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characters. After all, Verena was destined to shed more tears which she had already been made to anticipate some time before, because :

He allowed her, certainly no illusion on the subject of the fate she should meet as his wife; he flung over it no rosiness of promised ease; he let her know that she should be poor, withdrawn from view, a partner of his struggle, of his severe, hard, unique stoicism. When he spoke of such things as these, and bent his eyes on her, she could not keep the tears from her own; she felt that to throw herself into his life (bare and arid as for the time it was), was the condition of happiness for her, and yet that the obstacles were terrible, cruel.⁴⁷

47 James, *ibid.*, p. 324.

Most of them were young, all were in their prime, and all of them had fallen; this simple idea hovers before the visitor and makes him read with tenderness each name and place—name often without other history, and forgotten Southern battles. For Ransom these things were not a challenge nor a taunt; they touched him with respect, with the sentiment of beauty. He was capable of being a generous foeman, and he forgot, now, whole question of sides and parties; the simple emotion of the old fighting-time came back to him, and the monument around him seemed an embodiment of that memory; it arched over friends as well as enemies, the victims of defeat as well as the sons of triumph.⁴⁴

The pathos of the fate of young men who died in the recent war pressed him to feel the more bound to them by the ties of the sex they have in common. He said, "If, when women have the conduct of affairs, they fight as well as they reason, surely for them too we shall have to set memorials."⁴⁵ To him, the sexual danger was greater than the danger of battle.

This has been to say that James followed the dialectic way of thinking and writing at the same time, since it cannot be attained without struggling through the extant conflicting extremes. If in a tragedy in the old sense, the catastrophe comes in the end of the drama, but the tragedy here lies in its center. "The tragic tension lies partly between what is re-born and what is left over, and partly between the extremes toward which conversion always runs and the reality which contains the extremes,"⁴⁶ and that is the place where James and Basil Ransom lived, whose gesture of denial went with the assent of ideal; for it is the reality that contains both the beauty and the knowledge, the ideal and the actual. The ending passage of *The Bostonians* is the natural result of human relations between the

44 *Ibid.*, p. 205. 45 *Loc. cit.*

46 Blackmur, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

“No, I don’t want to destroy you, any more than I want to save you. There has been far too much talk about you, and I want to leave you alone altogether. My interest is in my own sex; yours evidently can look after itself. That’s what I want to save.”

Verena saw that he was more serious now than he had been before, that he was not piling it up satirically, but saying really and a trifle wearily, as if suddenly he were tired of much talk, what he meant. “To save it from what?” she asked.

“From the most damnable feminisation! I am so far from thinking, as yet you set forth the other night, that there is not enough woman in our general life, that it has long been pressed home to me that there is a great deal too much. The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passed out of the world; it’s a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don’t soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to care and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is — a very queer and partly very base mixture — that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover; and I must tell you that I don’t in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!”⁴³

In Memorial Hall at Harvard, Basil felt the place to be noble and solemn, for it spoke of sacrifice and example and was a kind of temple to youth, manhood, generosity, while Verena, beside him, worried knowing it stood there for duty and honour for the Northern cause.

43 Pp. 282-283.

Since each person should maintain the integrity of his own personality, Basil Ransom was kept as he had been in the beginning of the novel: "This lean, pale, sallow, shabby, striking man, with his superior head, his sedentary shoulders, his expression of bright grimness and hard enthusiasm, his provincial, distinguished appearance, is as a representative of his sex, the most important personage in my narrative."³⁸ To the very last of the novel he never wished to assent to what Verena learned to say, and yet he kept on feeling she was 'delightful'. He said, with a sententiousness of which he was perfectly aware, "The use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man pappy."³⁹ He gives us the impression that he is 'the only man in Boston.' He was the more capable of being masculine because he was not "a hero who was energetic and successful in the material business of the modern world," because he had "suffered the ruin of his fortunes," and was "a stranger in the land of his conquerors," just as the masculine characters in D.H. Lawrence's works were.⁴⁰

