

THE MOTE IN THE MIDDLE DISTANCE:
MAX BEERBOHM'S PARODY OF HENRY JAMES
IN A CHRISTMAS GARLAND

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this work is The Mote in the Middle Distance, Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland.

The first part of the thesis is concerned with the historical development and the traditional meaning of parody as far as the age in which Max Beerbohm practised the art. It also establishes, as a basis for the analysis and evaluation of The Mote in the Middle Distance, a working definition of parody as a satirical mock-imitation which with controlled exaggeration exposes in humorous fashion the excesses, weaknesses, and distinguishing traits in a particular work, or works, of an author, or a class of authors.

Following this is a brief survey of the evolution of the literary manner of Henry James, and a general picture of the author's preoccupation with certain themes and of the devices of rhetoric used by him in the presentation of his theme.

The final chapter consists of an exegesis of The Mote in the Middle Distance, concurrent with commentaries giving particular details regarding the techniques and stylistic devices of Henry James which are parodied in The Mote in the Middle Distance.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND MEANING OF PARODY

Max Beerbohm was nineteen years of age when he wrote his first recorded parody during his residence as a student at Charterhouse. Thenceforth, his literary efforts consisted chiefly of essays, a novel, character portraiture as in Seven Men, a short play, radio broadcasts, and a book of parodies entitled A Christmas Garland. With reference to A Christmas Garland, David Cecil remarks that "Parody was a chief branch of his [Beerbohm's] art, and all his longest and best parodies are in this volume."¹ Included in its contents is The Mote in the Middle Distance, a parody of Henry James. In order to establish criteria for the analysis and appraisal of The Mote in the Middle Distance, this chapter will, first, after due acknowledgement of the Greek origins of the genre, present a brief general survey of the history of parody in England down to the age in which Max Beerbohm practised the art; second, it will, in the light of this survey, examine the traditional views regarding the meaning of parody; and, third, it will establish a working definition of parody.

¹ David Cecil, Max, London, Constable, 1964, p. 10.

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1. Historical Survey of English Parody.

The etymological explanation of the word "parody" as a translation of the Greek "parōidiā--formed from pará, beside, subsidiary, mock-+ ōidē, song, poem"²--indicates the original function of parody as a mock imitation of a serious song or poem. The first recorded mock-imitations in Greece, "the most famous" of which was entitled the Batrachomyomachia, or Battle of the Frogs and Mice, were burlesques of the poems of Homer.³ But it is the Athenian comic poet Aristophanes who "took the first giant step from burlesque to true parody, with his satirical imitations of Aeschylus, Euripides and Socrates in such comedies as The Frogs, The Birds and The Acharnians."⁴ Noting that "Parody is a late form," Dwight Macdonald adds:

... the difference between the mild fun of the Batrachomyomachia, which consists merely of treating frogs and mice as if they were Homeric heroes, and Aristophanes' criticism of the philosophy as well as the manner of Euripides and Socrates is the difference between an early and a late period.⁵

2 Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, vol. vii, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909, p. 409.

3 Dwight Macdonald, ed., Parodies: An Anthology From Chaucer to Beerbohm--and After, New York, Random House, 1960, p. 562.

4 Ibid., p. 562.

5 Ibid., p. 562.

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The first English mock-imitations in verse seem to have originated with the clerics of mediaeval literature, who satirised and burlesqued, mainly in the Latin language, religious institutions and doctrines, the Bible, the Mass, and devotional songs and prayers. Occasionally, political satire and ridicule of chivalric love and the Court of Love were associated with religious themes. However, according to George Kitchin, it is Chaucer who "begins for us the true art of parody, [...] It will be centuries before English parody will again touch the level of The Rime of Sir Thopas, [...]"⁶ Chaucer's Sir Thopas parodies the verse romances in general, and its superiority over The Parlement of Foules and other Chaucerian burlesques of chivalric customs and modes of writing derives mainly from the subtlety underlying the language of the poem. The goliardic type of burlesque, aimed at the language of the Scriptures and religious practices, continued to flourish throughout the mediaeval period, and was frequently revived during the ensuing ages. Eventually the mock tournament was integrated into imitations of chivalric romances. But

⁶ George Kitchin, A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English, New York, Russell & Russell, 1931, p. 8-9. [As far as can be ascertained, this book is, to date, the most comprehensive, authoritative, definitive text on the historical development of burlesque and parody in English. The author of this thesis has explored all other known texts and sources, but has used this book extensively.]

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out of the abundance of mimicry written during this period, Chaucer's Sir Thopas alone seems to have merited the encomium of "first-rate English parody."⁷ Nevertheless, some of the answer poems in Tottel's Miscellany show promising signs of being the first steps in the production of purely literary parody in English.

The Elizabethan period marks the introduction into English literature of dramatic burlesque. It is significant that mockery was now directed chiefly at the excesses of the currently cultivated literary forms, such as the Petrarchan sonnet sequence and the classical pastoral poem, as well as at the habit of interspersing foreign phrases among the vernacular. Thus mock-imitation served as a timely vehicle of literary criticism as well as a source of amusement. A great deal of parody was mingled with the dramatic burlesque, for example, in the plays of Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. Indeed, by the early years of the seventeenth century, great quantities of dramatic parody were being produced, parody which was, on the whole, coarse and irreverent, but which at least illustrates the growing tendency of humorists like Ben Jonson, Marston, and Dekker to avail of this means of discountenancing the use of outmoded literary forms or themes and the adoption of

7 Ibid., p. 37.

extravagant modes of expression.

Though the spirit of ridicule continued to operate throughout the Jacobean period and the later seventeenth century, the proportion of direct literary parody is comparatively small. Among those recorded by George Kitchin are those by Sir John Davies which mock "the absurdity of metaphorical extravagance of the sonneteers,"⁸ parodies of the pastoral lyric, of Ben Jonson's Ode (to Himself), and of Metaphysical poetry. Considering the need for a "neat and economical method of parody," which was lacking in English literature "till at least Suckling's time," Kitchin suggests that Sir John Suckling was "the first accomplished parodist in the modern sense."⁹ There were other noteworthy examples of direct parody, such as The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse by Prior and Montague, but, while mockery abounded, it was expressed mainly in the forms of burlesque, travesty, or in mock-heroic poetry. Similarly, in eighteenth century England, burlesque, as well as the mock epic and direct satire, supplanted almost entirely direct parody. However, parody is to be found, for example, in Pope's mock-epic, The Rape of the Lock, in Gay's burlesque drama, The Beggar's Opera, and in the latter's

8 Ibid., p. 70.

9 Ibid., p. 79.

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pastoral burlesque The Shepherd's Week. Much of the direct parody of this age was at the expense of Horace or of Pope, of Dryden (his odes), and Gray, particularly his Elegy in the Country Churchyard.

The abundance of political and social parody published in the Anti-Jacobin magazine in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is of no particular significance here except that it indicates the still prevailing vogue of mockery as a means of criticism. Literary parody, both in verse and prose, also flourished, and, indeed, the nineteenth century may well be called the "golden age of parody"¹⁰ in England. The excesses of the different successive schools of literary thought: the new Romantics, the Victorians, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aesthetes and the Decadents, occasioned a reactionary flood of burlesque and parody, and derisive mimicry was aimed at every kind of extravagance. Few writers of the new schools escaped the mockery of the age. Of the many writers who practised this art, some apparently wrote for mere amusement, others with a definite purpose of implying the definite need for curbing the excessive innovations of contemporary writers. Calverley, Swinburne, and J. K. Stephen were considered

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 176.

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"the greatest exponents of the art of verse parody."¹¹

Referring to Max Beerbohm as "the greatest, the subtlest of modern parodists," Kitchin adds:

His satire is mostly prose satire, but the finer verse parodists have learned their art from him. They have learned from Max to imitate the subtlest intonations of the style they are parodying, the living gestures of the creatures they caricature. They attach themselves to difficult modern styles, and except for mere poetical pranks, eschew the broad manner and the guffaw. Parody becomes a very delicate and worshipful art, and almost loses its censorious, even critical, quality.¹²

As the nineteenth century draws to a close, it is evident that parodists are now concerned with utilising the weapon of laughter chiefly for the exposure of weaknesses in literary manners, that they have come to realize the superior effectiveness of the stroke of subtlety, and that in the fashioning of their conscious mimicry, the better parodists reproduce, with controlled exaggeration, not only the stylistic devices or the favorite themes of their victims, but their habitual mode of thought. Kitchin pays special tribute to Sir Owen Seaman's book of parodies, The Battle of the Bays, calling it "the best satiric commentary on the tastes of the Eighties and Nineties." "Its critical touch," he observes, "is delicate and its spirit high."¹³

11 Ibid., p. 285.

12 Ibid., p. 285-6.

13 Ibid., p. 333.

Regarding the verse parodies of the Decadents, he maintains that Max Beerbohm "was in a position to write the best parodies of that dismal school, for he himself had escaped from its influence only through his mocking humour."¹⁴

Beerbohm's parodies of the Decadents, however, were written mainly in prose, and hence will be referred to again in the following examination of the development of prose parody.

While for many years English parodists had, like the Greek originators of the genre, written their mock-imitations only in verse form, eventually they began to express their ridicule through the medium of prose. Indeed, prior to the eighteenth century, the quantity of recorded English prose parody is almost negligible. The eighteenth century, as has been previously indicated, was an age of burlesque and satire, with only occasional attempts at direct parody. However, there were some notable contributions in prose. Swift's Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind was, says Kitchin, "the best parody not merely of contemporary pseudophilosophical writing, but of seventeenth century prose writing in general."¹⁵ It was in this century that Fielding produced his fictional prose parodies of Richardson's Pamela, and that Jane

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 323.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 157.

