming into power and some years afterward, and finally Communist Cuba at the end of the seventies, beginning of the eighties, together with the American punk subculture of the time. The time before Castro is represented through the memories of Celia, the grandmother. The *coup* is seen through the eyes of her elder daughter, Lourdes, who chooses to emigrate to America. The 'present' of the storytelling belongs to Pilar, Lourdes's daughter who has grown up in the US and is looking for a Cuban American identity in NYC and back in Cuba. Politics alienates family members from each other. Celia has become Castro's devout comrade, while Lourdes adores America without criticism of any sort. Pilar and Celia's second daughter, Felicia, are apolitical, therefore stand apart in a family saturated and divided by political convictions. In this family, you always have to take a stand, and families are shown as always basically political.

This is a feminine novel in the sense that it is related by women about women, and also because of the way it is written: on account of the nonlinear storytelling that produces no definite end. Also, family relations among women are blown up to gain universal dimensions, as variations of the mother-child relationship dominate the story.

Women acting as daughters and mothers create and recreate networks of emotional relations that position their respective relational identities. Four-year-old Celia had been abandoned by her mother, and an aunt on her father's side brought her up. This behavioral pattern is repeated by Celia when she produces symptoms of depression, leaves Pilar to the care of others, and hides herself in a sanatorium saying "I will not remember her name" (43). In contrast, she would like to be a good mother of her second daughter, Felicia, and the attempt degenerates into pampering the child. As an adult, Felicia loses her ability for independence and self-reflection. The motifs are repeated again in the next generation, as the concept of motherly love does not exist in Pilar's frame of reference, so her daughter cannot get any of it, either. Perhaps she would have felt different about her second child, but she lost the baby in the course of the revolution. Felicia neglects her twin daughters but adores her son, Ivanito, who will suffer from weak nerves. All the members of the family become victims of repeated not good enough mother-child relations.

In these stories, being abandoned becomes a modus of life. In this life-mode, Celia's medicine will be depression and politics, Felicia's will be losing her memory, while Lourdes will recreate herself according to her own America-ideal she can share with no one (husband, daughter, lover). Pilar escapes to texts of 80s NYC punk subculture. Yet abandonment is accompanied by the upsurge of creative energies in the person. Celia reaches the level of a fictive reality through playing the piano and reading Lorca, Felicia's creativity is played out in the beauty parlour and in Santería ceremonies, Lourdes bakes wonderful cakes, and Pilar paints, plays music and does magic. Practically seen, the story functions as Pilar's *Bildungsroman.* Despite recurrent motifs of female behavior, despite being abandoned by family, and despite abandonment as a life-mode, Pilar manages to find her own sense of being at home by relying on her artistic aspirations and magical sensibilities.

Where does the healing creativity come from? Beside everyday events, all female characters experience magic happenings, too, and these magic experiences provide the energy for the characters' repeated attempts at self-fashioning. In the novel specific historical events blend with events created by the play of the imagination. A factual presentation of events is used for depicting everyday life in Castro's Cuba, demonstrations, the missile crisis, Cuban refugees at the Peruvian Embassy in Havana, the work of local courts of justice. Punk subculture flourishing at the end of the 1970s in NYC is also well documented. Yet factual events are paired with magic elements when history is placed side by side with the story of dreams, visions, and intuitions. As for Lourdes: she meets her dead father in NYC repeatedly, and is asked to pass on an important message to Celia. Celia herself can sense death: that of her husband and also Felicia's suicide attempt. Pilar discovers her prophetic faculty when getting acquainted with voodoo

procedures and ceremonies, and this ability will help her find her place. After years of drifting, ten year old boys attack her in Central Park, she gets terrified but remains unharmed. Then a sense of security engulfs her:

> I press my back against the the base of the elm and close my eyes. I can feel the pulsing of its great taproot, the howling chello in its trunk. I know the sun sears its branches to hot wires. I don't know how long I sit against the elm, but when I open my eyes, the boys are gone. I button my blouse, gather up my herbs and my album, and run back to the university. (202)

After this incident and having had her series of cleansing herbal baths, Pilar already knows she has to go to Cuba. This visit will link her to the world of the imagination.

The title of novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* can be assigned a meaning from the text at this point. The roles languages play come to the fore beforehand already: English is the language of business and facts, while Spanish is called the language of poetry and love. As the story evolves, Pilar's relation to Spanish changes considerably. First of all, she envies her mother's eloquent Spanish cussing, but she has nothing to do with it. Then, with her Peruvian boyfriend, Spanish becomes the language of intimacy. Later she realizes that she can initiate private conversations with foreigners (other immigrants of Spanish origin) in Spanish. Eventually she dreams in Spanish, that is, in Cuban, as it appears in the title, about the sea and its shades of blue. Instead of being a tool of self-expression, language becomes a tool for self-creation here, and the language Pilar can use for this purpose is called Cuban. For Pilar Cuban language stands for the ability to understand, to conceptualize the magic element that becomes possible for her only in Cuba, while taking part in Cuban traditions, experiencing a kind of reintegration with her family.

The novel problematizes not only the roles of languages but also the narratability of stories. As the magic perspective of the Cuban language was the result of Pilar's identification with magic, the story also contains narrative magic: the reader only needs to identify with this and can create the fictional world of the magic perspective. The text is a mosaic of shorter and longer stories told from the viewpoints of various family members. The first person singular is present in Celia's letters and in Ivanito's paragraphs. The stories of others are presented in the third person. The timeline is jumbled up, but from Pilar's diary entries you can trace a linearity of events. All realist novels worth their salt end with death, so does *Dreaming in Cuban*, with the addition that Celia's death as she drowns in the sea also metaphorically represents Pilar's (re)birth.

The novel presents an escape route from the cosmic abandonment of the immigrant with a hybrid cultural identity: the integration of the magic element that can be created in the language of Cuban imagination and tradition.

The success story of multicultural literatures can be seen as part of the cultural turn that has been going on in the social sciences from the early 1990s. Cultural studies think of literature as a part of cultural production, one representation of the cultural practices in a given context. In this sense, the study of texts belonging to a given minority fits the sense of literariness characteristic of cultural studies really well, as marginal literatures are characterized by an emphasis on contextual embeddedness, a struggle with group identity, and a strong autobiographical element. However, it is exciting to see that the magic element appears quite often, too: daily conflicts are transformed creatively by magic energy. This element might well be the reason why my friend whose story I mentioned in the introduction thought these texts readable. Last but not least, this element might well be the reason why one may be tempted to think about the sense of literariness cultural studies owns up to.

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CHAPTER 2

THE RACE ORIENTED NARRATIVE OF THE CULTURAL TURN: TONI MORRISON'S LITERARY THEORY

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* has become a major reference point in contemporary American literary theory. It forms part of the flowering of African-American studies has experienced since the 1990s. The 1993 Nobel Prize winning African-American writer examines canonized American literary terminology and the texts that inform the construction of the classical American literary canon. Her intention is to draw a map of a critical geography that opens up space for discovery. In the new critical space African-American texts are located as part of the geography of American literature. Morrison is concerned with how Europeanized white American literary practitioners silenced the African-American presence in American literature. To counter this process, Morrison contends that the basis of the American experience lies in the dynamic coexistence of Europeanized Americans and African-Americans. Morrison's project is to study the dynamism of silencing in American literature and in critical texts about American literature.

Though ambitious, the conceptual map Morrison draws is rather sketchy (although the argument was published in two versions, an article in 1990 and the book in 1992). Nevertheless, the frame can be fleshed out if we pose further questions. For me the weakness of the argument lies in its obscure relation to the contemporary American critical context, a background which remains unexplained: the two existing footnotes in the first essay of *Playing* refer to two interpretations, there is no specific reference to any theoretical text in it. To my mind, this suggests a lack that might be intentional, an awareness of this weakness. Therefore I set out to investigate the context of Morrison's argument and look into the problem of how the position she explicates fits the directions of American critical thinking in the 1980s. I claim that her concerns represent a growing interest in contextual issues like race, class and gender that characterizes American critical thinking of the eighties but is at the same time saturated by the terminology of traditional literary scholarship she professes to reform. This ambivalent connection to traditional American literary scholarship can be articulated best through Morrison's relation to the critical reception of Henry James. Despite the ambivalence, her ideas

remain provoking, as one can see in some of the applications of her mappings that represent the most challenging directions in literary studies in the early nineties, within and without the bounds of her initial conceptual frame.

I. A New Model of American Literary Discourse

Morrison claims that American literary criticism needs to be reformed since it has traditionally ignored a continuous African-American presence. The characteristics of American literature can be found in the notion of "Americanness" that excludes an African-American experience. Within this view, American literature is only concerned with the opinion, talent, and power of white men. In contrast, Morrison proposes the view that American literature characteristically responded to a dark African-American presence. "These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristics of our literature—individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell—are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (Morrison 1992, 5). Just as the founding the American nation required a coded language to mark the problems and moral questions of racism, so its national literature required its restrictions and codes that are still present in the 20th century.

The argument is built on the key terms "Africanism" and "African-American presence." Morrison's notion 'Africanism' covers all the presuppositions, readings and misreadings that constitute the Eurocentric body of knowledge about African peoples. These include "both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability" (7). In America, a special type of this knowledge is called American Africanism, but also South-African and European variations exist. The concept resembles Edward Said's term, "orientalism" that refers to the construction of a fictive Europeanized image of the Orient by colonizers. The companion piece of the concept 'Africanism' is the notion of 'African-American presence.' It refers to a special history of the effect Africans had on American literature. For Morrison, African-American presence becomes problematic in the context of American literature. How does an African presence function in this context? The issue is at least twofold: on the one hand, how a coded literary language turns from oppressive to seemingly subversive, and, on the other, how it limits or influences the perspective of literary critics when they think about American literature.

No scholar before Morrison has asked this question about American literature for two reasons. First, the coded literary discourse did not allow for the discussion of the topic but required a poetics of silence. It was considered a graceful, well-bred, liberal gesture to ignore racism, to enforce its invisibility through silence (10). For another, the literary discourse about African-Americans traditionally studies racism from the perspective of the sufferer, in terms of its consequences on the victim. As opposed to this, Morrison investigates the effect of racism on those who practice it: "the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it [...] what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (11, 12). So the new objective of literary studies is to retrace the ways canonized writers and critics practice racism in American literary discourse.

At this point it might be useful to comment on the personal background of Morrison's new objective. The new perspective she offers is a result of her personal conviction that concerns her role as a writer. As a student, as a reader, she was reading as she had been taught to read; in other words she had no expectations whatsoever about the representation of the Africanist presence in American literature. She did not even think such a link was possible. Later on, already as a writer, she articulated for herself the task of a writer as a personal responsibility for language. For her, this is the question of how one handles the discourses one applies in writing and how one makes use of the social contexts these discourses are tied to. Her view is that the writer's role lies in thematizing the ideological presuppositions of social discourses. A writer is able to imagine what he or she is not, to bring the unknown close by and distance the familiar, dust off the myth and look behind it (Laclair 1993, 372 and Surányi 2007, 16). In other words, the writer has the ability to imagine others and the threat that others pose for him/her (Morrison 1992, 4). Thinking along these lines made her realize absences within criticism, the actual blindness of criticism towards the treatment of African-American characters. Where she as a writer found an African-American character central to the text, in critical accounts she could only locate a white spot or refusal to notice. This, eventually, led to the careful formulation of her views.

Her textual analyses focus on rereadings of nineteenth century and early twentieth century works in which African characters seem of minor importance. Her examples include Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*. In Poe's text Morrison places the role of the mysterious whiteness of the Pole and the white giant into context. Whiteness is the reason of the death of the black servant, Nu-Nu, and the giant figures the blinding, unpiercable whiteness. Both figures are typical of literary representations of the Africanist presence (33). In *Huck Finn*, again, the main problem is not Huck's coming of age but rather the Africanist presence, as Huck is rafting down the Mississippi in the company of a black slave, Jim. It is certainly true that Twain is criticizing the

institution of slavery and middle-class features in Huck's character. Yet the adventures could not be realized without Jim's active assistance. Huck's own coming of age and freedom is partly a result of a slave's help. So Jim cannot just be allowed to go free or escape at the end of the story: the catalyst would then be lost. In accord with that, Tom Sawyer's appearance at the end, the reinforcement of Jim's slave status is to provide the story with a relieving (abiding) closure (55). Thirdly, Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* tells the story of the classical American hero: the isolated individual struggling with the state that limits his freedom. The hero has a black helper whose aid is indispensable for the him at first. Hemingway applies racial stereotypes for the main African-American character: he has no name, no sex, no individuality. It is only later on in the story that he is given a name and it dawns upon us that he can steer and also think—as far as one can make this out on the basis of his unfinished sentences and complaints. The relationship between hero and wife is also built on the exclusion of the black (dark) presence (69–80). Finally, from the perspective of an Africanist presence, Cather's *Sapphira* has failed to become part of the Cather canon not because it is less imaginative than her other works (as critics like to claim) but because it treats a topic that has traditionally been a taboo for literature. The problem is trying to come to terms artistically and critically with the novel's concerns: "the power and license of a white slave mistress over her female slaves" (18).

Morrison distinguishes three stages within the history of literary representations of the Africanist presence in American literature, in the literary construction of racism (63–4, Klein 1994, 660). The first phase is that of hierarchical differences, the stage when a European sense of superiority over blacks came into existence. At the same time, the perceived intellectual and moral inferiority of African-Americans legitimated the institution of slavery. In this phase the African characters represented are ignorant, wild, and different. In the second phase the Africanist presence was used as a subterfuge for thinking about the nature of white identity. The representation of an African-American character was not to be interpreted on the basis of African-American history or lack of rights but rather as a representation of the insecurities of creating a new world. So the African character always had a reflexive role. The romance, as a genre, represents the themes and problems of the new world, in which questions and anxieties are inscribed into the African characters who signified the dark side of the American Dream (36–7). The question of the rights of man in America, for instance, was yoked by Africanism (38), as slavery highlighted freedom for Enlightened contemporaries. In the third phase blackness becomes the rhetoric of fear and desire. The black characters or other representations of blackness articulate a double extreme experience. Images of blackness can be both good and evil, moral and immoral, chaste and guilty at the same time.

The representation of the Africanist presence in the American literary discourse is becoming more and more metaphorical throughout the three stages enlisted above. Through this process, the concept of race loses any biological origin and becomes a culturally constructed notion. A Morrison puts it: "Race has become metaphorical—a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay ad economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was. [...] [R]acism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. [...] [It] has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before." (63) This is the urgent reason why Morrison the writer considers it our most immediate task to study the mechanisms of racial language use in the American literary discourse.

II. Context: Morrison's relation to James's legacy

Morrison's project of redrawing the map of American literature is an ambitious project that, as we have seen, contains several powerful claims. These are, naturally, derived from a specific theoretical position (Wallringer 2007, 117). Despite the existing background, we have seen that the keynote essay in *Playing* titled "Black Matters" contains only two references to two interpretations, one pertaining to a primary text, the other to a critical misreading: two examples. There is no reference to any theoretical text, so the representatives of a traditional notion/map of American literature are not criticized directly. This is the more challenging when you realize that contemporary theoreticians are not pointed out, either, although references to them would indicate that Morrison is actually not drawing the map of an altogether 'white' or unknown intellectual landscape. I argue that her text aims at reforming Lionel Trilling's liberal notion of literature and at taking issue with Richard Chase's romance thesis from the fifties. Relying on contextual rewritings of the liberal tradition in the 1980s and retaining some of the traditional ones, Morrison locates the place of the Africanist presence as a decisive contextual factor in the discourse of American literature, but at the same time remains entangled with the terminology contested.

Despite her intention to make it new, Morrison's text is saturated by Henry Jamesian critical terms that became cornerstones of 'liberal' American literary theory in 1940–50s. As a James scholar, I was mightily surprised to notice that several of Morrison's key terms are linked to Jamesian theory. The most spectacular one of these, for me, is the term 'the literary imagination' in the title of Morrison's book. In Jamesian parlance the literary imagination is the motor or basic principle of literary creation (James 1963, 56). In James's postromantic model understanding is an endless process that is triggered by

empirical stimuli in the perceiver's mind. This fluid understanding is always idiosyncratic, characteristic of the mind of the perceiver rather than of the stimuli on the basis of which it came into being initially. Understanding in process creates experience, and this experience we normally call knowledge. An author creates literature by describing experience that comes into being in his/her mind. In his well-known essay, "The Art of Fiction," James lectures on the play of the literary imagination, his model of experience points out the significance of personal experience in literary creation (Kovács 2006b, 34). Morrison shares the interest in the authorial imagination, yet for her it is the linguistic aspect of writing that functions as the motor of the creative process. The activity of authorial imagination makes it possible for a writer to problematize the social role of stereotypical, oppressive, exclusive discourses, for instance that of metaphorical racism.

The second surprise comes when we consider the elements of Morrison's objective explicated above. Let us quickly recall how she motions us to perform the intellectual work needed for the study of racist discourse and its practitioners: "what racial ideology does to the *mind*, *imagination*, and *behavior* of *masters*" (emphases mine) (12). These elements can again be linked to Henry James. First of all, the terms *mind* and *imagination* are key concepts of the Jamesian model of understanding. Secondly, investigating manners or *behavior* is again a Jamesian earmark as he is known to be author of novels of manners, and displayed the movement of the human mind in the context of social interactions in his novels. Moreover, the term *master* relates very strongly to James as well: not only did he write a metafictive short story titled "The Lesson of the Master," but James *the master* is the critical code name referring to James in the early 1900s when he wrote his major novels, as is indicated by the title of the fourth volume of Leon Edel's James biography. No wonder that the title of Colm Tóibín's biographical metafiction, *The Master*, refers to James, too. Using these four terms together not only implies but points towards a Jamesian model of (literary) understanding.

Morrison's first example of absences in criticism brings up James's critical reception, too. Referring to effects of racist discourse in criticism, the black princess in his *What Maisie Knew* is singled out as a case in point. Her presence is silenced and made insignificant in critical accounts. An example referring to James criticism again, after all the hints enumerated so far, sounds as if Morrison said: had you by any chance missed the references to James so far, here is one more for you to stumble into.—Have we met a contradiction in Morrison's argument? On the one hand, she relies heavily on Jamesian terms in her title and the articulation of her objectives. On the other hand, she refers to James-related criticism as a critical landscape that needs a new map. The answer is no; a reliance on Jamesian terms need not imply an identification with the Jamesian project. Rather, the intertextual connection points towards the latent critical legacy of

James in Morrison's argument, the very tradition Morrison is intentionally criticizing, an ambiguity at most.

Looking into the literary debates on canon formation in American criticism during the 80s helps us place this ambivalent James-related tradition. Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Criticism* provides us with a Foucaldian genealogy of the realist novel in America and together with this a historical survey of the changing interests of American critics in the novel as such. This theme, in itself worthy of lengthy discussions (Kovács 2006a, 83), proves relevant for Morrison to the extent of a parallel: placing Kaplan's narrative beside Morrison's proposal, Morrison's theoretical preferences become much more focused.

According to Kaplan's introduction, the reception of the realist novel in America is built on a rhetoric of absence condemning American society. This rhetoric originates from Henry James's *Hawthorne*. As far as James is concerned, in American society one can find a significant lack of social institutions:

> The negative side of the spectacle on which Hawthorne looked out, in his contemplative saunterings and reveries, might, indeed, with a little ingenuity, be made almost ludicrous; one might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot! Some such list as that might be drawn up of the absent things in American life—especially in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which, upon an English or a French imagination, would probably as a general thing be appalling. The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains—that is his secret, his joke, as one may say (James 1879, 44–45).

James contends that Hawthorne's romances testify to what extent a talented writer can be limited by an underdeveloped social context.

Referring to James, several later critics adopted the argument that because of the underdevelopment and short history of American society it is impossible to write a European style realist novel in the US. Based on the example of F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* about the masters of the English novel, Richard Chase wrote his groundbreaking study, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, in which he expounded his romance-thesis with reference to James. Chase constructed an academic argumentation to support the claim that no good novel can be written in America because of historical reasons. In-

stead, the real American genre is the romance. In a romance the socially isolated hero starts out on a melodramatic quest in a symbolic universe where social limitations do not hold (Chase 1957). Kaplan comments that the romance-thesis is built on the presupposition about an opposition between the workings of the human mind and of social reality (Kaplan 1988, 2). In other words, in a romance the individual mind can operate without limitations even amidst a thin social context. Chase's romance-thesis and its presuppositions remained to be axioms of American literary criticism until the 1980s.

Although Chase himself refers to James when making the romance-thesis, Kaplan maintains that the real horizon of his work is comprised of Lionel Trilling's liberal literary criticism and the strategies of reading devised by American New Critics. Trilling adopts the rhetoric of absence James initiated and also the presupposed opposition between the workings of the human mind and the social context. He extends James's list of absent things with a new item, "manners," and endorses the view that the function of literature is to study the workings of the liberal imagination in the individual mind, rather than to reflect social relations in the real. Instead of a realistic representation of the real, the aim of literature is to represent the workings of the human mind, of the moral imagination (Trilling 1951, 206). Trilling's model survived other contemporary critical schools and determined American critical thinking for decades to come.

Returning to Morrison's text, on the basis of Kaplan's argument the James-related terminology in Morrison connotes the liberal America tradition *à la* Trilling, the tradition that elevated James to the position of 'the master.' Indirectly, this also explains the theme of the second essay in Morrison's book that explicated problems with the romance tradition in American literature. As we have seen already, Morrison holds that the romance genre had a significant role in the metaphorization of race in literary discourse. In the second phase of metaphorization romance was one of the major areas for the substitution process about the nature of white identity, rather than the space for the melodramatic quest of the socially isolated hero.

After all these theoretical meanderings, we can again wonder why Morrison remains silent about both the representatives of the old literary tradition and the proponents of the new ones she sympathises with. Kaplan's account again gives us a hand here, as it helps us to situate the conceptual background Morrison is actually applying. As Kaplan recounts, there was a renewed interest in realism in the 1960s, yet this return to the social was still characterized by preserving the real/mind opposition. Only in the 1980s can she witness the elimination of the binary opposition between social context and literary form (Kaplan 1988, 6). Yet she is content with neither poststructuralism nor literary history, the main approaches used in the 1980s. She thinks poststructuralists focus on fictionality and are always pointing out how a realist text deconstructs its claims for referentiality, while literary historians treat realism as an answer to the threatening fea-

tures of capitalism. Kaplan maintains it is not enough to eliminate the opposition between the mind and the real, because the relation of the two spheres is to be thought of as a dynamic process. Therefore we can neither claim that literature deconstructs referentiality (focus on the mind), nor that it reproduces the real (focus on the real) but need to consider both sides. A dynamic relation of the two sides means that the construction of the real happens in language, in a language that is far from being innocent, a language that is influenced politically, ideologically, in other words socially. So a literary text can be thought of as a discursive practice, as a language use that has a formative role in the *construction* of our knowledge about the real. The realist texts Kaplan investigates bear the traces of this struggle to construct a knowledge about the social realm.

