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HENRY JAMES

SELECTED LITERARY CRITICISM

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SELECTED LITERARY CRITICISM

*

EDITED BY

MORRIS SHAPIRA

PREFACED WITH

A NOTE ON "JAMES AS CRITIC" BY

F. R. LEAVIS

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To

Downing College

and the functioning of criticism
in the present time

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dr. Leavis' essay was originally a lecture delivered to undergraduates reading for the English Tripos. Because it is so much addressed to its original audience, he was reluctant to allow it to be printed as an introduction to a book intended for the general reader. The professional intention, however, gives a professional intensity and thoroughness to the de-academizing of the study—the reading—of criticism. It is an introduction to what is lively in James's criticism so it isn't parochial in its effect. I am very grateful to Dr. Leavis.

Dedicating somebody else's essays is impudence; I hope, though, that James would have forgiven my dedicating his to Downing College. The education that it has used its "immense academic privilege" to foster might have been inspired by the implied ideal of the London Note printed on Pages 176–179—the ideal implied by James's dismay at Oxford classicism. The dedication is an attempt to express the gratitude of all those who have had the privilege of an education so upsetting to one's desire for "prescribed lines" and that has given one so much to think about and test as experience grows and changes. It is gratitude too for intellectual society in which there was the community of interest to provoke and sustain liveliness and radicalness of discussion. My own special gratitude is for the Research Fellowship that gave me the time to re-read all James's criticism in order to make this selection.

This volume is also a symbolic repayment of the generosity of the American Government which, under the provisions of the Smith-Mundt Act, allowed me to spend a year at Harvard University, doing the initial work for this book. The other thanks I must express are to Mr. Francis Moran for doing the proof reading and to Mr. John Newton, Mr. Geoffrey Strickland, Mr. Norman Henfrey, and Mr. H. A. Mason for their questioning the essays selected.

All the essays, except the one on *The Tempest*, have been included on the grounds that they represent James at his strongest. May I recommend to the reader who would like to explore further *French Poets and Novelists* and *Notes on Novelists* as well as the *Hawthorne* in the English Men of Letters Series. (It is reprinted by Edmund Wilson in his *The Shock of Recognition.*) In *French Poets and Novelists* the two essays on Balzac and the one on Mérimée are particularly worthwhile. And

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for the reader who would like to explore still further there are the mostly young essays collected by Mr. Albert Mordell in a paperback *Literary Reviews and Essays by Henry James.* The reader of some of those might well agree with James's contemporaries that the young James is much more strikingly intelligent, unconventional and right as a critic than as a writer of fiction.

James made four collections of his literary criticism

French Poets and Novelists (*FP and N*) 1878
Partial Portraits (*PP*) 1888
Essays in London and Elsewhere (*E in L and E*) 1893
Notes on Novelists (*N on N*) 1914

The essays in this book come from the following:

Mr. Walt Whitman: *The Nation* I (16 November, 1865), 625–626
Our Mutual Friend: *The Nation* I (21 November, 1865), 786–787
The Belton Estate: *The Nation* II (4 January, 1866), 21–22
Taine's English Literature: *Atlantic Monthly* XXIX (April 1872), 469–472
Swinburne's Essays: *The Nation* XXI (29 July, 1875), 73–74
Charles Baudelaire: *The Nation* XXII (27 April, 1876), 279–281. Reprinted in *FP and N*, 1878
Daniel Deronda: A Conversation: *Atlantic Monthly* XXXVIII (December 1876), 684–694. Reprinted in *PP*, 1888
The Art of Fiction: *Longman's Magazine* IV (September 1884), 502–521. Reprinted in *PP*, 1888
Emerson: *Macmillan's Magazine* LVII (December 1887), 86–98. Reprinted in *PP*, 1888
Guy de Maupassant: *Fortnightly Review* XLIX (March 1888), 364–386. Reprinted in *PP*, 1888
The Journal of the Brothers de Goncourt: *Fortnightly Review* L (October 1888), 501–520. Reprinted in *E in L and E*, 1893
Criticism: *New Review* IV (May 1891), 398–402. Reprinted in *E in L and E*, 1893
Gustave Flaubert: *Macmillan's Magazine* LXVII (March 1893), 332–343. Reprinted in *E in L and E*, 1893
George Sand: *Yellow Book* XII (January 1897) 15–38. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914
London Notes: *Harper's Weekly* XLI (26 June, 1897) 639–640. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914
London Notes: *Harper's Weekly* XLI (21 August, 1897) 834. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914
The Future of the Novel: *The International Library of Famous Literature*, edited by Dr. Richard Garnett. 1899. Vol XIV. xi-xxii

