INFORMATION TO USERS

This material was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

5. PLEASE NOTE: Some pages may have indistinct print. Filmed as received.

Xerox University Microfilms
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
CHAPIN, Helen Geracimos, 1929-
MYTHOLOGY AND AMERICAN REALISM: STUDIES IN
FICTION BY HENRY ADAMS, HENRY JAMES, AND
KATE CHOPIN.

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1975
Literature, general

© 1975

HELEN GERACIMOS CHAPIN

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED.
PLEASE NOTE:

Page 224 is not available for photography.

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS
MYTHOLOGY AND AMERICAN REALISM: STUDIES IN FICTION

BY HENRY ADAMS, HENRY JAMES,

AND KATE CHOPIN

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Helen Chapin, B.A., M.A.

The Ohio State University

1975

Reading Committee:

Thomas Woodson
Julian Markels
Thomas Cooley

Approved By

Thomas Woodson
Advisor
Department of English
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible by the knowledge and guidance of my advisor, Professor Thomas Woodson, by the encouragement of my colleagues at Wilmington College, and finally by the understanding and support of my family. I wish to thank them all very much.
VITA

Born—Honolulu, Hawaii

1958. . . . . . B.A., University of Hawaii,
Honolulu, Hawaii

1958-1959 . . . Graduate Assistant, University of Hawaii,
Honolulu, Hawaii

1959. . . . . . M.A., University of Hawaii,
Honolulu, Hawaii

1960-1962 . . . Teaching Assistant, University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque, New Mexico

1962-1963 . . . Instructor, University of Kentucky,
Lexington, Kentucky

1963-1965 . . . Assistant Professor, Kentucky State College,
Frankfort, Kentucky

1965-present. . . Assistant Professor, Wilmington College,
Wilmington, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS

"Women's Liberation: The New Awakening," The Link, 22 (Winter,
1971), 4-5.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: American Literature

Restoration and Eighteenth Century British Literature
Nineteenth Century British Literature
Twentieth Century British and American Literature
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** ................. ii

**Vita** .................................. iii

**Chapter**

I. American Realism, Mythology, and Naturalism:  
"The Proper Study of Mankind is Woman" ........ 1

  *Lonely Antigones*  
  *Toward a Natural History of Consciousness*  

II. Henry Adams: The Awakening of Madeleine and Esther .................................. 60

  *Henry Adams's Signature*  
  *Madeleine Lee and the Sexual Politics of Democracy*  
  *Esther: a "Pallas Athene"*

III. Henry James: "The Cold Medusa-Face of Life"  

  *Henry James's Signature*  
  *The Princess Casamassima: an "Angel of Devastation"*

IV. Kate Chopin: "Aeschylus is True" .................. 256

  *Kate Chopin's Signature*  
  *Edna Pontellier: "Venus rising from the foam"*

**Bibliography** .......................... 336
CHAPTER I

AMERICAN REALISM, MYTHOLOGY, AND NATURALISM:
"THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS WOMAN"

Henry Adams expressed a deep but often forgotten truth when he said, "The proper study of mankind is woman and, by common agreement . . . it is the most complex and arduous."¹ In the late nineteenth century three American writers came to artistic maturity in a United States that had largely ignored women, as Adams said, and that needed to study and respect them if the culture were to be whole and healthy. Adams (1838-1918), Henry James (1843-1916), and Kate Chopin (1851-1904) all placed American women at the centers of their novels: Democracy: An American Novel (1880) and Esther: A Novel (1884) by Adams; The Princess Casamassima (1886) by James; and The Awakening (1899) by Chopin.² The women are struggling for freedom, enlightenment, and new roles. In one way they achieve success, for they affirm themselves. In another, they are doomed to failure, for a dangerously unbalanced


patriarchal society, which is in radical discontinuity with itself, cannot support their aspirations and so betrays them. The women, in turn, betray that society by withdrawing from it. Adams, James, and Chopin held a view of women's roles which meshed with their vision of society and informed these four novels.

Not only do these four writers concern themselves with women's roles, but their novels also share the following qualities: first, they are in the post-Civil War movement of literary realism, as so many critics have pointed out; second, the novels are all fundamentally mythological; and, third, they incorporate naturalism into what I have come to identify as mythic-realist structures. In the tradition of realism, these novels are concerned with character—the central characters are American girls, natural and spontaneous, complex and rebellious, the new women of the age who act out their lives in contemporary, densely rendered societies of New York, Washington, D. C., London, and New Orleans. The women attempt to find meaning in their lives within their societies and at the same time affirm their true selves. Because the societies are patriarchally structured and basically hostile to their aspirations, the women learn that to assert themselves they must in the end reject society and men. Edwin Cady, Harold Sons, 1908), 2 vols.; Kate Chopin, The Awakening in The Complete Works of Kate Chopin (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969), II, 879-1000. Subsequent references to these editions are in the text in shortened form.
Kolb, and other critics have pointed out that realism was founded on a culture of profound dualities and ambiguities and was a complex literary standard. Lionel Trilling has described late nineteenth century society (and our society since then) in "Reality in America" as a culture and not a flow, for "the form of its existence is struggle or at least debate—it is nothing if not a dialectic."^3 Realism in the four novels shows us a central debate of the age, that of the "woman question," or the problem of how a woman is to deal with the freedom she seeks.

These novels contain several mythological qualities. First, they possess the mythos of the seasons. As Northrop Frye has shown us in Anatomy of Criticism, mythic irony is connected with winter.4 The all-encompassing vision of each of the four novels is ironic, and each literary structure circles to a closure on a bleak wintry note of a woman's withdrawal into selfhood. The novels secondly include the mythological concept of an ancient great goddess or earth mother archetype, as Carl Jung and Erich Neumann have explained her. The earth mother contains in herself a complex double nature which in her positive phase gives


nourishing life, but in her negative phase brings death. Heroines' quests in literature are archetypal movements of the great goddess from darkness into light, from ignorance into awareness. Each realist woman in these novels is such an earth mother or great goddess. Mythology in the novels has a third meaning and function, that of specific allusions to classical Greek and Latin myths, but especially to goddesses. Henry Adams calls his heroine Esther Dudley a "Pallas Athene" (Esther, p. 258); Henry James describes Christina Light as a divine goddess (Princess I, 207-08); and Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier is a "'Venus rising from the foam'" (Awakening II, 997). The total mythological framework with all three kinds of mythology in it provides a "signature," or what Leslie Fiedler has described as a sum total of individuating factors which is the sign of personality through which archetypes are rendered.

In the age of realism, mythology seemed to realist writers and critics to be antithetical and therefore an unwelcome element that should be exorcised from realist theory and fiction. Literary realism is an historical movement in time and place and deals with individuals in particular circumstances. Mythology, on the other

---


hand, is non-historical, ancient, and recurring, and encompasses archetypes. The two forces pose a dialectic and a tension if they occur in the same work of fiction. But, turning to Frye again, we now know that mythic irony or the mythos of the season of winter, can be grounded in realism. Thus, mythic irony, even as it seems antithetical to American realism, paradoxically reinforces the irony of realism. Each author's deeply ironic vision is that a patriarchal destructive society betrays women. Each heroine's ordeal of self-discovery leads her then to reject society and heterosexual, recreative, communal life, thus contributing to the age's destructiveness and death orientation. Only one novel, The Princess Casamassima, has a central male figure, a hero, and Hyacinth Robinson dies. In the mythic-realist novels, Adams, James, and Chopin are ironic and ambivalent toward their heroines even as they believe in them. The dual response of the male writers is to their societies and is also a reflection of the dual-natured loving and death-dealing archetypal woman. In Chopin's novel the heroine responds ambivalently to men and male-dominated institutions, very much as Kate Chopin in her life responded to a husband and children she cared for yet resented for entrapping her.

Because realist authors, particularly James (and William Dean Howells), felt a discomfort with what seemed to be nonrealist elements in their fiction, they found a way out of their dilemma by including naturalism in their novels. Though naturalism

---

as a distinct literary movement emerges very late in the nineteenth century, these earlier novels display certain naturalist qualities that include elements of both realism and mythology and make the novels unified works of art. The Heroines are new American women in modern settings who insist on assuming individual responsibility and exercising their wills. They live, however, in deterministic, naturalistic environments that help to shape their lives and actions. This naturalism is remarkably close to the ancient Greek concept of a fated universe and in these novels is often indicated by classical allusions. At the end of Esther, Esther Dudley as Athene identifies with Niagara Falls; the water is her lover and speaks truth to her as human men cannot do. In The Awakening, Edna as Venus acts out her destiny by returning to the primal sea from which all life has come. Naturalism artistically resolves a fundamental paradox between realism with its emphasis on individual responsibility, and mythology with its emphasis on fated, inevitable actions.

Before undertaking a discussion of the individual novels, I want to first examine the historical and literary developments of the period which gave impetus to what I call the mythic-realist novel in which women are central figures. I shall then examine the critical concepts which provide the framework for this study, following these with a brief overview of criticism to date in order to show why new readings of these novels are needed.
Lonely Antigone

A survey of events in post-Appomatox America reveals why serious writers came to feel that the proper study of mankind is woman. What Warner Berthoff has called the "condition-of-America" question is in the hands of Adams, James, and Chopin, the "condition-of-women" question. Realism, a great collective event in American literature, was the movement Adams and Chopin, but especially James in criticism, helped to develop to reflect and explain a world in which traditions and beliefs had been shattered and rapid, unsettling change was becoming the norm. The fratricidal Civil War, fought by the north for unity, was ironically a social cataclysm that accelerated multiplicity and disunity. The war brought new knowledge and awareness, but also traumas of pain and confusion. Women were caught squarely in the force of these events. Influential developments of the latter part of the century on the study of women include: the rise of new sciences; accelerated technological changes; rapid industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization; the rise of finance capitalism and commercialism; the spectacle of incompetent or corrupt government as the norm; and rampant imperialism and expansionism. Two events in addition to

---

those were evolving which struck at the very roots of the culture—a developing feminine consciousness, and the rise of the new American woman. As Adams said, other issues like race might eventually be resolved, but those of sex are the most fundamental and least amenable to resolution. The science of biology, with its accompanying theory of evolution, and physics and geology, had all developed out of the earlier part of the century. Evolutionary theory was known long before Darwin's work, and it combined with the inheritance from eighteenth century deism which said the natural world was the deity's only revelation to mankind. But it was in post-Civil War America that the impact of *The Origin of Species* (1859) joined with that of the ear to assist in smashing traditions and beliefs. Post-war authors came to treat human affairs within a framework of environmental accident rather than as subject to some divine plan. Laws of the universe were now read as laws of nature, and biology brought home to Henry Adams and others that men are not fallen angels but risen apes who had not—to Adams's mind, if Ulysses S. Grant was an example—risen very far. Men were less and less certain of their place and future in the universe. But biology had an interesting and dual effect. It reminded men and women that they are in continuity with the natural world and that their progenitor is Nature herself. This new-old knowledge helped to make people

---

aware that their origins are feminine as well as masculine.

Other new sciences contributed to this awareness of feminine origins. Alongside biological studies arose the new social sciences of anthropology and its branch ethnology, of sociology and psychology, and very important to this study, the scientific inquiry into mythology itself. The study of Greek mythology and the Latin classics was part of the education of children and young adults in the nineteenth century. Henry Adams and Kate Chopin read the Greek myths in school, while James read them informally. But the new development of modern inquiries into mythology gained momentum in the post-war period and, like biology, brought back old knowledge. Johann Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), Hubert Howe Bancroft's *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America* (1876), Henry Adams's *The Primitive Rights of Women* (1876), and Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) comprised one development in myth studies closely allied to anthropology, and all resurrected woman's place in the world (allied investigations into economics and sociology by Marx and Engels reinforced the findings on women). These studies, along with the later *The Golden Bough* (1890) by Sir James Frazer, contributed to the realization that myths of primitive societies were not just of academic interest but were and are highly relevant to modern cultures. Mythology and the new reading of history reconfirmed biology. *Das Mutterrecht* is the classic statement of the biological basis of mother law dating from paleolithic times, and along with all the other investigations of
its kind, helped establish that the cultural supremacy of men has not existed since the beginning of time, but that law and custom once centered around women. Women, Adams found, have basic rights, independent and leading positions, and sexual equality in tribal communities, all denied her in his contemporary America. Protestant America (and Europe) had compounded the error of blindly suppressing the mythic female principle of Mary of Catholic Europe, and even Catholicism had become basically patriarchal. Directly related to the findings in myth, then, was a continuing deterioration of belief in traditional patriarchal religions. The blow struck during the age of realism to the doctrine of patriarchal supernaturalism, which insisted that an omnipotent, monotheistic male principle created life out of himself, was perhaps one of the most striking facts of the period. Adams's abandonment of Protestantism and his return to Mary in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres and in other works on the Virgin was not really an embracing of Catholicism, I believe, so much as a yearning for the comfort of the ancient great mother and female principle of whom Mary is a manifestation. Long before his later studies on Mary, he created in his fiction two earth goddesses. Kate Chopin was from her childhood a Roman Catholic, but by the time she wrote fiction she had fallen away from the church into a kind of personal creed and celebration of feminine divinity which she combined with Greek mythology in The Awakening. Adams, James, and Chopin all became agnostics, but agnostics who used a mythology of women in their
fiction. It seems to me that in this mythology they anticipated the psychological studies by Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell into the nature of the unconscious and its relation to myth and dreams, and the studies of the great mother by Erich Neumann.

Technology contributed heavily to the need to resurrect the female principle. A technology in the process of change and lending itself to industrialism, mechanization, and urbanization, exacerbated our writers' feelings that society was dehumanizing and alienating. All four novels in this study are city novels and show fragmenting, isolating, and destructive urban settings. But involved in this technology are ambiguities which are difficult to resolve and which lend themselves to irony particularly in relation to women's roles. The entire hierarchical concept of a god-created universe, in which man was god's chief representative on earth, arose with the invention of writing. Recorded history began with the technology of writing, and male domination of history and technology and the suppression of women have since that time been inextricably united. Nineteenth century industrial technology, directly dependent upon writing, was to Adams in Democracy, in the stunning scene at Arlington Cemetery of telegraph poles sprouting out of the graves of dead soldiers, devastatingly united with male control of social institutions like war and politics. He unerringly joined this scene with the Cadmus myth of the invention of the linear alphabet. But at the same time, industrial, mechanized, urbanizing technology was (and is) lending itself to making male
domination an anachronism. The heroines of these novels are independent, educated, strong women. The novel itself, of course, made possible by mass printing, is a technology which has helped to free women and increase their literacy and knowledge. It also significantly has contributed to their economic independence. Kate Chopin partly supported herself and six children through her writing.

A concommitant of technology was big business or finance capitalism which was gaining in force during the realist period. The three writers are concerned with the effect of this on their heroines. In The Awakening, Mr. Pontellier is a stockbroker and speculator who counts his wife among his material possessions, then travels from New Orleans to New York to increase his fortune. In the meantime he loses Edna. James takes up a basic social issue of male control of wealth. Christina Light's lack of financial independence dictates her final bleak return to a sterile marriage to the Prince.

The political scene had an impact on these novelists, too. The government in Democracy is hopelessly corrupt. The prospect of a new kind of government in The Princess Casamassima is more horrifying than the old. When the women turn to political men, Madeleine Lee to a U. S. Senator and Christina to a British anarchist, or when they become politicized as Christina is, they are corrupted and bitterly disappointed. In the larger sense, all four women are engaged in sexual politics. The control of
government, business, technology, religion, science, and the marriage and family institutions, is in men's hands. Madeleine, Esther, Christina, and Edna fight male domination with all their strength.

Another factor of the age that had great consequences for the mythic-realistic novel about women is imperialism. Imperialism involved, like technology, ambiguities difficult to resolve but making for profoundly ironic art. Whether domestic or overseas, imperialism rested on assumptions of the primacy of the individual and the beneficience of expansion. James's heroines leave America to travel and perhaps marry abroad. There are new worlds for them to conquer or buy, new freedoms to experience. The unfortunate concomitant of individuality connected with imperialism, however, is the denial of social roles and a collective life. Quentin Anderson wrote mainly about the world of fathers in his The Imperial Self, but what he said applies to heroines and the world of earth mothers in the period of realism. Imperialism reaches beyond just the characters within the novels and into the novels' creators, too: "Our dreams of empire have to do with our imperial selves," Anderson observed. James attempted the conquest of imaginative existence. Anderson has called James and his heroines "isolate entrepreneurs."10 Imperialism influenced two other events, the rise of female consciousness and the evolution of the

new American woman. These two have inherent ambiguities. A
deepened consciousness and an expanded imagination portrayed by
women in this fiction are very desirable characteristics, both at
the realist level and within the mythological earth mother archetyp.-
But the price of a heightened awareness, of gaining freedom, of insisting on her manifest destiny, is expensive—it is the
most costly for Edna Pontellier, who gains her individuality,
self-awareness, and freedom by giving up her life.

The four heroines are the new American women, given much
leisure and set free from domestic duties by money. They are
better-educated than their pre-war sisters, and they often aspire
to and even find useful work and service outside the home. The
first American feminist revolution before the war was principally
for abolition and for legal rights, and the second after the war
for winning the vote. The movement's first phase coincided with
the theories of evolution which were contributing to the destruction
of the ascendent position of god and man. Its second phase
coincided with the discovery of mother right. This all added up
to a feminist battle for recognition of individual worth and
autonomy. These daughters of the promised land rejected stereotyp-ing and rebelled against romantic idealistic views which either
placed them as angels and superwomen on pedestals or conversely
knocked them down to the place of whores.\footnote{Excellent sources for the condition of women are: Aileen S. Kraditor, \textit{Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History...}} A rising feminist
consciousness demanded that women should have responsibilities and rights equal to those held by men in the political, economic, and social arenas. Women desired to assert their deeply human, autonomous, whole selves. The women in the four novels are rebellious against society which denies this wholeness. James recognized both the social and psychological feminist revolutions. He wrote in "The Future of the Novel" (1899) of "the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women..." He said that the female elbow, increasingly active with the pen, will smash with "final resonance the window all this time most superstitiously closed" and will bring in fresh air. But it is another terrible irony that as women like Chopin smashed windows, or as the novels' heroines rebelled, they were perceived by male-dominated society as dangerous assailants who must be punished. When the new woman attacks the power of god, fathers, husbands, sons, and those "power-structured relationships whereby one group of persons is controlled by another," when she abandons her home, as Christina and Edna do, the home which is patriarchy's chief


institution and "both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society," when the new woman ignores the code of chastity and monogamy set up to control her and male lines of inheritance and descent—she suffers rejection, loss, and destruction. The woman in turn comes to feel her only salvation lies in rejecting the very foundations of life, the reproductive side of nature. Thus all four heroines in the end come to reflect a predominant death-orientation of their societies.

The question arises as to whether the forces which gave an impetus to the mythic-realist novels did not at the same time influence other fiction. A very brief survey of some late nineteenth century fiction reveals that other works of the period share qualities of the novels in this study. These other works, while perhaps not unified art as the fiction by Adams, James, and Chopin is, are still representative of the age.

William DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion From Secession to Loyalty* (1867), generally considered the first American realist novel, includes two women characters who each embodies a phase of the earth goddess archetype. Lillie Ravenel is the pale blond or "white heroine" D. H. Lawrence identified as a dreary constant in American literature. Her counterpart is Mrs. Larue, a bewitching and dark temptress. Lillie, as indicated by her name, is innocent even after marriage and contains only life qualities; that is,

even though her husband is killed in the war, Lillie will continue life by re-marrying and bearing children. Mrs. Larue personifies seduction, death, and destruction. Though she is interesting and achieves a certain self-awareness, DeForest has in effect drawn two stereotypes rather than an archetypal woman who embodies both life and death. Perhaps these females who are not fully developed human beings are symptomatic of the larger problem of the novel's lack of unity. DeForest does not reconcile the naturalistic war-torn environment with his idealization of Lillie.

Bret Harte created a series of tales which formed one long fictional work, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* (1870). It has many classical allusions. Harte said in his preface that his book was "replete with certain heroic Greek poetry..." Harte, however, did not present complete women characters nor include many women at all in his male-filled world. He modestly said that he was "content to have collected here merely the materials for the Iliad that is yet to be sung." Harte reflects, I think, how difficult the quest for the mythic-realist novel was in the age of realism.

One of the most interesting novels of the period is *A Modern Instance* (1881) by realism's advocate William Dean Howells. Like Adams, James, and Chopin, Howells was concerned with the American woman and insisted that she be realistically portrayed. He said in *Heroines of Fiction* (1901) that American realist authors
should not go back to the Greeks for fictional heroines but should depict modern women. Revealingly, however, Howells's practices did not always follow his strictures. Howells read Greek mythology from his boyhood on. In the summer of 1876 he attended a performance in Boston of Medea, and many years later he told a reporter, "I said to myself, 'this is an Indiana divorce case, . . . .' and the novel was born." He even suggested "The New Medea" as a title but settled with his publisher for A Modern Instance. In the novel Howells combines the realism of setting of Equity, New Hampshire, an American girl Marcia Gaylord, and the modern instance of divorce, to make "a Greek family tragedy," and provides naturalism as a synthesis for the elements of realism and mythology. The novel has a seasonal mythic structure from its opening winter scene when Marcia and Bartley Hubbard are wedded. They are married three years, then he deserts her. When she discovers his whereabouts, she rushes from New England to Indiana, hurtling in a train through the later winter countryside. Marcia's hopes are dashed by patriarchy's representatives: a husband who has abandoned her, her father who goads her into the divorce action, and the Indiana judge who gives her the divorce she does not want.

---


The Indiana spring has held but a false promise, and Marcia withdraws into a winter of the heart and a cold New Hampshire environment that is in the tradition of naturalism in that it has deeply influenced the lives of its inhabitants. Bartley's death alone at the novel's end in Whited Sepulchre, Arizona, is the final ironic comment on Marcia and Bartley's disunion.

Howells turns to mythological archetypes, too. With her primal passions of love, jealousy, and hate, Marcia emerges as an earth mother, a pagan goddess whom Howells describes as having a "Roman" profile and "a peculiar charm . . . her dusky hair flowed crinkling above her fine black brows." As Flavia's mother, Marcia has positive or life qualities. But she has contributed to Bartley's downfall, and death or negative qualities are victorious in her as well as in her culture. Howells emphasizes Marcia's Electra complex by describing in phallic terms Squire Gaylord as a male bird: "his high hawk-beak came down over them [his lips]; the fierce light burned in his cavernous eyes, and his grizzled hair erected itself like a crest." Even as a grown woman, Marcia sits on her father's lap. Squire Gaylord's name is an ironic indication of his humorlessness ("gay") and his role as old king ("lord") and

---


Yankee atheist. Before *The Golden Bough*, Howells anticipated Frazer’s findings on the old king-new king myth. Bartley Hubbard is the young king who as usurper is incapable of victory over Gaylord: "his chin, deep-cut below his mouth failed to come strenuously forward. ... ."\(^{19}\) Halleck, an indecisive suitor, is a cripple.

While the novel is a good example of mythic-realist fiction, it falls just short of artistic unity. James called Howells "the great American naturalist," but added, "I don't think you go far enough. . . ."\(^{20}\) There does seem something unresolved between the deterministic setting and Marcia's life. Perhaps it is that she never understands her position or self except briefly in the divorce court scene, but then she slips back into impulsive thoughtlessness. Several critics besides James have felt the novel to be flawed. Kermit Vanderbilt thought the choice of Medea as a tragic analogue to modern determinism raised a divided and unresolved response in Howells. Edwin Cady has said that Howells's seven-weeks breakdown while working on the novel meant that the ending was not thought through.\(^{21}\)

---

\(^{19}\)Howells, *A Modern Instance*, p. 7.

\(^{20}\)Henry James, *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), I, 105. The letter was written February 21, 1884, while James was beginning *The Princess*.

\(^{21}\)Vanderbilt, *William Dean Howells*, p. 82; Cady, *The Road to Realism*, p. 208.
Howells developed earth mother figures in whom the negative phase of the archetype is predominant, women who are also very realistic. Kitty Ellison in _Their Wedding Journey_ (1872) and Margaret Vance in _A Hazard of New Fortunes_ (1890) both retire into sisterhoods. _The Shadow of a Dream_ (1890) has a Diana or Artemis figure who is briefly married. Hermia Winter is suggestively named for her role—after her husband Faulkner destroys himself, she falls in love with the minister Nevil, but they ultimately reject each other. The novel is filled with desolation. It has, too, several classical mythological references including an ironic description of Faulkner who "is not an Apollo nor the nine Muses in one," and the narrator Basil March says all three of the main characters are as "blameless as the victims in a Greek trilogy." Howells includes another archetypal pattern in _The Shadow of a Dream_—Dr. Wingate is the wise old man archetype, a figure who recurs frequently in mythic-realist novels of this period.

The Howells novels are quite successful in presenting characters. John Hay's _The Breadwinners_ (1883), however, is an example of a poor novel which uses mythological allusions but fails to develop believable women (or men). There are two Diana figures. Maud Matchin is the lower class girl of whom Farnham, the hero and author's spokesman, observes, "'it was a pity she was so vulgar, for she looked like the huntress Diana.'" Alice Belding

---

is the other Diana, upper class and free from vulgarity, and about whom Farnham thinks, "Her beautiful head, crowned with its masses of hair drawn back into a simple Greek knot; her tall, strong figure . . . imposed no check on her natural grace and dignity. . . ."

Farnham says, "I am shot through the heart by the blind archer. . . ."23

With better control over his material than Hay had and with a sense of irony, Harold Frederick in The Damnation of Theron Ware (1896) created the beautiful, ripe Celia Madden. Celia calls herself a pagan priestess and has a love affair with a Catholic priest. Celia is not the central character, for the story is Ware's, but she attains a level of self-awareness, a positive attribute, and also has a negative phase in that she achieves her autonomy by rejecting marriage and motherhood. She is, like Marcia Gaylord, an earth mother archetype whose destructive nature predominates.

The Country of the Pointed Firs (1897) by Sarah Orne Jewett is another example from the period of mythic-realist fiction. Its Maine setting against the primal sea and its action that begins in summer and moves into fall provides a seasonal mythic framework. The widowed, aging, lonely, autonomous Mrs. Todd, with her archaic grief and præval herbs, is a "sibyl," an

Antigone alone on the Theban plain." The characters are all so fated, the lament of the author rising, as Warner Berthoff has said, "to a ritual intensity." Jewett's mythic vision and "Sophoclean drama" have been identified by Martha Shackford, and she and Berthoff have said the book approaches the literary naturalist's view of life. There is a problem of structural unity with The Country of the Pointed Firs, however, for it is a series of sketches, some published by Jewett, but others added posthumously. Mrs. Todd may not be the heroine, and here is another difficulty—I think it is possible that the female narrator-observer is the central woman character with a heightened consciousness. Still, we are not sure.

From this brief review there would seem to be more than enough material to warrant the kind of study Douglas Bush has made of mythology in various periods, and of mythology in American poetry. A comprehensive study of mythology and American realism would provide us with much new knowledge of how the American realist movement from 1865 to 1900 incorporated mythology into its fiction through a synthesizing naturalism.


Toward a Natural History of Consciousness

When we examine specifically the concepts of realism, mythology, and naturalism, we can then understand why in the nineteenth and even in our century very few theories of the mythic-realist novel have been only tentatively formulated. Considering realism first, the difficulty lies, I think, in the formulations that we have inherited from the nineteenth century. The movement to distinguish between the novel of realism and the romance was begun before the Civil War by Nathaniel Hawthorne who said that the novel was an imitation of nature and that the romance was an exposure of the truth of the human heart. But the movement really gained power after the war when American realist critics and writers became insistent on separating realism from romance, a form they considered inappropriate to their times. In severing romance from realism, realists made two assumptions. One was that realism would preserve for itself the sphere of the observable world, while the romance would deal with what could only be imagined. The observable was connected with the rational, while romance was linked to the non-rational. Next, they included in the romance all that they thought was non-rational: allegory, symbolism, fairy tale and legend, and myth. It is from William Dean Howells and then from Henry James that we get the specific connection of realism with faithfulness to the actualities of life and commonplace events. Howells (in 1872) reserved for the novel an allegiance to fact and the minute and careful delineation of
character and the physical world. James, correct in connecting the earlier Hawthorne with symbolism, fancy, and allegory (in Hawthorne, 1879), then included in romance everything not directly observable in human actions. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), James pronounced his now famous phrases that the novel of realism was "history," a "personal, a direct impression of life," and that "the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me the supreme virtue of the novel." (House of Fiction, pp. 25-29 and p. 33). He expanded on this in his Prefaces (1907-1908):

The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know. . . . The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that . . . we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire.

But because James and Howells were too wise to be doctrinaire, and because theory and practice so often diverge, James had already said in "The Art of Fiction," "Humanity is immense and reality has myriad forms," and that a novel "is a living thing . . . like any other organism . . . for it is life itself." This organic theory is much like a description of literary myth. And James said that to make such a separation as the novel from romance was indeed a "clumsy" practice by critics and readers indulged in only for their own convenience (House of Fiction, pp. 31-35). Yet James,

---

26 Carter, Howells and the Age of Realism, pp. 46-47.

as a theoretician of realism, still felt he must exorcise what he called "romance" from his novels. He was uncomfortable with, as he said in his Prefaces, an element in his fiction which did not fit his theories of realism. It is not so much, then, that James showed considerable change in his views in his lifetime toward realism, as one critic has suggested, but that he always recognized that he combined with realism what we now know to be the mythic. Howells, discussing the psychological side of James's fiction, thought that James's work had another quality besides realism that was not romance. In *Criticism and Fiction* (1891) Howells said, "there is yet no name for the literary kind he invented." Howells stated that there was a whole order of literature not necessarily scientific or realistic but "dealing with life on its mystical side." He wrote in 1900:

> We have indeed, in our best fiction, gone back to mysticism, if indeed we were not always there, and the riddle of the painful earth is again engaging us with the old fascination.

Thus it seems to me that by the turn of the century realist criticism moved to an acceptance of mythology in realist fiction, though it did so by using such labels as "mysticism," the "circuit" of the imagination, which describes the cyclical nature of

---

28 Donald Emerson, "Henry James and the Limitations of Realism," *College English. XXII, No. 3* (December, 1960), 161-66, argued that James changed his views toward realism.

myth, and "the riddle of the painful earth." Another Howells's concept, "psychologism," comes very close to the modern Jungian explanation of myth.

Romance is still made to all-inclusively contain the fantastic, the allegorical, symbolical, and mythic. A recent critic has said that realism is a polemical weapon against romanticism...reflecting the fantastic, the fairy-tale-like, the allegorical, and the symbolic...It means we want no myth, no Maerchen, no world of dreams.30

As a description of historical theory, this is correct. As an explanation of practice, it is not. Richard Chase, in his landmark study of The American Novel and Its Tradition, combined all the forms, too: "Being less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer toward mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic forms." But Chase's investigations proved that James's novels were not always devoid of other elements besides realism.31

Other critics have built on Chase's study and have made considerable progress in separating out the mythic from other forms of story-telling and in suggesting that the mythic is operating in the novel of American realism. Donald Pizer broadened the concept of realism to include the subjective and said there is a range of


realism beyond the representative. Joel Porte has said that James created novels

partially or completely according to a theory of stylized art—heavily dependent on the use of conventional or archetypal figures and on symbol, parable, dream, and fantasy—32

Two recent studies have clarified realism and are very informative. In The Light of Common Day, Edwin Cady has observed that it is very difficult in our culture to imagine our way into a realism which takes magic, witchcraft, or mythology as "ordinarily operative."33 This, I think, identifies the problem. At the conscious and rational level, it has been most difficult to include mythology in the theory of realism. Cady significantly has stated that the realist first tried to take refuge in visible, average, common reality, but that by 1885 the ambivalences had taken over, and major realistic sensibilities became conscious of "the tragic vision, of that knowledge half-hidden from themselves," which made their work increasingly psychological, increasingly symbolic. Cady then explains his theory of the batrachomyomachia, the mock epic which has at its root an inveterate irony.34 In the batrachomyo-


machia we have what I call mythic irony. Furthermore, "knowledge half-hidden from themselves" is one explanation of how archetypal patterns emerge in literature. Another fine critic, Harold Kolb, has posited 1885 as the highwater mark of realism and has used The Princess Casamassima as one of six prototypical realist novels. Kolb, too, has said, however, that realist fiction has complexity and ambiguity. Kolb found still another aspect of realism, which, I think, strengthens my theory that certain qualities in nineteenth century life were an impetus for the mythic-realist novel—he ties the authorial anti-omniscient point of view to agnosticism, a quality, I believe, that partly led in the realist fiction of Adams, James, and Chopin to a return to the complex archetypal woman and to mythic structure. I would like to say further that in these authors, agnosticism and despair with their cultures led them even before 1885 to ironic viewpoints. As Northrop Frye has said, during the last hundred years, "most serious fiction has tended increasingly to become ironic in mode."

Two other critics have influenced my views on the mythic-realist novel. Leslie Fiedler has stated:

the theory of 'realism' or 'naturalism' denies both the Archetype and the Signature, advocating, in its extreme forms, that art merely 'described nature or reality' in a neutral style... Fortunately, the great 'realists' consistently

---

35 Harold H. Kolb, Jr., The Illusion of Life: American Realism as a Literary Form (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1969). This is a general summary of some of Kolb's main points.

36 Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 35
betray their principles, creating Archetypes and symbols . . . though setting them in a Signature distinguished by what James called 'solidity of specification.'

Writing on the twentieth century novel, Paul West's insightful comments tell us further how the mythic-realist novel actually works. His description can be transferred back to the earlier age of realism. West has emphasized that "the modern American novelist" is a mythmaker, and that mythmaking "is usually accompanied by sense social documentation. . . ."

It is as if their predilection for myth makes them doubly anxious to avoid 'unreal' abstractions. . . . Their facility in myth-making enables them to make the recital . . . of social data seem a catechism of the cosmos itself.

West decided that the "simultaneous presence" of bare myth and "voluminous documentary" has given the modern novel its unique quality.

Turning now to the second operative term in this study, mythology, I have found that it has too often been indiscriminately joined with concept of the fable, folklore, fairy tale, and allegory. Though myth can occur alongside any or all of these elements and even can include them, there is, as Susanne Langer has said, an elementary difference between myth and the other elements. While they may use the same material, fable, fairy tale, and folklore supply vicarious experience; myth, on the other

---

37Fiedler, No! in Thunder, p. 318.

hand, provides the actual experience. \(^{39}\) Another assumption of the realists was that myth was untruth, and that the use of it in the American realist novel, therefore, is a flaw. Myth as we now so well know is the essential truths of human existence. It is concerned with the primary events of life such as birth, initiation, marriage or union, the trials of life, death, rebirth, and regeneration. It is always connected with origins—of the universe, the earth and its living creatures, the seasons of the year, the sun and moon. \(^{40}\) In Jungian terms, myth exists in the natural world as archetypes in all of us.

The very nature of myth as well as its place in the world contains inherent dualities. The realist theoreticians were sensitive to the dualism between history and non-history, reserving for realism "history" and social documentation, as James did. Non-historical myth seemed, therefore, antithetical to realism. The duality between the historical and non-historical is one of myth's most fundamental dualities. In his brilliant work on structuralism, Claude Lévi-Strauss said:

> On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages—anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern

---


described is ever-lasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future.\textsuperscript{41}

Lévi-Strauss has found that myth always works from polar extremes toward resolution, from the awareness of oppositions toward their progressive mediation. We now know that myth inevitably, at least since the invention of writing, is part of the literary historical process, too. In literature and in the historical world, myth exists in narrative resurrections of primeval reality. It is a structural organizing principle of literary form. To me, it is an intriguing possibility that, as Charles Sanford has premised, all written history "is a fantastic chronicle of fact straining to become myth," a constant active effort of living matter "to overcome obstacles in order to sink back toward origins."\textsuperscript{42} One can see when we turn to the fiction of Adams, James, and Chopin, how their historical consciousness was permeated by a mythic sense that furnished them with the essential substructure and nature of the world. In the hands of these writers, the novel is the mediator between realism, or how we live now, and mythology, or how we have always lived. Howells was right in recognizing that such a quality was a benefit and not a liability to the novel of realism.


There is another inherent dualism the realists were sensitive to, that of the rational and non-rational. Lévi-Strauss has insisted that a logical process, even an intellectuality, is at the root of mythological thought. Even if myth tells about the non-rational world, it has a logical structure of its own. Here again it is in the nature of myth to work toward resolution.

Another contemporary student of myth, Joseph Campbell, who has used the word "mystical" even as Howells did, has said that an essential function of myth is to reconcile consciousness or the rational with the unconscious or the non-rational and the preconditions of our existence. Campbell has insisted that the psychological, including dreams, is at the root of myth thought. The stories serve as partly conscious, partly unconscious vehicles for meanings about the nature of the universe and human life. Thus they incorporate our rational and non-rational lives while recounting our primary experiences. While those who are more historically oriented may think Campbell over-emphasizes the psychological, Campbell's analysis of literary creativity is very close, in fact, to James's. To Campbell the recounting of myths from their original sources lies both within the conscious inventions of individual writers and in their unconscious. In the 1870's James "dreamed" of writing a great American novel. James called writing his prefaces the "process of redreaming" and invited his

---

readers to "dream again in my company" (Art of the Novel, pp. 344-45). Referring specifically to the creation of The Princess Casamassima, James said the "root" of the fiction was in him, that he reproduced "a mystic solicitation" of the great grey Babylon of London by walking the city streets (Art of the Novel p. 78 and p. 59). James described, in other words, the archetypal creative process functioning with his realist efforts. It is likely, I think, that in his criticism, James strove to reconcile what he mistakenly thought to be a flaw, the duality between the imaginative or dream world of his creativity, and his acute observations of external events, a combination which lent itself to the great art of The Princess Casamassima.

The particular mythological qualities I have found in the mythic-realist novels are: one, that their mode is the mythos of winter and irony; two, that they have women archetypes at their centers; and three, that they contain classical references. This last is self-explanatory. Let me now briefly explain the other two elements as they are relevant to my thesis. Regarding the mythos of the seasons, Northrop Frye has shown us how irony and satire are linked to winter (comedy is the mythos of spring, summer of romance, and fall of tragedy). Irony, whose chief interest is human character in society, is unidealized experience. While an ascendent class tends to express itself with the idealized art of romance, the more bourgeois novel of realism often parodies romance and its ideals. Frye thus has implied that a class
structure is inherent in literature (Ian Watt made this explicit). I think it is apparent that one thing that happened in American literary realism was that the novel came into the hands of the rising class which was (and is) women and their spokesmen. James said as much in "The Future of the Novel." The writer of the mythic-realist novel mocks the class which has been traditionally in power so that there is a good deal of irony at the expense of men and patriarchal values. Irony, consistent with realism of content, attempts to be objective. But as an author's attitude enters, the author becomes increasingly satiric and attacks grotesques and absurdities. Adams and James are militantly satiric about grotesque characters like Senator Ratcliffe in Democracy and the political conspirators in The Princess.

Realism and irony are the direct dialectical counterpart of the mythos of romance or summer. As James knew, romance can be present in the novel of realism. James recognized what Frye later described—the presence of "a mythical structure in realist fiction poses certain technical problems for making it plausible. . . ." Frye pointed out that the device used to solve this problem is "displacement," or romance. Romance can be present in several ways. There is often in romance some kind of search for a golden age or ideal past, for a paradise lost. The romance's major


adventure is a quest, usually made from a position that assumes the present state is one of rapid deterioration. Sometimes the romance has a bride figure who is endangered by being in perilous or forbidden places and then rescued. In Democracy Adams posits a golden age of America's past during the time of George Washington. The imperiled bride figure, Madeleine Lee, pursues modern politics, a man's game and dangerous, in Washington, D.C. Romance would tend to allegorize her, but as realism enters, the character expands into a psychological archetype, which is what happens with the characterization of Madeleine. A mythic-realist novel will also have an element of romance in a love interest. When irony prevails, as it does in this fiction, romance or the romantic dies. Madeleine is rescued, but no hero wins her (one can see that James need not have been distressed by the romance quality he found in his The American, and that by ending the tale with Newman's rejection by Claire de Cintré and the Bellegardes, he was truer to his ironic vision than if he had had them accept Newman). In the mythic-realist novel irony and winter triumph. Irony and winter lie between fall and tragedy on the one side and spring and comedy on the other. When tragedy shifts from the heroic, as in The Princess with James's treatment of "little" Hyacinth, it tends toward the ironic. As it moves toward comedy, it achieves a happy ending and a reconciliation between its participants and their society—a situation which does not prevail in the four novels in this study.
The presence of the great goddess archetype in the mythic-realist novel brings me to the theories of Carl Jung and Erich Neumann. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious of the race is that the unconscious consists of primordial images of our instincts. He cited as proof our dreams, active imagination, and fantasies. Erich Neumann in *The Great Mother* graphically illustrated the goddess archetype with thousands of examples. Let me briefly describe other archetypes before discussing the great mother, and then consider contemporary criticism of the theory.

The main archetypes are the shadow, which is the meeting with oneself, the wise old man, the child (and child hero), the mother, the mother's counterpart or maiden, the *anima* in man and *animus* in woman, or feminine soul images. There are other images of the instincts, like the culture hero, divine king, and treacherous betrayer. Because she goes back to life's beginning and all life is dependent on her, the most important and central is the great mother. She is the right half of the uroborus, and though she is intimately connected with the male or left side (the serpent holds its tail in its mouth), the ancient regenerative and psychic processes begin with her. No great memory existed before this. Jung believed the psychological process in the human individual still lies in the feminine. The unconscious is dark, and as it evolves into the light and consciousness it moves toward the rational and masculine. The struggle between the unconscious and conscious is another dialectic which when externally
manifested can become the battle of the sexes. Thus, Jungians recognize environment as a factor in our development. Furthermore, environmental facts give variations to the shapes taken in society by archetypes.

As Jung has theorized about her, and as Neumann has illustrated, the great mother is essentially a dual-natured woman with positive or good, and negative or terrible attributes. An arrangement of opposites is itself symptomatic of her ambivalent character. We know her by compelling symbols. As loving mother, cherishing, nourishing, and redeeming, she is the great container, round, or mandala. Other vessel symbols image her. As fertility and fruitfulness she is garden, field, tree, and flower. Because she is close to our wild early natures, there is no hostility between her and the natural world (unlike the hero who often fights animals). Thus she is the Lady of the Beasts. Madeleine Lee is a cat, and Esther is a bird. The goddess is also lunar. Edna is a moon goddess on Grand Isle, Louisiana. But above all, the goddess is a mixture of earth and water, for all living things came from the sea onto land. Water is the most common symbol for the unconscious. As terrible mother, she is surrounded by images of death. The womb leads to the coffin, and a destructive womb can be a mouth with bristling teeth. The terrible mother is a Gorgon, a Medusa at whose sight men turn to stone. It is significant that Henry James expressed his own creativity, so life-orientated, as ultimately drawing him to "the medusa-face of life."
Another quality of the great mother important to my study is that she is elemental and unchanging, but paradoxically transformative because she drives toward change. Her transformational character leads through suffering, sacrifice, death, annihilation, to renewal and rebirth. Still another aspect is that of the maiden or daughter. Every mother contains her daughter, and every daughter is a potential mother. Woman's mixed nature can be reflected in man's anima which contains both daughter and mother. One is reminded of Adams's response to Marian Adams to whom he condescended even while she mothered him, and to the nieces whom he treated as daughters even while they took care of him. Jung said that the mixed anima in woman typifies her life, but in man is something alien and therefore can arouse love and fear. This is quite characteristic of Adams's response to women in his life and fiction. Furthermore, if the anima is violated, or if one tries to suppress it, it is at the peril of one's soul, for it will force its way out in destructive acts to self and society.

One could argue that in The Princess Casamassima James is showing in Paul Muniment a lack of respect for women and, therefore, for Paul's own anima, which is a kind of destructiveness.

The great goddess plays many roles, one of which is that of heroine. The concept of heroine goes back into our ancient past, but a rising patriarchy felt the need to suppress it. In the great age of Greek drama, Aristotle in his Poetics refused the woman heroic standing. In practice, however, Sophocles created
Antigone, and once again we see how literary theory and practice
do not always coincide. Like the hero, the heroine fulfills an
adventure of separation or departure, at the beginning of her
quest, initiation on her road of adventures, and a return. By the
end of the adventure she comes to know herself.\textsuperscript{46} Each heroine in
the mythic-realist novel undertakes this kind of quest. An inter­
esting recent study of the woman as hero traces the modern move­
ment from the 1880's and Henry James (and Ibsen). Carolyn Heil­
bron has said that the woman as hero plays an absolutely central
role in James's fiction.\textsuperscript{47}

There are several complaints against Jung's and Neumann's
theory of the great goddess archetype which I should now consider.
One is that the theory does not explain origins at all, and that
the feminine is not the basic psychological construct of human un­
consciousness or consciousness. A second criticism, growing out
of the first, is that this theory has been enormously damaging to
women. Regarding the first, Mircea Eliade has argued that the
archetype theory is unprovable and unlikely. He has said that our
original primal state was androgynous, and that human beings had
been living for a half million years before they left any traces.

\textsuperscript{46}I have condensed the hero adventure as it is explained
Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954); Joseph Campbell, The Hero

\textsuperscript{47}Carolyn Heilbron, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny
The belief that the earth is our mother, Eliade said, comes from a later Paleolithic situation. It seems to me, however, that this historical-cultural hypothesis of a previous androgyny as the original state is not far from Neumann's position. Neumann's evidence admittedly came from the Paleolithic, and he also assumed a precondition, the uroboric round or an androgynous, non-conditioned state of reconciliation. Neumann insisted consciousness began to be possible in Paleolithic times which seems to me a likely evolutionary concept. When one thinks of androgyny as it works in artistic creativity, it means that the creator of fiction identifies and empathizes with both male and female characters. Howells said that "novelists are great in proportion to the accuracy and fulness with which they portray women. . . ." Carolyn Heilbron said more recently that the creators of late nineteenth century American novels with central heroines had androgynous visions.

The next criticism is that the Jungian theory has lent itself to the oppression of women. Jung's assumption is that the unconscious is feminine, dark, primitive, and undeveloped, while consciousness is masculine and light (though all men by no means attain this). His list of female qualities includes formlessness, passivity, confinement, materiality, and irrationality. The ideal

---


49 Howells, Heroines of Fiction, p. 190.
is to move from dark to light and understanding. In rebuttal, one critic has observed that Jung's catalogue is only a list of nineteenth-century-conceived masculine and feminine traits. Another, Naomi Weisstein, has said that this is a case of psychology constructing the female, psychology looking to inner traits when it should be noting social contexts. In her delightful and cogent *Thinking About Women*, Mary Ellman explored Jung's list and found that the qualities he listed are those very ones stereotyped in fiction. Weisstein, Ellman, and other feminists have deeply resented women having been caught in a cultural bias. The accident of genitalia, as Weisstein said, should not determine human possibility.

Jung's catalogue is certainly irritating. It may even be ridiculous. Why indeed should rationality be "masculine"? Too many people have fallen back on the Jungian catalogue to justify economic and political oppression of women. If we can overlook the way the theory is stated, however, and see that human consciousness is a desirable quality for either sex, and if we remember that a heightened awareness is a Jamesian as well as a Jungian ideal, then we shall be on the right track. A great woman poet recognized that consciousness is indeed enlightenment:

---

There is a Zone whose even Years
No Solstice interrupt
Whose Sun constructs perpetual Noon
Whose perfect Seasons wait—

Whose Summer set in Summer, till
The Centuries of June
And Centuries of August cease
And Consciousness—is Noon.

--Emily Dickinson (c. 1865)\(^1\)

Neumann's avowal of non-interest in the historical is equally annoying, for the archetypes inevitably work themselves out in our historical world. But it is possible that Jung and Neumann's findings have contributed positively to the modern movement of women's quest for freedom and enlightenment. The great nineteenth and twentieth century scholarly studies have proved that women are equal to men. Women's oppression was connected with the rise of the concept of private property, writing technology, domestic agriculture, and the creation of towns, so that men came into control of political, religious, economic, and social institutions. Jung and Neumann have both deplored the evolution of a patriarchy. Neumann stated that long ago man became ashamed of his origins in the primordial world and denied them, forging a geneology that mistakenly traced his descent from heaven. Man in error set apart all pairs of opposites as though

---


they were absolutes in themselves: solar to lunar, light to dark, male to female, death to life, falsehood to truth. He lost sight of the truth that opposites are and should be held in equilibrium by male and female principles externally in society and internally in our psyches. The peril to present-day mankind springs in large part, Neumann said, from the one-sidedly patriarchal development of the male intellectual consciousness. Patriarchal constructs have overstressed abstract thought and have over-locked our intuitive natures so that we are no longer kept in balance by the matriarchal world of the psyche. The inequality of sexual relations has such far-reaching consequences as to pose disaster for us if continued. Adams said a male-dominated technology and science will destroy us. All three novelists have shown that the most sympathetic male characters are those with balanced natures: John Carrington, Mr. Dudley, and George Strong in the Adams novels; Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess; and Dr. Mandelet in The Awakening. Neumann made another point—women, too, are one-sided in their isolation, a fact James illustrated in The Bostonians. Only with synthesis, said Neumann, will we be able to develop the wholeness and balance urgently needed if we are to face the dangers that threaten our existence. Only then, as Adams, James, and Chopin knew, will the forces of love be able to triumph over those of disaster.

A recent investigation into bio-cultural conflicts in women, by Judith Bardwick, has reconfirmed my thinking that the biological, psychological, and social premises of Jung and Neumann are essentially correct. Bardwick demonstrated that it is the presence of a female reproductive system that effects women's personality, and that several personality differences between the sexes are not just culturally determined but are sex-based. Essentially for women the sex-based differences are in those very areas that ancient mythology called the blood mysteries: reproduction, birth and nourishment, menstruation, and menopause. It is certainly wrong that she has been oppressed because of her anatomy, but that anatomy has probably made woman's oppression all too possible. It has only been for a few decades that woman has been freed at all from her biology. We now have a technology, barely developed and known in Chopin's day, for example, that almost totally frees women from those blood mysteries and equalizes her roles with those of men. But perhaps this is another irony, and a frightening one. Modern technology makes her biological role obsolescent but also contains, like the dynamo Adams observed, the ability to destroy us all. This technology has smashed the cycles of the natural world. Yet, let us hope, all is not yet lost. The mythogenetic zone remains alive in the individual human heart. We still continue to maintain some arrangement

---

of the general inheritance of myth. Our literature is still beautifully recreating the natural world. The creative process in Adams, James, and Chopin, though leading to an ironic view of the culture's destructiveness, still has reaffirmed women's lives.