Kaplan's account of the reception of the realist novel provides a survey of critical approaches in the US and indirectly helps us place Morrison's project and its ambivalent relation to traditional American literary scholarship. On the one hand, Morrison's objective about representing and subverting the effects of the metaphorization of race in literary discourse is parallel to Kaplan's project to map conflicting discursive practices. Similarly to Kaplan, Morrison thinks of writing as becoming (Morrison 1992, 4), and finds herself face to face with social influences that have been encoded linguistically through history. Naturally, one cannot simplistically claim that Morrison is an intellectual apprentice of Kaplan, or for that matter, of Foucault, yet Kaplan's work represents an excellent example for the kind of critical thinking Morrison's texts in 1990 and 1992 could actually rely on. Morrison's approach is avowedly more of a compound—it has a quiltlike structure, as she likes to put it—than that of Kaplan, as Morrison often refers to feminist arguments and also the poststructuralist supplementational rhetoric of blindness and insight explicitly. Moreover, while Kaplan discusses discourses of consumer capitalism and surveillance because she is interested in how novels actively construct a sense of reality, for Morrison the same discussions come replete with a specifically Americanized political mission when they become methods for studying how racist discourses construct our sense of reality through American literature. On the other hand, Morrison's discourse itself is intervowen by the terminology of traditional American criticism (the Jamesian legacy), her periodization of the metaphorization of race in American literary discourse reflects classic divisions of American literary history. One might conclude that challenging as the language aspect of Morrison's theory might be, her reliance on traditional categories of scholarship might be less useful and also makes one wonder to what extent her excellent stylistic practice has been wrought out theoretically.

III. Reappearances of Morrison's framework

Morrison's manifesto has been out for more than fifteen years, so one has the chance to look at what has become of her project of redrawing the map of American literature from the perspective of the African American studies (Wallringer 121–2). Yet Morrison's contribution has elicited a wider response. From among the various possibilities, let me focus on two arbitrary examples in order to indicate possible directions of extending the project.

The most up to date and widely known reaction to Morrison's appeal came from Eric J. Sundquist in his 500 page literary history *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (1993). The main objective of Sundquist's study echoes that of Morrison: to awaken readers to the significant role African-American presence plays in traditional American literature. This objective is pursued in the era 1830–1930. The very first footnote of Sundquist's Introduction refers to Morrison's two programmatic articles (and Ellison), and the project is declared to form a part of Morrison's agenda. In spite of this, most of the discussions cover works by African-American authors from the era, not rereadings of traditional works by white authors. The book analyzes "black" and "white" texts in turn, since Sundquist contends that a focus on neither corpus is sufficient in itself to portray the continual race related crisis in American cultural and political life (Sundquist, 1993, 7). There is a lot at stake as Sundquist's ultimate aim is to document how black and white texts form an intertwined American literary tradition.

The second example shows how Morrison's argument can be used as the frame of reference for the recanonizaton of a white 19th–20th century American author, Edith Wharton. In 1995 Elizabeth Ammons devotes a whole article to expounding Morrison's project in the context of Wharton studies. Wharton, an upper class American dame from New York City's gentile elite of the turn of the century was active as a creative writer from 1890s till 1930s. Ammons follows Morrison's lead in approaching Wharton's texts: Ammons' starting point, her chosen texts, her treatment of racist discourse in Wharton all echo the tenets of *Playing in the Dark*. Ammons opens her narrative with the problem of blatant censure in Wharton editions and criticism so far. As a prime example, she names R. W. B. Lewis, the author of the first reliable and academic biography of Wharton, *the* prominent Wharton scholar to date, who in his edition of Wharton's correspondence omitted all the letters that had any anti-semitic references, actually quite a significant number of them. Thereby Lewis and his co-editor, Nancy Lewis, modified the image of the author represented by the collection. In turn, Ammons investigates the workings of anti-semitic discourse in Wharton's memoirs, letters, and three novels. She comes to the conclusion that Wharton's anti-semitism plays a basic role in all these texts, it even enables one to articulate radical rereadings of the novels.

In her analysis of *The House of Mirth*, for instance, Ammons rewrites her own former account of the novel along the lines of the race agenda. Formerly writing about the changing of social values, now she explains Lily Bart's suicide with anti-semitic sentiments towards her Jewish suitor, Rosedale, as it is encoded in the racist discourse that constructs her sense of reality. Formerly she argued that Lily's suicide becomes inevitable because she is unwilling to defend her social reputation with new and revolting means, by blackmailing someone from her own set (Ammons 1980, 42). In her rereading of the text and of her own former interpretation, Ammons claims that Lily commits suicide not because she is unwilling to change her manners but because she shares the assumption that to her set even "death is preferable to interracial sex" (Ammons 1995, 81).

Although both examples alter the initial project to some degree, even Morrison would approve of these critics' thematization of racist discourse. Sundquist and Ammons display how culturally encoded strategies of racist discourse silence the Africanist or the 'Semitist' presence in 19th century texts and in Wharton, respectively.

Conclusion

Morrison's text formulates a methodology for studying the cultural construction of race. In particular, it opens up new spaces in researching and thinking about American literature. In general, Morrison's argument can be understood as one of the metanarratives of the cultural turn in literary studies in the 1990s.

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CHAPTER 3

CHANGING GENRES OF LITERATURE: THE STORY OF TRAVEL WRITING

During the time I have spent at the Department of American Studies since 2000, we have had several Fulbright professors visiting for a year or six months. When I come to think of it, the only scholar of literature was my friend whose ideas on Morrison I have recounted, the others represented study areas as varied as history of journalism, political science, philosophy, discourse analysis. Perhaps this phenomenon is easier to understand when one is familiar with the narrative of the cultural turn and its relation to the institutional background of, say, American Studies. However, the story cannot be narrowed down to how a multidisciplinary approach to the study of culture allows for the variety of scholars assembled at a department. As we have seen, it mainly relates to the changing ways literature as culture is thought of and is approached.

It is difficult to say what comes first, a new theory of culture and literature or changing forms of cultural production, but perhaps it is logical to think that theorists begin to create new models of cultural representation when they face new cultural phenomena that cannot be explained by previous frameworks. Now, what new cultural phenomena is the cultural turn linked to? Throughout the previous chapters you have been reading about the cultural turn in its various forms. The background of the phenomena and the possible reasons of the changes were considered in chapter one, while both chapters one and two were concerned with changes of the canon connected to the cultural turn, more specifically with the new interests, themes, conceptual changes, and methods applied in literary studies. At this point it is also important to point out that the changing themes indicate a change in the selection of cultural products analyzed.

Connected to the altering selection of cultural products, another aspect of the cultural turn not mentioned so far is genre, that is the types of cultural products, considered as the possible subject area of cultural studies. The question is what conceptual notions can be used to group cultural phenomena if new interests, spaces, and methods prevail in cultural analysis, in other words if one thinks of culture as a space where cultural products are continuously produced and consumed. For our purposes it appears necessary to reconsider the notion of literary genre at this point. Literary genre is a cultural product in a given historical, social and political context—but what are the consequences to be taken into consideration when producing an analysis?

This chapter reconsiders the concept of genre in literature in three steps: first, it surveys the connection between changes of the notion of literariness and of genre, then it tries to map the changes of the genres 'fiction' and 'travel writing,' and finally it follows a specific story of travel writing as fiction in contemporary cultural studies with reference to Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*.

I. Concepts in context

In connection with the changing concept of literariness, one's notion of literary genre will change as well. This is primarily not a definition question of what is or what is not a genre but rather, and perhaps more interestingly, of the 'how' aspect. What one needs to reconsider is how changing presuppositions of literariness affect our changing notion of genre, and finally, of fiction as a genre. Chapter one followed three different sets of presuppositions concerning the notion of literariness in US literary studies. It has shown how ideas of literature are different for a New Critic, for a scholar doing deconstructive analysis, and also for a critic of culture. Let us reconsider these and find the principles a concept of genre acceptable for a critic of culture is based on.

In the 1940s–60s American New Critics thought of literature as a finite body of exquisitely formed texts representing a specific set of characteristics purported to be the American character. These traits were to be found in the prioritized texts by a codified formalist methodology (e.g. using tenets from Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* and practicing Cleanth Brooks' method in *The Well-Wrought Urn*). The notion of a unified American character (American Adam) served to lay the foundation of a unified notion of the American *national* character, too, and indirectly of a sense of a unified national identity. How did representatives of New Criticism think of literary genre, and what genres did they primarily work with? Any New Critical handbook on literature distinguishes the three genres, drama, poetry, and fiction on the basis of how they represent reality: conflicts in dialogue form, emotions in first person, and points of view in third person, respectively, and then identifies formal characteristics for the study of each in turn. Handbooks on elements of poetry, fiction, and drama are written in this vein. The genre New Criticism valued most highly was poetry because of New Criticsism's focus on language: the density of poetic language allows for masterly formal analyses of rhetorical figures and structures of ambiguity and irony.

As a reaction to the high Formalism of New Criticism, from the late seventies on the countercurrent of New Criticism later named American Deconstruction began to influence the way American scholars of literature thought of literariness. The focus on form and language remained and became most emphatic. The workings of language as

the basic mode of thinking about the world and of how the world becomes accessible to the human mind moved to the center of analysis. Now the main function of an analysis was to reveal the way the linguistic movement in a text practically prevented the construction of a unified meaning. This eventually questioned the possibility of representing a unified character or, for that matter, a unified national character, in literature. As linguistic movement prevented the construction clearcut binary oppositions in language, basic oppositions like literature-real, poetry-fiction, high-popular culture were questioned. Yet how does the concept of genre function in a textualized deconstructive universe? Deconstructive critics have little to say about a fixed concept like genre. For them genre, naturally, is also a linguistic construct changing in time. Formal parameters do not suffice for hypothetical definitions, it is rhetorical strategies that can distinguish types of texts. On the basis of this, one can sooner distinguish between writerly and readerly texts than between first person expressive language and a third person narrative one. At the same time, rhetorical analysis thrives on stylistically dense texts studded with tropes, so Romantic poetry remains one of the most fruitful areas of deconstructive textual practice.

From the eighties on the trend later called Cultural Studies began to shape the way a textualized universe is to be regarded contextually. The role of context, the importance of political, historical, ideological, and social factors interfering with linguistic movement has come to the fore of interest. Post-colonial critics analyze how linguistic movement undermined the representation of political intention. Critics of culture discuss how coded ideological messages inform textual representations. Although from this perspective the world is still considered textually constructed, this fact does not exclude the discussion of contextual issues like politics, history, society, race, class, and gender. Rather, the focus now is on cultural practices old and new that are linguistically constructed or discursive. For one example, film as a discursive representation of culture allows for a discussion of the representational strategies of contextual issues in diverse types of filmic discourse, a project that fits neatly into the agenda of cultural studies.

The diverse discursive cultural practices are interlinked and form culture. Literature is one such practice to be considered at the intersection of several other discursive formations. How can one approach the concept of genre in this context? As far as I can see, looking at genre as both a linguistic and a contextual product means that genres today are regarded as specific types of discursive formations linked to the cultural practices of a given culture. Perhaps this broad speculation sounds less airy when one thinks of an example. Take the genre of the Shakespearean sonnet, then. As we all know, it consists of 14 lines of iambic pentameter, with a set rhyme pattern to match. Thematically, the lines make up three quatrains and a couplet: the first three stanzas develop a theme usually related to love and death, normally through an opposition, while the

final couplet contains a thematic conclusion related to the theme of art. Is this definition adequate when one tries to consider the Shakespearean sonnet as a discursive formation? Clearly, this definition covers only part of the issues to consider. Indeed, the formal signs do belong to the discourse of genre, but it is also important to see the connection and references of Shakespeare's texts to those of his contemporaries and predecessors, for instance Spencer and Sydney. This includes the treatment of themes of love, death, and art—are they treated the same way or differently by Shakespeare? Can we find a historical or social reason why, perhaps in a contemporary document of clearly non-literary intent? Clerical opinion on the sacred and Christian redemption represented in Harsnett's *Declaration* has been shown to be connected to *King Lear* (Greenblatt 613). Is this in any way possible to link the sonnets to contemporary documents as well? Such questions indicate directions a discursive approach to genre opens up for us.

Having reviewed the three sets of presupposition of literariness and their connection to the notion of literary genre, one wonders if any more practical consequences can be drawn of all this. It seems just to say that the triadic drama, poetry, fiction division based on formal considerations can only be the first step in thinking about genre in the classroom. Instead of considering genre as form, one can regard it as a discursive formation linguistically structured but contextually diffuse. The above discussion might shed light on the reason why, in the age of cultural studies, one is not likely to find formalist readings of canonized works as literary analyses, say, in leading journals of American literature but rather accounts of the social and political potential of literary and non-literary discursive productions in American culture.

II. Travel writing as fiction

The notion of genre and literary genre as a discursive formation leads to the notion of fiction as a genre. At this point one needs to consider how it is possible to treat fiction itself and genres within "fiction" as discursive formations.

Having accepted the tenet that one makes sense of the world in the form of linguistic knowledge, that is discursively, it is difficult to draw the line between discursive formations that are factual and ones that are literary: they are all textual and contextually informative. Along the same logic, how can one distinguish fiction from non-fiction texts? To be sure, one cannot draw the line between fiction and nonfiction, and therefore the study of fiction has begun to include forms of writing formerly not considered literary, let alone fictive. As contextually coded narratives of a given cultural era, writings like autobiography, journalism, correspondence, literary criticism, travel writing, etc. have begun to interest former scholars of literature

The critical treatment of travel writing illustrates how a formerly non-literary genre is integrated into the study of cultural texts. When the interest of literary scholars shifts to the interactions of cultural discourses and the histories of cultural issues, travel writing comes to be seen as one discourse of cultural awareness. Actually representing how the writers represent their others to themselves, it indirectly represents the writers' sense of themselves and immediately becomes open for cultural analysis.

Writing about possible ways of analyzing travel texts in 1992, Mary Louise Pratt found that up to that point travel writing had been studied in three basic ways. Firstly, travel commentary may be celebratory, recapitulating exploits of the authors. Secondly, it may be documentary, drawing on the text as a source of information. Thirdly, it may be literary, when texts by literary figures are studied in order to point out their artistic and intellectual dimensions connected to the authors' 'main' work (Pratt 10). Pratt quickly distinguishes her own method from all these approaches and claims that she investigates conventions of representation that constitute European travel writing, suggests ways of reading and focuses on rhetorical analysis (Pratt 11).

In 2002, Jeanne Dubino places the interest in travel writing into the wider perspective Pratt had also adopted when she claims reading travel texts sheds light on cultural influences and concentrations of power:

> Rather than treating literature as the aesthetic product of a nation-state, literary critics, increasingly, are examining it as the cultural product of a wide array of cultural practices and global phenomena. In addition, they are interested in the flow of cultural influences and the multi-directionality of these transmissions, and argue for the necessity of attending to concentrations of power. With this emphasis on fluidity, greater consideration is also given to mobility, travel, and nomadism. (Dubino 217)

Seen from this wider culture-oriented perspective, one can also say travel texts represent their writers' sense of themselves as part of the cultural influences they experience.

Ziff in his book *Return Passages* (2001) calls this contextualized 'sense of self' poignantly as "cultural self-awareness" (16) when he claims that the history of travel becomes an index of cultural self-awareness. Reviewing Ziff and others in 2005[1], David Epsey finds that they all focus on what is particularly American in the travel writings they analyze. The scholars all study how American travelers project their biases to foreign lands and how the experiences the travelers undergo change their opinions of themselves, of others, of being American. Yet writings by American travelers indicate that their authors often have self-serving views of others. The strategy of the three books

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[1] Harvey, Bruce A. *American geographics: U.S. national narratives and the representation of the non-European world, 1830–1865*; Ziff, Larzer. *Return passages: great American travel writing, 1780–1910*; and Edwards, Justin D., *Exotic journeys: exploring the erotics of U.S. travel literature, 1840–1930.*

is similar in that they "interrogate this self-serving view among Americans and the ironic ways in which travel both affirms and undermines it." (Epsey 810)

The opinions by Pratt, Dubino, Ziff and Epsey indicate a change in the way the study of travel writing is perceived. After Pratt's breach with traditional readings of travel literature, a new kind of literary reading of travel texts has set in, one which relies on a rhetorical reading of the representational strategies of travel pieces. These strategies, in turn, map the cultural self-awareness of their authors and readers. In these readings, travel writing becomes a sensitive representation of the cultural awareness of its producers (and its readers).

III. The case of Pratt: travel writing and empire-building

Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) provides an illuminating example of a multidisciplinary rhetorical reading of travel texts. Pratt contextualizes her own project as part of the large scale effort to decolonize knowledge, in which colonial meaning-making has become a subject of critical investigation (2). She analyzes the mutual engagement between European travel and exploration writing and European economic and political expansionism (38). This practically means that she studies how travel texts by Europeans about non-European parts of the world have created the "domestic subject" of European imperialism from the 1750s through the 1980s (4). In particular, she is after signifying practices that encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire. She finds connections from travel writing to other forms of knowledge, primarily between travel writing and enlightenment natural history, based on how these both formulate Eurocentered forms of global consciousness (5).

Pratt's key terms indicate the scope and approach of the project. Firstly, the term contact zone means social spaces where different cultures interact and clash with each other (4–7). Her study deals with writings from the contact zone by Europeans or by natives responding to European influences. The cultural process happening in the contact zone is called transculturation, another key term. Transculturation refers to how subordinated or marginal groups select or invent from materials transmitted to them by dominant or metropolitan cultures (6). It is most interesting to see what elements subordinated groups choose to absorb and how they use these materials. In her readings, she aims at finding out how representational strategies of the center or metropolis are received and appropriated at the periphery and, in turn, whether representational strategies of the periphery have any effect on those of the center. As part of these

strategies, anti-conquest strategies refer to representational manueuvres through which European subjects seek to secure their innocence the very moment they assert hegemony (7). These are clearly points of ambiguity in the texts, mainly concentrated around tropes. Autoethnography, in response, stands for those instances in which the colonized subjects try to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizers' terms (7). In fact, this might be taken as the verso of travel writing by colonizers, responses to them or in dialogue with them, using their idioms, often bilingual and dialogic in structure. Finally, by planetary consciousness Pratt refers to Eurocentered forms of global consciousness, the set of representations that, coming from Europe and serving European economic and political interests, are used and critiqued in the contact zone.

Pratt's basically chronological survey identifies three general representational strategies of European self-consciousness in travel writing between the second half of the eighteenth century and the twentieth. Firstly, she investigates the second part of the 18th century, studying representational strategies of travel writers influenced by natural history. She finds that the Linnean project of natural history to classify all the known and not-known plants and animals of the earth launched a European knowledge-building project of unprecedented scale. Scientist traveled all over the world to find specimens and place them in Linné's universal system of classification. The power to name things came together with the act of classification. This practically unharmful activity had its effect in abstract ways: at home in the botanical garden and the natural history collections, and in the way things unknown were viewed from a European perspective. Backed by the project of natural history to place and name things according to a European universal classification, naturalists ruled out local names and systems. This knowledge building project of natural history, while sending seemingly innocent botanists all over the world to "naturalize," in fact paved the way for immensely profitable economic ventures by producing commercially exploitable knowledge. Travel writing from the era is underpinned by the innocent impulse to classify and naturalize while it actually finds ways to narrate travel aimed at territorial surveillance, appropriation of resources, and territorial control. Pratt names this self-effacing strategy the narrative of the anti-conquest (chapters 2–5).

The second representational strategy Pratt identifies is Humboldt's poetics of science (chapters 6–8). Alexander von Humboldt's thirty volume account of his visit to South America (1799–1804) laid down the lines for the ideological reinvention of South America in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when political and economic relations between Spanish-America and Northern-Europe were renegotiated. Focusing on Humboldt's non-specialized writings, travel writings in the broadest sense and of the broadest effect, Pratt finds a new type of nature discourse. An aesthetic mode of treating subjects of natural history combines vividness of esthetic descriptions and science's

revelations of occult forces moving Nature (121). The discourse is different from Linneans' in that it tries to find harmonies of things seen and also follow the movement of invisible occult forces orchestrating them. The seer is not interested in catalogizing any more but in finding contacts among things and man and the occult, God, if you like. This is the so called Romantic quality of Humboldt's enterprise. At the same time, the seemingly innocent nature of scientific anti-conquest is maintained in that America will be identified with primal nature devoid of human presence and history. The motivation for ahistoric and acultural representation, according to Pratt, lies in the Euroexpansionist project to civilize, beautify, commercialize. Even when transculturating elements of Maya and Aztec culture, Humboldt manages to integrate knowledges of the South American past accumulated by local elites into a European discourse of knowledge that legitimates Euroamerican rule (136).

The third pattern of representation she finds she calls Victorian verbal painting (chapter 9). This refers to descriptions of moments when geographical "discoveries" are "won" for a nation. English explorers of Central Africa in the second part of the nineteenth century often render the moments of their geographic discoveries dramatically, as if signaling a peak event when practically nothing happens but they see something that has been well known for the locals. There are basic discursive ways to secure the value of these peak moments. Firstly, the landscape is aestheticized, it is described as if it was a painting. Then, density of meaning is suggested, the landscape is represented as extremely rich in substance (material and semantic). Finally, the seer has an authority over the scene, if not to possess, then to evaluate it, proposing ways to beautify and improve it. Therefore, the descriptions represent a need for a civilizing mission in the form of an aesthetic project.

After a summary of her argument, it becomes possible to take a closer look at Pratt's actual practice of reading. Her rhetorical readings, substantiated by long quotations and illuminating illustrations from contemporary documents, argue changes in the structure and production of knowledge in different historical periods. As this description also tries to suggest, Pratt's method is deeply Foucaldian. She refers to Foucault's *The Order of Things* substantially in chapter two when the effect of Linné's *System of Nature* is discussed. Here Foucault's account of the project of natural history in the 18th century is taken as a starting point for Pratt's analysis (Pratt 28, Foucault 170–173). Yet it is not only in a specific reference to the eighteenth century that Pratt relies on Foucault. She uses Foucault's work, primarily *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*, as a method of explaining the connections between scientific thought and inland travel in particular and between the project of natural history and European expansionism in general. The main link to Foucault I find in the fact that throughout her analysis Pratt conceives of knowledge as activities and representational practices changing through

historical periods. When she distinguishes her three main representational strategies, she in fact identifies different genealogies of knowledge through archeological means, i. e. analyzing heaps of contemporary documents and their reception in order to come up with new insights on how they are structured conceptually. As Foucault insists on the rhetorical study of the contextually changing relation between words and things, Pratt's attempt is also intertwined with a focus on the linguistic nature of knowledge production in the form of travel writing. All in all, it is just to say that she follows the Foucaldian practice of knowledge production when she reads popular and less known travel texts in order to interrogate their changing representational strategies.

Through convincing analyses of breathtaking variety of material, *Imperial Eyes* manages to construct a counterknowledge and counterhistory of Europe's colonial past and of travel writing as well.

Conclusion

In the context of changes within the self-representation of literature today, the cultural turn effects the adoption of formerly non-literary genres into the area of 'literary analysis.' Genres conceived of as discursive productions connected to context require a way of analysis that is both language oriented and contextual. As a case in point, travel writing has come to draw considerable interest because rhetorical readings of travel texts provide illuminating insight into the changes of representational strategies their authors employ.

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PART 2

STRATEGIES OF READING REALIST AND MODERNIST TEXTS: THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE AMERICAN AUTHOR IN FICTION AND NONFICTION BY JAMES AND WHARTON

CHAPTER 4

HENRY JAMES'S IMAGINATIVE PROJECT OF THE NEW AMERICAN NOVEL

The imagination constitutes a major factor in the artist's and the characters' understanding in James's texts. Yet, a consideration of the uses of the concept reveals that in his diverse writings the work the imagination does can be markedly different: it varies from being the tool of the individual artist to being a motivating force for social decency. Can the scattered references to the imagination form a pattern in the Jamesian carpet of textual productions? This chapter is an investigation into the nature of a typically Jamesian concept of the imagination that constitutes the basis of a Jamesian theory of novel, arguing that his changing concept of the imagination directly influences his writing. Tracing the concept of the imagination also positions James among his fellow novelists and outlines his project of the new American novel at the crossroads of American, French and English traditions.