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Honoré de Balzac: *The Two Young Brides* by Honoré de Balzac 1902. v-xliii. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914

Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert 1902. v-xliii. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914

Emile Zola: *Atlantic Monthly* XCII (August 1903), 193–210. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914

D' Annunzio: *Quarterly Review* CXCIX (April 1904), 383–419. Reprinted in *N on N*, 1914

The Tempest: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Sidney Lee. Vol. XVI. ix-xxxii. 1907

The New Novel: *The Times Literary Supplement* No. 635 (19 March, 1914), 133–134
No. 637 (2 April, 1914), 157–158
Reprinted, revised and enlarged in *N on N*, 1914

Where James revised or altered his essays on republication, I have used the later version.

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THE effect, if not the prime office, of criticism is to make our absorption and our enjoyment of the things that feed the mind as aware of itself as possible, since that awareness quickens the mental demand, which thus in turn wanders further and further for pasture. This action on the part of the mind practically amounts to a reaching out for the reasons of its interests, as only by its so ascertaining them can the interest grow more various. This is the very education of our imaginative life; and thanks to it the general question of how to refine, and of why certain things refine more and most, on that happy consciousness becomes for us of the last importance. Then we cease to be only instinctive and at the mercy of chance, feeling that we can ourselves take a hand in our satisfaction and provide for it, making ourselves safe against dearth, and through the door opened by that perception criticism enters, if we but give it time, as a flood, the great flood of awareness; so maintaining its high tide unless through some lapse of our sense for it, some flat reversion to instinct alone, we block up the ingress and sit in stale and shrinking waters.

Henry James: "The New Novel, 1914"

IN every great novel, who is the hero all the time? Not any of the characters, but some unnamed and nameless flame behind them all.

D. H. Lawrence: "The Novel", *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine, and other essays*

MANY of the books which now croud the world, may be justly suspected to be written for the sake of some invisible order of beings, for surely they are of no use to any of the corporeal inhabitants of the world. Of the productions of the last bounteous year, how many can be said to serve any purpose of use or pleasure? The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.

Samuel Johnson: Review of *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*

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JAMES AS CRITIC

F. R. LEAVIS

HENRY JAMES the critic has in recent years attained to something of classical standing. He even figures academically as prescribed reading for students of "English" who are to take papers on Literary Criticism. It doesn't of course follow that this acceptance carries with it any just recognition of his strength and his limitations—of the qualities that make him worth study. In fact, there is an irony attending his acceptance as a distinguished critic that corresponds to the irony attending his recognized status among the great novelists. It is a characteristic of the age when "English" has conquered Classics in the field of humane education, and an industry of specialized addiction on the part of academics to this and that modern author is acquiring an American aspect and scale in our universities, that the established "appreciation" of the favoured authors should not uncommonly be conventional—flagrantly conventional, and not at all conducive to optimism in genuine admirers of the given author.

Thus, when there is question of James as critic, it is generally assumed that the Prefaces give us him at his most impressive and valuable, and that in the volume of the collected Prefaces we have a major critical classic. Yet few have read any considerable proportion of that volume, and very few indeed of those who have made pertinacious attempts to read it have brought much of value away. For the fact is, not only that it requires a great effort, but that the effort is not repaying. Those academics who take seriously the suggestion that it is the "novelist's *vade-mecum*" [1] will indeed be drawing from it a new academicism, for that is what the attempt to establish a general interest and validity in it must yield. And one can only deplore any offer to deaden the undergraduate reading English with such a misdirection and such a *corvée*.