Naturalism is the third element of the mythic-realist novel. It is the quality that synthesizes the dualities and tensions of mythology and realism. Simultaneously the naturalism that the mythic-realist author turned to has some inherent dualities of its own, but these paradoxically contribute to unifying the novels.

American literary naturalism is generally thought to have been established as a historical movement in the 1890's, but many naturalist qualities appear in these earlier novels of Adams and James, as well as in the later one by Chopin. Charles Walcutt's American Literary Naturalism has traced the literary movement from transcendentalism and its assumption that through science and through the spirit one could attain universal truths. Transcendentalism, thus, contained a belief in both the rational and non-rational. From transcendentalism naturalism divided into two streams. The first, located in the natural world, flowed into a kind of idealism and a belief in progressivism and social radicalism. The second current led to a belief in a mechanistic universe. The first stream is dominant in the final scene in Esther in which

54 Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). I have followed Walcutt's discussion fairly closely.
Esther is in communion with Niagara Falls, but both streams merge, as in *The Princess* when Hyacinth uses a gun to commit suicide and the princess comes to knowledge through his death.

Another duality inherent in the naturalist novel arises from the author's emotional power and involvement. Malcolm Cowley has suggested that this "autobiographical element" affected the author's objectivity. Objectivity and rationality, as we know, were goals of realism, and scientific detachment was an aim of naturalist theory. But in practice both were often mitigated by the passion and rebelliousness of the authors. Furthermore, these strong feelings were reflected in the passionate rebelliousness of the archetypal women in the novels. This kind of duality, a desire for objectivity but an identification with the heroine, becomes an artistic asset and lends itself to an androgynous vision and to the ironic stance of the mythic-realist novelist.

Still another duality, and perhaps the most important one, is contained in the question of individuality within a determinist universe. Naturalism presents the natural world or society, heredity and environment, as shaping human lives. There is no guiding supreme being or supernatural entity. Men and women, part of nature, struggle for survival within it and are subject

to its indifferent laws. But the observable world is by no means
the whole of reality. The belief that the human being could be
accounted for by only physical, psychological, and social factors
is always tempered, except in the most extreme naturalistic novels
(like those of Jack London, for example), by the belief that
people are responsible for asserting some measure of control over
themselves and their environment. The heroine is conditioned and
controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, and sex. But the
author also suggests her responsibility for human values which
affirm her significance and life's importance. We then ask, how
much can the archetypal heroine determine her own fate? How much
free will does she have in an entrapping environment? What are her
alternatives? The questions go to the heart of the duality between
the concept of a natural woman in a deterministic world, and the
traditional American belief in individuality and selfhood.

American literary naturalism has not denied the presence
of mythology as realism did, but has reaffirmed it. It is remark-
able how the vision of this naturalism reflects both the American
realist situation for women and yet returns us to our ancient
fates portrayed in Greek drama, the ancient mystery of our lives,
or as Howells said, "the riddle of the painful earth." Often some
mystery invades life's processes, as in Esther when Esther hears
Niagara's voice, or in The Awakening when Edna listens to the Gulf
spirit. Frank Norris thought that naturalism was the transcending
synthesis between the dialectic of realism and romanticism. I would add to this that naturalism is the synthesizer between realism, with its social, lineal, historical orientation in time and place, and mythology, cyclical, recurrent, and timeless.

In what is peculiarly the language of the mythos of irony and winter, as well as the language of Greek mythology, Charles Walcutt has said that naturalism in one form "appears a shaggy, ape-like monster; in another, it appears a god-like giant. . . . The Beast. . . . is indeed of a Protean slipperiness." "Stream" and "river" images are especially suitable for naturalism, for as Walcutt said, American naturalism included a dream of the monist sea, the dream of unity of man or woman with nature and the universe. When the natural woman, Edna swims into the primal sea, and the water embraces her in her suicide, the mythological and realist worlds are brought together by naturalism.

A look at the criticism to date of the four novels reveals that although much good work has been done, no depth readings at the mythic-realist level have been made. It seems to me there is a need to account for the full-bodied realism with its dense and detailed renditions of contemporary life. Then these novels should be examined for the signature provided by the mythological structure involving archetypal woman. Finally, one needs to consider how literary naturalism in the novels helps to bring the realist society together with the ancient deterministic

57 Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, p. 3
mythological universe.

Critics have accepted Adams's two novels for their realism and have praised the political realism in Democracy. But others have damned both novels as thin, accused Adams of writing only for recreation, or dismissed them as badly written. James was dissatisfied with Democracy and said it was so good that it was a pity it wasn't better. Interestingly, James, who did not know his friend Adams had written it, could not decide if Democracy were by a man or woman, which attests to its androgynous quality.

Melvin Lyon's recent study of symbolism in Adams's work discussed mythological aspects of the fiction. But Lyon finally decided in Symbol and Image in Henry Adams that even though Adams shares many of the qualities of the modern literary usage of mythology, he is finally "less a mythical (or imaginative) writer and is always more of an intellectualist." R. P. Blackmur said Adams just wrote "fables." Those who have written about Adams's mythic women characters have been preoccupied with the Virgin Mary. Richard Miller has gone beyond this and has observed in "Henry Adams and the Influence of Women," that Adams found in

---


the women he knew the generic symbol of the great comforter, "in a sense the great mother of all the gods," and added that they influenced the literary women Adams created. Miller suggested the women only as life-givers, however, and did not consider the doublessness of the archetype nor its negative qualities, nor did he consider the possibility that Adams had a divided response to these women. Edward Saveth did take up the subject of women as destroyers, stating that there was something in Adams which admired and needed destructive, strong heroines which he recreated several times. Saveth and Ernest Samuels have recognized the importance of the biographical basis of Adams's fiction, Samuels stating that the novels were a "release" for Adams. This is close to the explanation of how archetypes emerge. Saveth has asked for additional critical analysis of Adams's role with women and of the women's roles. No reading to date has clearly identified the signature of this fiction.

Several critics have studied the literary naturalism in the novels, mostly in Esther, and Adams has been favorably compared with Theodore Dreiser. Jay Martin, almost in passing, has


said that Adams was in revolt against naturalism. This aspect of revolt within the novels should be studied further. Lyon has discussed the naturalism of the Niagara scene of *Esther*, but this needs to be considered in connection with realism and mythology. Finally, there is the kind of impression, like John Conder's in *A Formula of His Own*, that should be corrected—Conder said that Adams's deterministic views are not fully fleshed out until his later non-fiction. Adams's novels, I am convinced, manifest his deterministic views in the 1880's.

Henry James among the three authors has had the widest acclaim as a realist. Howells long ago said *The Princess Casamassima* was James's great masterpiece. More recently *The Princess* has been recognized as a fine example of a political novel. W. H. Tilley's ardent defence of the accuracy of James's perceptions of revolutionary anarchism in London is to date the most complete investigation of James's knowledge and use of contemporary news accounts and other background sources. The novel has been

---


admired, too, for its vision of alienation in an industrial fragmented society. Critics have lauded James's "inward turning" or psychological realism, too—as William Troy said, James's portrayal of consciousness is concrete and integral to The Princess's plot. Yet this novel's realism has been seriously questioned and even viciously attacked, I think because of James's own complaints in his Notebooks that the details were vague to him even as he was working on the novel. It seems to me that very good critics have misunderstood this book. F. O. Matthiessen said that James "had not the slightest politican intention" in it. Charles Samuels deplored its contradictory doubleness and confusions. Stephen Spender objected to James giving his characters an unreal overdose of power. The question remains as to whether The Princess has a unified structure and it is complete in itself, a question that can be satisfactorily answered by a mythic-realist reading.

Regarding mythology, Lionel Trilling's excellent essay, praising Christina Light as a heroine created out of James's

---


imagination of disaster, is still the best place to begin. Trilling has identified universal primitive patterns, though he did not care to separate myth from fairy tale. James, he said, was the least primitive of artists, yet he was always aware of his connection with the primitive. . . . Like any primitive story teller, he wished to hold the reader against his will, to enchant. . . . he delighted to work, by means of the unusual, the extravagant, the melodramatic, and the supernatural, upon what he called 'the blessed faculty of wonder'; and he understood primitive story to be the root of the modern novelist's art.69

Trilling, Oscar Cargill, and Frederick Hoffman have seen the Princess herself as sharing the novel with Hyacinth. Hoffman has said that women are always the focus of James's "morals criticism."

F. W. Dupee identified a crucial aspect as being at the center of all three novels of the social realist period—the female's "will to power."70 It is rather surprising, however, considering James's own pronouncements on the "good-bad" heroine, why the heiress of all the ages, Christina Light, the American girl who becomes an international heroine, has not been seen as an archetype. Leslie Fiedler, for example, found in James's novels either the "mythically innocent" American girl or the bitch goddess, but

---


not one woman being both.⁷¹ Some criticism simply has ignored James's title and has denied Christina a central role. Nor have the autobiographical elements in The Princess been connected specifically with Christina except just in passing, as Harold McCarthy has done in Henry James: The Creative Process.⁷² Often only James's later works gain recognition for their mythic qualities, and sometimes the concept is badly confused with fairy tale, legend, and fable. One critic is so uninformed as to make one wonder at the vagaries of criticism—Maxwell Geismar has attacked The Princess as "illusory fairy tale."⁷³ A far better critic, Matthiessen, has said that James worked in the genre of the fairy tale because he had not yet become conscious of the possibilities of dealing explicitly with myth. This view overlooks the role of the unconscious in mythology. Daniel Lerner and Oécar Cargill have found classical allusions in James's letters and in The Bostonians and The Other House, but stop short of finding these allusions elsewhere.⁷⁴ One can see that Matthiessen's assessment, Lerner and Cargill's reading, and McCarthy's observations


need amending or expansion.

The Princess Casamassima falls into James's middle phase, "the naturalist" years of his career. European naturalist influences on this novel have been thoroughly explored, but it is surprising how little has been done with it as American naturalism. John Kimmey almost alone has pointed out that The Bostonians, that completely American tale James was finishing even as he began The Princess, had an impact on The Princess. James, said Kimmey, was developing an "impressionistic naturalism," an American brand of the movement less scientifically oriented than its European counterpart. Other naturalist elements have been discussed. Berthoff said the novel's metropolitan setting is like an organism, and Louise Bogan has pointed out that heredity and environment work on Christina as well as on Hyacinth in that both are illegitimate. No one has considered, however, how the patriarchal concept of legitimacy informs the sexual politics of the novel. And criticism has even been leveled against the book's naturalism as a fatal division. One begins to see that the three strains of realism, mythology, and naturalism must be accounted for.


Naturalism of "a torn civilization at war with itself," over which hangs a sense of doom, serves to bring together the social setting and actions of Christina, the socially ambivalent American girl abroad, with the profoundly ironic mythic quest of this divine goddess.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has been justly admired as a realist novel, though only in recent years. At the turn of the century readers were shocked and repelled by its frank treatment of Edna's adultery. In mid-century it began to achieve recognition, by Van Wyck Brooks and Edmund Wilson among others, and by George Arms who has placed it in the tradition of "classical realism" Arms said was realized by James and Howells. A recent dissertation has considered the importance of social roles in Chopin's fiction and her psychological realism. By far the most favorable criticism of the past fifteen years has been, however, from the perspective of feminism. Feminist critiques have included a reading of *The Awakening* as an intensive exploration of female identity problems, in a society that denies the need for a woman's separate identity, and as a discussion of self-hood, wifehood, and motherhood. Larzer Ziff has said that to be a serious female author in the nineties was to be a writer of stories about women

---


and their demands. But charges have been made against the realism of The Awakening. Donald Ringe placed the novel in the romantic tradition, principally because of its sea imagery, a view that does not account for romantic imagery acting as "displacement," a romanticism finally overwhelmed by the author's ironic vision.

Mythology in this novel has received some attention since Kenneth Eble compared Edna's struggle to Greek tragedy and Edna to Phaedra. Per Seyersted has perceived that Edna's revolt is against the patriarchy. George Arms wrote:

We look upon Edna's awakening as archetypal in marking her passage from death to rebirth, but we may also look upon her awakening as not a rebirth but as another kind of death that is self-sought.

Kenneth Rosen raised the possibility of The Awakening as American myth and asked what a woman is to do with the freedom she struggles for. Larzer Ziff has a provocative suggestion—that Chopin's and


Kenneth Eble, "A Forgotten Novel: Kate Chopin's The Awakening," Western Humanities Review, X, No. 3 (Summer, 1956), 261-69; Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969), p. 138; George Arms,
Edna's feminist awareness is part of Chopin's concern for myth. I have greatly expanded all these readings and more deeply explored mythological dimensions.

A few critics have discussed naturalist qualities in this novel. Marie Fletcher has said of Chopin's fiction that post-Civil War literary regionalism was partly a transition from romantic sentimentality to the newer realism and naturalism. But there is an implicit criticism and condescension in the too frequently expressed opinion that The Awakening derives from European naturalism. I find that the novel requires a reading that accounts for the realism of New Orleans and Edna's life, for the mythic ironic structure and Edna as earth goddess whose quest is for an awakening to full consciousness, and, finally, that deals with the deterministic naturalism of the Gulf and Grand Isle setting which opens and closes the book. There has not been a study of Chopin's signature that brings together mythology and realism, and shows her vision of women and society fused into art through a naturalist view of the world and woman's condition in it.


84 Marie Fletcher, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Louisiana History, VII, No. 2 (Spring, 1966), 117-18.
CHAPTER II

HENRY ADAMS: THE AWAKENING OF MADELINE AND ESTHER

Henry Adams created two mythic-realist novels which are social documents of late nineteenth century American life and women. They are simultaneously mythological in their seasonal structures, in their portrayals of women as archetypal heroines, and in their use of classical allusions. These novels are also in the tradition of naturalism that takes the form of an environmental determinism which is like Greek fate, a naturalism that synthesizes the elements of realism and mythology. At the core of these novels are two women, Madeleine Lee in Democracy: An American Novel (1880) and Esther Dudley in Esther: A Novel (1884). Each woman is an expression of a great goddess archetype who embodies positive and negative qualities of good and evil, life and death. Madeleine's quest is a search for the roots of power in the patriarchal American body politic, while Esther's heroic quest is for selfhood within a patriarchal American religion. Adams's portrayal of women's roles was closely connected with his view of

---

1 Henry Adams, Democracy: An American Novel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc., 1952); Henry Adams, Esther: A Novel (1884; rpt. New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1938); each hereafter referred to in the text in shortened form or by page number only where the reference is clear.
society and the world. All his life he sought a philosophic synthesis of unity out of what he perceived to be a growing multiplicity that was leading to universal chaos. He created archetypal women who strive for a union of themselves with society and for a basic union of their own dualities. But though they contain the promise of wholeness and health for themselves and society, Madeleine and Esther inevitably reflect what Adams saw as destruction and loss. Their realistic pilgrimages and their mythic quests of the eternal return lead to their awakenings which make them realize that in order to save themselves they must withdraw from nineteenth century death-oriented, male-dominated institutions, and from men themselves. Ironically, in affirming themselves, they must sacrifice wifehood and motherhood, historically and biologically the means of race survival. Irony is the central mode of these two mythic-realist novels.

Henry Adams's Signature

Before I discuss Adams's two novels in order to demonstrate how realism and mythology are synthesized by naturalism into fiction that is unified art, I want to explore Adams's signature, his sign of personality through which he rendered archetypes. This signature that informs his mythic-realist fiction developed chiefly from two influences, the women in his family background, and his education. I shall discuss first the women, both in his immediate family—his great-grandmother, mother, sister, and wife—and in what one may call his extended family, women who are surrogate
mother figures, like the two Tahitian women Arii Taimai and Marau Taaroa, the Virgin Mary, women friends, and nieces. Some of these women, like the nieces, fulfilled not just mother roles, but daughter roles, too. They all strengthened Adams's literary realism—his wife, for example, was a model for Esther Dudley. But more particularly, several also reinforced the expression of archetypes in his two novels. Henry Adams actually portrays in his fiction five archetypes Carl Jung defined: the shadow, wise old man, primordial earth mother, maiden, and the anima; but it is the earth mother who is at the novels' centers.\(^2\) I shall secondly examine the influence on him of his education. That education in history informed his literary realism, while it influenced his sense of the doubleness of the earth goddess archetype. All of Adams's learning affected his double vision, or what Melvin Lyon has called the "pervasive dichotomy" of Adams's works. As Adams said of himself in *The Education of Henry Adams*, "From earliest childhood the boy was accustomed to feel that, for him life was double."\(^3\) Education, furthermore, provided him with a view of a determinist universe, a view important to the naturalism of the


novels, and to their final reconciliation of the mythic structure with realism.

When one looks at Adams's relationships with women in his family, one immediately sees he felt their influence mainly through loss. His relationships came to reflect his basic view that society and the world are destructive forces. Adams keenly felt a deprivation because society denigrated women's roles. He lamented of his childhood experience, "Women counted for little as models" (*Education*, p. 41). He later intended to partly compensate for this loss and for women's absence from the history books by writing a biography of the "ancient lady of our house," his great-grandmother Abigail Smith Adams, wife of the second president, based on materials left by her. But he never completed the project.

Another Abigail, his mother, was also important to his feelings that women were somehow connected with loss. Adams called her "the queen-bee of the hive" (*Education*, p. 37), a comment that would seem to emphasize her life qualities. But perhaps, too, he felt her to be an inhibiting influence, for he said it was she who controlled the children in his family. At the same time, Adams, who lived with his family until more than thirty years of

---


4Ernest Samuels, *The Young Henry Adams*, I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 183-84. Samuels's three volume biography is a basic resource for this study.
age, was deeply attached to his mother and very special to her, a relationship at least partly accounting, one critic has said, for Adams's "unusual and penetrating sympathy with women."\(^5\) Thus Adams exhibited a kind of ambivalent attitude toward women; one side of him loved and revered them ("queen-bee"), but another saw them as repressive. Adams attended his mother during all of the last gloomy year of her life (she was confined to a wheel chair) and wrote that he "had inherited her disposition" of gloominess and sadness.\(^6\) Though they are childless, Madeleine and Esther share some of Mrs. Adams's qualities—they, too, like to exercise power and are quite sorrowful women.

His sister Louisa was another strong influence on Adams, and she at first glance seems a positive life force but comes to represent terrible destruction. Describing Louisa's desire to visit old Napoleonic campaign sites in Europe, Adams said:

> It was his first experiment in giving the reins to a woman, and he was so much pleased with the results that he never wanted to take them back. In after life he made a general law of experience—no woman had ever driven him wrong; no man had ever driven him right (*Education*, p. 85).

Louisa represents woman's beneficial nature with her courage, vitality, and love for life. Adams's desire to lose himself in


such a strong, attractive woman is obvious. But there is also the other side of the archetype. Louisa is a woman who can lead a man to a battlefield. The most terrible thing, however, was in her lingering, horrible death from lock-jaw which Adams witnessed. He said it was as if death enjoyed taking her (Education, p. 287), the statement indicative of his bitter ironic view of life as predominantly death. As Melvin Lyon stated, the death of this particular woman to Adams became "a universal symbol for all man's relationship with nature."^7

The next woman to touch him deeply was his wife Marian Hooper Adams. Motherless since the age of five, she was exceptionally close to her father, Dr. Hooper, "the strongest attachment of her life."® When Adams met her, he was both attracted to her, yet fearful of her, and one is reminded of his relationship to his mother. He exhibits another ambivalence which was to be part of his continuing response to women. Marian served as mother, yet also as daughter, and he fluctuates between admiring her and condescending to her:

She is certainly not handsome; nor would she be quite called plain. . . . She knows her own mind uncommon well. . . . She


reads German—also Latin—also, I fear, a little Greek. . . . She talks garrulously, but on the whole pretty sensibly. She is very open to instruction. We shall improve her. She dresses badly. She decidedly has humor and will appreciate our wit. She has enough money to be quite independent. She rules me as only American women rule men, and I cower before her. Lord! how she would lash me if she read the above. . . (Letters, I, 223).

After they married (in 1872), their relationship became increasingly sad. She never seems to have successfully negotiated her separation from her father, a condition that led to her suffering two major depressions. Her first depressive state occurred during her honeymoon. She recovered, and she and Henry appeared to have had some good years together. But references to her are always highly ambiguous, and underlying professions of happiness are tones of sorrow and loss. Of his marriage he said, "it is like a dream of the golden age" (Letters, I, 309). This reference to a "golden age" recalls Charles Sanford's explanation that golden age myths posit an idealized past in a present state of deterioration. Jay Martin has said that paradise lost myths arise in the period of American realism to reflect dissatisfaction with society and a yearning for a simpler past. One wonders if Adams was not sensing a personal as well as a socially deteriorating situation. In another ambiguous comment, Adams said

he owed to Marian his "sea of happiness" (Letters, 1, 354), and in
still another he referred to getting married as a "plunge into the
new ocean..." It is as if Adams sought out that in Marian
which was like primal water and the womb of life, but also water
which is unconsciousness and death.

Marian was active specifically in the creation of Adams's
two novels. He wrote Democracy while they lived in Washington in
1879. It was published anonymously, though a small group called
the "Five of Hearts" knew of its authorship. This group included
Marian, John Hay and his wife, and Clarence King. The extent of
Marian's involvement in Democracy's creation is still open to de­
bate. Adams told his publisher that Marian gave him descriptions
of women's costumes, but Ernest Samuels has said she may have
assisted in creating some of the portraits. The business of
anonymous authorship is important in another way, for it reveals
both the doubleness of Adams and his wife. Adams wrote to Hay:

My ideal of authorship would be to have a famous double with
another name, to wear what honors I could win. How I should
enjoy upseeling him at last by publishing a low and shameless
essay with woodcuts in his name! (Letters, I, 337)

William Jordy has suggested the possibility that anonymity was part
of Adams's liking for riddle or paradox, and Adams said of this

10 Cater, Henry Adams and His Friends, p. 439.

Henry Holt, Adams's publisher, added in a 1925 edition; Samuels,
The Young Henry Adams, I, '302.
authorship that "the riddle is more amusing than the solution." Marian was involved in this doubleness in that she had to keep the secret from her father who wrote and bluntly asked who the author was (there had been some speculation among those who knew the Adamses that Marian herself was the author).

Marian played a greater role in Esther. Adams published Esther under the pseudonym "Frances Snow Compton." As Robert Hume has suggested, a feminine nom de plume is itself "of definite significance" as an aspect of Adams's admiration for the nineteenth century woman. It seems to me that Adams's anima was working strongly, the anima that helped to provide a deep sympathy with a woman character. There is still another implication in Adams's use of this pseudonym, and that is that "Frances" cannot be identified as clearly male or female and so is an androgynous name. Androgynous authorship is an essential quality if male writers are to create fully developed women characters.

There is a debate as to whether Marian knew that Henry wrote Esther, but this is really of less importance than Marian's clear connection with Adams's characterization of Esther.


14 Samuels has stated that Marian did know Adams wrote Esther, Henry Adams: The Middle Years, II, 222. The secret of Adams's authorship was revealed five years after his death by his publisher Holt.
Esther is like Marian. By all accounts, as well as in her own Letters, Marian was high spirited, keenly intelligent, and of a strong, rebellious character. She had an avid intellect and an ambitious nature, energy, and managerial ability. R. P. Blackmur nicely phrased it that she was "charming without loss of the rational." Marian was twenty-eight at her marriage; Esther is twenty-five when the novel opens. Both women are physically small but have strong personalities. Here is Wharton's description in the novel of Esther, a description much like Adams's of Marian:

'she has a bad figure. . . . She is too slight, too thin. . . . She dresses to suit her figure and sometimes overdoes it. Her features are imperfect. . . . She picks up all she knows without an effort and knows nothing well, yet she seems to understand whatever is said. Her mind is as irregular as her face. . .' (Esther, pp. 26-27).

Another likeness is the absence of faith in both women, and still another is their Electra complex. Both also aspired to be artists, Esther a painter and Marian a photographer, and both had home studios. There is yet another likeness which is a frustration—Esther is childless, a condition according to Samuels that was to Marian and Henry their "shared secret sorrow."  

---


Marian as an expression of the archetype has two other melancholy similarities to Esther, similarities which only at first glance appear to be differences. One apparent contrast is that Esther's father dies in the novel while Marian's father did not die until a year after the book's publication. But Adams anticipated his wife's deep depression over Dr. Hooper's death by fictionally portraying Esther's. Samuels has said that Henry and Marian had only "a half marriage" and that Adams may have wished for the death of Marian's father because of "an unspoken rivalry between the two men."17 In the novel Esther's father wishes for the death of her suitors. A second apparent difference which is paradoxically prophetic is that Esther rejects her suitors and remains single, which to her is a kind of renunciation or death. After the book's publication, but before Marian's death, Henry and Marian's friend Charles King read Esther. A chilling note is that King told Adams that he should have made his heroine "jump into Niagara, as that is what she would have done." Adams replied prophetically, "Certainly she would, but I could not suggest it."18

The negative phase of the archetype recurs and reflects mythic patterns as well as social realist forces. Marian had

17 Samuels, Henry Adams: The Middle Years, II, 249.

18 Samuels, Henry Adams: The Middle Years, II, 256, an unpublished letter. Samuels had access to the Massachusetts Historical Society's unpublished materials. There is still no collected edition of Adams's work.
written her father every Sunday for thirteen years since her marriage and their separation. At his death in April, 1885, she suffered a second depression. She committed suicide on a December Sunday, 1885, when she was forty-two. In Adams's fiction, Sundays, April, and December are always crucial times. Marian swallowed potassium cyanide from her home photography lab. Thus, nineteenth century technology provided the means of her destruction. Always provocative, Marshall McLuhan has called the photograph "The Brothel Without Walls," in that the camera tends to turn people into objects or things. As Samuels said of Marian's suicide, it was accompanied by her sense of her own "profound unworthiness." I think, too, that her suicide was the final rebellion, a rebelliousness portrayed in Madeleine Lee and Esther Dudley when they assert themselves and withdraw from men. Adams never recovered from Marian's death. Written twenty years later, The Education omitted all mention of her and Esther, the absence reinforcing one's impression of trauma-producing loss. After Marian's death the Adams family, but particularly Henry, destroyed large amounts of correspondence and papers involving her.

Edward Saveth thought it difficult to discover how Adams or anyone else could have found solace and comfort in strong destructive women. But Saveth, Blackmur, and others who have written about Marian and about Adams's fictional women, do not account for the double-natured archetype in the fiction, the woman who is good but also destructive, nor do they fully account for the phenomenon of Adams's attraction and repulsion to the archetype in his fiction and life. Adams himself stated after Marian's death that he cared more for one chapter of Esther than for his whole History, yet that Esther was written in his "heart's blood" (Letters, I, 399).

To commemorate Marian, Adams commissioned Augustus Saint-Gaudens to build a monument to her. This is a seated, contemplative bronze figure, massive and shrouded—Adams described it as "sexless" (Letters, II, 513). Art critic Ernst Scheyer has explained that the circle of artists with whom Adams was friendly strove for (though they did not always achieve it) a fusion between artistic realism, chiefly materialistic in its orientation, and an idealism largely spiritual. This is a phase of late nineteenth century art with interesting implications for literary

Richardson, "McLuhan, Emerson, and Henry Adams," Western Humanities Review, XXII, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), is an intriguing study that notes technological and cultural connections between McLuhan and Adams.


Ernst Scheyer, The Circle of Henry Adams: Art and
realism and mythology. John LaFarge, painter, friend of Adams, and prototype for the artist Wharton in *Esther*, called the statue "Kwannon," after the Japanese all-powerful goddess of love and mercy. One might say that the statue is not so much sexless, then, as androgynous. Kwannon, a great goddess, specifically resolves the co-existence of contraries, a resolution the mythic-realist novel always strives for.

The women in Adams's family, as we have seen, provided him with primary relationships and models of archetypal women who had positive life qualities but in whom negative forces dominate. Another kind of family, the extended, also supplied archetypal women whom Adams felt through loss. These women were tied to him not by blood or marriage, but they became surrogate mother figures. They continue a pattern he formed early in life, followed through his fiction, and continued into what is called his "posthumous existence," or those years after Marian's death. Adams's long sea voyage with LaFarge in 1891, taken partly to recover from his

Artists (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970). The circle included Saint-Gaudens, painter John LaFarge, and architect Henry Hobson Richardson who designed the Adams's Washington house. The three collaborated on the Boston Trinity Church (1871-75) which figures prominently in *Esther*. Adams painted and collected art.

22 Hume, *Runaway Star*, p. 123. Kwan-yin is an eastern great mother, the goddess who hears the cry of the world and sacrifices her Buddhahead for the sake of the suffering world: Neumann, *The Great Mother*, p. 332.

grief, carried him first to the South Seas, then to Asia, Europe, and back to America. In Tahiti he met Arii Taimai, a full-blooded Polynesian and widow of a Jewish businessman: "I have learned from her what archaic woman was," Adams wrote (Letters, I, 483). He also knew the daughter, Marau Taaroa, a powerful chieftess and ruler. He strongly identified with the aristocratic Tahitian women, "the Adamses of the Society Islands," was adopted into their tribe and given a Tahitian name. 24 Tahiti, with its still visible traces of a communal Pacific paradise, symbolized the "golden age" Adams always yearned for. But Tahiti had suffered repeated devastating European invasions, and Marau Taaroa, half-Jewish and half-Polynesian, was the last queen of Tahiti. Adams's golden age quest, an odyssey of the eternal return, could not for long assuage his grief. His sorrow lifted temporarily when he visited Samoa, for there he found a society wonderfully in balance between male and female principles, an archaic culture in which mother law was still working. He described Samoan women as "large, broad and muscular," nearly six feet tall and as strong as the men, free and masculine. The women were loving and nourishing and childbirth "an easy affair of twenty-four hours." He wrote, "They

---

are the happiest, easiest . . . people . . . I ever saw.″ Moving easily into Greek mythic allusions to indicate his approval of them, he described the women and men as superb "Greek fauns and Apollos."26

Samoa was the high point of his journey into the golden age of the Pacific, a past in which women were truly valued in a balanced society. Adams then travelled to Fiji and Japan. In Fiji he found the women unimportant and unappealing. He attributed their negligible social position and personal unattractiveness to their being suppressed by a totally masculine and war-like society (Letters to a Niece, p. 53). He especially despised the heavily male phallic temple worship of Japan, then as today, extremely chauvinistic. Unlike the great goddess Kwannon, the living women were mechanical and childish, mere monkeys, dolls, and mannikins, Adams said, all lifeless and unattractive (Letters, I, 377 and 381).

Adams continued his circuit of the globe in search of Nirvana (Nirvanda, in Hindu philosophy, the freedom from opposites), reaching France and discovering the Virgin, another archetypal woman. "They are no doubt a strange triumvirate: Marian Hooper Adams, Arii Taimai, and the Virgin," Robert Hume observed. The Virgin, however, was another surrogate mother whom Adams both


26Cater, Henry Adams and His Friends, p. 199.
loved and feared, admired and condescended to, like the other two Marys, Marian Adams and Queen Marau. This woman fulfilled both a mythic archetypal role for Adams and represented an admirably balanced, healthy society so different from his own American culture.

Regarding Mary as an archetypal great goddess, Adams celebrated her in a triad of works: Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, "The Dynamo and the Virgin," and "Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres." He linked her specifically to great goddess figures, Diane of the Ephesians, Oriental goddesses, "the divinely naked Aphrodite of Praxtiles," goddesses of Indian mythology (Education, p. 384 and p. 388), and Eve: "The study of our Lady . . . leads directly back to Eve, and lays bare the whole subject of sex" (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 196). The Virgin is both good and loving mother and terrible, fearsome goddess. She is fecund and reproductive, the essence of the female principle (it is noticeable that Adams seldom mentions Christ's role). But because Mary is dual-natured, she is destructive, too—men went on their knees at Chartres, Adams said, "because they feared her intelligence and her anger" (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 84). Before her power he

---

27 Hume, Runaway Star, p. 129.

himself felt fear and "littleness" (*Mont-Saint-Michel*, p. 106). Exhibiting what for him was always a dual response toward mother figures, Adams wished to find himself in the sovereign protector, and lose himself in the annihilator. Exhilarated by her beauty and consolation, he still felt deadly cold and famished (*Letter to a Niece*, p. 20). His ambivalence continues in his view of his own role, with interesting reverberations of *The Golden Bough* and the dying and revived king: "I am senile—I am rococo—I am twelfth century—I am long ripe for the sickle, and dried on the stalk. . . . but by Saint Lazarus, I am not . . . yet so long buried" (*Letters*, II, 314). Adams's awareness of late nineteenth century mythological investigations seems very apparent in such a passage.

Mary is further revealed as an archetype through female symbols such as water, the circle and womb, the vessel, and flowers. Adams significantly opened *Mont-Saint-Michel* and *Chartres* with water which is, as Lyon said, Adams's "ultimate symbol" and always double.29 Michel, the Archangel, looks out over the North Sea, the "sea of Peril," which is Mary's sea (*Mont-Saint-Michel*, p. 4). Mary, who is fertile rose, has her window at the masculine *Mont-Saint-Michel*. As birth and rebirth within the eternal circle, she is the circle herself, the womb, healer of those "whose life has been a broken arch." They return to her, like Adams did, "to

---

29 Lyon, *Symbol and Idea in Henry Adams*, p. 133. Lyon considered ice, snow, glaciers, ocean, and steam among water symbols.
rest, after a long circle of pilgrimage," for she is the "cradle of rest from which their ancestors started" (Mont-Saint-Michel, pp. 7-8).

As a real woman and social force, the Virgin represented to Adams the sexual, psychic, and social balance and unity he could not find in his America. Drawing contrasts between the healthy, unified twelfth century society and his own fragmented, diseased United States, Adams said that Mary in the Middle Ages was an integral part of a culture that had sexual and "sacred harmony," a culture in which god and man, man and woman, peace and war, life and death, good and evil were reconciled (Mont-Saint-Michel, pp. 44-45). She was a human woman of her time and place in whom the people of the middle ages believed—her tastes, wishes, and passions were "intimately known" (Mont-Saint-Michel, pp. 257-58). Adams even stated that she had experienced the pain of childbirth, an aspect of Mary very few writers have mentioned. By contrast, the Virgin was practically unknown to Protestant America, and "all the Protestant churches were cold failures without her help..." (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 73 and p. 261). The Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, which the Puritans adopted, to Adams demonstrated masculine stupidity and brutality (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 84). Adams linked this parable to masculine lust for unchecked power and to the Puritan fathers having banished the Virgin from their churches and the state. In his study of nineteenth century multiplicity and fragmentation, The Education
of Henry Adams, Adams connected his patriarchal culture to his own psychic illness—he said he had but "half a nature" (Education, p. 387). It is clear to me that Adams understood his own need for a whole psyche, as well as his society's need for wholeness and health.

Adams's vision of the Virgin and the Middle Ages has been quite misunderstood. When one considers how mythology functioned in the literature and life of Adams from the time he was young until he was very old, then the criticisms against his view of medieval culture hold little weight. Yvor Winters has scornfully said that Adams's concept of Europe was "merely a version of the Romantic Golden Age." It is exactly as "golden age," however, that Adams's quest was mythic. Joseph Campbell has stated that Adams was essentially accurate in his perceptions. As Campbell's great study of mythology has shown, the Middle Ages represent the last age of the great mandala, when mythology and society though hierarchically arranged, were in balance with a universe that was a circular whole. Mary was the "leading muse" of a flowering, communal, creative civilization. The mandala broke after the twelfth century, and the twin developments of the scientific revolution and Renaissance humanism, including the Protestant Reformation, ushered in the disintegration of collective myth and the

---

rise of the new individualism. 31 These developments are directly applicable to Adams's search for myth and his expression of the archetype. And they directly point up what was both a personal and social nineteenth century dilemma, one that contributed to Adams's ironic stance toward himself, society, and women. As a nineteenth century American he admired individualism but longed for collective values. As a realist writer he strove for scientific objectivity, yet he saw the destruction of the world by man-made science; as a man he yearned for woman as savior, yet knew she could not save him.

Other women touched Adams and influenced him. After his wife's death and up to the end of his life, these women served as mothers before whom he could be a child and prostrate himself. Adams cultivated relationships with such women as Elizabeth Cameron whom he called "Madonna," 32 and Margaret Chanler, a devout Catholic and medievalist whom he called "My Adored Matron" and "Dear Lady." To Isabella Stewart, who was "Oh, Dear!" he complained, "I am afar and have no means of offering sacrifice." 33


33 Cater, Henry Adams and His Friends, pp. 573-75, p. 611, and p. 595.
All three women were Virgin figures.

A last word about Adams's extended family, nieces who were both mothers and daughters like Marian Adams was. Oscar Cargill called Adams "a lady's man" who went on pilgrimages to French cathedrals accompanied by "some adopted Daisy Miller. . . ." He meant this as withering sarcasm; but Adams's relationships with these young women assume other proportions when one understands that Daisy was an expression of the archetypal maiden or daughter to Henry James, and the young women like her were to Adams as daughters or nieces, with Adams in the role of uncle. The uncle figure emerges in his fiction as a wise old man archetype, like Dr. Dudley in Esther and Baron Jacobi in Democracy. Adams addressed Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres to a niece. The following is rather typical of many letters he wrote to and about nieces, and is reminiscent of his tone toward Marian:

They are tame as mice. . . . They woo me with their little love affairs and their little troubles. . . . They cause me terrors unspeakable. . . . They are jealous as tigers, and their little feuds are savage (Letters, II, 205).

Another niece figure who was also a surrogate mother was his last companion, Aileen Tone, whom Louis Auchincloss met and found to be "a kind of lay priestess . . . an eighteenth-century French Abbess. . . ." Adams begged Miss Tone to "Never leave me," as Marian had.  


35Louis Auchincloss, "Never leave me, never leave me. . . ."
Adams was in touch, then with mythic archetypes through women in his family life, women who also served as models for his realistic fiction. His formal historical education continued to attract him to archetypal women and to myth as literary structure. Giving his education a mythological reference, he said it provided him with the "labyrinth" through which he had to find his way to understanding and synthesis (Education, p. 389). Education also served to strengthen his literary realism and inform the literary naturalism he used in his two novels. It seems to me that Adams's education falls roughly into four periods: ancient history, from which he gained knowledge of Greece and Rome; medieval history, from which he learned about Teutonic culture; the Reformation period, which informed him on Puritan history; and, finally, the modern period, which gave him an understanding of pre- and post-Civil War sciences and of the new woman in society and fiction.

As a young child in the Quincy and Boston schoolrooms, Adams was exposed to an education that reached back into ancient history. He learned Latin and Greek and continued these studies at Harvard (1854–1858). He read the old myths in Greek, such as The Odyssey, the Alcestis, and Oedipus Tyrannos, and studied Greek history, economics and coinage, and architecture. As Ernst Scheyer said, Greece was "a touchstone for his taste. . . ."36


36Scheyer, The Circle of Henry Adams, p. 73.
Adams travelled through southern Europe and Greece several times. All this learning in ancient history gave him, as a similar education gave James and Chopin and so many literary Americans of this period, an easy familiarity with mythic events.

Medieval history chiefly influenced his realism and knowledge of mythology. He taught medieval history at Harvard. This was not an esoteric, escapist interest, for one can read Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres as a critical commentary on nineteenth century patriarchal America. And it is possible that Adams sought in the Middle Ages the clue to the woman question of his own age. He found that in the past, "the superiority of the women was not a fancy, but a fact," for she ran businesses, workshops, and households (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 199). He thought Eleanor of Guyenne a great queen and the equal to any French king.37

Another phase of medieval history that touches on my topic is Adams's racism. He was a Teutonophile, and the older he got, the more viciously anti-Semitic he became.38 But it has not been

37 In his chapter on the three queens of France, Adams compared them to queen bees, reminding one of his characterization for his mother.

38 Paul F. Boller, Jr., American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism, 1865-1900 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1969), p. 214. The Teutonic germ theory was that the Teutons and Normans were a superior race, and as they were the "germ" of the English race, Norman blood accounted for all that was good in American culture. This theory, highly regarded in Adams's day, was tied in with his anti-Semitism. Adams's responses to blacks were less doctrinaire; he seems easily to have accepted his friend King's marriage to a black woman.
noted that his anti-Semitism was aimed only at men. While this may be small comfort to us, it is still true that he did not encumber his heroines with racist theory. Marau Taaroa was half-Jewish and the Virgin was a Jew, and he loved them both. Adams's understanding of woman as sexual force meant that archetypal woman transcends narrowly racial roles.

Another influence on Adams's use of mythology and realism was the Reformation period. It was really a New England Puritanism that grew out of the Reformation which left its mark on him in two ways, on his conscience and on his analogizing mind. Adams rebelled against the religion of his fathers and threw away their Puritan god. His brother Brooks said Henry found the Reformation most antagonistic . . . because of the Puritan attack on women; for it was during the Reformation . . . according to his theory . . . that the degradation of woman began.39 His rebellion left Adams without a systematic creed, yet with a great spiritual hunger. And he retained a Puritan conscience in feeling his responsibilities and in searching for the truth. Adams's analogizing mind, another Puritan inheritance, meant, as Yvor Winters said, that Adams read the significance of every event into a godless universe.40 What Winters would no doubt have rejected, but what I am convinced of, is that Adams's analogizing mind and Puritan conscience at least partly filled the empty space

---


left by the disappearance of God with the woman archetype.

Adams's modern education included pre- and post-war sciences and technology which affected his concepts of realism and naturalism as they pertain to women. This education also informed him on the new woman in society and in fiction. His modern education added up to enormous tensions in him that he attempted to resolve in a naturalism which incorporated modern environmentalism and ancient deterministic fate. As Henry Wasser has said in *The Scientific Thought of Henry Adams*, Adams's modern scientific views were linked to a Greek vision of fate.

The sciences that most affected him were physics, biology, geology, psychology, and history (that is, he attempted to make a science of history), and the new social sciences. He worked out a theory of thermo-dynamics that attempted to prove the gradual dissipation of the earth's energy, leading to the extinction of life and the world. This disintegration was of necessity connected to a belief in a closed universe. While he was no Darwinist, he felt the impact of Darwinism and its commitment to the idea of an open universe and upward progress which he best expresses at the end of *Esther*. Adams reached a mental and emotional impasse. Geological investigations, too, contributed to his despair. Lyell, he said, "had probably wrecked the Garden of Eden".

---

His life-long friendship with Charles King, first director of the U. S. Geological Survey, was based a great deal on King's real interest being not in science, but in woman . . . the archaic female, with instincts and without intellect. . . . rich in the inheritance of every animated energy back to the polyps and the crystals.42

Technology, inevitably linked with science, lent a special pathos to Adams's position. During the Civil War, which accelerated technological changes and had such a strong effect on him that it served as background for both his novels and made him a close observer of power, he wrote:

Man has mounted science and is now run away with. I . . . believe that before many centuries more, science will be the master of man [and] . . . the human race [will] commit suicide by blowing up the world (Letters, I, 135).

Only woman could get Adams out of his impasse, only the "eternal woman—Astarte, Isis, Demedter, Aphrodite, and . . . the Virgin" could combat the atrophied scientific mind (Mont-Saint-Michel, p. 198). Referring to the railroad, he said, "All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres" (Education, p. 388). The woman, he said, must go on reproducing, swimming about the ocean "of future time as she had swum in the past, with the gar fish and the shark, unable to change" (Education, p. 448). The archaic woman, Esther and Madeleine, the Virgin, and all the women opposed to the dynamo and the scientific world, were his protection against his apocalyptic vision of the death of

the universe.

Yet the ironies are great. He could yearn for salvation through women, but he could see still another development. To his dismay the women of his time seemed to be abandoning maternity and the family to follow and imitate the American male who had his hand on a lever of a speeding engine racing toward disaster. Adams could accept the American man as a failure, but when he realized the American woman might betray his hopes for her, he was really horrified. Adams continued to the end of his days hoping that the ancient, biological, life-saving role of woman would resurrect itself, yet as a realist he portrayed two fictional heroines as childless (as Marian was) and life-renouncing.43

Other modern educational events that affected Adams were the social sciences like anthropology and ethnology. What emerges is that as Adams gained knowledge in these fields of women of the past, his understanding increased of the new woman of the present and future. There is a definite thread through his works of something close to Jungian psychology. What were Adams's assumptions about women? As an historian he had written a dozen volumes to show that events were more important in making history than men were. He viewed woman as an inert force. The above passage on King and the following are fairly typical of his

If the laws of inertia are to be sought anywhere with certainty, it is in the feminine mind. . . . woman's thought is mostly subconscious. . . . The woman seldom knows her own thought . . . and responds far more quickly than the man to a sudden idea (Education, pp. 441-42).

Reacting to William James as early as 1882, Adams said he did not believe in free will, and that human acts were the result of the universe's movements (Selected Letters, p. 86). Does this mean, as Saveth has charged, that Adams had "slight respect for women's mind," or is it that his modern scientifically-based determinism reinforced the archetypes? Yet he was a keen analyst of women's roles in society. Four years before his first novel, he delivered a lecture on the "Primitive Rights of Women" in which he demonstrated a great knowledge of women's roles through the ages and in tribal communities of Europe, North America, and Asia. Aware as he was of such studies as Bachofen's on mother right, Adams's lecture proved that women, especially wives, were not just property like slaves but had claims men could not disregard. When rights are systematically denied, women are degraded. Thus Adams portrayed the battle of the sexes, so well pictured in his novels, the ancient battle deep in mythology and a modern realist phenomenon of the sexual politics of his day.


45 Henry Adams, Historical Essays (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890); hereafter referred to in the text as "Primitive Rights."
Women still made choices, then, and had responsibility within a fated universe.

The chief limitations of Adams's thinking on women were first, that he was probably ambivalent about their intellects, and second, that he did not sufficiently account for economic factors in their oppression. What he really despised, however, was male irrationality disguised as rationality, or male blind instinct. Like many feminists, he did not wish women in their desire to achieve equality to simply imitate male error and become corrupt, as Madeleine almost does in *Democracy*. And although he read and was impressed by Marx and Engels, he disagreed radically with their conclusions. He knew that marriage as an institution had its origins in property, but he did not think the link was harmful. Marriage, he thought, was a contract. His lecture on "Primitive Rights" was meant to be a rebuttal in 1873 to a tract which said that married women were slaves and women's subjection was economic. Nor did he see the connection between suffrage and the dignity of women. But Adams never argued that woman's oppression arose because of some psychological necessity. And he understood the basis of their suppression by male-dominated religious and scientific-technological institutions. More than that, he anticipated Jung and Neumann by graphically showing that male and female principles had to be balanced for individual and social

---

health, though he despaired that in his culture this could be achieved.

Adams's modern education included knowledge of the new woman in society and fiction. The emancipated woman of his age is that woman who has undertaken an archetypal quest out of darkness into light and knowledge. Adams's fictional women reflect modern women of the post-war decades with their increased freedom and education. If Adams retained any hope at all for the future, it was in the new woman who was sure to break off as an emancipated social class. Characteristically, he phrased his hope as paradox or riddle: "What will the woman turn out to be? Read me that riddle aright, and art will conform to the answer... She is only beginning her career." Adams was somewhat outside literary circles by comparison with Henry James, but Adams was certainly aware of the new fictional realism involving women characters. His literary tastes were formed at Harvard during the 1850's and have been said to be conservative, but they were tempered by his continual reading. He reviewed Howells's first novel, Their Wedding Journey and argued that Howells must have had female assistance for the novel because of "a delicacy of touch which does not belong to a man." This was a good insight into Howells's androgynous nature. Yet Adams was not at first so perceptive


about another androgynous author. He faulted James for knowing little about women and nothing about their instinctual life.

Writing in 1881 after a visit from James, Adams said:

I frankly own that I broke down on The Portrait of a Lady, but some of my friends . . . admire it warmly, and find it deeply interesting. I hope I may be of that opinion (Letters, I, 333).

Perhaps The Portrait achieves less androgyny than some critics think. Adams said, "James knows almost nothing of women but the mere outside; he never had a wife" (Letters, I, 354). But many years later he did acknowledge James's literary contributions and was no doubt taking into account James's portrayals of women:

Henry James had not yet [in 1881] taught the world to read a volume for the pleasure of seeing the lights of his burning-glass turned on alternate sides of the same figure (Education, p. 163).

Adams returned several times to the absence of sex as force in the literature of his day, tying this specifically to society's ignoring women. Was there, he asked,

any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done; but he could think only of Walt Whitman; Bret Harte, as far as the magazines would let him venture; and one or two painters for flesh-tones. All the rest had used sex for sentiment, never for force. . . . American art, like the American language and American education, was as far as possible sexless. Society regarded this victory over sex as its greatest triumph (Education, p. 385).

Adams knew it was not a victory for women, literature, and life, but defeat.

The modern education of Henry Adams that informed his realism, mythology, and naturalism is perhaps best revealed in his awareness of how creativity works. He said about a biography (in
1882) he was writing what he might have said about his novels—that the work of creativity is like the birth process which inevitably is death:

Do you know a book to me always seems a part of myself, a kind of intellectual brat or segment, and I never bring one into the world without a sense of shame. They are naked, helpless, and beggarly, yet the poor wretches must live forever and curse their father for their silent tomb (Letters, I, 341)

After Esther's publication, its disappointing reception by the public, and Marian's death, he again revealed his life-oriented creativity as paradoxically death-filled—he said of this book he called his favorite, "let it die!" (Letters, I, 377)

Madeleine Lee and the Sexual Politics of Democracy

In Democracy: An American Novel the three strains of realism, mythology, and naturalism come together to make a unified mythic-realist novel. From the title and the beginning, Adams concentrates on the realistic, contemporary setting of post-Civil War Washington, D. C. His main character is Madeleine Lee, a new American woman, intelligent, well-read, economically independent; a beautiful woman of thirty who five years previous to the novel's opening lost her husband and baby. She is an urban woman who moves from New York City to Washington in order to discover for herself the roots of political power in the democratic system. Democracy is a political realist novel of the age, a full and authentic report with particulars of time and place, and a dissection of the American government and an analysis of Madeleine's
character. Though a realist novel, the organizing principle of Democracy is mythological, and the characters assume archetypal proportions. Madeleine Lee is an archetypal woman, the heroine of the eternal return in quest of feminine power and knowledge.