The Jamesian concept of the imagination has been widely studied in the 1970s and 1980s as a faculty of cognition and as such has ceased to excite scholarly interest lately (Fluck 18). When defined cognitively, the imagination has a role in understanding; it is responsible for the production and reproduction of images in the human mind. Focusing on patterns, Anthony Ward and Daniel Mark Fogel have shown the workings of a Romantic imagination through themes like the "reconciliation of opposites into organic unity" and the "spiral return from innocence through experience into organized innocence," respectively (Ward 4 and Fogel 4). From a phenomenologically-oriented perspective, Osna Kaston and Charles Fiedelson have problematised the Jamesian imagination as having an outer, socially important aspect, too. They claim that although James seems to have focused on the work of the individual imagination, the Jamesian imagination plays itself out in interpersonal relations (Kaston 14 and Fiedelson 336, 339). Writing about the late phase as one where imagination is in dominance, Kaston claims that in the late fiction "characters collaborate with each other, they build upon and modify each other's meaning", and she names this shared fictionalising (Kaston 14–15). So it turns out that James's explorations of the possible uses of the individual imagination are parallel to his well-known interest in manners.

Recently, scholarly interest in the cultural context of literature through issues like race, class, gender, power and history have resulted in dropping the cognitive category of the imagination, even in James studies where it had previously seemed to be centrally

important (Buelens 12). Today, James is being re-evaluated through the issues of his possible homosexuality and of his attitude to race (Henke 227, Sedgwick 182–4, Blair 11). In spite of the relative critical indifference to the Jamesian imagination today, I propose to reconsider its mixed internal and external qualities. For me, the Jamesian imagination is not so much a faculty of cognition but rather an aid in social interactions and a skill in good manners. I wish to show that the Jamesian imagination and manners are not only parallel but are intricately linked because the imagination is both triggered and limited by social interaction in James. The moral aspect of the Jamesian imagination lies in its sensitivity to the imagination of others; in its ability to respond to difference (Posnock 76). My overall aim is to restage the discussion of the Jamesian imagination in terms intelligible to recent scholarly discourse on James by showing the faculty to be a central aspect of James's account of social behaviour and American culture.

I argue that the general Jamesian concept of the imagination should be defined in a moral rather than cognitive sense. For James, the imagination has a much broader function than that of being a faculty of isolated personal cognition (Levin and Novick 298). The Jamesian imagination has a basic role in human social interactions: it is to make participants more empathic of each others' opinions and needs. Such an understanding of others, naturally, can be most useful both for helping and for deceiving them, and herein lies the moral component of the Jamesian imagination. On the one hand, when one character understands the others' understanding imaginatively, he has to make a choice as to which personal version he accepts—he has to make a moral choice, choose to support one version only. When he is able to interact with and tolerate others in accordance with his chosen beliefs, his behaviour is morally legitimate. On the other hand, when a character deceives the others' understanding imaginatively without allowing for the versions the others had made, his behaviour becomes morally objectionable. Either way, knowledge is being produced socially during interpersonal understanding.

At the same time, one needs to draw attention to the shifting use of the concept of the imagination in diverse Jamesian texts: critical articles, essays and novels. In one context, the term "the moral imagination" appears in many Jamesian essays on fellow novelists and on literature with a meaning different from the general description offered above. In the well-known "The Art of Fiction," for instance, the morality of the artistic imagination simply lies in its role in the imaginative reprocessing of personal impressions of the world: in other words, the morality of art is "the quality of the mind of the producer" (James 1984a, 52). To be sure, this version of the moral function of the imagination does seem to qualify for a cognitive definition, its role in personal understanding. However, given that this personal vision is dependent on the social context of the perceiver and that the process of understanding is not a finished but an ongoing

one, this basic theoretical projection of the workings of the imagination in "The Art of Fiction" has affinities to the broader definition. In another context, indeed, the full moral import of the Jamesian concept of the imagination evolves in his fictional production and is in full swing in the novels of the late phase. In yet another context, in James's essays on American culture written late in his career, James comes up with an applied version of the moral imagination, in his criticism of American speech and manners. Let us trace how these different contexts of the "imagination" accommodate diverse uses of the concept.

I. Critical articles

James's own statements on the imagination set out a framework from which to approach his other work. James describes the case of his ideal novelist in his 1888 essay on Maupassant and with this also provides a good starting point for fathoming his ideal of the imagination. Here the faculty of the imagination appears as an element of the artistic understanding or experience which then needs only to be rendered or reported by the novelist. Reading James's essays on other novelists, basic terms of the Jamesian model of understanding such as the imagination, morality and senses are explained further. Interestingly, his essays on American, English and French novelists are primarily focused on specific issues of his model of understanding like morality, imagination and the senses, respectively. So the Jamesian attempt to fashion himself a novelistic project at the crossroads of three diverse literary traditions can be seen as a corollary to his need to formulate a general model of understanding.

The critical essays prove highly informative regarding the power of the imagination. James's 1888 essay on Maupassant provides us with a horizon of expectations on this issue.[1] James accepts Maupassant's idea that there is a general order behind each per-

[1] James's ideas on fiction are taken to be a coherent conceptual system despite its minor alterations over time. James E. Miller, Jr. claims that in spite of a few shifts James remained remarkably consistent in his views from the beginning to the end of his career (see Miller xv). In contrast, Tony Tanner contends that between "The Art of Fiction" and his essay on Balzac from 1902, there has been a considerable shift in James' relation to "realist" novels and writing, because his ideas on "the air of reality" have changed (see Tanner 4, 18), but Sarah B. Daugherty shows that the change happened earlier: in the 1880s James reshaped his attitude towards realist writers and became much more tolerant than he had been in his early essays (see Daugherty 167). René Wellek agrees with Daugherty that James's essays in *The Nation* and the *North American Review* in 1864–66 differ in being more pronouncedly moralistic and intellectualistic than his later production, and adds that, on the whole, he considers James's critical views remarkably coherent and consistent (see Wellek 293–321).

sonal case or pattern of understanding (James 1984b, 523). First, impressions are created in one through one's senses. Already at this point impressions are different in each case because one's senses take up and process sensory information differently. After the impressions, one's emotions and thoughts are used to organise impressions. This subsequent organisation of sensory data on higher levels makes up the process of experience. James adds that the imagination becomes active after emotions and thoughts have organised data: the imagination is responsible for the activation of the process of experience.[2] Here, and in other critical articles, James makes use of the Coleridgean distinction between fancy and imagination that has obviously influenced his model of understanding. Novelists can be assessed on the basis of this model, since the novelist's task is to render his own process of experience faithfully. I call this preliminary model of the Jamesian understanding liminal because of the subsequent (sense, thought, imagination) and recurrent stages involved in it.

The next step is to approach some of James's essays on American, French and English authors and literature in general in order to fine tune the preliminary model in particular literary contexts. Individual authors' cases are presented by James to be characteristic of national tendencies. The American tendency can be criticised through James's book on Hawthorne. The absence of many social institutions from American life is pointed out:

> [N]o sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old countryhouses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages or ivied ruins,; no cathedrals, no abbeys, no little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot! (James 1984a, 351–2)

This prevents the novelist from having impressions of social life sufficiently complicated to merit being written about. Another problem with the American way of thinking as exemplified in Hawthorne is a reliance on the imagination in a way that it is not connected to the process of experience. Instead, flights of the imagination in romances divert attention from particles of one's life to one's dreams.

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[2] Notice the basically phenomenological model of understanding. On the relation of knowing and impression in James, Paul Armstrong relates James's concern with impressions to Husserl's theory of aspects (see Armstrong 1978, 12). Merle A. Williams relates it to the theories of Sartre, Kirkegaard, and, mainly, Merleau-Ponty (see Williams 21–22). I agree with John Carlos Rowe that in James the term impression often refers to a mental act prior to reflection and not mimetic or expressive impressions, although criticism in the 1980s associated his "impressionism" with the phenomenological process of constructing intentional objects (see Rowe 192).

The French method of focusing on the experience of the real is equally mistaken. For James, French novelists, although interesting technically, are basically immoral in their limited themes: they rarely show an interest in the process of imaginative experience. Even Balzac, who has a wonderful imagination, tends to stop at matters of money, the body and the flesh and not proceed to show the process of experience. Flaubert's detailed descriptions are not more useful in this respect as they only approach the house of the mind from the outside:

> He hovered forever at the public door, in the outer court, the splendour of which very properly beguiled him, and in which he seems still to stand as upright as a sentinel and as shapely as a statue. But that immobility and even that erectness were paid too dear. The shining arms were meant to carry further, the other doors were meant to open. He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul (James 1984b, 313–4).

It is exactly the inner imaginative workings of the mind that escape Flaubert's eye. Perhaps only Daudet has an affinity for rendering the kind of experience James is after. So for James, French novelists offer good example for how to write about sense impressions, but he lacks the account of further, so called moral aspects of understanding.

As far as James is concerned, the English novelists, unlike the French, share a profound moral interest. However, George Eliot is of limited use for him, since her moralism is of the restrictive type: it is without the imagination altogether, therefore it is not concerned with the imaginative experience but moralism in terms of what is supposed and not supposed to be shown or done (James 1984a, 933). In contrast to the abovementioned novelists, Ivan Turgenev is James's major hero novelist who performs imaginative experience and has a moral interest at the same time. This moral interest is an interest in representing imaginative experience. It is morally oriented not because it is restricted to moral themes but because it shows the way the mind moves (James 1984b, 1034). When appointing Turgenev his author-hero, James the essayist seems to be criticising the American, the French and the English traditions of the novel equally in order to define a new position for his own literary project that relies partly on all three. His model of understanding is also a map of his relation to these traditions that stand for parts of his model of understanding: the American, French and English traditions are related to the themes of the imagination, the senses and morality, respectively.

The programmatic "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces explore the specific Jamesian project of literature in detail. Experience is a process that comes into being through the Jamesian model of understanding. The imagination converts the experience of trifles into personal revelations. In the famous passage about experience, James refers to the key role the imagination has in its workings:

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations (James 1984a, 52).

The novelist has a task to execute his own process of experience as faithfully as he can.[3] The moral aspect of literature is the quality of the mind of the producer, i.e. the quality of the process of experience that in turn depends on the imagination of the producer. This morality has nothing to do with the restrictive moralism of the immorality of personal relations: it refers to the imaginative process of experience in the perceiver. Execution is simple rendering after this: one has to find ways to convey imaginative experience as it is. The Jamesian general framework of understanding is present, despite traces of sloppy thinking, in "The Art of Fiction" (Davidson 124). This model of the novelist's task is also presented in the Prefaces. Emphasis is placed on the way sensory data become experience, germs become novels, and on the activity of the principal man of imagination, the novelist whose story we read in the Prefaces to the New York edition. This model of literary understanding is procedural and also contextual because of its dependence on sensory data and social context.

James's model of understanding in his critical articles can be viewed as the Jamesian *contextual model of understanding.* The imagination acts as a central activating force within the process of understanding as it helps to convert sense impressions, feelings and thoughts into "revelations," that is, acts of understanding. The model is contextual because the kinds of stimuli the mind receives for processing are significant: according to James, a socially rich context proves better food for the imagination than rural solitude.

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[3] Mark Spilka shows that the term "to represent" in the famous sentence "The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life" (James 1984a, 46) was originally the term "to compete with" in *Longman's Magazine* of September, 1884, and was changed into "to represent" in 1888 when the article was reprinted in *Partial Portraits* (see Spilka 204). He draws attention to representation in the sense of a competition with the real and claims this is a version of reality which commands our interest in life, which is to shift the question of truth from subject to treatment (205–6). Both Spilka and Vivien Jones claim that this is a break: the breakthrough of modern sensibility and a break with nineteenth century mimetic tradition, respectively (Spilka, 204; Jones 130). As for the temporal position of that break I disagree with Jolly Roslyn who claims that in "The Art of Fiction" James still sticks to the idea of fiction as history and changes into a conception of fiction as an anti-historical approach to experience in the major phase only (Roslyn 34). I think Roslyn misses the rhetorical structure of the article when she takes the first statements for granted and disregards the "reality as experience" argument later. I am interested in the modus of the break with the mimetic that I think can be sensed already in "The Art of Fiction": if the break from the mimetic tradition into a modern sensibility entails an adherence to a Romantic disruption between reality and art or rather an adherence to the post-Romantic idea of art as part of culture and society.

The contextual model of understanding includes three basic notions important for the novelist. Firstly, the imagination; secondly, the experience the imagination helps to produce; and thirdly, rendering or executing (telling about) this experience. Slight shifts of meaning can be detected in individual essays that rely on this basic framework. "The Art of Fiction," for instance, contradicts itself exactly on the problem of the context: first James states that the subject a novelist chooses influences the quality of his work, but then he contends it is only the way a novelist renders his imaginative experience that constitutes quality. Despite such ambiguities, I adopt the Jamesian contextual model of understanding as the framework by which to approach his other texts because it proves to be a useful reference tool for synthesising disparate data.

II. Novels

Because the imagination is a central concern for James, most of his works can be analysed though the problem of the imagination and the contextual model of understanding. However, the novels I have chosen to analyse can be characterised by the *dominating presence* of the imagination and I think reflect markedly different positions in the use of the concept. I have not considered Jamesian bestsellers like *The Turn of the Screw* and "The Figure in the Carpet", firstly because they fall into the category of *What Maisie Knew*, which I discuss here, and secondly because their analysis would divert my investigation into discussing secondary literature irrelevant for my survey. So James's early phase (1870s to the early 1880s) is represented by *The Portrait of a Lady*; his experimental phase (late 1880s to the early 1890s) by *What Maisie Knew*; while the late or major phase (1890s to the 1900s) by *The Ambassadors*.

Studied from the perspective of the Jamesian contextual model of understanding, one expects *The Portrait of a Lady* to stage diverse processes of imaginative experience. Yet *The Portrait* is discussed as a story of the *limitations* of the imagination, as the problem of understanding others in context can be pursued in it in detail. The novel elaborates on the conflict between an individualist and a social concept of the self, and Isabel and Mme Merle embody these trends. The story of Isabel's unhappy marriage shows how the socially blind heroine is forced to imagine contextually. Although she starts out as a self-reliant heroine with a firm belief in her powers to think and imagine, she becomes the victim of another kind of imagination she herself refuses to take account of. This contrast is exemplified by the widely known passage about "things" presented by Madame Merle:

> 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 are 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 got a great respect for *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 expressive (James 1995, 175).

When Merle sees Isabel's innocent self-assurance in opposing her pragmatic view of the self, she can easily manipulate the girl into a marriage with Osmond (Rowe 34–35). Isabel dreams up a story to accompany the marriage: she is providing Osmond with the means to realise his unrealised devotion to art. The real story is a marriage for money, a possibility Isabel cannot even think of.

Isabel's imagination in the novel works against revelatory experience. In the first part of the novel, her theories about life, especially about the independent self, make her read situations and other characters as parts of her pre-existent pattern about life: for or against her personal progress towards freedom and distance from convention. In so doing, her imagination prescribes the places, situations and persons can take; it does not allow them to influence Isabel's main theoretical framework. This imagination is termed "transcendental" by criticism and Isabel's project of progression a crash course on Arnoldian self-culture. By the time she is compelled to reconsider her relation to her husband, Merle, and to Ralph, her imagination is forced to accept a new explanation of the self as relational, and this also means a basic modification of her theory of her independent imagination. She realises that she should understand events in their contexts, by considering the social positions and manipulative potential of the characters involved in them.

While rethinking her past experience, her imagination orders her senses of the past in an imaginative way according to James's model. Her imagination is now transforming surface events into parts of an overall underlying pattern for herself. However, she is unwilling to practice her imagination through manipulating the actions of other characters. Although she realises how Madame Merle and Osmond involved her in their marriage plot by manipulating her individualistic idea of the self, now that she has to accept the adequacy and power of their model, she herself is unwilling to go so far as to practice her imagination and make other characters act as she would constitute them through her imaginative experience. The remnant of her idealistic theories prevents her from putting her imagination as a constitutive factor of experience into practice by manipulating others. In this way her behaviour eventually is both moral in the conventional sense of the term and in the Jamesian sense of being imaginative. So in *The Portrait* a conflict of imaginations results in the dominance of the contextually oriented imagination. Isabel learns to realise how such an imagination has manipulated her life by ac-

quiring the use of this kind of imagination in her own experience. Still, she is unwilling to use her ability for imaginative experience to start a new life.

What Maisie Knew shows the process of experience coming into being in social interactions. *What Maisie Knew* is an account of growing up: the education of Maisie Farange's imaginative faculty ends up in the acquisition of a moral sense. Maisie is exposed to the mutual bad will and immoral behaviour of her parents and step-parents; she is used as an unknowing victim by both sides. Soon she learns to pretend to be stupid, to remain silent, to guess and to make up analogies. These are her principal weapons of self-defence in her interactions with others. As her education is primarily limited to the acquisition of such social skills of behaviour, in her early teens she is already an expert schemer. Surprisingly, her skill turns out to be basically different from that of her elders: her manipulative behaviour is motivated not by a wish to hurt others but by a self interest to arrange relations to mutual advantage. Her moral sense is related to this intention to use her social skills to arrange relations to advantage. This moral sense is different from the moralism of her governess, Mrs. Wix, who thinks of morality in terms of a Victorian code of honour (Williams 39–40). The novel is the story of the education of the imagination in dire circumstances that paradoxically yields a positive outcome. Maisie learns to experience imaginatively in her interactions with others but at the same time is able to maintain a moral sense that is not a narrow Victorian moralism.

The production of experience through the use of social skills is epitomised in particular scenes in the novel. Let me focus on two of these to illustrate the dynamics of this experience. The first such explicit scene is the one where Maisie is contemplating Mrs. Wix's behaviour toward Sir Claude early in the story. Wix has just noticed Claude's attraction to Mrs. Beale and warned him of the dangers—parallel to this, Maisie has just noticed a new trait of the lady herself, a new dignified air about her. The girl speculates about where this dignity may have come from, if there are surprises like that to expect from Mrs. Wix. Then Maisie feels she is a spectator:

> So the sharpened sense of spectatorship was the child's main support, the long habit...of seeing herself in discussion and finding herself in the fury of it—she had glimpses of the game of football—a sort of compensation for the doom of a peculiar passivity. It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass. Such she felt to be the application of her nose while she waited for the effect of Mrs Wix's eloquence (James 1985, 101).

Maisie is present as someone watching a game; she is passive but compensated by the fury of the game. She is separated from the actual event by being the audience. The metaphoric glass wall implies that she can only see the action but cannot interfere with it. Actually, the trope of the glass wall separating her from knowledge is used again when she would like to go to lectures but is not taken:

> It was devillish awkward, didn't she see? to try, without even the limited capital mentioned, to mix her up with the remote array that glittered before her as the children of the rich. She was to feel henceforth as if she were flattening her nose upon the hard window-pane of the sweetshop of knowledge (120).

She strains for knowledge as an outsider through an invisible but hard wall. Paradoxically, however, this sharpened sense of spectatorship is eventually the price Maisie pays for experience: without watching, she would not get to experience at all.

Being the most famous adventure of the Jamesian imagination, *The Ambassadors* explores further moral dilemmas implied in the contextual model of understanding. It shows not only that Strether learns to produce imaginative experience but also the problems that arise for him from his new ability. Lambert Strether is already in possession of a double consciousness at the very beginning of the novel: he is both a Woollett man representing stereotypical American values like work, lawful life, duty and a reborn Parisian enjoying the stereotypical social, cultural and sensual pleasures the city has for him. Despite the double connections of filiation (Woollett) and affiliation (Paris), he exists without questioning or celebrating either of his allegiances until the scene in Gloriani's garden, where he utters his famous advice to Bilham: "Live all you can, it's a mistake not to" (James 1994, 134). This speech can be taken as Strether's statement of his conviction: although his own consciousness has been cast by a simple mould and he cannot change his life now, he understands that it would have been possible to live another life he could call having *had* a life. He is certain that the way one can live in Paris is the way to *have* a life. Yet, he has to modify his idea of Parisian life when he eventually has to face the fact that his friends are verily engaged in an affair: in the Woollett sense Chad and Vionnet are having an immoral relationship. At this point Strether has to reconsider his previous conviction and reflect whether Parisian life as it looks now is still to be considered ideal, with the crack of immorality to it. His reaction to his revelation, surprisingly, is not to revert to his original "American" values, and dismiss his friends, who deceived him, but to modify his conviction and begin to live according his own personal set of values that takes account of the affair and does not consider the couple immoral in the Woollett sense. Still, his attitude is not to adopt the Parisian way to life, and he decides to return to Woollett although he has no future there.

One can read Strether's adventure as an account of a specifically Jamesian imaginative experience. In Paris, Strether does not experience the spoils of the flesh but those of culture and of manners. His pleasurable experience makes him realise that his duty to represent Mrs. Newsome from Woollett, Mass. is not necessarily good. If his initial mission is to ensure that the son Chad Newsome reverts from useless and empty occupations, then his new mission is to make Chad stay in Paris. Compared to the

imaginative life of the mind in Paris, Woollett life is empty and grim. Strether's new duty to understand imaginatively works against his former duty to represent, but he is convinced he has to stick to his new duty. Yet, when he realises that his belief in Parisian imaginative experience has been too innocent and Chad has indeed been having an affair, his new ability is not falsified. He experiences the shock imaginatively and decides to interpret the events favourably (Armstrong 1987, 100). Relying on this decision, he sticks to his own understanding of the case and his own sense of morality. The narrator is after the decision making process Strether is involved in:

> ...since we have spoken of what he was, after his return, to recall and interpret, it may as well immediately be said that his *real experience* of these few hours put on, in that belated vision—for he scarce went to bed till morning—the aspect that is most to our purpose (James 1994, 312–3, emphasis mine).

Strether's conviction threatens his social position, economic balance, even his job back in America: he becomes a social failure by Woollett standards. He also renounces his chances for a happier life in Paris. Yet, he feels secure because he thinks his own moral position is clear amongst different other possible notions of morality.

III. Essays on culture

James's recently rediscovered fourth phase, his work after 1904, shows further evidence of the focal role of the imagination in James's texts. After what was thought to be a climax and end of a literary career, James went on to write quantities of non-fiction analyzing British and American culture and this phase of his work is called his fourth phase today. *The American Scene* is the most popular text of these. As *The American Scene* does not focus on the imaginative process of experience and could fill a book on its own, I have selected articles James published in *Harper's Magazine* at the time he wrote *The American Scene* to explain the role the imagination has in them. Considered from the perspective of the Jamesian contextual model of understanding, the articles show an applied imagination at work.

Writings from James's fourth phase can be compared to indicate the relevance of the contextual model of understanding in his critique of culture. In his late articles on American culture James criticises American speech and manners in the name of an existentialist belief in the power of the imagination. Slack speech and bad manners are indications of a lack of taste and civilisation. Speech, pronunciation, intonation and manners constitute parts of the imaginative life of the mind James is after in his novels. The ideal of civilised behaviour is to be brought about in interpersonal relations, the

articles claim. The critic has the responsibility of reminding his readers of this, as the novelist must in his novels (Walker 42–102). From the perspective of the novels the ability of speech James misses in American women is similar to and may be the verbal equivalent of social skills of behaviour. Philosophically speaking, the life of the imagination ensures the existential dimension to life in James (Kovács 209).

IV. Model

The critical articles reflect on the imagination in a homogenous fashion. The double social-personal orientation of the imagination appears to be the consequence of the structure of the contextual understanding in them. The work of the imagination is central to the Jamesian model of understanding in that it intensifies one's process of experience and keeps it in movement. Until experience is kept in movement, experience is moral for James the critic. Reality can only be thought of as somebody's impression of reality. Knowledge is produced along with experience and is subject to continual change. While using this frame of reference, James relied upon the Coleridgean notions "imagination" and "fancy" in his descriptions of novelists. At the same time, understanding is also dependent on the context, the complexity of social institutions that surrounds the perceiver. All in all, one's impressions of reality are based on a presupposed reality that can only be known through impressions.