The preface the undergraduate might profitably be told to read, along with the novel itself, that to *Roderick Hudson*, is not commonly singled out for attention. Its examination of that strikingly promising early work is immediately intelligible and critically enlightening. The main point it makes explains—with a general critical profit for the reading of James—why the obvious weaknesses of the novel, the

[1] Henry James: Letters to W. D. Howells, 17 August, 1908.

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impossibility of making the postulated artistic genius anything but a postulate and the too rapid disintegrative effect on Roderick of the *femme fatale*, don't prevent *Roderick Hudson's* being a distinguished success. "The centre of interest throughout *Roderick*," James tells us, "is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness." And we see how the novel does in fact justify that account. But the Prefaces in general belong essentially to that phase of the late James in which they were written. One must not expect to find out from James's discussion of it how one is to take an example of his more difficult and problematic works. Those who assume naïvely that they *are* getting light (and it seems to be a not uncommon illusion) are likely to come away with some notable misconception. Thus, because of such a misadventure on the part of an influential commentator,[1] there has been a notion current that *The Awkward Age* is a comedy, though anyone who reads comprehendingly what is there (and the work is one of those in which the difficulty of the late James is triumphantly vindicated) sees that—if we are to talk in these terms—it is a tragedy. James's analytic discussion serves a special technical preoccupation, one that had for him an absorbing intensity characteristic of that late phase (and consider the given retrospective occasion!); and the resultant abstraction, with its inadvertent emphasis, suggests the false account of the novel that has been taken up (people don't expect to understand a late work of James unless they know beforehand on authority what they are to find). Of course, readers of the novelist who study him closely because of a genuine response to what he has written may very well find some critical interest in the Prefaces. What should certainly be found is reason for reflecting on the way in which, in the late James, what began as a short story or *nouvelle* will end as a two-volume novel.

If the collection of the Prefaces ought not to be prescribed as a critical classic, James nevertheless has his place among the classical critics. Like all great original artists, he was distinguished by critical intelligence where his art was in question. Coming when he did, and writing for an English-speaking public, he was inevitably concerned to insist that the novelist's art was, as seriously as any, an *art*. Not that its standing as such was not, in one sense—the most important, firmly established: there had been Jane Austen, Dickens, Hawthorne, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. What James, of course, had to contend for was a general full recognition among the educated that creative

[1] Percy Lubbock: *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 193.

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talent—creative genius—was at least as likely to go into the novel as into any mode of art, and that for the critic and the "educated" reader to be innocent of their corresponding obligation was ignoble. The obligation was to be intelligent and to know that a novel might challenge all the intelligence and the most responsible judgment one could command. George Eliot had not waited to be assured that there would be a community capable of a perceptive response to the inventions of her genius, but towards the successors of George Eliot the public had none the less a duty. As James himself had, as time went on, his own poignant reason for knowing, the sense an artist has, or has not, that he may count on getting recognition from an intelligent public matters immensely to him—matters to him as an artist and a creative power.

James's distinctive position in criticism is given by these considerations: he, more than anyone else, was George Eliot's successor; he was an intimate of the Parisian literary world before he decided that he was irretrievably an Anglo-Saxon and must settle in England; the clear unignorable challenge for the novelist as artist, the vindicator of the artistic conscience in the art of fiction, was for him, inevitably, Flaubert, yet his decision that he was an "Anglo-Saxon" was that which he rested in. He knew France, creative France, intimately and affectionately: his Anglo-Saxonism was fully conscious and fully informed; it cannot be charged with provincialism. The representative document is his appraisal of Flaubert; sympathetic, grateful, admiring, full of piety, but inexorable in its limiting judgment. This indeed is a classical piece of criticism, one that can be prescribed for the close attention of the literary student. What we have here, in the attack, the close relevance, the essential economy, the combined trenchancy and suppleness, the sensitiveness and the penetration, is the critical intelligence of the creative writer, the practising novelist—an intelligence trained and refined in the *atelier*; but there is nothing technical or esoteric about the critique. All that could propose itself to the student as something to be carried away for his own use is what can be derived from an example of convincingly relevant intelligence: he can take the incitement to try and be himself as intelligent. But the way in which James arrives at and makes his major value-judgment—the limiting or reluctantly qualifying judgment that is the upshot of his critique—has a general and central significance for criticism, a clear general bearing.