Madeleine's pilgrimage begins in ignorance during the winter of the year. The dominant mode of winter and irony is thus established from the start. Mrs. Lightfoot Lee's departure from New York for Washington is the beginning of the heroine's adventures. Her name, or that of her dead husband, derives from the Virginia Lees who were real people in historical time but who, by the 1870's, had assumed larger than life proportions. Henry Adams, by recalling to us the American Revolution, the Southern aristocracy, and the Civil War, recreates our mythic as well as our historical past. Our mythic and historical origins are emphasized again by Madeleine's other family connections. Her dead father was a famous clergyman. Her cousin, John Carrington, the novel's main male character, is an ex-southern cavalry officer who is related to General Washington. Madeleine and her sister Sybil are orphans. Thus the forces of family and religion are already defeated when the novel opens. Madeleine's quest from the beginning has connotations of a lost cause and lost values. Madeleine is "eating her heart out" because she can find "no object worth a sacrifice" (p. 5). Her decision to move to the Potomac area

is from ennui, but also from rebellion. Like the Fijian women, Madeleine is threatened with degradation by the patriarchy; not the patriarchy of the warrior class, however, but that of a rising political class without a code of honor and, ironically, democracy's representative. She yearns for heroic men, but no man stands tall enough: "'you grow six inches high, and then you stop. Why will not somebody grow to be a tree and cast a shadow?'" (p. 8) The trees are phallic, and present-day men are clearly inadequate, for they promise sex and safety but cannot deliver. Here we see Madeleine chiefly as passive, as an earth mother with beneficial life qualities. But people sense an ambivalence in her: "'What does the woman want? . . . Does she think herself made for a throne? Why does she not lecture for women's rights?'" The center of this first chapter, which anticipates the entire novel, follows, and we see that Madeleine is good, but Adams begins to reveal her negative qualities, symbolized by her desire to connect herself with her society's destructive forces:

Here then, was the explanation of her restlessness, discontent, ambition. . . . It was the feeling of a passenger on an ocean steamer whose mind will not give him rest until he has been in the engine-room and talked with the engineer. She wanted to see with her own eyes the action of primary forces; to touch with her own hand the massive machinery of society; to measure with her own mind the capacity of the motive power. She was bent on getting to the heart of the great American mystery of democracy and government (p. 9).

In the above passage, she is a passenger on a ship, and ships can be protective female vessels of salvation, but they are also tombs. Always elemental, the ocean is fundamental to the cyclical
process which is "the alternation of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death." An ocean is experienced archetypally not just as birth force, but as a devourer who takes her children back into herself. The dominant imagery surrounding the female vessel on the ocean is male, mechanical, hostile, and destructive, "the massive machinery of state." This is a symbolic framework, but it is a realistic sexual politic, too. Kate Millett has pointed out that in democracies, patriarchal politics deny females public power, while an aristocracy, "with its emphasis upon the magic dynastic properties of blood, may at times permit women to hold power." As Adams suggests, the aristocratic Madeleine Lee is capable of wielding power; in a democracy, however, it would be deadly to do so. What is so ironic is that Madeleine must acquire knowledge; she must move from ignorance into consciousness, and her quest is dangerous but absolutely necessary. She will come to know herself and the patriarchy at their worst. Like James's Christina Light, Madeleine is emancipated into a destructive society. The mythos of winter and irony is of unidealized experience.

Now Adams stresses Madeleine's negative phase—she is a power-hungry woman: What she wanted was POWER." Adams capitalizes


the word. But her desire is based on her desolation:

However strongly she might deny it, the passion for exercising power, for its own sake, might dazzle and mislead a woman who had exhausted all the ordinary human resources (p. 10).

Adams is deeply sympathetic to her as a victim, but he considers her also to be an executioner. Adams means us to realize that in her world she cannot possibly find happiness in politics, nor can she fall back on traditional women's roles, for husband and child have been taken from her. Like James and Chopin, Adams shows a woman posed between two impossible alternatives. To mediate between them is the author's as well as the woman's problem. We see that the ambiguity of Adams's view toward women is reinforced by her social position and by the duality within the archetype which is life-searching but death-dealing.

Irony as ambiguity and double vision functions mythically from the novel's beginning, too, in Madeleine's December quest, and it operates both verbally and dramatically. Mrs. Lee is witty and ironic. The well-travelled, restless widows says, "'America produces petroleum and pigs; I have seen both on the steamers..." (p. 6). Alluding to Gulliver's Travels, she calls American men Brobdingnagians (another phallic put-down). And the narrator is ironic about her. Irving Howe has characterized irony in

---

53 Gertrude Himmelfarb, "Henry Adams' Skeptic Faith in Democracy," Commentary, XIV (December, 1952), identified the same instinct for ambiguity and irony in James and Adams (p. 599).
a political novel as withdrawal from the subject. But while there is a distance at times between the narrative voice here and the characters and action, the reader is always directed to Adams's view, which is the same blend of condescension and admiration, of fear and love we saw in his letters to Marian. Adams attempted an ironic withdrawal from the subject, himself, in The Education, but involvement is everywhere apparent. In Democracy the narrator easily slides into the role of sage or archetypal wise man, so that the ironic archetypal structure reinforces the realism:

Mrs. Lee certainly knew very little. She had read voraciously and promiscuously... Ruskin and Taine had danced merrily through her mind with Darwin and Stuart Mill... She was perhaps the only woman in New York who knew something of American history. Certainly she could not have repeated the list of Presidents in their order, but... she was aware that the President, the Speaker, and the Chief Justic were important personages... (pp. 8-9).

While the avuncular narrator Adams dissects Mrs. Lee, he also cares about her, and his tone remains ironic. When he turns to the subject of democracy, however, he becomes militantly satirical: democracy "rightly understood, is the government of the people, by the people, for the benefit of Senators" (p. 23). The rising class, women, and their spokesman, the narrator, are satirical at the expense of the risen class. This is the batrachomyomachia, the American mock-epic as Edwin Cady has defined it.  


Neil Schmitz, who traced the American political novel tradition beginning with James Fenimore Cooper's *Home as Found* (1838), stated that authors have treated political life as a comic and vulgar spectacle, but that this changes in *Democracy* to a feeling of betrayal of the American dream/myth and to a feeling of deep moral revulsion. Betrayal is also a primary theme in the quest myth.

Just as the opening chapter reveals a pattern of realism, mythology, and naturalism (the naturalism is particularly evident in the section on the determinist ocean), so the next chapter shows a recurrence and deepening of the pattern. Mrs. Lee's quest within the eternal return is to penetrate the "mystery" at the heart of democracy. The call to adventure draws our heroine toward events she does not fully understand. She is an outsider who undertakes a dangerous voyage into alien lands. When she crosses the first threshold she begins the second phase of her adventure—significantly for realism, this is into a rented Washington, D.C. house, emphasizing the disrupted condition of a commercialized, urbanized, transient America. As an exotic outsider in her rented house, Madeleine is surrounded by Syrian and Persian carpets, woven gold from Japan and Teheran, "a strange medley" of paintings, fans, porcelain, a "domestic altar piece," and a "mystical Corot landscape" (p. 12). The Corot painting serves as a kind of talisman, as Madeleine has carried it with her in her world wanderings.

---

Adams next presents Madeleine's sister, Sybil Ross. Madeleine's role as beautiful and mature earth mother is enhanced by contrast with that of the twenty-four-year old Sybil, a Kore or daughter figure dependent on the surrogate mother. Sybil's growth from an innocent girl to a mature, knowledgable woman is a subplot. She, too, is very attractive, the natural American girl with moral spontaneity so admired in her times. Sybil is a believer and churchgoer, unlike Madeleine who has not entered a church for years—"it gave her un-Christian feelings" (p. 14).

One can interpret this in several ways. As a girl, the innocent Sybil still fits into the social structure and is less alienated than the older woman, less renunciatory, and, by extension, less threatening. But this is a difference only in degree. Sybil has less power than Madeleine, but when the time comes she will use it. Now as mother/daughter they form a fragmented family of two.

The whole novel is filled with foreshortened families or with people who are alone. I think this is a direct reflection of the recent war and an increasingly fragmented America, which Adams viewed as socially, politically, familially, and morally destructive.

The novel's men are all loners. John Carrington is from a shattered family. Like another southerner, Basil Ransom in The Bostonians, Carrington after the war goes north as a lawyer into the conquerors' land, leaving behind a devastated land, and mother and sisters whom he helps support. He loathes the victors and
becomes a lonely, cynical, alienated man. Adams carefully develops Carrington's character, for he is important in the heroine's adventure:

He had something of the dignity of the old Virginia school, and twenty years of constant responsibility and deferred hope had added a touch of care that bordered closely on sadness . . . Mrs. Lee trusted him by instinct. 'He is a type!' said she; 'he is my idea of George Washington at thirty!' (p. 17).

Adams's enhancement of Carrington by linking him with the hero of democracy's golden age, Washington, makes Carrington worthy of Mrs. Lee's consideration. He serves another function; he unwittingly introduces Madeleine to her most dangerous adversary, another lone figure of dim origins. The Honorable Silas P. Ratcliffe is a U. S. Senator from Peonia, Illinois and a devil who personifies the worm of evil at the core of present democracy and is, then, a direct challenge to Carrington's goodness which is connected to the past. Both are rootless and live in rented rooms, heightening one's feeling of loss of community.

The villain Ratcliffe is a Jacksonian demagogue (a natural enemy to the Adamses), a Yankee, with "Cold eyes . . . steel grey, rather small, not unpleasant in good-humor, diabolic in a passion . . ." (p. 19). He is "Lucifer." As Northrop Frye argues, when ironic literature moves toward myth, it is suggestive of the demonic. Ratcliffe is demonic in his social role as Senator and

---

57 Hume, Runaway Star suggests an indebtedness of James's Bostonians to Democracy (p. 37).

58 Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 140
in his mythic role as potential seducer of Madeleine. When he delivers an oration on the Senate floor (in Chapter Two), Madeleine is fascinated by the "Prairie Giant." To her he "was the high-priest of American politics; he was charged with the meaning of the mysteries, the clue of political hieroglyphics." As a political "priest," Ratcliffe is the corrupt inheritor of power from the good priests, one of whom was Madeleine's minister father. The Senator and Presidential hopeful is twenty years Madeleine's senior and seems to the lonely woman to promise fatherly protection. Physically he is imposing. But we are reminded quickly of Madeleine's dual nature, for Adams now introduces modern experimental science as he returns to her role as destroyer: "She wanted to understand this man, to turn him inside out; to experiment on him and use him as young physiologists use frog and kittens" (p. 26). The narrator picks up military and war images to close the scene of their first meeting, the initial stage of their battle of the sexes, and the battle of the heroine with the forces of evil. They are "two combatants. . . . Madeleine Lee had fully met her match in Mr. Silas P. Ratcliffe" (p. 27).

The scene shifts to Madeleine's parlor, in a sense a fitting female cave symbol, where she presides at fashionable and exclusive Sunday salons for a cosmopolitan set. Sybil and Carring-ton are there; also the Bulgarian minister, Baron Jacobi, a sage archetype and old warrior; Nathan Gore, a journalist in government
service; a Russian and an Italian count; Lord Skye of the British
embassy; a Connecticut congressman; the Schneidekoupons, a rich
brother and sister from New York; and the American girl personi­
fied, Victoria Dare. The use of symbolism deserves a closer look
now, for it becomes a central mythic construction in the novel.
Symbol is sign as in Sybil’s name—in Madeleine’s parlor Sybil, the
innocent sorceress, sings and plays "simple airs" (p. 37).
Victoria Dare’s name is symbol as image; like Daisy Miller she is
virginal and innocent, daring and unconventional, but unlike
Daisy, Victoria is victorious when she maneuvers a British lord
into marriage. Schneidekoupon has vague, unpleasant connotations
of anti-semitism and coupon clipping (Adams never portrayed a poor
Jew). Symbolically men and women are animals, too. Victoria is
a "demure yellow cat" (p. 152). If men are cats this signals
their androgynous and sympathetic natures—Jacobi has "eyes like a
cat" (p. 182), and Carrington is called a cat (p. 134). Rat­
cliffe, on the other hand, connotes the enemy of cats and is
hateful animal life. Symbol used as image assumes a distinctive
associative cluster and merges into symbol as archetype. Made­
leline is amused to lead Ratcliffe about like "a tame bear" (p. 57),
but bears and rats can be dangerous:

Mrs. Lee’s tacit assumption of superior refinement irritated
him, and sometimes made him show his teeth like a bull-dog, at
the cost of receiving from Mrs. Lee a quick stroke in retal­i­
ation such as a well-bred tortoise shell cat administers
... but drawing blood (p. 68).

Ratcliffe is a bull-dog, ugly, tenacious, showing his teeth.
Madeleine is a lady of the beasts who tries to tame animals like
Ratcliffe. His teeth show how dangerous he is and are a sign of deadly qualities. When Adams uses teeth imagery for Madeleine— "People who envied her smile said she cultivated a sense of humor in order to show her teeth" (p. 12)—he is returning to her dual-natured destructiveness. Madeleine is not as deadly, say, as Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove; she is a "cat" to Kate's "Panther." But she is a woman to watch out for.

To return to Madeleine's parlor—it is a court of love and a battlefield for her suitors, Ratcliffe and Carrington. It also provides a setting for a dialectic on democracy. Here the novel operates on the grounds of realism. Madeleine asks what is a key question for her, "Is a respectable government impossible in a democracy?" (p. 49) Democracy must encompass morality as well as power. Ratcliffe hedges his response and says the government is only as honest as the people. He really operates by party allegiance which is the same as self-interest. Gore says that to expect Ratcliffe to be a crusader is unfair. But Carrington replies that on the other hand one should not obstruct justice or crusades. Gore then defends the democratic experiment on evolutionary and idealistic grounds:

I believe in democracy. I accept it. I will faithfully serve and defend it... because it appears to me the inevitable consequence of what has gone before. Democracy asserts the fact that the masses are now raised to higher intelligence than formerly (p. 53).

Gore's argument appears to close the debate and is often cited as Adams's view. But the dialectic should be placed within the larger framework, and it expands to encompass the new science and Madeleine's dissenting view. Gore asks Madeleine to visit the near-by observatory to view the universe. She shudders: "'I cannot get to the height of your philosophy. . . . You are wandering among the infinities, and I am finite'" (p. 54). Madeleine is an earth mother who rejects Gore's lofty abstractions, and her morality is earth-bound and practical. This is perhaps one reason she is drawn to Ratcliffe's practical approach. She has not yet seen that his earthiness is of the gutter; but her initiation into the mysteries of democracy is well underway. Chapter Five again blends realism and mythology. Ratcliffe's lust for power is stressed: "He loved power, and he meant to be President" (p. 58). Then we see the outgoing president and his wife greeting the public:

two seemingly mechanical figures, which might be wood or wax, for any sign they showed of life. . . . their faces stripped of every sign of intelligence. . . . with the mechanical action of toy dolls (p. 59).

Furthermore, the deadly dull imitation of monarchial custom mocks Americans' supposed love of equality. Madeleine stands back and watches in disgust and horror "the slowly eddying dance of Democracy" (p. 61): "'What puts it into his foolish head to cease being a citizen and to ape royalty?'" she asks Ratcliffe of the President (p. 63). The mechanical atmosphere is persistent through the novel, and Ratcliffe is the quintessential machine
It is here that Carrington's role becomes more central. Driven chiefly by his subdued passion for Madeleine, he is too proud, poor, and modest to act the declared lover, but he can counter-attack Ratcliffe. Adams shows elemental human nature and the natural world within determinism as he lets Ratcliffe reveal himself to Carrington and Madeleine on the subject of Darwinian evolution. Ratcliffe speaks slightly of the theory that man is connected with monkeys. Such books as Darwin's disgrace our civilization, he says, and degrade and stultify our divine natures. Ratcliffe calls Jacobi a "monkey-faced foreigner" (p. 75). Carrington in the debate on democracy has goaded his rival into such outrageous remarks to reveal the Senator as artificial, presumptuous, ignorant, and provincial. Though Madeleine does not yet see through Ratcliffe, she defends Darwinian theory because she is basically wiser about our connections with the natural world.

Adams directly describes the natural world in Chapter Six. It is an unseasonably warm February: "In Virginia there comes often at this season a deceptive gleam of summer, slipping in between heavy storm clouds and sleet and snow. . ." (p. 76). Adams evokes a sensuous, glowing, false spring and, by extension, false hope. So that the reader knows it is still winter, Adams sardonically ushers in the new congressional year:

This is the moment when the two whitened sepulchres at either end of the Avenue reek with the thick atmosphere of bargain and sale. The old is going; the new is coming. Wealth, office, power are at auction (p. 77).
This new year brings little joy or hope. And with such a passage before us, I think it should be noted that those who read the novel as an expression of mystical faith in democracy do not read it correctly. Gore's argument is overwhelmed. The whited sepulchres at either end of Pennsylvania Avenue are biblical images of human hypocrisy; the Capitol and White House are really unclean ("reek," "thick atmosphere"). The phrase "whited sepulchres" sounds a death knell (one is reminded of Bartley Hubbard's death in Whited Sepulchre, Arizona, in Howells's A Modern Instance). By the novel's end Washington, D.C. is the tomb of democracy.

Madeleine and a party of friends depart from Washington in order to cross the Potomac to Mount Vernon, Virginia. The journey takes Madeleine across water from the present into the past. This movement is central to the novel's mythic structure as well as to its realism and naturalism. On one side of the Potomac is the deadly city of corrupt political intrigue. The river forms a natural and mythic boundary between that and what remains of goodness in America. The passage is from the profane into the sacred world, from the present into the past and America's golden age. It is, furthermore, a retreat from the urban to the rural. A little steamer carries the party from one shore to the other, pounding the muddy waters of the Potomac and sending up its small column of smoke as though it were a newly invented incense-burner approaching the temple of the national deity (p. 80).

Adams is gentler with his irony here, and yet too much a realist to give us hero-worship straight. Still, he admires what
Virginia represents. The brave little steamer keeps precariously afloat on this dangerous voyage. Ratcliffe, who is the last one on board, and his followers could easily sink her: "'If they had known where I was going . . . you would have seen the boat swamped with office-seekers. Illinois alone would have brought you to your watery grave.'" They are, of course, already sinking the ship of state. "'What a noble river!'" says Lord Dunbeg, a visiting Englishman (p. 81) Ratcliffe denigrates the river just as he does virtue.

When the party lands on the Alexandria side, they go from the noble river to the noble house of Washington. Our great dead father was a Virginia country squire, a real man in living memory but also of mythic proportions. Adams injects a kind of southern regionalism or local color, and the Mount Vernon episode is made to embody the myth of the golden age. A southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, has suggested that the northerners James and Adams turned to the south in search of lost values and traditions. 60 The Washington-Adams-Jefferson age was to Adams the last great age of America. Adams describes the house with its small bedrooms, narrow halls, and fireplaces with real fires still burning. It is a vital reminder of a time when greatness lay in simplicity. Through Gore, Adams contrasts the home with the present horrible

---

possibility of a monument constructed "of white marble with Gothic pepper-pots, and gilded ... inside on machine-molded stucco!" (p. 85) This is a prophetic picture of the present Washington monument.

At this point Adams takes up the question of the old culture Washington's beloved home represents. If Mount Vernon lies in the Garden of Eden, a "'quaint garden'" says Mrs. Lee (p. 88), Adams and we must face the fact that the old culture and Washington were slave-holders. Mrs. Lee asks Carrington if he regrets the destruction of the old social arrangement, and he replies that one must regret what produced such great men having passed. She then asks if he would bring back the old society if he could. His reply is:

'What for? It could not hold itself up. General Washington himself could not save it. Before he died he had lost his hold on Virginia, and his power was gone' (pp. 86-87).

Here and in the later section about Arlington Cemetery, Carrington will suggest slavery had to go. But as critics have pointed out about Huckleberry Finn, it is as if the most idyllic society Mark Twain could imagine was a slave-holding one on the Mississippi—or Adams on the Potomac. One might say that Adams's golden age was an America represented by Washington and slower, more human rhythms, with honesty and moral purpose, but still an Eden with a core of rottenness in the fruit. Adams, however, did not believe in a Rousseauan innocence. And the archetypal mythic structure always recognizes the dual existence of evil and good.
The narrator's attention now shifts to Washington himself. Another debate and dialectic, this one surrounding the nature of democracy's founder, takes place. Washington is presented comically by Virginia Dare as an awkward, dull, illiterate, brutal country farmer. Gore presents him, as one would expect, highly idealized, like a Roman god in contrast to present-day men who can be measured by twelve-inch carpenter's rulers. Carrington next emphasizes Washington's honesty, simplicity, and integrity. At this point Madeleine brings us back to the unpleasant present and "that dreadful Capitol and its office-seekers only ten miles off" (p. 88). This observation leads into Ratcliffe's view of Washington—he not only refuses to deify the man, but does not much respect him. Pragmatically, he insists today's hurly-burly requires a different kind of man, and that if Washington were president now he would learn new ways or lose the next election.

The party returns to the steamer, leaving behind "the sunny hillside, and the peaceful house above," fading away in the "pure air" (p. 96). With them on the boat is the widow Mrs. Baker, a client of Carrington's. She has been on an outing with her child to Mount Vernon, and she is introduced into the plot to undercut, through Madeleine, Ratcliffe's suit, but also later to help show Madeleine to herself. The dialectic now moves toward internalization, a direction necessary to Madeleine's developing consciousness. She wonders if she is becoming tainted. Is Ratcliffe right in accepting the good with the bad, or "is it better to be a child and to cry for the moon and stars?" Madeleine is linked with the
female woman in contrast to the male polluted Capitol—she returns to the denser fumes of the city, where imagery becomes solar as besieging office-seekers look upon the Capitol as "the grandest government the sun ever shone upon." Adams continues his observations on the patriarchy—Ratcliffe is "prophet" to "Clan Ratcliffe" (p. 99), a degenerate clan and chief, not a genuine tribal culture, for Ratcliffe has "sold himself to the devil, coined his heart's blood..." (p. 101). The system breeds hypocrisy, and Ratcliffe next attends church to engage in undisturbed reflection on how to exploit the new president and secure his own power. In Washington the new chief executive arrives, "Old Granite," "The Stone-Cutter of the Wabash" (p. 108), a brilliant composite portrait probably of Grant and Hayes. Democracy's rhythms take on Dionysian overtones: "The dance of democracy round the President now began again with wilder energy" (p. 114). Ratcliffe's step quickens in this orgy of power. Appealing to Mrs. Lee's "feminine sense of self-sacrifice," Ratcliffe temporarily succeeds in implicating her in his political decisions. Her danger increases as he intensifies his marriage suit:

Ratcliffe, too, had a curious instinct for human weakness. No magnetic needle was ever truer than his finger when he touched the vulnerable spot in an opponent's mind. Mrs. Lee was not to be reached by an appeal to religious sentiment, to ambition, or to affection... But she was a woman to the very last drop of her blood. She could not be induced to love Ratcliffe, but she might be deluded into sacrificing herself for him... She had a woman's natural tendency toward asceticism, self-extinction... (pp. 119-20).

Psychologically and biologically, Madeleine is true to the arche-
type—she embodies a sacrificial instinct with the ancient blood mysteries: "She was a woman to the very last drop of her blood."

Adams now bitterly denounces America by comparing it invidiously with Rome. In America the wicked are the majority and serve the devil. A "shoreless ocean" surrounds American humanity floating on a rotten plank. An American Adam invokes a moral exemplum: the servants of the people "are not better than wolves in sheep's clothing, or asses in lion's skins," and repentance is a long way off (p. 122).

The inauguration of the "new dynasty" (p. 128) is, fittingly for American custom and the novel's cycle, on a cold, windy March day. March quagmires find Mrs. Lee "deep in the mire of politics." She can see "how the great machine floundered about, bespattering with mud even her pure garments" (p. 130). She still hopes that underneath the scum floating on the surface of politics, "there was a sort of healthy ocean current of honest purpose, which swept the scum before it, and kept the mass pure" (p. 131). In this image of the ocean, the desire by the narrator and Madeleine for monism is apparent. But Mrs. Lee drifts into increasingly dangerous waters: "I have got so far as to lose the distinction between right and wrong. Isn't that the first step in politics?" (p. 137) Washington intrigue thickens as the shady Mrs. Baker comes to call. She fills Mrs. Lee's ears with Capitol gossip. The Bakers, former lobbyists and steamship company agents, were involved specifically in buying Ratcliffe's committee vote for $100,000, but Mrs. Baker only hints now at wrong-doing. Madeleine
is repelled by Mrs. Baker who represents corruption sexually, politically, and commercially, but Mrs. Lee still wishes to believe in the system and Ratcliffe.

As the novel's movement ebbs and flows, Adams takes us again into the mythic-realist past. Now it is Madeleine's sister Sybil, in Chapter Nine, who is at the plot's center. Sybil rides with Carrington into the Virginia countryside on a lovely March morning. Again they cross the noble river. Sybil is journeying toward her maturity and, with Carrington's help, toward saving Madeleine. But this is also a retreat into the most recent past of the Civil War. It is not idyllic, for it represents the war that tore to shreds the fabric of American society, the war from which none of the people in the novel have recovered. The quietness of Arlington provides Sybil with the opportunity to assess her sister. She thinks:

Madeleine dissected her own feelings and was always wondering whether they were real or not; she had a habit of taking off her mental clothing, as she might take off a dress, and looking at it as though it belonged to someone else, and as though sensations were manufactured like clothes.

At this point Madeleine's attempt to know herself is still thwarted—she is too mechanical ("Manufactured"). Sybil by contrast continues to respond elementally and naturally:

This seems to be one of the easier ways of deadening sorrow, as though the mind could teach itself to lop off its feeling. Sybil particularly disliked this self-inspection. . . . she did not understand it . . . her mind was all feeling, and amputation was death (p. 144).

In this tightly structured narrative, "amputation" of feeling leads directly to Sybil's and Carrington's arrival at Arlington Cemetery,
and a description of the graveyard:

the long white ranks of headstones, stretching up and down the
hillsides by the thousands, in order of battle; as though Cad­
mus had reversed his myth, and had sown living men, to come up
dragon's teeth. . . . This was war—wounds, disease, death
(p. 145).

Adams's use of the Cadmus myth is dramatic and crucial and merges
instantly with the reality of war. The Cadmus story is a patriar­
chial myth in which the influence of women is still strong though
suppressed. Cadmus followed a cow with the full moon on each
flank (obvious female symbolism), and founded Thebes where she sank
down from weakness. When he sent his men to fetch water, a ser­
pent killed most of them. For crushing the serpent's head in re­
taliation, Cadmus was ordered by Athene to sow the serpent's teeth
as sacrifice. He did so in the soil, and armed sparti or sown men
sprang up, clashed weapons and fought until only five survived.
In an insightful analysis, McLuhan said that the Cadmus myth cap­
sulates a prolonged process. The alphabet, the new writing tech­
nology, passes into the power of the military class, which leads
to the fall of city states, to the rise of empires and military
bureaucracies. Adams brilliantly has reversed the myth—living
men are sowed into the dead at Arlington. The old priest class
(Madeleine's father) has lost its power, and the old warriors have,
too (Carrington's "rebel isolation," p. 145). Adams as journalist,
editor, novelist, historian, and educated man, knew the mass print

61 Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin
85-86.
technology and knew his mythology. The process of technology is united with its content. Those thousands of graves in battle order were made by modern warfare, warfare made possible by mass, centralized transmission of information by the telegraph—Sybil thinks that "there is nothing more war-like than a nursery of telegraph poles!" (p. 148). Telegraph poles grow warriors for death. This is a stunning insight into nineteenth century technology.

Sybil now raises the problem of national loyalty. Ratcliffe has already accused Carrington of being a traitor, and Sybil, not profoundly but with sympathy, finds the idea of Carrington as a killer very hard to grasp. Sybil and Carrington dismount and stand by General Lee's old house; they look "across the superb river to the raw and incoherent ugliness of the city. . . ." A mist lies beneath them, formed by the beautiful Virginia countryside, and what do they see through the mist? The Capitol, with its "crude 'thus saith the law' stamped on the white dome and fortress-like walls. . . ." (p. 146). Sybil is a feeling person and has been less influenced by linear technology—the narrator has made clear that she seldom reads books and prefers music, horseback riding and other sensuous pleasures, while her sister reads all the time. As we know, the lineal mode weakens certain senses, like sound and feeling, and intensifies the visual. Madeleine has taken refuge in books and amputated her feelings, though, of course, sorrow is the root cause of her desire to stifle her emotions. Adams connects the man-made war to the alphabetic lineal
"law" stamped on the fortress Capitol. The codified law is an integral part of writing technology, mocking Adams then as it does us now.

Adams contrasts Lee's house to the Capitol, and Carrington says Lee is the man "we thought . . . to be our Washington!" (p. 147). Sybil is fascinated by Carrington's war reminiscences, just as Adams's sister Louisa once found battlefields intriguing. It is at Arlington that Sybil confides that her sister is involved with the Senator. Sybil, who hates Ratcliffe, enters into a conspiracy with Carrington and plans a battle strategy—"Alliance offensive and defensive . . . war to the knife on Ratcliffe," to save Madeleine from Ratcliffe (pp. 151-52).

Back in Washington the focus is again on Madeleine. Ratcliffe senses his suit is in danger, but he mistakenly thinks it is only Carrington he need worry about and so obtains a government job which will take the Virginian out of the country for six months. Ratcliffe is certain that in that interval he can secure Mrs. Lee. Because Ratcliffe's anima is practically dead, he cannot sense that Sybil is equally unsympathetic and as dangerous as Carrington. Sybil now begins to give Carrington advice on how to win her sister.

Madeleine senses Carrington's growing love and realizes that long ago she could have loved him:

suddenly another thought flashed upon her, and she threw her hand up before her face as though someone had struck her a blow. Carrington had reopened the old wound (p. 157).

This arresting gesture of warding off a blow tells us that feeling
is still alive in Mrs. Lee, but that she will deny it. The flash is the light of sexual passion which has brought her only misery.

Love is not joy nor life, but only a delusion like the false Washington spring: "some new leaf or flower" attempting to push "its soft head up against the dead leaves that have sheltered it" (p. 165). As Carrington describes love to Sybil, it is a steady physical pain, an ache about the heart . . . a long strain . . . like toothache or rheumatism . . . exhausting by its steady drawing on the strength. It is a disease to be borne with patience . . . (p. 166).

Sybil explains in Chapter Ten that Madeleine fears love. The husband she loved died after only a day's illness, and a week later her little child suffered horribly from diptheria—Madeleine was "wild with despair because she could not relieve it." She held up under her husband's death but after the child's, was shattered, "quite insane," violent and wished to kill herself, and "raved about religion and resignation and God" (p. 168). Madeleine's dual archetypal nature is made explicit. Her love for husband and child were good. But then, like Louisa Adams, she is made sport of by cruel providence. Her own negative qualities surface—Sybil warns Carrington that her sister is really very domineering and has always had her way. Referring to both Ratcliffe and Carrington, Sybil says that if either married Madeleine he "would be unhappy in a week . . ." (p. 170). Madeleine bluntly rejects Carrington's offer of love, her refusal emphasizing her coldness:

You do not know how much misery I am saving you. I have no heart to give. You want to young, fresh life . . . . I have done my best to persuade myself that someday I might begin life again . . . but it is no use . . . . If you married me,
you would destroy yourself. You would wake up someday, and find the universe dust and ashes (p. 173).

Only "'Graves, and a broken life!'" can come from marriage.

Ironically, she insists on her own responsibility in a determinist world. She discards Carrington's warning about Ratcliffe, saying that she is architect of her fate: "'If I fall victim I shall deserve my fate, and certainly I shall have no cause to complain. . ." (p. 177). One is reminded of Isabel Archer, another new American woman who made a similar mistake about her freedom of choice.

Sybil (who in some ways duplicates Henrietta Stackpole's role) agrees to keep a letter from Carrington to use in the event it appears Madeleine might accept Ratcliffe.

April comes, and with it the plot's climax in Chapter Eleven. The mythic circle is about to close. Adams describes in documentary style the social excitement surrounding the visit of European royalty to Washington. He waxes satirical at the fortune spent by the lions and asses of republican America, led by "Old Granite," to ape and gape at royalty. Madeleine considers the festivities a "godsend" to divert Sybil, whom she thinks is pining for Carrington, and decides to put herself out of reach by marrying Ratcliffe. Adams returns to the language of "fairy stories and fables" to mock society, at the same time that he believes in the women's ritual in preparation for the big evening (p. 191). Adams uses classical mythological allusions to show his admiration of Madeleine and Sybil, but there are elements of the batrachomyomachia, a mocking of the process which gives the whole
scene a doubleness. The sisters' gowns are "a triumph of Mr. Worth's art." Sybil's dress, by "imperious order," is meant to reflect dawn in June, birds twittering, dewy nature, "maidenhead in her awakening innocence." (p. 192). Ironically, it is an exact replica of one Mr. Worth made for a client in Dahomey, Africa. When Sybil as "the Deity of Dawn" stands ready at last in all her young and happy beauty, the women servants offer "their share of incense at the shrine," and are "allowed a glimpse of divinity." She is "Hebe Anadyomene, rising from the foam of soft crepisse," fresh and virginial, "Aphrodite rising from the Sea in a painting by Apelles at Caesar's Temple" (p. 193). Madeleine is appropriately dressed in silver-grey satin and Venetian lace, "Nocturne in silver-grey!" (p. 195). She is Selena, the moon goddess, to Sybil's young Venus, her shaded imagery purposefully darker than Sybil's light. This is all rather pleasant irony, but Adams's satire again becomes militant at the expense of society and its dupes. His description of the ball's setting is devastating. At one end of the ballroom is a dais for the royal visitors, at the other a dais for the republic's president and his lady. The two heads of state are enthroned at opposite ends of an enormous ballroom, and over each is a red velvet canopy, one bearing the lion and unicorn or royal standard, the other the eagle and stars and stripes. The two couples detest each other; the visiting royal princess, knowing Mrs. Old Granite hates Madeleine, keeps Mrs. Lee by her side and brandishes her "as though she were a charm against the evil eye" (p. 198). Adams cleverly uses
totems and amulets in this phase of Madeleine's journey. Mrs. Lee, in contempt, finally escapes from the ballroom's glare and noise to a sofa in a quiet, dark window-recess, a bower beneath a leafy laurel (another promise of life betrayed), where to her horror a determined Ratcliffe lays siege to her. Her retreat into darkness is her continued journey into the interior, and this scene can be viewed as the harrowing of hell, the locale of utmost danger to her. Ratcliffe, with a coarse, animal expression of the mouth, and an "undefinable coldness in the eyes," appeals to her to marry him (p. 203). Mrs. Lee is motionless as the statue of Agrippina and is barely saved by Sybil. The two women effect a temporary escape, but not before a touch of romance enters. Victoria Dare announces her engagement to Lord Dunbeg, an impoverished Irish coronet with a castle to which she can bring an enormous American commercial fortune. It isn't very romantic.

The sisters take flight from the hell of an official Washington ritual to their rented house. Sybil puts aside "Dawn in June" and hastily plunges Carrington's letter "into her breast, like a concealed weapon," then confronts Madeleine who has had an anguished vigil before the fire. The two women, now about equal, begin their long deferred "trial of strength," Madeleine cleverer but Sybil knowing more what she wants: "Do you mean to marry Mr. Ratcliffe?" is presented to Madeleine's face "like a pistol" (p. 210). Madeleine mechanically replies yes. Sybil is almost wild, and the older woman accuses her of behaving like a child. But Madeleine is still blind, for Sybil is not a child but is
attaining equal womanly strength. She gives Carrington's letter to Madeleine, the letter with the facts about what Mrs. Baker had hinted at, that Ratcliffe's vote on certain legislation had been bought. In the cold gray morning light it is Madeleine who is wild to "tear off his mask" (pp. 219-20). Her arrival at full awareness makes her wish to strip away all pretenses, especially her own:

In her restlessness and solitude . . . she had only asked whether any life was worth living for a woman who had neither husband nor children. Was the family all that life had to offer? Could she find no interest outside the household? (p. 220)

Her "discovery" comes as "a blow, not as a reprieve from execution." She sees, too, that in thinking she could marry the Senator as a sacrifice for Sybil's happiness, she had really engaged in self-delusion:

In the depths of her soul very different motives had been at work; ambition, thirst for power, restless eagerness to meddle in what did not concern her, blind longing to escape from the torture of watching other women with full lives and satisfied instincts, while her own life was hungry and sad. For a time she had actually . . . hugged a hope . . . that she could do good in return for the good taken away from her.

Madeleine has journeyed into herself and has met her shadow archetype, and the worst thing is not in the dream's being over, "but in the discovery of her own weakness and self-deception" (p. 221).

'Oh, what a vile thing life is!' she cried, throwing up her arms with a gesture of helpless rage and despair. 'Oh, how I wish I were dead! how I wish the universe were annihilated!' and she flung herself down by Sybil's side in a frenzy of tears (p. 227).

The light of full consciousness reveals what is really so terrifying to her, her complicity in the drift toward immorality and spiritual
death. In some ways she has been unwittingly a siren or seducer just as Ratcliffe has. Life is vile because she feels vile. Madeleine comes out of the storm which has raged in her breast, but she is chilled with a mortal terror that she has barely escaped "being dragged under the wheels of the machine..." (pp. 224-25). Her penetration to the heart of politics has revealed a "lurid nightmare," a dream she at least in part helped make.

Divesting herself of false raiment, she is glad to quit the masquerade and to return to the true democracy of life, her paupers and prisons, her schools and hospitals. Like Esther Dudley, there is some good for Madeleine to do in the world, but it will be away from official institutions. When Ratcliffe faces her one last time, on a Sunday, to plead for her hand, she firmly rejects him. Furious because he has misjudged her strength of character, he tries to defend himself against her charge that he was bribed, by the explanation that he got the money not for personal gain but for party debts. There is, in a grimly ironic way, truth to his assertion—he paid off his own electioneering costs with the money. Madeleine thinks:

Not until this moment had she really felt as though she had got to the heart of politics... like a physician with his stethoscope, measures the organic disease. Now at last she knew why the pulse beat with such unhealthy regularity... (p. 232).

So it is that Adams analyzes the order itself of society as disorder. The organic pulse beat, the life blood of democracy is diseased. Mechanical regularity fuses with the organic so that a dying democracy paradoxically continues to beat on.
This is a determinist universe, but within it is left the possibility, as a naturalist viewpoint often provides, of asserting one's will. In contrast to Ratcliffe who is a "moral lunatic," Madeleine comes to full moral knowledge and can act. Her decision is to withdraw. She sees the "absurdity" of going out to "the shore of this ocean of corruption" to try to clean it up with her mop and pail" (p. 233). She abandons forever the "absurd" idea of purifying politics (p. 238). She retreats from Ratcliffe "as thought he were a reptile" with "a loathsome disease" (p. 240). But it is Ratcliffe's turn now, and he attacks her, calling her a "heartless coquette" (p. 241). The phrase may seem tame to us, but in nineteenth century usage it had force, for it applied to the new woman who was increasingly self-confident and was leaving her biological role behind her.62 The implication is further that she is a loose woman. Madeleine is by no means sexually innocent, and she is stung and wishes to annihilate Ratcliffe. Then she grows calm and wraps a few shreds of dignity around herself: "'Understand once and for all that there is an impassable gulf between your life and mine'" (p. 242).

A final battle is fought over the heroine on the threshold of her home by a retreating Ratcliffe and by Baron Jacobi. The Baron hurls an insult—he has long hated Ratcliffe—and the

---

62 Constance Mayfield Rourke, Trumpets of Jubilee (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), pp. 192-93. The use of "coquette," for example, occurs in James's Confidence (1880)—Longueville warns his friend Wright against Angela Vivian by saying she is a coquette.
Senator retaliates by thrusting the old man out of the way. An honest old warrior with a brave heart, Jacobi canes Ratcliffe in Mrs. Lee's defense but also provides one more drubbing to the American political system. The Senator's ever-present pragmatism prevails; he cannot be caught in a public brawl with an infirm old diplomat, and by quitting the field he survives to perhaps even become president.  

Madeleine, in determining to leave America and put a literal gulf between herself and Washington, desires to cross the threshold from the profane back into the sacred world. "I want to go to Egypt . . . democracy has shaken my nerves to pieces. Oh, what rest it would be to live in the Great Pyramid and look out forever at the polar star!" (p. 243). The polar star returns us to the mythic zone, to Mount Vernon and Mrs. Lee's yearning for the stars and moon, but it also symbolizes her desire for death and annihilation. The star could be a fixed morality, but it seems as remote as infinity itself. The Great Pyramid is a tomb, and Madeleine's death wish is quite pronounced.

The third phase, return, of her heroine adventure is frequently negotiated successfully; but in Madeleine's case return is flight, and the only success possible to her is in withdrawal. The novel circles toward closure and calmness. Sybil says to Madeleine, 

63Michael Molacurcio, "Democracy and Esther: Henry Adams' Flirtation with Pragmatism," American Quarterly, XIX, No. 1 (Spring, 1967), suggested that Madeleine's attraction to begin with to Ratcliffe was an attraction to political pragmatism (pp. 53-70).
"'I will go to the end of the world with you'" (p. 243), and the two women exit from the diseased garden, hand in hand, paradise lost. An epilogue introduced a letter from Sybil to Carrington in Mexico, relating Ratcliffe's defeat and telling Carrington she and Madeleine will be gone for two years. They are to sail the seas, in a sense withdrawing into the ocean from which life first came. Madeleine adds a postscript, ironically bitter in its comment that most of her countrymen would say she had made a mistake. Sybil has inserted a thin slip of paper into the letter: "'If I were in your place I would try again after she comes home'" (p. 246). This seems a hopeful note, for we would like to think that Mrs. Lee could find happiness with the melancholy but likeable Carrington. Democracy's ending has received quite varied interpretations, one being that the "fable concludes with a romantic hint that the Virginia hero will yet be successful," and that Mrs. Lee's withdrawal is only temporary.64 This kind of reading is possible if one thinks the novel a romance or fairy tale and that Carrington is the hero. I think Sybil's "'I would try again'" is like Henrietta Stackpole's final "just you wait!" to Caspar Goodwood.65 It is no comfort at all. It may be faintly possible that Mrs. Lee would recover from a third disaster and re-engage in marriage and heterosexual, reproductive life. But I think that from the novel's


evidence of her desperate desire not to be hurt again, this is very unlikely. She could only have contemplated marriage with Ratcliffe because she did not love him. The slightest hint that she could care for Carrington terrified her. Why should this change? Madeleine has denied her sexual nature and will continue to do so. She thus saves herself but asserts herself in renunciation. Her withdrawal is destructive to society, which is a wretched business anyway. Joseph Campbell has said that in the eternal return of the hero or heroine, reintegration into society is indispensable to the circulation of spiritual energy in the world. Henry Adams said that sexual energy is, too. In *Democracy* one can only save one's spiritual energy by retreating from society. Though Adams desired woman's continuing role as sexual force, Madeleine's withdrawal in the face of impossible alternatives, her affirmation of her imperial self, is her only real choice. Thus the novel achieves a reconciliation through loss.

Reconciliation is further gained by an overall naturalist determinism of Madeleine's meeting her fate. Naturalism brings together the twin strains of nineteenth century realism and its portrayal of a woman's retreat from her society, with the mythology of the eternal feminine goddess and the mythos of irony and winter.

---

Esther: a "Pallas Athene"

Again in an Adams novel, the three strains of realism, mythology, and naturalism come together to form a mythic-realist work of art. An elegiac mood prevails from the opening pages of Esther: A Novel. Esther begins in the fall on the last Sunday in October, 1880, in St. John's Episcopal Church, New York City, and closes at Niagara Falls one year and three months later on a winter Sunday. Esther has two themes which work together: the relationship of art to religion, and the relationship of science to religion. Adams focuses his satire on religion in America, and so attacks here the third of the American holy trinity (he attacked country in Democracy and motherhood in both novels). Esther may seem at first to be, as Samuels has said, an "ideological novel," but it is more accurately a composite and prophetic portrait of Marian Adams and of archetypal woman whose destructive nature reflects a death-oriented society, a nature and society that will overpower her life forces and lead her to loss and renunciation.67

One could call this "The Education of Esther Dudley." Here again Adams is drawn to a young, attractive, vibrant woman who holds the promise of the most elemental kind of stability, the continuity of life. At the same time, in the age of realism, she will reject her primary life-giving role.

Esther begins in the fashionable Fifth Avenue Episcopal church—the narrative tone, however, is Puritan, for on this

67Samuels, Henry Adams: The Middle Years, II, 237.
opening day the church "audience" is a Vanity Fair of bobbing bonnets. The church's gorgeous medieval decorations, its huge prophets and evangelists, all look down "from red walls on a display of human vanities that would have called out a vehement Lamentation of Jeremiah or Song of Solomon. . ." (p. 2). The narrator, as in Democracy, is satirically angry and uses the jeremiad to castigate religion's hypocritical advocates. Religion has inevitably declined in an urban, bustling New York City of 1880.

Esther Dudley, in the "audience" this Sunday morning, discusses Michelangelo and overdressed matrons with her cousin and companion, George Strong, a geologist and paleontologist who has not been to church for ten years. Esther was appropriately named for Hawthorne's character from his tale "Old Esther Dudley" by her father, a descendent from "the old Puritan Dudleys" (p. 22). The unbelief of the father has passed on to the daughter. Hawthorne's story reflects the old order which departed from New England, an incompatible past clashing with an impossible present. What becomes apparent is that young Esther, like her Puritan namesake, is still keeper of the New England conscience which now expands into feminine consciousness. Adams's Puritan conscience is working in the age of unbelief.

Esther's quest begins in the sacred realm which is alien territory for our mortal, modern, atheistic heroine. Her cousin Strong is a fellow interloper who in a voice of cool, secular,
material agnosticism, speaks for modern sciences. As in *Democracy*, the friendly protective group around the heroine is cosmopolitan. Thus Adams poses mythological universality against narrow provinciality. Adams sets up a dialectic in this novel, too, but the struggle is even more internalized than in the first novel, "for Esther's conflict is with religion and its spokesmen, but it is also intensively within her own passionate and artistic soul. In some ways Adams's task here is more difficult, for he believed in the golden age of democracy, but he cannot believe in the Puritan mythos and cannot posit a golden age for Protestantism. He does not mourn God's departure, but only the loss of community. He turns again to a woman to provide that for him.

Speaking for religion is Stephen Hazard, a modern kind of priest but still a fighter in the Lord's army, charismatic, tall, slender, dark; "his thin, long face gave so spiritual an expression... that his great eyes seemed to penetrate like his clear voice to every soul within range" (p. 5). "'Good art!'" George says in church. George thinks the church is a theater, but Esther perceives that such a thought would put her and George among the wicked because the Puritans have always despised the theater. In an important way *Esther* is much like *Democracy*. When George replies to Esther, "'I am a martyr,!' he is fore-shadowing his and Stephen's martyrdom to Esther's womanhood, as Carrington and Ratcliffe were sacrificed to Madeleine's. Stephen is clever and a worthy opponent to Esther; he touches her soul and takes possession of the congregation, "sweeping all human thought and
will into his strongbox, shut[ing] down the lid with a sharp click,"
and bidding his audience kneel (p. 7). Money images, because the
church represents enormous wealth, and death images ("strongbox")
merge in the hands of this powerful minister. To be swept along
into his religion is to lose possession of self, a consummation
soon devoutly to be wished by Esther. As money, sex, and politics
united in Democracy, so money, sex, and religion combine to threat­
en Esther. Hazard begins unknowingly to tempt her; his sermon is
"'of all being and all thought" rising by "'slow gradations to
God,"' all materialism of past and present but "'emanations of
divine thought doing their appointed work'" (p. 7). Esther yearns
for wholeness and faith, and she now listens to the contemporary
voice of seduction:

'Analyze, dissect, use your microscope of your spectrum till
the last atom of matter is reached. . . . the church now
knows what she once knew only by the certainty of faith, that
you will find enthroned behind all thought and all matter only
one central idea,— . . . I AM! Science like religion kneels
before this mystery; it can carry itself back only to this
simple consciousness of existence' (pp. 7-8).

The minister promises oneness and unity. No wonder Esther is fas­
cinated. The new woman of rising consciousness, well-educated by
her father out of belief, is still searching for it. She says of
Hazard to Strong, "'I hope he believes it all. . . .'' (p. 9).
Strong, who has known Hazard from college when he was called "St.
Stephen," replies that Hazard has put his life itself into the
idea and would send anyone to the stake with a sweet smile for the
love of god. Strong correctly identifies Hazard's will to power,
but Esther has yet to learn it. Like Carrington, Strong is further
along the road at this point to self-knowledge than the heroine, but the heroines develop further finally.

The novel has some rather obvious symbolism. Stephen is the first Christian martyr, and Strong's name is symbol as sign of his strength against religion. There is no Christ figure, however—Stephen is an absolute threat to Esther's well-being. Like Ratcliffe, he is a devil seducer, though he is not as despicable as the Senator. The church is dangerous, hostile territory to Esther. Her initiation and road of trials will take her away from the sacred and into the secular, so Christian symbolism functions as paradox and pervasive irony.

Esther exits from the church and meets her Aunt Sarah, a churchgoer and power among the congregation because she is rich. Aunt Sarah Murray challenges her nephew George to reply to Hazard's sermon, and George stresses how far apart their two views are: "'He might as well have stood on the earth, and I on the nearest planet, and bawled across'" (pp. 11-12). Stephen's faith claims to be universal, but is narrow and provincial, while Strong's scepticism is universal. The narrator carefully constructs the nineteenth century secular world. Another modern phenomenon is that Hazard is family-less, from Cincinnati. He is now in New York where there is "'no regular community to deal with,'" and were New Yorkers "'have no souls to be saved,'" as Strong says (p. 17). Most of the characters are rootless; all are restless. Strong, Wharton, and Hazard have no immediate families. Aunt Sarah has a lawyer-husband, and Esther an invalid father,
truncated families. There is only one woman in either novel with a living child, Mrs. Baker. Esther is an only child and her mother is dead. The Dudleys are the last of their line.