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Austen's Love and Friendship and her Northanger Abbey presented comical and distorted reproductions of the current sentimentalism and terrifying episodes of the "Gothic" novels. Love and Friendship satirises, as well, Goethe's exaltation of youthful independence, and the exaggerations of the picturesque tour books. One significant point of interest in connection with Northanger Abbey is that the author parodied only two of Mrs. Radcliffe's novels and failed to take into consideration the latter's general style.

Early in the nineteenth century the mock-review made its appearance. Conspicuous among its producers were Douglas Jerrold and Thackeray. Later, in 1847, Thackeray published in Punch a series of Novels by Eminent Hands, thus establishing a new mode of mimicry of prose fiction, which entailed exposure of a writer's excesses in compositions of much smaller proportions than those of the original productions parodied. Later parodists, notably Bret Harte, would follow this pattern, as it became evident that it was possible to portray, with cunning and skill, an amazing number of absurdities without the necessity of a multiplicity of words. Apropos to Thackeray's mock-imitations, Kitchin raises the question as to "whether we are to regard a witty imitation without the intention of

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malice or ridicule as true parody."¹⁶ At any rate, the tendency in the eighteen forties was towards straight burlesque.

The great upsurge of parody in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was designed to curb the extreme, unconventional literary theories and practices of the Aesthetes and Decadents. Some of the best prose parodies include W. H. Mallock's New Republic, G. S. Street's Autobiography of a Boy, and Hitchin's Green Carnation, which was "perhaps the cleverest--a brilliant parody of the mind and talk of the Aesthetes, of Wilde himself."¹⁷ Max Beerbohm's parodies of the Aesthetes and Decadents include a number of essays written in his youth, and pervade, as well, some of his other writings of the period. Regarding Beerbohm's parodies of Wilde, J. G. Riewald has this to say:

The young Max certainly fulfilled the two conditions for a successful imitation or parody of Wilde--a natural susceptibility to the idiosyncrasies of his thought and style, and a sympathetic understanding of his personality.¹⁸

Though Max Beerbohm's A Christmas Garland was not published until 1912, one of its parodies had been written

16 Ibid., p. 274.

17 Ibid., p. 351.

18 J. G. Riewald, Sir Max Beerbohm Man and Writer, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1953, p. 130.

in 1896, and others, including The Mote in the Middle Distance, in 1906. The prefatory note to this volume of parodies indicates not only the humorous nature of its contents but also the seriousness of purpose of the author, who writes:

Stevenson, in one of his essays, tells us how he "played the sedulous ape" to [...] writers of the past [...]. I felt that I must have other models. And thus I acquired the habit of aping, quite sedulously, this or that live writer--sometimes, it must be admitted, in the hope of learning rather what to avoid.¹⁹

The manner and calibre of his mock-imitations of eighteen contemporary authors may be judged from the encomiums of well-known critics. Gilbert Highet considers the work

one of the most brilliant achievements of parodic satire in our language [...] contain[ing] eighteen little tales [...] each [...] placed in a favorite setting, told in the preferred language and rhythm, and infused with the characteristic emotional color of a contemporary novelist.²⁰

Wilbur Cross admires the skill with which Beerbohm indirectly draws comparisons between the writers he has parodied. Noting the difficulties entailed in comparing writers of different methods and ideas, he adds:

¹⁹ Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, London, Heinemann, 1950.

²⁰ Gilbert Highet, The Anatomy of Satire, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 145.

Beerbohm simplifies the problem for us by assigning to his authors an identical theme so that we may pass easily from style to style and at the same time gauge the mind of one writer by the side of another, comparatively [...]. Within the compass of a single small volume we have before our eyes, as it were, the whole world of contemporary letters.²¹

Derek Stanford maintains that "A Christmas Garland is one of the most valuable documents of criticism on certain modern writers,"²² and Edgar Johnson remarks:

His parodies of literary figures ape with such sedulous restraint the stylistic eccentricities of his victims that his exaggerations are barely more than observable. It is a minor art, deliberately so, this which Beerbohm practises, but it is contrived with the hand of a master.²³

One other characteristic noted in Beerbohm's parodies is his obvious respect and admiration for most of his victims. Louis Kronenberger, who contends that "Sir Max is by all odds the greatest parodist [...] of our time, and the best things in A Christmas Garland are almost beyond praise,"²⁴ is of the opinion that "All Max's finest

21 Wilbur Cross, "The Humour of Max Beerbohm", in Yale Review, issue of January 1924, p. 216.

22 Derek Stanford, "The Writings of Sir Max Beerbohm", in The Month, vol. 13, issue of June 1955, p. 359.

23 Edgar Johnson, A Treasury of Satire, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1945, p. 628.

24 Louis Kronenberger, "The Perfect Trifler", in The Saturday Review of English Literature, issue of June 21, 1947, p. 42.

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parodies are at the expense of writers he loves and appreciates."²⁵ This theory is supported by Riewald, who believes that "This sympathetic attitude [...] took the sting out of these skits,"²⁶ and by Edgar Johnson, who declares that Beerbohm's book

is a masterpiece of parody because it so delicately exaggerates the eccentricities of its victims' styles, and does so with so much love and understanding in the midst of its gaiety that we find ourselves seeing not only their defects but their merits more closely.²⁷

It is significant that Henry James was pleased with Beerbohm's parody of himself. Edmund Gosse writes to Beerbohm that "he [James] desired me to let you know at once that no one can have read it with more wonder and delight than he. He expressed himself in superlatives."²⁸ Beerbohm himself loved to recall the night when, soon after the publication of his A Christmas Garland, James, on being questioned by a lady on some topic, directed her to Beerbohm, "'Ask that young man,' he said. 'He is in full possession of my innermost thoughts.'" "But James," he adds, "was always gentle to me; he was very nice about

25 Ibid., p. 42.

26 J. G. Riewald, Op. Cit., p. 128.

27 Edgar Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 42.

28 Evan Charteris, The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse, London, Heinemann, 1931, p. 350.

that parody."²⁹

George Kitchin draws comparisons between Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland and Jamesian parodies written by two other skilled contemporary parodists, Sir Owen Seaman and Philip Guedalla. Sir Owen Seaman's Borrowed Plumes includes a parody of Henry James's novel The Sacred Fount, and Philip Guedalla's Bonnet and Shawl (1928), parodies of Henry James and of Max Beerbohm himself. Kitchin is of the opinion that Seaman's "first class" production 'challenges Max's famous "James" parody,' and of Guedalla's parodies, he says: "After Max's own parodies, these appear laboured. In another age they might have done!"³⁰

In the early decades of the twentieth century, some writers tended to look to the past for more interesting targets for their mockery. Thus G. K. Chesterton turns to mediaeval literature; J. C. Squires effects a revival of the former mock-reviews in his Tricks of the Trade, a combination of prose and verse; and Father Ronald Knox writes both prose and verse parody in imitation of the early neo-classic manner of literary expression. But by now much of

²⁹ S. N. Behrman, Portrait of Max, New York, Random House, 1960, p. 231.

³⁰ George Kitchin, Op. Cit., p. 362-3.

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the mimicry inclined once again to burlesque rather than to direct parody. The golden age of parody was on the decline.

As the topic in question is the historical development and evolution of the meaning of parody down to the age of Max Beerbohm, no account will be taken of parody written in the succeeding decades of this century. It remains to summarize the gradual development of the art of parody to its culminating point in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The foregoing survey traces the development of the art of parody through the following stages: First, its birth, in verse form, in the mock-imitations of the Greek Homeric burlesques, with the basic ingredient of humor. Second, the additional note of purposeful satiric criticism was added by the Athenian comic poet Aristophanes in his mimicry of the philosophy and manner of expression of Euripides and Socrates. It was also the Greeks who coined the word, meaning a mock-song or poem, from which the word "parody" is derived. Third, in the mediaeval period, Chaucer's Sir Thopas, with its playful criticisms of the absurdities of chivalric institutions and literary manners, is manipulated with a degree of subtlety which was necessary for the inauguration of the true art of parody. Fourth, parodists of the Elizabethan period used extensively

this genre, applying it as well to drama, and, to a much lesser extent, to prose, as a vehicle for literary criticism, discountenancing by mocking exposure the use of outmoded literary forms and the cultivation of extravagancies by contemporary writers. Fifth, in the Jacobean period and the later seventeenth century, as well as in the eighteenth century, the only notable contribution to the evolution of the art was the introduction of a neat and economical method of parody by Sir John Suckling. Sixth, in the nineteenth century, sometimes called the golden age of parody, both verse and prose parody flourished, reaching its peak in the mocking criticism of the Aesthetes and Decadents in the Eighties and Nineties. By the end of the century, literary parody had attained an eminent degree of controlled exaggeration effected with refined subtlety, and a mature critical touch which not only revealed merits and defects of style and choice of subject, but also recaptured the very personality of the original writers, and this with a delicacy that frequently betrayed an underlying respect and admiration for the victims.