And Basil Ransom was a germ to rise in the later South of an intelligent romantic conservatism. His fear of the loss of manhood is common to Yeats, Lawrence and to *The Waste Land*. Ransom kept away from Mrs. Luna, who had the effect of conjuring away all masculine potency with her shallow possessive sexuality; her sister, Olive Chancellor, was fond of those weird meetings—"a rendezvous of witches on the Brocken".⁴¹ It was almost the primitive fear: Trilling called Mrs. Luna, Mrs. Hecate, presiding in homosexual chastity over the Athens of the New World; Olive, Minerva; and Verena Tarrant a sort of Iphigenia in Tauris, forced to preside as the priestess of the sacrifice of male captives.⁴² Basil Ransom, as the only male character in a true sense, wanted to save his own sex. He was talking to Verena:

38 P. 2.

39 P. 202.

40 Trilling, *ibid.*, p. 112.

41 James, *ibid.*, p. 3.

42 Trilling, *ibid.*, p. 114.

necessarily so. It is more probable that it would merely extend the split between inward and outward life which is so much a feature of modern society. Inwardly people would have faith, but outwardly they would continue to live in a world characterized by the lack of faith penetrating its tasks and productivity. The modern tragedy lies in the failure of the sea of faith to flood external things.³⁶

It is W. B. Yeats who tried to achieve this task by means of the Mask which he supposed would separate his inner vision from the anarchic contemporary scene, for we need today to protect ourselves from becoming like everyone else, from becoming nothing—like Verena Tarrant. We must be very careful here not to confuse this with what John Keats called ‘negative capability’, the willingness to remain in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts, which never means an abandonment of intellectual activity. “Nothing comes out of nothing.” Far from that, Henry James wrote with a creative activity of mind, perhaps like James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. Their works were written in prose but they chose that style in order to deal with the complexity and abstraction of modern life, and theirs is a poetic talent. There seems to be some kind of limitation in the conception that poetry is born out of suffering alone, for otherwise John Keats as well as others would not have produced their masterpieces. There should be poetic imagination strengthened by ‘a body of pieties’, if not religion.

Consequently, it is neither necessary nor helpful to kill the constituent parts so that we may build a reality, keeping ourselves as alive as we are, because our way now ought to be a dialectical development. In Trilling’s opinion, Parrington’s characteristic weakness is suggested in the title of his book, “for the culture of a nation is not truly figured in the image of the current. A culture is not a flow, not even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate.”³⁷

36 *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

37 *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

failure of the characters is not necessarily a failure on the novelist's part.

James succeeded in turning the destructive element into the creative; he knew hatred and combined it with love. While his mind was never violated with any idea, his poetic mind remained quite undisturbed. The most disturbing factor to us is ideology, which differs from ideas. James's idea is the form itself, his way of writing stories and novels is nothing but dialectical development. As yet that is not exactly 'the automatic writing', for although "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Wordsworth never failed to add that "our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thought, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings;"³³ here it is that poetry is connected with rational thought, and also here we can have the pleasure of literature whatever the correctness or adaptability of what it says. We may disagree but can respond to the power or grace of a mind.³⁴ In Henry James, intellectual power and emotional power go together, and it is natural that Trilling should praise Henry James because this critic thinks "that contemporary American prose literature in general lacks emotional power."³⁵

Stephen Spender also says:

But the modern situation is one in which the Church does not effectively criticize a materialistic civilization; indeed, in many ways, it is a part of the general materialism, the spiritual death. This is what I mean by the difference between subjective and objective faith. You can —and many people do—lead spiritual lives within the Church, but the Church has no influence on the materialist values or lack of values of our society. It can be said that if there were more churchgoers then, through them, faith would act objectively upon society. But this is not

33 "Preface to the Second Edition of *Lyrical Ballads*," *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800), p. 6. 34 Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, p. 291.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 294.

suggested, what is called by Blackmur "the Christian pattern of re-birth, the fresh start, the change of life or heart— arising from the pity and terror of human conditions met and seen—with the end not in death but in the living analogue of death, sacrifice, and renunciation." It is not the Aristotelian Katharsis but "the journey of the pilgrim, the searcher, the finder" like Strether in *The Ambassadors*.²⁹