Adams quickly sketches in the other men besides Strong in Esther's life. The most important is her father. The Civil War is again a background of ruin for people's lives. Her father saw service, and because of "a bullet through his body and a saber cut across his head," he never has fully recovered. He is the old, infirm, upperclass warrior, the wise man archetype, an atheist. Esther has been absolute mistress of his house for fifteen years.

We see Hazard next, in her new parsonage, surrounded by art and music books, classics, Eastern literature, and poetry. High-minded and passionate, a sensual aesthete, he would have followed art if he had not had a special vocation for the church. As Carrington brought Ratcliffe and Madeleine together, to his regret, Strong brings Hazard together with "'the sternest little Pagan I know,'" as Strong calls Esther (p. 21).

To complete the circle of men around Esther, Adams introduces the artist for the new church, Wharton, "'his mouth a little sensual, his yellowish beard ... ragged" (p. 23), bohemian, drinker, talker, dedicated painter. Wharton paints a verbal portrait of Esther to Hazard as an American woman and ancient archetype:

'she has a bad figure. ... She is too slight, too thin. ... She dresses to suit her figure and sometimes overdoes it. Her features are imperfect. Except her ears, her voice, and her eyes which have a sort of brown depth like a trout brook,
she has no very good points. . . . [But] I want to know what she can make of life. She gives one the idea of a lightly sparred yacht in mid-ocean. . . . She sails gaily along, though there is no land in sight and plenty of rough water coming' (pp. 26-27).

This passage is central, and here is the naturalist ocean again. Both women are out in mid-ocean and deep water; the vessels are receptacles of death as well as life. Esther, a "lightly sparred yacht," is like a frigate, built for flight rather than fight.
The heroine of the eternal return again journeys over water in her series of trials ("rough water coming"). The artist-observer Wharton describes her with admiration blending into condescension, a tone familiar to use in Adams's descriptions of Marian:

'She never read a book, I believe, in her life. She tries to paint, but she is only a second rate amateur. . . though she has done one or two things which . . . I would like to have done myself. She picks up all she knows without an effort and knows nothing well. . . . Her mind is as irregular as her face, and both have the same peculiarity. . . . the same upward curve like a yacht's sails which gives a kind of hopefulness and self-confidence to her. . . (pp. 27-28).

Hazard, exhibiting his limitations by his mocking a woman's primary role, asks, "'What sort of a world does this new deity of yours belong to?'" "'Not to yours,'" Wharton replies (p. 28). Esther is the eternal woman, pagan earth mother, suited for this earth and the future world, "'when paganism will come again and we can give divinity to every water,'" prophetically the connection Esther will make with Niagara (p. 29). Wharton is closer to the truth about women than Hazard is.

Esther as a mythological heroine becomes Esther as a realist modern woman in the second chapter when Adams introduces her
in her social role as new American woman working at a children's hospital, a post-war charity organization. When Esther assesses her contribution as only story-telling, her aunt tries to reassure her that the endeavor is meaningful. But it is significant that this kind of work outside the home holds no more promise of satisfaction than do marriage and family. Mr. Dudley, concerned because of his failing health for Esther's future, consults his sister-in-law. But Mrs. Murray responds by telling him not to be anxious, by saying that modern unmarried women are really better off than the married ones. Marriage is clearly not the be-all, end-all in this world. Nor is Mr. Dudley that anxious to have Esther wedded. He confesses, half joking but serious, to having hated any future possible husband and threat to his household:

"About twice a year I have treacherously stabbed him in the back as he was going out my front door. I know that he would interfere with my comfort if I let him get a footing..." (p. 39).

Adams anticipates Freud's theory of the Electra complex, as Howells did in A Modern Instance. One assumes that Esther, like Marcia, would be equally unable to adjust to husband or marriage. Mr. Dudley is less austere than Mr. Gaylord, but as resentful of young men suitors. Only George Strong is even a remotely acceptable possibility, but Mrs. Murray, echoing Sybil's response, says Esther and George would make each other miserable. She gives marriage a poor recommendation:

"Women must take their chances... Marriage makes no real difference in their lot. All the contented women are fools, and all the discontented ones want to be men. Women are a
If Esther is sensible she will never marry. (p. 41).

Her speech seems anti-feminine, yet she is genuinely fond of women and a friend to many. She loves Esther, and she has already invited the visit of a young Colorado woman, an orphaned daughter of an old friend. Mrs. Murray is cynical but good-hearted. Hers is an accurate appraisal of woman's impossible situation in or out of marriage. Her opinion that woman is a blunder of creation shows how wrong Protestant theology is, but is correct about woman's position in contemporary society. Esther's father muses: "Poor Esther... is not used to harness. If things go wrong she will rebel, and a woman who rebels is lost" (p. 42). He and Mrs. Murray understand sexual politics. Yet, of course, Esther's rebelliousness is one of her best qualities to them and us.

Adams introduces the young Colorado woman, Catherine Brooke, another rebel, beautiful, and with a complexion "like the petals of a sweet-briar rose" (p. 45). She comes to occupy the same kind of younger sister role to Esther that Sybil did to Madeleine, or daughter to surrogate mother, and also comes to the heroine's aid. Women in both novels have crucial roles in helping other women. She has less sentiment than Sybil and more humor—she chatters that she is called "Sage Hen" because she is so quiet. She is equal to Esther in inner strength, and there are thorns around that rose. As maiden archetype, her secondary role is also a quest into maturity. Catherine is the vital "girl of the golden
west," the "prairie flower" (pp. 38-39). But stereotype becomes archetype as Catherine is shown to be an earth goddess, the spirit of mountains and prairies.

As the friendship between the two women flourishes, Esther agrees to do Catherine's portrait, and the narrator now raises seriously the problem of, first, being an artist, and, second, being a woman artist in late nineteenth century America:

Whether there was a living artist whom Wharton would have classed higher than a first-rate amateur is doubtful. On his scale to be second-rate was a fair showing. Esther had studied under good masters. . . . She had not the patience to be thorough, but who had? (p. 49)

Art is, then, demanding for all. Now the narrator considers Esther as a woman artist. She had put her whole soul, and with success, into a portrait of her father, though Wharton states that its "masculine firmness of handling was due to the subject and could never be repeated" (p. 50). This is Wharton's sexism, not the narrator's. Art provides another way for us to view Esther, as a positive life force. We see her through the author's painterly eye in Chapter Three. On his Saturday duty rounds to cultivate rich parishioners, Hazard comes upon Esther at the children's hospital. She is seated in the autumn sunlight, surrounded by children, and the portrait is charming and promising of life.

Esther's quest takes her next to Strong's rooms and a meeting with Hazard who becomes increasingly threatening to her as his

---

68 William Wasserstrom, _Heiress of All the Ages_ (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1959), pp. 44-45.
interest in her grows. He wants to draw her and other strong-minded people into the church, for "it was small triumph to draw a procession of followers from a class who took their opinions, like their jewelry, machine-made" (pp. 62-63). The mechanical image seems self-explanatory. The scene shifts to Esther's studio, built for her by her father at the top of the house, and filled with eastern porcelains, Damascan swords, Italian carvings, and Japanese screens. Like Madeleine, Esther is an heiress of all the ages. Hazard wields a direct influence on her painting, for it is as an artist and man that he relates best to her. Because he urges her to paint Catherine and offers good technical advice, she, in turn, feels obligated to go again to church but reveals that the passage from profane to sacred or back is always dangerous: "'there is no harm in knowing an actress or opera-singer, but religion is a serious thing'" (p. 65). Hazard threatens her autonomous self. He begins to dominate her will—she feels his "impalpable tyranny," but for the time being submits because Catherine's portrait is almost completed and "in a few days more she should be free" (p. 66). Desire for freedom is a strong theme in Esther, in James's *The Princess Casamassima*, and in Chopin's *The Awakening*. Hazard is on Esther's side in art, and so his anima does not appear to be as damaged as Ratcliffe's, but he is otherwise unsympathetic and especially so in regard to her freedom.

Adams returns to Esther's ability as an artist when Wharton asks her help in finishing the church's decorations. Esther is
modest and serious about her work, and she paints in an inconspicuous spot. Wharton has very high standards and articulates an increasingly androgynous position as he discusses art. Now he states, "'An artist must be a man, woman and demigod.'" He places the artist not just beyond sex but beyond mortality and on the "'path to Paradise'" (p. 76). The artist is the world's real saint, and art is Nirvana. If St. Cecilia, whom Esther is creating, glows from Esther's soul, oneness and universality will be attained. Wharton's vision, which was translated into Saint-Gauden's monument to Marian Adams, can be assumed to be Adams's view of art. If there is a paradise lost or golden age myth at all in this novel, it is in the role art played in the lives of people in the middle ages (represented by the church's decorations). When Esther says that she has no soul, Wharton tells her the soul is like a bird, and "'one who has as much feeling for art as you have, must have a soul somewhere'" (p. 77).

Bird symbolism is a dominant pattern and is part of both naturalism and mythology. For centuries people have believed that birds encompass human souls. Adams closely associates Esther with nature, but especially with lonely birds, and one is again reminded how the novel's symbolism is archetypal. Catherine Brooke, the sage hen, is a wise bird who in this fourth chapter defends the concept of self-consciousness which she equates with awareness. She insists, against Wharton arguing otherwise, that self-consciousness is good for art, and she points out that the natural
world's creatures, like antelopes, horses, and herself, are self-aware. Catherine is also linked to horses—she is an excellent, fearless driver and rider (Sybil, too, was an excellent rider). Adams emphasizes the closeness of these women to the natural world.

To return to art, a secondary love interest between the artist Wharton and Catherine never evolves beyond the ambryonic stage. It is as an artist that Wharton, already married, anyway, interests us. He is trying to put life into the church. To Esther's remark that 'the church is just a theater, he replies:

'That is what ails our religion. But it is not the fault of our art... I would like now, even as it is, to go back to the age of beauty, and put a Madonna in the heart of their church' (p. 98).

The theme of the relationship of art to religion is inextricably connected with woman's position. And Esther surely anticipates Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres in its recognition that life and fecundity and the female principle are missing from the cold stones of this New York Protestant church. It is significant to the theme of a destructive male-dominated Protestantism that Hazard gave up art for the church.

Esther's and Hazard's relationship is becoming more complicated. She finds him charming, "especially when he was allowed to have his own way..." (p. 100). Their relationship develops against the backdrop of the Middle Ages. Again, as he will later in Mont-Saint-Michel, the author juxtaposes the present to the past. The way each character responds to Petrarch and Laura and the Middle Ages is a touchstone that tells us how he or she
responds to the present. Hazard has "thirteenth century ideas" and "spirit" (p. 104), but this is not a hopeful sign. He intellectualizes Petrarchan sonnets but does not feel them. He himself recognizes the fatal modern separation of religion from life. His church is merely decorated. And Wharton? He has idealized Petrarch's Laura and denies that she was a married woman with a dozen children. An idealistic Wharton is paradoxically trapped by the flesh and is married to a terrible woman. Neither Wharton nor Hazard can achieve oneness with a woman nor with himself.

Catherine, who has never before heard of Petrarch nor Laura, agrees to translate a sonnet; that is, she persuades Esther to do so for her. Catherine is a quick study and sees the social usefulness of fitting in with clever people. As maiden archetype, like Sybil, she is less socially alienated than the heroine. Esther is moved by a sonnet: "Siccome eterna vita è veder dio"—as sight of God is the eternal life (p. 115). This is her dream, never to be fulfilled. The belief of the Middle Ages is hopelessly beyond recall. I should note one more response, Strong's. He is totally untouched by Laura, Petrarch, and the Middle Ages.

As the work in the church draws to a close, Esther confides to Wharton her feminine want of motive in life: "'I wish I earned my living,' she said, 'You don't know what it is to work without an object.'" Wharton answers as an artist that "'some of the best work is done with no motive of gain.'" Esther replies, "'Men can do so many things that women can't. . . .'" (p. 117). She turns to Hazard with her feminine dissatisfactions, for she doubts
her ability to learn more than trifles and needs to be reassured. She insists her St. Cecilia is a failure: "'I am going home to burn my brushes and break my palette. What is the use of trying to go forward when one feels iron bars across one's face?'" (p. 122) Hazard encourages her and seems understanding. Then he asks her to be "'reasonable'"—a male response women have heard for centuries. He adds that if Wharton is willing to teach, she should be willing to learn. Suddenly she decides she will paint again, and the narrator comments, "A woman could easily have seen that she was torn in opposite directions by motives of a very contrary kind" (p. 123). Adams shows a fine sympathy for and grasp of women's social roles in conflict with her needs, and with her feelings of inferiority. An interesting analysis of Esther by Cushing Strout is based on a "semi-clinical description of emotional turmoil," and uses Erik Erickson's psychological theory of identity crisis. Strout has said Esther is facing decisive choices of vocation and mate.69 One can only speculate if Adams was as understanding of Esther's prototype, Marian Adams, and of Marian's frustrations. Adams presents the reasons for Esther's nervous crisis. She is torn by her desire to be an artist and her growing passion for Hazard. With a heavy heart she makes up her mind that there is only one thing to do, to "retreat into her own house and bar the doors" (p. 124). Prison images are very

pronounced. Significantly, she feels bars across her face, shutting her away from a meaningful vocation. Adams's recognition of a woman's imprisonment is obvious.

But Esther postpones an immediate decision about Hazard when Wharton's mysterious wife shows up in New York on the church steps. She is dirty, coarse, bloated—"her eyes alone were fine." She is a bohemian, a "Parisian Pole with a strange history" (p. 131). The scene with Wharton's wife and his subsequent divorce are posed against the urban background and are intensely realistic. Mrs. Baker in Democracy indicated that women could influence Senators' votes by money and sex. Adams fills in Mrs. Wharton's corrupt character with more explicit detail. The scene is also mythological. Wharton speaks of his wife of twenty years as "'fierce, splendid, a priestess of the oracle!'... I believe she loved me.... I know she took possession of me, body and soul" (p. 137). Wharton, possessed by this ancient bitch-goddess, painted her once as the Priestess of Delphi. Mrs. Wharton is another dual-natured archetype, with splendid qualities but the temper of a fury, a "'Medea, Clytemnestral!'" and like "'a Maenad'" (p. 143). As destroyer she mirrors a similar kind of destructiveness in Esther.

Adams reintroduces the triangle of Esther, Mr. Dudley, and Stephen Hazard in the novel's center. Knowing his health is failing, Mr. Dudley has accepted Hazard as a regular caller, and Hazard entertains him. They have a happy evening together, but this is Esther's last calm moment. That night her father has a terrible
attack, and the doctors admit there is no hope. The brave man says, "'It's not so bad, Esther, when you come to it,'" but she is devastated:

Now that she had come to it, she thought it was very bad, worse than anything she had ever imagined; she wanted to escape, to run away, to get out of life itself, rather than suffer such pain, such terror, such misery of helplessness" (pp. 149-50).

We remember Marian annihilating her life and Madeleine's desire to do so. Adams sets Mr. Dudley one last time against the war background: "'Laugh, Esther, when you're in trouble! ... then you're safe. I saw the whole regiment laugh under fire at Gettysburg!'" (p. 150) Adams yokes together war, suffering, human bravery, and helplessness, as he did in his description of his sister Louisa's death. All one has within a deterministic universe is one's courage and integrity of self. Mr. Dudley dies, and Esther, desolated and alone at twenty-six, is like "a solitary bird flying through mid-air," who looks ahead on her "aerial path," but can see no time."more human than that which bound her to Andromeda and Orion" (pp. 157-58). An intense realism unites with mythic symbols and structure, through a naturalist view of the universe.

Esther decides to go abroad with Catherine, and this galvanizes Hazard into a declaration of love which she has both feared and longed for, the declaration which makes her feel under "sudden and violent attack" (p. 163). As in Democracy, love is not life but a condition which breeds violence and death. She is bewildered, trembling, protesting, "but the traitor within her own breast was worse than the enemy without" (pp. 163-64). Love is
warfare, external and internal:

For the moment all her wise resolutions were swept away in a wave of tenderness; she seemed to come suddenly on a summer sea, sparkling with hope and sunshine, the dreary sand-banks of her old life vanishing like a dream. She shut her eyes and found herself in his arms. Then in terror at what she had done, she tried to draw back... trying to free herself (p. 164).

Here is the lure of the monist sea again. Esther warns Hazard that she will never satisfy him and says he must love someone who has her heart in his work, but he persists with much confidence and ego. She ceases to struggle. Adams depicts her ambivalent responses to love and Hazard very convincingly. Her capitulation is short-lived.

Esther's and Hazard's responses to each other in love are important. Both are astonished at their passion. She is convinced that because of her love she has only now to will belief: "She thought herself ready to worship Woden or Thor, if he did" (p. 169). Significantly, she falls back on pagan figures. She becomes secretly engaged on Saturday and attends church the next morning. All is sympathetic during the music, but when her lover starts to read the service he recedes and belongs not to her but to the world. She shrinks from such a public display and cannot believe a word he says. "This is the end of her short happiness, and she knows that through the church door lies "the only road to her duty and peace of mind" (p. 172). Like the dutiful daughter of the Puritans she is, her conscience will not permit her to be a hypocrite, but neither can she stand the competition and is jealous that Hazard believes more in the church than in her.
Adams brings the struggle "to its sharpest form in the practical question of inter-marriage, for marriage was the most formidable of all social relations," as Samuels said. This is certainly true of a patriarchy, and we watch the woman and man struggle for mastery:

Esther had all her life been used to act for herself and to order others rather than take orders of any sort. The more confidentially Hazard told her to leave everything to him, the less it occurred to her to do so (p. 178).

Hazard is horrified that she is trying to answer her own religious questions from books in her father's library. When he tries to choose "more correct" books for her, the abyss between them widens (p. 179). Catherine tells her most people can't say what they believe in, that it is enough that Hazard loves her. Esther is less satisfied than ever.

I am quite impatient with criticism of these two novels which dwells on Madeleine's and Esther's intuition and omits their intellects. Though Adams made pronouncements in his Letters and in The Education which were condescending to women, when he creates his fictional archetypal women he shows them to be clever, intellectual, and admirable. It is the flesh that helps to betray them. Our instincts are powerful, as George Strong suggests when the Murrays ask his help in preventing Esther and Hazard's marriage: "It's a case of survival of the fittest. The strongest will convert the other" (p. 183). The movement in each novel is

---

70 Samuels, Henry Adams: The Middle Years, II, 237.
inevitably toward consciousness and knowledge, just as the archetype, in the Jungian explanation, moves from the unconscious state to consciousness. It is the woman in each novel who persists in her struggle toward enlightenment.

George Strong, basically tender-hearted though tough-talking, is the most androgynous male in this novel besides Mr. Dudley, and George is sympathetic with Esther's struggle. They now engage in a debate on science and religion, and Esther asks him if religion is "true"—Strong replies:

'I can tell you about the mound-builders or cave men ... but I could not tell you the difference between the bones of a saint and those of a heathen. Ask me something easier! Ask me whether science is true!'

When she does, he answers no. She asks why he believes in it. He responds, "'I don't believe in it. ... I want to help in making it truer'" (p. 198). Because he is fair-minded, he says the doctrine of the Trinity is not as difficult to accept as a working proposition from physics. Strong insists both science and religion assume the unknowable. Esther gazes into the fire, the fire again a symbol of woman trying to find the light of truth. George tells her that she is searching for truth in the wrong way, that she is trying to attain faith through reason and it cannot be done for faith is a state of mind like love or jealousy. In real distress, she cries, '"I want to submit. ... Why can't some of you make me?"' (p. 202) This is an echo of Madeleine's desire for strong men. Handing her a small crucifix, a mantel-piece decoration, Strong tells her she needs Catholicism which knows how to
deal with pride of will. In an intensely dramatic scene, she
drives the crucifix, an ironic symbol, into her breast, but
neither belief nor submission comes.

Because their relationship is so stressful, Hazard in a
moment of play suggests they elope to Japan to sketch and paint.
She is delighted until she realizes he is joking. So another
wedge is driven between them. Like Ratcliffe, he appeals to her
to help him in his work. Like Madeleine, she is baffled and in-
creasingly horrified by her real hatred of that work. "I am
being dragged in against my will... What am I to do?" she
asks her aunt. Mrs. Murray, who has known all along that the
marriage would be a disaster, seizes her opportunity and crushes
the "sparrow with a stone" (p. 217). She tells her niece that
if she cannot believe in Hazard’s faith, he will choose his pro-
fession and jilt her. "From the moment that Esther’s feminine
pride was involved, the sparrow was dead" (p. 218). Yacht, but-
terfly, rosebud; and sparrow heighten Esther’s frail and innocent
qualities, her smallness and vulnerability. But these are only
one phase of her personality, for she has a vein of steel, too.

Hazard as priest, like Ratcliffe as politician, is abso-
lutely right both mythically and realistically. Both women are
drawn to powerful, domineering, dynamic men, in professions which
vitally interest yet repel the women. Both men wish to absorb the
women into their lives and work. To each the heroine is a posses-
sion—Hazard thinks of Esther as "his prize" (p. 218). Both women
have been forged out of tragedy and loss and are tempted to yield.
But Ratcliffe played a lone hand, while Hazard now, in dramatic irony, turns to Strong for aid, for Strong "looked at churches very much as he would have looked at a layer of extinct oysters in a buried mud-bank" (p. 219). But he is a man of good-will, and here the narrator is moving sympathetically closer to him. Hazard, who remains static, becomes by contrast increasingly unsympathetic, rigid, and repellent, and even more the betrayer than he at first seemed.

In the meantime, Esther's radicalism and unbelief have become the object of parish gossip. Hazard is getting more nervous, for he prides himself on his orthodoxy and this is now under attack. He prevails upon Strong to get Esther to leave New York City for several months until the gossip dies down. Mrs. Murray leaps at the chance of removing Esther from Hazard, not for him, and suggests an immediate departure for Niagara. Esther, who has passed the "stage of self-submission," is now in a"mutinous mood" (p. 228). Foreshadowing the path of her archetypal quest from passivity into assertion, she suggests to a willing Catherine, "'Suppose we elope together! ... We will take our wedding journey together and leave our husbands behind. Let them catch us if they can!'" (p. 229) When Olive Chancellor attempts to elope with Verena in The Bostonians, James makes Olive's lesbianism obvious. Adams is not suggesting homosexuality here, but the women are very comfortable with each other. Though Esther is still interested in Hazard, the women form a sisterhood beyond men's reach. Adams's androgynous vision has permitted him to see that it is desirable
for women to be close to each other in a male-dominated society.

But Esther is still somewhat ambivalent. Adams now picks up royal imagery to heighten her situation and the battle between the earth goddess and her suitor. When she prepares to meet him, she dresses with great care: "She meant to keep her crown even though she threw away her kingdom, and though she should lose a husband, she intended to hold fast a lover" (p. 231).

Adams now introduces in the concluding three chapters the first of three deliberate Greek mythological references. He first compares Esther as an imperial woman to "Iphigenia herself, when the priests, who muffled her voice, stretched her on the altar and struck the knife in her throat," and Hazard "not precisely an Agamemnon," who would have liked to stop "the sacrifice which seemed to him . . . like a triumph over himself. His own throat was the one which felt itself in closest danger to the knife" (p. 231). One can see that the battlachomyomachia is mocking Hazard. Esther is victim and executioner, as her dual nature indeed is. There are recurring patterns of three, basic to mythology: Esther "knew that neither six months nor six years would make her a fit wife for Hazard. . . ." (p. 235). Adams emphasizes the theme of sacrifice when Esther tells her lover:

'I would like nothing better than to lie down and die in your arms. I will promise to be faithful to you all my life; to go into a convent if you want it; to drown myself. . . .' (p. 236).

She knows marriage to him will be submission, annihilation, self-sacrifice. And he asks, "'Will you not make a little sacrifice
of pride for me? ... You are mine—mine—mine!" (p. 237) Then follows the most passionate scene in the two novels:

With an uncontrollable impulse of self-abandonment Esther held out her hand to him and he seized her in his arms, kissing her passionately again and again, till she tore herself away. ... said she breathlessly, 'Go! You are killing me!' (p. 238)

This scene is explicitly sexual, and Adams graphically links marriage and sex to death and loss of woman's self. Love for Esther is "already a sorrow rather than a passion; (p. 241). Adams has another arresting insight when he joins religious and sexual emotions in Hazard.

Esther flees from Hazard, taking the train to Niagara through a frigid February night and snow-bound country. "Never again could she go back to the old life, but like a young bird that has lost its mate, must fly on through the gloom till it end" (p. 246). As she flies up the frozen Hudson, she stares from the train window into "this dark, polar world. ... On the ocean the forces of nature have it their own way; nothing comes between man and the elements. ..." With snowflakes driving against the window and heavy clouds drifting through the sky, this is a highly naturalistic section. Esther is attracted to patterns of ordinary male-female relationships like "twinkling light from distant and invisible farmhouses," but "these signs of life behind the veil were like the steady lights of shore to the drowning fisherman off the reef outside" (p. 247). She is in outer darkness. Wharton prophesized rough waters, and indeed she is having a stormy passage in her quest. Adams has not forgotten
the battle between Esther and Stephen. In New York City George has told Stephen, "'You are out-generalized and your line of attack is left all in the air'" (p. 251). Hazard feels Esther has "rebelled against his authority" and determines to follow her (p. 252). Strong's respect and admiration for Esther grow—she is making a good fight.

At Niagara on the final and fateful Sunday, Adams alludes to classical mythology for the second time. Esther has a sense of new life as she watches the cataract outside her hotel window, the "tremendous, rushing, roaring companion":

To brush her hair while such a confidant looked on . . . was more than Pallas Athene herself could do, though she looked forever from the windows of her Acropolis over the Blue Aegean (pp. 257-58).

Athene, goddess of wisdom, is just the right mythic analogy for Esther. Just as the daughter who sprang from Zeus's brow reveals vestiges of the feminine principle in a patriarchal myth, so Esther's female force asserts itself in nineteenth century America. Athene, too, rejected lovers and remained virginal. In Chapter Nine this second mythological section finds Esther decisively withdrawing from Stephen and moving toward elemental water ("Blue Aegean"): "The sea is capricious, fickle, angry, fawning, violent, savage, and wanton," and speaks to Esther in a steady voice, "so frank and sympathetic that she had no choice but to like it."

Niagara is androgynous, primal water. First it is female, "its dress... . . . dazzling white," wearing diamonds in the sunlight. Then it is male, a huge playmate who has won her heart with divine
manners; she falls in love with the cataract and turns to it as a
cfidant (p. 258). Hazard will never know what Niagara is say-
ing. In an illuminating interpretation, Michael Colacurcio has
said that this feeling for Niagara is part of a Darwinian worship
of nature as force (Adams's Mariolotry is another version of this
kind of worship). The falls are elemental, Protean life and
death. Esther is so dazzled that she takes infinite care with her
dress as if for a lover. She obviously is attracted to a union
with Niagara, and in reply to Catherine who says Niagara is a
self-conscious woman, Esther is sure it is a man. They are both
right—it is our androgynous original state. The falls serve as
structural symbolic center at the end of the novel, and each
man's reaction reveals an inadequacy of response. The artist
Wharton sees the falls only as tableau, with Zeus on the throne at
Table Rock. To the naturalist Strong it is a rollicking Newfound-
land dog. The minister Hazard on his arrival barely notices it.

Posed within the naturalist setting is the primary
patriarchal conflict involving the question of marriage. In a
series of vignettes culminating at Niagara, we observe the only
happy one in the two novels between Mr. and Mrs. Murray. The
other marriage in this novel was Wharton's and a disaster.
Murray is a sensible, dull man who admires his clever wife and
lets her lead. Esther could never accept such dullness. Esther
has really made her choice, anyway, because she cannot believe in

71 Michael Colacurcio, "The Dynamo and the Angelic Doctor:
The Bias of Henry Adams's Medievalism," American Quarterly XVII,
No. 4 (Winter, 1965), 710.
Hazard's religious faith and because she cannot submit to his will and domination. She explains to Strong that she cannot reason out her refusal but feels it. This has contributed to the opinion that Adams glorifies instinct over reason. But that is to not closely read the debates she engages in. Esther's quest is to know, which is exactly what faith cannot satisfy. She debates again with Strong: "Do you believe in a God?" (p. 269) He replies that he believes in two things, mind and matter, and tells her that if one's mind could get hold of one abstract truth, that mind and truth would be immortal. His is a kind of Darwinian progressivism:

'We may someday catch an abstract truth by the tail, and then we shall have our religion and our immortality. We have got more than halfway. Infinity is infinitely more intelligible to you than you are to a sponge. If the soul of a sponge can grow to be the soul of a Darwin, why may we not all grow up to abstract truth?'

Do you mean, asks Esther, that the next world "'is a sort of great reservoir of truth'" pouring into it like rain-drops? (p. 273)

Rain here reinforces water symbolism, and with Niagara becomes the promise of the monist sea like the ocean was at the end of Democracy. The Potomac in that novel was water, too, but served more as a barrier between the past and present. Niagara is past, present, and future blending into one. It provides mythologically a mediation in time, as well as a mediation between mortality and immortality, this world and the next. Metaphysically, cosmologically, sociologically, and psychologically, Niagara is the exactly right symbol. Esther knows that Niagara has been telling her the
truth. Her response to it as at the sensual level, but as Niagara helps her in her evolution toward full consciousness and knowledge, it is at the intellectual level, too. Niagara thus mediates between the passions and the intellect. Strong's blood runs cold at the audacity and largeness of her perception, at her sudden synthesizing vision. We see in this episode a dramatic example of myth's central characteristic, its mediation between polar extremes as it progresses from oppositions toward their resolution. Esther's vision of monism is an oceanic reservoir of truth.

The closing chapter includes the third mythological reference and finds Catherine and Wharton, George and Esther driving in a sled pulled by fast horses, Catherine at the reins "like Phaeton" (p. 274). Catherine does not go too near the sun to be burned and destroyed, however (the solar symbol is male, of course). An expert horse handler, with "mutinous" eyes and a blood-red scarf around her neck, she laughs at Wharton's proposal that he follow her and Esther to Europe. When he lectures Catherine that she will one day learn to give up her own life and follow an ideal, she laughs again at his solemnity and chauvinism: "Men are always making themselves into ideals and expecting women to follow them..." (p. 279). Her response is worthy of the second feminist declaration of independence of 1876, and, in fact, could be from a feminist tract today:

'You want us to take you [men] on condition that we amuse you, and then you tell us that if we do amuse you, it will be because you are no longer worth taking... When we come home from Europe I am going to buy a cattle ranche [sic] in Colorado and run it myself' (p. 280).
Their "struggle for mastery" ends, and Adams once again has a woman rejecting a man.

In the concluding scene Esther is painting Niagara by her hotel window when Hazard arrives in pursuit. He recalls their Petrarchan sonnet to her, "'So, lady, sight of you, in my despair, /Brings paradise to this brief life and frail,'" and admires her painting, thus momentarily weakening her defenses (p. 288). But her native rebellion quickly resurfaces:

'Why should you drive and force me to take this leap? Are all men so tyrannical with women? You do not quarrel with a man because he cannot give you his whole life.'

Stephen Hazard admits, "I am tyrannical! I want your whole life, and even more" (p. 293). He says it is because he loves her, but then he fully reveals himself—he wants to save her for religion:

'You are trembling on the verge of what I think destruction. If I saw you tossing on the rapids yonder... I could not be more eager to save you... a soul much dearer to me than my own... I have got to fight for myself and my profession and you, at the same time' (p. 294).

This last speech is "unlucky." Esther feels "the thunders of the church... already rolling over her head (pp. 294-95), and she no longer cares if she offends or shocks him:

'I never saw you conduct a service without feeling as though you were a priest in a Pagan temple, centuries apart from me. At any moment I half expected to see you bring out a goat or a ram and sacrifice it on the high altar. How could I, with such ideas, join you at communion?' (p. 296)

Adams's sympathy for her spirit is strong. Her father's library must have provided her with some of those nineteenth century studies in comparative religions and mythology. She is a pagan,
archaic and archetypal. When Hazard, deeply insulted, tells her these are eternal truths and divine revelation, she replies that the church is not spiritual at all but cries "flesh—flesh—flesh" at her and is personal and selfish. "What difference does it make to me whether I worship one person, or three persons, or three hundred, or three thousand. I can't understand how you worship any person at all!" (p. 297). He wants to crush her and asks if she can think of a future existence where she could not meet once again her father, mother, husband, and children—"'surely the natural instincts of your sex must save you from such a creed!'" That does it. She is furious at his sexism:

"Why must the church always appeal to my weakness and never to my strength! I ask for spiritual life and you send me back to my flesh and blood as though I were a tigress you were sending back to her cubs. What is the use of appealing to my sex? the atheists at least show me respect enough not to do that!" (p. 299)

The archetypal woman has moved from instinct toward full consciousness. The room is filled with silence, but she hears the low thunder of the waters. Esther and Niagara dominate this final scene. When Hazard retreats, Esther knows that "the romance of her life has ended." George Strong now proposes marriage: "'you have fought your battle like a heroine. If you will marry me, I will admire and love you more than ever a woman was loved since the world began.'" The circle closes: Esther looks at him with an expression "that would have been a smile if it had not been infinitely dreary and absent; then she said, simply and finally, 'But George, I don't love you, I love him'" (p. 302)
Esther is still keeper of the conscience, harsh as it is, not just the New England but a universal woman’s conscience. She has passed through the dark night of her soul, has met her shadow archetype in her interior journey, and has made her choice. She can neither love Strong nor marry Hazard; she must reject scientist and priest. Esther embraces her own isolation and autonomous self. The irony is bitter, for it was Hazard’s original promise to her in his opening sermon that is fulfilled, that of consciousness. She achieves herself; she denies life’s continuity. She embodies the full archetype of earth mother who can give life, but who in taking it away is ultimately a sexual betrayer. There is no other possible role for her in a destructive American culture.

In this mythic-realist novel the function of mythology is not to reinforce the collective, communal society of men and women. Since the Middle Ages, symbolized by the art of St. John’s Church, these mythologies have gone to pieces, leaving, as Joseph Campbell said, one to be a light unto himself. In American society, dominated by a diseased, unbalanced patriarchy, the eternal woman is left, in loss but in self-assertion. The center is herself.

Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology, IV, 77 and 85.
CHAPTER III

HENRY JAMES: "THE COLD MEDUSA-FACE OF LIFE"

Henry James is justly famous as a theorist and creator of late nineteenth century American realism, and his major fiction has been well-recognized in our century for its mythological qualities. In the middle of his long career James fused realism and mythology with a naturalist-deterministic vision into The Princess Casamassima (1886), an outstanding mythic-realist novel. Like Henry Adams's earlier Democracy and Esther, and like Kate Chopin's later The Awakening, The Princess Casamassima arose out of James's intense awareness of personal, social, and universal ambiguities. James broadened his previous scope to encompass not just American dualities and dilemmas, but those of a western European money-oriented, patriarchal culture. Many of James's ambiguities have been defined, such as the paired opposites of America and Europe, innocence and experience, good and evil, the moral and aesthetic, self and society, possibility and fact, and comedy and tragedy. Austen Warren has added another, "dialectic and myth," which he found in James's late novels. Warren has called these James's "two modes of knowing." The first mode is

---

1Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 2 vols.; hereafter referred to in the text in shortened form, or by page number only where the reference is clear.
analytical, while the second is arrived at "personally, intuitively, imaginatively." I think this double mode characterizes The Princess Casamassima.

A novel of realism in the analytical mode, The Princess is concerned with dialectics about contemporary political, aesthetic, and moral problems. Christina Light is by heredity an American girl. She is from a broken, uprooted family, and grows to womanhood abroad in a male-dominated, destructive, isolating, decadent society whose center cannot hold. Her marriage to a European is a disaster, and her search for meaning and freedom in the London underworld of political radicalism is doomed to failure.

Simultaneously the novel is mythological. It has a mythic structure of irony and winter, an archetypal woman is central to its action, and it is filled with classical allusions. James called the fictional heroine he created for American realism, "our transported maiden, our unrescued Andromeda . . . disjoined from all associations. . . ." There is no Perseus to save Andromeda. The Princess, for whom the novel is named, engages in a heroine's quest which begins in darkness and ignorance and ends in knowledge and awareness. She is the novel's female principle essential to

---


life's continuity, the archetypal dual-natured goddess. James ex-
pressed his attraction to the female principle in yet another way,
stating his preference for the moon over the patriarchally connec-
ted sun: "I like ambiguities and detest great glares, preferring
thus . . . the cool and the shade to the sun and dust of the
way."\(^4\) Christina has positive qualities of beauty, kindness,
loyalty, and the imagination of love, but she also embodies negative qualities in that she works to destroy society and is an
accessory to Hyacinth's betrayal and destruction. The novel's
male center is Hyacinth Robinson, named appropriately for Apollo's
son, a classic child hero. His role is more important to this
mythic-realist novel than any man's role is in the novels by
Adams and Chopin. Christina's own dual nature is in conflict with
itself as well as with her death-oriented male culture, and
finally the destructive phase of her personality and her society,
"the cold Medusa-face of life," prevails.\(^5\) Medusa was the beautiful maiden who became a Gorgon and by her gaze turned men to
stone. Hyacinth dies, mourned by the ancient moon goddess Christ-
tina Light, who bleakly survives him in James's wintry, ironic
world.

---


Mediating between the two modes of realism and mythology and synthesizing them into an artistic whole, is the naturalism of a Greek deterministic environment. Christina and Hyacinth are forged out of a combination of heredity and environment and act out their fates in an urban London, a social organism at war with itself. The novel closes with Christina confronting her destiny. She still has choices, but her fate has been at least in part determined by her heredity and environment.

Henry James's Signature

Before I discuss The Princess Casamassima as a mythic-realist novel, I want to examine, as I did with Henry Adams, that expression in James of his signature, his literary personality. Twin influences of family background and education contributed to the continuity of James's fiction like they did to Adams's. James's family background contributed to his expression of recognizable Jungian archetypes in The Princess and in other Jamesian fiction—archetypes of the shadow, the wise old man, the primordial earth mother, the maiden, the anima and animus, and the child hero. But expressions of the maiden archetype and earth mother are especially strong. Though there is not always an absolute distinction, maiden archetypes appear principally in James's short stories, while young girl figures who develop into fully conceived

James, "Dissertation Abstracts International, XXXIII (1972), 6906A (Yale), has proposed that the Medusa/Muse is a double image and focal point of Adams's and James's investigation of paradoxical interrelations of self and society, freedom and determinism, chaos and order, life and art.
earth mothers emerge in his longer fiction. The second influence, his education, tended to reinforce his literary realism. But this education also strengthened his use of archetypes and mythology in his non-fiction, especially in his theory of literature in his Prefaces.

Looking at James's family life first, we find that several women, his grandmother, mother, and aunt Kate, were important to the creation fictionally of mother archetypes. His sister Alice and cousin Minny Temple were especially influential in his creation of maidens. James was also strongly influenced by such women outside his family as Marian Hooper Adams, Grace Norton, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Edith Wharton. And the chronicle of his relationships with women is one of deaths, orphaned children, suicides, renunciation, and loss.

His grandmother Catherine Barber provided him when he was very young with knowledge of a dual-natured woman. She was his grandfather's third wife, a loving maternal figure with eleven children (eight of her own and three from her husband's previous wives who died). She was also a stern Presbyterian who outlived her husband by twenty-seven years, "the placid, joyless grandmother" of his childhood recollections. We have an image of her seated and straightbacked, reading lady novelists, with a tall candle set between her eyes and the book. It is his grandmother's death-filled Albany house, windowless and with bolted doors, that James describes in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and which Isabel
Archer loves but is glad to leave. 6

Henry's mother Mary was another "purposeful, strong-willed and determined woman" who elicited an ambivalent response in her son. 7 Henry, whom his mother called "angel," was her favorite son whom she loved, as his father told him, "more than all her other progeny." 8 Just as his brothers and father did, Henry thought her the perfect mother and wife. He wrote to her as "My dearest Mother" and "My darling Mammy." 9 Her memory was "sacred," and he described her in exalted terms reminiscent of Adams's description of the Virgin Mary:

She was our life, she was the house, she was the keystone and the arch. She held us all together, and without her we are scattered reeds. She was patience, she was wisdom, she was exquisite maternity. Her sweetness, her mildness, her great natural beneficence were unspeakable (Notebooks, p. 40).

This it the "myth of the 'sacred woman,'" as Leon Edel has said. James confessed, "I was passionately attached to her." 10 But

---


7 Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, I, 44.


Edel, his best biographer, has shown that James's response to his mother's protection was to feel a parental tug and pull upon his affections that was anxiety-producing. She wrote to her sons and daughter every Sunday when they were separated from her, was possessive, and exercised control even in her absence: holding "a firm rein . . . is especially my forte."¹¹ She admonished Henry for spending too much money, then reversed herself and urged expenditures upon him. Knowing that Henry admired Minny Temple, she wrote him that another young woman, Lizzie Boott, was much Minny's superior (Lizzie was probably James's model for Pansy Osmond). When Henry, in Italy, was attracted to a Mrs. Wister, Mrs. James wrote, "Mrs. Wister's too conscious of her own charms to be very dangerous I am told--but beware!"¹² He was thirty at the time.

He was unmistakably ambivalent toward his mother's sacrificial nature. He idealized yet assessed it negatively; it was possible, he said, that her "selflessness" was "so consistently and unabatedly active" as to have nothing left to offer (Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 179). Her death, he said, gave him "exquisite pain." He was "wretched," yet in death she was "beautiful" (Notebooks, pp. 40-41). His grandmother, father, and mother all died in the same year.

¹¹Leon Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, I, 41.

James carried over into his fiction these double views toward American mothers. (I am limiting my discussion to Americans although one can find the same patterns in his European mothers.) His fictional American mothers, first in the short stories and then in the novels, are self-effacing, sacrificial, and life-giving. But they also possess strong negative qualities. It is noteworthy how often this devoted, loving son portrays mothers who may have good qualities but are ultimately power-seeking and dangerous. As critics have suggested, they are probably unconscious recreations of his own mother's concealed force.  

Several power-seeking destroyers abandon their children. In "Georgina's Reasons," the beautiful Georgina deserts her young son. She is said to look like "a duchess" and "empress," and is repeatedly called "imperial."  

She is a "cold-blooded devil," a liar and bigamist whose "blooming hardness . . . acted upon her like a kind of Medusa-mask" (Complete Tales, VI, 20 and 43). Her last name "Roy" signals her prevailing and ruling destructiveness. In another tale, "Louisa Pallant," Mrs. Pallant is cold and hard and molds her daughter in her own image. Horrified at the results,

---


the mother betrays Louisa to a suitor as a "bad, hard girl, who would poison any good man's life!" (Complete Tales, VI, 257) While this may be so, the reader is left with distaste for both mother and daughter.

In the novels James develops to a greater depth the dual positive and negative qualities of American mothers with the negative dominating. Christina Light's mother, named "Savage" before her marriage to an American consul, appears in Roderick Hudson (1876) as a money-hungry, affected, hypocritical adulteress who deprives Christina of childhood and happiness. Mrs. Light is a "finished fool of a mother!" Roderick's mother, with her "small quaint majesty," is "a little old malevolent fairy" (Roderick Hudson, p. 433 and p. 456). James includes several mothers in The Portrait of a Lady. Mrs. Touchett, unlike Mrs. Light, is quite virtuous, but her basic responses are almost always negative. Though she loves her son Ralph in her own austere way, she lives with him (and his father) for only three months of each year. Ralph contrasts his mother with his father: "His father . . . was the more motherly; his mother, on the other hand was paternal, and even . . . gubernatorial" (Portrait, I, 48). It is Edel's opinion that the Touchetts are an implied picture of Henry's parents. Such role reversal indicates dis-

---

15 Henry James, Roderick Hudson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 420; hereafter referred to directly in the text.

16 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (1881; rpt. Boston:
orientation. But what is so interesting is that maternity fails James's mothers. Following Isabel's loss of her baby and Ralph's death, Mrs. Touchett says to Isabel, "'Go and thank God you've no child!'" (Portrait, II, 419) Another mother in this novel, Madame Merle, gives up all rights to her child and is quite willing to sacrifice Pansy's happiness to a rich marriage. James creates several women, like Madame Merle and Mrs. Light, who have children by men other than their husbands. His realism comprehensively includes the dismaying consequences to women who have children within the legal framework of patriarchal marriage and outside its bounds. Not only does marriage as an institution prove unsatisfying, but so does the natural condition of womanhood.

Another kind of mother figure James portrays is less powerful than Mrs. Light or Mrs. Touchett. She is powerless, ineffectual, and ridiculous. James nowhere implies that passive, weak women are to be preferred to strong women. In his short fiction, Mrs. Day in "Pandora" has no control over the daughter. Daisy's doting, ignorant mother, Mrs. Miller, fails to curb her headstrong daughter with disastrous results. In the novels, Mrs. Tarrant in The Bostonians (1884) is weak and foolish. In the same novel, Mrs. Luna, while not so powerless, is still absurd. Perhaps the only really sympathetic portraits of American mothers are Isabel Archer and Maggie Verver. Isabel is a loving stepmother to

Pansy; but more about Isabel shortly. Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl (1904) is devoted to her Principino.

James's Aunt Kate also influenced him. Catherine Walsh, his mother's sister, came to live with Mary and Henry, Sr., upon their marriage. In Kate's middle years, she attempted to break away and married a Captain Walsh, but the marriage was short-lived, and she returned to her maiden name and to the James family. Aunt Kate was always present as Henry was growing up. Like his fictional mothers, fictional aunts usually assert themselves negatively. The young aunt and sister in "A London Life," Laura Wing, seems to have right on her side when she insists that her sister Selina (a moon-goddess figure), an adulteress, think of her children first (Complete Tales, VII). But Laura's responses are exaggerated—she advises Selina that rather than bring shame to her children she should kill herself. Aunt Penniman in Washington Square (1881) is silly, weak, and self-serving. She is, by the way, like James's Aunt Kate in her dependency on her brother Dr. Sloper for home and support. Mrs. Touchett is fond of her niece Isabel and provides the means whereby Isabel can escape from Albany; yet she really acts frequently out of self-interest.


The legacy of loss and death which women leave him again occurs in Henry's life with his sister. With Alice we find the archetype of the maiden. Alice, Minny Temple, and Marian Adams are the prototypes in James's fiction for the American girl. Alice's impact on Henry James was enormous and reminds one of Louisa's on Henry Adams, though Alice never held the reins as Louisa did. As the youngest and only girl among four brothers, she seems to have been overwhelmed by an aggressive, competitive family situation. Subject to physical and mental ill health, her invalidism may have been partly a solution to an impossible life. She even contemplated suicide. It might be said of Alice that like another New England woman, Emily Dickinson, whom Alice quoted in her journal, she died all her life. Alice's journal reveals a sensitive, witty, intelligent woman beset by frustrations. She had wide-ranging interests from politics and feminism to art and literature but felt severely "deprived" and a "fool" because she was uneducated. James recognized her frustrations—they spent much time together, even while James was writing The Princess Casamassima, after Alice moved from America to London in 1884. Henry said Alice had a "passionate radicalism" (Letters, I, 215), and that she would have been a feminine "political force" had she been able to live in the world (Letters, II, 216). Her

---

19 Alice James, Her Brothers—Her Journal, ed. Ann Robeson Burr (Cornwall, N.Y.: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934), p. 120. Another good source on Alice James is Alice James, The Diary of Alice James, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1964).
death from breast cancer deprived him of "a rare and remarkable being" (Letters, I, 187), but once again, as he did with his mother, Henry saw death as a release, feeling "great sorrow" when Alice died but glad she was finally at peace in "the wintry earth." 20

Alice's effect on James's fiction seems on first consideration to produce fewer ambiguities and less negativism than that of his mother and aunt. Some sister figures are quite sympathetically done, like Mrs. Westgage in "An International Episode" (Complete Tales, IV) and Henrietta Stackpole, a surrogate sister to Isabel Archer. It is possible, I think, that an ill, younger Alice posed less of a threat than mothers. Yet fictionally he is heavily ironical about young women who are politically involved like Olive Chancellor and the Princess Casamassima. One wonders whether James would have admired Alice quite so much if she had been able to transmit her beliefs into action. And even when a-political, a fictional, invalid Rosy Muniment in The Princess comes in for some scathing Jamesian satire. Rosy is a devoted and plucky sister, but demanding and grotesque.

Mary Temple provided another maiden archetype. His Albany cousin Minny was charming, life-oriented, and dead at twenty-four of tuberculosis. Once again James deeply experienced a woman through loss. Minny was one of four orphaned Temple girls, the

daughters of Henry Senior's sister Catherine. Henry Junior met Minny in 1861 and was instantly attracted to her. She was a "Diana" figure, "chaste and beautiful." Minny came to be closely connected with the disasters of the Civil War. To Henry's disappointment, he was unable because of a back injury to go to war. He visited Minny in the summer of 1865 and seems to have disconsolately and helplessly stood by as other young men (in uniform) courted her. The war took its toll on two of his brothers, injuring them either physically or emotionally. Minny became seriously ill about this time. It was as if all she stood for was being obliterated by the war and the post-war world. She understood all the while what was happening to her and valiantly fought against her disease. To Henry she seemed "a helpless victim and tool of her own intelligence." When she was hemorrhaging daily and knew she was dying, she wrote Henry in Europe with open affection, as if it were safe to now do so:

My darling Henry. . . . You don't mind if I am a little affectionate now that you are so far away, do you? . . . If you were not my cousin I would . . . ask you to marry me and take me with you, but as it is, it wouldn't do.

After her death he wrote his mother about Minny: "oh poor struggling suffering dying creature!" He wanted all the details of her last hours, death, and funeral. To Henry, Minny remained in memory an original and natural girl, a "heroine" keenly interested

---

21 Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, I, 235.
in life, vivacious, audacious, generous, with "an indescribable 
	grace." While she had all these life qualities, she was also an 
"ominously" pale flower (Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 461 and 
p. 77). One is again reminded of Henry Adams and his doomed sis­
ter, for Minny, too, was James's "great emblem of mortality," un­
chained from suffering, a symbol of all beautiful things lost. 23

Another doomed woman affected James. Marian Adams won his 
great admiration: "Henry is very sensible, though a trifle dry. . . . 
. . . [but] Clover has a touch of genius." 24 When James wished to 
compare American women to Europeans, he used Marian and Minny. He 
confessed to being repelled by Englishwomen's 

plainness and stiffness and tastelessness. . . . I revolt 
from their dreary deathly want of it—what shall I call it? 
Clover Hooper has it—intellectual grace—Minny Temple has it 
—moral spontaneity (Letters, I, 26).