What we come to here is the basic matter of criticism that lies at the bottom of James's handling of the theme of "morality". The point of

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putting the word in inverted commas is that it covers more than one issue, and, even in what may be called *loci classici* for the discussion of "art and morality", often, within one text, has a shifting force. It has more than one force, and (the student will perceive) some subtle transitions, in James's own reflections for which it provides the focus. In the commentary on Besant he is merely, or mainly, concerned to dismiss the idea that the novelist should be required to limit himself by the prohibitions and decorums of prudery, propriety and social convention. That his Anglo-Saxonism doesn't entail any lack of plainness, directness or completeness in this dismissal is put beyond question in his critique of Maupassant. But he has a criticism to make of this artist for whose un-Anglo-Saxon single-mindedness of devotion to art he is expressing an intense admiration. It is that Maupassant, militantly anti-sentimental vindicator of the right (or duty) of the novelist to render the whole of life as it presents itself to him, seems unaware of the part the moral sense actually plays in life. With the easy directness of a great Victorian Anglo-Saxon, James permits himself the gloss that Maupassant never, in his score of volumes, presents a gentleman.

But what basic to criticism is at issue under "art and morality" doesn't get fairly suggested—or not suggested with any felicity—by the question, however much point it may have in the given context, as to whether the novelist's presentment of life allows adequately for the part we know to be played in life by the "moral sense". James, of course, was well aware of this. The important thing about his criticism as he deals with Maupassant is the way (it is at once firm, responsible and subtle) in which, defining his essential value-judgments—or, to put it in other terms, intimating as a literary critic his sense of the human significance of Maupassant's art—he invokes "life".

He is insisting—and this, perhaps, is the important thing in the given context—that in respect of any art one takes seriously one *has* to make value-judgments, since a real response entails this; it entails forming an implicit critical sense of the human significance of the art in question, and the demand of intelligence is that one should bring one's sense to conscious definition. In Maupassant he was dealing with that reaction against "bourgeois" moralism (think of the prosecution of *Madame Bovary*) which denied any possible relevance of moral judgment to art. This meant the exaltation of art into something absolute, a self-justifying end in itself: *l'art pour l'art*. We don't, when Aestheticism is in question, think first of Maupassant, who was not addicted to Beauty; but he was (as James observes) the disciple of Flaubert, and for him too

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art was an absolute or ultimate: it was art for art's sake. You could say no more of a work than: "This is perfect; this is perfectly done." The critic could do no more than, within its own terms, point out the elements and structure of its perfection. It was irrelevant, supererogatory and presumptuous to ask questions about the value or significance (we need the words in association) of the perfectly done.

James discusses this implicit attitude of Maupassant. He points out. with his characteristic force of delicacy, that there is still the question of *interest*; the most resolute amoralism or anti-moralism doesn't eliminate that. He then asks of Maupassant: "Is *this* all there is in life? Does life reduce to this? Has it no more than this in the way of interest to offer?" He brings home to his reader, that is, that there is no eliminating and no escaping the appeal to life, however much one may suppose oneself to believe in the ultimateness or self-sufficiency of art.

It doesn't take a great deal of reflection to establish that "life" is a large word and doesn't admit of definition. But some of the most important words we have to use don't admit of definition. And this truth holds of literary criticism. Not only can we not, for instance, do without the word "life"; any attempt to think out a major critical issue entails using positively the shifts in force the word is bound to be incurring as it feels its way on and out and in towards its fulfilment. And it would hardly be questioned that there is point in saying that a critic who would be intelligent about the novel must be intelligent about life: no discussion of the novel by any other kind of critic is worth attention.

When one remarks that the strength of James's criticism of the novel is his being himself a novelist one may complete the observation by noting how, in his own criticism, it is on the supreme need for the *novelist*, the novelist as artist, to be intelligent about life that the accent falls; always implicitly, explicitly in key places. There is nothing technical, it is worth repeating, in his examination of Flaubert, where, in criticism, we have a clear example of the consummate professional taking the challenge. And when he comes to the judgment that the masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, is qualified by a default of intelligence in the master, the default of intelligence in the artist as artist *is* a default of intelligence about life. James, when he comes out with the explicit judgment, is considering in the first place Flaubert's heroine, Emma Bovary—"Madame Bovary herself as a vessel of experience".[1] But the implicit effect of the whole approach is to bring the criticism against the Flaubertian exaltation of "Art", for the mode and spirit of James's

[1] From *Gustave Flaubert, 1902*; p. 221 in this selection.