Henry James's selected but brilliantly precise representation of social actuality interfuses closely with the inner actuality of vision. The British poet Spender says, "the reality we can make for ourselves in art is the result of an inter-relationship between objective and subjective worlds."³⁰ It is the artist's obligation therefore to represent life as he sees it, but it may not be the same as life as it 'really' is, not in 'the way things happen' as the readers know. Although I mentioned 'failure' before, it did not mean that James had "the suspicion that he might not have seen reality clearly," as Howells and Mark Twain had.³¹ On the contrary we may say he was not in the least distracted by ideas, which he concentrated to the perfection of his craft under one point of view, indifferent to religious dogma but with his 'exceptional awareness of spiritual reality' such as Hawthorne had. The real reason why James concluded his *The Bostonians* as we see it now must be the same as Trilling's last comment on *The Princess Casamassima* in his *The Liberal Imagination*: "Its power to tell the truth arises from its power of love. James had the imagination of disaster and that is why he is immediately relevant to us; but together with the imagination of disaster he had what the imagination of disaster often destroys and in our time is daily destroying, the imagination of love."³² Shakespeare did not fail because Lear did by his folly. Likewise I should like to say that the novelist's knowledge of

29 Blackmur, "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," *ibid.*, p. 276. 30 *The Creative Element*, p. 30.

31 Cf. Spiller, *The Cycle of American Literature*, p. 134.

32 P. 92.

that James's method, for example, of presenting characters of different degrees of consciousness is always workable in every writer when we know many instances where the isolation has remained just the same. If we fail in unification, we are left with a terrible and weary apprehension of ignorance. It was Henry Adams in the last phase of his education that applied the mechanical theory of the inevitable change of all energy from higher to lower forms,"²⁶ and it was John Keats at his suffering younger age who dreamed of Cynthia's becoming the Indian Maid, not of the Maid's becoming the Moon goddess. In the abyss of ignorance Adams called it ennui;²⁷ Keats, Indolence.

One remarkable point in *The Bostonians* is that Basil Ransom stands somewhat outside that sharp contrast. He is of the same type as Miss Olive Chancellor in his distaste or rather ignorance of the arts, and thus resembles Christopher Newman in *The American*. Bowden comments on him concerning the arts:

He is in many ways a representative of the greater America, as distinct from the small Bostonian group of a rather admirable Puritan morality, and the even smaller, and perhaps not so admirable, cosmopolitan, cultural, New York group. The arts to him are neither something to be sought nor something to be avoided, but merely a distant and relatively unimportant concept.²⁸

Whereas Verena Tarrant is, in a sense, representative of nothing (but herself, if anything); hence it is Verena, herself a work of art, but not Basil Ransom, that is tragic in passing from Olive's restricted world of the conscience by rational effort, through the art lover Henry Burrage of New York who is too weak to be effective in this America of powerful conflicting forces, to the hands of Basil Ransom who cannot appreciate a beautiful work of art. But we may hope that Basil and Verena will have their own life, if it is not as Maugham and Lawrence

26 Blackmur, "The Expense of Greatness," *ibid.*, p. 93.

27 *Op. cit.*, p. 427.

28 *The Themes of Henry James*, p. 46.

ity complex which he seems to have wanted to fasten upon American writers should be cured by turning away to Henry James, because, as Trilling rightly says, "James's mind is nothing if not 'dialectical'—the values assigned to each of the two opposing principles are not permitted to be fixed and constant."²³

In establishing distinctions between sections of America, James brought out Boston, New York and the South, and was careful enough to comment upon the relative degree of absence or presence of the arts in the widely differing American societies. This is already not merely a deadly conflict of extremes. We may expect some 'greater reconciliation', the one new rebirth out of the two opposing extremes, the endless, dramatic development onto the third stage; that is the dialectics of James just as Henry Adams tried to reach: "She was goddess because of her force; she was the animated dynamo; she was reproduction."²⁴ And a more artistic expression of this is found in John Keats's Apollo who becomes a god after his suffering, a thing of beauty to be attained only after the agony. This is "the shudder of beauty" as R. F. Blackmur calls it, which is "the condition of more than usual emotion and more than usual orderin a unity of response felt as achieved without any feeling that the substance unified has been cheated in the theoretic form in which the unity is expressed."²⁵

The procedure towards such an achievement is the parallel path of verse-making; the poetic mind attains what it is not conscious of: that is, the beauty Keats declared to be 'all we ought to know'; something obscured often in the mystery. In forming new wholes out of chaotic experiences Henry James as an artist did better than Henry Adams, because Basil Ransom and therefore James thought with their bodies, connecting the sensuous with the intellectual. This does not mean, however,

23 *Opposing Self*, p. 108.