Marian Adams's suicide gave James sorrow but relief: "Poor Mrs. 
Adams found . . . the solution of the knottiness of existence." 25 
He visited her Rock Creek tomb on his 1905 American visit. 

James's fictional American girls have received extensive 
critical attention. I do not intend here to cover old ground and 
shall only take them up, therefore, first in the short fiction,

23Dupee, Henry James, p. 39.

Robert F. Sayre, The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, 
the importance of Minny Temple and Marian Adams to the two Henrys.

25Leon Edel, Henry James: 1882-1895 The Middle Years, III, 
then in the novels as they relate to my subject. When one turns to James's short fiction, one finds a definite recurring pattern of a young woman who is a daughter figure, a maiden archetype. In his long fiction James develops this maiden more fully into an earth mother who suffers great loss and comes into awareness of her own role. Each maiden has the duality of the woman archetype—she is herself a victim, either rejected by life or incompatible with male-dominated social values, and she is also an executioner who rejects others and causes suffering. James's fiction is additionally mythological in being filled with classical allusions and in its basic structure of the mythos of irony and winter.

The young girl archetype appears in James's short fiction with his first published tale, "The Story of a Year" (Complete Tales, I), that has a Civil War setting which provides a naturalistic determinism. Elizabeth is an embryonic figure, a victim of her environment, and because she is shallow and fickle, she contributes to her dying lover's unhappiness. In another early story, "A Most Extraordinary Case," James deliberately identifies the earth maiden in mythic terms—Caroline Hoffman is "like Diana" and has "the inviolable strength of a goddess..." (Complete Tales, I, 345-46). There are hints of her destructive role, for she thrives and marries even as the wounded veteran who loves her loses strength and dies.26 Robert Gale's study of Jamesian imagery includes Greek

26 Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, I, called this a part of a vampire theme. Edel connected the theme with the family women around James but said it emerges mainly in his spectral or ghost stories.
and Roman myth in the category of "religious images." While falling short of insight, Gale did find that James's use of these images increased in density from the late 1860's to 1900. In other words, James used mythic allusions with increasing frequency even as he was developing his realism.

The young girl or maiden archetype shows signs of developing into full womanhood with Gertrude Whitaker in "Poor Richard" (Complete Tales, I). James again uses a naturalist war environment. Gertrude is an orphaned heiress whose lover dies in the war. She comes to care for Richard, but too late, for although he has loved her for years he is now indifferent. She survives, single and autonomous. Another maiden, Madame de Mauves, is an intriguing portrayal of a "sweet American girl" abroad, corrupted by a combination of a rigid Catholic convent education, bad family advice, her own romantic nature, and a philandering husband. Euphemia Cleve de Mauves, with her "radical purity" of imagination, seems a very model of virtue (Complete Tales, III, 127-29). But we see her destructiveness as she drives her repentent husband to suicide. The American Perseus, Longmore, who has hopelessly loved her, comes to discover that she has aroused in him "tenderness," but also the singular feeling "for which awe would be hardly too strong a name" (Complete Tales, III, 209). Madame de Mauves is a Medusa whose gaze emotionally paralyzes Longmore. In "Crawford's

---

"Consistency," the Medusa-face of life strongly emerges again. James includes elements of realism of late nineteenth century urban New York life, mythic references, and naturalism. A young, beautiful Elizabeth Ingram is engaged to Crawford who in his delight "marched away with the step of a sun-god beginning his daily circuit" (Complete Tales, IV, 22). When a rich suitor appears, Elizabeth's mother breaks the engagement. Before Elizabeth can marry the rich man, she contracts smallpox. Mrs. Ingram is a medd-ling, domineering Jamesian mother who earns her own reward. Her daughter, her most marketable item, has her beauty ruined, and the rich suitor jilts her. In the meantime, Crawford has made a miserable marriage to another woman.

Daisy Miller, a "princess" with a queer little native grace, is the American girl personified (Complete Tales, VI, 154). She is the earth maiden connected with nature, "a flower," at her best in a garden setting as at Vevey, but by contrast has her fate sealed by gossip in stuffy drawing rooms. Daisy is the unrescued (by Winterbourne) transported Andromeda from Schenectady, who like other young women, Bessie Alden and Francie Bosson, achieves a certain level of consciousness. Bessie rejects her lover; Francie accepts hers but takes him from his home and family. In all of these stories, all three young women'a radical extreme innocence causes them to hurt others besides themselves.

James creates an American girl, Pandora, whose name is a specific reference to a mythological woman whom the Greeks said introduced sexuality, shame, and a plague of troubles to humankind.
In James's tale "Pandora," the girl is from Utica, New York, "the latest, freshest fruit of our great American evolution. She is the self-made girl!" She is imaged against the Acropolis and "frisking over the Parthenon" (Complete Tales, V, 396 and 373). Pandora rejects a European nobleman who has sworn not to worship her but is still "sacrificed on the altar of the American girl" (Complete Tales, V, 401)—the implications are strong of her destructiveness.

In the long fiction we have a consistent deepening of the maiden archetype into a fully created earth mother having both good and bad qualities, and struggling for and achieving full consciousness. The maiden in her quest develops from ignorance and innocence into maturity and knowledge. Realism, mythology, and naturalism come together fully in Roderick Hudson. Its mythological structure functions from the opening, a Massachusetts summer, continues in a cyclical three-year pattern, and concludes with Roderick's suicide in the naturalist winter environment of the Swiss Alps. This novel has many mythological allusions. Rowland compares Roderick to a "Ulysses" who "refuses to be tied to the mast" and be saved, and so is dashed on the rocks (Roderick Hudson, p. 294). The narrator calls Roderick an Apollo. The novel has two earth mothers. One is Mary Garland, symbolized by her name.

28 "Pandora" bears interesting parallels to Democracy and demonstrates that there was more of a literary connection between Adams and James than one would at first think. "Pandora" includes an April trip to Mount Vernon and a caricature of a Washington socialite couple, the Bonnycastles, who were, as James said, the Adamses (Notebooks, p. 56).
Mary is a sacrificial woman in love with Roderick and a doormat for him and his mother. But she is cold and remote, too, and when he dies she, like Madame de Mauves, sacrifices the better man, Rowland Mallet. Christina provides a beautiful description of Mary's double nature: Mary "'glares—like a Medusa crowned not with snakes but with the tremor of doves' wings'" (Roderick Hudson, p. 381). Christina Light is the other earth mother, a Lady of the Beasts constantly accompanied by a large poodle. Christina has great beauty and dangerous, dusky looks. She is "a goddess on a cloud or a nymph on a Greek gem." (Roderick Hudson, p. 297). A question arises as to whether Christina is a heroine. Louise Bogan has said that because Christina marries the Prince Casamassima at once after she learns of her illegitimacy from her mother, she is not truly courageous nor a heroine. It is possible, I think, to read her capitulation as a realistic response to the sexual politics of her day. James himself was dissatisfied, however, with this novel and felt Christina's story incomplete. He therefore reintroduced her, along with several other characters, into The Princess Casamassima.

Watch and Ward (1878) has a young heroine, an orphan from St. Louis; in a Pygmalion situation. Nora is adopted when she is

---

twelve by a young man who proceeds to shape her into a perfect wife. She has "a kind of awkward slender majesty," and is "a Pallas Athene . . . sprang full-armed . . . from the brain of Jove." Nora is a "western version of the myth!" (One is reminded of Catherine Brooke in Esther.) Watch and Ward is primarily the mythos not of winter, but of spring and comedy. Nora is won by the solar king Roger, and the story ends happily in marriage.

When we come to Washington Square we find a masterpiece that combines in Catherine Sloper a fully developed, double-natured archetypal great mother. Catherine has positive qualities of a fine character, gentleness, capacity for deep love and loyalty, and an "impulse of self-effacement and sacrifice." But she is also part of a deadly patriarchal family and social system and has been forged out of suffering and loss into a renunciatory and barren earth mother with destructive tendencies. The motherless Catherine (this is a modern truncated family) is a rich, plain, awkward New York girl. An adventurer Morris Townsend seeks to marry her, for her money is a means to power, status, and leisure. She loves him, but her domineering and repressive father, Dr. Sloper, prevails in the power struggle between them. He threatens

---


Catherine with disinherittance, and Morris predictably then jilts her. When long after her father's death, Morris returns again to woo her, Catherine rejects him. She has travelled the painful road from darkness into light and consciousness and has established her unique identity. She survives in dignity in the lonely Washington Square mansion, celibate and autonomous. Only a childless Aunt Penniman remains as her useless companion. There is a kind of affirmation of self, but it is achieved through pain and loss of community, for Catherine is an isolato. The Jamesian world of Washington Square so well reflects what Erich Neumann described as a culture whose loss of the female principle of life has left it dangerously unbalanced. Morris is a drifter and wastrel; Dr. Sloper is a power-hungry tyrant; Aunt Penniman is a dependent, dispensible widow.

Isabel Archer, the next great goddess figure, is like Catherine Sloper in snatching a moral victory out of defeat. Isabel is also the most direct forerunner of Christina Light, for Isabel chooses among impossible alternatives to survive within the framework of marriage. Because The Portrait of a Lady has been interpreted so many times, I shall only add here what I think throws light on James's development of the archetypal great goddess, identified by many mythic allusions and within the mythic ironic structure of the realist novel. James establishes the cyclical pattern of nature in The Portrait in the opening scene at Gardencourt on a "splendid summer afternoon" in 1871. The orphaned American Andromeda Isabel has just recently been transported
across the threshold of her Albany house and over water by her aunt. Isabel has begun her quest for freedom. Gardencourt, where the Touchetts are engaged in a ritual "ceremony" of afternoon tea on the lawn above the Thames, seems to Isabel to belong to an idyllic golden age (Portrait I, 1). The novel works itself out in a six-year cycle. A year from its opening, in May, Isabel meets Osmond, marries him the following year in June, and has a baby the next spring or at the end of a three-year cycle. The baby dies six months later. Isabel returns to England in the spring of 1877 because Ralph is dying. She comes full circle back to Gardencourt where she fully comprehends her fate. The Portrait ends in an ironically promising springtime, reminiscent of Adams's Democracy, on one of the last of the treacherous May-time" days (Portrait, II, 420).32

The double modes of mythology and realism occur all the way through the novel. There are several mythic figures. Osmond in relation to Isabel is the devil seducer. As Pansy's father, he is like the King of Hades who doesn't rape Persephone but does psychologically dominate her and threaten her physically, too, by having her imprisoned in a convent. Serena Merle is the modern, rootless alienated American woman and is another moon goddess ("Selena"), "a Juno or a Niobe" (Portrait, I, 249). As crow or

32 William Bysshe Stein, "The Portrait of a Lady: Vis Iner-tiae," Western Humanities Review, XIII, No. 2 (Spring, 1959), 177-90, has made a case for James's revisions of the novel's conclusion bringing James's view of women as force and sexual inertia closer to Adams's view.
blackbird ("merle"), she has symbolic connotations of evil and
magic, and she virtually casts a spell over Isabel. The Countess
Gemini is also surrounded by images of bird and birds' wings, so
that symbol becomes archetype and connotes augery. Her role is to
tell Isabel about Osmond and Madame Merle. The androgynous Ralph
is a wise man. Several people warn Isabel, but Ralph's warning,
that Osmond is a sterile dilettante, emphasizes Osmond's deadly,
barren, exploitative nature. Among the men Ralph has the most
well-developed anima, and at the novel's end he touches Isabel's
soul—she calls him her brother.

Isabel herself is the spontaneous young woman from Albany,
"a real little passionate force" (Portrait, I, 86). She is the
Virgin maiden or huntress queen ("archer"), a "goddess in an epic"
(Portrait, I, 45), who cannot escape her fate. Isabel has many
mythic associations. As an archetype she is a "Madonna" (Portrait,
II, 256). Connected with the moon, she is courted by Osmond at
the Palazzo Crescentini (crescent moon). She is a Galatea fig-
ure, too. Dorothy Van Ghent has suggested, without naming it
specifically, that the Procne-Philomela myth lies behind the "sub-
urban wilderness" courtship scene when Osmond and Isabel listen to
the nightingales (Portrait, II, 62). Isabel is not raped, but

33 R. W. Stallman, "The Houses That James Built--The Por-
trait of a Lady," The Texas Quarterly, I, No. 4 (Winter, 1958),
176-98, rpt. in R. W. Stallman, The Houses That James Built and
other Literary Essays (East Lansing: Michigan State University

34 Judith Montgomery, "The American Galatea," College
Osmond violates her spirit when he lures her into marriage and deals untruthfully and cruelly with her. It is as if her tongue has been cut out in a foreign land, for she cannot tell anyone of the debasement she has suffered in marriage nor of her unhappiness. Another archetypal pattern is Isabel as Lady of the Beasts—the Touchett dog at Gardencourt has instant sympathy with her, Isabel herself is "'a carefree greyhound'" (Portrait, I, 39), and she is an expert horse handler.

Water and vessel symbols are basic to this earth mother. Her adventure began when she crossed water from America to Europe. Later Ralph says, "'I should like to put a little wind in her sails!'" (Portrait, I, 260) When Isabel learns of Madame Merle's betrayal, the knowledge comes over her "like a high-surging wave" (Portrait, II, 327). In the novel's final scene, when Caspar kisses her, Isabel feels she is drowning. Water thus manifests its elemental properties of life and death.

Isabel's quest is internal, too, an ordeal of consciousness into knowledge. In the famous vigil scene before the fire, she meets herself as her shadow archetype and realizes her own complicity in her fate. In her supreme egotism and pride she had insisted on "freedom," but finds ironically that what she thought to be "the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end" (Portrait, II, 189). She has made the fatal error in a patriarchal culture of choosing the

wrong man, one who, in fact, despises women. She will pay a life-
long penance, for marriage is "the most serious act—the single
sacred act—of her life" (Portrait, II, 246). Goodwood and War-
burton are impossible alternatives. Her best choice would have
been Ralph, but he is hopelessly ill and is her first cousin. One
recalls that Minny Temple wrote James that marriage "wouldn't do"
between cousins.

The Portrait's ending has long raised questions whether
its ambiguities are resolved and whether Isabel is a satisfactory
heroine. Does her acceptance of the marriage vow, the Protestant
ethic of duty, and her promise to return to Pansy signify spiri-
tual suicide, as Marion Montgomery has charged?35 Does Isabel
truly come to know herself? Has James resolved the problem of her
freedom within a fated universe? If The Portrait is read as a
mythic-realist novel, these questions are answered, particularly
so through the Jamesian resolution of naturalism. Isabel as
archetypal woman has in innate duality. On the one hand, she is
life-giving. She rises to consciousness and achieves intellectual
freedom. The Countess Gemini has said that Osmond, who always
hated Isabel's ideas, met his match in her. Equally important,
she retains sexual integrity. On the other hand, her destructive-
ness is the mirror of her goodness—in searching for her freedom
she rushes headlong to her doom. She suffers and causes others to

35Marion Montgomery, "The Flaw in the Portrait," Univer-
sity of Kansas City Review, XXVI (March, 1960), 215-220, rpt. In
Peter Buittenhuis, ed. Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Por-
suffer. Although she is capable of passion, Isabel remains cold and virginal to the end. Dupee is instructive: "Again and again in James novels the process of becoming one's self excludes physical intimacy with others." This is one of the most poignant and ironic aspects of Isabel's fate. While a virgin coldness provides Isabel with autonomy and self-reliance, it prevents her from engaging wholeheartedly in life's continuity. She is an example of how much in radical discontinuity the culture is with itself. There is in The Portrait no convincing picture of healthy male sexuality, either.

The novel synthesizes through naturalism the nineteenth century dilemma of an American woman in an unbalanced, disintegrating western culture. The lightning flash of Goodwood's kiss drives Isabel into a retreat from male violence. Like Henry James himself, Isabel prefers the cool and moon-filled shade, symbolized at the novel's end by her retreat into darkness and away from the glare and heat of Goodwood's kiss. The novel's closure, of Isabel meeting her Greek ironic fate, her remaining true to her promises as a heroine must, and her taking responsibility for her actions within a deterministic universe in which she has been manilubated and denied the very freedom she sought, means that she asserts herself in renunciation and loss, and that she achieves

---

36 Dupee, Henry James, p. 107.

unity out of the chaos of her world. As James said in his Notebooks, the novel "is complete in itself" (p. 18).

A much later Jamesian development but a continuation of the maiden archetype who matures and affirms, her autonomy in loss is Milly Theale, Minny Temple personified down to her name's initials. Milly is a "Rhine-maiden" and Lorelei, "a priestess;" an unrescued American Andromeda abroad. Morton Denser is "a bland Hermes." Though she wishes to "float on and on," Milly is doomed in her hired palace, "the ark of her deluge," to an early death in Venice (Wings of the Dove, II, 157). Water symbolism indicates Milly's return to the protean and monist sea which will reconcile the terrible ambiguities and suffering of her young life. In contrast, Isabel at the end of The Portrait rejects drowning and keeps her head above water, but a reconciliation is achieved there, too. Milly is duck and dove. Kate Croy is a magnificent earth mother with predominant qualities of death and destructiveness. She is intelligent, beautiful, and graceful, but she is also a panther, blackbird, and crow, "as strong as the sea" (Wings of the Dove, II, 60). While not an American, Kate is like Madame Merle a penniless victim of the male world. Her life is a desperate struggle for survival. She is, like Merle, both victim and executioner. She is additionally cursed with a lying, manipulative, negligent father. There is a wise man archetype, the doctor

38 Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (New York: Random House, 1937), I, xii and xix, and II, 105 (two volumes are in one book); hereafter referred to in the text in shortened form.
Sir Luke Strett, but he cannot save Milly. Milly, having achieved knowledge and understanding, dies in the fall of the year, the mythic season of tragedy. The novel has a nine-months cycle from its March opening to the last meeting between Kate Croy and Densher in December, on the shortest day of the year. Tragedy blends into irony at the end.

Charlotte Stant in *The Golden Bowl* is another moneyless American woman abroad who must live by her wits, and is another beautiful expression of the great goddess. She promises fineness as "an expanded flower," but is also "a huntress" whose threatening character is symbolized by her large mouth and "a slight, the very slightest, tendency to protrusion in the solid teeth, otherwise indeed well arrayed and flashingly white."39 James stunningly describes Charlotte's entrapment by poverty and sexual politics: her slender body "gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well-filled with gold-pieces, but having passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together" (*Golden Bowl*, I, 47). She marries for money and position and becomes a caged lady of the beasts whom a hostile Adam. Verver, pockets filled with money, keeps leashed, "holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long silken haltar looped around her beautiful neck" (*Golden Bowl*, II, 287). In this novel Maggie Verver is an archetypal maiden, a "passionate little daughter," an Electra who becomes a woman when

---

she realizes she must give up her daughterhood for wifehood (Golden Bowl, I, 395). James reinforces the central realist action of marriage and adultery by mythic allusions—spring brings the generous mood of the sunny gusty English April, all panting and heaving with impatience or even at moments kicking and crying like some infant Hercules who wouldn't be dressed (Golden Bowl, I, 332).

Although Charlotte is magnificently portrayed, and while this book is metaphorically beautiful, The Golden Bowl raises certain problems. Maggie's desperate desire to accept her cracked marriage is understandable, but why she continues to adore the indolent, adulterous Prince is a puzzle—if it is for his physical beauty and title, she would be shallow, which she is not. I also find her role in Charlotte's humiliation and defeat, particularly after she engineered Charlotte's marriage, to be very unpleasant. This is supposed to be the novel that reconciles James to his imagination of love. James at the end has Maggie supposedly live happily ever after with her Prince. But James wrote elsewhere:

But why do I write of the all unutterable and the all abysmal? Why does my pen not drop from my hand on approaching the infinite pity and tragedy of all the past? It does, poor helpless pen, with what it meets of the ineffable, with what it meets of the cold Medusa-face of life, of all the life lived, on every side. Basta, Bastal (Notebooks, p. 321)

I think that The Golden Bowl is filled with the Medusa vision, and though James adopted a mask of love in it, there remains glimmering behind the mask the Medusa-face of life.

Several other women outside his family played important roles in James's life. American literary women Constance Fenimore Woolson and Edith Wharton, and non-literary women Grace Norton and
Jessie Allen were confidantes, strong women, even surrogate mother figures. James's friendships with American women authors were always filled with ambiguity. He liked and admired them, but condescended to and feared them. Miss Woolson was a disciple, and he both depended on and desired independence from her. At one point they shared a villa in Italy, but he felt confined by the arrangement. It is interesting that she entitled a novel The Lonely Friends (1885). Upon Marian Adams's death, Constance Woolson wrote James: "I should like to die without warning myself. ... But for those who are left it is very terrible." Her probable suicide in Florence in 1894 was just such a shock to him. He wrote his notes for The Wings of the Dove in the autumn of 1894, right after her death. Once again, one is impressed by the connection between James's life and art.

Edith Wharton was another friend and disciple whom he greatly admired but was wary of. She was "The Angel of Devastation," the "Firebird" and "Eagle." When she was to pay him a visit, he said she was about to swoop down and "catch me up in her irresistible talons." Ironical about her domineering character, he called her and her husband "the Edith Whartons."

---

40 Edel, Henry James: The Middle Years, III, 194 and 356-58.
41 Millicent Bell, Edith Wharton and Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship (New York: George Braziller, 1965), 175-76. Like Adams, James destroyed a great deal of correspondence from women, including Edith Wharton's letters (she kept his).
Grace Norton, a "maternal confidante," and ten years his senior, was probably the most motherly of these women and the least literary. All were childless. Like Miss Woolson, Miss Norton was single. James debated in the abstract with her the question of marriage. He told her it was too important an institution to treat casually, and besides if he were to marry he should have to pretend to think better of life than he did. He also confided to her his principle belief, that he did not know the source nor purpose of life, but that life itself was "the most valuable thing" and consciousness "an illimitable power" which might bring misery but holds us to the universe (Letters, I, 100-101). Consciousness is always the supreme goal of his mature fictional earth mothers.

Jessie Allen, the last woman I wish to mention, was one of the few young women among his close friends. James seemed to feel safer among older women. He addressed Miss Allen as "Dear bountiful and beautiful lady!" (Letters, II, 379) and as "Dearest and worst Miss Allen." Fictional surrogate mothers who are not related to the daughter figures in the fiction, like Mrs. Portico of "Georgina's Reasons," and Mrs. Tristram of The American, Madame Grandoni in The Princess Casamassima, and Susan Stringham in The Wings of the Dove, are usually rather sympathetically rendered. They are somehow less threatening to the young women–daughter

---

43 Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, I, 253.
figures, too.

Henry James, then, was in touch through women in his life with mythological archetypes, and they especially influenced his fiction. His education continued to inform his attraction to women archetypes and mythic literary structure, while providing background for his realism. Education influenced, additionally, his literary criticism. It is not possible to divide James's education, as I did with Adams's, into "periods," for James's was far less formal and historical. But many of the same educational forces had an impact on both men—as Adams said, they were products of a New England conscience, or "Type bourgeois-bostonien!" The new sciences, technology, urbanization, industrialism, capitalism, imperialism and expansionism, and the new woman all provided Henry James with a "crooked corridor," the equivalent of the Adams labyrinth, through which James made his artistic odyssey. All James's education, in a sense, led to his art. It is a striking circumstance that this theoretician of realism often stated his aesthetics in mythic or archetypal language. He knew from his young adulthood on that he would follow his "Muse," for art was "the rarest boon of the Gods."
A brief look at James's formal schooling reveals his milieu as double. Henry James, Sr., considered "spontaneity" to be desirable and encouraged this in the erratic and experimental education of his children. But he was very intellectually oriented, so that young Henry from his boyhood on was a great reader as well as a receptacle for felt experiences. We are told that he wrote his first novel at the age of ten. Schooling consisted of a variety of academies and a series of governesses and tutors in America and Europe, all part of a nomadic existence. Henry said that in his early years he "wholesomely breathed inconsistency and ate and drank contradictions."\(^{48}\) Percy Lubbock has called these years James's "queer unanchored youth" (\textit{Letters}, I, xxvi). Amid all this change, and even as he experienced constant shifts, breaks, and alterations, Henry learned about traditional culture. His reading, like that of other educated youth of his day, included the Greek and Roman myths, so that he could, for example, make easy references to two young cousins being "a small New York Orestes ridden by furies," and the "quietest, most colourless Electra of a lucidest Orestes."\(^ {49}\) While traveling in Europe with his family (1856-57), his visit to the Galerie d'Apollon of the Louvres was

\(^{48}\) Edel, \textit{Henry James: The Untried Years}, I, 47.

apparently a memorable experience and provided him with dream-inspired subjects and mythological themes. Later in England (in 1869) he attended a lecture by John Ruskin on Greek myths, and he recorded a visit to the National Gallery where he viewed Renaissance paintings of classical subjects. James had, in the meantime, after a spotty year at Harvard Law School, left behind all formal school structures and had earnestly taken up writing: "You see . . . how I am in the councils of the gods—how I am cast upon Olympus."

His informal educational experiences included knowledge of the new sciences. He knew Darwin and read his work. But he was not terribly interested in scientific matters: "I reach beyond the laboratory brain." James expressed his knowledge of changing scientific and social-scientific thoughts not only directly in his theory and practice of fiction, but in metaphors which become archetypal symbols. Nineteenth century Darwinian, organic, and naturalist thinking permeated his views of women—he thought of them in organic and environmental terms. The American woman was a "plant of pure American growth" and "an experiment of nature" (Letters, I, 26). The experience of dining with the excavator of Mycena, Dr. Schliemann (1877), as well as his museum visits, gave him knowledge of ancient mythology which he inevitably used in his

---


51 Edel, Henry James: The Master, V, 564.
work as he used all experience. His use of and interest in an anti-omniscient point of view was also a direct reflection, as Harold Kolb has pointed out in *The Illusion of Life*, of the rising belief in the evolution and the absence of god from the universe.

Like Henry Adams, in the absence of god James returned to the female principle of biological life and of the psychological process— that process, as Carl Jung has said, which lies in the feminine. James evolved a religion of psychological consciousness. Again like Adams, James retained the analogous and allegorical Puritan mind, but the meaning now lay in the consciousness of certain superior individuals who are either women or who are androgynous like Hyacinth. Secular evil in James's fiction becomes translated into earthly terms and into personal relationships, as into a battle of the sexes between Isabel and Osmond or Paul Muniment and Christina Light. And it becomes simultaneously translated within the superior individual, as in the dual-natured female archetype, into her interior struggle for her soul and consciousness, as it is in Christina.

The next area of influence, the technological, was especially felt in James's non-fiction. Technology had an impact on his theory of aesthetics as well as on his fictional practice. James returned again and again in his non-fiction to archetypal mythological phraseology. He was affected by a changing late

---

nineteenth century technology in several ways: first, he himself as Leon Edel has said, evolved a technology of fiction; second, he adapted new technology to his own ends; and third, a matter I shall discuss in connection with The Princess Casamassima, he showed how industrialization vitally affected the traditional world of art and culture.

The first point has to do with James's being on the cutting edge of the new realism. He felt a pressing need to formulate his particular system of fictional observation. His Notebooks from 1878 to 1911 dramatically demonstrate how he grounded his fiction in reality, for his entries include many facts such as plot sources and lists of names. But at the same time he was absolutely dependent on his creative imagination which he described archetypally:

I have been sitting here in the firelight—on this quiet afternoon of the empty London Xmas time, trying to catch hold of the tail of an idea of a 'subject.' Vague, dim forms of imperfect conceptions seem to brush across one's face... with a flutter of impalpable wings (Notebooks, p. 138).

In evolving a new technology for fiction, James felt it necessary to exorcise the old pre-Civil War "romance." His criticism in the 1870's, as in Hawthorne (1879), is filled with statements that romance is incompatible with realism. His later eighteen Prefaces (1907-08) use the language of mythology with enough frequency so that we can detect certain patterns. For one thing, James labels as romance what he cannot account for

---

otherwise. Today we would say that what he called "romance" is mythology. To James "romance" occurred when the cable connecting one to outer reality broke, which he said happened in *The American*. His dissatisfaction with this novel, Edel has pointed out, was unfounded. Rather than being inconsistent, James was true to his Medusa vision when he had Madame de Cintré shut herself up in a convent and refuse to marry Newman. In another case, James described the mythic process quite well when he connected "the resuscitation of Christina" Light from one novel to another. He cannot answer why, he said, he had her "strike again," but her "pressure when was hot to be resisted." This felt to him like "romance." Christina is disponible; that is, she is vacant, an available vessel. Because she was not completely developed in *Roderick Hudson*, he wished to return to her and clothe "her chilled and patient nakedness" (*Art of the Novel*, pp. 73-75). I would like to suggest that such a description of the process of creating the Princess is that of the archetype welling up. As James said of his authorship of this novel, one had to have "the root of the matter" in oneself (*Art of the Novel*, p. 78). Whatever elements of romance exist in *The Princess* are there as displacement; that is, as Northrop Frye has explained, there are certain accompanying technical problems when mythic elements occur in a realist novel, such as plausibility, and one way to resolve this problem is by the use of romance. But romance is also, Frye said, an idealized

---

view of life. James uses romance, like Hyacinth's perceptions of the Princess, as displacement, then overwhelms romance with an ironic, unidealized Medusa vision of irony and disaster.

Another pattern of archetypal mythology in his realist criticism is in his employment of imagery which has the following configurations: it is circular and cyclical, and it often clusters into archetypal symbols that are either feminine or androgynous in their essence, such as those of the natural world, of water and vessels, and those related to weaving. Circular or cyclical patterns are basic to James's view of art:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, but the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by the geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so (Art of the Novel, p. 5).

He writes of "the active, contributive close-circling wonder" (Art of the Novel, pp. 149-50). One critic, Georges Poulet, does not think circular imagery is a cosmic symbol with James, but rather the circle is an artistic problem of technique. This argument divorces style from content, however, which one should not do with James. James's recurring circles reflect a particular ambiguity, too. The novel technically provides a finite circumference. But its ramifications are endless like a rock thrown in a pool that creates ever-widening concentric circles. These circles involve another pattern—the novel's author is its creator,

but the circles he creates take in the reader who also then becomes the book's maker. One could therefore say that the mythic structure of literature lies in both creators, writer and reader.

Feminine symbolism which at times becomes androgynous occurs in these prefaces again and again with words like "germ," "seed," "flowering," "soil," and "blooming." Imagination itself is "germination." A story springs from "a single small seed" (Art of the Novel, p. 119). His topic, the American girl, is "a child of nature," a "flower" of "young American innocence transplanted to European air" (Art of the Novel, p. 267 and p. 133). He describes the "free flowering of the actual..." (Art of the Novel, p. 122). Yet in several places, he resorts to architectural and man-made metaphors to describe the house of fiction, and in many novels he locates action in man-made atmospheres. Here is another inherent ambiguity: the novel is artificially created but is about human consciousness. J. A. Ward has expressed the ambiguity well — James's creative energy thrives on reconciling opposites, and a central tension which includes nearly all others "is the resolve to be at the same time natural and artificial, or organic and mechanical." 56 James communicates this doubleness and tension in his explanation of how the situation of The Princess Casamassima required and provoked

all round a mystic solicitation, the urgent appeal... to be interpreted and... reproduced... the great grey

Babylon easily becomes, on its face, a garden bristling with an immense illustrative flora (Art of the Novel, p. 59).

James used feminine vessels or symbols for his own creativity. He calls Maisie "my light vessel of consciousness," and himself "a vessel of sensibility" for Milly Theale (Art of the Novel, p. 143 and p. 293). One might say that this is a powerful anima working. Surely his identification as androgynous author, as Carolyn Heilbron has said in her study of this subject, stems from his viewing women as part of men's inner economy and not as other from men nor outside. Because the anima reflects an innate duality, James loved his creations and feared them—Christina was waiting to "strike again."

Water is elemental, protean, and with the earth, the very essence of the female as well as of the unconscious. James explains the metamorphoses of his craft from the early short stories to his well-developed fiction:

I had but hugged the shore . . . bumping about, to acquire skill in the shallow waters and sandy coves of the 'short story' and master as yet of no vessel constructed to carry a sail.

Then the subject of Roderick Hudson came to him: "I have not forgotten after long years, how the blue southern sea seemed to spread . . . before me . . ." (Art of the Novel, p. 4). In his very next preface (to The American), James confessed to fear and despair that he was not yet fully "afloat"—"I ask myself if,

---

possibly . . . I was launched," and if there was "not danger of an
inordinate leak—since the ship has truly a hole in its side more
sufficient to have sunk it . . . ." But he was, in any case, "at
sea, with no harbour or refuge till the end of my serial voyage"
(Art of the Novel, p. 21). Looking back on his long career, he
saw himself as having undertaken an odyssey, often dangerous and
beset by modern technology, in this case serialization.

James further connects his art of fiction to patterns of
webs and threads. Woman as weaver is an ancient mythic concept,
of course:

Experience is . . . 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.58

The cable connecting the imagination to reality in several cases
is a "silver thread" (Art of the Novel, p. 27).

Still another pattern within the mythological is that
James specifically describes his system of observation as dream-
ing. In the preface to The Golden Bowl, the last complete novel,
he states that the act of writing the preface for The Princess,
among other novels, meant "I could but dream the whole thing over
as I went—as I read . . . ." He asks the reader to dream again in
his company (Art of the Novel, pp. 344-45). Dreams and feminine
symbolism blend into James's role of androgynous author; the re-
perusal occasioned by writing the prefaces yields a search for

58 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in The House of Fic-
tion: Essays on the Novel by Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (London:
Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), p. 31; hereafter referred to in the text
in shortened form.
many more of the "shining silver fish afloat in the deep sea of one's endeavor than the net of widest casting could pretend to gather in. . . .", and it is "so beautifully tangled a web. . . ." (Art of the Novel, p. 345). This is a fascinating re-creation of having dreamed of writing the great American novel while still a young man at Newport, the Newport which appeared to him like "a small Greek island. . . . a mythic image. . . ."59

The second problem, James's adoption of a changing technology to his own method of creation, is one which only a few critics have taken up and should be studied in far more depth than I can do here. I shall, therefore, only touch on a few of the connections. Manfred MacKenzie observed that the serialization method influenced James in helping him to organize his narrative and in providing stimulus to architectural balance and form.60

The Princess, for example, before it was published in book form, appeared in The Atlantic Monthly and is filled with foreshadowing and heightened melodrama, possibly two effects of serialization. James changed about 1898 from a laborious hand-writing method to a system of dictating directly to a typist. Leon Edel has suggested that this may have added to the productivity of his late years.61

It is an intriguing possibility that it was a factor in the intensified ambiguities, particularly between the natural and the architectural, that James conveyed in his prefaces.

Technology by its very nature is a changing phenomenon and is therefore non-conservative and non-moral. Yet James used this technology to make a morality of art to which he dedicated his life. His most famous secretary-typist, Theodora Bosanquet, said of his work: "He lived a life consecrated to the service of a jealous, insatiable, and supremely rewarding goddess. . . ." 62

Urbanization, industrialism, and an exploitative money culture all made their impact. Urbanization or the city environment works in many ways: it is an active participant in shaping character and action; it hastens traditional society; it contributed to the misery of the urban poor, and to dislocation, fragmentation, isolation, and alienation of all; it abets a materialist orientation; and it heightens the conflict between the artist and society. 63 But the city operates positively, too, fostering a rich and exciting life. Thus the city contributes to ambiguity. All these factors are a part of The Princess Casamassima. James


uses the language of realism in his non-fiction to describe the genesis of The Princess out of an urban locale—it "proceeded quite directly" from his walking the London streets, and Hyacinth Robinson, the disinherited bookbinder, sprang from the city streets (Art of the Novel, p. 60). James uses the language of mythology, too. London as "the great grey Babylon" is a "Goliath" and "monster." James is sometimes fond of its great figure, and sometimes the city is a "she," a woman before whom he feels small and powerless and dislikes. (Middle Years, pp. 22-23). During one period he lived in "dusky ground-floor rooms at number 7 Half-Moon Street" (Middle Years, p. 12). Life indeed can imitate art!

Urbanization and capitalism merge, and a money-based society creates strong dualities and tensions. When James began The Princess there was widespread economic depression, scarcity of work, civil unrest, and "immense destitution" (Letters, I, 120–21). Lack of money is unbearable. But when Christina and the conspirators turn to collective socialist efforts to try to erase inequities, human relationships and culture suffer. Paul Muniment and the anarchists exploit Christina through money, and she exploits the Prince. Another problem James urgently felt was his own need to make money from his writing, strongly stated in his letters.

64 Henry James, The Middle Years (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), pp. 12–13; hereafter referred to in the text in shortened form.
He surely saw art in economic terms—life itself is a "splendid waste," but art gives one the opportunity for "sublime economy." Art "rescues...saves, and hoards and 'banks,' investing and reinvesting these fruits of toil," and gives "us spendthrifts" the "most princely of incomes!" (Art of the Novel, p. 120)

Money is tied to imperialism, and together they form a power dynamic which creates intense dualities. Raised in New York City, but living abroad in foreign cities as well, James was the imperial American who invaded a foreign place to have "complete liberty, and the prospect of profitable work. . . . I took possession of London. . . ." The act of imagining a character, he said, was "an act of personal possession of one being by another. . . ." (Art of the Novel, p. 17). One hastens to add that imperialism in this case was for the good, for it gave us great art. But James was capable of seeing himself in another light. In his fiction he deplored emotional cannibalism—yet it was absolutely necessary to him. As an imperialist, James was cosmopolitan: "If you have lived about. . . . you have lost the sense of absoluteness. . . ." (Portrait of Places, p. 75). He said he wished to write in such a way that it would be impossible for an outsider to say whether he was an Englishman or American, "and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized" (Letters, I, 142). Europe, furthermore, was part of the spell of the past and of traditional

---

community and gave James a sense of place that New York could not. James's beautiful American heiresses abroad were imperialists. These women were cosmopolitans and universal. Archetypal and mythic figures erase boundaries of mind and limits of consciousness and are by nature anti-national. Yet these same women demonstrate a ruinous, deadly imperialism. Without families or from broken families, they are rootless wanderers, like Isabel and Christina, in rash pursuit of freedom and experience. They meet and cause disasters. Like Henry Adams, Henry James hoped to find in archetypal woman a rootedness, but this hope is continually betrayed by women characters who are nomadic, childless or barren, or if mothers, with destructive personalities.

Imperialism and expansionism made an impact in another important way. James held strong American beliefs in the supreme value of the individual and in freedom. Speaking of the novel, he said his only two doctrines for it were "liberty" and "absolute freedom" (Selected Letters, pp. 122-23). Miss Bosanquet, perhaps as close to James as anyone in his later years, spoke of his hatred of tyranny of persons over each other: "His Utopia was an anarchy where nobody would be responsible for any other human being but only for his own civilized character." Ward said that evil resides in a James novel when a complex of forces prevents one from completing oneself. But community requires giving up one's freedom. James

deplored the thinness of American community and culture in Haw-
thorne, and he was partly in search of social continuity when he
settled in England. But he never relinquished his individual
freedom as an artist—thus he himself encompassed another double-
ness.

The final duality is that James abroad always felt the
pull of home. His last request was that after his death his ashes
be brought "home" to the family burial plot in Cambridge, Massa-
chusetts. 67 James's search for unity and oneness in women, in the
novel, and in his western culture, is epitomized by his initial
imperialist act of migration across the Atlantic ocean, by its
nature a dividing sea, but for him in art a connecting sea, and
finally in death a monist sea.

The last area of influence is that of the new woman who
came of age in post-Appomatox America and for James as the demo-
cratic princess. He was always fascinated by her. When he was
twenty-two he reviewed for American magazines Louisa Alcott and
other women writers. He continued to write widely about them,
deploring their conservative tendencies which he characterized as
being an affair of private rather than public life (European women
writers he found to be more public, liberal, even radical). He
was interested in the new political woman—Princess Casamassima's
political activity is evidence of this interest, and her character—

67 Jackson W. Heimer, The Lesson of New England: Henry James
and His Native Region (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State University Press,
ization has led to any number of suggestions that various active European and American women were her prototypes. The strongest contender, according to Edel, was a Bostonian in Italy, Elena Lowe, an interesting possibility in that Christina's family is said, in Roderick Hudson, to be originally from New England. Feminine revolutionists were also familiar to readers like James of the London Times. Theodora Bosanquet, herself a feminist, university graduate, and author, who taught herself to type so that she could work for James (a practice still all too well-known to educated women today), reported that James attended a London suffragist meeting.

Again like Henry Adams, Henry James lamented what was happening to American women, which he said was a growing divorce between the American woman (with her comparative leisure, culture, grace, social instincts, artistic ambitions) and the male immersed in the ferocity of business, with no time for any but the most sordid interests, purely commercial, professional, democratic and political. The divorce is rapidly becoming a gulf—an abyss of inequality, the like of which has never before been seen under the sun (Notebooks, p. 129).

He described how the world of American women was located within that of men, men supplying the canvas, women the embroidery (American Scene, pp. 63-64). The American girl or maiden was lost and helpless, "a broken reed." As for the mother, she was a statue, a "monument enshrouded in her brown holland," with her daughter seated at the base of the pedestal (American Scene, pp. 315-16).

---

It is the young woman's distressed consciousness which James felt most keenly.

Dupee has observed that the predominance of men in American life in the late nineteenth century presented a cultural weakness in the age and that James overcame this to a large extent by the very intensity of his affinity with women. Carl Jung specifically connected what he called "feminine traits" in men—creativity, insight, the aesthetic sense, and the cherishing values of the past—with what he thought to be the best of the human condition. He could have been writing about James and the art of his fiction.

The Princess Casamassima, an
"Angel of Devastation"

Christina Light, an archetypal woman, is present in The Princess Casamassima in an intriguing way. Her quest for light and consciousness is only directly rendered by Henry James in a few crucial scenes. Hyacinth Robinson, the diminished hero, is James's principle vessel of consciousness. Christina's role, however, deserves far more attention than it has been given. She gives the novel its title, and she is the realistically portrayed major female character to whom all the characters including Hyacinth react. She is also the novel's mythic feminine center who

---

69 Dupee, Henry James, p. 97.

represents the hope of continuing life. But her concomitant destructive urge toward people and culture signals that the society is doomed.

This six-part mythic-realist novel opens with a prologue of three chapters. In terms of the novel's realism and naturalism, the prologue explains the mixed heredity and background of Hyacinth. In mythic and dramatic terms, it is the ritualistic unfolding of past events in order that we may understand the present dilemma and main action. James skillfully opens Book One with the establishment of the female principle whom society has in some way failed. Amanda Pynsent and Mrs. Bowerbank in Lomax Place are comic figures, but James's surface comedy soon turns to a pervasive irony. Miss Pynsent, a spinster, is Hyacinth's surrogate mother, a poor seamstress who has adopted the desolate baby "because maternity was in her nature" (I, 10). Mrs. Bowerbank is a prison matron and the messenger from his natural mother, the Frenchwoman Florentine Vivier. Florentine has been in Newgate for nine years for having killed a man who wished to abandon her when she was pregnant. This is the sad world of distorted human and social patterns to which women must adjust or suffer, or more accurately, adjust and suffer. Miss Pynsent is a patient Penelope, cutting and stitching and basting, who yearns to salvage dignity and respect from this society for her little stepson—she thinks that his natural father is the Lord Frederick his mother stabbed. For everyday advice in raising the orphan, she turns to a surrogate father figure, the bachelor Vetch, who succinctly
tells her she has adopted "a prostitute's bastard" (I, 30).

It is a sad and death-filled world for men, too. Vetch, who carries a "small coffin-like fiddle case" (I, 38), is a study in failure and futility:

a lonely, disappointed, embittered, cynical little man, whose musical organisation had been sterile . . . whose fate had condemned him for the last ten years to play a fiddle at a second-rate establishment for a few shillings a week (I, 24)

Vetch is also a Greek chorus in the drama. He tries to give the right advice and guesses "the treacherous untrimmed truth about everything." (I, 26).

The double modes of mythology and realism operate at every level in the novel. James uses ritual language so consistently that he creates a dense mythic-linguistic atmosphere, while simultaneously recreating realist London society. A mythological configuration is that Pynnie adopted Hyacinth nine years previously to the novel's prologue. She is "a pilgrim" who undertakes with Hyacinth a "long and devious journey" to "the threshold of the dreadful place." (I, 40). The right ironic symbol for their passage into misery, "Newgate" is described with impressionist realist strokes

its dusky mass from the back of the Thames, lying there and sprawling over the whole neighborhood with brown, bare, windowless walls, ugly, truncated pinnacles and a character unspeakably sad and stern (I, 42).

Irony, grounded in realism, and the mythos of irony and winter devastatingly infuse the London world. Florentine Vivier, dying in prison, has a name symbolizing flowering life. With her white ravaged face, hollow eyes, and cropped hair, she is a wasted person with "no beauty left in the hollow bloodless mask. . ." (I, 49). Mrs. Bowerbank's name and profession are ironic comments on the systematic, institutionalized denial of fertility and life. Miss Pynsent's name and description reflect social and natural desolation: "needles and pins stuck all over the front of her dress—they might almost have figured the stiff sparse fur of a sick animal . . . (I, 59). The prologue, which has set the tone and vision, closes with Hyacinth's submitting to Florentine's "terrible irresistible embrace" (I, 56), a phrase which captures his ambivalent attitude toward women, women's dual natures, and the ambiguity of life itself.

We leap ten years forward to the present, in Chapter Four, and the novel enters a three-year cycle. Once again women are central to the action, and again we see a woman in mythic and realist terms. At the same time a naturalist London environment has formed character and determined action, and it serves to bridge the dialectic between myth and realism. Millicent Henning is a former Lomax Place child, the off-spring of a gin-swilling adulterous mother. Because Millicent is beautiful, energetic, and shrewd, she has risen above her squalid environment and is now a shop girl in a fashionable store. But she retains her environment too. She has returned to her old haunts to look up her childhood
playmate Hyacinth. An earth mother, common yet magnificent, Miss 'Enning is a robust, bold girl, with abundant hair and white teeth, and

rich in feminine curves. . . . a nymph of the wilderness of Middlesex, a flower of the clustered parishes, the genius of urban civilisation, the muse of cockneyism (I, 61-62).

Millicent to Amanda Pynsent is a direct threat for Hyacinth's attentions. In a patriarchy, after all, women are always rivals for men. Millicent acknowledges she is dangerous: "'I could swallow him at a single bite!'" (I, 72) The feminine principle, always present, is directly connected with the naturalist environment. Heredity in Millicent and Hyacinth (and in the Princess) is important: "'You look for all the world like a little plastered-up Frenchman!'' (I, 75) Millicent tells Hyacinth. He is half French, half English. And because of his heredity, he is determined to "never marry at all," to "never hand on to another . . . the inheritance that has darkened the whole threshold of his manhood (I, 80). It is a patriarchal society that has decided legitimacy is an all-important value. (In a culture based on mother right, legitimacy is no problem.) In the mythic world of the hero, the "threshold" of Hyacinth's "manhood" is also important, and such a decision on his part to forego fatherhood emphasizes how profoundly anti-life the culture is.

In this first section, James enters into a series of important dualities and conflicts which are not just within Hyacinth, as in his double nationality, but are an "intricate pattern
of contradictions," all grounded in irony. An "obscure little beggar . . . buried in a squalid corner of London" (I, 90) and eking out a living in a book bindery, Hyacinth dreams of literary distinction. In the bindery beautiful work is still lovingly created by hand; but the shop is in the midst of a vast, impersonal, urban city. The work force at Crookenden's includes Eustache Poupin, "an ardent stoic, a cold conspirator and an exquisite artist. . . ." (I, 93). Even such a minor note reveals James's superb talent at dealing with ambiguity—Mrs. Poupin is a "small, fat lady with a bristling moustache" (I, 96), and the Poupins are respectable petit bourgeois though unmarried. The narrator now becomes militantly satiric as he moves toward a central dialectic of the novel, the role of politics in modern society. Poupin is described as

an aggressive socialist . . . and a theorist and an optimist and a collectivist and a perfectionist and a visionary; he believed the day was to come when all nations of the earth would abolish their frontiers and armies and custom-houses. . . . Then humanity would sit in groups at Parisian tables, drinking coffee and listening "to the music of the spheres" (I, 96). As in Adams's Democracy, the narrator is a felt presence. This narrator, in addition, resorts to "I," "we," and "our" to absorb the reader into his viewpoint. Unlike Adams, James posits a golden age only to satirize it. The edenic quest among the novel's socialists, a collectivist utopian vision, is not just absurd but,

to James, dangerous, even ruinous. James recognizes human misery and injustice, but in *The Princess* he finds the proposed cure for them worse than the disease.

Among those who would try to cure diseased society is Paul Muniment, treacherous and destructive, with "the complexion of a ploughboy and the glance of a commander-in-chief..." (I, 114):

There was something in his face, taken in connexion with the idea that he was concerned in the taking of a stand—it offered our quick youth [Hyacinth] the image of a rank of bristling bayonets... (I, 119).

James joins the political issues with man’s capacity for personal violence. This is the beginning of a series of war images which Robert Gale’s study demonstrated to be a dominant pattern in James’s fiction. These images become archetypal clusters.

The next scene reveals a diseased society, this time in the form of a crippled woman trapped by her circumstances. Rosy Muniment, Paul’s crippled sister, has had a diseased spine from birth. Metaphors of animals show her as a victim: "'She’s in bed just the same as a little slippery trout’s in the water'" (I, 123). Later she is described as "'stuck up there [in her apartment] like a puppy on a shelf'" (I, 311), and as "'a bedridden grasshopper'" (II, 75). Her father, a coal miner and small inventor, sold an invention for fifteen pounds to the mine’s management which made it rich. He became a bitter drunkard who one night died in a gravel pit, leaving behind two young children and a wife who had to become a laundress. Rosy is confined to a small shabby room at the top of a long dark flight of stairs, and she exhibits steady
courage and strength. We should without reservation pity and respect her, but we don't. Her repellent qualities, such as her glittering and "gay demented eyes" (I, 239) put us off. Her total self-absorption, except for a passionate devotion to her brother, and her illness reveal her death-orientation. Her brother's potential for betrayal (foreshadowed by those bristling bayonets) and her acceptance of this are revealed by her amusement at his mocking those who speak up for the poor and downtrodden. The two are as close to a devoted family unit as we get in this novel, and it is pretty sick. In the London setting, as in New York and Washington, D. C. in Adams's novels, urbanization mitigates against healthy family life. The Princess is filled with rootless, transient, isolated, disoriented people in rented rooms. There are, of course, admirable people here, too, like Lady Aurora Langrish, by contrast to the Muniments, rich and well-bred and having a more favorable inheritance

in the fine grain and sloping, shrinking slimness of her whole person, the delicacy of her curious features, and a kind of cultivated quality in her sweet, vague civil expression . . . a suggestion of race, of long transmission, of an organism that had resulted from fortunate touch after touch (I, 127).