2. The Meaning of Parody.

This section will consider the modern concept of parody, noting its inclusion of the basic elements the gradual combination of which through the centuries has

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culminated in the distinctive literary form of parody. The definitions and other statements to be quoted will sometimes perhaps tend to emphasize some particular aspects of parody, thus failing to embrace the complete concept of the genre. For this reason, a variety of opinions will be utilized in order to demonstrate that the requirements for good parody demanded by today's critics correspond closely with those summarized above as met by the better parodists of Max Beerbohm's time.

Parody, says Max Eastman, "may be described as the exaggerated imitation of a work or style of art."³¹ Its derivative meaning, as has been previously stated, is a "mock-song or poem"; hence, a comic imitation of a song or poem. However, as Joe Lee Davis affirms, "Parody [...] may exist in all the arts and sub-arts, from architecture and the dance to acting and salesmanship."³² The topic in question here is, of course, literary parody, which is defined by Davis as

³¹ Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1936, p. 156.

³² Joe Lee Davis, "Criticism and Parody", in Thought, Vol. 26, No. 101, issue of Summer 1961, p. 181.

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that type of satirical burlesque writing whose purpose is to heighten, through comic parallelism, our awareness of the peculiarities, the excesses and defects, in a specific literary work or in a literary type or mode or vogue or style represented by specific works.³³

A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles describes

parody as

A composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect.³⁴

As indicated in the foregoing definitions, the first requisite of parody is the element of mimicry for the purpose of exposing the peculiarities of style or method of one or more literary productions or of a writer or group of writers. The ridiculous effects are achieved by the process of distortion so regulated as to create an initial illusion of identity with the original styles or authors, an illusion which is neatly dispelled, however, by some ludicrous twist of thought or expression or by the application of the style parodied to an obviously incongruous theme. In the words of A. C. Ward:

33 Ibid., p. 181.

34 Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., Op. Cit., p. 489.

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In modern usage the word 'parody' no longer implies exact imitation, but a form of humorous yet controlled exaggeration. In that quality of controlled exaggeration lies the value of parody.³⁵

The suggestion by Joe Lee Davis of a satirical purpose in parody accords with the view of Gilbert Highet, who maintains that "Parody [...] is one of the chief shapes which satire assumes." "We may define it," he adds, "as an imitation, which, through distortion and exaggeration, evokes amusement, derision, and sometimes scorn."³⁶ The use of mimicry as a curative measure for literary ailments is not always perhaps too manifest, nor is it always used in a manner which constitutes good parody. As revealed in the foregoing survey, there were periods in English literary history when parody did not abound, and when a spirit of revolt against literary aberrations and obsessions found expression rather in straight burlesque or in direct satire, that is, in mock-imitation which was mere fooling, or in purposeful criticism flavored with humor or wit but not involving mimicry. "The art of persuasion," which James Sutherland maintains "is the art of the satirist,"³⁷ is operated in the best

³⁵ A. C. Ward, Twentieth Century Literature, London, Methuen, 1928, p. 202.

³⁶ Gilbert Highet, Op. Cit., p. 67.

³⁷ James Sutherland, English Satire, Cambridge, University Press, 1958, p. 5.

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parody by means of the gentle weapon of subtle irony, the weapon which, it has been noted, was handled so deftly by Max Beerbohm, of whom Edgar Johnson says:

The essence of his art of exaggeration is so unobtrusively veiled that only a happy few perceive the cloven hoof of irreverence. For them the light disdain may be purgative.³⁸

John Graham, who considers parody "the most translucent form of ironic mockery," declares that "The slighter the distortion, the subtler the parody; and the subtler it is, the better, for the hall-mark of good parody is its ironically straight-faced imitation of its victim."³⁹ "The spectrum-analysis of satire," says David Worcester, "runs from the red of invective at one end to the violet of the most delicate irony at the other."⁴⁰ Just as in living human relationships, people are more easily led than driven, so the extent and duration of the satirist's influence will depend on the restraint which he exercises in the formulation of his criticism. It may well be the delicate but artful stroke of irony that makes of parody "one of the most delightful forms of satire, one of the

³⁸ Edgar Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 628.

³⁹ John Graham, "The 'Caricature Value' of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando", in University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 4, issue of July 1961, p. 350.

⁴⁰ David Worcester, The Art of Satire, New York, Russell & Russell, 1960, p. 16.

most natural, perhaps the most satisfying, and often the most effective."⁴¹

In its implied judgment and evaluation of a writer's style or method, parody may be considered as a form of literary criticism. Indeed, its alliance with satire presupposes its association with the correlative factor of criticism. David Worcester's assertion that "The content of satire is criticism"⁴² is corroborated by Edgar Johnson, who points out that "The one ingredient common to all these activities from satire in cap-and-bells to satire with a flaming sword is criticism."⁴³ In the introduction to his anthology of parodies, Dwight Macdonald refers to parody as an 'intuitive kind of literary criticism, shorthand for what "serious" critics must write out at length.'⁴⁴ Walter Dwight maintains that "The composition of parodies is a department of pure criticism, has its laws and traditions, and calls for special qualifications in those who would obtain distinction in the art."⁴⁵ Since "accentuation of

⁴¹ Gilbert Highet, Op. Cit., p. 67.

⁴² David Worcester, Op. Cit., p. 16.

⁴³ Edgar Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 7.

⁴⁴ Dwight Macdonald, ed., Op. Cit., p. xiii.

⁴⁵ Walter Dwight, "Parodies and Parodists", in America, Vol. 16, No. 15, issue of April 7, 1917, p. 629.

peculiarities is of the essence of parody,"⁴⁶ it is to be presumed that the competent writer of parody is well acquainted with the works and style of the author he is imitating. He must also be capable of exposing in a mock-serious manner the eccentricities of his original, as well as of adding a flavor of his own. Thus his textual analysis and appraisal can be a delightful entertainment as well as a source of enlightenment for the reader and a covert suggestion for reform to writers of extravagant tendencies. That the composition of parody entails both cognitive and creative criticism is clearly demonstrated by Joe Lee Davis:

... at its best, parody may be regarded as a unique combination of both creative and cognitive criticism. At its best, it is creative because it is genuine self-expression. It debunks aesthetic illusion by means of a mock-aesthetic illusion of its own [...]. Again, at its best, parody qualifies as cognitive criticism on several counts: It is grounded on objective analysis of a specific work or works. It seeks to contribute something to the knowledge and understanding thereof. It implies evaluation of the original text. It sends its readers back to that text. Finally, parody, by its very nature, is prevented from going off on genetic and affective tangents.⁴⁷

The value of a piece of parody depends to a great extent on the parodist's attitude towards his victim.

⁴⁶ Christopher Stone, Parody, London, Martin Secker, (no date), p. 10.

⁴⁷ Joe Lee Davis, Op. Cit., p. 181-2.

Christopher Stone finds that "nearly every writer on parody, and quite a large number of parodists specifically declare that the parodist must love or admire or revere or respect his original."⁴⁸ In an essay entitled "Laughter," Max Beerbohm once wrote:

Reverence is a good thing, and part of its value is that the more we revere a man, the more sharply are we struck by anything in him (and there is always much) that is incongruous with his greatness.⁴⁹

This reverence, it has been previously noted, generally impregnated Beerbohm's parodies in A Christmas Garland. Hence, it is not surprising that his parodies also demonstrate his keen powers of observation of deviations from the normal and conventional literary patterns by the writers whom he esteemed. It is a historical fact that not all parodies implied their creator's admiration for his victim. While it can be said of James and Horace Smith, nineteenth-century authors of Rejected Addresses that as their "spirit [∟...∟] was entirely conciliatory, and indeed amiable, even the victims were able to contemplate their wounds with equanimity,"⁵⁰ this is not the case with J. K. Stephens, Calverly, and Swinburne,

48 Christopher Stone, Op. Cit., p. 12.

49 Max Beerbohm, And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1960, p. 170.

50 George Kitchin, Op. Cit., p. 207.

for example, parodists whose attacks on the style of Robert Browning were devastating and bitter.⁵¹ Even Max Beerbohm was capable of malicious mimicry as is manifest in his parody of Kipling in A Christmas Garland. But the Kipling parody is not considered Beerbohm's greatest. It seems evident that a predominating factor in the constitution of truly effective parody is a favorable balance between a tone of asperity and an undercurrent of affection. Joe Lee Davis describes this aspect of parody as follows:

There is another odd paradox or ambivalence in the muse of parody, when she is really herself. She wears a mask of derision, but behind the mask the face is crinkled in a smile of sneaking sympathy and admiration. The sneer on her false lips is belied by the twinkle of her peering eyes.⁵²

There is need at this point to attempt to elucidate the distinctive meanings of parody and the closely allied humorous types: burlesque, caricature, and travesty. The element of mockery basic to parody is also the motivating principle of burlesque, caricature, and travesty. Hence it is possible for two or more of these forms of mockery to be used in the same text. Again some critics tend to use the terms interchangeably. This is particularly true of parody and burlesque. David Worcester places parody in

51 Ibid., p. 307-8.

52 Joe Lee Davis, Op. Cit., p. 182.

"the family of high burlesque" and travesty in that of low burlesque, as imitations of a specific work;⁵³ as does Edgar Johnson,⁵⁴ The expression "to burlesque" is defined in the New English Dictionary on Historical Principles as "to turn into ridicule by grotesque parody."⁵⁵ The implication here seems to be that when the exaggeration in a parody is carried to extremes, the seriousness of its purpose is destroyed and the resulting mockery is no longer parody, but burlesque. Wilbur Cross expresses as follows what he considers to be the specific difference between parody and burlesque:

Parody, as I understand it, has to do outwardly with style, with imitation or mimicry of a writer's mannerisms; through style parody necessarily reaches ideas and sentiments. Burlesque has to do not so much directly with style as with ideas, sentiments and characters; it admits of greater exaggeration than parody. Such a distinction, however, is theoretical rather than real [...]. Parody and burlesque at once lay bare the weaker side of the victim's mental and artistic equipment as displayed in his writings.⁵⁶

Regarding the occasional synonymous use of the terms parody, burlesque, caricature, and travesty, H. W. Fowler explains that "In wider applications the words are often

53 David Worcester, Op. Cit., p. 46-7.

54 Edgar Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 22.

55 Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. 1189.