The novels present a thorough complication of the initial model of understanding as the homogenous model is being reformulated step by step. In the novels, imaginative understanding proves to be a process connected to a social concept of the self. If one tries to produce experience without an interaction with others, one's projects (of marriage, of acquiring knowledge) are doomed to failure. The social concept of the self implies that social skills of behaviour like silence, assumed ignorance, lying and analogy, making up theories, manipulating or squaring others are intricately linked with the imaginative process of experience. The morality of the imagination does not only mean its intensity. Imaginative experience is constructed in social scenarios, in negotiations with others. When others' versions are neglected, one's imagination can no longer be called moral. The term "moral" can be used in more than one sense: in a narrow sense, it may refer to rules of behaviour; in a broad sense, it may refer to one's consideration of other's imaginative constructs. In the novels, James uses the concept of the imagination in the broad sense. The imagination may have links to power in its manifestations as one's imaginative constructs can be imposed on others in ways that may well be morally questionable. So in the novels the use of the concept of the imagination gradually shifts away from the Coleridgean conceptual definition into a broader moral sense of

it. Thus the moral dimension of the process of imaginative experience lies not in the fact that it remains in progress, but in the fact that one has the responsibility to choose from among possible processes of experience about a posited event, and that one's experience can only be produced in interactions and negotiations with others.

Execution, the technical segment of the novelist's art, is aimed at a direct rendering of experience. The task of the novelist is to be faithful to his own or the character's own process of experience. In the novels the task of faithful execution seemed to become more and more of a problem that was indicated by the appearance of a distinct narratorial voice. In *The Portrait*, there is explicit commentary for the reader on Isabel. In *What Maisie Knew*, the narrator addresses the reader and points out analogies. In the last novel analysed, the narratorial stance in *What Maisie Knew* is pursued further: in *The Ambassadors*, the few narratorial remarks serve to remind the reader of his task to think analogously with the character and to guide him in this. In this process, the authorial—narratorial imagination becomes a theme distinct from the characters' imagination, and a readerly imagination is also implicitly relied upon. Given the diverse uses of the term, the notion of the "imagination" in James might be more specifically named fictionalisation.

The contextual model of understanding is implicitly present in James's articles on American culture. When James criticises the manners of Americans in general and the speech of American women in particular, he is seeking to find traces of the process of social experience he had idealised in his novels. James is bitter at not finding imaginative elements in the speech and habits of Americans. His cultural criticism of American speech and manners, thus, is based on a moral argument.

The intellectual project James the critic outlined himself as a novelist at the crossroads of American, French and English traditions of the novel has evolved through the changes of his model of understanding and imagination in his other texts. For James the new American novelist and cultural critic the project has become an *imaginative* processing of social interactions: as he called it, a "moral" project.

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CHAPTER 5

HENRY JAMES'S EXPERIENCE OF 'AMERICA' IN *THE AMERICAN SCENE*

Apart from his fictional production, Henry James published an array of nonfictive writings beside his critical essays: travel writings, articles on current political issues, volumes of autobiography, and even a philosophical essay. Early on in his career, he wrote nonfiction sometimes to make ends meet and as part of an extended literary apprenticeship (Anesko vii), but beginning with the Prefaces, perhaps overburdened by the present and tempted to turn back to the past, his production was mainly constituted by these nonfiction efforts.

The name of this phase, the "fourth phase," refers to William James's comment on Henry's *The Golden Bowl* in 1905. William disliked the style of *The Bowl*, Henry's third manner and expressed a need for a fourth, possibly more straightforward style (Caramello, 464). Henry's fourth manner, however, is wide off the mark William set: it can be seen as a modification of the third in two major respects: real material is handled and the genres relied on demand the use of the first person Henry had previously tried to avoid (ibid.). Currently, Ross Posnock and Beverly Haviland called this part of James's work his second major phase (1907–14), one of autobiography, cultural criticism, and aesthetics (Posnock 1995, 23–4, Haviland xv). The pieces that constitute the phase are first and foremost *The American Scene* about James's travels in the U.S., two and a half volumes of autobiography, articles and lectures, the Prefaces to *The New York Edition*, two novels, one of them unfinished, and further tales.

The critical reception of these pieces is a fascinating story as it represents trends in the James industry and critical fortunes simultaneously. James's contemporaries did not consider the writings of the phase to be pieces of cultural criticism at all. Critical orthodoxy in the 1930s, exemplified by Van Wyck Brooks, read them as degenerate productions of the expatriate (Brooks 1926). Formally oriented criticism, heralded by F. O. Mathiessen, tended to read them as footnotes to a work already unified, focused on artistic qualities, and used them for background or biographical information. Avant-garde criticism stressed the freedom of signification and the ambiguity of the writing (Schloss 39–40, Caramello 465). The contemporary interest in multiculturalism and cultural studies, however, finds this phase of James doubly interesting: he is writing about culture and society explicitly and is also expressing his personal view of the problems encountered (Ickstadt 301). The interest in James and culture is epitomized by the vol-

ume *Henry James on Culture* edited by Pierre A. Walker, a selection of texts by James, and is theorized by John Carlos Rowe (Walker 1999, Rowe 1993, 73–93). The race issue has been addressed by Warren, Blair, *The Henry James Review* (Warren 1993, Blair 1996, *THJR* 1995 Fall), and diverse further aspects of the phase studied by Posnock, Haviland, most recently Salmon (Posnock 1991, Haviland 1997, Salmon 1997). As a secure mark of current interest, one can also see this stage focused on by fliers announcing conferences.

The works have achieved their 'cultural' receptions individually as different genres used for the construction of James's personal narrative. Among them *The American Scene* is the hottest text to date (Buelens 1997, 166). In the articles written about his trips in the U.S., James encounters an America different from that of his memories and is first and foremost forced to consider the phenomena of race and racial vs. national identity: immigrants at Ellis Island, Jews in New York and anti-Semitism, African Americans in the North and in the South, the fate of the natives: American Indians; the relativity of being native and alien. James's position to these issues is characteristically ambiguous and is subject to debate (Warren 141, Blair 158–210). Secondly, his approach to gender issues is another problem at hand: masculine and feminine roles and his rejection of the American ideal male position in them (Banta 30–33). Thirdly, he is preoccupied with the problem of the past: America as he remembers it and as it is. In the face of what he dislikes, he reconstructs his past in a nostalgic image of America (Rowe 1976, 134). Last but not least, the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of the work are also explained: against Posnock's combative idea of the aesthetic, Buelens stresses the mediating value of the aesthetic in political action, while McWhirter explores the ethical stance behind the project (Posnock 1999, 226; Buelens 1997, 170 and McWhirter 1997, 157).

In one of the justly famous scenes of James's *The American Scene*, James presents his report about a visit to the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York City. The place, writes James, constitutes a revelation about New York's loud life, and the so called amazing "hotel-world" of America. The hotel presents an expensive, glittering surface—but there is nothing for the inquisitive Jamesian eye to find beyond that surface, however hard he tries to read something into it. This specific scene at the Waldorf-Astoria has become a well known image of James's criticism of America in *The American Scene* (*TAS*) in general. Yet, of late, critical opinion seems to center on James's ambiguous relation to America rather than on his alleged dismissal of his American experience. James is clearly not attracted by what he sees during his journey but is at the same time arrested by his experience.

I would like to suggest that we look at James's ambiguous relation to what he represents in the context of James's own texts. I claim that James's descriptions in *TAS* rely on tropes that are familiar from his well known theory of fiction. In particular, I will be looking at two of his metaphors, namely "house" and "chamber." The use of the

metaphors in *The American Scene* and in the con-texts indicates that James is relying on a specific model of experience during his travels. I also claim that this very model is being challenged by the New York scenes in *TAS*.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part the Waldorf-Astoria phenomenon is described. In the second part I proceed to point out a possible Jamesian context for his image of the Waldorf-Astoria, more specifically his notion of experience in his literary criticism. In the third stage, I refer back to the Astoria scene and show how metaphors from James's literary criticism appear in it and explicate it. My aim is to show how, firstly, the Waldorf-Astoria scene challenges the basic Jamesian model of "experience" and secondly, how it indicates Jamesian reactions to the challenge.

I. The Waldorf-Astoria story

James describes the Waldorf-Astoria as a labyrinth that conveys to him the strongest impression, as he puts it: the essence, "of the loud New York story." (James 1968, 102)' The hotel presents a contrast to the dire street, as one crosses its swing door, one plunges into the "revelation" which is the condensed characteristics of New York City. For James the hotel expresses a social ideal (ibid.), a civilization, in other words a "capture of conceived manners themselves" (ibid). He states that the scenes at the Waldorf-Astoria represent that the contemporary American world is actually a "hotel-world." The contemporary "hotel-world" and its social ideals favor the public life versus the private life, which was the social ideal of a previous world. The contemporary "hotel-world" is open to anyone, once s/he can afford it and looks respectable enough. In this sense the new "hotel-world" breaks down old social canons.

We may wonder what James is actually after when he accentuates the importance of the "hotel-world" revelation at the Waldorf-Astoria. His statements are somewhat vague, but it is our task to explicate them further. He contends that the "hotel-world" may well be the "American spirit" most finding itself. He witnesses "a society which had found there, in its prodigious public setting so exactly what it wanted. One was in presence, as never before, of a realized ideal and of that childlike rush of surrender to it and clutch at it which one was to recognize, in America, as the note of the supremely gregarious state" (104). The ideal state occurs because of the publicity of the setting, the lack of interior, which appears as the most important feature of the scene. The Waldorf-Astoria itself constitutes the image of the "hotel-world" in which there are no private, interior spaces.

The statements on omnipresent publicity in the "hotel-world" can be linked to James's ideas about a specifically American lack of interior. Not long before the Astoria scene James analyses a tendency to minimize the interior as the prevailing American conception of life. In particular, James complains about American houses without private spaces in them. He claims that there is a

> diffused vagueness of separating between apartments, between hall and room, between one room and another, between the room you are in and the one you are not in, between the place of passage and the place of privacy." (166) [...] "The effacement of the difference [between interior and exterior] has been [...] triumphantly brought about [...] Thus we have the law that every part of every house shall be [...] visible, visitable, penetrable, not only from every other part, but from as many parts of as many houses as possible [...] Thus we see the systematized the indefinite extension of all spaces and the definite merging of all functions (167).

James goes on in a similar manner to claim that this arrangement, the lack of a well defined interior space, provides one with the opportunity of looking at the social tone that dictates it. By *social tone* James means the manners that accompany this spatial arrangement (166). James jumps into the conclusion that if the difference between the interior and the exterior is effaced, then there is no need for concentration, there is no space for a(n intimate) play of social relations as it can be practiced in the framework of a small room. Then there is space for the play of social relations only as it can be practiced in the framework of a huge hall.

James's reaction to the lack of interior is not so much dislike but surprise and a desire to understand. At the Waldorf-Astoria he envies the state of satisfaction he witnesses, and is at the same time amused by it. Also, he comments that "the reflective surfaces of the ironic, of the epic order, suspended in the New York atmosphere, have yet to show symptoms of shining out, and the monstrous phenomena themselves ... got ahead of ... any possibility of ... dramatic capture ...[A] welter of objects and sounds in which relief, detachment, dignity, meaning perished utterly and lost all rights" (83). Similarly, at the instant when he accounts for the lack of interior in American houses, he again faces the need to think in a different way. He is "beguiled" and is also trying to find a limit amongst the showering impulses. Moreover, in the passages that close the New York chapters, he expresses he is helpless with the fact he cannot possibly analyze the scenes any further. Yet, he is quite "agreeably baffled" (208). James is aware of the fact that what he sees has grown beyond his frame of reference but at the same time he is amused and wishes to find means to make sense of his experience.

Before going on, let me make it clear that my interest in these passages lies not in the sweeping generalizations about the "American spirit" or "American conception of life." Rather, for me, these passages illuminate how impressions are represented in *TAS*.

Let me briefly refer to critical accounts of the way James the observer reacts to the fact that his system of intelligibility seems to break down during his trip. Gert Buelens claims there is a deeply ambiguous relationship to America in James's text as James is both amused and horrified by realizing his notions of personal understanding do not help him in analyzing events any more, in other words by realizing his idea of the self does not seem to work. Buelens claims that "[t]he narrative voice of *TAS* seems to participate in the disruptive vision of the self even while critiquing it" (Buelens 1999, 353). Yet Buelens does not state exactly *what notions* of understanding are being challenged by the disruptive vision. Ross Posnock's interpretation might help here who argues that James's ambiguous relation to what he sees in *The American Scene* is connected to a *pragmatic pluralism* derived from Henry James's brother, William James's notion of *experience*. For William experience is a mosaic where pieces cling together by their edges, the pieces overlap and overflow in flux, and Henry James would share this idea in *TAS*, too (Posnock 1998, 241).

I suggest that if we have a look at the problem of the absent interior in the context of James's literary and cultural criticism, we can link it to a specific Henry Jamesian idea of experience and see Henry James's relation to his American trip more complex than an acceptance of William's ideas. *En plus*, thereby we can also see more clearly what is at stake when James fails to comment in *The American Scene*.

II. Jamesian contexts: experience

The concerns one encounters in a close reading of the Waldorf-Astoria scene are familiar from James's well-known theory of fiction. The interior-exterior opposition, the focus on the visual, the search for revelations all constitute parts of his ideas on fiction that we know from his "The Art of Fiction" and other critical articles. For the sake of clarity (and brevity), I am going to focus on James's essays on Flaubert and "The Art of Fiction" itself to point out specific parallels.

Writing about Flaubert in the 1890s and 1902, James relies heavily on the interior-exterior opposition we have encountered in his description of the Waldorf-Astoria. Also, James's visual metaphors about Flaubert's lack of interest in character and focus on form both illustrate and elaborate the Jamesian standpoint on Flaubert in particular and on fiction in general. Besides, looking at two Jamesian metaphors on Flaubert provide us with a context to reconsider the problem of surfaces at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Let us start out with James's view of Flaubert that in turn will explain the spatial metaphors he uses to illustrate his points. For James, Flaubert is an interesting, ponderous failure (James 198b4, 289) whose mistakes represent potential success (James 1984c,

330). He is "formed intellectually of two quite distinct compartments: the sense of the real and the sense of the romantic" (op. cit., 321). James describes his sense of the real as the basis of his strange talent, "his peculiar talent ... in the description ... of material objects, and it must be admitted that he carried it very far" (James 1984b, 290), and his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, as not his most imaginative work. So there is criticism implied in James's account because Flaubert nearly excludes the free play of the imagination in his best writing (James 1984c, 322) and because it is limited to deplorable subjects (James 1984b, 326). At the same time, his imagination is also portrayed as great and splendid, but is not to James's liking.

In this context, James's reading of Flaubert's mistakes deserves particular attention as it highlights the potential James saw in Flaubert. Writing about *L'Éducation sentimentale*, James discovers the indicative mistake in the figure of Mme. Arnoux, saying that the character is Flaubert's least superficial one, it is somehow moral. The figure is an error inasmuch it does not fit in the company of Flaubert's superficial characters. It is also an unconscious error, as the author had not suspected it was an opportunity that would have counted as his finest (James 1984c, 330)—from James's perspective, of course. It seems that for James a moral character can be opposed to one that is portrayed through the description of things and he misses the depiction of a moral character in Flaubert and would value the appearance of one (Kovács 2006b, 232).

From a Jamesian point of view Flaubert's case, his conviction that the beauty of art is dependent on form is greatly discredited because he deems the Flaubertian conviction shallow.

> He regarded the work of art as existing but by its expression, and defied us to name any other measure of its life that is not a stultification. He held style accordingly an indefeasible part of it and found beauty, interest and distinction as dependent on it for emergence as a letter committed to the post-office is dependent on an addressed envelope. Strange enough, it may well appear to us to have to apologise for such notions as eccentric. There are persons who consider that style comes of itself—we see and hear at present, I think, enough of them; and to whom he would doubtless have remarked that it goes, of itself, still faster. The thing naturally differs in fact with the nature of the imagination: the question is that of proprieties and affinities, sympathy and proportion (James, 1984c, 338).

The basis of James's critique is directed at Flaubert's insistence on the formal aspect of the novelist's art: the sole concern with style. Expression, for James, is not the only measure of the life of a work of art; it is as eccentric to say only form matters as it would be to say that only the subject matter does. I think here James misses that part of his own model where the perceiver's senses and the mind cooperate to construct an illusion (James 1984e, 523), and he is astounded by the eccentric and limiting focus on the stage of execution only (Kovács 2006a, 29). To say that such a preference for execution on Flaubert's part differs with the nature of the imagination Flaubert applies is to

connect Flaubert's two sides, the romantic one (*Salammbô, Saint-Antoine*) and his realist one *(Madame Bovary)* with the question of execution (James 1984c, 335). The Realist project, however, is concerned with execution only, while the Romantic one is aware of the importance of a construction of an illusion to be executed.

The Jamesian position on Flaubert can be explicated through his metaphors on the French author. The first metaphor James uses is that of the *crystal box*. For James, a writer of the first order writes in the style of a "crystal box" (op. cit., 335). It resembles "when in the hand and however closely viewed a shapely crystal box, and yet to be seen when placed on the table and opened to contain innumerable compartments, springs and tricks. One is ornamental either way, but one is in the second way precious, too" (ibid). In this metaphor one's way of looking at the box stands for one's writing style. More specifically, Flaubert's two coexisting styles, the romantic and the realist, are identified with ways of looking at the crystal box. The box can be studied both from the inside and from the outside, or only from the outside, respectively. The concentration on form, then, the realist project, is ornamental but not precious, and is the result of too close an observation 'in the hand'. As opposed to this, the romantic project is both ornamental and precious, in placing the object of study far enough ('on the table') for the perceiver to notice that it can be opened and that innumerable compartments and particles can be found in it.

The opposition of observing the crystal box from the outside only or both from inside and outside is related to that of observing things or thoughts. (In Jamesian parlance, this means observing superficial character or moral character.) This relation is to be shown through another spatial metaphor, the chamber of the soul, where James contends that Flaubert "stopped too short ... He hovered forever at the public door, in the outer court, the splendor of which very properly beguiled him ... was meant to carry further, the other doors were meant to open. He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul" (James 1984d, 313–4). In this metaphor the inside-outside opposition surfaces in the image of the house of fiction which could not be accessed by Flaubert. He was paralyzed by the splendor of the court, as if by the ornaments of the crystal, and this prevented him from observing the innermost parts of the house. He could not open the doors, as he also had problems with opening the crystal box. He was too close to the public door and enthralled by the beauty of the outer form to notice the spaces to be opened beyond that. Doubtless this is the reason why James calls Flaubert "one of the most conspicuous of the faithless" (op. cit., 313), and considers him an interesting failure.

James's notion 'the chamber of the soul' is a trope from his "The Art of Fiction" from 1884, in which he gives an account of the desirable process of artistic experience. The Jamesian notion of experience explains the reasons why James considers Flaubert's work a failure. In "The Art of Fiction" James explains the myriad forms of personal

senses of reality by the nature of experience. For James, reality comes into being through personal experience. Although James starts out by criticizing Besant's claim that one should write from experience as inconclusive, he basically accepts the very same idea. One should write from experience but this is not a prerequisite by which to evaluate authors, for experience is a process and one cannot evaluate such an idiosyncratic phenomenon. James uses a spectacular spatial metaphor to illuminate the process:

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken-threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind, and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations (James 1984f, 52).

Experience, then, is a sensibility that collects impulses Experience happens in one's consciousness and constitutes the processes going on in the mind. When experience is fine, in other words when the web in one's consciousness is sensitive, the web of experience can sense even the tiniest impulses and attribute meaning to them. Imagination is the quality of the mind which makes the process of experience fine, sensitive, which motors the unlimited, incomplete process called experience. James adds that an author can represent only this personal experience when he writes.

James's criticism of Flaubert relies on this model of experience. James's criticism of Flaubert refers to a specific lack of Flaubert's experience, namely that Flaubert was never able to enter the chamber of the "soul" and give an account of the process of experience. Instead, he only writes about the work of the *senses*. As far as James is concerned, the work of the senses needs to be represented, but this only constitutes a beginning for the work of experience. For James the most important aspect of experience, the attribution of meaning, goes on in the mind (or soul) in the form of a process. Therefore it is only natural that James points out the need for the representation of the mind (or soul) in Flaubert. Basically, James misses Flaubert's representation of the interior space where experience is processed.

III. James's experience of New York City in *The American Scene*

Let us return to James's criticism of the lack of interior at the Waldorf-Astoria and reconsider it from the perspective of James's model of experience in his literary criticism. The terms James used in the description of the Waldorf-Astoria scene appear similar to

his general account of experience in "The Art of Fiction" and resemble the structure of his spatial metaphors on Flaubert. Specific features of the Astoria scene which appear in James's model of experience indicate that the Astoria scene is exemplary not only of the American scene but of the fate of the creative writer in the new context as well.

Firstly, the Astoria scene constitutes a process of experience according to the Jamesian concept of experience. The Astoria scene is a "revelation" for the observing James about the American "hotel world" in particular and the American spirit in general. Similarly, in "The Art of Fiction" James describes the process of experience as an instance of revelation. On the basis of some sensory impulse, the perceiving mind is able to process an impression into specialized symbolic constructs that go on changing with the movements of the perceiving mind. James's account of the scene at the Astoria represents a fine example of how a sensory impulse grows into 'revelation,' i.e. in this case a treatise upon American ways of behavior.

Secondly, one can also find a similarity in the way James depicts experience in "The Art of Fiction" and in the Astoria scene. In *The American Scene* the space of the Astoria is described in terms of chambers, as a space constituted of interlinked chambers. We can recall that James's account of the process of experience in "The Art of Fiction" relies on the image of the "chamber of the soul" in which experience takes place. However, there is slight modification of the image in the case of the scene at the Astoria: it is a *labyrinth* of chambers instead of chambers with well-defined functions. In other words, in the American setting it is difficult to distinguish the chamber of the soul from other chambers of the house it belongs to.

Is this difference of any significance for us thinking about the relevance of the Jamesian model of experience from his mid-career to his account from his late phase? By all means, because it is through this difference that the interior-exterior opposition in the 'house' metaphor of the Flaubert articles between a sense-oriented and a thought-oriented way of writing can be related to the Astoria scene, a third similarity to take account of. The Waldorf-Astoria as a building is like the house that is to be penetrated by the writers's eye in the Flaubert essays. Writing about Flaubert, James expressed his opinion that Flaubert never once got into the house of fiction and was able to open the door to the chamber of the soul. He remained outside, in other words cared for matters of literary execution and not for the process of understanding in the mind. If the Waldorf-Astoria is like a house of fiction to be entered the writer or perceiving mind is supposed to enter the chamber of the soul in it to be able to render the process of experience. So from the perspective of James's literary criticism, the Waldorf-Astoria can be conceived of as the house of fiction James the writer is to enter in order to open the door of the chamber of the American soul there.

However, from James's account it is apparent that the innermost chamber, the chamber of the mind the writer is after is simply absent from the Waldorf-Astoria. Although James as the perceiver attempts to perform an act of understanding there and even relies on all the basic concepts of his model of experience while he is doing so, the act itself remains ambiguously devoid of understanding an "essence of the scene." James states there is a revelation of understanding going on, the chambers are being discussed and analyzed, still, the outcome is far off the expected understanding of the scene. All that comes to the fore is the superficiality of the scene, the lack of social interplay and motivation. In other words, there is a lack of experience to be represented for the writer's eye in this setting.