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critique, with its essential appeal to life, implicitly challenges the contradiction represented by the Aesthetic way of exalting "Art". An intensity of addiction to an Art that is set over against life, an addiction that offers to manifest itself creatively in the rejection of life (subsumed under *la platitude bourgoise*), must certainly be held to be a major default of intelligence. James doesn't actually say that, but his criticism, in its constant habit, conveys and enforces a refutation of Aestheticism as clear and basic as its dismissal of the opposite kind of fallacy. In many ways he expresses his charged sense that the creativity of art is the creativity of life—that the creative impulsion *is* life, and could be nothing else.

Addressing himself *ad hominem* to Maupassant, he points out that the cynic-sensualist's art is confined for its creative purposes to a sadly limited range or interests, since it leaves so much of life out. James's criticism, of course, is concerned for something more than range and variety: he can't conceive an artist, or (it follows) a critic, who is not concerned for significance. "Significance", again, is a term that doesn't admit of close definition, and, again, the critic can't do without it. It points to the wholeness of a created work to that which makes it one—to the principle of life that determines its growth and organization. Observations regarding "significance" are intimately bound up with judgments regarding "value"; the two terms are in close attendance upon one another. Discussion of "significance" entails in the most challenging way the anti-Aesthetic reference to life ("Art and Life"—we use the antithesis, knowing that we are not judging it to be meaningless, or anything but useful, when we remind ourselves that art is a manifestation of life or it is nothing). The creative writer's concern to render life *is* a concern for significance, a preoccupation with expressing his sense of what most matters. The creative drive in his art *is* a drive to clarify and convey his perception of relative importances. The work that commands the reader's most deeply engaged, the critic's most serious, attention asks at a deep level: "What, at bottom, do men live *for*?" And in work that strikes us as great art we are aware of a potent normative suggestion: "*These* are the possibilities and inevitablenesses, and, in the face of them, *this* is the valid and the wise (or the sane) attitude." Lawrence, asked, towards the end, about the creative impulsion in his own work, said: "One writes out of one's moral sense; for the race, as it were." [1]

"Moral" too is a difficult word and a necessary one. Lawrence's use

[1] Edward Nehls (ed.): *D. H. Lawrence, a composite biography*, Vol. 2, p. 414.

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of it here is special, but central and right. A great writer is a man impelled by a deep irresistible sense of responsibility, and he appeals to a deep sense of responsibility in us. A great work of art explores and evokes the grounds and sanctions of our most important choices, valuations and decisions—those decisions which are not acts of will, but are so important that they seem to make themselves rather than to be made by us. The tone (or *timbre*) of this kind of formulation is not, indeed, characteristic of James: for criticism, and statements of the grounds of criticism, in which (as in the utterance just quoted) the word moral has "religious" in close attendance, the student will go to Lawrence.[1] But James in his way bears the same testimony, exemplifies the same truth. If not with the Laurentian astonishingness, the clair-voyant, deep-striking and wide-ranging genius, he is, as critic, finely and strongly central. For the student, his place in history adds to his value as that. His intelligence about the need of his time alerted and quickened by his Parisian initiation, he dealt firmly with Victorian moralism in the way the time—the state of British and American culture—required. On the other hand, strong in his un-British inwardness with France, he yielded no ground to the opposed fallacies of Aestheticism, which had so great an attraction for the would-be enlightened and unprovincial. He had achieved a centrality that made him strong to deal with all provincialisms. He expressed with a fine and irresistible sincerity his sense of Flaubert's place in the history of the novel, and of the indebted-ness to Flaubert that should be felt by all practitioners. But, making his famous decision in favour of the country of George Eliot,[2] a decision that was a mature conscious realization of what for him was fact and necessity, he knew, while not the less committed to go on developing his own post-Flaubertian conscience of the *atelier*, that he belonged, not with Flaubert's associates and disciples, but with George Eliot, Haw-thorne, Dickens and Jane Austen.[3]

[1] The epigraph by Lawrence suggests how different his timbre is from James's.