56 Wilbur Cross, Op. Cit., p. 216.

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interchangeable," but that

burlesque, caricature, and parody have, besides their wider uses, each a special province; action or acting is burlesqued, form and features are caricatured, and verbal expression is parodied [...]⁵⁷ travesty differs from the others both in having no special province, and in being more used than they when the imitation is intended to be an exact one but fails.⁵⁷

In consideration of Fowler's statement, and in view of the fact that "Burlesque," in his opinion, "has almost lost its exclusive reference to the theatre, and parody [...] is a very elastic term," George Kitchin decided to use the terms synonymously "for the sake of variety"⁵⁸ in his A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English. However, he very frequently makes a distinction by referring to straight burlesque or direct or pure parody. In the introduction to his volume, he points out the distinction on which he intends to base his terminology, one which he admits he is adopting mainly for the sake of convenience. Hence he will "as a rule" apply the term "parody" to "direct imitations of an individual work with humorous or critical intention." On the other hand, he will consider burlesque "the wider species in which an author's work generally or that of the school to which he may be attached is imitated

⁵⁷ H. W. Fowler, A Dictionary of Modern English Usage, Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 68.

⁵⁸ George Kitchin, Op. Cit., p. xxii.

with comic intention."⁵⁹

Of the four forms of mock-imitation under discussion, travesty and caricature present little difficulty and are of little or no concern in the present study. However, the problem of specifying the nice distinctions between parody and burlesque has resulted in a variety of explanations from which the above examples have been drawn. Though not all the definitions are equally comprehensive--some, for example, confine parody to imitation of one work, others to a much broader field of literary production--, they agree, in principle, that while both parody and burlesque are exaggerated mock-imitations of literary styles and ideas as exemplified in the writings of one or more authors, the purpose of parody is curative criticism while that of burlesque is amusement without any serious intention. It is with this understanding that they will be used in the forthcoming exegesis. Finally, the total concept of parody which will govern the proposed analysis and evaluation of The Mote in the Middle Distance may be summed up in the following definition: Parody is a satirical mock-imitation which with controlled exaggeration exposes in humorous fashion the excesses, weaknesses, and distinguishing traits in a particular work, or works, of an author,

59 Ibid., p. xxii.

or of a class of authors.

3. Summary and Conclusions.

After a brief reference to the Greek origins of parody, its historical development has been traced, and the gradual evolution of the art has been examined and summarized, down to and including the nineteenth and the opening decades of the twentieth century. It was seen that in England, mock-imitation was introduced by mediaeval clerics, but that it was Chaucer who initiated the true art of parody. In his The Rime of Sir Thopas, he parodies the metrical romances of his age and with a degree of subtlety which parodists for centuries failed to attain. Mimicry of the Elizabethan period, which marked the beginning of dramatic burlesque, was directed chiefly at the excesses of contemporary literature. Dramatic parody began to flourish during the early years of the seventeenth century. Though coarse and irreverent, it registered earnest disapproval of the current tendency to cling to outmoded literary forms and to adopt extravagant and affected modes of expression. The output of actual literary parody during the Jacobean period and the latter part of the seventeenth century, as well as in the eighteenth century, was comparatively small in favour of mere burlesque, the mock-epic, and direct satire. The

extravagant innovations of a series of new schools of literary thought occasioned an outbreak of parody in the nineteenth century, which is sometimes called the golden age of parody. Much of the parody of this age, as well as in the first few decades of the twentieth century, was of high calibre and evidently intended as a restraining influence. Parodies of the Aesthetes and Decadents abounded and many of them were handled with skill and subtlety. Outstanding among the writers who contributed much towards the perfecting of the art of parody was Max Beerbohm. He has been called the greatest parodist of his time, and his book of parodies, A Christmas Garland, is said to be one of the most valuable documents of criticism on certain writers. Besides having successfully reproduced, with controlled exaggeration, the peculiarities of his victims' style and method, he has shown that much of the secret of the effectiveness of good parody lies in the use of a subtle irony beneath which is only partly concealed the parodist's sincere esteem for his original.

Part Two of this chapter examined the modern concept of parody and attempted to establish a clear distinction between burlesque and parody. It was found that the modern notion of parody embraces the characteristics which were the culminating product of stages of improvement from the mediaeval period of English literature down to the

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was shown that while parody and burlesque alike operate as humorous and exaggerated mock-imitations of literary manners and productions, parody is to be considered as being designed for a serious purpose of amendment, but burlesque merely for comic amusement. Finally, a working definition was formulated to serve as a basis for the analysis and evaluation of The Mote in the Middle Distance, Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY MANNER OF HENRY JAMES

The salient characteristics of parody have been examined in Chapter One, and a working definition has been established as a basis for the analysis and evaluation, in Chapter Three, of The Mote in the Middle Distance, Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland. The purpose of this chapter is to present a general picture of the literary manner of Henry James. Particular examinations of James's literary traits and presentation of his theme will accompany the relevant discussions of Max Beerbohm's exaggerated imitation of each in The Mote in the Middle Distance. This chapter will consider briefly: First, the history of the evolution of Henry James's manner of writing; second, James's thematic preoccupations; and third, the devices of rhetoric used by James, especially in his third, or what is sometimes termed his later, manner.

1. Evolution of Henry James's Literary Manner.

Henry James's literary career began with the publication of his first story in the Atlantic Monthly

in 1865.¹ Thenceforth his style and method of writing evolved through three different stages: his early, middle and later phases.² The following decade was noted for the steady output of his writings, which "early tales," comments Leon Edel, "are rather melancholy and romantic [...]" rather devoid of the later wit [...] concerned not so much with plot as with personal relations."³ In these tales, according to Joseph Warren Beach,

Economy is the last thing that seems necessary, especially in the matter of characterization. Every tale begins with a long account of the characters; or if [...] we are treated first to a bit of incident or dialogue, we are soon halted for some lengthy explanation about the participants [...] there are far too many scenes, [...] no one of them [...] adequately developed.⁴

The young author's stories, which were usually concerned with the romances of youth, contained a great many dramatic scenes and placed undue emphasis on a display of emotion both in speech and in action. They lacked depth and complexity of character, situation, and language, and it is significant that James excluded most of them from the

1 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 180.

2. Ibid., p. 180.

3 Ibid., p. 175.

4 Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, Philadelphia, Albert Saifer, 1954, p. 175.

"New York" edition of his novels and tales (1907-9).⁵

Before many years there was a noticeable improvement in James's writing techniques.

The middle phase of his literary career is generally considered to have begun soon after his first journey to Europe as an adult, an experience which not only enriched his mind and fed his imagination, but which evidently prompted a broader subject for his fiction, the international theme. Europe now became the setting for most of his stories and novels, included among which are The Passionate Pilgrim, The Madonna of the Future, Madame de Mauves, published in the early eighteen-seventies, and the novels Roderick Hudson, The American, The Europeans, Confidence, and Washington Square, Daisy Miller, and The Portrait of a Lady, written between 1875 and 1881. Many of the characteristics of the author's earlier fiction still prevailed, such as the use of a great number of characters, introduced with much descriptive and chronological detail, frequent scenes of dramatic effectiveness, and as yet no real depth of experience. However, Beach, who considers The Portrait of a Lady to be James's "first masterpiece,"⁶ observes that in this novel "the early

5 Ibid., p. 166.

6 Ibid., p. 205.

manner is found in points more technical and superficial than essential and organic."⁷ He sees in it a new spiritual profundity, a portrayal of "the quality of experience"⁸ and "the first of" James's "... compositions entirely free from crudity."⁹ The point of view method was introduced into James's fiction as early as Roderick Hudson (1875), "the centre of interest throughout," as James explains in his Preface to the novel, being "Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama [...] the very drama of that consciousness."¹⁰ This technique was an initial step towards the author's attainment to economy of means and detachment from his materials. Two other noteworthy aspects, during James's middle phase, in his gradually evolving style are "the extraordinary play of intellectual humour"¹¹ and an "epigrammatic style."¹² Not all critics agree regarding the dividing line between James's early and middle periods. Edwin T. Bowden, for example, makes the following

7 Ibid., p. 208.

8 Ibid., p. 210.

9 Ibid., p. 211.

10 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934, p. 16.

11 Leon Edel, ed., Op. Cit., p. 175.

12 Ibid., p. 175.

statement:

In chronology, in theme, and in style and method, James' novels fall easily into three broad groups, of which the first includes all but two of those published by 1888.¹³

The two he decides to exclude are The Portrait of a Lady (1881), and The Princess Casimassima (1886), because of the identity of their themes with those of the publications after 1888. D. W. Jefferson considers The Portrait of a Lady "a landmark in James's career [...] the culmination of a phase, the greatest novel of his early period,"¹⁴ and Leon Edel places James's international stories in the middle period.¹⁵ The fiction written immediately after James's trip to Europe (1869-70) is so obviously superior to his earlier productions that in this study it is recognized as belonging to James's middle period.