James is never far from nineteenth century naturalist explanations of character. Amanda Pynsent, another commendable woman, has "generations of plebian patience in her blood. . ." (I, 140). Lady Aurora, however, is plain and diffident, and her name which should symbolize dawn and the hope of a brighter day, ironically comments on the dead end of her life. Shyly and hopelessly in love with Muniment, she, like Pynnie, is doomed to singleness. While
James is careful to show that human goodness and evil cut across class, money, and political lines, and while he shows that Lady Aurora is a truly charitable socialist practicing philanthropy of self as well as money in the homes and hospitals of the poor, James characterizes both Amanda Pynsent and Lady Aurora as sacrificial victims but nevertheless ridiculous people. Militant satire requires grotesques.

The mythic theme of sacrifice is heightened in this first section through Rosy Muniment. When Rosy announces she will side with her brother against Hyacinth should they quarrel, Hyacinth replies that she is willing to sacrifice him though "One might as well perish for a lamb as for a sheep" (I, 145). This is prophetic of James's argument that the ends do not justify the means, and of the scapegoating of Hyacinth. The archetypal symbolic structure in Book One also encompasses images of circles and water, connected with Hyacinth's ill-fated desire for involvement in and contemplation of a better society. He was perpetually, almost morbidly conscious that the circle in which he lived was an infinitesimally small shallow eddy in the roaring vortex of London, and his imagination plunged again and again into the flood that whirled past it and round it, in the hope of being carried to some brighter, happier vision. . . (I, 140-41).

The above is the first of several passages demonstrating that water is an ambivalent life-giving, death-dealing force.

It is noteworthy that all through Book One, when James is developing Hyacinth as the central male character, women remain of paramount importance. James is always close to the female core of
life. He reintroduces Millcent who "represented for Hyacinth during this period "the eternal feminine" (I, 162). She is a powerful, vital life force, a well-meaning, generous girl, a cockney earth mother, but she is at the same time the dual-natured earth goddess with negative qualities. As a-political woman—and Millcent is the feminine counterpart to the political Christina—Millcent has a low opinion of her own sex and

no theories about redeeming or uplifting the people; she simply loathed them, for being so dirty, with the outspoken violence of one who had known poverty... (I, 163).

Because she is primitive and possesses reckless energy, Hyacinth can imagine her at the barricades in London streets, "with a red cap of liberty on her head and her white throat bared so that she should be able to shout the louder the Marseillaise..." (I, 164).

Because of Hyacinth's well-developed anima, he so well reflects James's own duality toward woman and the duality of the female archetype. James says of Hyacinth and his increasing attraction to Millcent: "It may easily be believed that he criticised his inclination even while he gave himself up to it..." (I, 162).

By linking Millcent with the French Revolution, the "dim, dreadful confused legend" of Hyacinth's mother's history (I, 171), James further unites women with his and Hyacinth's imagination of disaster.

All is now ready for the introduction of Christina Light, the main woman. Book Two opens, and James prepares to present Christina by reinforcing the ritual and ironic structure of the novel and by placing her in a highly dramatic setting. Vetch has
provided tickets to a popular stage play for Hyacinth and Milli-
cent. Vetch is thus one means of bringing Hyacinth and Christina
together. Another means, at the theater, is by this time a famil-
lar figure in the mythic-realist novel, the devil-seducer, Captain
Gregory Sholto. Sholto is an acquaintance of Hyacinth's. He now
chiefly acts as escort to the Princess, "Like a Mephistopheles
converted to inscrutable good..." (I, 203). Sholto is a pimp who
brings an interesting, fresh young man of a radical hue to her thea-
ter box, then diverts Millicent in the balcony. James introduces
another dialectic and conflict through the way each character per-
ceives the Princess. To Sholto she is the most charming and re-
markable woman in Europe. Millicent is instantly jealous of her.
Hyacinth sees her as a vision who emits a strange perfume and
light, a beautiful, good goddess:

She was fair, shining, slender, with an effortless majesty.
Her beauty had an air of perfection; it astonished and lifted
one up, the sight of it seemed a privilege, a reward... Her dark eyes, blue or grey... were as kind as they were
splendid, and there was an extraordinary light nobleness in the
way she held her head. That head, where two or three diamond
stars glittered in the thick, delicate hair... suggested to
Hyacinth something antique and celebrated... a statue... a picture... Purity of line and form, of cheek and chin
and lip and brow... a radiance of grace and eminence and
success... he held himself in his chair trembling with the
revelation... She might be divine, but he could see she
understood human needs... (I, 207-08).73

73 The original Atlantic Monthly version adds after "tremb-
ling with the revelation," the phrase "wondered whether he were not
in the company of a goddess." Reported by R. W. Short, "Henry
James's World of Images," PMLA, LXVII, No. 5 (December, 1953), 943-
60; in Henry James, "The Princess Casamassima," Atlantic Monthly,
LVI (December, 1885), 729-30.
Such a passage has made Lionel Trilling think of a fairy tale. At first glance, *The Princess* does indeed seem to be a fairy tale. Accompanying Christina is Madame Grandon, a fairy godmother figure who claims to be 120 years old. An aura of the exotic, romantic, and supernatural seems to surround the Princess. But Christina is mythic, while she also exists in realism's world. She is the orphaned, illegitimate, displaced daughter of an American woman and an Italian Cavaliere. The Prince has legitimized her through marriage, money, and a title, so Christina has risen in the world. James is really mocking the fairy tale. This is the American batrachomyomachia, the mock epic, and the irony is fundamental to the mythos of irony and winter. Christina is a Europeanized American leading "a wandering Bohemian life in a thousand different places..." (I, 292). Though she is the heroine who has (here at the theater) embarked on her road of adventures, and in Hyacinth's eyes is an exalted being, the narrator's double view tells us that Hyacinth might "have guessed what he discovered later—the among this lady's faults (he was destined to learn they were numerous) not the least eminent was an

---


exaggerated fear of the commonplace" (I, 209). Hyacinth is a
hybrid, the dislocated young man from the provinces, as Trilling
has called him. Madame Grandon is fat and crumpled, an
"ancient dame . . . without majesty or grace; huddled together with
her hands folded on her stomach and her lips protruding. . . ."
She is "'an honest, ugly, unfortunate German'" (I, 209-10). James
attacks the romantic and exotic. He makes fun, too, of the play
Christina and Hyacinth watch, "The Pearl of Paraguay."

The Princess, as archetype intensifies the continuing dia-
lectic. She is in conflict with herself. Soon after they meet,
she engages Hyacinth in a highly political conversation that is at
the same time very personal, so that a double motive seems to be
working:

'I'm very serious, you know; I'm not amusing myself with peep-
ing and running away. I'm convinced that we're living in a
'fool's paradise, that the ground's heaving under our feet'
(I, 219-20).

Madame Grandon demurs: "'It's not the ground, my dear; it's you
who are turning somersaults. . . ." (I, 220). The political novel at
its best, as Irving Howe has said, fuses immediate experience and
ideological or abstract politics into the emotions of its charac-
ters. James does this with the Princess and her somersaults,
the configuration of revolution, and the image of her intense

76 Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, p. 63.
77 Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York: Horizon
desire to turn her life around, to become completely committed to a worthwhile cause. Immediate experience and the ideological blend in Christina when she asks Hyacinth to guide her through the slums so she can see at first hand what the revolution will be about: "I don't want to teach, I want to learn . . . I want to know à quoi m'en tenir. . ." (I, 220-21). Christina is not just an Artemis who hunts men, but, like Isabel Archer, she hunts experience. In Jamesian terms, the latter is a necessary virtue which inevitably leads to suffering. Christina is a quintessential brave, beautiful heroine. She is an outsider, too, who hasn't been in England long and doesn't know the manners of the country. Her birth, like Hyacinth's, is murky, a mixture of two cultures, and her childhood is mysterious. Unsettled, unhappily married, she says of this arrangement, "'We don't always live together'" (I, 222). Circumstance, therefore, has forced her to embark on a road of adventures across Europe and England, while moving internally to self-knowledge. She is willing to give herself completely to what she perceives to be right. But Christina is not just good; she is a dangerous, reckless woman willing and anxious to involve others in her misadventures. Her virtues carried to excess are her vices. Thus she perfectly images the doubleness of James's vision of her, and her female duality mirrors the society with much good in it but headed for ruin.

Even when James transfers the action away from the Princess and she is absent, she is still present. Thus when the scene shifts to the Muniments Audley Court apartment, the conversation is about her. The Princess has already elicited a promise from Hyacinth that he will bring Paul Muniment to visit her, for Paul by reputation interests her. Muniment, in his sister's room and talking with Hyacinth, expresses great wariness: "Is she genuine?" He then shrugs: "It doesn't matter; at night all cats are grey. Whatever she is, she's an idle, bedizened trifler; perhaps even a real profligate female" (I, 230). Animal imagery indicates Muniment's hostile attitude toward women. Rosy is removed from the sexual, a puppy on a self, so Paul can admire her. Otherwise he despises women. He's "as dark as a fish" (I, 231). Cool and detached, with no minor vices like smoking, drinking, or idle talk, Muniment easily identifies human frailties. Sholto he calls

'a tout... a cat's paw... Or a deep sea fisherman... He throws his nets and hauls in the little fishes—the pretty little shining, wriggling fishes' (I, 258-59).

Finally, Paul warns Hyacinth against both Sholto and the Princess whom he says is "a monster" who "swallows" the little fishes: "Take care, my tadpole!" (I, 259). Once again, as we saw in the passage on the flood, there are foreshadowings of Hyacinth's death.

James made only a minor revision from the original Atlantic Monthly version, in which Paul called the Princess "an idle, bedizened jade"—Atlantic Monthly, LVII (January, 1886), 67. Reported by Short, "Henry James's World of Images," pp. 943-60.
Because *The Princess Casamassima* is a novel of political and social realism, James must face the problem of class privilege and exploitation. He does so in part through the Muniment's circle at Audley Court. Paul likes money and is a political opportunist, and Rosy loves privilege if she can benefit from it and is an apolitical one. To Lady Aurora class position is "the deadness of the grave!" (I, 253) She knows first-hand how deadly the class structure is if one is unhappy over the world's injustices and troubles. A totally opposing view is that of Captain Sholto, an upperclass exploiter. Through Sholto James raises the question of privilege yoked to a rapacious imperialism. Sholto has baited his hook well and has carried off a little fish, Hyacinth, to his chambers, rooms outfitted with a "big divan covered with Persian rugs and cushions" and trophies and pictures from all over the world: "There was not a country . . . he appeared not to have ransacked. . . ." (I, 263-64). Imperialism has yielded not art but trophies. First in Sholto's rooms and next at Medley, James connects politics to art, a theme he will develop in depth.

Now the scene shifts to another problem, that of sex. Art, politics, the personal and sexual, are all closely interwoven in this book's fabric. James introduces the Prince Casamassima (whose name means "great house") in his wife's London drawing room after a three years separation. She refuses to see him. He is a dull and silly man who suspects Hyacinth (who has also arrived at the Princess's) of being her lover, revealing his sexual jealousy and ineffectuality. The sexual politics of marriage unfolds
Itself. To the Prince Christina is "she" and "my wife," an object and his property. The marriage on her part was loveless from the start. She is now using his money to try to buy her freedom from him and meaning in life. The Princess is by no means all wrong—the marriage is rotten:

"My husband traces his descent from the fifth century, and he's the greatest bore in Europe. That's the kind of people I was condemned to by my marriage" (I, 291).

Sexual politics continue to unfold. Muniment, soon to be Christina's lover, holds a view close to the Prince's of woman as property. He attaches various sarcastic labels to Christina, such as "'her serene highness,'" and "'a precious piece of goods!'" (II, 231). To the Prince, Paul, and Sholto, she is a sexual object. By contrast, to Hyacinth she is so far above him as to be beyond the desires of the flesh. The sexual political problem is brought into focus by Christina's confidante, an old woman beyond the sexual, Madame Grandon. Only Madame Grandon views Christina as an equal—she addresses her by her first name in contrast to the others who either elevate or denigrate her. It is Madame Grandon who warns Hyacinth against becoming entangled in Christina's web:

"'I want to warn you... Don't give up anything... Don't give up yourself!'" (I, 282)

Sexual politics become more complex when the Princess reveals herself to Hyacinth. One might say that his role is partly to let this happen. By telling him that her parentage is American on her mother's side and Italian on her father's, she acknowledges her illegitimacy. (Her legal father would have been the American
Horribly educated and robbed of innocence, she was married by her people "for the sake of a fortune and a great name..." (I, 292). She is honest—she confesses she has made a mess of the marriage. Explaining the "evolution" of her opinions and social consciousness, she says she has turned to a belief in revolution to regain her self-respect. She has moved along in her search for knowledge, and she swears by Darwin and Spencer and all the scientific iconoclasts and by the revolutionary spirit. Christina is a beautifully rendered portrait of an enraged woman deeply compromised. Madame Grandoni explains Christina's fury:

'the Princess considers that in the darkest hour of her life she sold herself for a title and a fortune. She regards her doing so as such a horrible piece of frivolity that she can't for the rest of her days be serious enough to make up for it' (I, 307).

Yet Christina is a capricciosa and uncommendable. She wishes Hyacinth to wear his work clothes when he is with her, and he accuses her, tellingly, of regarding him as a curious animal. She displays what we today call radical chic. Inviting Hyacinth to visit her in the country, she says, "'Why shouldn't I have my bookbinder after all? In attendance, you know—it would be awfully chic'" (I, 298). She amuses herself by palming him off as a gentleman to rich, aristocratic, stupid neighbors. We thus see her double nature, truthful, open, serious, generous, sympathetic,

80 Henry Seidel Canby, Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1951), has said that today she would be a fellow traveller, "a right who would like to be a left, if the left would take her" (p. 179).
spontaneous; but simultaneously exploitative, egocentric, changeable, short-sighted. Christina is not just light, but is a threatening moon-goddess, the "silvery moonshine" who smiles benignly down on Hyacinth with "strange high radiance" (1, 294 and 298).

I want to now examine Hyacinth's role more closely. He is the hero as John Carrington in Democracy and George Strong and Stephen Hazard in Esther are not. Hyacinth admirably fits the ancient pattern of the mythic child-hero. His name is that of the beautiful son of the sun god Apollo and the ancient moon goddess. His mixed human parentage is from an aristocratic father and commoner mother. The circumstances of his birth were dangerous, and he was saved and raised by a humblewoman. He is thus a member of two worlds, and in his quest he will be unable to successfully negotiate the passage between the two. He crosses two worlds in another way. He was named for his Republican clockmaker revolutionary grandfather and for Lord Frederick whose alias was "Robinson." Hyacinth is an adult hero, too. His road of trials is through the labyrinth of modern London. Realism and the mythic come together when Hyacinth meets the Princess and he crosses into alien territory, symbolized in the theater scene.

irval art which is dying in an industrial, urban, mechanized age. Crookenden's is a last hold-out, and Hyacinth's work for the Princess an act of faith thoughtlessly rejected by her.

Hyacinth is additionally the ancient and modern hero in his desire to serve others in the cause of revolution. "Ancient and modern" are a duality duplicated by another opposing pair. The revolutionary headquarters are the "Sun and Moon," a perfect symbol for the solar and lunar worlds that threaten him. As a misguided Icarus, Hyacinth disastrously flies too near the sun. He is a ritual scapegoat trying to bring health to a radically disordered, plague-ridden society. Attracted as he is to the moon, too, he has been blinded by Christina Light's beauty. Nor can he clearly make out in the dim, "grimmest subterranean circles" exactly what the situation is. Hyacinth's "initiation" into the revolutionary underworld occurs in the murkiest light (I, 295). The conspirators' meeting place is the hell the classic hero must harrow. As a modern hero he is faced with the hell within his own psyche, for he has given his oath to serve the revolution but has ceased to believe in it.

Since he is in addition to the classic child hero, the modern diminished and bewildered hero, Hyacinth fits the ironic mode all too well. Northrop Frye has said:

if inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have a sense of looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity, the hero belongs to the ironic mode. . . .
During the last hundred years, most serious fiction has tended increasingly to be ironic in mode.\textsuperscript{84}

James describes him: "His bones were small, his chest was narrow, his complexion pale, his whole figure almost childishly slight." (I, 78). Hyacinth is the confused hero, thwarted from his errand to deliver his beautiful book to the Princess. He drops in at a pub, unexpectedly meets Sholto, and by even greater coincidence runs into Millicent. Betrayal is in the air. Is Millicent playing him false? He asks Sholto, "'Who the devil are you, anyway, and what do you want of me?''' (I, 335) Hyacinth feels the deluge coming; his mind is "flooded in a moment with everything in the Captain that had puzzled and worried and escaped him. This swelling tide obliterated on the spot everything that had beguiled" him (I, 335). In ancient mythology "Hyacinthus" is metamorphosed at his death into a beautiful flower—James writes that Hyacinth is "destined to perish in his flower. . . ." (II, 125). The name symbolizes the hero's androgynous, frail, even fragile quality, enabling him to be "obliterated."

Mythic patterns, modern and ancient, continue to create tensions and irony, while the dialectic of social realism persists. James also provides a naturalistic environment of the "Sun and Moon" cafe. During the brutal second winter of revolutionary activity, the "Sun and Moon" is filled with workers who suffer great misery: one says, "'And what the plague am I to do with

seventeen bob—with seventeen bloody bob?" (I, 339). There are
half a million Londoners who do not know "where the hell the
morrow's meal was to come from. . ." (I, 354). Hyacinth's vow to
assist in cleansing society through an act of terrorism is both
historically accurate and part of the hero's code. The ritual
sacrifice of Hyacinth is essential; he awaits "the sacred sign," and
Paul finally informs him that Hoffendahl wants him as "the
lamb of sacrifice" (I, 343 and 362). But Jammes cannot give him­
self unequivocally to this viewpoint. A wintry irony prevails as
all the workers' deprivations are articulated in "loud, contra­
dictory, vain, unpracticable" babbles, a kind of doubleness
apparent in James's view of our little hero, "a bloody little
beggar as bold as a lion" (I, 355 and 360). Book Two closes
dramatically with the confused little scapegoat rushed off in a
cab by Schinkel, Poupin, and Muniment, to meet the great conspira­
tor Hoffendahl, a midnight pilgrimage through the drizzling gloom
and labyrinth of London. On the ride Hyacinth is "wholly lost"
(I, 363). He will promise his life to the anarchist cause.

Returning now to the heroine, we find that the Princess,
with her "living flower-like freshness" (II, 14), comes into a
central position again in Book Three. Medley Castle, rented by
Christina for three months, provides a fine series of ambiguities

---

that begin with Hyacinth's enchanted "cockney vision" of the
castle, its parapets and moat, which immediately shifts to the
narrator's disenchanted view (II, 3). Hyacinth is visiting the
Princess a year from the date they first met, as he has promised,
though he can ill afford the visit. His poverty is epitomized by
his not having suitable clothes, while she, who has money, affects
the simple dress of a young girl. A Jamesian doubleness underlies
the entire section. Christina symbolically and actually reads the
Revue des Deux Mondes. Medley seems a fairy land with gardens
that have charming pavilions, but one of these is

an asylum for gardeners' tools and superfluous flower pots;
the other was covered inside with a queer Chinese paper repre­
senting ever so many times over a group of people with faces
like blind kittens, groups who drank tea while they sat on the
floor (II, 20).

Christina and Hyacinth are blind kittens, she insistently urging
him to stay on at Medley against both their best interests, and he
dazzled and powerless to leave. Christina's role of enchantress,
a negative phase of the archetypal great goddess, deepens. She is
a siren who even plays the piano beautifully, and he is entranced.

As in The Portrait of a Lady, freedom is a theme. Bondage
versus liberty is a continuing dialectic. At Medley Hyacinth meets
Madame Grandoni again. She sincerely likes him and urges him to
leave in order to keep his independence. Hyacinth feels he is
losing his liberty, but it is a liberty Hoffendahl now has "a
mortgage on" anyway (II, 22). Money metaphors through the novel
indicate how illusory freedom is. Money also promises freedom but
really entraps one and is a means for exploitation. Christina
gives Hyacinth money for binding the Medley library books so he can be free from his London job. With the great wealth of the House of Casamassima behind her, Christina attempts to purchase freedom from marriage and for society. The Prince, in turn, thinks he can bind her to him through money. Muniment will use her money to advance the anarchist cause. As in other James novels, freedom can be positive. The quest for liberation is always a necessity for those with a heightened consciousness. And Christina's assessment of the French Revolution as a battle for freedom and of present-day English and European societies is essentially correct:

'It's the old régime again, the rottenness and extravagance, bristling with every iniquity and every abuse, over which the French Revolution passed like a whirlwind; or perhaps even more a reproduction of the Roman world in its decadence, gouty, apoplectic, depraved, gorged and clogged with wealth and spoils, selfishness and scepticism, and waiting for the onset of the barbarians' (II, 23).

Christina is really not an aristocrat at all, but a child of democratic America, a country she says she has always wanted to visit. Besides freedom for the oppressed, the revolution promises both Hyacinth and Christina a sense of belonging to an ideal, just society. But this is the illusory golden age myth, hopeless of fruition, according to James, and ruinous if pursued. The French Revolution, therefore, is a central symbol that works organically to reflect the duality not just of Christina's good and evil nature, but the ambiguity of life itself. When translated into British revolutionary action, it means the destruction of Hyacinth and art or that which is the best the world has to offer. And it
means the extinction of the feminine life force in Christina.

James continues with the theme of freedom and adds sexual undertones to the desire for political and personal liberty. The struggle for autonomy turns into the battle of the sexes. The Princess tells Hyacinth that she regrets he has already become friendly with Lady Aurora: "'I was thinking you might be less fresh than I first thought'" (II, 25). She overrides his desire to return to London and his job by a tearful appeal to his chivalry and friendship. During their debate over whether he should leave, she stands close to him. James's stunning verbal picture makes explicit her powerful, aggressive sex appeal. When Hyacinth surrenders and agrees to stay at Medley, he kisses the ribbons which are like "glossy loops" in the "folds" of her dress (II, 38). She has enfolded and bound him to her.

But Christina is always complex. She truly likes Hyacinth and regrets his loss of freedom. When he confides the intimate details of his life and that he has committed himself to a cause in which he no longer believes, she says of this vow:

'I wish you had waited—till after you had been here. . . . Perhaps then you wouldn't have given away your life. You might have seen reasons for keeping it (II, 45-46).

She is poignant and sincere in wanting to believe that the socialist revolution is real and solid and in trying to find purpose in her life. She yearns to take a sacred vow. In some ways she is thoroughly realistic about sexual politics—she accurately assesses the movement's leader as having a low opinion of women.
James now adds the naturalistic to synthesize realism and mythology—Hoffendahl's wisdom "seemed to shine like a great cold splendid northern aurora. . ." (II, 54). This solar, patriarchal symbol is prophetic of Hoffendahl's cold-blooded aloofness and of a determinism that indicates the absence of freedom in the universe.

The Medley sequence closes with a view of a deterministic, indifferent world. Captain Sholto, who first brought the Princess and Hyacinth together, arrives at Medley and begs Hyacinth to help him appear before the Princess who has banished him. Christina uses organic images to devastatingly indict Sholto as a false cosmopolite and an imperialist destroyer. He is a product of old societies that have run to seed, corrupt and exhausted civilisations. He was a cucumber of the earth—purely selfish . . . he had taken the greatest care of his little fortune. He had travelled all over the globe several times, 'for the shooting,' in that murdering, ravaging way of the English, the destruction, the extirpation of creatures more beautiful, more soaring and more nimble than themselves (II, 82).

Back in London, Amanda Pynsent is ill and is, in fact, dying. Book Three concludes with Pinnie's death and Hyacinth's small inheritance from her, supplemented by a gift from Vetch. Hyacinth can now fulfill a lifelong dream of seeing Paris, a journey that seems to promise him his freedom and yet brings him ever closer to his inevitable fate.

Hyacinth's heredity, a naturalist theme, is brought up again in Book Four. Paris, the city of revolution, is the seat of his "maternal ancestry" (II, 121). Never far from his thoughts as he travels abroad, however, is the Princess. The whole section is infused with her influence and with the presence of the eternal
feminine. Because of Christina, Hyacinth feels he has lived intensely during the last six months and especially in the last weeks at Medley, and they have confirmed in him the feeling that civilization has produced wonderful, precious, irreplaceable beauty. The Princess, too, seems to be his savior. She has promised to intercede on his behalf with the revolutionists, "to fling a cloud about him as the goddess-mother of the Trojan hero used in Virgil's poem to escamoter Aeneas" (II, 127). The mythic returns to the novel in Book Four with maternal ancestors and goddess mothers as protectors. Hyacinth recalls Millicent "as if she had been his mother and he a convalescent child, promising if anyone hurt him they'd have her to deal with" (II, 130). With her robust beauty and primitive passions, as Stephen Spender has observed, Millicent is a Roman street woman, a "proletarian princess," and "the most sensual of all James's women." 86

The central organizing symbols of Paris are maternity, the revolution, and the guillotine. They come together to form the very core of this mythic-realist novel. Maternity and the revolution represent the best and worst of worlds—James's phrase for life as savage beauty is "the beautiful horrible world" (II, 123). While the French Revolution had magnificent energy and is "the great legend," it was simultaneously "a sunrise out of a sea of blood." The guillotine, that "inscrutable obelisk," is hideous.

One recalls that Milly Theale feels under the death sentence as if on the scaffold during the French Revolution (Wings of the Dove, II, 370). In connection with the revolution and women, the guillotine is a violent war image that is also part of the inherent violence of the human condition. It is yoked with elemental ocean imagery to reveal James's fundamental vision of disaster. This is further confirmed by Hyacinth's letter to the Princess from Venice which makes it obvious that for him she too has the Medusa-face of life. The Princess has opened to him the beautiful world, and as a result he has suffered "demoralisation . . . from the moment I first approached you. Dear Princess, I may have done you good, but you haven't done me much" (II, 144). Civilization is for him and James—by general critical agreement, this is James's credo here—bound up with injustice. The "splendid accumulations of the happier few," the monuments, art treasures, great palances, the conquests of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilization, are based

if you will upon all the depotism, the cruelties, the exclusions, the monopolies and the rapacities of the past, but thanks to which, all the same, the world is less of a 'bloody sell' and life more of a lark. . . (II, 145).

The dialectic continues back in London. Christina is ready to renounce what Hyacinth has just fully discovered. Although she still looks "like a radiant angel" in her plain dress (II, 160), and though she has been to him the epitome of art, culture, leisure, and civilized life, she has now put her beautiful things up for auction, put aside her splendid gowns, jewels, and works of
art. She has moved in her quest from her eminence at Medley downward to a small house in Madeira Crescent. This is a necessary path for her to take in the heroine's adventure so that she can achieve full self-knowledge. The characters, again gathered at the Muniments, enter into a dialogue on the relation of art to politics. The kind-hearted Lady Aurora asks why the world should not be made more beautiful. Christina, who has really affected an-exaggerated simplicity by giving away most of her possessions, replies, "'The world will be beautiful enough when it becomes good enough..." (II, 169). Rosy defends privilege and the class structure on the basis of her enjoyment of them. Hyacinth altruistically sides with Lady Aurora and Rosy: "'there can't be too many pictures and statues and works of art... The more the better, whether people are hungry or not.'" His position has become increasingly conservative, while the Princess's has become increasingly radical. She insists, "'A piece of bread and butter's more to the purpose if your stomach's empty..."'(II, 170). All positions have some merit, even Muniment's which is, like the narrator's, to mock the arguments. But Christina is not just present at the Muniments for politics. The sexual again enters when she asks Muniment to come to see her. He replies by asking what good it will do him. Within the framework of the debate on art as opposed to politics, there is an intensifying of personal conflict.

The scene shifts to the "little ugly bare middle-class house" in Madeire Crescent, part of Christina's downward journey
which James describes realistically and mythologically:

a low stucco-fronted edifice in a shabby, shallow semi-circle, and... the window-place in the parlour, on a level with the street door, was ornamented by a glass case containing stuffed birds and surmounted by an alabaster Cupid (II, 175).

The house seems like "the home of an exile." Indeed, it is of several—of Christina, Madame Grandon, staring up "with her fat empty hands on the arms of her chair," and Christina's Italian maid (II, 180). By such small touches, as Christina retaining her maid, by her having, as it turns out, some of her beautiful possessions still around her like her piano, we see that though she is at times altruistic, she is also a shrewd realist and has a pragmatism that indicates her ability to ultimately survive.

Like Madeleine Lee, Esther Dudley, and Isabel Archer, Christina holds back something of herself. There is in these mythic-realist novels a woman's instinct for survival in a destructive environment. What has really precipitated this extreme step of renouncing most of her worldly goods is a response to her husband's galling remonstrance that her expenditures are excessive, while she knows that her allowance is but an insignificant part of his wealth. She resents his using money as a threat over her, and she in turn knows how to humiliate him.

Now another important episode occurs in which the Princess is offstage but still present. It is another Sunday afternoon. Paul and Hyacinth's outing at Greenwich Park is a key passage across water, the Thames, and is reminiscent of Hyacinth's childhood voyage to see his mother, another shock to his soul. Sundays
are vital to mythic-realist novels. In The Princess they are essential to the novel's realism, for Sunday is the working man's day off. Mythically they establish the dominance of the solar calendar and patriarchal values over the lunar.

The boat was densely crowded, and they leaned, rather squeezed together, in the fore part of it, against the rail of the deck, and watched the big black fringe of the yellow stream. The river had always for Hyacinth a deep beguilement. The ambiguous appeal he had felt as a child in all aspects of London came back to him from the dark detail of its banks and the sordid agitation of its bosom: the great arches and pillars of the bridges, where the water rushed and the funnels tipped and sounds made an echo... the miles of ugly wharves and warehouses... the painted signs of grimy industries staring from shore to shore; the strange flat obstructive barges... the clumsy coasters and colliers... and the small loafing boats... in short, all the grinding, puffing, smoking, splashing activity of the turbid flood (II, 207-08).

Like the Potomac in Democracy, the Thames serves as a boundary, but Greenwich Park does not represent a golden age Mount Vernon. Though it has savage aspects, London is not a corrupt, evil Washington, D. C. Rather, Greenwich clarifies the life-filled present and the journey across the Thames. Hyacinth's passage into knowledge. The Princess's felt presence forces Hyacinth to ask Paul now if he is really "sweet" on her—Rosy has said Paul is. Paul implies that he has plenty to do without paying Christina visits. This brings Hyacinth to the bitter realization that his own visits to her will shortly cease, and he blurts out, "'Why the devil should I care now?" (II, 211) Paul, his arm about Hyacinth's shoulder, tries to good-humoredly reassure him of his friendship and tells him that he may never have to perform the deed that would bring him death. The whole involved passage on love, friend-
ship, and implied betrayal is brought to a head by Hyacinth's terrible realization that he does not want to give up the beauty and sweetness of life made real to him by the gorgeous Sunday at Greenwich Park and by his acknowledgement to himself that because he is jealous of her he really cares for the Princess. Prostrated, [he] tumbled over to the grass on his face, which he buried in his hands. He remained in this attitude... with a sudden quick flood of association, of many strange things (II, 214).

In spite of his denials or evasions, Paul does visit Christina. We find her, as does he, before a November fire, reading "Labour and Capital" and quite bored. James moves again into her consciousness. Another woman re-assumes importance, too—Rosy lies behind Paul's present actions. She is his bonnie lassie and the only woman who can truly influence him. It is Rosy, he admits, who has been hounding him to visit the Princess. His basic misogyny resurfaces. To the Princess he is scornful of Lady Aurora, who has been genuinely good to Rosy, characterizing her charities as self-amusement and ego-gratifying. The Princess reflects accurately that Paul is not a gentleman, but that this "made no difference in her present attitude" (II, 224). The sex instinct does not totally overpower her rationality, nor has she forgotten Hyacinth—she says to Paul, "Don't betray him... I love him very much..." (II, 227). She also reveals her sacrificial nature, urging that she be allowed to do Hyacinth's job for him since he has changed his opinions. She wishes to help "the millions who are rotting under our feet... on the brink of
starvation... Try me, test me... I'm not trifling" (II, 228). The effect on the misogynist Paul is not to make her credible but to make him wary of her "fireworks": "I don't trust women—I don't trust clever women!" (II, 231) In such a scene one sees how isolated from each other people are emotionally and intellectually. Paul is emotionally involved with Rosy but separated from her intellectually. He becomes sexually involved with Christina but never otherwise gives himself. His frank appreciation of her "lovely home" and his admiration for "solid wealth" is quite far removed from her view that the house is hideous. Their sexual union is tied to physical passion and money. She tries to buy his affection and interest. As they stand close together, she promises him, "I could get money—I could get money..." (II, 231). She makes explicit the promise of money Isabel silently holds out to Osmond, and the results are equally as devastating.

The home in Madeira Circle, the street appropriately a lunar symbol, is the nucleus of much of the fourth book's action. Mr. Vetch, the old-time radical who has guessed that there is a conspiracy, arrives at Madeira Crescent to learn, if he can, how Hyacinth is involved. He wishes to save his little friend. When Vetch meets the Princess for the first time, he understands fully how Hyacinth has been charmed. Vetch articulates the dialectical shift within Hyacinth and the path many radicals take from youth to old age: "I don't know what was in my head. I wanted him to quarrel with society. Now I want him to be reconciled to it..." (II, 242). Vetch also heightens the inevitable conflict between
the sexes—he begs for the Princess's help. Her response?

Her beautiful head raised itself higher and the constant light of her fine eyes became an extra-ordinary radiance. . . . she might have been some splendid siren of the Revolution (II, 244).

She denies knowledge of the conspiracy, technically the truth, and denies she is a powerful influence on Hyacinth, a falsehood. She baffles Vetch who poignantly says:

'I only want to get Hyacinth free. . . . From some abominable secret brotherhood or international league. . . . He's just the sort of youngster to be made a catspaw' (II, 247).

The fourth book closes with the Princess finally promising Vetch she will appeal to Muniment on Hyacinth's behalf.

The winter of the beginning of the third year is the setting for the fifth section. We move inexorably closer to the ironic wintry conclusion. Christina receives a book Hyacinth has lovingly bound for the "lady of his life" and tells him:

'It's beautiful, I'm sure, but I've lost my sense for such things. . . . such things have ceased to speak to me; they're doubtless charming, but they leave me cold. What will you have? One can't serve God and Mammon' (II, 259).

Hyacinth assesses her duality very well: he thinks her "superficial or profound" (II, 260). His well-developed anima is reflected in a cluster of water images which are equally ambivalent and part of the mode of winter and irony:

He had plunged into a sea of barbarism without having any civilising energy to put forth. He was aware that people were direfully wretched. . . . In these hours the poverty and ignorance of the multitude seemed so vast . . . and so much the law of life, that those who managed to escape from the black gulf were only the happy few . . . who have come safely out of a shipwreck or a battle. . . . the flood of democracy was rising over the world. . . . When this uplifting tide should
cover the world and float in the new era, it would be its own fault ... if want and suffering and crime should continue to be ingredients of the human lot. With his mixed, divided nature, his conflicting sympathies, his eternal habit of swinging from one view to another, he regarded the prospect in different moods with different intensities. ... At the same time there was joy and exultation in the thought of surrendering one's self to the wash of the wave, of being carried higher on the sun-touched crests of wild billows than one could ever be by a dry lonely effort of one's own. That vision could deepen to ecstasy, make it indifferent if one's ultimate fate, in such a heaving sea, were not almost certainly to be submerged in bottomless depths or dashed to pieces on immovable rocks (II, 263).

The narrator adds that for "a little bastard bookbinder" there was no peace "between the two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of his passionate plebian mother and that of his long-descended super-civilised sire" (II, 263-64). Thus we see Hyacinth torn between male and female, society and self, death and life. The long passage reflects the Protean ambiguous quality of life, but in James's vision, life dashed to pieces on immovable rocks.

But if Hyacinth is ambivalent about the socialist cause, the Princess at this point still is not, though she remains like him far from being at peace with herself. Again politics and sex interweave. Lady Aurora has made a violent scene of tears supposedly over Christina's increasing activities in the conspiracy. But this is a barely submerged contest for Paul. One of the recurring themes is how the best people, like Christina, have a hard time knowing themselves in such a fragmented, power-ridden society, and how frightening that society is. Madame Grandoni is filled with foreboding which she cannot translate into action. She hates the politics dedicated to breaking up society, she fears for
Christina's personal safety, is sure Christina is watched by the police, and is suspicious of Paul. Paul and Rosy further reflect a fragmentation and alienation which removes them from their own emotions. Rosy fears Paul is being side-tracked by the Princess—she wants him to marry Lady Aurora. But Rosy need not worry, for this soldier of the revolution will keep his head. No siren will lead him to the guillotine. Paul's lack of passion means he is safe and, in fact, destined for success. He may well becomes, as Rosy says, Prime Minister of England.

Inevitably with the political conflict heating up, the personal battle between Christina and Paul intensifies. This is important to James's consideration of women's roles in a patriarchy. Christina is determined that Paul take her seriously, and she desires to exert control over him. He laughingly tells her that "everyone" is in her power, and she astutely replies, "'Everyone's no one..." (II, 293). Christina thinks he at least takes Rosy seriously, but Paul tells her simply that Rosy, like all amiable women, is an ornament to life. Paul's opinions of women's roles are quite orthodox. Referring to Christina's steadily more complicated and dangerous role in the conspiracy, he tells her, "'If I was your husband I'd come and take you away'" (II, 294). She now asks him to help save Hyacinth. Paul puts her down by accusing her of wanting "'to suffer for the people, not by them'" (II, 299). He reminds her that the personal motive must be set aside in politics, that Hyacinth must do the work for which he has taken an oath. Paul is the modern impersonal bureaucrat of
violence who does not reveal the vows he takes. When she really comprehends this, she tells him "'You're a most extra-ordinary man'" (II, 299). Christina persists in appealing to the personal, while Paul takes refuge in the impersonal (she will soon take exactly the opposite tack with Hyacinth): "'And can you see a dear friend whirled away like that?!'" Losing patience, Paul terminates the argument, "'You had better leave my dear friend to me'" (II, 300). Politically it is a man's world. Like Madeleine Lee in Democracy, all Christina has gained from her exposure to politics is to be corrupted.

In Book Five Christina's dualities and internal conflicts and her socially ambivalent situation lead to terrible errors that reach fateful dimensions. Her husband appears at Madeira Crescent to observe her and Paul. "'It's true—it's true! She has lovers,'" he tells Madame Grandon (II, 304). Christina is "'the Devil in person. . . .''" But Madame Grandon, always the voice of moderation between opposing factors, replies that perhaps Christina will bore herself to death before the coup is ripe and, besides, "'she's not the Devil, because she wishes to do good.'" She adds, "'They're not all scoundrels any more than she's all one'" (II, 310 and 312). Nor does this wise old woman believe that the Prince and Christina are of any use to each other, for their relationship is dreadful. She pays no attention to their being Catholic. When the Prince stupidly says England suffers misery because it has not the true faith, she replies that there is suffering even in Catholic countries. But her position, and this is important, is such that,
being reasonable, she is really helpless. She can only look on as conflicting wills and forces battle among themselves. Madame Grandoni is a Cassandra, always warning, always right, to whom no one pays attention.

Hyacinth blunders by late at night. Madame Grandoni retires to her bedroom, while the Prince spies from outside the house and Hyacinth reluctantly joins him. Paul and Christina return from a political meeting and stand in earnest conversation before the Madeira Crescent door. Then Paul enters with her. It turns out the Prince is less a fool than he has seemed: "sangue di Dio! . . . Is that for the revolution?" (II, 324) Hyacinth and the Prince see what is happening by murky lamplight, the London urban substitute for moonlight. The only light from the house is Madame Grandoni's, glimmering from her upstairs bedroom. Her role is further symbolized by this light image in the midst of darkness.

In the mythological structure, the third and last summer circles round. Again women are crucial to the novel. Because the Princess is too busy to give him comfort, a restless, unhappy Hyacinth seeks out Millicent's "distinguished protection" (II, 329). But as in Greenwich Park, Kensington, with its shining Serpentine, its "innocent and pastoral," misty and sunny green expanse, is all too much a part of the earth's terrible beauty and the real present—the sheep in the gardens are "smutty" (II, 332). Millicent is very sympathetic. Assuming the Princess has chucked Hyacinth for Paul, she says of Christina, "Ah the vile brute!"—the remark
reveals her jealousy (II, 335).87 When Hyacinth admits he's always been terribly influenced by women, Millicent says that women therefore have a great deal to make up to him. Had she been Florentine Vivier, she tells him, she too would have stabbed Lord Frederick. Christina's and Paul's betrayal of Hyacinth makes him "nicer" to Millicent, and she virtually offers herself in the park to him as comforting mother and sexual partner. The scene occurs beneath a great tree, symbol of fertility and life. She even evokes in Hyacinth the thought of marriage, something he has never dreamed of with the Princess, and furthermore, he has attended church with Millicent. But yet when he visits her soon after this, she causes a fuss and excuses herself for another engagement with a woman, a patently false alibi she resorts to when she is going to see another man. James emphasizes sexual betrayal by both women and men. Hyacinth ends up at Lady Aurora's, and they face each other in an unspoken "occult community of suffering" (II, 354). Both feel Paul and Christina have been false. Our last view in the novel of Lady Aurora, a thoroughly good woman, is as she leaves for a ball, joylessly and hopelessly doomed to singleness, taking up again her empty family and class duties. So much for feminine goodness in this patriarchal, death-filled world.

87 M. E. Grenander, "Henry James's Capricciosa: Christina Light in Roderick Hudson and The Princess Casamassima," PMLA, LXXV, No. 3 (June, 1960), 309-19, has suggested that the few revisions between the original magazine version and the New York edition tend to enhance Millicent's jealousy of the Princess. The revisions are, however, very minor.
The futility of communication recurs here in Book Five several times, accelerating the denouement. Vetch reappears to fight a losing battle to save Hyacinth's life. Vetch long ago warned his little friend against this great goddess: "'take care the great lady doesn't lead you too far...'' (II, 99). He now begs the young man to come live with him. Hyacinth refuses while enigmatically reassuring Vetch he will never do any work for the conspiracy. Another failure in human contact occurs when Christina next receives Hyacinth for what will be the last time. Reason's spokeswoman, Madame Grandon, has retired from the field of combat and returned to the continent to live out her futile years under the Prince's protection. Christina is completely alone, a difficult position for a young woman. She comforts and coddles Hyacinth and gives him many cups of tea, but she is out of touch with him. She does not know that his instructions from the conspirators have arrived, nor does she know that she and Paul are under suspicion so that Paul is equally uninformed. All acts seem to happen in isolation yet terrifyingly lead to a closely interwoven, inevitable, ironic fate. "'I know you won't be called... Mr. Muniment keeps me informed,'" Christina tells Hyacinth (II, 404). She still believes in the cause: "'The old ferocious selfishness must come down. They won't come down gracefully, so they must just be assisted"' (II, 405). She is beautiful and sincere, distracted and confused. In addition, she reverts from the personal to the impersonal, in some ways a greater error. In
response to Hyacinth's confession that he could not stand the thought of anything happening to her, she replies:

'To me! And pray why not to me? What title have I to exemption, to security? . . . Why am I so sacrosanct and so precious?' . . . And she turned from him as with a beat of great white wings that raised her straight out of the bad air of the personal. It took her up too high, it put an end to their talk (II, 406).

Christina is overwhelmingly the angel of devastation. Her great white wings have taken her out of the personal and into the abstract, the realm of nobly stated causes which have always made it possible for human beings to destroy each other. From her rarified position she fails to see that her friend, about to depart, is in tears. She illustrates another paired duality of des Deux Mondes, the abstract or impersonal and the personal. Hyacinth, unable to reconcile these opposites, is about at the end of his road. At the Poupins he finds the Poupins and Schinkel discussing the details of his letter of instructions.

James rounds out the betrayals of politics, love, and culture in the sixth and final section. The Poupins have looked upon Hyacinth as their child (it was Poupin who, with Vetch's urging, got Hyacinth on at Crookenden's). Yet when Madame Poupin tries to wrest the fatal letter from Schinkel to destroy it, Poupin pulls her off. Another woman has tried—and failed. The good grey conspirator Schinkel reminds the Poupins: "it's not your affair! . . . it's none of any one's business!" (II, 372) Ideology again defeats human relations. For Hyacinth it is indeed "the evolution of his doom (II, 365), the right phrase to combine the
naturalist environment with Greek fate. Schinkel then shakes "the ashes out of the big smoked-out—so vehemently smoked-out-pipe" and lays it "to rest in its coffin" (II, 383). James thus recalls for us that Vetch had carried his violin in a coffin-like case. The promised music of the spheres of this universe is dead.

Christina now rapidly approaches full knowledge and the completion of her archetypal quest. The next scene between her and Paul discloses that he has received a letter from the Prince who is going to stop his wife's allowance. She is still rebellious, refusing to read or touch the letter. Christina's rebelliousness is one of her best qualities. Yet it is ironically part of her self-deception. Paul, who is a "man who sees things as they are," reminds her that she touches her husband's money and assures her she will return to him before long, for she will have nothing to live on otherwise (II, 407). Then when Christina threatens to fight her husband's actions legally, Muniment reminds her that even Madame Grandon has withdrawn her chapteronage and protection so that Christina is exposed and, besides that, she has engaged in actions neither he (Paul) nor Christina would want publicized. Christina's vulnerability is all too obvious. Muniment further quickly disabuses her of her idea that she might exist alone on her own bit of property, inherited from her mother, for according to her husband's letter to Paul she has about used up this. Christina has fought bravely, but stronger forces are prevailing. She begins to lose her
strength—her eyes for the first time are lightless and somber. Another mistake she has made is to have insufficiently accounted for the primitive side of her nature. Like Esther Dudley, passion has betrayed her, and she now faces the truth of her relationship to Paul: "'from the moment I've no more money to give you I'm of no more value than the washed-out-tea-leaves in that pot.'" Only slightly embarrassed, Paul admits to his opportunism: "'I do consider that in giving your money—or rather your husband's—to our business you gave the most valuable thing you had to contribute.'" Christina acknowledges, "'This is the day of plain truths!'" (II, 413) Realistically, money is the root of power in a capitalist society, even more so than sex, and even, ironically, among socialists. Trying to salvage a shred of self-respect, Christina asks Muniment if he does not value her devotion and intelligence. He responds that he does her intelligence, but that she is not to be trusted so that the one is nothing without the other. He judges her actions toward her husband as betrayal and assumes that she therefore could betray the revolutionary cause. Paul demonstrates his ability to disengage himself from a dubious situation in order to regain the conspiracy's confidence and save himself. Calling him a "'brute,'" she says, "'In a moment you'll make me cry with rage, and no man has done that for years!'" (II, 414). Her rage, once turned outward against society and against the institutions of government, economics, and marriage, frustrates her internally.
Freedom as an ironic theme, within imminent doom, resurfaces. Christina learns that Hyacinth has finally had his instructions, and Paul again insists she cannot do Hyacinth's job for him. When she asks Paul if he is at least not going to see his friend before the deed is done, indicating her return to the personal realm, Muniment replies that he wishes to leave Hyacinth "free." Christina finally fully comprehends Paul's character, her own character, and her responsibility in the train of wretched events leading to what is sure to be Hyacinth's death sentence. She flings herself down and buries her face. It is Hyacinth's gesture on that Sunday afternoon at Greenwich. From the very first we have been told about her beautiful, deep-set eyes. Hers is a despairing movement like his that covers her eyes from the insight she has had. She now feels utter shame. Christina has harrowed the hell of her soul, has met her shadow, and realizes her role in the politics of revolution which will assist in killing her loyal friend whom she loves. Paul's last words to her, as she is slumped over, her face buried, are a taunt and the refrain of her doom: "'I don't want to aggravate you, but you will go back!'" (II, 417)

Believing that Christina has forgotten him, and filled with dismay over the act he must shortly perform, Hyacinth now wholly faces himself, too. One perceives how James has developed both characters and their actions as counterparts and how important she is to the novel. Several critics, including Leon Edel and Lionel Trilling, have pointed out how Hyacinth, a duke is disguise,
as Muniment has called him, is horrified at being the assassin of a duke, a surrogate father. But his deep reluctance also stems from his affinity to the feminine, to his dead mother. I think that this is the dominant feeling in him. He recalls her bloody hands—were he to be a murderer, he too would have bloody hands. If he kills the duke, it would be a "personal stain" reminding him of the stigma of his birth and his shame that would be "like a blow dealt back at his mother, already so hideously disfigured..." (II, 419). His mother's atonement by imprisonment meant a "redeemed pollution"—by killing the Duke he would wipe out her redemption and by extension his own. Hyacinth is true to his androgynous nature in his strong identification with Florentine.

Reaching out to a woman one last time, one who significantly was sympathetic, as she said, to Florentine, Hyacinth travels through the gray, damp London to Millicent Henning's place of work: "Might n't she help him?—Might n't she even extricate him?" (II, 421) He makes his way through the "labyrinth" of the shop and up the stairs to "the object of his own quest..." (II, 422-23). There he finds Millicent modeling for Captain Sholto and Sholto looking at her lewdly. The formula of betrayal, as Yvor Winters has said, has finally worked itself out. Hyacinth's return to the feminine is a disaster. One might have thought that there

would have been hope for life in Millicent, the cockney earth
mother, but though she is magnificent, she too is a Medusa. Like
Christina, Millicent helps to turn Hyacinth to stone. Their be-
trayal of him with other men only reinforces the total strength
patriarchal values have over him, values of love and politics.
There is only art left.