This lack of interior as the "lack of experience to be represented" constitutes the very problem James has with the American "hotel-world" in the Astoria scene. If there is no interior space of experience and social play within the house of fiction, then what should a writer specialized in representing the process of experience write about? The problem is not with the perceiving mind but with the "subject" in the sense that the impulses are only able to generate an impression of emptiness in the perceiving mind.

To make matters worse, at the Astoria James faces the fact that his whole conception about writing is being challenged. James the observer approaches the scene with all his perceiving might but realizes that the process of experience stops short of the chaotic abundance of impulses and impenetrable glittering surfaces in New York City. The "subject," seemingly devoid of the process of experience to be represented, actually defies the observer's attempt to create an experience on the basis of it. James's bafflement and lack of commentary are the results of this understanding on his part. In this sense, James's understanding is different from his early idea of America in *Hawthorne* where had condemned the American social scene to be unworthy of representation and he himself moved to Europe in search of more specialized contexts to write about. In contrast, at this instance at the Astoria James glimpses the social scene of a new era he needs to face.

Yet, there is another contradiction involved in the Astoria scene. I am thinking of James's reaction to his understanding that the New York City atmosphere suspends the process of experience in his old sense of the term. James, as mentioned above, is baffled by New York City but at the same time he is also amused and beguiled by it and is admiring it. He is not at all bitter or sour to see that his frame of reference is crumbling, that in New York there is no interior or depth to understand through the process of experience. Although he is aware his most important objective with his trip cannot be realized, he goes on with his description of surfaces that for him are signifiers of an absence only.

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CHAPTER 6

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE: THE ORDER OF CULTURE IN EDITH WHARTON'S *THE DECORATION OF HOUSES* AND *ITALIAN VILLAS AND THEIR GARDENS*

Edith Wharton is best known as a novelist of manners specializing in life in upper class New York City society around the turn of the 19th–20th centuries. In this chapter I am focusing on work by another Edith Wharton: the author of travel books and a manual on interior design. In particular, I am going to take a look at two early texts of hers, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) and *Italian Villas and their Gardens* (1904). These two are linked by the intellectual project they perform: showing the American audience the use of European art in everyday life. To put it in general terms, Wharton conveys a sense of cultural order to her American readers through examples of European architecture.

In her *The Social Construction of American Realism*, Amy Kaplan approaches Wharton's early work as an attempt to establish her position as a professional author. Kaplan claims that architecture is the metaphor of writing in Wharton, and both in her early fiction and nonfiction architecture represents the clash between a professional male tradition of writing and female amateur text production. So in her nonfiction, when Wharton discusses architecture, her statements can also be read as comments on her aim to become a professional female author. For instance in *The Decoration of Houses*, when she is describing architectural principles of interior decoration, she criticizes the concept of the domestic interior as the special space of women separate from male authored spaces of architectural design. So the term interior architecture becomes a metaphor for criticizing the inside-outside divide, for thinking about a supposedly female space in supposedly male terms.

In my discussion of Wharton's early nonfiction I suggest that the gender oriented reading of these texts limits reflection on their other social aspects. Wharton's continual references to historical change, the historiography of art, and national features of cultures situate the gender aspect at the crossroads of other social aspects of culture. Although Wharton seems to set up manuals of interior architecture and garden design, I claim that in fact she lays out historically established principles of taste. She does not hold her arty examples up for copying, but rather for reflection: she offers meditations on the relation of art and everyday life. In her own terms, she reflects on the uses of civilization.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first part explicates the problem of professionalization and cultural work in Wharton's contemporary reception as a basis of my argument. The second part surveys of the importance of the metaphor of architecture for Wharton in her early fiction. The third part looks at how *The Decoration of Houses* relies on the notion of interior architecture while describing European examples of interior order. The fourth part studies how the volume on *Italian Villas* applies the notion of architecture for the space outside the house: the garden. The conclusion formulates the function of the nonfiction texts in more general terms than that of the professional female author. It explicates the approach Wharton performs towards architecture, art history, and cultural change in the texts.

I. The problem: female subversive potential in Wharton's texts

During the 1980s Edith Wharton's *oeuvre* was recanonized. The work was performed by scholars who foregrounded female subversive potential in her fiction. As Millicent Bell puts it: "Though she was no conscious feminist, it was felt that she had expressed her own struggles in fiction that showed her clear understanding of what it had meant to her to be a woman." (Bell 13) As a result, a multitude of books and articles have been published on the subject. The interest promoted biographical studies showing her life in terms of feminist psychopatology, (ibid.) as well as monographs investigating the commodification in the formation of the female artist's character. (Bell 14) This image of Wharton also appears in literary overviews: for instance in 1984, Amy Kaplan in her *The Social Construction of American Realism* articulated the commodification of the figure of the female artist in terms of the division between private and public sphere. "[Wharton's] writing is situated at a complex intersection of class and gender. Wharton attempted to construct a separate personality in the mind of the public and to write herself out of the private domestic sphere, (Kaplan 79) inscribing a public identity in the marketplace, unlike contemporary lady novelists of the domestic sphere like H. B. Stowe and Catherine Sedgwick. (Wright 5) Wharton's achievement in constructing a public identity for herself as a female author was considered to be a significant alteration of the public roles designated for the lady novelist of her time.

It would seem that the body of travel writings could have been included in the description of the construction of Wharton's public identity as an author. As we know, by writing American travel books she took upon herself a position formerly filled by American men of letters, a position forbidden for lady novelists. It was exactly through the modification of the public roles of the lady novelist that she was able to write travel

books. However, there is one specific problem with her newly forged public identity. Wharton the woman of letters seems an arch conservative in questions of gender and class. In other words she writes nonfiction to preserve the existing cultural and social status quo, so much so that in 1996 Frederick Wegener, the editor of a Wharton's uncollected critical writing states that her criticism "does little to locate a genuinely feminine sensibility in it." (Wegener 44) Also, Michael E. Nowlin argues along similar lines: "Wharton boldly set out to claim cultural authority on grounds long exclusively occupied by men ... in the public arena ... [but] showed no eagerness to challenge the bifurcation of culture along gendered (as well as class) lines." (Nowlin 446) It seems the female subversive potential in Wharton cannot be readily reconciled with her public identity.

On the basis of this opposition one is tempted to ask whether she was modern or conservative, feminist or not. Yet these questions cut us off from the achievements of her work. It is more useful to look at her output in terms of what it does, not in terms of what it is like. In this sense, as Nancy Bentley puts it, we can look at Wharton's work as "neither culturally subversive nor apologist; rather [let us look at how] it effects a new representation of the sphere of culture itself in order to articulate, circulate, and finally acculturate the shocks of the modern." (Bentley 1995a, 50) So in *Italian Villas*, the task is not to point out the incompatibility of the feminist sensibility and the public identity. Rather, the task is to explicate how the text represents the sphere of culture and how it articulates the shocks of the modern (Bentley 1995b, 5).

II. Architecture as metaphor in Wharton's early fiction

Architecture "remained an important metaphor for writing for Wharton throughout her life," as Amy Kaplan claims. "For her, the achievement of architectural form in her novels is related to her sense of attaining the status of the professional author." (Kaplan 78–79) But how can one attain the status of the professional author? Kaplan maintains that Wharton created the status of the professional female author for herself and rejected the traditional role designated for a female author, the status of the amateur lady novelist. The 19th century lady novelist produces popular, sentimental texts for a domestic female audience. Instead, the professional female author aims at leaving the topics of the domestic sphere and adapting herself to the concerns and methods of professional male authors. To illuminate this dilemma of Wharton's, I suggest that we have a look at a section from her 1893 short story titled "The Fulness of Life" and compare the architectural metaphor of writing there to a similar one by Henry James

in order to visualize the new problems of the professional author Wharton faces at the beginning of her career.

In her short story, Wharton relies on an architectural metaphor to illuminate the way the female psyche works and is expressed. The frame narrative of the story is quite simple. An intelligent, cultured woman dies and is happy to find herself in Heaven. Upon entry, she is interrogated about her life and relation with her husband, and from the interview it turns out they never had much in common intellectually speaking, as the husband was never able to comprehend the spiritual joys or sorrows of his impressionable wife. At the beginning of the tale, the woman describes her relationship to her husband in architectural terms, and relies on the image I wish to focus on now. As the conversation goes:

> "And yet you were fond of your husband?" [the Spirit asked.]
> "You have hit upon the exact word; I was fond of him, yes, just as I was fond of my grandmother, and the house that I was born in, and my old nurse. Oh, I was fond of him, and we were counted a very happy couple. But I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes."
> "And your husband," asked the Spirit, after a pause, "never got beyond the family sitting-room?"
> "Never," she returned, impatiently; "and the worst of it was that he was quite content to remain there. (Wharton 1893, sec. 2)

The description of a woman's nature as a house with public and private spaces provides a visual representation of the inaccessibility of the female 'soul.' Even the husband, the prioritized male enters the communal rooms only. It is only the public spaces that are accessible for him: not because the inner chambers are closed but because he feels no need to access them.

This visual metaphor of the female soul by Wharton is strikingly similar to Henry James's image of the chamber of the mind the novelist is to represent. As James maintains:

> Experience is never limited and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (James 1984, 52)

For James the chamber of the mind is the site where the process of experience happens. The good novelist is after the representation of this process. According to James, French realist novelists fall off the mark because they fail to enter this chamber, they do not even enter the house (of a person's nature).

Let us compare the two images of the 'soul' and its accessability, Wharton's version of the room of the soul and James's chamber of the mind. The main structures of the houses, their architectural designs are identical. In the center one finds the room of the soul, the most important and most private space of the building. For James, the room is accessible, but only for those applying the right means: for novelists interested in psychological introspection and not in empirical sensory details of human life. In other words, access is provided for psychological novelists and not for realist authors. For Wharton, the same question of accessibility is posed along gender lines. In her version it is specifically the female soul that awaits its male visitor. Also, the male visitor never gets access to the precious chamber. So for Wharton it is the prioritized male who fails to enter the room of the female soul, the analogue of the realist novelist in James.

Let us go a step further and read Wharton's architectural metaphor as a metaphor of writing similar to James's, as Kaplan also suggested. The main concern being the expression of the life of the female soul, it is indicated its space can never be explored by a male visitor. If we read the room-visitor duality in terms of James's code, i. e. as a subject matter and novelist duality, then Wharton's image poses a concern about the novelistic methods that are needed for an exploration of the female soul in a novel. The male novelist and his methods do not suffice in conveying the contents of the female soul, at least not by the realist method. But would Wharton accept a psychologizing novelist, James's ideal, as fit for entry?

If we go on reading the story, we get an ambiguous answer, a yes, no, maybe so. In Heaven, the woman does find a male partner who is able to comprehend her thoughts and emotions, yet she decides not to go for him but to wait for her husband to accompany her in eternity. So yes, there are ways to express the female soul. Yet the female soul does not want to be expressed and reverts to its original isolated position. How are we to take this ambiguity? Why does the woman prefer her isolated condition to one of communication and partnership?

At this point we can return to the question of professional authorship Wharton's architectural metaphors are supposed to be linked to. It is the woman who, despite former claims, prevents the male visitor from entering the room of her soul. The idea of women's sphere as separate, linked to the domestic interior of the house is the one problematized here. Is women's sphere really separate from men's, or is this separation being kept up by women authors themselves? The ironic ending of the short story would suggest the artificiality of the divide and also a criticism of the intelligent lady

novelist who keeps up the division by intentionally not sharing her experience with male partners. A professional female author is unlike the lady novelist, as her main concern is to allow communication between the male and female spheres, even at the cost of the loss of the idea of a separate female sphere. So for Wharton the metaphor of architecture is connected to her aim to create the position of the professional author at the crossroads of former male and female traditions of writing.

III. Interior Architecture: Architecture and interior decoration in *The Decoration of Houses*

Problems of architecture remain the main concern of Wharton's nonfiction texts, too. In the next sections, let us have a look at how she involves the concept of architecture into her texts on interior decoration and gardening.

The Decoration of Houses starts out with professing the architectural principle underlying the field of interior decoration. As Wharton starts out "Rooms may be decorated in two ways: by a superficial application of ornament totally independent of structure, or by means of those architectural features which are part of the organism of every house, inside as well as out." (1) The contrast between decoration as superficial ornament versus decoration as structural element has come into being as late as the 19th century, when a division of labor between the work of the architect and the work of the decorator took place. Wharton professes that the art of interior decoration is comprehended only if one thinks of interior decoration as it was conceived of until the 19th century, as a branch of architecture (2), or as house architecture (140). So the keyword to interior decoration is architectural treatment, in all areas.

Yet what does an architectural treatment mean in practice, for the areas covered in the different chapters? The book has dull-sounding chapters like: walls, doors, windows, fireplaces, ceilings and floors, hall and stairs, different kinds of rooms (gala, morning, library, dining, bed, school), *bric à brac.* Perhaps it is easier to see how the placement and size of doors, windows, and fireplaces should depend on architectural proportion, simplicity, and the needs of the inmates. Yet how, Wharton asks, does one find the link between these principles and the decoration of bedroom carpets? She finds the answer stating that "in the composition of the whole there is no negligible entity" (192), as in all areas the supreme excellence is simplicity, harmony, and proportion.

Wharton bases her positive belief in the architectural treatment on two presuppositions: first, on her belief in the reliability of the historical method and second, on her belief in an innate sense of beauty. First, she maintains that an understanding of the historically changing functions of rooms is needed for the application of the right decora-

tion. In her explanations she continually refers to the fact that the present vulgar American style of interior decoration shows deficiencies mainly because it does not understand the proper functions of the rooms and the decorations. It is a historical knowledge of changes of functions in the English middle-class house or in the aristocratic town residence that is needed not to mix functions when planning today. For instance, the gala rooms are not separate from the private apartments in American homes. The historical reason for this is that the American house is the enlargement of the *maison bourgeoise* and of the English middle class house, not of the aristocratic county seat or the town residence, where gala rooms had been necessary and a different planning was needed. In Italian Renaissance palaces the private apartment called '*mezzanin*' was placed in a separate portion of the palace, an intermediate story that was formed by building some very high studded salons and of lowering the ceiling of adjoining rooms, thus creating intermediate rooms. (7) In fact, due to changes of lifestyles, the architectural decoration of the renaissance private apartment is of more interest to decorators today than the enormous public spaces of the same palaces.

As the second presupposition of her belief in the architectural method, she accepts the existence of an innate sense of beauty. For her, it is a vital part of life like other civic virtues. Her idea is that one has a feeling for beauty that awakens in childhood already. This sense can be cultivated—the schoolroom of a child should provide an environment that develops this sense of beauty. Cultivation here means the development of those habits of observation and comparison that form the basis of all sound judgements. (175) With the study of art we learn to observe and compare, aesthetic criteria that are elements of culture and make art a factor of civilization. From this perspective the habit of regarding art as a thing apart from life is fatal to the development of taste, and indirectly, to civilization.

In sum, *The Decoration* criticizes the opposition between spaces inside and outside the house, and also points out the historical changes of the architectural functions linking them. Wharton finds a refuge from historical change in an innate human sense for beauty, observation and reflection.

IV. Exterior architecture: The architecture of the garden in *Italian Villas and their Gardens*

In *Italian Villas*, architecture appears as the larger rule behind Italian garden magic invisible for the everyday American perceiver. A harmony of design is based on the rule that the garden must be studied in relation to the house, and both in relation to the landscape. (6) For Wharton, the garden is in effect a prolongation of the house with its own

logical functional divisions. It is related to the landscape in its orientation, and in using the natural building materials and plants of the region. Wharton again works with an opposition when she formulates the architectural principle for garden-art. She contrasts the architecturally designed Renaissance or Baroque Italian garden to the English garden of the landscape school that wishes to blend the garden with the landscape. Historically, the landscape school is responsible for the alteration of several Italian Renaissance gardens into English parks from the mid-18th century on, in essence for a national forgetfulness about functions of the garden space even in Italy since the 18th century.

Armed with this quasi structuralist intention of locating the deep structure of Italian garden magic, Wharton the scientist also lists the basic units necessary for the transformational laws she has identified. There are three basic materials the Italian gardener uses to achieve his goals: marble, water, and perennial verdure because these are the materials the climate/location offers. The garden of the Italian villa consists of the following elements: shady walks, sunny bowling greens, parterres, (rose arbour) orchards, woodland shade, terraces, sheltered flower and/or herb garden, waterworks. Enlisting the ingredients, Wharton is on the lookout for the architectural principle in every villa-garden-landscape relation she presents. She mentions the position of the villa on the property, she identifies the separate functional parts of the garden and their relations to the house, respectively. Let me give you a delicious example of what exactly all these elements are and of how they can be harmoniously placed according to the three rules above. The case in point is the Villa Gamberaia, 10 miles from Florence, with the main lines of a small but perfect Renaissance garden from the 16th century. The house is situated on a slope overlooking valley of the Arno and the village, and Florence can also be seen at a distance. In front of the façade of the house there is a grassy terrace bounded by a low wall which overhangs the vineyards and the fields. To the two sides of the villa there are two balustrades, one leading to the chapel, the other to an oblong garden with a pond and symmetrical parterres. Behind the villa, running parallel with it, is a long grass alley or bowling green flanked for part of its length by a retaining wall set with statues and for the remainder by high hedges, closing it off from the oblong garden. The alley is closed on one end by a grotto, a fountain. At the opposite end (behind the oblong garden) it terminates in a balustrade whence one looks down on the Arno. The retaining wall of the bowling green sustains a terrace planted with cypress and ilex and on the other end a lemon house with a small garden. The wall is broken opposite the entrance of the house and a gate leads to a small garden with a grotto. Two flights of stairs lead up to the terrace from here. In Wharton's admiring commentary:

> The plan of the Gamberaia has been described thus in detail because it combines in an astonishingly small space,..., almost every typical excellence of the old Italian garden: free circulation of sunlight and air about the house; abundance of water; easy ac-

> cess to dense shade; sheltered walks with different points of view; variety of effect produced by the skilful use of different levels; and, finally, breadth and simplicity of composition. (46)

Wharton's task as a guide is most challenging when she visits run down gardens that look like enchanted forests for the innocent eye. She herself can only identify the parts by relying on her foreknowledge of typical functions, ingredients, and plants used.

In her analysis, Wharton again manifests her belief in the value of historical knowledge of changes of functions in garden space. It is not only that she criticizes the way the landscapist school blots out former traditions of garden design, making geometric lines seem ugly for visitors. She also wishes to acquaint her readers with subsequent styles of art history from Gothic through Renaissance and Baroque, contrasting these to Romanticism. She leads her readers through seven regions of Italy: regions around Florence, Siena, Rome, Rome itself, Geneva, Milan, and Venice, but these can in fact be seen as two tours, one a tour of mainly Renaissance architecture (chapters 1–4) and one a tour of mainly Baroque architecture (chapters 5–7).

Also, she provides commentary on the historiography of art. She often mentions the way other guidebooks comment on the given site, and locates the reasons for preference or dislike. A case in point is the reception of Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore in Lombardy. Baroque travelers admired its geometry and artifice. Yet in the mid 18th century a counterreaction set in: visitors with a taste for the artificial naturalism of the English landscape school found the frank artificiality of Isola Bella frightening. Commenting on the different judgments, Wharton states that these two preferences are still present in discussions of art, although it would be more useful to reflect on the artificiality of artistic conventions themselves instead of taking sides. "The time has come, however, when it is recognized that both these manners are manners, one as artificial as the other, and each to be judged ... by its own aesthetic merit." (205) To my mind, this view allows for the existence of simultaneous but possibly incompatible manners or styles of art.

Apart from the need to reflect on historical discontinuity and the artificiality of styles, there is also a third aspect to be regarded by the art-historian, the aspect of race. In an aside Wharton characterizes Italian architecture as somewhat out of step with classicism in European art and reverting to medieval images.

> This Italian reversion to the grotesque, at a time when it was losing fascination for the Northern races, might form the subject of an interesting study of *race aesthetics*. When the coarse and sombre fancy of mediaeval Europe found expression in grinning gargoyles and baleful or buffoonish images, Italian art held serenely to the beautiful..., but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the classical graces had taken possession of Northern Europe, the chimerical animals... reappeared in the queer fauna of Italian grottoes and ... garden-walk(s). (234, emphasis mine)

In other words in the formation and appearance of art traditions or *manners* seem to be influenced by racial characteristics, too. To read this along with the previous considerations of the meta-historian, diverse races come with diverse histories of art each to be understood as a sign system in itself, possibly incompatible with others.

In sum, *Italian Villas* manifests an interest in the architectural principles of garden design with an eye to the relation of inside and outside, house and space, but at the same time also stresses that one acknowledges the historicity of garden constructs and the artificiality or constructedness of artistic manners, and realizes the role of national (as she puts it: race) characteristics in the appearance of artistic manners.

Conclusion: Wharton's approach to culture and history in her early nonfiction work

Having looked at the role of architecture in Wharton's early short story, in her work on interior decoration, and on Italian garden design, let us consider the differences in its use. In the short story the opposition of the male exterior and female interior space was criticized and the chance of revealing the inner space of the soul with the psychologizing, already existing male method was opened for the professional female novelist. In *The Decoration*, the importance of the architectural method in the design of decorations, the mixing of the difference between inside and outside was stressed, but at the same time the historical changes of spatial functions was pointed out, balanced by a belief in man's innate sense of beauty as part of everyday life. In *Italian Villas*, exterior architecture of the garden space was in focus, a criticism of the opposition between inside and out in that outer spaces were shown to have their roomlike functions and proportions. At the same time, the importance of a historical knowledge of changing functions was joined by a new awareness of the artificiality, the constructedness of artistic manners. So the initial deconstruction of the opposition between inside and outside in the short story was first amended by an awareness of the historically changing relation between inside and outside, yet all this was treated as the manifestation of a an innate sense of beauty in man in general. Eventually, this belief in an innate sense of beauty disappeared in *Italian Villas* to be replaced by manners and race, a culturally constructed basis for historical change.