24 *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 384.

25 Blackmur, "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," *ibid.*, p. 274.

long, low bridge that crawled, on its staggering posts, across the Charles; the casual patches of ice and snow; the desolate suburban horizons, peeled and made bald by the rigor of the season; the general hard, cold void of the prospect; the extrusion, at Charlestown, at Cambridge, of a few chimneys and steeples, straight, sordid tubes of factories and engine-shops, or spare heavenward finger of the New England meeting-house. There was something inexorable in the poverty of the scene, shameful in the meanness of its details, which gave a collective impression of boards and tin and frozen earth, sheds and rotting piles, railway-lines striding flat across a thoroughfare of puddle, and tracks of the humbler, the universal horse-car, traversing obliquely this path of danger; loose fences, vacant lots, mounds of refuses, yards bestrewn with iron pipes, telegraph poles, and bare wooden backs of places.²⁰

The novel, *The Bostonians*, represents, like James's other pieces, the conflict of two principles, one of which is radical, the other conservative; or it is the conflict of the two sexes, of the two kinds of culture of Boston and New York, and of New England and the South. Van Wyck Brooks emphasizes these two irreconcilable planes on which human nature in America exists: "One admits the charm of both extremes, the one so fantastically above, the other so fantastically below the level of right reason; to have any kind of relish for muddles humanity is necessarily to feel the charm of both extremes. But where is all that is real, where is personality and all its works, if it is not essentially somewhere, somehow, in some not very vague way, between?"²¹ Brooks endeavoured to embrace the Whole but ended by losing touch with its parts; it may be that "he had finished trying to reconcile politics and literature, mysticism and science."²² The impression of a cultural inferior-

20 *Ibid.*, p. 149.

21 *America's Coming-of-Age*, pp. 21-22.

22 Dupee, "The Americanism of Van Wyck Brooks," Zabel, ed., *Literary Opinion in America*, p. 567.

Olive and Basil felt each other to be quite irreconcilable: Miss Olive Chancellor, it may be confided to the reader, to whom in the course of our history I shall be under the necessity of imparting much occult information, was subject to fits of tragic shyness, during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror. One of these fits had suddenly seized her now, without any obvious cause, though, indeed, Mrs. Luna had made it worse by becoming instantly so personal. There was nothing in the world so personal as Mrs. Luna; her sister could have hated her for it if she had not forbidden herself this emotion as directed to individuals. Basil Ransom was a young man of first-rate intelligence, but conscious of the narrow range, as yet, of his experience. He was on his guard against generalisations which might be hasty; but he had arrived at two or three that were of value to a gentleman lately admitted to the New York bar and looking out for clients. One of them was to the effect that the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into the people who take things hard and the people who take them easy. He perceived very quickly that Miss Chancellor belonged to the former class. This was written so intently in her delicate face that he felt an unformulated pity for her before they had exchanged twenty words. He himself, by nature, took things easy; if he had put on the screw of late, it was after reflection, and because circumstances pressed him close. But this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid.¹⁹

Basil could not bring himself to like Boston itself, either:

The western windows of Olive's drawing-room, looking over the water, took in the red sunsets of winter; the

¹⁹ James, *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

in *The Bostonians*, is more successful in a more daring conjunction of the sexual and the political life.¹⁵ Again, James is deeper than Lawrence in having 'a sense of history' such as F. O. Matthiessen points out in agreement with T. S. Eliot about the difference between James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* and Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, in which Lawrence has only a sense 'of the moment.'¹⁶