The transition from James's middle to his later style seems to have occurred approximately during the decade from 1885-1895. With the publication, in 1886, of his two novels The Bostonians and The Princess Casimassima, James realised that he was no longer popular with

13 Edwin T. Bowden, Themes of Henry James, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1956, p. 23.

14 D. W. Jefferson, Henry James, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1960, p. 42.

15 Leon Edel, ed., Op. Cit., p. 175.

the reading public. In a letter to W. D. Howells in 1888, he complained: "They have reduced the desire, and the demand, for my productions to zero [...]" though I have for a good while past been writing a number of good short things, I remain irremediably unpublished."¹⁶ Turning, in his frustration, to the writing of drama, he was to suffer the humiliation of the crushing failure of his Guy Domville (1895). This "was the great turning point of James's career,"¹⁷ "a fortunate crisis in that it led to a renewal of his aspirations and powers as a novelist, and in the period that followed his methods reached their final maturity."¹⁸

Henry James was dedicated to his art, and he exemplified in his own straining towards perfection the advice he offered to young novelists in his essay The Art of Fiction: "Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible--to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize."¹⁹ Hence he would not be deterred for long by the rejection of his drama. On the

¹⁶ Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James, Vol. 1, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920, p. 135.

¹⁷ F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase, New York, Oxford University Press, 1944, p. 1.

¹⁸ D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 69.

¹⁹ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, New York, Dutton, 1964, p. 609.

contrary, from his experience of little more than a half dozen years in the writing of plays and a number of short stories chiefly about struggling painters and writers, he would acquire a keener sense of the value of economy of means in the writing of novels, as well as many valuable guides for the attainment of his goal. Words written to his brother William about one month after the failure of his Guy Domville, reveal the amazing resilience of James's indomitable spirit: "I have worked like a horse [...] over the whole mystery of 'technique'--I have run it to earth [...] I have made it absolutely my own."²⁰ His determination to benefit from his setback was also conveyed to W. D. Howells in a letter written in January 1895, soon after the destruction of his hopes regarding the writing of drama: "... I mean to do far better work than ever I have done before. I have, potentially, improved immensely and am bursting with ideas and subjects ..."²¹ It was the implementation of the ideas gained from experience and persevering effort that constituted Henry James's third, or later manner, a general discussion of which is reserved for the third section of this chapter, followed by a particular analysis in Chapter Three.

20 Percy Lubbock, ed., Op. Cit., Vol. 1, p. 235.

21 Ibid., p. 231-2.

2. Thematic Preoccupations of Henry James.

A dominant unifying factor in the large body of Henry James's fiction is the author's almost obsessive adherence to a small number of central themes. While, by his own account, ideas for many of his narratives sprang from chance remarks or chance encounters, and while there is within the compass of his words a definite variation of settings and thematic ideas, the impression gained from a study of the wide range of his literature is that his manipulation of imaginative incidents and characters revolved mainly around the reality and consequences of American-European contrasts, and the conflicts within the individual in consequence of his contacts with society: the inevitable moral-aesthetic problems involved in such associations. The recurrence of a number of lesser motifs discernible within the major pattern, reveals James's concern with such matters as: the significance of the arts in the determination of international differences in situation and character; the natural human passion for fullness of living; and the prevailing influence of evil within the individual consciousness, or, occasionally, emanating perhaps from the dead. However, these and other life patterns are so interwoven throughout the unfolding of the central ideas that it has been decided to consider them in conjunction

with the basic thematic preoccupations of the author.

a) The international theme.--Reference has already been made to the impact of his visit to Europe (1869-70) on Henry James. From his childhood and throughout his lifetime, the most fascinating and most rewarding of his diversions seems to have been his habitual practice of intense observation of all that came within his range of vision, and of the conservation of his innumerable impressions as potential material for his writings. The tour through Europe provided the opportunity to satisfy his avid interest in famous art galleries, cathedrals, castles, theaters, and all that savoured of the arts, as well as a wide scope for association with renowned writers, and for observation of the customs and attitudes of Europeans and of the behaviour of his compatriots in a European setting. Of the countless benefits derived from this experience, not the least was the widening of his thematic horizons, and, thenceforth, the question of international contrasts was to feature largely among the elements awaiting transformation in the crucible of James's imagination. In the eighteen-seventies and the early eighteen-eighties, his stories and novels were concerned chiefly with the American image in Europe as typified by idle wealthy tourists lacking culture and richness of background, debarred from the

fullness of living by their rigid moral codes, and undeterred by European conventions in the pursuit of their comparatively innocent pleasures. Meanwhile, though the imagination and the artistic sense of the author sometimes permitted his New Englanders to express most unpuritanical aspirations and to make surprising moral decisions, there is conveyed especially in his later fiction an impression of American strength and nobility of character as opposed to the frequent ruthlessness and duplicity of behaviour and attitudes of his European characters. Europeans, as seen through the eyes of Americans both in Europe and, as in the novel The Europeans, in America, are portrayed as possessing the sophistication peculiar to their rich, age-old cultural heritage, and their strict adherence to family traditions and familial authority seems to transcend other moral and religious obligations.

In October 1888, James wrote to his brother William: "I am weary of the whole 'international' state of mind..."²² Obsessed with the vision of guileless Americans victimised not only by European sycophants and fortune-hunters but also by an exorbitantly rigid moral code and its frequently devastating effects upon the adherents of the code and their most intimate associates, James

22 Ibid., p. 141.

temporarily despaired of the desired fusion of American-European social interests. Hence, from about 1885 until the turn of the century, he discarded the international theme only to return to it in the production of the three great novels of his final period, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl. There is now a noticeable difference in the author's portrayal of the status of his countrymen in Europe. Though still capable of being deceived by the worldly blandishments of their foreign associates, the Americans of these later novels display greater adaptability, a greater, though still moderate, degree of intellectual preparedness, and a certain elasticity of conscience which allows for essential reasoning combined with a moral strength the impelling influence of which can extend even to transgressing Europeans. In The Golden Bowl, James succeeded, to some extent, in realizing his dream of reconciling the cultures of the Old World and the New. In the words of Joseph Warren Beach, "Old and New World come to understand one another. New world takes on some of the cunning of the old; old world, some of the spiritual insight of the new."²³

23 Joseph Warren Beach, Op. Cit., p. 14.

b) The moral-aesthetic theme.--His abandonment of the theme of international contrasts led James, in the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century, to concentrate on the conflicts experienced by individuals in their contacts with other individuals or with society in general. The struggle within his characters between duty and inclination had, of course, featured in James's fiction prior to this period, but as subordinate to the central theme. According to Edwin T. Bowden, James's interest in "the problem of the moral decision by the individual" was "always latent in the earlier novels, and [was] to become increasingly stronger in the rest of his work." He adds:

The moral decision, however, is seldom a matter only of an ethical choice between right and wrong, but more often involves a choice between two ways of life, one offering some opportunity for a greater fulfillment of the possibilities of the human spirit, and the other offering eventual frustration and aridity.²⁴

In James's earlier fiction, while the international question is the dominant theme and moral conflict does not appear as a great issue, there is evidence of clinging to ethical standards in the actions of some of the chief characters. For example, in The Europeans (1878), the Baroness Eugenia, inheritor of a culture that condones the lie of convenience, loses her opportunity for a coveted

²⁴ Edwin T. Bowden, *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

marriage because the New England gentleman who is attracted to her is shocked at the discovery that she habitually stoops to deception; Madame de Cintré of The American (1876-77) recounces marriage and a life of ease and happiness with the man she loves, and submits to the austerity of convent rules and customs rather than disobey her mother of whose wickedness and cunning she is fully cognizant; and Isabel Archer of The Portrait of a Lady (1881) similarly refuses to sacrifice her ethical principles in exchange for love and happiness, and freedom from a husband whose worship of traditional conventions has chained her to a living death of repression of all the vitality of her ardent nature. The works of the period from the mid-eighties to the end of the century focus particular attention on the complexities confronting the individual in his contacts with other people. Thus, The Princess Casimassima (1886) is chiefly the story of conflict within the soul of Hyacinth Robinson, the illegitimate child of a convict, who pledges himself to active service in the Socialist cause, only to find himself later so strongly attracted to the pleasures and advantages of capitalistic living that he chooses to take his own life rather than be an instrument of destruction of a system he has learned to appreciate; while, in The Spoils of Poynton (1897), the story centres around the moral conflicts of Fleda Vetch,

who sacrifices her chance of happiness and possession of the prized art collections because she will not consent to Owen Gereth's breaking off his engagement with another girl, even though he no longer cares for her. To Fleda "Nobody had a right to get off easily from pledges so deep, so sacred,"²⁵ and adherence to her convictions was proof against her own love for Owen Gereth, his apparent readiness to fail in his obligations to his betrothed, and the machinations of Owen's mother, who could stoop to theft, bribery, and other unscrupulous acts in an effort to save the treasures of Poynton from the vulgar Mona Brigstock.