[2] ". . . my last layers of resistance to a long-encroaching weariness and satiety with the French mind and its utterance has fallen from me like a garment. I have done with 'em, forever, and am turning English all over. I desire only to feed on Eng-lish life and the contact of English minds." Letter to William James, 29 July, 1876.

[3] The "post-Flaubertian" conscience of the *atelier* expresses itself in a way of talking about "form" and "composition" that makes us a little uneasy sometimes —more than a little when it goes with such a reference as we have here to Jane Austen: "They all represent the pursuit of a style, of the ideally right one for its relations, and would still be interesting if the style had not been achieved. *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô*, *Saint Antoine*, *L'Education* are so written and so composed (though the last-named in a minor degree) that the more we look at them the

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That the sophisticated "conscience of the *atelier*" had not tendency to make him less sensitively and supplely responsive to great art in the creation of which the artistic conscience engaged had been of a different ethos from that characteristic of his own work—had been (let us say) wholly English in genesis and habit—his "Conversation" on *Daniel Deronda* may serve as a demonstration. Even if one registers a disagreement here or there, it is impossible to read this critique, with its quick and witty sensitiveness of intelligence, without some keen pleasure when one reflects that it was written as a contemporary review. The conversation form, which lends itself to the effect of ease and lightness and also permits a command of varied tone, belongs to the critical method with which James responds to the given challenge —one that he takes, it is clear, with a warm and growing admiration and a proper kind of humility. He uses the conversation, with its different voices, representing a diversity of approaches and possibilities of response, to convey a due sense of the complexity both of the work and the critical recognition it calls for.

Those who have read (and there are authorities—James suffers much from authorities—who assert it as a patent truth) that Balzac is pre-eminently the master from whom he descends should consider how he deals with *La Comédie humaine*. He admires immensely and wonderingly the portentous energy, industry and courage of its creator, and the degree of success he has achieved. What he admires is the antithesis of himself. He reflects with a kind of envy on the conditions of

more we find in them, under this head, a beauty of intention and of effect; the more they figure in the too often dreary desert of fictional prose a class by themselves and a little living oasis. So far as that desert is of the complexion of our own English speech it supplies with remarkably rarity this particular source of refreshment. So strikingly is that the case, so scant for the most part any dream of a scheme of beauty in these connections, that a critic betrayed at artless moments into a plea for composition may find himself as blankly met as if his plea were for trigonometry. He makes inevitably his reflections, which are numerous enough; one of them being that if we turn our back so squarely, so universally to this order of considerations it is because the novel is so preponderantly cultivated among us by women, in other words by a sex ever gracefully, comfortably, enviably unconscious (it would be too much to call them even suspicious) of the requirements of form. The case is at any rate sharply enough made for us, or against us, by the circumstance that women are held to have achieved on all our ground, in spite of this weakness and others, as great results as any. The judgment is undoubtedly founded: Jane Austen was instinctive and charming . . ." (p. 228).

That Jane Austen's art had made a deep and decisive impact on James is proved (if that were necessary) by *The Europeans*. His being able to refer to her in such a context as "instinctive" proves that he himself as critic can be insufficiently conscious. The passage might be noted by the student as a monitory *locus classicus* for the term "form".

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an old civilization that made possible, in Balzac's attempt to "faire concurrence à l'état civil", his "solidity of specification", his effect of structure and density. The antithesis of the poverty that James, in a famous passage, notes as offered Hawthorne by the American scene[1]—that is what Balzac's France gave Balzac. But, without anything in the nature of envy, James is constating how different in *kind* Balzac's energy is from his own. For the upshot of James's critique is a drastic limiting or privative judgment, one that comes under the rubric of "significance".