In view of this, I think we indeed need to extend Kaplan's gender oriented approach to architecture in Wharton's early work. Architecture bridges the divide between inside and outside, private and public, female and male spaces, and can be a metaphor of professional female writing. Yet, Wharton's awareness of the historicity of the inside-outside relation and her eventual reflection on the cultural construction of artistic manners

indicates that Wharton the cultural critic uses architecture as a metaphor of cultural construction, in her words, of civilization. Eventually reflecting on how this articulates the shock of the modern, one can state that between 1894 and 1905 her theoretical frame of reference changed so much that by *Italian Villas* she could reflect on the cultural construction of artistic manners, an idea that was probably deeply at war with her innate belief in an innate human sense of beauty she discussed in *The Decoration.*

Appendix

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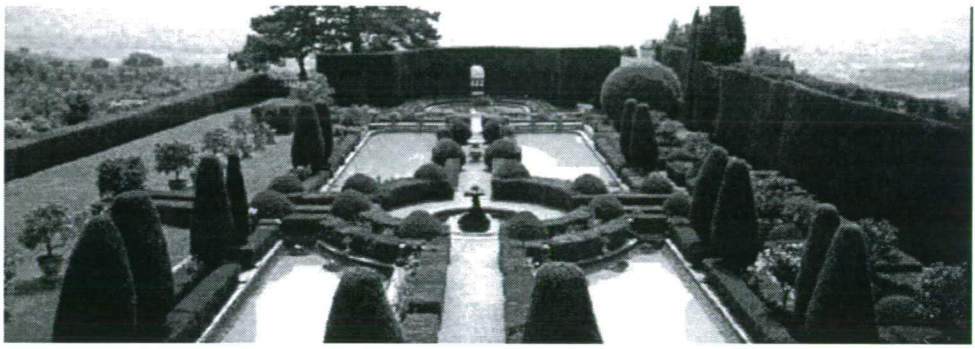

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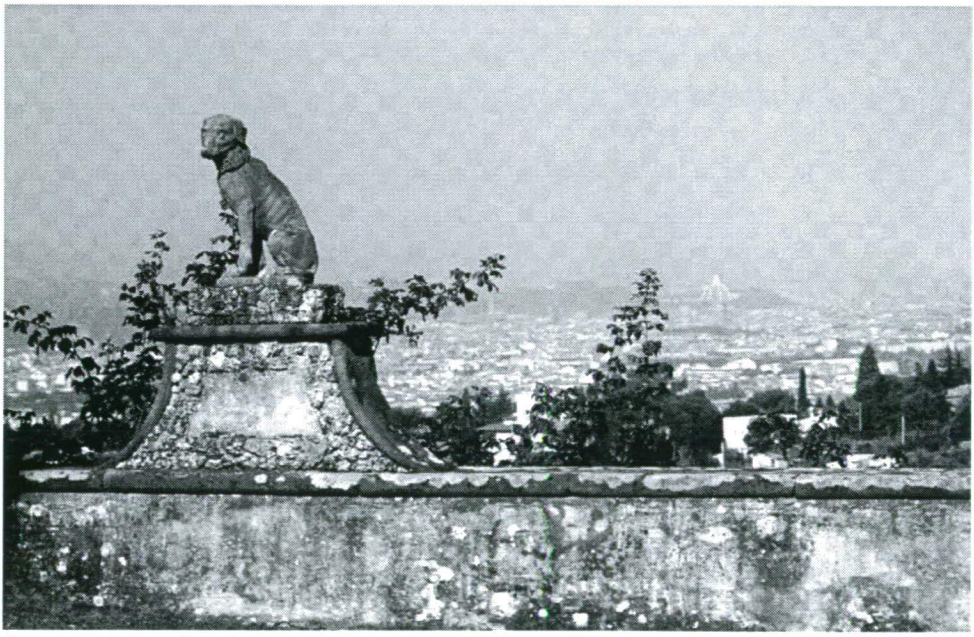
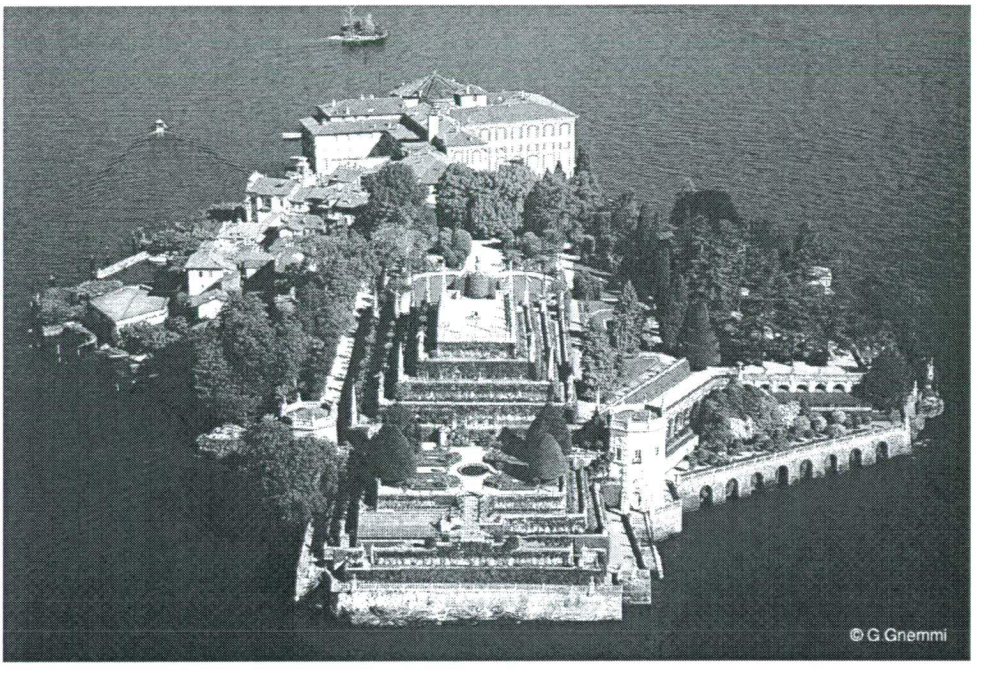


Pictures 1. and 2. Villa Gamberaia, near Florence (Tuscany)

3.



4.

Pictures 3 and 4. Isola Bella, on Lake Maggiore (Lombardy)

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CHAPTER 7

EDITH WHARTON'S MODEL OF CULTURE IN *FRENCH WAYS AND THEIR MEANING*

In the conclusion of her *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton differentiates between two kinds of Hell, a Latin and an Anglo-Saxon version. To be more precise, she distinguishes between two different concepts of Hell: one version is symbolized by Paolo and Francesca's story, the other by *The Scarlet Letter* narrative. She argues that the position the adulterous lovers take in their respective Hells reflects the values their respective cultures attribute to morals in general. In the Latin version the lovers are placed in the temperate zone of Hell because their sin against the third person is not considered a serious one. Real sinners are traitors of business, state, religion, friendship. Conversely, in the Anglo-Saxon version the lovers are punished most severely because their sin against the third person is considered most serious, whereas here business or state affiliations matter less.

The basis of the difference lies in how the two cultures think about the relationship between individual and community. Wharton claims the Latin model places values and rules of the community higher than individual ones, while the Anglo-Saxon version reflects a belief that individual values and rights are worth more than those of the community. Wharton claims that Americans could make better use of the French concept than they think. For me this scenario is challenging as it also characterizes Wharton's perspective and method. Focusing on the theme of man-woman relationship, she jumps to generalizations about morals and nations as a whole, and even makes comparisons between cultures with an educational intent.

In this chapter, I propose to look at Wharton's model of French culture from the perspective of her work on social patterns of behaviour. My hypothesis is that her account of French culture reflects her concern that World War I has ruined those social patterns she considers superior and she makes an effort to reconstruct them. I am going to argue for this reading in three moves. Firstly, I am going to introduce the problem of social patterns of behaviour in Wharton's texts. Secondly, I am to explicate her presuppositions about a general model of culture and male-female relations she relies on when she differentiates French and US cultures in *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919). Thirdly, I will show how Wharton's account of the French indicate questions and tasks of the social self after the war.

I. The problem: the social self in Wharton's texts

We all know Wharton as the author of novels of manners. She focuses on the habits of the NYC elite at a time of major social changes. In the US (America from now on), the first decades of the twentieth century bring along alterations of the class system, ever increasing immigration, and changes of the urban landscape. It is in this mobile social context that Wharton records the customs and manners of the rich, of her own class. In her *The Ethnography of Manners*, Nancy Bentley claims that Wharton performs this work as a novelist ethnographer (Bentley 1995). What is it in Wharton's texts that proves the scientific orientation? Firstly, she shows and also refashions social forms as a member of the elite. Secondly, she poses questions of culture addressed in early anthropology: what culture is, how it works, what its power is, where its limits are. Last but not least, she represents a culture consciousness in all her texts. This culture consciousness allows her writing both to critique and preserve the authority of the late 19th century elite class, therefore it is difficult to say whether Wharton's texts are subversive or apologist. It is better to say that she has a double strategy, and that this simultaneous critique and preservation enables Wharton's texts to effect a new representation of culture that serves to process social shocks of the early 20th century.

In this sense, we can look at Wharton's work as a method of channeling social conflicts of her time. (Bentley 50) For instance, one can look at how Wharton represents women's changing social roles in changing contexts, the fashioning of the female position. Similarly then, in *French Ways* the task is to explicate how the text represents the sphere of culture and how it articulates the shock of World War I for the US, and how this relates to the practice of social roles.

II. Wharton's Model of Culture in *French Ways*

Wharton's work is a collection of articles permeated with the intent of warming the feelings of the American reading public to their war ally, France. At first glance, the book's seven chapters simply consist of a series of positive traits the French, as a people, are supposed to possess. As a result, an idealized image of the French in general appears from the introduction. At the same time, a model of culture as such can be constructed on the basis of Wharton's scattered remarks. If one looks at what Wharton may consider real culture, real education and real life (her terms), one can understand the basis of her criticism of the US and the objectives of her text.

Practically, the idealized image of the French confutes the negative stereotype the Americans tend to have about the French. Each positive feature Wharton enlists has

its negative counterpart it aims at turning over. It is revealing to see how the idealized image reforms the former sinister stereotype. For instance, the new positive trait 'continuity' stands against the old American belief that the French are old fashioned or traditional. Another long standing grudge is erased when Wharton argues that knowing how to live a 'real life' describes what otherwise is known as the French being sensual and immoral. A further example could be the French being cautious with money; this can be mistakenly called the French being frugal with money. In other words instead of saying "No, the French are not immoral, sensual, frugal, traditional, etc. as we tend to believe they are," Wharton's rhetoric focuses on the positive cultural framework these individually unpopular features fit into.

Yet the main purpose of the new list of features lies in catalyzing the self-reflection of Americans. Wharton points out a new frame of reference for Americans to think about the French as artistically minded and well educated. Simultaneously, she points out the mistakes of the American perspective that misreads the French as a people. Although the French can be regarded sensous, immoral, frugal, impolite, conservative, and bad businessmen, this becomes possible only if one loses sight of cultural continuity all these individual features fit into. In turn, that framework remains an example for the rest of Europe and America alike.

The central reason why the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon peoples misunderstand each other can be found in how they think about the relation of the individual to the community. In France, the community regulates the individual, overwrites individual rules. In contrast, in America a belief in individual rights ensures that individual aims and incentives are regarded more important than communal regulations. Wharton comments that Americans should reconsider their former stereotypes about the French and reflect on their own beliefs and values instead. "Before calling a certain trait a weakness, and our own opposite trait a superiority, we must be sure, as critics say, that we "know the context;" we must be sure that what appears a defect in the character of another race will not prove to be a strength when better understood."(18)—as she puts it.

However, Wharton does not remain a neutral observer of the two sets of cultural values. It is her contention that average Americans stand at a lower level of social organization and knowledge than the French. She holds up the French example to follow because she maintains a belief in the existence of real culture, real knowledge, real life yet to be obtained by the average American. After the turmoil of the war, the US and France being allies, Americans should take the opportunity to understand the French and to learn from them. The somewhat biased form she puts this in her introduction: the labels Anglo-Saxon and Latin are convenient, simply a loose way of drawing a line between the peoples who drink spirits and those who drink wine, between those whose social polity dates from the Forum, and those who still feel and legislate in terms of the

medieval forest. (viii) She places the two cultures at opposite ends of the scale as far as social organization is concerned. Wharton's primary objective in the book is to give a warning: to show the medieval social conditions she thinks Americans live by and also to pinpoint the way out of this situation.

Wharton's comments on the French in particular provide a chance for reconstructing her model of culture in general and this system explains her lowly view of US social patterns. Her model can be introduced through her three terms real civilization, real education, and real life. Firstly, Wharton claims that real civilization is a way of life: it forms speech, manners, taste, ideals, judgment at the same time. So real civilization is a process, it is an education that extends to the whole of life. Instead of the word culture she often uses the term education, partly because she maintains that in the US the term culture is looked upon with contempt, but also because the two concepts overshadow each other in her vocabulary. Secondly, for her real education takes time and effort, as knowledge and manners cannot be obtained in college during a two or three year course, as is often supposed in the US. Finally, real life comes into being as the result of good education and an ability to see events and human actions as parts of a historical continuity (e.g. the French). So Wharton's concept of culture covers historical patterns of social habit, or to put it bluntly, it maps the historicity of man's social self.

The cultural contrast between the US and France, or Anglo-Saxon and Latin spheres can be described in terms of two basically different patterns of social habit. Interestingly, Wharton suggests that we take their two different concepts of love as a primary example of the different patterns of social convention. To understand the different concepts of love one must first understand the Latin and the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of marriage. In the Anglo-Saxon world, marriage is supposed to be determined solely by reciprocal inclination, and to bind the parties not only to a social but also to a physical lifelong loyalty. In this system, love which never has accepted and never will accept such bonds (as Wharton claims), immediately becomes a pariah and sinner. Conversely, in the Latin world, marriage is founded for the family and not for the husband and wife. Marriage secures them as associates in the foundation of a home and the production of a family. It is a kind of superior business association based on community of class, of political and religious opinion, and an exchange of advantages. Love is not expected in the association neither as an emotion nor in the form of physical loyalty. In other words, Wharton defies the old stereotype of the immoral and sensuous Frenchman and woman by placing the phenomenon of illicit sex into a social context quite incomprehensible or invisible for the average American.

For Wharton the French businesslike association of man and woman, interestingly, is a sign of superior interpersonal relations. For her, the relation of the French man and wife proves to be more valuable than the relation between married man and woman

in the Anglo-Saxon world. The reason simply lies in that in France the idea of equality extends to the relation of man and woman, she claims. Here the married woman becomes a full social partner of men. She is not only socially free to take part in the intellectual life of the salons. Rather, in many cases she rules French life through the important relations she can establish with men in her circle. Wharton calls these relations "frank social relations" (112) and contrasts them to the relations an American woman has both to her husband and to men in general. In the US, a girl is free to move around in society until she becomes married: then she is cut of from men's society in all but the most formal ways. An American woman is listened to by women, because women are restricted to the domestic sphere where they are engaged by questions of art and ideas. In America, the clear division of roles between domestic and public spheres relies on an odd Anglo-Saxon view that a love of beauty and an interest in ideas imply effeminacy.

Wharton's primary example of French ways of culture can be found in her account of the new Frenchwoman. Wharton claims the role of the Frenchwoman is so telling about French ways she devotes a whole chapter to discussing it. Her position, when taken out of context, is often recalled as groundbreaking and modern, yet read as part of her story to educate Americans through the French example, it appears quite traditional indeed (Nowlin 2004, 90), as Elizabeth Ammons puts it, in the volume "the American Dream of personal liberty does not apply to women." (Ammons 1980, 127) Let us take a look at the chapter and feminine roles in detail now in order to specify the values the Frenchwoman exemplifies for Wharton.

Wharton claims that the new Frenchwoman is really not new but America has never taken the trouble to look at her and understand her. (99) On the surface the difference between American and French women is that the Frenchwoman dresses better, knows more about cooking, is more feminine, more excitable, emotional, immoral. (100) Still, the basis of the difference lies in the fact that the Frenchwoman is grown up while the American remains unrestricted by traditional discipline (in *The Age of Innocence*, Ellen Olenska would represent a mix of the two positions.) (Viglietta 2005, 5) American women have little part of "real living" because they lack the old and rich social experience needed for it. The reason for this lack can be found in the fact that American women are mainly each others' only audience, in other words they live their social life in an isolated realm of women (102), whereas the Frenchwoman acts as the business partner of her husband and a peer of other men in social intercourse. This social sense of being grown up is not diminished by the fact that the French wife has less legal independence than the English of the American.

Because she is a grown up socially, Americans the Frenchwoman actually rules French life: "she rules it under a triple crown, as a business woman, as a mother, and

above all as an artist". (111) Wharton links this social sense to the Frenchwoman's sense of beauty in particular and to the importance of life as art for the French in general. (112) The behavior of the Frenchwoman represents exactly that sense of social maturity and knowing how to live *(savoire vivre)* beyond concerns with money the French as a whole seem to possess. Interestingly, it is the married woman whose social position permits the full exercise of her social powers, as girls are most severely isolated from socializing. Americans, as we have seen, are familiar with the reverse of this scenario, since in the US girls are allowed to "romp" with male associates while married women are not. This is the reason why American married women cannot perform as social centers of their households.

Wharton values the social roles filled in by the French woman by clinging to one presupposition. She takes it for granted that the "knowing how to live," the aesthetic sense of beauty she often recalls is more valuable than the money oriented materialist vision Americans as a whole represent.

So how are French ways of culture presented in Wharton's account? According to the new stereotype the French are learned, live according to historically formed social patterns of behaviour, and devote much attention to maintaining this heritage through education. In Wharton's view, Americans are supposed to improve as a people by following the French example of learning, relation to past, education, man-woman relations and marriage. Wharton's representation of French ways is apparently biased. She takes Latin and Anglo-Saxon people as unities, she pretends to talk about and for the whole social spectrum of the US although she talks about the leisure class only, she argues for an unbiased comparative study of other cultures when she does the same with a clear preference for French ways and a with a clear dislike of American ways. The French middle and upper classes represent a top of the range model of culture for her.

III. French Culture and Female Writing

Wharton's text provides a personal representation of French ways that consciously refutes old American stereotypes about the French. The new images of the Frenchman and of the new Frenchwoman offer positive examples for the average middle-class American to follow. The question of cultural difference between Europe (France) and America (US, NYC) has been a subject for Wharton the author of fiction in her novels of manners all her life. Why does she focus on it in such a straightforward manner in an ethnographically oriented but as we have seen, also quite didactic piece? Obviously, the reason is World War I, but what has Wharton the upper class American expatriate to fear from the war, what triggers her cry of warning? Let us look at two of her metaphors that indicate the nature of her fears.

In her introduction Wharton describes the effect of World War I with a simile that develops into an extended metaphor. As she explains: "The world since 1914 has been like a house on fire. All the lodgers are on the stairs, in dishabile. Their doors are swinging wide, and one gets glimpses of their furniture, revelations of their habits, and whiffs of their cooking, that a life-time of ordinary intercourse would not offer." (v) The house has been bombed, the façades have fallen, the inhabitants are swirling out, and their "ways" patterns of social interaction and habit have become transparent. So has the world been bombed and its structure uncovered for observation, if you like. This transparency offers a rare chance for observation and learning for the American audience, Wharton claims.

As a reader of Wharton's stories, I cannot abstain myself from pointing out the similarity of the house without a façade trope and another imaginary house of Wharton's. In her early short story "The Fulness of Life," she writes about the structure of woman's nature whilst relying on the figure of the house:

> But I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing-room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead; and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.

This house is of course equipped with a façade, its rooms are arranged according to their respective social functions. The female soul is situated in the center that is never actually supposed to be reached by any observer. There is no trace of bombing or of excitement; rather, there is a silent boredom of useless waiting, of an undisturbed dust of years.

It is as if we had two opposite versions of the same house in the two figures. The silence and atemporality of the house where the lonely female soul resides is burst and the commotion becomes visible in the second figure. The difference of the imaginary houses indicates the imaginary ruin caused by the war: the order, the peace, the social functions of the female nature and of the world have been shaken. In *French Ways* Wharton's objective is to set things back to normal again. Learning from what is revealed by the disarray, Americans should learn what French continuity, knowledge, caution can achieve, and possibly reorder the house of their world accordingly. American women also have a task: instead of posing like lonely unreachable damsels, their nature is to be made more accessible for full social relations with men, as their French counterparts do.

Conclusion

Wharton's *French Ways* represents changing social patterns of behavior after the turmoil of World War I with nostalgia and a concern for social losses. The objective of the text is to provide a warning for America: to point out the need to revert back to old standards of behaviour and culture exemplified by the French. Wharton's representation of cultural values bespeaks of a basic ambivalence in her model of the social self. For one, female patterns of behavior are put in focus and in so doing the self is treated as a social entity in the network of culture that comes into being through education. Yet at the same time Wharton's representation is compromised by its prescriptive and didactic tone resulting from her Francophone bias. Therefore I find her model of culture more challenging than the actual lesson it was intended to teach.

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PART 3

STRATEGIES OF READING CONTEMPORARY TEXTS: RACE, CLASS, ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND POLITICS IN LITERATURE

CHAPTER 8

RECANONIZING HENRY JAMES: COLM TÓIBÍN'S *THE MASTER*

The James industry seems to be in full swing at the moment. It is not so much that innumerable dissertations are being written and books published on him—this has been normal critical practice since the 1940s. Rather, and perhaps more importantly, his figure and work are adapted to film versions and to new novels, so he is practically becoming part of the contemporary cultural output through the allusions. Speaking about the films, one must mention Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996) that was followed by Iain Softley's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997), Agnieszka Holland's *Washington Square* (1997) and James Ivory's *The Golden Bowl* (2000). More recently, James can often be sighted as a theme or character in British fiction, too. Emma Tennant's *Felony* (2003) is a rewriting of James's *The Aspern Papers* that allows for the perspectives of the female characters and the author beside the narrator. Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004) rewrites Leon Edel's famous biography of James focusing on James's consciousness and was shortlisted among the final six for the Booker Prize, 2004. David Lodge published his latest novel titled *Author, Author* (2004) as a tribute to the Jamesian achievement. Last but not least, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004) presents a satire of 1980s Tory government in Britain, while it features "the tone of a laconic latter day Henry James" (Hickling 2004) coming from his narrator-aesthete. Also, it won the Booker Prize in 2004.

What might be the reason for the frequent references to James and his work? As for the film adaptations, David Lodge claims the constant need for screenplays in the film industry is well satisfied by Jamesian narratives. James tends to write stories that are confined to a limited space and to a minimal number of characters. Also, his usual reliance on a strict dramatic structure in his texts lends itself well to scenes in the films. (Logde 2002, 201) Yet, one has to admit a possible problem, too: James's lifetime ambition, the representation of human consciousness, is difficult to actualize on film and becomes a pitfall of adaptations. As for the novels, James's experiments with perspective and his focus on the process of personal experience that paved the way for Modernist prose present a challenge for rewriting his texts in the manner he foreshadowed.

Apart from the reasons based on formal features, one can also find a contextual explanation for the James renaissance. Referring to Sacvan Bercovitch, Heinz Ickstadt de-

scribes the direction of New American Studies since the 1980s as a shift of focus on issues of race, class and gender in the direction of research. (Ickstadt 549) In practical terms this means the outpouring of articles and books on hybrid identities, power struggles, queer and lesbian performances of gender in the case of specific texts or authors. For James, the focus on issues of gender has provided a new source of critical activity. In a similar vein perhaps, in contemporary adaptations of Jamesian texts or figures, one can spot the interest in questions of gender identity. Campion's film presents *The Portrait* with a feminist bias, Tennant complements the male perspective of *The Aspern Papers* with the female one. Tóibín and Hollinghurst focus on gender performances of gay men in their adaptations of Jamesian themes and tones.[1]

As a case in point, I propose to investigate Colm Tóibín's *The Master* (2004) in the context of current critical focus on gender in James's reception. Max Saunders compares Tóibín's novel to that of Lodge's to investigate what the two fictionalized biographies have to tell us about James, biography, and writing. (Saunders 122) For me, viewed from the perspective of gender difference, Colm Tóibín's novel reenacts Leon Edel's biography of Henry James. Tóibín's title is borrowed from the fifth volume of Edel's biography which describes James's life between 1901–16, "the evolution of the legendary master." Yet Tóibín's new volume relates the events of 1895–1901 instead, using the same title and it also offers glimpses from James's life before and after 1895. Shifting the reference of the title from James's major phase to his experimental phase indicates a shift of focus: instead of the master of the late novels, the new hero of the new book is the Master in the making. In the experimental years the Master is born because of personal and professional anxieties that trigger his new way of writing. For Tóibín, James's unresolved sexual identity constitutes the core of these anxieties. While Edel's psychologizing narration only hints at James's ambiguous performance of gender, Tóibín explicates this performance. I wish to find out to what extent the gendered focus alters Edel's biographical account in Tóibín's novel.[2] In this chapter I am going to explore, firstly, the current situation in James studies in terms of gender, thereby explicating expectations towards a new biographical volume. Secondly, I am going to dis-

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[1] David Lodge meditates on the possible reasons of the James revival and he also points out the role of gender studies and Queer Theory in the recanonization process. (Lodge 2006, 6–8)

[2] Diverse biographies of James are competing at the moment: one has to mention at least two more authors whose work would fit into the framework of this discussion (if stretched longer). Fred Kaplan's Henry James: *The Imagination of Genius* and Sheldon M. Novick's *Henry James: The Young Master* can be placed along Edel's and Tóibín's work, respectively. Novick has written about the love life of James, more specifically about his emotional attachments to diverse men during his life. Fred Kaplan, posing for Edel the official James biographer, maintains that although James had a strong homosexual tendency, there is no proof whatsoever as to his actual involvement with any of the men Novick mentions.

play some comparable scenes from the two books with a focus on performances of gender (using Edel one volume version of his biography as handy reference), and thirdly, consider the extent to which issues of gender actually inform the novelty of Tóibín's work.