When James finally returns to the international theme, the moral-aesthetic problems of his characters retain the prominence accorded them during the latter part of his middle phase, and in the great novels of his final period the two themes are interlinked and interdependent. In The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl (1902-4), the American-European contrasts are still vividly portrayed, but interest is equally sustained in the moral puzzlements and conflicts of characters of the Old World and the New, and there is evident a moderating or shifting sense of values resulting from frequent associations, until ultimately, the patient planning and

²⁵ Henry James, The Aspern Papers The Spoils of Poynton, New York, Dell, 1959, p. 202.

magnanimity of Maggie of The Golden Bowl has, to all appearances, effected a solution to the problem of happy co-existence between individuals of the two opposing cultures which were the central interest of Henry James's fictional creations.

c) Minor themes.--Recurrent in James's fiction and closely linked with his two central themes are topics which obviously impressed him as powerful influences in the lives of individuals in the social milieu in which he placed his characters. Thus, one is struck by his persistent demonstration of the significance of the arts, of the urge for the plenitude of living, and of the prevailing presence of evil in his delineation of character and situation. Throughout his fiction, one finds that an individual's knowledge of or attitude towards the arts is, in James's pattern, an indication of his nationality, his cultural advantages, his personality, and his intelligence. Frequently, in James's novels characters exhort themselves or others to fullness of living, such as Strether's advice to Little Bilham: "Live all you can";²⁶ Sir Luke Strett's reminder to Milly Theale: "There's no reason why you

²⁶ Henry James, The Ambassadors, New York, The New American Library of World Literature, 1964, p. 134.

shouldn't have a really splendid life";²⁷ and Caspar Goodwood's plea to Isabel Archer: "You must save what you can of your life."²⁸ And the sense of evil prevails in the ruthless autocracy exemplified in the behaviour of Madame and the Marquis de Bellegarde of The American and of Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady; in the fanatic compliance with the demands of a strict moral code as in The Author of Beltraffio; and in the corrupting influence on the lives of innocent children of wicked companions, living or dead, as in What Maisie Knew and The Turn of the Screw. These minor themes embrace a considerable number of different situations and characters, but, in essence, they, as well as the central themes of international contrasts and moral-aesthetic conflicts, are concerned with the exigencies and vicissitudes of human experience. However, the uniformity of the thematic pattern manifest in James's fiction from the eighteen-seventies to the end of his life, fails to produce an impression of monotonous repetition because of the diversity of the reactions of the individual characters to the persons and incidents that constitute their experience. Moreover, a bounteous measure of variety

27 Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, New York, Dell, 1958, p. 320.

28 -----, The Portrait of a Lady, Toronto, The New American Library of Canada, 1963, p. 543.

accrues from the assiduousness with which James strives to enrich his manner of presentation with all the tools of rhetoric that appeal to his artistic imagination.

Since Chapter Three of this thesis consists specifically of a consideration of James's style and method as parodied by Max Beerbohm, the following section will present merely a brief general reference to the devices of rhetoric usually embodied in his writings.

3. Devices of Rhetoric in Jamesian Fiction.

Henry James's essay "The Art of Fiction" (1888) states his views of the necessity of freedom of exercise for the novelist. Insisting that the chief requirement for a novel is that it "be interesting," James adds:

The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable, [...] as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others.²⁹

James believes that the novelist must be free to experiment in a variety of ways on the direct impressions which he receives from life, to the end that he will represent, with an "air of reality [...] the illusion of life,"³⁰ those

²⁹ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 591.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 595-6.

impressions, which have been transmuted by the magic of his artistic imagination. The manner in which the novelist effects this transformation is his own secret, not communicable to others. Regarding the importance in the novel of the actual story, James says:

... in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation point contribute directly to the expression...³¹

Convinced that the novel is "the most magnificent form of art,"³² James continually experimented and adopted new ways and means of perfecting his mode of expression.

In the foregoing study of the evolution of his style and method, it was noted that as early as 1875 James had introduced into his method of narration the progressive revelation of the individual consciousness. This plan, by which the significance of character and incident were seen from the point of view of a central character, provided a means of self-effacement on the part of the author, and, therefore, allowed for greater detachment and an opportunity for elimination of descriptive and explanatory details. This method was developed and nurtured by James, was a source of delight for him when used as a unifying

31 Ibid., p. 603.

32 Ibid., p. 604.

element in the scenic method of What Maisie Knew, and seems to have reached its peak of perfection in The Ambassadors, and in the skill with which the author manipulated the shifting of the central consciousness from Prince to Princess in The Golden Bowl. It is through the central consciousness that James achieves the desired ironic effect and resultant air of detachment in his narratives. By this means also he is able to invest his stories and his novels with an illusion of intense reality. While remaining aloof from the dilemmas in which he has placed his characters, he can, as it were, disclaim all responsibility for their actions and judgments, and thus widen the boundaries within which his artistic and moral sense can operate.

James communicates his ideas in a language and an arrangement of word patterns which indicate the complexities of the lives of the characters of his creation. Especially in his later works, the comparatively limited dialogue between his characters tends to be packed with meaning and dramatic intensity. This effect is acquired by the use of epigrammatic pronouncements and symbolic imagery, a practice which also extends to the prolonged cerebrations projected to the vision of the reader. Characteristics in James's mode of expression which stamp them as peculiarly his own include the following: the prevalence

of subtly veiled implications frequently combined with homely and idiomatic expressions; the tendency to ramble in seemingly interminable involuted sentences; the occasional wide extension of his metaphors; the habit of resorting to mannerisms that are rendered more conspicuous by the rich and sonorous language into which they are frequently embedded; and the presence in his writings of obscure and ambiguous observations. While excesses and defects abound in his literary productions, the unbiased reader is impressed, above all, with the artistic dedication and genius of the writer who persisted in the face of adverse criticism and unpopularity with the reading public, in following the dictates of his artistic conscience. The contents of the following chapter will throw further light on the manner in which Henry James gave practical expression to his theories regarding the art of fiction, and will, moreover, submit authoritative critical observations in support of what has already been stated in general terms regarding James's method and style of writing.

4. Summary and Conclusions.

This chapter has presented a brief survey of the evolution of Henry James's style and method of writing over a period of approximately fifty years. It has also considered in a general sense the thematic pattern

observable in James's fiction during his middle and later periods, as well as the devices of rhetoric used by him in the presentation of his themes. It was observed that, as a result of James's constant striving after perfection, his literary manner was continually in a process of development and change, but that generally his career as writer is divided by critics into three definite stages called the early, middle, and later phases. The knowledge and enrichment gained from a trip to Europe (1869-70) enabled James to organize his materials with greater depth and compactness around a wider selection of thematic ideas than had been his practice during the early period of his literary career. The questions of international contrasts and the moral-aesthetic conflicts resulting from the impact of their associates and of society in general upon the lives of individual characters, which predominated in varying proportions during the middle period, were correlated with equal prominence in the novels of the final period. Recurring frequently, and subordinate to these two central themes, were the minor motifs of the significance in the lives of individuals of the arts, of the passion for fullness of living, and of the prevalence of evil. It was noted that in his method of narration, James made use of a variety of devices of rhetoric for the further enrichment of the intrinsically artistic outpourings of his

well-nourished and fertile imagination. Particular details regarding James's method and stylistic usages were reserved for Chapter Three of this thesis.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTE IN THE MIDDLE DISTANCE

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the proficiency and effectiveness with which Max Beerbohm parodied, in The Mote in the Middle Distance, the literary manner of Henry James. Beerbohm's exaggerated imitation of the style and method of Henry James will be considered under the following headings: first, the title of the parody; second, the Jamesian predicament; third, James's moral sense; fourth, James's presentation of his theme; fifth, James's use of dialogue; and sixth, James's mode of expression as seen in the obscurity of his language, his use of symbolic imagery, and his mannerisms.

1. The Title of the Parody.

The Mote in the Middle Distance, the title of the parody, suggests the trivial proportions of the basic thematic idea for Max Beerbohm's story. It also recalls aspects of Henry James's method and mode of thought which illustrate the felicity of the parodist's choice of inscription. Beerbohm's use of the word "mote"--"a particle of dust; esp. one of the innumerable minute specks seen

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floating in the sunbeam; ..."¹--brings to mind James's frequent references, in his Prefaces and elsewhere, to inspirational ideas for his narratives as "small germ,"² "precious particle,"³ "the grain of suggestion, the tiny particle."⁴ This conceit is to be found in his preface to The Spoils of Poynton. The thematic idea for the novel originated, the author explains, as follows:

... a lady beside me made in the course of talk one of those allusions that I have always found myself recognising on the spot as "germs." The germ, whenever gathered, has ever been for me the germ of a "story," and most of the stories straining to shape under my hand have sprung from a single small seed, a seed as minute and wind-blown as that minute and casual hint for "The Spoils of Poynton" dropped unwittingly by my neighbour, a mere floating particle in the stream of talk [...] one's subject is in the merest grain, the speck of truth, of beauty, of reality, scarce visible to the common eye.⁵

It seems necessary to interpolate here that quotations from Henry James's The Art of the Novel are being used despite the fact that his Prefaces were not published until 1907-9, that is, after the first publication, in

1 Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, vol. vi, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909, p. 689.

2 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934, p. 140.