The significance we look for in creative literature is a matter of the sense of life, the sense of the potentialities of human experience, it conveys. It may fairly be said that life in *La Comédie humaine*, life for the reader immersed in the "comedy", is populous, an immensely demonstrative energy, and insistently "actual", but that the "life" that provides the themes and materials for Henry James's art hardly makes its presence felt. For all its populousness, Balzac's world strikes James as dauntingly empty. He conveys this judgment while his explicit emphasis falls on mass, weight and extent; the effect of "solidity" or "reality" he acclaims is significantly qualified in the acclaiming. "A born son of Touraine, it must be said, he pictures his province, on every pretext and occasion, with filial passion and extraordinary breadth. The prime aspect in his scene all the while, it must be added, is the money aspect. The general money question so loads him up and weighs him down that he moves through the human comedy, from beginning to end, very much in the fashion of a camel, the ship of the desert, surmounted with a cargo. 'Things' for him are francs and centimes more than any others, and I give up as inscrutable, unfathomable, the nature, the peculiar avidity of his interest in them. It makes us wonder again and again what then is the use on Balzac's scale of the divine faculty. The imagination, as we all know, may be employed up to a certain point in inventing uses for money; but its office beyond that point is surely to make us forget that anything so odious exists. This is what Balzac never forgot; his universe goes on expressing itself for him, to its furthest reaches, on its finest sides, in the terms of the market. To say these things, however, is after all to come out where we want, to suggest his extraordinary scale and his terrible completeness. I am not sure that he does not see character too, see passion, motive, personality, as quite in the order of the 'things' we have spoken of. He makes them no less concrete and palpable. handles them no less directly and freely.

[1] Henry James: *Hawthorne* (English Men of Letters), pp. 42–43.

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It is the whole business in fine—that grand total to which he proposed to himself to do high justice—that gives him his place apart, makes him among the novelists, the largest, weightiest presence. There are some of his obsessions—that of the material, that of the financial, that of the 'social', that of the technical, political, civil—for which I feel myself unable to judge him, judgment losing itself unexpectedly in a particular shade of pity. The way to judge him is to try to walk all round him—on which we see how remarkably far we have to go." (P. 197.)

There would be no point in summarizing the criticism or (it is hardly, the student will find, a separable thing) the way in which James makes it. The student will find a good and relatively simple illustration here of how James repays some attentive reading. A criticism of very much the same kind is brought against Arnold Bennett in the late essay, "The New Novel". And again the student should note the way in which the criticism is conveyed. James has his idiosyncrasy of expression, but his essential method, his approach and movement in criticism, can hardly be *imitated*. The learning that can be done by the reader is only of the right kind.

But there is no need to particularize further. The reader, aware enough of the distinction of James the critic to look with adverted interest through a varied collection of his criticism, will do his own exploring, picking-out and discriminating. For there *are*, of course, discriminations to be made: its interest doesn't invariably, or often wholly, lie in its convincing rightness and inevitableness. We turn up with some eagerness his review of *Our Mutual Friend*, and comment, perhaps, that he rightly judges it to be inferior and tired, and yet doesn't do it justice. To dismiss Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wrayburn in that way—is *that* right? Isn't there some subtle and convincing psychology that is at the same time penetrating insight into the conditioning civilization? Haven't we some strong Dickens in the waterside parts? And so on. We note his brief sentence on Lawrence in "The New Novel". And we may remind ourselves, observing how seriously he there takes Hugh Walpole, the type Book Society novelist of the time, that Walpole enjoyed great "social" advantages, and was cultivating the old, lonely, recognition-starved James—in the same spirit that later (*via hommage* to Virginia Woolf) won him the entry into Bloomsbury and *The Criterion*.

Reading James on Whitman and Baudelaire, we comment that his being an intelligent novelist didn't help him here. But we don't feel superior—or oughtn't to: that is in and of the whole "lesson", the

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total interest and profit of reading any representative collection of his criticism. Reading him on Baudelaire, for instance, though we may exclaim at his being able to rank Baudelaire below Gautier, we may find it salutary to explain to ourselves why it was natural, and almost inevitable, for him to do so. We might even, considering James's Baudelaire (whom he presents carefully), be led to ask whether in the post-Eliotic Baudelaire there doesn't perhaps tend also to be a deflection —of another kind.

F. R. LEAVIS

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