But Christina is nevertheless the heroine, and her act of
redemption occurs when she atones for her mistakes by an act of
love and pity. In the novel's final scene she rushes to Hyac-
cinth's lodgings to make up for her neglect and error and to try
to save him. Of course, she is too late. It is evening and
Schinkel is on the doorstep, checking up, one supposes, to be sure
Hyacinth does his job. The latter has not answered his door.
Christina is horrified: "'Good God, is that his door—with the
light?"' (II, 428) She instantly knows the bookbinder is too poor
to have left candles burning if he had gone out as Schinkel has
surmised. Her agitation and despair rapidly increase—she presses
Schinkel to break down the door. She waits with her hand against
her heart as Schinkel gives a violent push and smashes the door.
She adjusts her sight in the poor light of a single candle to per-
ceive what is on the bed. In the language of objects for what was
a living being, James reveals what mortality comes to after death,
and Christina's final absolute perception and awareness:

There was something on it—something black, something ambiguous,
something outstretched. Schinkel held her back, but only an
instant; she saw everything and with the very vision flung her-
self, beside the bed, upon her knees. Hyacinth lay there as if
asleep, but there was a horrible thing, a mess of blood, on the counterpane, in his side, in his heart (II, 430).

Like Hyacinth, Christina has seen the Medusa-face of life. She collapses on her knees by the bed. Thus she fully falls from her eminence by the theater where we first saw her, to her knees in a shabby rooming house, and because she has travelled from ignorance into an awakening, she has completed the passage so necessary to the archetypal great goddess's quest.

Schinkel fishes out the weapon from under the bed where Christina's knee inadvertently pushed it. Schinkel has the last ironic word. He coolly informs the landlady that Mr. Robinson shot himself while she was out buying milk and thinks to himself in the novel's closure, that the pistol "would certainly have served much better for the Duke" (II, 431). James has produced in this novel realism, filled with solidity of specification, of every day common humanity and events in a contemporary London of poverty, deprivation, anarchism, exploitation, alienation, and isolation. He also has created a mythic structure of a bitter wintry irony and the Greek fate of an earthly goddess in fatal conflict with men, society, and herself. Finally, he has brought to The Princess Casamassima a deterministc naturalism, a vision that synthesizes and reconciles all opposites by making of this novel an ancient drama that shows our responsibility in a deterministic universe.

The ending of The Princess, like that of The Portrait, has raised certain questions. One is with Christina as the heroine.
Does her suggested return to marriage signify weakness and defeat? F. W. Dupee has said that she is a futile woman. Is James's final vision the imagination of love and a kind of affirmation, as Lionel Trilling has suggested, or is it one that belongs to the savage god of suicide? Finally, is James's conclusion that art is the only true conserver, and that social revolution will do away with the world's art and beauty, an adequate grasp of modern life? Irving Howe has charged that James held a limited nineteenth century view that social upheaval would annihilate culture.

Christina's role is complicated by her survival. Her quest will take her full circle back to the Prince and marriage. Her return to him is to a barren, sterile situation and to the acknowledgement that society and money rule. I think that she achieves, however, a limited victory out of disaster, the victory of self-knowledge. She will not have as much integrity as Isabel Archer—she didn't have as much to begin with. But she is as true to her own character as Isabel is, and she comes to full consciousness in defeat and loss. She will salvage some dignity out of the catastrophe, and a connection with suffering humanity through atonement. This is a true connection and not the false one she attempted as a chic radical. Though she will not recreate life out of herself, nor even have as much a life connection as Isabel

89Dupee, Henry James, pp. 137-38.

90Howe, Politics and the Novel, p. 151.
will have with Pansy Osmond, a step-daughter, Christina achieves a kind of negative affirmation of self.

What Joseph Campbell has said about the hero of the eternal return is informative for the modern heroine. She brings back to the world no boon nor elixir, so she cannot be the world's redeemer. In the modern existential search, furthermore, the middle part of the drama, which is initiation between birth and death, is the most important phase of the quest. There can therefore be no rehabilitation nor rebirth. Discovery of the self is the tragic experience, and the cross the heroine carries is herself. Because we come to rest with Christina at the novel's end, and because this is a James novel, we write our own epilogue. The mythogenetic zone is in Christina and in us.

In a sense, Christina's return to marriage is an acceptance of life and society. In a brilliant study of the modes of fictional adjustment to dying, Frederick J. Hoffman found that without god in the world, the self does not nor cannot wish to stand alone:

*It is a comfort to know that patterns of behavior, actual or imagined, are repetitious, shared archetypally, with the entire history of the race, are actually a part of a 'collective unconscious,' to which each self may attend.*

Hyacinth chooses to die violently and thus negatively affirm

---


civilization. Christina lives: "'We must pay for all we do,'" she told Hyacinth at Medley (II, 47). She will pay by living. Her presence at his side in death is vital in establishing her common humanity and capacity to genuinely love.

The third argument, that James's is an inadequate grasp of modern life, seems particularly short-sighted. The image of Monument as a bristling bayonet, the symbol of revolution as a sunrise out of a sea of blood, and Hyacinth's having killed himself with the modern weapon of terrorism, the pistol, are all too contemporaneous. James graphically demonstrates how ideology dehumanizes us. One must beware today, as then, of the cross of the social redeemer who may be a savior but may be, on the other hand, a Hoffendahl or Hitler. Is James's view of art and culture as salvation too simple? W. H. Auden, another Anglo-American who affirmed himself in art, has stated that we have art in order not to die of the truth.
CHAPTER IV

KATE CHOPIN: "AESCHYLUS IS TRUE"

At the end of the nineteenth century, mythology and realism unite with naturalism in Kate Chopin's The Awakening to bring us to a fitting conclusion of the study of the mythic-realist novel. Edna Pontellier is an archetypal woman who returns us from Christina Light's European residence, back across the monist sea to America. Edna is a Presbyterian Andromeda engaged in a quest for selfhood and transported from Kentucky to French Creole Louisiana. The only heroine among the four in this study with children (two sons), she awakens from a long primal sleep into full consciousness and knowledge that to save herself, not just from a male-dominated society that would deny her individuality, but from the biological role of motherhood, she must lose herself. Like the other heroines, Edna's solution is to withdraw from giving life. Her final decision is the most drastic rejection of society by all the heroines and the most fundamental assertion of selfhood, for she insists on an existential control over her feminine life by choosing her moment of death.

There is another difference in these novels, and this lies between the woman author and the two male writers. Kate Chopin, like Henry Adams and Henry James, is androgynous in that she understands and sympathetically portrays both sexes, a quality
essential to good characterizations. And like them, she expresses fundamental ambiguities. But she incorporates another kind of problem. In man the mother image is something alien, the "thou" which, according to Carl Jung, at least partly accounts for man's tendency to simultaneously idealize and fear women. In The Awakening the double natured archetype is Edna Pontellier and is also Kate Chopin herself, who feels a profound ambivalence about roles dictated to Edna because she is female, and who feels an ambivalence toward men. In her own life Kate Chopin was the southern and western version of the myth that Adams and James celebrated in their literature. These ambiguities of the earth mother are a major dialectic of her fiction.

Kate Chopin's Signature

Kate Chopin's personality sign, like that of Adams and James, developed out of the influences on her of family and education and out of ambiguities within those influences. Her family experiences informed her fiction with archetypes, chiefly the earth mother figure, and strengthened her expression of women's ambivalent responses to men. Her life, too, in Missouri and Louisiana made a strong impact on the mythological structure of her fiction. The second element, education, tended to reinforce her literary realism and naturalism, while it also informed her literary criticism.

Katherine O'Flaherty's family life, like that of Adams and James, was a chronicle of loss, death, and mourning, while like theirs, her creativity provided a life force. She was born in St. Louis in 1851. Her father's first wife died giving birth to a son. His second wife, Eliza Farris, was Kate's mother. Kate's father was killed in a railroad accident before she was five. One brother was killed at twenty in an accident, and she lost another from typhoid fever during the Civil War in which he was a Confederate soldier. Kate was raised by her great grandmother, grandmother, and mother. All had suffered terrible losses, but all were living examples of strong women who by necessity controlled their own lives. She returns again and again in her fiction to this kind of woman. Her mother especially influenced her, for the two were very close. One can see an ambivalence in Kate upon the occasion of her marriage at nineteen to Oscar Chopin. She recorded in her diary that her wedding day was the "happiest day" of her life and that she had married "the right man." But it was a dream in which she seemed to be married "before I could think of what I was doing." It was also, she wrote, "very painful" to leave her mother and family and go off to a strange locale.² This

²Per Seyersted, Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), pp. 31-32 and pp. 58-59. Apparently much of Chopin's letters, diaries, and some notebooks and fiction were destroyed. Her only other major biographer, Daniel S. Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), was instrumental in saving many of her papers which are now held by the Missouri Historical Society.
is, of course, the kind of situation a woman in a mobile and patriarchal society is likely to have. Marriage, no matter how happily entered into, usually means she is wrenched from her family and roots. Kate Chopin lives first in New Orleans and then in Cloutierville, Louisiana. She had five sons and a daughter. When she was thirty-one her husband died of swamp fever. She managed his family's plantation and store for a year, then was prevailed upon by her mother to return to her old St. Louis home. Eliza O'Flaherty's sudden death a year later (in 1885) left Kate prostrated with grief. At the age of thirty-four all of her beloved family except for her children were dead. With an inadequate income (her husband had failed in business in New Orleans), she picked up the reins of her life and those of six small children. Lelia Chopin Hattersley, her daughter, said that while her mother had a keen sense of humor and found things amusing, she had "rather a sad nature," for all the family deaths had left a stamp of sorrow on her which was never lost.³

While Adams and James turned for consolation to women outside their family life who were often surrogate mother figures, Kate Chopin turned to a man. Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, an obstetrician, her family physician, and life-long friend, appears to have affected her personal life and literary career. Because her letters Home during her absence apparently had a high literary

³Seyerated, Kate Chopin, p. 48.
quality, and perhaps partly to give her life order and meaning, he
had been urging her upon her return to St. Louis to write for pub-
lication. At thirty-eight, much later than either Adams or James,
she turned to writing fiction and criticism. One can only specu-
late that had she been able to artistically develop earlier, she
may have created far more than the one hundred or so short stories,
three novels, some two dozen poems, and a dozen or so reviews and
essays she did write. She wrote in the family living room.

Leila Hattersley said her mother was reluctant to shut herself
away from her children, but at the same time expressed the wish
that she could write undisturbed. One can only surmise how this
situation must have contributed to her dual feelings of love for
her family, yet a resentment against the demands of motherhood.

Her biographers have raised the question as to why she did
not remarry. She appears to have been a handsome, charming woman.

Father Daniel Rankin rather sentimentally has assumed she loved
her dead husband too much to ever remarry. Per Seyersted has
suggested that Dr. Kolbenheyer was an admirer. It seems to me,
however, that the doctor may chiefly have served in the role of
mentor, perhaps even as a surrogate father. Wise men archetypes
occur frequently in her fiction. A daughter-in-law has suggested
another reason, an unsentimental one, for Mrs. Chopin's continued
singleness—she liked her independence and freedom and came to
love writing. But her attitude is quite mixed. After the success

4Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 60.
of her first volume of short stories, *Bayou Folks* (1894), Chopin recorded in her diary that the past ten years had witnessed her growth, "my real growth." She would, however, she added, give this up to have back her husband and mother.5

In Chopin's short fiction and in her two surviving novels (she destroyed a third, entitled *Young Dr. Gosse*, when she could not get it published), there is a continuing pull between a woman's desire for love, marriage, and the duties and joys of home and family, with the often conflicting desire for freedom, independence, and self-fulfillment. This is a basic dilemma of an archetypal woman. Her primary role is that of life-giving, sacrificial, loving mother; her archetypal drive is for autonomy, consciousness, and independence. Chopin's short stories, like James's, contain portraits of spontaneous, natural girls who often cannot decide between a commitment to men and one to themselves. The characterizations deepen as her fiction matures and she becomes more certain of her art, and the dilemmas the earth mothers find themselves in and the ambivalences they feel become more disturbing to them. And when the women suffer great losses, which they so often do, they in turn are negative and renunciatory.

When we turn to the short fiction, we find that he first known work, probably written while she was still a schoolgirl in the late 1860's is a sketch about the natural desire for freedom. "Emancipation. A Life Fable" takes up the problem of an animal in

returns to her husband (I, 58). She does achieve an awareness, however, of the reasons for her actions, which makes her superior to her husband who remains obtuse. A woman's heightened understanding is a recurring pattern from the late 1880's on. Many of the women must give up their freedom, and some even wish to, but in the process they come to know themselves.

The development in the short fiction, which extends into her novels, of a mythic world that is strongly realistic and has naturalist elements that synthesize mythology and realism, is very likely Chopin's major contribution to literature. In more than sixty short stories centered in Natchitoches Parish and in and around New Orleans, Chopin begins with Louisiana local color and ends with universals, or as Seyersted has said, she provides a "southern setting" but a "global view." These stories have as yet to take their deserved place in American literature as Sarah Orne Jewett's Maine fiction has, for example. Kate Chopin's precisely rendered Louisiana is filled with families and individuals who appear and reappear: the Duplans, the Laballières and Santiens, Lawyer Paxton, businessman Offdean, editor Gouvenail, the Lebruns, beautiful and passionate Calixta, and many others. This is a recreative, cyclical, organic world of life and death in which constant change is the rule, including man-made technological change, yet basic human nature remains unchanged. Chopin is not quite like the local colorists, however, in that there is no

---

Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 75. Seyersted said that Chopin intensively studied Jewett (p. 121).
yearning for the past nor a posited golden age. She shares the mythic-realist elegiac but unsentimental tone in much of her fiction—her Acadia is a naturalist environment in which women and men conflict and err, feel joy and pain, and more often than not, an environment in which loss and death prevail.

In the first of these Louisiana stories, "A No-Account Creole," the young earth goddess Euphrasie is torn between her sacrificial self and her desire to assert her will (I, 80). The story has a significant reversal, a sacrifice which comes to be a "sin" and a self-assertion which is good. Euphrasie has promised to marry Placide, but she comes to love Offdean. She is a natural creature who cannot suppress the call of her senses which awaken in the spring when the earth is fruitful, which is when Offdean arrives from New Orleans to restore the old Santien plantation. In this story and in most of Chopin's fiction about Louisiana, sexuality and passion are directly and honestly connected with the seasons, with "the palpitating earth" (II, 622). This means the author does not moralize, for nature, whether in people or in their environment, is an amoral power. Euphrasie assumes she must suppress her feelings and obey the social code and marry Placide. He perceives her conflict, however, breaks the engagement, and sets her free to marry Offdean, but allows the public to think she has jilted him. Both Placide and Chopin understand sexual politics. Her most sympathetically drawn males show an androgynous insight into women and their social as well as personal situations.
Chopin continues to upset conventional morality and to reveal her own androgyny towards male characters in "The Going Away of Liza" (I, 111). A young, dissatisfied country woman seeks excitement and runs away to the city where she becomes a prostitute. She returns to her house during a winter storm and is taken back in by her husband and his understanding mother. The closing scene is of him kneeling and taking off his wife's wet and torn shoes for her. A not entirely successful but an appealing story is that of Marianne, an earth maiden,

tall, supple, and strong. Dressed in her worn buckskin trappings she looked like a handsome boy rather than like the French girl of seventeen that she was. . . . There was something stag-like, too, in the pose of her small head as she turned it from side to side to snuff the subtle perfume of the Indian summer (I, 116).

"The Maid of Saint Phillippe" rejects her lover and marriage, for she considers marriage and motherhood to be slavery, and she strikes out for freedom in Indian country. Marianne remains unmarried. Liza's marriage in the previous story was the pre-condition that made her quest an impossible dream. There is another theme working in these stories. Women in their natural settings are beautiful creatures like Marianne, or like Diantha in "A Harbinger" (I, 145), with her hair the color of "ripe what," or like Lalie in "Love on the Bob Dieu," as "slim and delicate as a flower-stalk" (I, 156). There is a pattern, too, of the superiority of country to city life. While the country is not part of a golden age myth, nor the women without pain and troubles, its
natural rhythms are preferable to fragmented, commercial city life. But Chopin is not doctrinaire. In "Doctor Chevalier's Lie" (I, 147), a country girl is tempted by city life, cannot cope, and turns to prostitution. The emergence of a wise man archetype, a physician, occurs in this tale. When the girl meets a shameful, violent death, the doctor, who knew her as a child, covers up for the sake of her family the brutal facts of her life and death.

"Beyond the Bayou" is a well-developed story of a strong black woman. Chopin turns several times to black women in personal command of their situations, like La Chatte in "A No-Account Creole" and Tranquiline in "Love on the Bon-Dieu." At first glance "Beyond the Bayou" is a local color tale, but the author moves beyond habitat, custom, and speech for their own sakes and into the realm of the mythic and universal. Nor is La Folle the fool society has labelled her. For years she has refused to step beyond an imaginary line which is a circle and water, both natural and mythic forms that work organically: "The bayou curved like a crescent around the point of land on which La Folle's cabin stood" (I, 175). La Folle's passage is from her sacred and protected world into the dangerous profane sphere beyond the bayou. She finally executes the passage during an act of saving the life of a young man and returning him to his home across the water. As she looks back "at the perilous ascent" she has made, she catches sight "of the river, bending like a silver bow at the foot of Bellissime. Exultation possessed her soul" (I, 180).
Another mythic connection with naturalism and realism is Easter, never just a Catholic Christian event in Chopin's fiction, but a pagan spring ritual. She describes the early part of April in "After the Winter": "The whole earth seemed teeming with new, green, vigorous life everywhere. . ." (I, 182). In "Love on the Bon-Dieu," the young Cajun Azenor gives the poverty-stricken, oppressed, but lovely Lalie a gift of a colored Easter egg. When she becomes ill, he goes to her cabin, wraps her fevered naked limbs in a blanket, and in the moonlight carries her through the forest, across a stream where he bathes and cools her, to his own house. All the time he hears Ma'me Zidore's voodoo chanting "to the moon, maybe," which heightens the pagan ritualism of the story (I, 162). Azenor and his old nurse Tranquilîne will nurse Lalie back to health and life's renewal.

Fertility images like Easter eggs before archetypal clusters and include blossoming flowers. "The Lilies" is about a young widow Madame Angèle, whose calf gets loose and into a neighbor's corn and cotton crops. Mr. Billy is an infuriated masculine force, "taller and broader than ever as he squared himself on the gallery of Madame Angèle's small and modest house." He threatens to shoot the calf if the incident is repeated, then rides off with "a great clatter of spurs" (I, 195). Unknown to Madame Angèle, her little daughter Marie Louise gathers up heaps of blooming Easter lilies and carries them as a peace offering to Mr. Billy. He is softened, and at the story's end one assumes he will become
the husband and father to the widow and child. Thus Chopin, like Henry James in *The Princess Casamassima* with Hyacinth Robinson, denigrates aggressive masculinity and proposes tenderness and love as desirable male traits. In "A Morning Walk" an older man, who has shut himself away from life, sees a young girl's face "between the long stems and the blossoms" of white lilies (II, 567). Archibald follows her to church on Easter and is aroused into life again as he gazes through the church window to where the sun shines and "the leafy shadows quivered."—he preaches a sermon to his own heart. It is too bad Marcher, in "The Beast in the Jungle," could not have had a similar experience. The point is that Chopin's male character returns to his own roots and, thus, to his emotions, while Marcher is hopelessly alienated from both. Archibald has a vision of the "pulsing" harmony of "an undivided existence" (II, 569).

Women often suffer a separation from self and an alienation, too. This occurs in a story with political overtones which reminds one of both James and Adams. The emancipated political woman who fails to know herself is in trouble. In "Miss McEnders" (I, 204), Georgie McEnders is an embryonic Madeleine Lee, involved in but not understanding political action. She attends lectures on Henry George and the Single Tax and is concerned with the plight of the factory girl. A self-righteous reformer, she tries to lecture virtue to a seamstress raising a child out of wedlock. When the woman is unrepentent, Georgie then deprives her of work
by taking away the trousseau she has been sewing for Georgie. The Mademoiselle confronts Georgie with the facts that Georgie's father was a corrupt politician and her fiancé a notorious viveur. Ironic at the expense of marriage and the legal family structure, Chopin concludes the story with Georgie throwing exquisite, spotless white spring blossoms, a gift from the fiancé, into a sooty fireplace. An emancipated woman's lack of self-understanding is again harmful to herself and another in "A Shameful Affair" (I, 131). Mildred Orme is a clever young woman who reads Ibsen and gratuitously humiliates a nice young man. Emancipation itself is never bad, however—for example, in "An Egyptian Cigarette" (II, 57), a rather undeveloped sketch, Chopin presents without comment the delights a young woman finds smoking hashish. Harm is caused by obtuseness or by doctrinaire and rigid responses that do not meet life's needs.

A story which shows two women as archetypal maiden figures who do not achieve self-knowledge, is "At the Cadian Ball." Chopin shows how their failure to awaken to themselves harms themselves and others. Clarisse calls to mind that spotless English virgin who at a subconscious level is driven by her passions. To be sexually cold means alienation in Chopin's fiction if there is no compensating passion like art. Clarisse's opposite is the voluptuous, natural, profane, but thoughtless Calixta. Both women are in love with Alcée Laballièrè. When Alcée is with Calixta at the Acadian Ball, a Dionysian revel, there is a passionate scene
beneath the moon with Alcée kissing her neck and playing with her earring, "a thin crescent of gold hanging from her small brown ear" (I, 224). Clarisse and Calixta are both phases of the moon goddess. Though drawn to Calixta's sexuality, Alcée is won by the chaste Clarisse who takes the initiative and pursues him to the ball (she does not enter), then persuades him to leave with her. They agree to marry. In dismay, Calixta impulsively then tells the dull but loyal Bobinôt she will marry him. Chopin realistically emphasizes the mismatches by the story's closure: there is "the rapid discharge of pistol-shots" in the background, and "le bal est fini" (I, 227). One critic has suggested that Chopin's fiction generally upholds the ideal of womanly purity. What we see in "At the 'Cadian Ball," however, is how that idea can betray people.8

The same social code is grossly inadequate in "Désirée's Baby." Désirée is as warm as Calixta and as chaste as Clarisse, but she runs afoul of the same false value. The ideal of chastity, in addition, is devastatingly yoked to the horrifying institution of slavery. Armand Aubigny sees the beautiful orphaned Désirée one day and falls in love "as if struck by a pistol shot." Aubigny is enmeshed in disastrous patriarchal assumptions—that Désirée and

8Marie Fletcher, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Louisiana History, VII, No. 2 (Spring, 1966), 131. Fletcher's thesis is that Kate Chopin describes two types of southern women, the faithful, self-sacrificing wife and mother, and the faithless, selfish breaker of home and family.
his slaves are his exclusive possessions, and that white purity is an absolute value. Symbols of societal and male violence blend with the brute force of the natural world—Aubigny's passion for Désirée is like "an avalanche, or like a prairie fire..." (I, 240). A naturalism which seems very much like Greek deterministic fate bridges Acadian realism and the story's mythic structure. When Armand's and Désirée's baby turns out to have Negro features, he assumes that his wife, whose origins are unknown, has slave blood. He cruelly turns against mother and child. He has never really loved them, of course, but has confused possession with love. Behind the events lie the brutality, hypocrisy, and the inherited curse of a slave-holding society, a nightmare southern world. Chopin's powerful mythic vision compares Armand's home to a Catholic monk's garments and to death:

The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far reaching branches shadowed it like a pall (I, 241).

Désirée's baby is the same color as the house servant, a quadroon boy, and, in fact, the same color as Armand. Chopin frankly raises the actuality of miscegenation. Armand has fathered several children by the quadroon's mother, LaBlanche, and has continued, though married, to visit her cabin. Désirée's stepmother has a loving nature and is not a racial fanatic. She urges Désirée to come home with her baby. But the young girl, crushed by her husband's rejection, takes the child and walks into the deep bayou. The story's bitter ironic closure has Armand discover an old letter in
which his mother confesses that she is of the race cursed with slavery's brand.

In other stories involving blacks, Chopin sometimes slides into a slick sentimentality, as in "The Bénitous' Slave" and "A Little Free-Mulatto" (I, 189 and 202). When this happens her characters are stereotypes. But when she responds to and trusts her instincts, she writes with great insight and power. Another example of the latter response is "La Belle Zoraïde" (I, 303). An oppressive white society decides cruelly and arbitrarily on matters of color and the human heart. Zoraïde's mistress does the patriarchy's work. She wants Zoraïde to marry a mulatto and forbids the quadroon maid's union with her lover, the black slave Mezor. Madame Delarivièrè arranges for Mezor's owner to sell him, and she falsely claims that Zoraïde's baby is born dead. Even when a repentant Madame Delarivièrè returns the living child to her, the now demented Zoraïde is unable to recognize it. Bigotry is always anti-life. It is often defeated by natural events, but not before human suffering takes its toll.

Chopin can be quite satiric of women who have no growth into self-knowledge. Always destructive, these women behave at a primitive level of the earth mother's negative phase. Madame Delisle, in "A Lady of Bayou St. John" (I, 298), is a Creole Madame de Mauves. When her husband goes off to war, a neighbor falls in love with her. Just as she is about to flee to France with him, she learns her husband is dead. Sépincourt waits out a year's
decent interval, then proposes marriage. In the meantime, Madame Delisle has given herself up entirely to mourning. She sacrifices Sépincourt and devotes her life to her dead husband's memory and to listening to love stories told her by an old servant (one story is "La Belle Zoraïde"). In another tale, "Madame Martel's Christmas Eve," Chopin writes that "Madame Martel was one of those women—not rare among Creoles—who make a luxury of grief" (I, 474). A demanding, unfaithful, death-dealing wife in "Her Letters" bites into her lover's letters with "her sharp white teeth" and tastes the torn scraps of paper "between her lips and upon her tongue like some god-given morsel" (I, 399). In a pure power play, she leaves her bundle of love letters to her husband with instructions that upon her death he is to destroy them unopened. He does so by throwing them into a river. She has planted the seeds of doubt in him about her, however, and he kills himself by leaping into the same river.

One of Chopin's best stories is of a woman who feels grief at her husband's death, but who then experiences a sense of release and finally arrives at a self-knowledge that destroys her. Here the satire is turned against society. Seyersted has connected "The Story of an Hour" with Chopin's 1894 diary entry that if it were possible for her husband and mother to come back, she would give up everything. While the diary entry seems to be reaching one conclusion, the fiction clearly reaches another. Louise Mallard

---

9Seyersted, Kate Chopin, pp. 58-59.
learns suddenly that her husband has died in a railroad disaster.

She weeps, then becomes silently exultant:

'free, free, free!' ... There would be no one to live for during these coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. ... What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being' ... There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself ... like a goddess of Victory (I, 353-54).

The death report is false, however, and her husband reappears.

Louise drops dead. The official verdict is that she has died "of a joy that kills" (I, 354). Another story that is also impatient with official wisdom is "Lilacs" (I, 355). The inadequacy of Catholicism appears in many tales. Here a not too virtuous woman retires yearly to a Catholic retreat to renew herself. When the nuns learn the facts of her worldly life, they coldly return her gifts and turn her away from the convent.

Women who live solitary lives because society has found no way to meet their needs are recurrent and sympathetically rendered. "Regret" is about a strong, self-sufficient Mamzelle Aurélie. Called upon unexpectedly to take care of a neighbor's four small children, she not only adjusts to their dirt and noise but comes to love them. When the mother reclains her children, Mamzelle Aurélie is alone once more and devastated:

She let her head fall down upon her bended arm, and began to cry. ... Not softly, as women often do. She cried like a man, with sobs that seemed to tear her very soul (I, 378).

Another story of a young, lonely, single woman takes up lesbianism.
"Fedora" is tall, slim, and severe, and kisses a pretty girl visitor with "a long, penetrating kiss upon her mouth" (I, 469). Fedore is a lonely figure. "The Godmother" is about a sacrificial, lonely, unappreciated woman who having helped her beloved godson cover up a murder, gains only his hatred (II, 597).

"Athénaïse" is another strong woman. She is honest and attains self-understanding, two qualities Chopin always respects. This story develops the ambivalence of a girl-woman, an ambivalence that occurs as early as in "A Point at Issue!" Athénaïse, or Athene (she has an uncle Achille), has married too young and feels trapped. On the one hand, she has had an attraction to marriage; but a conflicting desire for singleness and independence on the other now overwhelms her. The marriage is symbolized by an oak tree beneath which a runaway slave once rested. Athénaïse runs away from Cazeau, first to her old home, but Cazeau, who has first claim on her, comes to fetch her back. She flees again, this time to New Orleans. He does not follow, for he now feels the marriage has been a blunder. She explains to her brother:

'It's jus' being married that I detes' an' despise. I hate being Mrs. Cazeau, an' would want to be Athénaïse Miché again. I can't stan' to live with a man; to have him always there; his coats an' pantaloons hanging in my room; his ugly bare feet—washing them in my tub, befo' my very eyes, ugh!' (I, 431)

Unlike a later woman, Edna Pontellier, Athénaïse is able to resolve her dilemma when she learns she is pregnant. This awakens her sexually, and she returns willingly to her husband who has demon-
strated his own growth of understanding and whose passion for her now finds a response. But according to one critic, Chopin has not been entirely successful in working out the conflict. Edmund Wilson has said that in spite of the happy ending there is at a deeper level a protest against woman's condition (I, 27). Chopin, however, does not advocate woman's sacrifice for its own sake. Athénaïse comes to happily accept her marriage. When Madame Célestin decides not to divorce her worthless husband, it is because she loves him and he promises to reform ("Madame Célestin's Divorce," I, 276). Sacrifice should not be forced. In "The Unexpected" the opposite solution is justifiable—Dorothea, who loved her fiancé when he was healthy, now cannot bear the thought of marrying him when he is sick. She cries at the close, "'Never, never! not for millions'' (I, 461).

When Chopin's strong women give into men without an accompanying growth of awareness, the fiction can suffer, as in "A Night in Acadie," one of the few stories she changed to suit an editor. Zaida is an aggressive, fearless, strong-willed young woman, accustomed to making her own decisions, "yet these was no lack of womanliness in her" (I, 487). She cold-bloodedly watches two men fight over her. Chopin's revised ending has Zaida meekly taking orders from the victor, probably a violation of her character, as Seyersted has said, for had she followed her character she might have ordered the young man to marry her.10 In "Two

---

10 Seyersted, Kate Chopin, pp. 68-70. R. W. Gilder, editor
Portraits" (I, 462), the author does not satisfactorily resolve a woman's conflicting duality, characterizing Alberta as first a wanton, then as a nun. Both figures are exaggerated and unbelievable. A more consistent story poses an inherent conflict and achieves artistic unity out of an atmosphere of loss. Here is where Chopin excels. "A Pair of Silk Stockings" concerns a young widow, care-worn by children and lack of money. An unexpected gift of $15.00 comes her way. She impulsively treats herself to stockings, a literary magazine, a delicious lunch, and a matinee. Then she must go home. The closure shows her on the street car, feeling "a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever" (I, 504).

By the late 1890's, when she was writing The Awakening, Chopin produced two more stories that are like "A Pair of Silk Stockings" in not compromising their conclusions. They are celebrations of the natural and sexual, which Chopin came close to achieving in "Athénaïse." "A Vocation and a Voice" tells us it is impossible to suppress Eros and undesirable to try. A young man joins a vagabond gypsy couple. Butro is a drunken lout who beats the young Suzima. One day the boy sees Suzima naked bathing in a pool. They become lovers (she takes the initiative). To complicate matters, the boy is a devout Catholic who wants to lead

of Century, refused "The Story of an Hour," too, because he considered it unethical. She did not tamper with this story, however, and was eventually able to get it published in Vogue.
a blameless life. He leaves Suzima and joins a monastery and sets all his young strength to building a barrier against the outside world. While toiling on a rock wall one spring day, he hears a familiar voice singing from the road below and recognizes Suzima's song. Brother Ludovic abandons wall-building and the cloister, leaps over the wall, and bounds down the hill to her, "the breeze lashing his black frock" (II, 546). Perhaps Chopin's frankest celebration of Eros is "The Storm, a Sequel to 'At the 'Cadian Ball.'" Natural elements unite the Natchitoches setting with human passions to bring the realist and mythic worlds together. Sex is an imperative as inevitable as a Louisiana storm. The author appears to have had unfinished business with her people from the earlier story. Calixta, the Catholic heroine, has not seen Alcée Laballière since his marriage to Clarisse and hers to Bobinôt. Calixta's husband and young son are gone one summer day when a fierce storm occurs. Passing by on his way home, Alcée is driven inside Calixta's house. What happens is the explosion of a full-blown summer passion, one of the most erotic scenes in American realist fiction:

They did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms. . . . Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world. . . . When he touched her breasts they gave themselves up in quivering ecstasy, inviting his lips. Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life's mystery. .

* * *

The growl of the thunder was distant and passing away. The rain beat softly upon the shingles, inviting them to
drowsiness and sleep. But they dared not yield.

The rain was over; and the sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems. Calixta, on the gallery, watched Alcée ride away. He turned and smiled at her with a beaming face; and she lifted her pretty chin in the air and laughed aloud (II, 594-95).

In "The Storm" tension between male and female briefly evaporates. When Calixta's family comes home, she is singing and cheerful, doesn't nag, and forgets her compulsive house cleaning. Alcée writes his wife tenderly to extend her Biloxi vacation, and Clarisse is glad to forego conjugal life for awhile and enjoy "the first free breath since her marriage" that restored to her "the pleasant liberty of her maiden days" (II, 596).

At this time in her career, Chopin published The Awakening. The public and critics were outraged ("The Storm" was not published until 1969). St. Louis libraries banned it, and Chopin was ostracized from city literary circles. This has all led to the rather soft-headed notion that bad reviews helped to kill her. She was far more tough-minded than that, however, and she lived another five years and continued to write and publish. What is interesting is that this late fiction contains less ambivalence and more resentment toward men. Perhaps this is in part a retaliation on the male publishing and reviewing society. A young girl, "Charlie," is one of seven daughters of a widowed plantation owner (II, 638). She has the soul of a poet and is more at home on a horse than in a house. Charlie wears her hair cropped short, trousers and boots, and she shoots as well as a man. She has a strong Electra complex. Though her father dotes on her, he comes to feel that for her own good she should learn to be more ladylike, so he sends her away to
school. When he is seriously injured, she returns home, again
dons her trousers, serves as his amputated right arm, and runs the
plantation and family. "The White Eagle" is about a cast-iron
bird, a male symbol, which a young girl inherits as one of her few
earthly possessions and hauls around through her poverty-stricken,
lonely life (II, 671). She has dreams that it pecks at her bosom.
When she dies a relative places the bird at her grave's head where
it blankly stares into space and gives only the illusion of wisdom.

 Twelve years, or so before these late stories, Chopin wrote
a novel At Fault (1890). As in much of her short fiction, the fem­
ine principle is at the center. The novel allows more room for
development of the earth mother archetype, Thérèse Lafirme, who
struggles for self-fulfillment. At Fault reveals many traits, such
as ironic ambivalence, that Chopin will perfect in The Awakening.

 At Fault opens in 1882 on an elegiac note, "When Jérôme
Lafirme died. . ." (II, 741). One recalls Oscar Chopin died in
1883. Thérèse Lafirme is thirty, handsome, and "inconsolable,"
but unlike the author is childless. Chopin instantly ironizes—
Thérèse surprises the neighbors by successfully running a 4000 acre
plantation. Her place on the land may account for the main differ­
ence with the other mythic-realist heroines. Although Thérèse has
certain negative qualities, and life has relentlessly dealt her

11Lewis Leary, Kate Chopin's Other Novel," The Southern
Journal, I, No. 1 (1968), 61-78, makes biographical connections
between At Fault and Chopin's Cloutierville years.
death and sorrow, she is at home in her environment. This may contribute, too, to Chopin's attempt at affirmation in the novel.

Water, endemic to the bayou country's naturalism, dominates the environment. Images of circles and growth join water to make for a mythic structure of the cyclical process of death and renewal:

The short length of this Louisiana plantation stretched along the Cane River, meeting the water when that stream was at its highest, with a thick growth of cotton-wood trees... further down the pine hills started in abrupt prominence from the water and the dead level of land on either side of them. These hills extended in a long line of gradual descent far back to the wooded borders of Lac du Bois; and within the circuit which they formed on the one side, and the irregular half circle of a sluggish bayou on the other, lay the cultivated open ground of the plantation—rich in its exhaustless powers of reproduction (II, 741-42).

Yet At Fault has a pervasive melancholy atmosphere that the novel's art will not entirely reconcile with its affirmation. Acadia's pastoralism is giving way to industry—the arrival of the Texas and Pacific railroad causes Thérèse to abandon her old home "to the inroads of progressive civilization," and to rebuild Place-du-Bois above the river. Chopin does not condemn intrusive industry, though the sawmill it brings is "of questionable value" (II, 742):

Thérèse wanted but time to become familiar with this further change. Alone she went out to her beloved woods at the hush of mid-day, bade a tearful farewell to the silence (II, 744).

The male principle is David Hosmer, from St. Louis, forty, graying, and divorced, with only a dead son's photo to show for his life. He runs the saw mill on Place-du-Bois. At Fault moves naturally through the seasons to a year after the opening when the mill is
in full operation, its buzz "pleasant music" to Hosmer's ears (II, 745). This phase reveals that Hosmer is not hopelessly alienated but will adjust, yet again loss and affirmation are an uneasy pair.

The women in this novel contain ambivalent responses to and conflicts with men. Melicent Hosmer, David's visiting sister, is an emancipated, rootless woman who thinks the south is quaint. She has been engaged five times and now dallies with Grégoire San- tiens. Melicent and Grégoire first appear in a pirogue on the dark, silent bayou. It is a menacing, death-filled scene. Grégoire shoots at an alligator, and Melicent wants to see the grave of old McFarlane (the alleged prototype for Simon Legree):

"This is a place than can make a man sad, I tell you," said Grégoire. . ." (II, 750).

The primary battle of the sexes is between Thérèse and David. Grégoire has reinforced what we have guessed of Thérèse's character when he says, "Oh, they ain't no betta woman in the worl' than Aunt Thérèse, w'en you do like she wants" (II, 751). When Hosmer declares his love, Thérèse (now thirty-five) admits she cares for him but cannot accept him because of "moral" reasons. The novel's basic problem is whether personal happiness can be built upon unhappiness and whether duty comes before self-fulfillment. Thérèse articulates the problem. Though she has "the prejudices of her Catholic education coloring her sentiment" (II, 764), she is an independent thinker, and it is neither divorce nor mourning which keeps her from marrying David. She feels Hosmer must take the responsibility for his ex-wife. In a
sense she is both punishing him for his mistake and exerting her will: "I would have you do what is right. . . " (II, 769). Homer reluctantly yields to her and returns to St. Louis to remarry Fanny. Here is a third sexual conflict, handled with frankness against an urban St. Louis background filled with loneliness and alienation. Fanny is a faded, weak alcoholic, who accepts David because she loves him in her own way. But yet she dreads and defies him. Her personality is all too human, and the novel's real achievement may be in her characterization. On his part he fulfills his obligation, returns to Louisiana with his self-assumed burden, and soon comes to hate her. A city-bred Fanny cannot bear the remoteness of Place-du-Bois. She soon becomes certain her husband loves Thérèse. Ill-humored, jealous, lonely, Fanny drinks from unhappiness but also for the sake of the alcohol.

But humanity is really at the mercy of the most elemental force, water, the symbol of the feminine and the unconscious. Heavy spring rains cause the Cane River to rise. Thérèse crosses the river to try to persuade her old nurse Marie Louise to leave her cabin, once situated well back from the river but now perched perilously near its edge as the Cane eats away at the banks. The natural violent world which mirrors human fury recalls a modern southern writer, William Faulkner. 12 Grégoire Santien kills a man.

12 Robert Arner, "Landscape Symbolism in Kate Chopin's 'At Fault,'" Louisiana Studies, IX, No. 2 (Summer, 1970), 143-45. Arner has said the treatment of racial violence in this novel foreshadows Faulkner. This is so in "Désirée's Baby," too.
flees his home, and as an outcast meets a swift death at the hands of another murderous man. Fanny's drinking and jealousy are an inner turbulence and enrage Hosmer—in one scene when they fight, his fingers close over his pocket knife and he wants to kill her. Now when she cannot get whisky because her supplier is marooned on the other side of the river by the rising water, Fanny crosses the river in a driving rain storm:

The red turbid stream was eddying and bulging and hurrying with terrific swiftness between its shallow banks, striking with an immensity of power against the projection of land on which stood Marie Louise's cabin, rebounding in great circling waves that spread and lost themselves in the seething turmoil (II, 863).

She finds whisky at Marie Louise's. When David discovers her there, she refuses to leave. The river cuts away the ledge and sweeps the cabin and its occupants into the water. David leaps from the nearby bank into the river and desperately tries to rescue Fanny, but a plunging beam knocks him out. She dies, and he is saved.

The novel closes a year later, in a sweet, soft March:

"The air was filled with spring and all its promises" (II, 869). The main conflict is settled by Thérèse's acceptance of Hosmer, who convinces her that life is for the living, and that the living spirit is better than the dead law, and, finally, that they have every right to happiness. He carries a red scar on his forehead from the heavy beam to remind us that he has paid for his errors. The Cane River is not a boundary as the Potomac is in Democracy, for Acadia is not Eden, nor does it serve as Niagara does in
Esther as the hope that immortality may in some future time be distilled into one great truth. Hosmer insists the truth can never be entirely known. Though At Fault ends as romance with a kind of quiet passion between the older lovers, and although Acadia has self-renewing qualities, the Medusa-face of life seems to gleam behind the mask of happiness. Fanny's death seems a little contrived, and the theme of self-fulfillment is inadequately analyzed. One cannot therefore help but think that although At Fault has an important role in Chopin's artistic development, the author is far surer of her materials in The Awakening.

It is clear, however, that Kate Chopin was in touch in her fiction with the earth goddess archetype through women in her family life and herself, and that events of her life informed the mythic structure of her literature. When we look at her education, formal and informal, we find that it influenced her art of realism and her non-fiction. This education included: learning in the new sciences, an exposure to a unique regionalism, changing technology, the advent of the new woman, and the impact of a rapidly urbanizing, industrializing, capitalistic culture. Adams made his way in education through a "labyrinth," and James through a "crooked corridor." Chopin's quest for knowledge and art was through a "maze," or what she called the "inward maze of contemplation. . ." (II, 883).

Kate O'Flaherty's formal education was in a Catholic convent where she was a day student until she married in 1870, and
where her chief interests were music, reading, and writing. Like the other American mythic-realists, she was widely read in ancient mythology. A composition entitled "The Early Dead," found among her schoolgirl papers, has a phrase familiar to us—she writes of the "loveliness and terror" of the "wreathing and recoiling snakes on a Medusa head. . . ." In her young years she saw the Medusa-face of life and expressed in her own words, "loveliness and terror," what James called "the beautiful horrible life." As an example of the pull of opposing forces on her, however, she at this point asserted that Christian (meaning Catholic) art was superior to Greek as the Greek was pagan and earthly.

This institutionalized education was continually supplemented, like James's, with a far more informal instruction. When she was just four, her father took her to visit his commission house and the wharves on the Mississippi, and the life and activity she found there apparently impressed her. Women family members, especially her great grandmother, taught her French and music. While still quite young, she came to love being outside and having a sense of freedom and independence. She walked the city streets, rode on street cars, and absorbed impressions of life around her. Later she began jotting down these impressions. In other words, she showed all the signs of becoming a writer. During her Cloutierville years she became an excellent horsewoman. When she

---

13 Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 22.
finally returned to St. Louis, she began organizing her impressions and responses; for example, she recorded the sensuous beauty of the countryside around St. Louis. Even when confined at home as so many women were, she was able to be in the world: "I like to look out of the window; there is a good deal of unadulterated human nature that passes along during the length of a day" (II, 706).

Her love of the natural was reinforced by her growing knowledge of the new sciences. She was aware of Darwinian evolution as early as in "Emancipation" (1869). Back in St. Louis after her husband’s and mother’s deaths, she apparently resumed her study of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer, and was especially interested in biology and anthropology. Recalling the birth of her first child twenty years after the event, she said mother love was an animal sense that "only comes once to a mother. It must be the pure animal sensation; nothing spiritual could be so real—so poignant." Reporting on a visit to an old school chum who had become a nun, Kate Chopin wrote that after the visit an accompanying friend asked if Kate would not give up everything to have the nun’s vocation and happy life:

There was a long beaten path spreading before us . . . [where] a little dog was trotting. . . . 'I would rather be that dog,' I answered her. I know she was disgusted and took it for irreverence and I did not take the trouble to explain that this was a little picture of life and that what we had left was a phantasmagoria.15

14 Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 49 and p. 40.

15 Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 70.
But she could not really share the Darwinian or Spencerian belief in evolutionary progress, for her vision was more Greek and cyclical. It was also intensely personal—she found the countryside near the Merimac river "penetrating and moving as love!" Seyersted has summed up the net result of her education very well. It was to draw on the Greeks and the Bible, on science and modern fiction: "In a manner combining the ideas of Euripides and Darwin, she formed her independent and entirely personal view of passion and woman."16

Chopin was able to resolve most early tensions between her Catholic education and the newer knowledge by eventually drifting away from religion. Pictures of her in her early life show her wearing a cross, and her diary entries refer to going to Mass. But after her return to St. Louis, the cross is gone from the photographs. Kolbenhayer, an agnostic, may have influenced her here, too. She never openly repudiated Catholicism, though she expressed puzzlement, for example, as to why Catholics banned Zola (II, 698). And god still existed for her in a kind of spirituality in natural life and in one's own being. But priests and churches could no longer speak for god. She also despised religious hypocrisy. Of a preacher, "red-faced and loud voiced, she wrote: "I hate people who teach lies. Can he tell . . . me things of Christ? I would rather ask the stars: they have seen

16Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 67 and p. 198.
him." A poem says: "I wanted God, in heaven and earth I sought, / And lo! I found him in my inmost thought" (II, 733). What T. S. Eliot said of Henry James applies to Chopin, that while James had an indifference to religious dogma, he had an exceptional awareness of spiritual reality. The main tension caused by religious training and a naturalist orientation is in her lingering belief in "sin." There is a consciousness of sin in some of the fiction, like "Désirée's Baby." She wrote in her diary, "it must be good to prowl sometimes, to get close to the black night and lose oneself in its silence and mystery and sin." Seyersted has reported that there was an unsuccessful attempt to scratch out the last several words. She transmuted the thought into fiction ("Vagabonds," I, 472), where it becomes a very minor, unresolved ambiguity.

Kate Chopin lived most of her life in Missouri and Louisiana, and another influence on her was an urban cosmopolitanism in conflict with a regional provincialism. As we have seen, she resolved this through art. St. Louis had a French, white American, and black American mix. In addition, though officially Yankee, it was southern in sympathy. The resulting tensions found a response in the young Kate O'Flaherty who, while northern soldiers were garrisoned in the city, was a young rebel who flew the Confederate flag. New Orleans, where she lived from 1870 to 1880,

---

was a cosmopolitan city of Spanish, blacks, Creole French, and various ethnic European groups. The years she lived in rural Louisiana exposed her to Cajuns and Indians.

As a writer and defender of the new realism, she harbored a resentment against provincialism if it were untempered by larger, more tolerant viewpoints. Like both Adams and James, she railed against the moral priggishness of American letters. To her the "eleventh commandment" was "thou shalt not preach" (II, 702). She felt a writer like Hamlin Garland did not go far enough in his realism. She argued as James did, for the universality of culture and linked that with ancient immutable truths, the passions of the human heart:

Human impulses do not change and can not so long as men and women continue to stand in the relation to one another which they have occupied since our knowledge of their existence began. It is why Aeschylus is true, and Shakespeare is true to-day, and why Ibsen will not be true in some remote to-morrow. . . because he takes for his themes social problems which by their very nature are mutable. . . .

The author of "Crumbling Idols" would even lightly dismiss from the artist's consideration such primitive passions as love, hate, etc. He declares that in real life people do not talk love. How does he know? I feel very sorry for Mr. Garland.

She had even more to say about provincialism in the context of a new and changing technology. As a writer and critic, she was, of course, part of the process of mass print and publication. This technology offered her the opportunity to augment her income, to fulfill herself, and to make known her views on the new realism. Expanding railroad services gave her freedom to travel. She refused to intellectually attack technology, and here she is unlike
Adams and James. Attending "the Western Association of Writers" (1894), she reported it necessary that a provincialism, unsuited to the end of the nineteenth century, disappear. She felt that the writers were tied to an unrealistic Eden:

The cry of the dying century has not reached the body of workers, or else it has not been comprehended. There is no doubt in their soul, no unrest... (II, 691).

While St. Louis seemed an outpost away from the New York-Boston-London axis of publishing, Chopin kept what amounted to a literary salon, and because of technology kept in touch from 1889 on, when she began publishing regularly, with the east. As a local colorist she came to the attention of William Dean Howells, whose novels she read, and he praised her fiction. She said no good could come of abusing Boston and New York as long as western cities remained provincial. Besides, the east aided in bringing to light what was original in the west and south since the Civil War (II, 694).

The rise of the new woman had a strong impact on her, both personally and at a literary level. She is that new woman, forward thinking, rebellious, non-conforming, in search of self. On her

---

19 Seyersted, Kate Chopin, pp. 53-54. She sent a copy of At Fault to Howells (she published it at her own expense), according to Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories, pp. 128-29. When a review criticized her colloquial language and her use of "depot" for railroad station, she replied that Howells did this, too. The French influence on her has always been stressed, but few connections have been made between her and the American realists of her day. One might guess that she read James as well as Howells, but there is no absolute evidence.
honeymoon she met Victoria Claflin, the famous suffragist who had just begun her newspaper advocating women's independence, socialism, and birth control. Victoria Claflin Woodhull declared in 1871 words quite similar to those Edna speaks at The Awakening's end: "I have an inalienable . . . and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can, to change that love every day as I please!" Kate Chopin herself smoked, drank beer, visited the New York Stock Exchange with her husband, and on her honeymoon strolled about European cities quite alone, much as a Jamesian American girl would. She was never a feminist in the political sense, nor did she join women's organizations, except briefly a St. Louis literary society. Yet she named her only daughter for George Sand's Lelia. Her friends were doctors, lawyers, and newspaper people including the St. Louis Life editor Sue V. Moore, all independent thinkers. She wrote encouraging and supportive reviews of other American women writers like Ruth McEnery Stuart and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. What she foresaw was that women might attain a degree of social equality but that their basic sexual role would remain unchanged—this is what Ibsen, she though, did not address himself to.