Considering James's distaste for naturalism, the final passage of *The Bostonians* must have been selected deliberately as a necessity, not selected as 'a loose end'. It is in no sense a loose end that he suggested further struggle, the mystery of ignorance, and human rebirth probably into new world. It is neither a happy ending, nor a usual tragedy. Basil Ransom stood out too much from American society, but he knew and hated ignominious applause from the wrong people just as R. P. Blackmur's outsiders like Whitman, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, our Henry James, Melville, Hart Crane and George Santayana did with different emphases in their books. Their examples were eccentric and lonely, but had "an intelligence whose actions were direct, naked, and at their best terrifyingly sane."¹⁷ *The Bostonians* was concluded not only with a sense of happy success but still more with something like a sense of failure, and would this not be the driving power of the work? R. P. Blackmur thinks that Henry Adams was a failure, for Adams failed to express what he felt; he knew his thought left him discontented with what he actually felt; it is this knowledge that leads to the conviction of "the positive ignorance which is the final form of contradictory knowledge;"¹⁸ and in the like manner Henry James was sort of failure, too, but it was 'the triumph of failure.' Even if the principle of unity was carried to failure, it was worth 'the expense', because it is the reconciliation of opposites that is always found to be so difficult to attain.

15 Trilling, *ibid.*, p. 60.

16 *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot*, p. 148.

17 Blackmur, "The Expense of Greatness," *The Lion and the Honeycomb*, p. 82.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

He smiled and took her hand and pressed it. They got up and walked out of the gallery. They stood for a moment at the balustrade and looked at Trafalgar Square. Cabs and omnibuses hurried to and fro, and crowds passed, hastening in every direction, and the sun was shining.¹³

We can see here that everything is complete, the plot being concluded with a happy ending. The work contains one distinct contrast between the human bondage which afflicted Philip at the earlier stage and this inversion into happy release. This, however, we might say, is the only principal change from one extreme to another. It is a gradual and onefold development in one direction, although we admit it is a valuable pattern of human elevation towards the final salvation through society, art, Nature, and God.

This pattern reminds me of another example in D. H. Lawrence, who undoubtedly is very different from Maugham in many ways: Lawrence never goes to religion as Maugham has. He is nearer to Henry James in *Sons and Lovers* in that the protagonist Paul begins walk back into the agonizing world and will continue his life in the seemingly familiar but really unknown mystery again and forever.

“Mother!” he whimpered——“mother!”

She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this. And she was gone, intermingled herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her.

But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly.¹⁴

Lawrence has taught us much about the profound disturbance of sexual life and the excess of will which seems a response to certain maladjustments in society. But Henry James,

13 P. 760.

14 P. 491.

said at a convention. Yet she was delightful to him. He smiled at her and she returned hers. This was the danger to Olive, who was impatient to take possession of Verena almost losing herself in admiration. Olive's eagerness and tenderness made her inquire of Verena very abruptly: "Will you be my friend, my friend of friends, beyond every one, everything, forever and forever?"¹¹ Olive was haunted with the fear that Verena would marry someone at any time, which made her look with suspicion upon all male acquaintances, including Basil of course. Sometimes Verena was fascinated by Olive's sister Mrs. Adeline Luna, but Olive never gave her a chance to see Mrs. Luna alone.

After a long struggle between Olive and Basil, the latter succeeded in attracting Verena to him. Getting out of the Music Hall into the street, escaping the angry parents and the crying Olive, Verena said, "Ah, now I am glad." Have we then come to the end of the story? Henry James did not forget to add some words more: "But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed."¹² My belief is that James has presented one thing which deserves our attention; there is at least a clue to James's arts.

For the sake of comparison, let me quote the ending passage of S. Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*:

He smiled a little. He knew her pretty well now, and her manner did not surprise him.

"But don't you want to marry *me*?"

"There's no one else I would marry."

"Then that settles it."

"Mother and Dad will be surprised, won't they?"

"I'm so happy."

"I want my lunch," she said.

"Dear!"

11 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 378.

the way he liked them—not to think too much, not to feel any responsibility for the government of the world, such as he was sure Miss Chancellor felt. If they would only be private and passive, and have no feeling but for that, and leave publicity to the sex of tougher hide! Ransom was pleased with the vision of that remedy; it must be repeated that he was very provincial.⁸

When he came to see Olive, she felt that she had courted danger and they would never agree with each other, because he was so indifferent; and her ominous anxiety proved to be true. Henry James often successfully dwells on Olive:

The curious tint of her eyes was a living color; when she turned it upon you, you thought vaguely of the glitter of green ice. She had absolutely no figure, and presented a certain appearance of feeling cold. With all this, there was something very modern and highly developed in her aspect; she had the advantages as well as the drawbacks of a nervous organisation. She smiled constantly at her guest, but from the beginning to the end of dinner, though he made several remarks that he thought might prove amusing, she never once laughed. Later, he saw that she was a woman without laughter; exhilaration, if it ever visited her, was dumb. Once only, in the course of his subsequent acquaintance with her, did it find a voice; and then the sound remained in Ransom's ear as one of the strangest he had heard.⁹

Basil had a passionate tenderness for the South. Since his desire was: "to be quiet about the Southern land, not to touch her with vulgar hands, to leave her alone with her wounds and her memories, not prating in the market-place either of her troubles or her hopes, but waiting as a man should wait, for the slow process, the sensible beneficence of time——"¹⁰ he naturally despised the Northern fanatics, even disliked what Verena had

8 James, *The Bostonians.*, p. 8. 9 *Ibid.*, p. 15. 10 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Although it failed to receive the attention it deserved in its author's lifetime, and has been to this day one of the least known of his novels, the failure for the most part seems to have come from prejudices, for, Dupee says, "James is not dealing with the original group of abolitionists and Brook Farmers, his father's generation, but with the epigoni of the '70's,"⁵ moralists without moral sense. The central theme of this work is not feminism but defending the integrity of the individual personality and its right to its own discriminations and its own experience, as always seen in James's fiction.⁶

Basil Ransom, a young man from Mississippi, came up to Boston after the war, and saw his cousin Olive Chancellor and her sister Mrs. Luna. Olive tried to help him from her sense of duty; Mrs. Luna loved Basil, but the man happened to meet Verena Tarrant and made up his mind to take her out of the women's rights movement and away from Olive's grip.

The plot is a struggle between Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom for possession of the beautiful Tarrant, who had a curious talent which was meant "to represent the feminine virtue of passive receptivity,"⁷ which was both a virtue and a tragedy. She was the wonder of Boston but is less interesting than Olive and Basil. Olive was the arch-feminist and proposed to save Verena for the cause of women's rights from Basil Ransom who wanted Verena for his wife. Several types of women in this novel will interest us very much in marked contrast to one another, *e.g.* between Olive and the Southern females:

Why was she [Olive] morbid, and why was her morbidness typical? Ransom might have exulted if he had gone back enough to explain that mystery. The women he had hitherto known had been mainly of his own soft clime, and it was not often they exhibited the tendency he detected (and curiously deplored) in Mrs. Luna's sister. That was

5 *Henry James*, p. 151. 6 Rahv, *ibid.*, pp. viii-ix.

7 Dupee, *Henry James*, p. 144.

On Henry James's *The Bostonians*

by

Kin-ichi Fukuma

Henry James's *The Bostonians* first appeared in *The Century Magazine*, where it was serialized in 1885, and was published in book form the next year, 1886. Unfortunately, however, it was never included in the collected edition of Henry James brought out by Scribner's between 1907 and 1917. That this work has not been available for more than half a century in any American edition indicates the fact of "its failure on first publication and the multiple prejudices it aroused."¹

In his *The Bostonians*, James described a portrait of the pathetic figure of Miss Birdseye: "She was heroic, she was sublime, the whole history of Boston was reflected in her displaced spectacles; but it was a part of her originality, as it were, that she was deliciously provincial."² This rather humorous passage, etc. caused the people to be outraged, because this was nothing but that of "the venerably respectable Miss Elizabeth Peabody, veteran philanthropist and transcendentalist, and the sister-in-law of Hawthorne and of Horace Mann."³ *The Bostonians* may have taken it for an invasion of privacy, but a more probable reason for its failure may have been the too mature appearance of the work, for the time was too early for them to understand such things as Lesbian feelings, sexual abnormality, and hysteria; moreover readers in those days were not capable of anticipating a twentieth century type of intellectual, "Exemplified in writers like T.S. Eliot or the school of Southern agrarians, whose criticism of modern civilization is rooted in traditionalist principles."⁴

1 Rahv, "Introduction" to *The Bostonians*, p. v.; cf. Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, p. 57. 2 P. 28. 3 Rahv, *ibid.*, p. vi. 4 *Ibid.*, p. ix.