3 Ibid., p. 142.

4 Ibid., p. 235.

5 Ibid., p. 119.

1906, of The Mote in the Middle Distance. This is because it is realized that though James reserved the organized formulation of his theories for The Art of the Novel, yet knowledge of his literary theories and aspirations was easily accessible to Max Beerbohm and the others of his contemporaries who were in communication with him through personal association and by correspondence, and who were, above all, assiduous readers of his works. Biographers of Max Beerbohm, such as J. G. Riewald⁶ and David Cecil,⁷ testify to his familiarity with and admiration of Henry James's writings, while, in his letters to Reggie Turner,⁸ Beerbohm himself refers with enthusiasm to some of James's books, and, in his dramatic criticism, he speaks of his "immense delight [...] in that immense array of volumes."⁹ In a letter to W. D. Howells, dated Aug. 10, 1901, James writes of his having seen in five previously spoken words, "the faint vague germ, the mere point of the start, of a subject," and he adds: "...years afterwards [...] the

6 J. G. Riewald, Sir Max Beerbohm Man and Writer, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1953, p. 59.

7 David Cecil, Max, London, Constable, 1964, p. 49 and 321.

8 Max Beerbohm, Letters to Reggie Turner, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964, p. 248-9 and 163.

9 -----, Around Theatres, Vol. II, New York, Knopf, 1930, p. 699.

subject sprang at me, one day, out of my notebook."¹⁰ Max Beerbohm owned a copy of the first edition of The Notebooks of Henry James, seven publications of which are dated prior to 1906.¹¹ While the contents of the notebooks are concerned mainly with James's plans for development of his thematic ideas, occasionally one finds in them significant references, such as, "I heard an allusion yesterday [...]" the germ of a story,"¹² the date of entry of which is 1881, which are repeated almost verbatim in The Art of the Novel.

In his essay "The Art of Fiction" (1888), James makes the following observations regarding the importance of sense impressions in the creation of fiction:

Experience is never limited [...] never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative [...] it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations.¹³

Hence F. W. Dupee could speak of James as "A kind of

¹⁰ Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James, Vol. I, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920, p. 376.

¹¹ F. O. Matthiessen & Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., The Notebooks of Henry James, New York, Oxford University Press, 1961, Note on the cover to this edition.

¹² Ibid., p. 19.

¹³ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, New York, Dutton, 1964, p. 594.

visionary of the small fact, who compels a maximum of meaning from a minimum of evidence."¹⁴ In designing the title of his parody, Beerbohm was not only slyly intimating that the magnitude of his theme was not intended to measure up to the simulated dignity of his tone, but he was also obviously poking fun at the habitual tendency of James to elaborate a single idea into a complex plot, that tendency of which Richard P. Blackmur says in his introduction to Henry James's The Art of the Novel:

Subjects never came ready-made or complete but always from hints, notes, the merest suggestion. Often a single fact reported at the dinner-table was enough for James to seize on and plant in the warm bed of his imagination [...]. Taking his single precious germ he meditated upon it, let it develop, scrutinised and encouraged, compressed and pared the developments until he had found the method by which he could dramatise it, give it a central intelligence whose fortune would be his theme, and shape it in a novel or story as a consistent and self-sufficient organism.¹⁵

The expression "the middle distance," a term familiar in landscape parlance, is probably aimed, first of all, at James's appreciation of, and, indeed, almost obsessive interest in art. That "James loved the art which was in a picture-frame almost as dearly as that

¹⁴ F. W. Dupee, ed., The Question of Henry James, New York, Henry Holt, 1945, p. x.

¹⁵ Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. xv-xvi.

embraced by the covers of a book,"¹⁶ is evident from his travel books, as well as from his fiction. The following statement from his Preface to The Spoils of Poynton illustrates his familiar usage, in his writings, of even the technical terms of painting:

The real centre [...] the citadel of the interest [...] would have been the felt beauty and value of the prize of the battle, the Things, always the splendid Things, placed in the middle light ...¹⁷

Undoubtedly, also, the subtle parodist intended, by means of his title, to evoke impressions associated with James's symbolic use of the term "middle." In 1893, James published a story entitled The Middle Years, which, Clifton Fadiman suggests, "embodies one of the recurrent visions of James's dream life [...] a hankering for [...] success."¹⁸ Pelham Edgar suspects that in this story James is "reveal[ing] with scarce-veiled directness the impulses of his own imaginative life."¹⁹ As a basis for his belief that the sources of this and a few other similar tales "strike firm root in his [James's] own experience," Pelham Edgar

¹⁶ Robert L. Gale, The Caught Image, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1954, p. 120.

¹⁷ Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 126.

¹⁸ Clifton Fadiman, ed., The Short Stories of Henry James, New York, Random House, 1945, p. 316.

¹⁹ Pelham Edgar, Henry James Man and Author, Toronto, Macmillan, 1927, p. 161.

gives the following explanation:

No author of his day had been more consistently haunted by the idea of perfection, and none assuredly had more reason to realise the isolation that such solicitude entailed. Most of these stories, then, are parables designed to embody the idea of perfection sought and isolation achieved, but he occasionally deviates in the interests of a finer irony to exhibit the multiplied vulgarities of popular success, and to contrast the self-satisfaction of mediocrity with the sensitive discontent of genius.²⁰

James depicts "poor Dencombe," the dying author of a novel entitled "The Middle Years," longing for one last chance to perfect his art. In response to Doctor Hugh's interest in his novel, Dencombe

found another strain of eloquence to plead the cause of a certain splendid "last manner", the very citadel, as it would prove, of his reputation, the stronghold into which his real treasure would be gathered.²¹

James permits his hero to die frustrated, but clinging, to the last, to his artistic ideals. "It is glory--," he says,

to have been tested, to have had our little quality and cast our little spell [...] We work in the dark--we do what we can--we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art.²²

Some of the parodies in A Christmas Garland were accompanied by an apologetic note assuring the readers of

20 Ibid., p. 160-1.

21 Clifton Fadiman, ed., Op. Cit., p. 309.

22 Ibid., p. 315.

Beerbohm's reverence and esteem for the victims of his mockery.²³ Considering his high regard for Henry James, it is thought that his implied reference, in the title of the parody, to The Middle Years may have been a form of apology for his humorous exposure of the excesses of the author, whose genius, especially during the middle period of his literary career, was so little appreciated by the reading public, but of whose claim to greatness Beerbohm was fully cognizant.

It is possible, also, that Beerbohm was alluding, in his title, to James's tale The Figure in the Carpet. Joseph Warren Beach mentions the fascination of this narrative for interpreters of James, a story in which the author "shows us a novelist of rare distinction flinging down to the eager critic the challenge of his secret." "The critic," Beach observes, "is a clever fellow, a 'demon of subtlety'; but has failed, like everyone else, to discover the 'little point' the novelist wishes to make."²⁴ The novelist, Hugh Vereker, tells the young literary critic who is planning to write an article for The Middle on Vereker's last book:

²³ Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, London, Heinemann, 1950, p. 88, 187, and a postscript to the Preface.

²⁴ F. W. Dupee, ed., Op. Cit., p. 92.

It stretches, this little trick of mine, from book to book, and everything else, comparatively, plays over the surface of it. The order, the form, the texture of my books will perhaps some day constitute for the initiated a complete representation of it. So it's naturally the thing for the critic to look for. It strikes me [...] even as the thing for the critic to find [...]. It's really an exquisite scheme.²⁵

"One cannot but wonder," remarks Beach, "if Henry James, like Hugh Vereker, did pass away without ever having his secret put adequately into words."²⁶

Considered as a whole, the title The Mote in the Middle Distance appears to have been designed to draw attention to the infinitesimal proportions of the original ideas for many of James's stories and novels, as well as to the lack of recognition accorded to his genius, notably during the middle stage of his literary career, and largely, perhaps, because of the obscurity of his style, "the hinted riddle of his work"²⁷ Beerbohm, it is surmised, contemplated with mischievous delight his meaningful inscription, the harbinger of the literary commotion he would make over his own ridiculously trivial, but nonetheless well-guarded secret, the contents of the Christmas stockings--a secret which, frustrated as "poor Dencombe" had been, Keith

25 Ibid., p. 93.

26 Ibid., p. 94.

27 Ibid., p. 94.

Tantalus and his sister presumably never did explore.²⁸

The frustrating circumstance mentioned above suggests an aspect of the author's method which is frequently referred to as the Jamesian predicament, a topic which demands further consideration.

2. The Jamesian Predicament.

Perhaps one of the first impressions experienced in reading many of James's novels, or his tales, is an awareness, from the start, of complications in the lives of his characters. "The late tales," says Leon Edel, "are studies of 'predicaments' [...] of individuals frustrated and defeated who arrive at the ultimate tragedy."²⁹ And Michael Swan remarks:

There is a side to James which is inherent in most of his work, but which comes out plainly in the stories; his insistence on the frustration of life, on the idea that in everybody's life there is some significant thing which he has lost or failed to achieve.³⁰

Whence it follows that The Mote in the Middle Distance, if the pretence of Jamesian authorship is to be properly

28 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 9.

29 Leon Edel, ed., The Complete Tales of Henry James, London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962, vol. I, p. 14.

30 Michael Swan, Henry James, London, Longmans Green, 1950, p. 29.

effective, must be presented in the guise of a dilemma to which there appears to be no immediate solution.