I. James's recanonization today

Problems of gender identity and performance in James have been discussed widely only recently; as, I suppose, they have been in all areas of the humanities influenced by the cultural turn. So today we have a new, powerful image of Henry James influenced by gendered readings of his texts. So in James' letters we glimpse the image of the young man with tropes of homoerotic panic lurking among the lines. In the biographies, we find the image of the consciously feminized bachelor artist who has taken a conscious decision not to be a productive member of society in any material sense of the word. In his *Notebooks,* we get acquainted with the image of the homoerotic ageing man.

The issues discussed in recent important studies on James often relate to the problem of gender. As a case in point, James's relation to women in general was studied by Alfred Habegger in his *James and the Woman Business* to show the falsity of the account of James' relation to his cousin, Minny Temple, which is revealed to be mostly James' own creation. (Habegger 231) Also, in her *The Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has discussed post-Romantic male homosexual panic in James' texts, letters (Sedgwick 1990, 208) and Prefaces. (Sedgwick 1995, 233) Even the acclaimed Americanist, John Carlos Rowe published his latest book on James titled *The Other Henry James* about homosexual implications in noncanonized short stories. (Rowe 1998, 3) Perhaps as a companion piece to Rowe's book, Donatella Izzo analyzed technologies of gender in stories about women in 2001. (Izzo 2) The most recent example is Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity* which traces the emergence of modern male homosexuality including James's sexual politics.

To make sense of the gender upsurge, Richard Henke goes as far as to say that gender has a lot to do with the rehabilitation of James' reputation in the 1980s and 90s an issue latently present in his first rehabilitation already:

> As the well-known story goes, a group of devoted critics in the late 1930s and early 40s transformed an eccentric and increasingly unread author into one of the most important writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. James may have earned his place in the revised canons of British and especially American literature because of shifting literary priorities that resulted in a new understanding and respect for modernism that his experimental late narratives seemed to prefigure. What has not been so often noted about the rise of James's literary fortunes is how pivotally issues of gender played in his redemption. (Henke 227)

Henke claims that a discussion of issues of gender is central to the critical rehabilitation of our James today, after his formal reception whereby New Critics assigned him his canonized position as a pre-Modernist author, a canonic figure of American national literature. To put it bluntly, his homoerotic interest is no longer a shame but an attraction for us.

Tóibín's book reflects an awareness of the pivotal gender orientation in James's reception. So it seems a matter of course that he centers his biographical work around the question of James's gender identity. Also, Tóibín as a literary biographer has a reputation for writing about gay Irish authors, so James seems to be a natural choice for him. One's expectation is definitely that the fuller exploration of the gender aspect is the most likely reason why Tóibín chose to reenact Edel's story about James the Master.

II. The performance of gender in Edel and Tóibín

When we indeed look into the two books, however, the expectation turns out to be a gross oversimplification. Although it is true that Tóibín modifies the way scenes from James's life are presented and organized, and the narratorial commentary is also different, it is mainly the representation of James's *consciousness* that is modified. Let me explain my position further first in general terms (on genre) and then through examples (of scenes).

GENRES

Generally speaking, Edel and Tóibín relate two versions of James's psychic development. Edel's classic is also a well-known example of psychobiography. A psychobiography designates "an account of the life of an author that focuses on the subject's psychological development, relying for evidence both on external sources and on the author's own writing." (Abrams 266) It stresses the role of the unconscious and disguised motives in forming the author's personality, and is usually written in accordance with a version of the Freudian theory of the stages of psychosexual development. In this vein, Edel's hero is James the dēvoted artist who has sacrificed his personal relations and his emotions on the altar of art. For Edel, James's textual production is primarily the expression of James's personal anxieties, a safety valve, as it were. In this respect, Edel's biography is essentially a monograph of James's work because the life is related to show how it inspired the texts. Edel's work also has an impressive scholarly polish to it. The text is studded with quotations from James's correspondence, from his articles and novels, from newspapers of the time. The tone Edel uses, whilst the language

is slightly embroidered and Jamesian, is mainly informal tone reporting events in James's life and work. In the focus we find the 'Work' by James, paraphrases of the plots and the connection of these to James's repressed emotions. As is due from a biography, the events are related in a chronological order. The only aspect that may make us wonder about the obvious objectivity of Edel's narration is the recurrence of his personal voice. Repeatedly, Edel finds it necessary to explain James's behavior. He poses as a modest, understanding friend of James who is telling us the insider's view. James is usually addressed familiarly as 'Henry,' and any time there is an instance in James's personal relations that would make the implied reader wonder as to the novelist's egoism in his personal affairs, we get the comment that all this happens because James has sacrificed life for art.

Colm Tóibín's version of James's life is definitely not a psychobiography but rather a fictionalized biography.[3] Although Tóibín relates James's position in his family, the relations of the siblings, his emotional responses and memories, none of this serves the purpose of a background to the work. As an important difference from Edel's book, in Tóibín Jamesian art is not elevated as a result of a sacrifice. Rather, the book focuses on James's relations to others with only brief references to the artistic aspect. The hero in this version is not the author but James the experiencing person. Tóibín's version has little of the scholarly polish characteristic of Edel. The titles of the chapters do not come from texts or events but are modest dates. We have no quotations from letters because the wordings from the correspondence are woven into the text as descriptions or dialogues. However, the most striking difference from Edel's account lies in the absence of narratorial evaluations. Nowhere in Tóibín can you find a definite commentary from the narrator as you have groun accustomed to it in Edel. Although he calls the novelist Henry, this third person singular narrator is not a friend of James. Instead, he provides detailed accounts of James's consciousness. In other words, in Tóibín's novel the Jamesian center of consciousness is the character called Henry James. In this sense, Tóibín's text is more of a psychological novel featuring James the person than a psychobiography starring the artist.

GENDERING

Let us concentrate on some of the scenes of consciousness featuring Henry James. I have selected three scenes some version of which exists in Edel and are relevant from the perspective of gender identity, too. The first one is about how the young James

[3] Lodge devotes a whole survey to this genre he considers a recent interest in fictional biographies of writers and calls it metafictional biography of writers. I would rather use the term "biographic metafiction" instead. (Lodge 2006, 10)

shares a room and a bed with Olivier Wendel Holmes, Jr. in 1865. The second concerns James's reaction to and possible role in the suicide of Constance Fenimore Woolson, a fellow novelist, in 1894. Last but not least, his intimate friendship with a young sculptor, Hendrik Andersen, in 1910s is elaborated on. Brief references to Edel's version will indicate the contrasts Tóibín's prose creates.

The case of Olivier Wendell Holmes, Jr. takes place in 1865 right after the end of the Civil War. Holmes had been a soldier while James maintained his civilian life in Boston. The two young men visit James's cousins, Minny Temple and her sisters, at their summer residence, and Minny can only arrange for a room with one bed for the two men. Edel quotes James's letter in which he makes fun of the situation, and then goes on to relate the conversations with Minny. The letter is mentioned to illustrate the wit and tone James uses with Minny, while the significance of the holiday proves to be intellectual and social.

Tóibín, in contrast, magnifies the story of the night. We get to know little about the actual events of the summer with Minny although it is indeed mentioned that James feels he has been writing about this summer ever since. In Tóibín's presentation, the focal event happens in the room with one bed. There is a proper dramatic structure to present the story: the issue of Holmes, Jr. is introduced with the anecdote. The young James's interest is roused by a male nude being drawn at William James's art school. The same allure appears in the description of the night with Holmes, Jr. as Holmes undresses for the night. The main part of the scene is constituted of a sex scene without sex. Holmes invariably directs the situation: he moves close to Henry who is a yielding but passive partner to Holmes. All the movements are presented from Henry's perspective, how he silently agrees to being nude, how he turns his back on Holmes not to initiate anything but to be able to respond.

> They lay side by side without speaking. Henry could feel the bone of his pelvis hitting against Holmes. He wondered if he could suggest moving to the bottom of the bed but somehow, he understood, Holmes had taken control and silently withheld permission for him to make any suggestions. He could hear his own breathing and sense his own heart beating as he closed his eyes and turned his back on Holmes. (Tóibín 98)

The closing of the situation is a report on Henry's somewhat disappointed observation that Holmes does not refer to the events of the night the morning after. The turning point in the story is that it serves as a counterpoint for James's evening with the old Holmes in Britain some thirty years later. Holmes has come to visit James in order to tell his conviction that James did not help her cousin Minny recuperate from her illness when they were young. Holmes thinks James should have invited Minny to spend the winter in with him in Rome, and this would have saved the girl's life. James denies the accusation point blank and bitterly resents Holmes for bringing it up. So in Tóibín's

version, the joke from Edel is turned into an alluring and disturbing scene of desire that is eventually reversed as Holmes's antagonism towards James is proven in 1890s.

Constance Fenimore Woolson was the only possible woman who could have aspired to be a wife in James's life. She did not achieve this aim, and committed suicide. The dilemma for James and his friends was to determine how much this unrealized connection influenced Fenimore in committing her act. In Edel's version, this story one of the major examples of the Jamesian identity theme "life sacrificed for art." Although James is drawn to Fenimore as a person and is willing to spend a lot of time with her in private, he is afraid that a relationship would jeopardize his artistic independence. Also, he is abhorred by thinking that their friendship gets publicized. So after years of intimate friendship, James practically stops seeing Fenimore, although he is aware that she suffers from depression when they are separated for long. The last incident between them happens when James promises to visit Fenimore in Venice, to stay there for a while to keep her company, but when he learns that Fenimore has told others about his promise, he reverses his plan. He does not write to Fenimore but to one of the acquaintances involved that he is not coming to Venice. A couple of months later Fenimore jumps out of her window and dies. Edel recounts the events as a dilemma that James resolved when he decided to withdraw from the attachment in the first place. It was a renunciation, a sacrifice only logical for James whose life was patterned according to the principle life for art. James feels remorse and given the chance destroys those parts of Fenimore's correspondence that would reveal their involvement. Apart from his emotional shock, he feels utterly frustrated by the six weeks the selection and destruction of Fenimore's papers has taken from his work.

In Tóibín's representation, James's remorse is much more intense. James is shown struggling with Fenimore's letters and papers. He is also shown burying her clothes in the Canal like a romantic lover. The letter expressing his annoyance at the loss of time caused by arranging Fenimore's papers is not mentioned at all. Instead, the actual reasons for James's remorse are stressed emphatically. James's experience of the time with Fenimore is triggered by Lily Norton's visit. She has come to see James in England to tell him she thinks he had a major role in Constance's depression (and suicide) that winter. (Tóibín 219) James can hardly back out of the conversation, and the remainder of the chapter relates his experience of Constance's death. In other words, in *The Master* there is no narratorial explanation of the events but a careful projection of events, accusations, and reactions that reveal the full ambiguity of James's behavior to Woolson. He dreads the possible role of a husband and although he enjoys Fenimore's company, it should in no way be linked to his solitary life and work. As a male performer, he is inactive. He is also indirectly responsible for Constance's suicide. He suffers from this knowledge, but is unwilling to face the accusation: in conversation he rejects it right away.

The most rewarding scene from the perspective of James's performance of gender in both volumes is the account of James's relation to Hendrik Andersen, the Norwegian-American sculptor in Rome in 1899. Edel reports their meeting step by step. James behaves like an older mentor figure to the young sculptor, as if they were characters from James's early novel *Roderick Hudson.* Then, Edel tells about their correspondence which is striking in that James uses several descriptions of bodily gestures he would perform if Andersen were near—patting, drawing close, holding long, gestures a lover would write about. This impression is strengthened by the general tone of the letters that expresses a cry for the absent one. Characteristically, Edel is prompted to add a speculative paragraph to the account, where he poses the question if this relation was really "love." By the term "love" here he means a realized homosexual relationship. He says we cannot tell if it was, as Victorian bedrooms had their doors shut. Nevertheless, Edel deems it important to point out that James "had hithertho tended to look at the world as through plate glass." (Edel 498) That is, without us knowing if the relation was consummated or not, it would not fit into the Jamesian pattern of renunciations witnessed so far.

Of course, Tóibín takes full advantage of this story. The implied reader's knowledge about the depth of the involvement is not more specific, but the way James and Andersen behave carries the full understanding of the potential relationship. James and Andersen gaze at each other well before being introduced. James takes his brand new acquaintance to Constance's grave and the two hug each other because of the emotional strain on the part of James. James watches Andersen bath very much like his father had watched a swimmer woman in Boulogne, with repressed desire. (Tóibín 86) James can assess Andersen's foolish artistic aspirations but remains supportive of him. Also, he writes the letters of longing we know of from Edel, too. So in this affair, James would perform the role of the elderly seducer, if there was a seduction. Both Edel and Tóibín are fully aware of the nature of the attraction between the two men, the difference comes from the way they represent it: Edel as part of the Jamesian sacrifice scheme, while Tóibín as another ambiguously desiring and withholding performance.

III. Tóibín and recanonization

Having looked at specific scenes of the two texts, it is apparent that the two accounts can not be sharply contrasted on the basis of their understanding of Jamesian gender identity, because both Edel and Tóibín are aware of the homoerotic tinge in James's attractions. The difference lies in the way they represent this impulse. Edel explains the scenes by fitting them into the story of Jamesian sacrifice, his renunciation of life for

art. This theme does not leave space for actual adventures, and the repressed is put to good use as it surfaces in the form of artistic activity. The issue of the possible homosexual inclination is positively resolved as far as Edel is concerned.

Tóibín, in contrast, exposes the ambiguities of Jamesian human "sacrifices" to the full. In Tóibín there is no dichotomy of renunciation contra good use. As a result of his personal renunciations, James is shown to be possibly responsible for not helping his friends in need. His reluctance to invite Minny to Rome when his life opens up is similar to his unwillingness to take a flat in Venice when Fenimore intimates his plan for others. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. and Lily Norton appear to articulate these accusations to him. In terms of roles acted out, James declines to act like a woman or a man; instead, he prefers the position of the patron, that of the (elderly) inactive gentleman. So the issue of the homosexual tendency is definitely not resolved in Tóibín's account, as it represents a lack of human contact and responsibility. While Edel appraises James's renunciations because of its artistic yield, Tóibín is critical of the very same because of the irresponsible behavior it results in. So Tóibín portrays James's ambiguous performance of gender roles as a betrayal of human ties under the pretext of creating art.

From the perspective of the recent James revival, the expectation of Tóibín's work was that it would focus on the popular gender aspect of James's life and work. His reenactment of Edel's biography would expose James's implied homoerotic inclinations as central to our understanding of his output. Instead I found that Edel had been fully aware of and communicative about the gender aspect, it did not need to be introduced. The main difference between the two versions is the way James's psychology is represented. Edel's psychobiography has been turned into a psychological novel focusing on the ambiguities and the experience of James's gender identity.

My suspicion is that Tóibín's novel may soon be integrated further into the steady flow of contemporary remakes of James when the book gets turned into a film, possibly into one similar to the film adaptation of Richard Ellman's biography of Oscar Wilde.

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CHAPTER 9

FEMALE IDENTITY PROSE: ON SANDRA CISNEROS

Sandra Cisneros is one of the best known contemporary Spanish American authors. Her name sounds familiar for both American high school and university students, since due to current processes of literary canonization, her book *The House on Mango Street* has been included in the contemporary literature section of curricula of different educational levels. Her work has been translated widely, so her reputation has spread abroad, too. Cisneros is a poet, an essayist and a novelist at the same time, but it is mainly her work as a fiction writer that has been noted so far. In order to provide an introductory framework, let us now trace her biography, her work, her recurring motifs and topics, and eventually the critical reception of her work. The survey represents the author as part of the Spanish-American trend in contemporary American literature, and thereby also wishes to explain why it is Cisneros who has been selected for an introduction.

I. Background

Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954 as a descendant of parents of Mexican origin. From among the seven children in the family, she was the only girl, with the result that she was often left alone and got to like books *(Voices)*—as her biographies think it important to tell. Her family moved from Chicago to Mexico City and back again several times, so the girl was unable to form and maintain lasting contacts and friendships in the changing neighborhoods and schools. Cisneros became shy and was attracted to books even more. She went to Catholic schools, where she struggled with her inhibitions and did not perform exceedingly well, but she edited the students' paper in high school. She entered the English BA program at Loyola University, Chicago, and got her diploma in 1976. Her father would have liked her to get a husband at the university as well, but it was only her passion for books that she developed. Then she entered the renowned Iowa Writer's Workshop, where she took part in the Poetry MA until 1978. She worked as an administrator, taught in primary and high schools, coordinated a writing Program and taught courses on composition. She received several government grants for writing her books. Today she lives in San Antonio (Texas) without husband or child in her own house, devoting herself to her chosen occupation, writing.

Cisneros found her own voice as an author during her years at Iowa. In the first year of the program, her old school inhibitions got the best of her, when it turned out her fellow students were not in the least interested in the Mexican- American themes and experiences formative for her. She tried to imitate work by authors like Richard Wright, Richard Hugo, and Theodore Rhoetke, but this did not seem the right way. The turning point was the moment she realized that despite the lack of interest, she has to write about problems of Mexican-American life and femininity. As she comments: "It was not until this moment when I separated myself, when I considered myself truly distinct, that my writing acquired a voice." *(GALE)* She began to write her short, interlocking fragments about her childhood spent in different suburbs of Chicago. These fragments formed her first and perhaps best known book, *The House on Mango Street* later. The text features issues that remain important for Cisneros later on: family relations, love, oppression and repression, problems with the role of femininity and religion. These issues evolve from the stories of Mexican-American women who somehow or another manage to escape their restricting context. Everyday events of the ghetto appear from fragmented storytelling replete with action and surprise, also characteristic of Magic realism. (Bollobás 713)

II. Work

The House on Mango Street (1983) provides a series of loosely connected stories about Esperanza Cordero, a Mexican American girl growing up in the suburbs of Chicago. Esperanza desires first and foremost to escape her twardy surroundings. The text represents her emotions metaphorically, built around the central image of the house. Esperanza and her parents dream about a whitewashed house in the middle of a patch of neat lawn as it appears in advertisements. Yet when they eventually move to their own house, all the attributes of the ideal house are absent: the garden, the three bathrooms, a room of one's own. So, for the time being, they have to put up with the ugly, shabby little brick house and its run-down neighborhood. However, Esperanza does not give up her dreams and although she keeps them in secret, the witch-like relatives of her friend find out about her and remind her: "When you leave, you must come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget what you are." (105) So although Esperanza knows she is able to leave the house in Mango street and her background, she also recognizes the paradox of leaving to stay. Distance and escape enable her to return later and to belong to her people through the stories she writes about women who have been unable to change their lives.

Cisneros has been influenced by several texts in choosing her central motif. She reconsiders her sources from the perspective of her different class position, gender roles and ethnic identity. Reading Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, she realized that for her, "home" does not connote the space of intimacy, the memories of belonging as it does for her white middle class peers at the Iowa class. In her context, "home" much rather connotes poverty, being on the move, shame. "I realized that I was the only person in the creative writing workshop that didn't have the same type of memory as Bachelard did regarding houses. This made me realize my class difference, and, subsequently, my gender difference regarding homes." (Oliver-Rotger) So her book can be seen not only as the heroine's Bildungsroman, but also as that of the author, too. (Gagnier 138)

The motif of a "room of one's own" links the novel to Virginia Woolf's classic essay, "A Room of One's Own." Woolf's argument surveys the relation of women's economic dependence to their creative literary activity, and traces a literary tradition by women authors at the same time. Woolf envisions an ideal economic status for the creative woman: a minimum of economic independence enables her to live the life of the literary author. Cisneros' stories indicate very clearly that a working class, colored housewife has little chance for the Woolfian kind of independence. If she does attain it, this idependence will also mean her freedom from the ghetto and household chores. (Doyle 63) Yet the heroine's Bildungroman in *The House on Mango Street* seems to follow Woolf's pattern. Towards the end of the story, however, the heroine realizes her inability to free herself of her class and family relations, but she manages to envision a new model of a room of one's own. She realizes that independence can only happen by remaining attached, that is, paradoxically, for a colored working class woman the independent life of an artist only becomes possible in interaction with its context (ibid.), not in separation from it.

Similarly to other multicultural texts, several autobiographical elements can be located in the novel. So although Cisneros has named her own genre "poetic prose," *The House* is usually listed as a female autobiography, too. Without getting meshed up in the difficult problem of autobiography, let us mention that in *The House*, the processes of authorial and communal identity formation meet the problem of narration. The narrator depicts herself as strange, different, separate from the others. One could also say the narrator positions herself to be able to show herself as different, special. Such a narratorial attitude can be linked to a Romantic concept of the artist as the alienated genius (Gagnier 139). In the given multicultural context this attitude proves tobe problematic as it contradicts the communal, ethnic, gender based solidarity appearing at the end of the story. In other words, the paradox of the colored woman author seen before also surfaces, now in the form of the paradoxical self-definitions of the narratorial "I." In this sense, Cisneros's text is quite distinct from those female autobiographical texts in which the narratorial "I" remains much less definite, where the perspective of the "I"

may move among perspectives of the female family or community members (Gagnier 142), indicating the mobile and mosaic-like relations of the female relational self.

Her second book, a collection of short stories titled *Woman Hollering Creek* appeared in 1991. Female Mexican-American experiences return: these short stories represent women who, similarly to Esperanza, are able to alter or change their traditional gender roles. The stories vary both in respect to their complexity and to their style. The recurring female figures vary from the housewife, the single mother, the divorcee through the self-assertive college graduate to the historic Mexican woman with magic qualities. Stories of integration and breaking away are intertwined with stories of interpersonal relations.

In "Small Wonders, Kept Promises" one finds a mosaic-like collection of prayer notes representing the variety of Mexican voices and their everyday concerns. The seemingly random juxtaposition of the heterogenous notes creates a comic effect. The wishes of the college graduate also characterize Mexican men in general, but relativize the perspective of the speaker at the same time:

> Dear San Antionio de Padua,
>
> Can you please help me find a man who isn't a pain in the nalgas. There aren't any in Texas, I swear. Especially not in San Antonio.
>
> Can you do something about all the educated Chicanos who have to go to California to find a job. I guess what my sister Irma says is true: "If you did not get a husband when you were in college, you don't get one."
>
> I would appreciate it very much if you sent me a man who speaks Spanish, who at least can pronounce his name the way it is supposed to be pronounced. Someone please who never calls himself "Hispanic" unless he is applying for a grant from Washington, D.C.
>
> Can you send me a man man. I mean someone who is not ashamed to be seen cooking or cleaning or looking after himself. In other words, a man who acts like an adult. Not one who has never lived alone, never bought his own underwear, never ironed his own shirts, never even heated his own tortillas. In other words, don't send me someone like my brothers who my mother ruined with too much chichi, or I'll throw him back.
>
> I'll turn your statue upside down until you send him to me. I've put up with too much too long, and now I'm just too intelligent, too powerful, too beautiful, too sure of who I am finally to deserve anything less.
>
> Ms. Barbara Ibañez
> San Antonio, TX
> (Cisneros 1991, 117–8)

The short stories include separate short vignettes and also clusters of these short impressions, like "The Eye of Zapata" and "Woman Hollering Creek." The latter two integrate the series of fragments in a way familiar from *The House in Mango Street*. "Zapata" relates the story of Zapata, a general of the 1910 Mexican War of independence. The speaker is Iñes, the general's lover, who risks her social position and also her actual physical freedom by her involvement in an illicit love affair with a political outcast. Watching her aging lover sleep, Iñez thinks of the past and the future story of their

affair, the nature of their relationship, and the marginal social position she finds herself in as a consequence. She is a sorceress who heals and spells magic, can fly and is able to tell the future. Her lover is going to be assassinated—in possession of this mute knowledge, she browses her memories, emotions and tries to create the present from her memory. As Iñez very well knows, knowledge about the past and the future does not entail the possibility of prevention or interference, so she uses her special experience to acknowledge her isolation and her value for herself.