As a writer she was very much the new woman and yet the artist concerned with human and universal truths. Later, describ-

---

ing the beginning period of her writing, she states that she was looking back and groping around, "looking for something big, satisfying, convincing, and finding nothing but—myself. . . ."

Then she found what she wanted, an impressionistic realism that came internally from her own solitude and externally from experience and literature:

It was at this period of my emerging from the vast solitude in which I had been making my acquaintance, that I stumbled upon Maupassant. . . . Here was life, not fiction. . . . Here was a man who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own eyes and . . . told us what he saw. . . . It is genuine and spontaneous. He gives us his impressions (II, 700-01).

Furthermore, writing and creativity are a flowering process. In an interview with the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (1899), she said:

Story-writing—at least with me—is the spontaneous expression of impressions gathered goodness knows where. To seek the source, the impulse of a story is like tearing a flower to pieces for wantonness.

She added:

There are stories which seem to write themselves, and others which positively refuse to be written—which no amount of coaxing can bring to anything. . . . The 'material' of a writer is to the last degree uncertain (II, 722).

She is unlike James in that she does not think a complete "portrait" can be rendered in fiction. Rather, only a shorthand method can capture the individual. Nor could anyone else give her ideas for stories: "I am completely at the mercy of unconscious selection" (II, 722). But they are remarkably in agreement as to the archetypal response of the writer to him or herself and the artist's response to environment.
The final event which strongly influenced her was the invasion of the post-Civil War south by industrial capitalism. The resultant exploitation of natural resources is a factor in At Fault. She shows the effects of big business and finance capitalism in the life of a woman in The Awakening—Mr. Pontellier is a New Orleans businessman who speculates on Wall Street. Capitalism and an accelerating technology merge with urbanization. She has quite ambivalent feelings about the urbanizing of American life. In At Fault when Hosmer returns to St. Louis to remarry Fanny, the 1894 St. Louis Exposition is going on. As he weaves his way "through the mazes of the city" and crowds, he feels a duality, an invigorating thrill through the block, and a love for intoxicating life, but "no reacting warmth in his heart" (II, 775). Another mythic-realist novelist, Henry Adams, attended expositions and stood in amazement before the dynamo. Kate Chopin attended the St. Louis Exposition of 1904 with the same kind of enthusiasm Adams had, but the final irony of her life was that while she seemed to have loved the great fair's excitement, that event may have contributed to the stroke she suffered shortly after her attendance. (An irony of Adams's life was that the dynamo ultimately destroyed his philosophic stance.) Perhaps, like she wrote about Louise Mallard's death in "The Story of an Hour," Kate Chopin suffered the joy that killed.
Edna Pontellier:
"Venus rising from the foam"

Kate Chopin's The Awakening brilliantly unites from its opening scene, realism, mythology, and naturalism. The setting is a hot Louisiana summer Sunday by the Gulf, and Edna Pontellier, the novel's heroine, has already begun her quest. The novel's cyclical closure occurs six months later in February when Edna returns to the sea. Chopin's realism deals with the social world of Grand Isle and New Orleans during the 1890's. Then through a series of images of sun, moon, the earth goddess Edna, birds, music, flowers, dreams, and water, the author creates a mythic structure of archetypal symbols and of irony. Both at the realist and mythological levels, there are terrible personal, social, and universal ambiguities and tensions of feminine life. Chopin reconciles these ambiguities and the twin strains of realism and mythology with naturalism, principally through the natural environment of sea, earth, and sex.

To introduce her central dialectic, Chopin opens the novel with two birds. A caged green and yellow parrot hangs on one side of a door and repetitiously mimics a command for action and a simultaneous acknowledgement of the status quo: "'Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!'" (II, 881). The

---

parrot speaks French, English, a little Spanish, and a language no one understands. A similarly imprisoned mocking bird, hanging on the other side of the door, whistles "his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence" (II, 881). Léonce Pontellier, slightly stooped, forty, with a neatly trimmed beard, is weekending on Grand Isle, where his wife and children are summering. He is quite annoyed, for the birds' distracting noises begin a duality which quickly multiplies. The Farival twins play a duet on the piano. Two lovers whisper together. Edna has just returned from the beach with Robert Lebrun, the elder of the resort owner's two sons. The main dialectic, between the status quo and imperative change, remains as a tension and becomes a pervasive irony. Mr. Pontellier, representing the status quo, reveals how he feels about his wife who will soon break out of the marriage cage symbolized by the imprisoned birds:

'What folly! . . . You are burnt beyond recognition,' he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage (II, 882).

Irony and symbols unite as Edna slips on her wedding rings and they sparkle in the sun, that ultimate patriarchal symbol that dominates the setting. The opening scene concludes with the introduction of the Pontellier children, two boys ages four and five, and with Mr. Pontellier fingering his pocketed money as he prepares to leave for a nearby men's club. Edna stays behind at the resort talking with Robert who is the first catalyst for her desire for change.
Bird symbolism again opens the next chapter. Edna's eyes are like a bird's,
quick and bright; they were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair. She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought (II, 883).
The smallest detail is significant in this novel. Ancient mythology is filled with tales linking the human soul and birds. It is Edna's soul which is important, and birds are exactly right for her. The "inward maze" is the labyrinth Edna must travel to eventually reach the center of her soul and self-hood, while "lost" marks her distance from others and foreshadows her ultimate isolation. Kate Chopin had originally entitled the book A Solitary Soul. Edna is "captivating," charming, and natural (II, 883). Her relationship with Robert Lebrun at this point is quite innocent, but their growing mutual and natural attraction is foreshadowed during these languorous summer days—they share a golden brown coloring and an open expression, and they enjoy each other's company.

Grand Isle is a microcosm of Creole society and family life. The Pontelliers are a well-to-do middle class family, and by all social standards Mr. Pontellier is an excellent husband. But husband and wife have nothing in common. Arriving back at the cottage late at night from his evening out, he wants to talk with Edna, but she is too sleepy:

He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation.
The continuous struggle of wills between husband and wife, another dialectic, has been muted but now comes into the open. Léonce turns to the children. Raoul is burning up with fever, Mr. Pontellier says, and he reproaches Edna for neglecting the children (he has, incidentally, forgotten candy he promised them). Talking in "a monotonous, insistent way," Léonce reminds her that he is too busy with his brokerage business to oversee the boys and that it is her duty to care for them (II, 885). Once he has succeeded in arousing her, he easily falls asleep. She rocks on the porch, and in the background is the hoot of an owl in a water-oak, another mocking, lonely sound, and "the everlasting voice of the sea, that ... broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night." Edna cries, not over the quarrel for "such experiences ... were not uncommon in her married life," but rather over "an indescribable oppression" and "a vague anguish" (II, 886). The archetypal woman's awakening, her quest that is an ordeal, has begun. Mr. Pontellier gives his wife a generous amount of money and leaves Monday morning for New Orleans, eager to return to business. The Pontelliers are vivid illustrations of what James described in the 1890's, as a "growing divorce" between the American woman, with her comparative leisure, culture, grace, and artistic ambitions, and the male immersed in business and commercial interests, which led, said James, to "an abyss of inequality, the like of which has never before been seen under the sun." 22

Chopin's introduction of the Pontellier children at the beginning and her portrayal of parental attitudes are crucial to the novel's continuing tension. Though the husband has immediately regretted his expression of dissatisfaction with his wife, he is right in perceiving she is not, as Kate Chopin writes, "a mother-woman." Nor are her children "mother-tots" who rush to her arms for comfort but are, rather, sturdy, independent boys. Mother-women prevail at Grand Isle:

It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were the women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels (II, 888).

Raoul and Etienne are not central to Edna's life. Nor does she worship Léonce. There is an ambivalence in Edna, a mother who is not a mother-woman, but also in Chopin's attitudes toward mother-women who foster dependent children and are perfect wives. Chopin's ambivalence is obvious in her portrait of Adèle Ratiognolle. Adèle is "delicious in the rôle," a "faultless Madonna" who has the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to possess (II, 888-90). Adèle is developed sympathetically as a warm, loyal friend to Edna and wife and mother to husband and children. As Per Seyersted has said, however, she is also "a striking illustration of the patriarchal ideal of the submissive female who writes her history through her family."23 Chopin satirizes this

---

23Seyersted, Kate Chopin, p. 140.
ideal—Adèle is like "the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams" (II, 888). Barely pregnant with her fourth child, she talks continuously of her condition and thinks it a meaningful activity to sew night drawers for her children.

Another difference between Edna and the Creole women is important to the dialectic. Edna is a daughter of the Puritans and has a reticence ingrained in her from childhood. She is always surprised at Creole mores. They discuss pregnancies, love affairs, and risqué books frankly, and they carry on flirtations. Robert Lebrun flirts openly with Mrs. Ratignolle and other married women. Edna is unable to lightly deal with this frank, foreign society and with her embryonic feelings for Robert:

A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light, which, showing the way, forbids it.

At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears (II, 893).

Chopin's objectivity in this novel has been highly praised. But one finds in The Awakening, as in the other mythic-realist novels, that the author sustains a steady, ascertainable position. Edna's movement toward the light and awakening is a journey toward her real self. As Joan Zlotnik's sensitive feminist reading has expressed it, Edna has the author's implicit approval.²⁴ No irony is directed at Edna here:

²⁴Joan Zlotnik, "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood," The Markham Review, [1], No. 3 (October, 1968), [3].
In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual in the world within and about her. This may seem like . . . perhaps more wisdom than any Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

But the beginning of things . . . is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing (II, 893).

Edna's quest through the "maze" of her soul to her center begins in chaos and is tension-ridden. Her quest takes place within the elemental circle of life and death, the womb of life and its grave:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (II, 893).

While desirable, the quest is simultaneously disturbing and dangerous.

Because her quest is still at its beginning, much of her response is at the sensuous level. Even her friendship with Adèle is based partly on Edna's sensuous susceptibility to beauty. In one of many mythic allusions to fate and the gods, Chopin emphasizes that our primary responses are not always rationally understood: "Who can tell what metals the gods use in forging the subtle bond which we call sympathy, which we might as well call love" (II, 894). Chopin makes it clear that Edna is still at a primary stage, and she connects Edna not just with the sea but as an earth goddess with soil and vegetation. Edna's head is like "a rich rare blossom" (II, 922). Edna walks toward the beach with Adèle through a tangled growth, yellow camomile, vegetable.
gardens, and orange and lemon trees:

The lines of her body were long, clean and symmetrical; it was a body which occasionally fell into splendid poses; there was... noble beauty of its modeling, and the graceful severity of poise and movement... (II, 894).

Yet it is an imperative in the quest to move from the elemental and primary toward rational understanding. Her friendship with the more candid Madame Ratignolle encourages Edna to be less reticent and to investigate her own feelings. It is with Adèle that she makes the connection between her Kentucky girlhood and the sea. She remembers swimming as a young child through waist-high grass in the meadows "as big as the ocean... I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of" (II, 896).

Edna's Protestant upbringing causes her trouble not just, then, because it makes her an outsider in Creole society, but because it has contributed to her rebelliousness. Her growing conflict with her husband and marriage is but an extension of her childhood rebelliousness against Presbyterian patriarchal values.

Her revolt has other implications and ramifications. In her motherless, isolated, lonely childhood, she took refuge in a fantasy and dream life made up on unobtainable men and love. One of her dreams was of a cavalry officer, her father's friend; another revolved around someone else's fiancé; a third was an infatuation with a distant actor. Then Léonce Pontellier appeared. His devotion flattered her, and she thought they shared sympathy and thoughts. When her father and older sister objected to his...
Catholicism, Edna's mutinous nature again flared up. The ensuing marriage has left her fond of her husband but without a trace of passion—the marriage, says Chopin, is an accident masquerading as fate. The result has been two boys that Edna is fond of "in an uneven, impulsive way." Sometimes she gathers them passionately to her heart; something she forgets them. When she is apart from them, she misses them but their absence is a relief: "It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (II, 899). Chopin in this way brings Edna's rebellion against social values into the larger arena of the natural world, her motherhood.

As a heroine and outsider, Edna's growing rebellion against Creole values is dangerous for her. As she feels a greater sense of freedom and candor, she is surely headed for disaster. Madame Ratignolle perceives Edna's danger when she asks Robert Lebrun to let Mrs. Pontellier alone: "'She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously!'" (II, 900). Edna is the American girl, spirited and natural, and basically serious in her approach to life. One can see how much she shares in common with the other heroines of the mythic-realist novels.

Edna is an outsider with serious concerns in still another way. She is an artist. On Grand Isle Edna is one of the few people Mademoiselle Raisz, an excellent pianist, will play for. Edna weeps uncontrollably at the beautiful music. Music is a
recurring motif for her sensitive, responsive soul. By contrast, Madame Ratignolle plays well but keeps up her music chiefly for her family's sake.

After the music scene, Robert suggests a swim "at that mystic hour and under that mystic moon" (II, 907), and the novel's symbolism continues as an organic entity. The moon is a condensed symbol of womanhood and intimately connected with water and the ocean's tides. Strains of music and strange, rare odors fill the night air:

a tangle of the sea smell and of weeds and damp, new-plowed earth, mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms somewhere near. . . . The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep. . . . The sea . . . swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents (II, 907-08).

It is on this moonlight night that Edna learns to swim, an indication of her growing independence. Once filled with a dread of water, she is now like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone . . . . She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul (II, 908).

In language that seems quite contemporary, Chopin says a woman wishes to control her own body. Edna is intoxicated with her new power. But once again, what is good and desirable is also perilous, and Chopin foreshadows this: "She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where
no woman had swim before." Edna perceives that the water is a barrier "which her unaided strength would never be able to over­come. A quick vision of death smote her soul. . ." (II, 909). Edna swims alone and isolates herself. Total aloneness does indeed mean biological and social death. Edna is the imperial self, which Quentin Anderson so well described, who will cut herself off from community and thus will sever her ties to life. 25

Another recurring mythic symbol is the dream, intimately joined with the sleeping state from which the heroine must awaken. Since childhood Edna has been troubled by her dreams. One is of a naked man on a desolate rock on the seashore who watches a distant bird winging from him. Another is of a lady dancing down an avenue bordered by tall hedges. Edna dreams of a woman stroking a cat. Another is about children. These dreams are either sexual or oppressive, or both. The night that Edna learns to swim is like a dream, and she expresses her feelings about it: "'The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night.'" (II, 909).

The novel's section in which Edna learns to swim is very mythological. Robert connects her with the semi-divine when he tells her that she has lifted him above the realm of mere mortals and into that of the "semi-celestials." She is a goddess who has cast a spell over him, a "'poor unworthy earthling,'" and he must

"walk in the shadow of her divine presence" (II, 910). He is attracted to her but feels a separation, and while he banterers he also has mixed feelings of caring for her but yet fearing her power. His dualism is reflected in her next observation of him. They walk back to the hotel from the beach and her swim, and she watches his figure "pass in and out of the strips of moonlight" (II, 911). The double pattern of dark and light strips has a visual impact of prison bars, the prison bars of marriage, but in a larger sense the indication of one's individual imprisonment and isolation from others.

After the swim and the walk back to her cottage through the moonlight, a restless Edna refuses to go to bed with Léonce and instead sits on the porch in the dark until very late. She has a growing sense of self and aloneness. Although she has yielded to his orders before, she now resists her husband's command to come into the house instantly. Beginning to sense her power, her will blazes up and she feels "like one who awakens gradually out of a dream. . ." (II, 912). Léonce is no Gilbert Osmond nor even a Stephen Hazard. He is basically decent, stops harassing her, and joins her outside. But the relationship is as stymied as any male-female relationship in the mythic-realist novels.

Edna's fluctuation between sleep and awakening, so like the flux of the ocean waves or the moon-controlled tides, continues through the Grand Isle sequence which moves from the heat of the
day to night time coolness and back again. She and Robert embark on a boat trip to the Chênière Caminada, a nearby island, to attend Sunday Mass. The whole section is very sensual. Edna's senses are wide-awake. She notices that the Spanish girl Marieguita has sand and slime between her brown toes. As Robert plans other trips, he describes how they will climb the hill on Grand Terre to look at "the little wriggling gold snakes, and watch the lizards sun themselves" (II, 915). They will go by pirogue in the moonlight so that the Gulf Spirit can whisper to them. Gold snakes and moonlight pick up the sea imagery of the swimming scene. Opposed to this is the effect of the church service on Edna, Catholic and not Presbyterian but equally oppressive. Orthodox religion cannot compete with the demands of the body. A drowsy Edna goes to a nearby home and sleeps through the day. When she awakens she has a ravenous appetite and tears at a crusty brown loaf "with her strong white teeth," then drinks down wine with relish (II, 918).

The elemental quality of the Sunday outing blends into what is a fairy tale atmosphere. Robert tells her she has slept "precisely one hundred years" (II, 919), and a woman of the island relates tales of phantom ships, of dead men and gold. When they return to Grand Isle, it is moonlight and Robert sings "si tu savais" (II, 922). The suggestion this song makes will come back to haunt her. But The Awakening is no more a fairy tale than The Princess Casamassima is—it is all too realistic and ironic.
Romance in the form of fairy tale functions in *The Awakening*, as it did in the other mythic-realist novels, as displacement. Robert cares for Edna but now understands he must leave her. He reverts to his Creole Catholic upbringing which dictates that he can flirt with a married woman but cannot fall in love with her, and he abruptly leaves for Mexico. Edna is stunned. Because self-centeredness is fundamental to one phase of archetypal woman who must find her center, her first thought is of herself, that she has been deserted. More than this, she recognizes for the first time as an adult woman the girlhood infatuation she felt, and she feels she is being denied that which "her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded" (II, 927).

As the Grand Isle episode draws to a close with the summer’s end and Robert’s departure, Edna’s only real pleasurable moments are spent in the water swimming. She attempts to sort out her feelings, and this leads, almost at the novel’s center, back to her children. With Adèle as her confidante, Edna explains paradoxically, not quite sure what she means, that she would never sacrifice herself for her children or for anyone:

'I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something I'm beginning to comprehend. . . .'

Adèle replies that a woman can’t give any more than that, for "'your Bible tells you so'" (II, 929). But Edna knows, though she has yet to wholly articulate it, by the end of the Grand Isle summer that she has an essence she must preserve at all costs. One
might say Grand Isle closes the first act of the heroine's drama.

The scene dramatically shifts to New Orleans which functions as the locale of the drama's second act. Grand Isle tends to concentrate on the natural elements, the archetype's birth in darkness and chaos and her sensual nature, and her movement toward the light. New Orleans emphasizes the novel's realism and Edna's growing awareness of the demands of social institutions. This is not to say that there is a precise dichotomy between the natural and the man-made settings, for they are never mutually exclusive in Chopin's fiction. One cannot exist without the other. The novel's movement, from island to city and back to island, mirrors Edna's development and physical movements which form a circle: first her natural self awakens; then she awakens to the social issues, and this leads imperceptibly into a total grasp of her natural and social situation which brings her full circle back to herself.

At the realist level, the Pontellier home in New Orleans, as John May has pointed out, is "a perfect microcosm of the restraints of the Creole city. . . ."26 It is as beautiful as the Princess Casamassima's Medley estate and just as inadequate to Edna's needs as Medley is to Christina's. Both women are only sojourners in these houses. Edna speaks of the house as her husband's, and Chopin mocks Pontellier's pride in it:

Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details. . . . He greatly valued his possessions chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain—no matter what—after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods (II, 931).

The house and an ornamental Edna are testimonials to his superior business competitiveness. Though not a fool, Mr. Pontellier is the Creole counterpart of the Prince Casamassima, and both are inadequate to the challenge of understanding their wives.

Edna now begins to break out of the Esplanade Street doll house by determining one fall day that she will no longer hold Tuesday afternoon "at homes," a program she had "religiously" followed since her marriage six years before (II, 932). It is always an indication when a word connoting religion appears, like "holy" or "bible," that Chopin is satirizing religion. Edna must put such institutional restrictions behind her to become herself.

That evening at the dinner table a scene erupts between husband and wife. Her sudden abandonment of the "at homes" genuinely upsets her husband. What will people say, he asks, adding that "such things count" (II, 933). Because the dinner has been especially poorly prepared Edna is remiss, he tells her, and neglects her duties in not directing the cook and servants properly. But writing out menus and supervising servants are as meaningless to Edna as her receptions. Pontellier stalks out to take dinner at his club. Edna feels a brief flush of success, but her exhilaration is short-lived. Here is another fluctuation between opposites, this one between happiness and depression or anger. From
her bedroom window Edna looks out on the "deep tangle of the garden below," at the "mystery and witchery of the night . . . seeking herself. . . ." The voices she hears from the night are jeering and mournful, without promise or hope. Edna finds the appropriate objects upon which to vent her rage. She flings her wedding ring to the carpet and tries to crush it, but "her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet" (II, 934). She smashes a vase on the hearth. A servant hastens in and cleans up the shattered glass. The ring of marriage and the vase or container of woman herself are the two symbols of her imprisonment. She cannot break the one; she will finally smash the other, herself. This scene closes with Edna slipping the ring back on her finger, the gesture recalling the novel's opening and "'Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!'"

In contrast to the Pontellier home, Chopin describes another New Orleans household, the Ratignolle ménage in which Adèle is the contended center. The Ratignolles have perfect domestic harmony and understanding, quite different from the discords Edna has heard. They have a perfect marriage, but when Edna visits them, she feels an "appalling and helpless ennui," and pities Adèle's "colorless existence" and "blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium" (II, 938). One critical reading of this passage has assumed that Chopin's treat-
ment of the Ratignolle marriage is satiric. This is partly so. Edna's contempt for marriage is solidifying, and she tells her husband on the occasion of her sister's coming marriage, which she refuses to attend, "'a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth'" (II, 948). But Chopin is also satirizing Edna who doesn't know what "life's delirium" means. The Ratignolles have achieved a happy union. Once again we are poised in ambiguity.

New Orleans further heightens Mrs. Pontellier's dissatisfaction with marriage. She broods, tramps about the city, and rides streetcars by herself. Her husband is confused, then enraged:

Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

The realist atmosphere contains mythology of an interesting sort, clothing images which indicate metamorphosis. As in The Princess Casamassima when Christina attempts to get back to her democratic roots by putting on simpler, less expensive clothes, Edna moves toward her naked, fundamental self by shedding the garments of convention:

It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could

---

27 Zlotnik, "A Woman's Will" [p. 3].
see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world (II, 939).

Chopin maintains ambiguity in a pair of paragraphs so that stylistically, as well as dramatically and dialectically, she shows Edna's double archetypal feminine nature, and at the same time approves the quest which is a continuing trauma:

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day... There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation (II, 940).

New Orleans is the locale, too, for Edna as artist and outsider. She attempts to get to her roots through painting, and to find meaning, fulfillment, and order. One recalls Esther Dudley. Both women have energy and talent and spend long hours in their studios. In The Awakening there is another woman artist whom we can compare with Edna. Mademoiselle Reisz is single, eccentric, and gifted. Once again Chopin's ambivalences surface—Mademoiselle Reisz is a creeping, plain, vitriolic woman, dressed in rusty black and faded artificial violets, but she is a passionate, accomplished pianist who has forged a life for herself. Her role is much like that of Madame Grandon to Christina in The Princess, except that the Creole woman is not as involved with the heroine and is financially independent. But she is a wise older woman who advises and cautions the younger Edna and tells her if
she wishes to be an artist and an emancipated woman she must have "absolute gifts" and above all "the courageous soul!" (II, 947). Feeling Edna's shoulder blades to see if they are strong enough for independent flight, she speaks of Edna as a bird: "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings" (II, 966). It is at her apartment that Edna reads letters from Robert Lebrun in México. Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna that Robert is a very ordinary man, indicating that Edna is extra-ordinary and will be disappointed in him.

One recalls the structure of The Princess Casamassima for another reason. Just as older women fulfill confidante roles to younger women in both novels, so older men are wise men archetypes to younger men. Dr. Mandelet, a physician, is like Vetch a sage who knows his fellow creatures. The doctor is, as Joseph Campbell has said, the modern master of the mythological realm.28 Mandelet, like Vetch, plays another role, that of a Greek chorus prophesying doom and unable to change destinies. Pontellier seeks out the old man as a friend and advisor. Once Mandelet establishes that Edna's actions are not due to heredity—that is, she is not crazy—that Pontellier has not been abusing her, and that she is not consorting with feminists (this last the doctor says with a smile, for he is urbane), Mandelet then persuades Pontellier to let his wife alone for a while. Viewing life naturalistically and

knowing psychology, the doctor looks upon women as delicate organisms. He tells Léonce to be patient. Léonce arranges for the doctor to dine at the Esplanade Street house to observe Edna. Several male portraits in this section contribute to a rounding out of the novel's dialectic. Here the conflict between female and male is additionally seen through a quick sketch of Edna's father, an old Confederate colonel "with his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his 'toddies' and ponderous oaths." He has a military bearing, a rugged bronze coloring, and white silky hair and mustache. But the author has no respect for the old warrior, unlike Adams who admired war veterans in *Esther and Democracy*. There is, we know from Chopin's short fiction, no golden age in the background. Edna's father is a bore, an unwise old man who tells his son-in-law: "'Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife.'" Pontellier is more sensitive to his wife than one might suppose and is no easy scapegoat for our dissatisfactions nor for hers. Chopin allows her satire to filter through Pontellier's perceptions so that he gains our sympathy: "The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave," Léonce thinks (II, 954). Father and daughter have little in common except for horses. Once again the mythic enters the realist world. Edna and her father have been to the track before the dinner party Manetlet attends. Like the other heroines, Edna is a Lady of the Beasts:
The race horse was a friend and associate of her childhood. The atmosphere of the stables and the breath of the blue grass paddock revived in her memory and lingered in her nostrils (II, 957).

That evening Edna is excited and exciting. She reminds Dr. Mandelet of "some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (II, 952). At the dinner table the stories recounted reveal each person's interests. Mr. Pontellier talks of hunting and shooting possum and grosbec in his youth. Edna's father recounts long pointless war tales. The doctor's story, from his practice, is about a restless woman. Edna's is a legend of two lovers lost one night in a pirogue. Her romantic inclinations are obvious to Mandelet. She earlier had met Alcée Aribin at the races. Mandelet leaves the party, depressed that he cannot avert the trouble he anticipates, and like a Greek chorus forshadows trouble: "I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée Aribin" (II, 953).

In the New Orleans section Pontellier now prepares to leave home for an extended business trip to New York City. Edna becomes affectionate toward him, but upon his departure and when the children leave soon after for their grandmother Pontellier's Iberville farm, Edna feels gloriously free. One recalls "The Story of an Hour." Edna now reads Emerson, that prophet of the imperial self.29 With no immediate responsibilities, she turns to her old love, the race track, and to a new relationship that is without love

29 Various critics have pointed out Chopin's indebtedness to transcendentalism and to Walt Whitman, particularly in her use of sea imagery.
but that meets the needs of her arouses sensuality. Chopin creates another portrait to fill out the male roles. Arobin is a handsome, shallow, conventional man of fashion, the practiced bon vivant with a manner "so genuine that it often deceived even himself" (II, 960). He appeals "to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her" (II, 961). One can see still a further resemblance between this novel, The Princess Casamassima, and another James novel, The Golden Bowl. Arobin plays a similar role to Sholto's, except that Sholto is more sinister. Both selfishly pursue women. Edna and Arobin's relationship swiftly becomes intimate. He puts aside a previous liaison with the American Mrs. Highcamp, a kind of older Charlotte Stant, intelligent, attractive, manipulative, and full of delicate courtesy and consideration toward her older, dull husband.

Edna now realizes her husband is someone she married without the excuse of love. She makes a major decision. With a small inheritance from her mother, and with money from the races and from the sale of a few of her paintings, she decides to leave her husband's house. "Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance.... she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (II, 963). Edna's honesty and integrity are consistent. She begins to fix up a nearby house which is just large enough for her and calls it her "pigeon house." This whole movement is part of her drive toward autonomy. And she thus commits a serious social error—she usurps
patriarchal prerogatives. When Edna visits Mademoiselle Reisz soon after, that lady says, "'Ah! here comes the sunlight!'" (II, 962)

It is a striking phrase that recalls Pontellier's complaint in the novel's opening that the sun has burnt Edna beyond recognition. In her development Edna is acquiring men's rights: "'I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence'" (II, 963).

Edna's decision to leave her husband leads her inevitably to greater self-scrutiny, for it brings her closer to herself.

She confides in her lover Alcée:

'One of these days . . . I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think—try to determine what character of woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it' (II, 966).

Edna now senses her danger and remembers Mademoiselle Reisz's warning that she is not strong enough to stand against tradition and prejudice. The pianist had added, "'It's a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering to earth.'"

When Edna recounts this to Arobin, he, too, frames his response to her in bird imagery: "'Whither would you soar?'" (II, 966) This indicates, in part, his character, in that he can relate to her—he is a seducer but not a devil, understands her, and is paradoxically necessary to her growth while dangerous to her social reputation. Edna replies poignantly that she is not thinking of any extraordinary flights. Bird imagery indicates, too, the naturalness of Edna's quest—but society will not allow her to test her wings with impunity. In this scene with Arobin, Edna is an equal parti-
incipient in love-making, her sexual nature responding fully for the first time as she kisses him and clasps his head. Her internal reactions to her adultery are mixed. She feels irresponsible, and she regrets that it was not love "which had held this cup of life to her lips." But singularly missing are shame and remorse:

Above all there was understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality (II, 967).

Consistent with her deterministic outlook, Chopin means that sex, the essence of life and, therefore, of death, is beautiful and cruel.

Edna celebrates her freedom with a farewell party at her husband's home, a sumptuous dinner at his expense. It is a kind of revenge on marriage and on him for having embroiled her in it, and an expression of her anger. The occasion is also her twenty-ninth birthday. The dinner is a splendid affair. Soft mandolin music plays in the background. Golds and reds carry out the sublimated motifs of aroused passion, blood, danger, and death. The table is set with massive brass candleabra and yellow and red roses. The guests drink a garnet-colored cocktail and sparkling golden champagne. Edna, whom Mademoiselle Reisz calls "ma reine," wears a cluster of diamonds in her hair, a gift from Mr. Pontellier sent from New York, and takes gold for her own color:

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her ... vibrant flash. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and
spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone (II, 972-73).

Victor Lebrun, Robert's brother, will later describe the evening as a Lucullian feast and Edna as "Venus rising from the foam," and the other women guests as charming houris (II, 997). But this is a lonely Venus with the chill of winter on her soul. Albert Camus has said of la femme de trente ans that she often faces an awakening into the life of the absurd. One thinks of Madeleine Lee in this respect. Edna's celebration of independence is joyless, for she does not feel free and disharmony is all around as well as within her. Seated among her guests, she

felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession. .. a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed. There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable (II, 972).

The dinner becomes a subdued Bacchanalian orgy. Mrs. Highcamp weaves a garland of yellow and red roses into Victor's dark curls. He is a spoiled lady's man, a handsome dark youth with gleaming teeth, "a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the color of crushed grapes, and the dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire." Another guest, Gouvernail (from "Athénais"), murmurs, "There was a graven image of Desire / Painted with red gold on a ground of gold" (II, 973). The Swinburne lines heighten the

---

pagan atmosphere and also, as Bernard Koloski has pointed out, "the brooding presence of death." Victor sings, "'Ah! si tu savais!" which picks up the refrain Robert sang on the summer moonlit trip among the islands. Edna is openly distressed. She shatters her wine glass on the table, rises, and stops Victor's song with her hand over his mouth. Victor kisses her palm and she briefly feels his physical appeal, which upsets her further. She practically dismisses outright all the guests, and the dinner ends on a distressing note—Mrs. Highcamp invites Victor to call upon her daughter, a pretext she uses for cultivating young men, while the disbanding guests' voices "jarred like a discordance note upon the quiet harmony of the night" (II, 974). Disheartened and miserable, Edna feels the party was stupid. She has grown in her capacity to look upon her own actions with detachment. She leaves her husband's house this night for the last time. As she walks to her "pigeon house" with Arobin, she notices "the black line of his leg moving in and out so close to her against the yellow shimmer of her gown" (II, 975. This image is reminiscent of the moonlight strips on Robert, the image here picking up phallic implications. Chopin's symbolic sense at its best always works organically with the fiction's dialectic. The dinner episode, a celebration of Edna's freedom, closes with Arobin stroking and kissing her shoulder and neck until she is sexually aroused, making this complex

---

woman realize that she is not free to deny her body's demands.

Having informed her husband by letter that she was moving out of his house, Edna now hears from him all the social arguments against her doing so. He is worried that people will talk and that "incalculable mischief" might be done to his business prospects. Pontellier quickly by mail orders the remodeling of the big house so that it appears his wife's move is temporary. In the meantime, Edna likes "the feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual" (II, 977). Again as in The Princess Casamassima, a husband does not like his wife living in reduced circumstances because it reflects back on him. By contrast, both women feel better for having become less affluent and dependent on their husbands' bounty.

Chopin writes of Edna:

She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her own soul had invited her.

But Edna has complications unknown to Christina. She must think of her children. She travels to the country to see them. She is filled with pleasure, for these are "delicious February days, with all the summer's promise hovering in the air" (II, 978). But when she leaves the little boys at the week's end, and by the time that she is back in the city, their song no longer echoes in her soul, and she is again alone.

Close upon Edna's visit to them is a visit to her from Adèle Ratignolle. Children continue to play a vital role in the
novel. Now nearing her confinement, Adèle makes Edna promise to be with her when the baby is delivered. But Adèle is also genuinely worried about her friend's affair with Arobin. She cares for Edna and understands the social and sexual codes. Creole society is gossiping about the affair, and Arobin's reputation is notorious. It is a pattern in the mythic-realist novel to show these strong friendships between women. Possibly, I think, the authors are in part undercutting a conventional belief of the patriarchy that women can't be friends.

At this point Robert Leburn unexpectedly returns from Mexico, and Edna meets him by accident at Mademoiselle Reisz's. Though he seems cool and aloof, he says enough of his unhappiness to support her intuition that he loves her. The next day upon awakening she feels the "morning is full of sunlight and hope" (II, 987). Chopin writes, almost parenthetically, that Edna receives a letter from her elder son Raoul, telling her that the farm sow has had ten tiny pigs. When Robert does not come that day, nor the next or next, Edna's hope turns to despondency. One night she drives out with Arobin. The horses are full of mettle, and her senses respond once again to that excitement and to Arobin who has detected her sensuality "which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature's requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom." This is a new feeling for her: "There was no despondency when she fell asleep that night; nor was there hope when she awoke in the morning" (II, 989). She fully realizes that her sexual needs are at the mercy of circumstances.
Edna unexpectedly again meets Robert in a restaurant garden, and her mood wildly fluctuates once more. Now it briefly appears to her "as if a designing Providence" has led him to her, and life again seems to hold meaning. Robert calls her "cruel" when she questions his deliberate avoidance of her, but he walks her home and she kisses him "a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being. . . ." At last it looks like Edna's dreams will come true. Robert confesses the struggle he has had against caring for her because "'you were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife'" (II, 991). He had dreamed wild impossible dreams in Mexico, he says, that Léonce would set her free. Setting aside religion, loyalty, his code of honor, he had rushed back to New Orleans. Then he realized again that she is another man's wife and he felt like "a cur." This all demonstrates Robert's socially-instilled mores which stand between him and Edna. But he fears her at another level, too, signified by his use several times of the word "cruel" for her. Edna now tells him:

'I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, "Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours," I should laugh at you both' (II, 992).32

Robert's face pales, and he asks her what she means. But he really

---

32 Donald A. Ringe, "Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening," American Literature, XLIII, No. 4 (January, 1972), 580-88, has read Edna's character as wishing to possess Robert. This is certainly part of what Robert fears. But I think that such a passage as the above demonstrates her lack of possessiveness.
senses what she means—she is the liberated woman and, more than that, indifferent and even hostile to male values, while he is the conventional young man cut out to be a husband and father. Very early in the novel we are told he is a great favorite of the children on Grand Isle. There are no heroes in this novel. Only Dr. Mandelet is equal to Edna, but he cannot be the Perseus who rescues her. Robert is aroused and passionately responds to her. But the language describing his passion is that he thinks of Edna as a temptress, a siren, who has him "enthralled" and under a spell. Robert is weak in other ways. As fate would have it, in this accidental universe, Edna's romantic dreams cannot come true. Adèle, in labor, sends for Edna. Robert pleads with the cry of the helpless, "'Stay with me, stay with me,'" but Edna is the strong one—she has promised to go to Adèle and will. She tells Robert to wait for her.

At the Ratignolles the atmosphere is filled with what it really means to be a woman. Here is what passion and the union of flesh lead to. Adèle's beautiful face is drawn and pinched, and her eyes are haggard. Her beautiful hair is plaited and lies "in a long braid on the sofa pillow, coiled like a golden serpent" (II, 994). The image summons up the tangled garden Edna saw from her bedroom window and the serpents of the sea. They are not the snakes of evil, but the ancient mythological symbol of the great uroboric round of life and death. Once again Chopin unites the realism, here of childbirth, with mythology, through a naturalistic universe. Edna is filled with dread and recalls her own
experiences:

an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go (II, 994).

Wishing she had not come, Edna in loyalty stays. "With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture." The baby is born. When Edna, stunned and mute, kisses Adèle before leaving, Adèle goes to the heart of the matter, whispering in an exhausted voice, "'Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!'" (II, 995). The childbirth scene dramatically yokes the biological and social implications of motherhood. Adèle reminds Edna that what one was brought naturally and unthinkingly into the world must take precedence over everything else. Edna's pursuit of freedom will mean the eventual victimization of two young children.

Dr. Mandelet understands. The final dialogue in the novel, except for Edna with herself, is between Edna and the wise man. He walks her home from the Ratignolles and is angry that Edna attended the birth, for he understands her impressionistic and romantic temperament. But Edna is at the stage in her development that she sees the wider ramifications of her quest for freedom: "'One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better.'" She has still not entirely sorted out all the implications, and her old rebelliousness flares up. Her husband will be home in March and has offered her a trip to Paris. She tells the doctor:
'I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be let alone. Nobody has any right--except children, perhaps--and even then, it seems to me--or it did seem--' (II, 995).

Mandelet intuits her meaning and expresses what is the author's naturalistic philosophy. The trouble is, he says, that youth is given up to illusions, which is a provision of nature,

'a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, or arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost.'

Edna has grown into maturity--she tells the doctor now, "'it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life'" (II, 996). Because he does fully comprehend her situation, Dr. Mandelet asks Edna to let him help her, but as a heroine in her quest must ultimately do, she determines to rely only on herself. She terminates their conversation by saying that all she wants is her own way, which "'is wanting a good deal, of course,'" but that she does not wish "'to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others . . . to trample upon the little lives'" (II, 996).

When Edna arrives at her front gate, she still thinks Robert is waiting. She is willing to postpone until tomorrow the decision she knows she must carry through. Perhaps she will now awaken Robert with a kiss. Adèle's "think of the children" has "driven into her soul like a death wound--but not to-night. Tomorrow would be time to think of everything." The lines foreshadow her suicide. Then she enters to find Robert gone and a note, '"I love you. Good-by--because I love you'" (II, 997).
Edna lies down on the sofa in the darkness, the lamp having sputtered out, the hearth cold. Mute and motionless through the night, she totally awakens and completes her internal dialogue. Like the other heroines of these novels, she harrows the hell of her suffering soul and faces the consequences of her actions.

The final act and closing chapter is a return to Grand Isle. It is the beginning of the early southern spring. Edna arrives on the island and tells a startled Victor Lebrun and Mariequita that she wishes to have a swim and dinner. The Gulf water will not be too cold, she insists, for the sun will have warmed the ocean's depths. Having allayed suspicions, she walks rather mechanically to the beach. She is not thinking now, for she had done all the thinking necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake until morning:

She had said over and over to herself: 'To-day it is Robert; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier—but Raoul and Etienne!'

She wants Robert now, but she knows the day will come when the thought of him will melt out of existence, too, leaving her alone. She now completely understands herself and what she meant six months earlier when she said she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children. Her life is the essential, and her essence is her integrity as a woman and separate being. While she truly does not care what society thinks of her, she cannot follow a course that would exploit or hurt the children. But then if she were to give up her freedom for them,
they would be her enemies.

The children appeared before her like antagonists, who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them (II, 999).

What is her choice then? As she walks down to the ocean, the Gulf stretches before her, gleaming in the sun. The ceaseless, seductive sea calls, inviting her soul to wander in abysses of solitude, calling Edna back to itself. Beyond the empty beach, "A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling, disabled, down, down to the water" (II, 999). First Edna dons her old bathing suit from the bathouse, but the clothing dictated by society feels constricting, so she sheds it. The ending fuses all the symbols: clothing, sun, sea, birds, snakes; the fluctuating motion of her exhilaration and depression, the realism of her position, mythology, the naturalist world:

for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some newborn creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world it have never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents around her ankles.

This is the final call to action, allez vous-en, and it is all right. Edna lifts her body in the deep water and reaches out with long, sweeping strokes into the enfolding, embracing sea. Her old terror of the sea flames up, then dies down. As she swims further and further out, the concluding movement is cyclical, back to the night she first learned to swim, when she tottered like a child into the surf, and back to her bluegrass country childhood. She
thinks of Léonce and the children and of Robert who would never understand. She thinks of Dr. Mandelet who may have understood but it is too late. All her memories converge into a final consciousness just as she loses consciousness. She hears her father's and sisters' voices. She recalls the oppressions of her girlhood and the fantasies and dreams that can never become realities. She hears the barking of an old dog chained to a sycamore tree and the spurs of the cavalry officer walking across the porch. As the Gulf spirit drew her to it the night she learned to swim, it now claims her for its own, and unites her as an earth mother with the sea: "There was the human of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air" (II, 1000).

The Awakening's ending, like the other novels in this study, has posed certain problems. One is its dialectic. A second is the question of why Edna takes her life. Whether her suicide is a victory or defeat is a third problem. The first problem, the dialectic, is between the biological and social. This dilemma reflects archetypal woman's inherent duality of striving for movement and change, but of being locked into her anatomy. Edna, though without shame or blame, comes to understand that her sexual needs stand between her and her own rational control of her life. She also comes to comprehend the role of her children. Several critical readings have not appreciated how central these children are to the dialectic. In one sense, as Per Sayersted has pointed out, the children remain anonymous. They biologically
represent life's tyranny. At a social level they stand, as George Arms has said, for a stable society and the permanence of an unbroken home.  

But in another way the children are not anonymous in that they are introduced in the opening pages and returned to again and again at crucial intervals. When Edna admits that she loves Robert, for example, she sends them a huge box of candy and a tender message. They make demands on her at a sub-conscious level. Right after Robert's return from Mexico she receives the letter from Raoul about the ten piglets. She veers wildly between loving them and forgetting them, but she must finally see them as antagonists. When Adèle says, "think of them," and even before Edna knows Robert has left her, Edna knows that children as well as marriage mean the enslavement of her soul. Or as Larzer Ziff has expressed it, when Edna fully realizes what the children mean, she drowns herself.  

I think there are two reasons why contemporary readings have not emphasized the role of sex nor that of Edna's children. It seems less necessary to do either today, for women enjoy greater sexual freedom than ever and, at least in modern industrial societies, they no longer must be the total victims of their

---


anatomy. Nor are they condemned for sexual licence. I say "seems," however, for I am not sure the situation when children are involved has changed that much since Chopin's day. Edna was not a "mother-woman"—with only two children she had likely found a way to limit conception. It was the devoutly Catholic Adèle Ratignolle who had a baby a year. Middle class women have more information at an earlier stage now, and more choices of occupations and more opportunities for economic independence. But once children come into the lives of women, these children cannot be ignored. The "soul's slavery" may be an extreme statement but only in degree, not kind. Women bearing children still fulfill their ancient primary role, and I suspect many still feel they are decoys of nature. Patriarchal society still condemns particularly a freedom-seeking woman who neglects her children (I, 28).

The second problem, why Edna takes her life, is tied in with the children as antagonists and with sex, but has an added dimension of patriarchal religion. A very harsh criticism of this novel's resolution condemns Edna's suicide. Wendy Martin has stated that from Charlotte Temple and Hester Prynne to Isabel Archer, Edna Pontellier, and Catherine Barkley, American literature is filled with portraits of daughters of Eve. These morally inferior creatures have been beguiled by their own passions, have eaten the apple of experience, and are destined for tragedy. Martin's main argument is that Chopin is trapped in a Puritan
morality and the Christian concept of the fallen woman. An even more sympathetic reading, by Larzer Ziff, has said that Edna, trapped between her illusions and the conditions which society arbitrarily establishes to maintain itself, "is made to pay."

Robert Arner has suggested that sexual fulfillment still carries a price fixed by the religious and moral establishment. These arguments all have some merit. Edna does revert to her Presbyterian upbringing, her transplanted New England conscience, in the early scene with Adèle. But Edna develops a deeper awareness of her position in the universe and goes beyond religious or ethical considerations. In her walk home with Dr. Mandelet the last night of her life, she tells him not to blame her for anything. A very good reading of *The Awakening* has been overlooked by recent criticism. Stanley Kauffman has said the book has three phases.

Edna is a conventional woman of her time who awakens first to what is missing in her marriage. At this stage she thinks about Presbyterianism. Then she awakens to the disparity between her sexual being and the rules of marriage. By the time she faces the third conflict, that of nature versus civilization, she has moved beyond

---


36 Ziff, *The American 1890's*, pp. 304-05; Robert D. Arner, "Kate Chopin's Realism: 'At the 'Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm,'" *The Markham Review*, II, No. 2 (February, 1970), [1-4].

social considerations. One might say that the first response is personal, the second social, and the third the universal condition of feminine life. Thus Kate Chopin, as James does in The Princess Casamassima, demonstrates that culture and civilization are at war with nature. But Chopin cannot say, as James can through Hyacinth, that culture makes life less a "bloody sell" and more of a lark.

There is no alternative for Edna who is nature herself. Her quest for freedom means she will first rebel against society, but her final revolt is against the tyranny of feminine life. When she realizes the power of sex, it is not with any sense that it is evil, but rather that it is a force within an indifferent universe. This cosmic indifference to Edna means life is empty. Kauffman has said that Edna kills herself because "of the foredoomed emptiness" of life stretching ahead of her. All four heroines face this existential emptiness, and all work out their own resolutions. Edna's is closest to Esther Dudley's. Esther comes to hope for some final monist distillation of truth in an intellectual sphere, while Edna's desire to find a healing, soothing oneness leads her full circle back to the primal sea.

George Arms has stated that the novel of American realism often exists in a state of tension. And behind the naturalist novel, as Charles Walcutt has said, lies the dream of the monist sea.

---


Edna's suicide and Chopin's resolution is the dream of the monist
sea which in The Awakening is a Greek determinist fate that finally
resolves all terrible ambiguities.

Whether Edna's suicide is a victory or defeat for her, the
third problem, seems to me to be largely resolved by the previous
discussion. One critic, however, is convinced that the ending is
"fundamentally evasive." George Spangler has stated that Edna's
independent character suffers a reduction by the suicide and that
a "complex psychological novel is converted to a sentimental one."
Edmund Wilson, who admires this novel, is not sure that her sui-
cide is deliberate nor that Edna has thought the issues through.40
These criticisms overlook Edna's having wavered from the beginning
between joy and despondency about her position. When she comes to
know herself, she knows she cannot be satisfied with what life has
to offer and decides her position is hopeless. To return to the
children, I am reminded of what Ian Watt has said of The Portrait
of a Lady. What is revealed to Isabel, Watts wrote, is that "all
but unendurable disparity between her expectation and reality that
faces woman in modern society, and the difficulties that lie be-
fore anyone who is unwilling either to be used, or to use others
...

40 George M. Spangler, "Neglected Fiction Kate Chopin's The
3 (Spring, 1970), 253-55; Edmund Wilson, Patriotic Gore: Studies
in the Literature of the American Civil War (New York: Oxford Uni-

41 Ian Watt, Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richard-
horrified at their complicity in exploitation. Their struggle to assert themselves is in part to fight free of being dominated. When they come to realize that they, in turn dominate and exploit others, they are devastated. Edna's solution to this, far from being mindless or a reduction of her character, is the most radical. She thinks out her future actions during the long night she lies awake. She prepares for suicide within the silence of her heart, and she resolves her dilemma. Edna's final control of her life is in her self-sought death. Birth and renewal are the primordial affirmations of mankind. The closure of The Awakening brings a kind of rebirth to this Venus rising from and returning to the foam. Edna Pontellier unites Greek tragic inevitability with modern existentialism—she finds majesty in that existential trio of revolt, passion, and freedom when she seizes her life in her own strong arms and asserts her imperial self in death.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Realism, Mythology, and Naturalism


---


---


---


---


---


Henry Adams: Primary


Henry Adams: Secondary


Richardson, Robert D. "McLuhan, Emerson, and Henry Adams." Western Humanities Review, 22, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), 235-42.


Saveth, Edward N. "The Heroines of Henry Adams." American Quarterly, 8, No. 3 (Fall, 1956), 231-42.


Henry James: Primary


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---


---

Notes of a Son and Brother. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914.


Roderick Hudson. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907.


Henry James: Secondary


Kate Chopin: Primary


Kate Chopin: Secondary


Arner, Robert D. "Kate Chopin's Realism: 'At the 'Cadian Ball' and 'The Storm.'" The Markham Review, 2, No. 2 (February, 1970) [1-4].

"Landscape Symbolism in Kate Chopin's 'At Fault.'" Louisiana Studies, 9, No. 2 (Summer, 1970), 142-53.


Fletcher, Marie. "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin." Louisiana History, 7, No. 2 (Spring, 1966), 117-32.


Ringe, Donald A. "Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening." American Literature, 43, No. 4 (January, 1972), 580-88.


Zlotnik, Joan. "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood." The Markham Review [1], No. 3 (October, 1968 [1-5]).