"Woman Hollering Creek" maps the revolt of a Mexican housewife in the US. Cleófilas does not live up to the self-fulfilling prophecy of her name and become the martyr of her marriage. Instead, she escapes her husband with the help of her female friends, returns to her hometown and family, hopefully not to the same defenceless housewife position she has decided to leave. The third person narrator tells Cleófilas' story from her own perspective, but using the voices of the members of her set. As a result of this technique, it becomes possible not only to identify with Cleófilas, but also to view her from the outside and notice her internal alteration. The main theme of the story is not so much to document the various ways wives can be slighted by their husbands in the home, but rather to follow the story of the self-awareness of a young woman who has been socialized (mainly by TV telenovellas) to accept traditional gender roles in marriage. The story remains unfinished, and in this case the open work offers the chance of change: the baby to be born is a girl and is to be named Felice Graciela. As her name indicates, there is a wish, a hope, and a possibility that she does not have to follow the route trodden by her female predecessors and can escape the female martyrdom she would normally be destined to. She will be a member of a community of self-aware women who try to live a life of solidarity.

Cisneros' latest novel titled *Caramelo* (2002) tells the story of a Mexican family returning to Mexico for a family celebration and allows for intervening stories to digress from the main plot. The heroine is the teenage Lola who later will inherit her grandmother's special caramel striped Mexican shawl. As the central image of the shawl indicates, Lola has to integrate her Mexican background and the story of her grandma's social ascent with her own American context and her own social expectations. Her escape from home begins with an elopement: she leaves home with a boy for Mexico City with dreams of marriage and is brought home by her father two weeks later only to ponder about the behavior of men and possibilities of women for a long time afterwards.

Cisneros' poetry has appeared in two volumes. The first, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987) is a poetic, playful and witty confession of a self-fashioning young woman in the private sphere. The second, *A Loose Woman* (1994) speaks to its readers with the voice of a single, meditative, self-aware woman in her forties, whose sense of humor mocks authority of all sorts. Her work also extends to a bilingual picture book for kids titled *Hairs/Pelitos* (1994).

III. Focus

Cisneros' critical reception offers an excellent example of how a minority author becomes integrated into the national canon. Her first book receives the national Book Award, she does a tour of readings, and her book of poetry appears. In 1991 Random House publishes the second edition of *The House*, and she signs a contract with Vintage for the second work. She receives two major national grants. *The House* becomes compulsory reading at departments as various as Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Literature, Creative Writing. When multiculturalism becomes an asset of cultural policy, the work appears on the reading lists of Fulbright Summer Institutes, is edited into prestigious anthologies, and one can win good grants and scholarships with a project on it.

Perhaps it is too early to place *The House* and Cisneros' work in American or Spanish-American literature, yet some connections can be pointed out. The novel is a direct descendant of Tomas Rivera's *And the Earth did Not Devour Him* (translated into English in 1987), which consists of a series of short sequences about a Mexican-American boy working in the US at the turn of the 1940s–50s. The boy turns into a man through a series of humiliating and difficult situations—the way Esperanza turns into a woman and a writer in Cisneros. Both novels rely on the Bildungsroman-frame, the fragmented way of storytelling, and relate the story of the immigrant experience, but the sex of the protagonists differ, and so do their contexts and desires.

It is also useful to mention that Cisneros's texts abound in references to other Spanish-American texts, for instance those of Helena Maria Viramontes. If you take "Woman Hollering Creek," it is linked to Viramontes' "Cariboo Café" through their reliance of the La Llorona myth (Carbonel 53). The myth relates the narrative of la Llorona, the woman who threw her child into the river and keeps mourning it by wailing, as one can hear in the hollering of water. In Viramontes, the heroine loses her child in one of Central-American dictatorships when the five-and-half-year-old is accused of spying and is taken by the police never to return. The woman leaves the country for the US, lives the life of the illegal immigrant in the border area until she meets two kids lost in the street. She gets attached to them, and when local policemen want to take the kids from her, she finally resists. In Cisneros, the heroine keeps hearing the voice of the mourning woman but is not tempted to follow her example. Rather, she decides to save herself and her children and read a new meaning into the voice of the creek. She realizes the hollering may also be that of joy, not only that of mourning, to put it metaphorically. Although both texts refer to the myth of Llorona, Viramontes' story deals with oppression and violence much more directly than Cleófilas' lyric anti-romance in Cisneros. For Viramontes the main point of criticism is directed at US foreign policy

in South-America, at the violence of the police force, while with Cisneros the growing self-awareness of the heroine remains the main theme. The texts share a mosaic-like structure, and have open endings, but for Viramontes' heroine the missing end indicates death, violence or prison and depression in the least, while for Cleófilas her first independent steps promise further assertive ones.

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CHAPTER 10

THE ROLE OF RACE IN LITERATURE: WHARTON'S CRITICAL REAPPRECIATION

Jennie A. Kassanoff. *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Jennie A. Kassanoff's *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* discusses the diverse ways Edith Wharton takes part in turn of the century discourses of race in her seven novels written between 1902 and 1920. Kassanoff wishes to account for Wharton's conservative politics of race on its own terms: in the context of turn of the century cultural discourses. Within this problematics, Kassanoff's main objectives are (at least) threefold as her narrative of Wharton's politics also maps out a new territory for Wharton's reception and has relevance for a methodological discussion of American Studies as well. Firstly and most importantly, she sets out to account for Wharton's conservative politics and concepts of race with an historical accuracy, situating the issue of race within the cultural discourses of Wharton's time and showing "not only the role of race and class in Wharton's fiction, but also the extent to which Wharton's writings registered and, in some instances, shaped the larger patterns of American cultural discourse in the early twentieth century." (4) Secondly, she places this study in the context of Wharton studies and explains how the need for an agenda of historical specificity arose. As her third objective, Kassanoff wishes to show how a shift in critical interest from pluralism to its marginalized opponent, conservatism, reveals concerns influentially formative at Wharton's time and is therefore crucially important for American Studies as cultural studies.

Kassanoff sets out with discussing Wharton's role in the construction of American myths of race and national identity as it shows both her main concerns and the complex way she interacted with issues of her day. Wharton's main concern in *The Valley of Decision, The Custom of the Country*, her literary theory and pieces of travel writing proves to be the ambivalence of American national identity. In the first book, *The Valley*, the story of an Italian principality parallels the fate of the US. Caught between two historical epochs, the rule of decadent gentry and forces of mass culture and revolutionary democracy, the historical tale ends in the failure of both systems. The tale invokes the paths open for the US and the possible fate of the US genteel elite. *The Custom of the*

Country with its narrative of the social upstart Udine Spragg who marries and divorces her husbands for social advancement, proposes the problem of the American "aboriginal." Is the American aboriginal the native endowed by anti-modern simplicity or are the aboriginals the Americans who insist on playing indians, signifying that American identity is nothing more than a minstrel act? This ambivalence is played out in the figure of the gentile Ralph Marvell, second husband of Udine, who might be the native gentile, but it turns out he is just acting out his part. Is it then Udine who can be regarded as the aboriginal American from the prairie, her identity composed of her ability to appropriate and assimilate? These questions reverberate with echoes of the Mount Bilder controversy about the identity of the builders of prehistoric monuments in America—whether they can actually be linked to present Natives or not, being the material remnants of a race that seems highly superior to natives of the day, more precisely highly superior to contemporary conservative views of natives. As a response to the possibilities of racial and ethnic hybridity, Wharton forged a racial aesthetic, a theory of language and literature that encoded a deeply conservative model of American citizenship. In this the novel formed an architectural, aesthetic and political bulwark against the menacing possibilities of democratic pluralism, as "Wharton fashioned a deeply conservative model of citizenship and writing" (30). Relying on the discourse of post-war language panic, Wharton aims at defending the purity of the American idiom and of aesthetic form in order to impose a strict immigration policy in her Land of Letters. She also turns against Modernism on this basis, thinking it will open the way for pure anarchy in fiction, quite the opposite of her objective.

Wharton puts this racial aesthetic into literary practice in *The House of Mirth* through Lily Bart and Rosedale. Faced with Anglo-Saxon doom, Lily Bart sacrifices herself on the altar of racial purity. Her suicide represents the annihilation of the gentile race, and a stylized act of preservation at the same time. She is a fully grown spectacular specimen of the race, a hothouse flower that stages racial perfection without being devoid of personal specificity. In other words she is not only a perfectly preserved taxidermic specimen of her kind but also a personalized one at that, posing questions as to what extent she is 'real.' The way Lily's perfection and specificity are shown resembles Carl Akeley's 1908 taxidermic *tableux* of African mammals in New York's American Museum of National History. The stereotypical representation of Rosedale, the eligible but formidable Jew in the story reflects Francis Galton's photographs of Jews that are composed to represent a "racial typology." The whole story of Lily's social descent evokes Henry Adams's "Degradation" where he delineates the threat of Anglo-Saxon extinction in contemporary US culture. For Wharton, Lily Bart's story presents a stylized alternative in the slow decline of New York's competitive racial wilderness, a monumental act of historic preservation.

The Fruit of the Tree, a less popular text, stages the threats of political and cultural democratization posed by technology to the traditions of class entitlement. The main question revolves around who controls the yield of economic production and the issue of genetic reproduction. The immobile and drugged body of an elite American woman incarnates the loss of upper class agency. Unable to move, having become the object of a scientific experiment trying to save her life, Bessie Amherst's body becomes democratized and she loses her agency. She can only be saved by a singular act of elite compassion: euthanasia. Euthanasia is performed by her nurse, a former friend, descendant of an elite family, who later marries the widowed husband. The treatment of the act of euthanasia in the novel is part of the contemporary lively discussion of euthanasia, and is also inscribed into Wharton's logic of class: the gentile Bessie's agency can be saved by euthanasia, while in *Ethan Frome* the working class Mattie Silver is doomed to living death without any agency whatsoever. In this sense, Lily Bart's suicide would be the opposite extreme of Mattie's inability to control her own life. Problems of agency appear in the question of textual authenticity as well, when texts escape authorial intentions and construct persona who never existed. The author becomes the final incapacitated body in the text.

The Reef represents yet another danger lurking in the depths of democratization: changing sexual mores. Sexuality effectively democratized the Victorian body by subordinating the mind's authority to the commonplace impulses of passion. For Wharton, changing sexual mores presented a threat because they put all Americans on a common plane, blurring the distinctions of race and class. The story centers on the adventures of a middle aged gentile American who meets his old unconsummated lover as a widow in France, and for whom a chance of a second marriage with his former love opens up. Yet he is distracted by an affair with a young American girl who later becomes the governess of the widowed lover's child, and eventually the fiancée of her grown son. In the end all seems to settle into a conventional ending, yet Wharton finishes the book with a controversial, ambiguous finale, an emotional shipwreck. In the tale, Wharton shows how sexuality unleashes "the unwieldy chaos of direct experience" Wharton unwillingly immerses in. The tale is informed by the discourse of the loss of the Titanic, the reckless speed and the disaster of the ship as an emblem of the doom of gentile society nobody seems to be aware of, replete with the class and emotional anxieties of democratization. A second intertext is Wharton's affair with Morton Fullerton that awakens her to her own sexuality and results in her new compassion for everyday experience. The book also bears the mark of William James's pragmatism—although Wharton disliked the man and his books, in practice the way she relates to the issue of direct experience in *The Reef* is familiar from a Jamesian pragmatism. The intersection

of all these discourses evidences that Wharton lost confidence in the preservationist strategies she had put to use in *The House of Mirth.*

World War I made Wharton rethink her flirtation with democracy, as she saw the war as a systematic attack on the sites and rituals of the "ancient home" in France, in Belgium, and indirectly in the US. This threat triggered the revival of her most austere form of conservatism. In *Summer*, her regionalist escape text, New England stands for American origins, and represents the story of the American ancient home. Lucius Harvey, the seasonal tourist in New England revitalizes the declining New England village and its inhabitants: Charity Royall becomes pregnant, lawyer Royall, her stepfather regains his liquidity. Yet Harvey leaves, and Charity resigns herself to the safe limitations of patriarchal domesticity by agreeing to marry her stepfather. Why has the conservative "bred" side of Charity won over the revolutionary "born" side? Calling Carity's decision a Faustian deal at best, Kassanoff show how Wharton relies on discursive elements like New England tourism, French abortion debates, historical preservation movement, and philantropy to delineate her project of racial restoration in the novel. For this she has to read incest not as a sexual perversion but as a recuperative response to racial emergency. Wharton's travel writing from the time of the War elucidates the conservative positions Wharton takes in these issues. Kassanoff contends that in *Summer* Wharton answers the chaotic multiplicity of the war with cultural containment, a conservative cry for the racial uniformity of the ancient home.

After World War I Wharton acknowledged the failure of the recuperative strategy explored in *Summer.* In 1920 *The Age of Innocence* shows the inevitability of elite defeat. The authenticity of the genteel elite becomes subject of an open debate as is figured by the discourse of the Cesnola controversy in the text. Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska find refuge in The Metropolitan to discuss their relation. They are gazing at the Cesnola Cypriot artefacts that later became the center of the Cesnola controversy. The three year scandal centered on the debated authenticity of the artefacts: to what extent they have been tampered with: washed, reassembled, restored, supplemented. Cesnola denied all accusations, and although instances of tampering were evident, Cesnola was acquitted. Similarly to the questionable originality of the artefacts displayed in The Metropolitan, the authenticity of the gentile elite is also on trial: when Newland's son marries Lucius Beaufort's ill conceived daughter, Fanny, she becomes member of an elite whose claims for being the elite have become precarious.

Kassanoff's book has very clear objectives she manages to attain to the full: she presents her contextual story of Wharton's diverse ideas about American gentiles by positioning it within Wharton studies and also hints at general methodological loopholes in American Studies. So, first of all, how does her work on politics and race figure in the

history of Wharton's reception? In the 1970s, after the opening of Wharton's papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale in 1968 and the publication of R. W. B. Lewis's groundbreaking biography in 1975, the general scholarly interest in Wharton increased and she was recovered as a truly American author invested in the question of American manners, rites, authenticity. In the 1980s an emphasis on the intersection of class and gender issues in Wharton came to the fore (Kaplan 66; Ammons 1980, 10; Bell 13–4), yet feminist critics did not have an eye for race and were also unwilling to discuss Wharton's conservatism. Only in the mid 1990s did race as an issue surface in Wharton studies, after Morrison's appeal for extending American literary studies to areas where discussions of the metaphorization of race became necessary (MacMaster 188, Ammons 1995, 68–9). As a reaction, it was needed to explore the ways Wharton herself used the concept of race as part of her conservative politics.

For a reader who is not a Wharton scholar but a (Hungarian) Americanist, the methodological aspect of the volume might be most challenging. As Kassanoff claims, for a study of Wharton's conservative politics of race, one needs to situate oneself on the margins of critical discourse. On the level of American Studies in general, one needs to bracket the contemporary interest in pluralism and dissent and set out to explore the marginalized other, the conservative discourses of turn of the century America. On the level of Wharton's reception in particular, this boils down to one's disregard of either the neglect or of the patronizing treatments of Wharton's conservative politics. Interestingly however, on the level of actual methodology Kassanoff performs cultural work at the very heart of a current new historicist American Studies enterprise. She shows how Wharton seeks to contain dangerous social forces like the democratic impulse, technology, changing sexual mores: 'the pluralist excess' of American life. She displays a variety of contemporary discourses Wharton capitalized on, thereby places her within an intertextuality of cultural discourses that does not work in a linear temporal order and, importantly, does not function according to the intention of the author either. Kasanoff makes a claim for historical accuracy and authenticates her work with a host of documents unearthed by archival research in a number of Wharton collections at the Beinecke Library at Yale, the Lily Library at Indiana University, the Bodleian at Oxford. At the same time, she has larger aims than philological documentation and precision: she constructs the large story of Wharton's treatment of race, and simultaneously integrates this into a rereading of Wharton's reception indicating how certain critical misrepresentations came into being. Also, she takes advantage of textual ambiguities that help her to display again and again how Wharton's conservative discourse undermines its own belief in an authentic American identity. As Kassanoff sums it up:

> In exploring a number of strategies to contain what she saw as the pluralist excess of American life, however, Wharton inadvertently profited from the cultural diversity she was determined to resist. In drawing on the considerable resources of American popular discourse, Wharton gave her fiction a hybrid force that could withstand and even countermand the limited *hateur* of her message. (7)

Evidently, although Kassanoff sets out to investigate a way of thinking alien to her and only marginally interesting for contemporary critical practice, she in fact manages to *contain* Wharton within contemporary critical ideology in the sense that the book not only attests to Wharton's conservative politics of race but also to the texts' hybrid force—and necessarily to Kassanoff's eye for this hybrid force. I would rather call this hybrid force pluralism in the sense Kassanoff herself refers to it elsewhere in the book. In every chapter she turns Wharton's conservative claims upside down by pinpointing ambiguities of argumentation, appropriation, or imagery that concern the authentication of American identity. Thereby she draws attention to the unintentional hybrid force that makes Wharton the object of fervent recanonization in the culture industry today and also has her fun to top up years of archival research.

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CONCLUSION

Is it possible to provide a collection of related essays with a satisfactory narrative closure? Indeed it is, the contours of the project "Nonfiction by Henry James and Edith Wharton" have become clearer through considering the chapters as parts of a whole. It is now plain that to the backdrop of the cultural turn the study of nonfiction will focus on the representations of cultural fault lines encoded in travel writing, literary criticism, political essays, and autobiography. Main themes of analysis will include the politics of gender, race, class, and nation in James and Wharton.

From among the diverse genres of nonfiction, travel writing has come to the fore as a challenging discursive practice that is strongly present in the work of both authors. Travel writing has attracted James and Wharton because it was considered part of the activities of a (wo)man of letters at the time, yet from a cultural studies perspective today James's *The American Scene*, Wharton's *Italian Villas* and *French Ways* appear significant as the spaces where fact and fiction meet, where the authors' voice becomes more pointedly personal and contextually informed. As Pratt has shown, travel writing is always intricately linked with questions of national identity and politics, the representation of the other representing the position of the speaker in turn. In the case of James and Wharton, the intention to educate an untrained American audience culturally through diverse but mostly European examples remains the main explicit motivation. At the same time, the intention to educate and refine also reflects an implicit conservative cultural position on manners, the use of the English or American idiom, women's role in society, the value of cultural tradition, to pick just a handful of themes James and Wharton tend to discuss.

It has become clear that issues of gender and race remain the most fruitful subjects in analyzing the conservative politics in James' and Wharton's travel writing. Questions of gender have been pivotal to James' contemporary recononization, and no wonder his work on American culture is also immersed in a discussion of the manners and talk of American women and the sphere of culture they are to represent. Wharton's work has been embraced by feminist critics as focused on female creativity and criticized by analysts of culture as aimed at maintaining traditional gender roles. As a case in point, her account of the New Frenchwoman in *French Ways* argues for the central social position of the married woman in French society, yet at the same time it claims traditional gender hierarchy as coded by, for instance, law remains acceptable for a socially

active Frenchwoman. Margaret Fuller has argued for the equality of man and wife before the law in 1844, while Wharton represents the position of Fuller's opponents in 1919 still. So it seems that both James and Wharton focus on the social roles of woman, the creative aspects of femininity, and describe them from a traditional Victorian perspective in their travel writings.

Questions of gender cannot be separated from questions of race in the pieces discussed. James in *The American Scene* not only misses the chances for constructing experience, he also criticizes turn of the century American culture for tolerating a cultural abyss like the Jewish ghetto in lower Manhattan and makes biased remarks on African-Americans in the South, too. A conservative rhetoric of race is characteristic for Wharton as well. Elizabeth Ammons has used Toni Morrison's framework on the rhetoric of race in American literature for analyzing the representations of anti-semitism in Wharton's novels. Kassanoff went on to argue that for Wharton the concept of race was not as clearly articulated as it is for us today. Instead, one should see it as tied to the concept of nation and influenced by changes of cultural values. Kassanoff integrates a brief survey of Wharton's travel and other nonfiction pieces into a monographic survey of her fiction, an enterprise that clearly calls for a more focused analysis of the nonfiction work.

Questions of cultural value, gender, and race are tightly intertwined with those of nation in work by James and Wharton. The project of cultural improvement for America, with whatever slight variations, presupposes an ideally unified and ideally ignorant body of American people to educate, to refine, to polish. America, a construct of memory for James and America, the nation of domestic and not so domestic women for Wharton implies an exclusive politics when it comes to questions of regulating immigration and discrimination.

As the critical story goes, both James and Wharton discuss the cultural experience of their class, largely ignoring the world outside their set in their fiction. How does that work in their nonfiction? Can issues of gender and race imply problems of class as well? This is an aspect still to consider and enlarge upon, but James' account of the Jewish section of NYC and Wharton's ideal targeted audience in her introductions would indicate that indeed that the project of cultural improvement at the heart of the travel writing enterprise is secured for a select upper-middle class only.

Further questions as to the cultural politics of James and Wharton also arise. First and foremost, the investigation has to expand to James' and Wharton's further pieces of travel writing. Writings by James on France, England, Italy and by Wharton on the Mediterranean, Spain, and Morocco all lie in wait to elaborate our understanding of issues of gender, race, class, nation in their work. It is quite likely that more pronounced differences of the two cultural positions will also emerge on the basis of an extended investigation. Also, it will be interesting to see how other genres of nonfiction: criticism, journalism, and possibly autobiography, complicate the cultural positions represented in the travel pieces.

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Kovacs's essays are quite interesting interventions in the discourse concerning the future of American Studies. ... [T]hese essays will also be of great service to specialists who would learn how to frame pertinent discussions of how conceptions of what professors and graduate students of literature used to mean by 'style' have changed and been expanded, and will continue to change and expand within the disciplines and methodologies that make up the New American Studies. *Jack Roberts, STA College, NY.*

Literature in Context: Reading American Novels is a collection of essays that introduces students to major disciplinary and methodological problems of studying American 'literature' today. It discusses changes of the field of American studies in a set of brief historical surveys and then focuses on recent strategies of reading literature in cultural context in more detail. Yet the novels analyzed form no general survey of American literary history. Rather, they provide examples of themes and issues that have been challenging scholars lately, and also offer an insight into the hermeneutics of literary response.

The book introduces work by Americanists from New Criticism to Cultural Studies: from F. R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling through Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartmann and Heinz Ickstadt to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Sacvan Bercovitch, Vincent B. Leitch. It focuses on the consequences of disciplinary debates and changes of strategies of reading mainly in the area of Modernist and contemporary American fiction. It covers work by authors as diverse as Henry James, Edith Wharton, Toni Morrison, Sandra Cisneros, Cristina Garcia, and even digresses to include the Irish Colm Tóibín. It points out thematic connections and continuity in the reading of fiction today through concepts like race, class, gender, history, hybridity, culture. A resource for students and teachers, this book will also appeal to those interested in modern literature and culture.

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