A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles defines "predicament" as "state of being; condition, situation, position; esp. an unpleasant, trying, or dangerous situation."³¹ In the parody, the situation happens to be nothing more trying than the responsibility, on the part of two children, of having to decide whether or not to examine the contents of their Christmas stockings. By means of the depicted labyrinthine musings of Keith Tantalus and the grave, anxious discussion between him and his sister, Eva, following the discovery of the stockings, Beerbohm, with studied extravagance, effects an illusion of momentousness and of imminent frustration. Regarding this parody, Louis Kronenberger maintains that "the subject-matter--two tots worriedly debating whether they should inspect their Christmas stockings--is, as a travesty of a Jamesian predicament, little short of inspired."³² Beerbohm is not satisfied with merely placing his characters in a dilemma. Even before Keith's discovery of the stockings, his mind is depicted as

³¹ Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., Op. Cit., vol. vii, p. 1260.

³² Louis Kronenberger, "The Perfect Trifler," in The Saturday Review of English Literature, issue of June 21, 1947, p. 42.

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disturbed by perplexing thoughts as he struggles to recover his grasp of reality after the dissociating effects of a night of sleep. The language used to describe Keith's celebrations at this point illustrates the self-revelatory manner in which Beerbohm occasionally intensifies his ridiculous exaggeration, as, for example in the following passage:

He had run up, in the course of time, against a good number of "teasers", and the function of teasing them back--of, as it were, giving them, every now and then, "what for"--was in him so much a habit that he would have been at a loss had there been, on the face of it, nothing to lose.³³

The very construction of the sentence indicates the maze of perplexities through which James's characters must wend their way in search of a possible escape from their dilemmas.

The anxious reflections of the children in the parody regarding the course they are to follow are an amusing representation of the self-communings of perplexed individuals in James's writings. The necessity of making a momentous decision frequently involves moral obligations, which factor points to another of the Jamesian characteristics recognizable in The Mote in the Middle Distance.

33 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3.

3. James's Moral Sense.

Beerbohm's arrangement that his child-characters refrain from indulging in the lawful pleasure within their grasp, is a comic distortion of James's persistent and, in a sense, controlling interest in the conduct of his characters. The many conflicting critical views which have been expressed regarding James's understanding and portrayal of human behaviour leave little doubt as to the presence in his writings of the deciding factor of moral consciousness. On this matter, also, James nurtured, and utilised, ideas peculiar to his own way of thinking. In "The Art of Fiction," he deplores the "moral timidity of the usual English novelist,"³⁴ yet critics, such as Edmund Wilson, find in his own writings "a lack [. . .] of direct emotional experience-- a lack which is naturally felt more disconcertingly in his later than in his earlier books."³⁵ The fact is that his insistence that, in the art of fiction, "the essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field,"³⁶ is exemplified in an unusual manner in his works. In the opinion of

³⁴ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 606.

³⁵ -----, Henry James, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 65.

³⁶ -----, Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 607.

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Stephen Spender, Henry James is

an individualist [...] [who] has worked out in his books his own private system of ethics, which makes it possible for the individual to live aesthetically and morally, in spite of the world around him.³⁷

It is thus that Spender interprets a matter of vital importance in the understanding of Henry James: his complete dedication to his art as embodied in his advice to the young novelist: "Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible--to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize."³⁸ For this reason, James takes care not to allow his personal views to interfere with the conduct of his characters, and determines that "whatever renunciation may be involved, these characters must act in the way they do if the complex of values which constitutes their moral personality is not to be violated."³⁹ To James the final court of appeal was the individual's own conscience aided by reason and intelligence, so that ethical requirements depended on the nature of the person rather than on any predetermined standards. Obviously no didacticism is intended. The author does not judge, nor does he

37 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 109.

38 -----, Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 609.

39 Harold T. McCarthy, Henry James: The Creative Process, New York, Thomas Yoseloff, 1958, p. 134.

require the reader to judge, the morality or immorality of his characters; their actions are presented to the reader in the light of the awareness, the sensibilities of the persons principally involved.

With reference to this "moral detachment or neutrality" of James, Joseph Warren Beach observes that "it is plain that he prefers a view of life that takes largely into account moral considerations," but that "we are not here concerned with the morality of the decalogue and the public court, with what is known as 'conventional morality.'"⁴⁰ Indeed, it is not unusual for James's characters to violate or ignore the conventional code while, at the same time, they, for a noble motive, voluntarily accept painful renunciation of some coveted and lawful pleasure. For example, Merton Densher of The Wings of the Dove, at the insistence of his fortune-seeking fiancée, Kate Croy, agrees to deceive the dying Milly Theale into believing that he wishes to marry her. He does not hesitate to demand that Kate sacrifice her virtue as a proof of her enduring faithfulness to him. Yet after the death of the disillusioned, heart-broken Milly, Merton's principles will not permit him to accept the money which she has bequeathed to him so that he

⁴⁰ Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, Philadelphia, Albert Saifer, 1954, p. 133.

can marry Kate Croy. Eventually it is the spirit of Milly that triumphs, as is evidenced by Kate's comments to Merton Densher: "Her memory's your love. You want no other," and "We shall never be again as we were!"⁴¹ It is Beach's opinion that "on the whole, the conventional morality does not come out so badly after all."⁴² The following quotation from James's essay "The Art of Fiction" explains the motivating factor of James's moral consciousness. It should also dispel any delusions that moral preaching was a determining element in James's portrayal of the struggles between the forces of good and evil:

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground.⁴³

That James himself possessed the quality of mind which he considered so essential in a writer of novels has been

⁴¹ Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, New York, Dell, 1958, p. 512.

⁴² Joseph Warren Beach, Op. Cit., p. 136.

⁴³ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 607.

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unequivocally demonstrated by Max Beerbohm, who writes:

No industrious and intuitive reader can have failed to deduce that he has a very strong moral sense. He hates selfishness. He loves honour--loves, indeed, a sense of honour so punctilious that its effects are apt to be rather exasperating to readers who are only averagely good. But he never lets his moral prejudices be prejudicial to his characters. He never tries to set in an unduly attractive light the things that he loves, or to blacken the things that he hates. The hand of the artist in him is held tightly over the mouth of the preacher.⁴⁴

One wonders what form of expression of James's moral sense proved "exasperating" to Beerbohm; if, indeed, the creative impulses of the parodist presuppose incitement. Perhaps he considered slightly ridiculous, or, at any rate, worthy of amusing comment, James's insistence that "the moral consciousness of a child" is an appropriate subject for novels,⁴⁵ and his application of his theory to some of his fiction, notably What Maisie Knew, The Pupil, and The Turn of the Screw.

One of the two "works that receive the most extensive discussion in his notebooks"⁴⁶ is James's novel What Maisie Knew. The author anticipates with evident delight

⁴⁴ Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres, p. 568.

⁴⁵ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 605.

⁴⁶ F. O. Matthiessen & Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., Op. Cit., p. xviii.

the "ironic effect"⁴⁷ to be gained by making an innocent child his central character, just as later, in his Preface to the novel, he unabashedly rejoices in his "little wonder-working agent,"⁴⁸ the "extraordinary 'ironic centre'"⁴⁹ of his story. Pelham Edgar suggests the author's motive for his choice:

The real theme of the book is How Maisie developed a Moral Sense, and James is particularly anxious to give a true account of the way in which childish innocence might react in the midst of irregular and impure surroundings, and how childish naïveté may acquire a sense of the distinction between the right and the wrong of conduct while still retaining its serenity of outlook unimpaired.⁵⁰

It is Maisie's naive remarks, embarrassing in their innocence for her elders, that serve, ironically, to accentuate the moral ugliness of her associates even though she seems not to suspect them of any irregularity of conduct. Similarly, in The Pupil, the unscrupulousness, the parasitical habits, the indifference and negligence of the Moreens, and "their whole view of life," as Pemberton sees it, "speculative and rapacious and mean"⁵¹ assume horrible proportions

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁸ Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁰ Pelham Edgar, Op. Cit., p. 123.

⁵¹ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 439.

in the light of their disastrous effects upon Morgan, their delicate, precocious child, who admits that he is painfully aware of "their lying and cheating,"⁵² of the absurdity of their high pretensions,⁵³ and of their habitual shirking of their responsibilities in leaving their son constantly in the care of his unpaid tutor.⁵⁴ Morgan's frequent ironic remarks about his family reveal his keen sensibilities and a degree of perception beyond his years; nevertheless, there are things about his parents which he does not understand, and the strain of anxious wondering, combined with "the shock, the whole scene, the violent emotion"⁵⁵ of the public exposure of his parents and their complete surrender of him to his tutor, is eventually the cause of his death.

The theme of Beerbohm's parody of James is on an entirely different plane from that of either of the works mentioned in the foregoing paragraph. In the present analysis, identification of similarities allows for the existence within the parody of a modicum of that aspect of burlesque "which aims at exciting laughter by caricature

52 Ibid., p. 451.

53 Ibid., p. 452.

54 Ibid., p. 450.

55 Ibid., p. 475.

of the manner or spirit of serious works, ..."56 Hence it is not surprising that the problem which confronts Keith Tantalus and his sister, despite the illusion of weightiness, of moral import, stems from nothing more serious than a trifling matter of fear lest the experience of possessing Santa's Christmas presents may not measure up to the anticipation of their delightfulness. From the troubled cogitations of Keith on his awakening on Christmas morning, it is learned that he "had run up, in the course of time, against a good number of 'teasers'; and the function of teasing them back had involved the offer/ing/ of rewards." He

had ever so liberally pasted the windows of his soul with staring appeals, minute descriptions, promises that knew no bounds. But the actual recovery of the article--the business of drawing and crossing the cheque, blotched though this were with tears of joy--had blankly appeared to him rather in the light of a sacrilege, casting, he sometimes felt, a palpable chill on the fervour of the next quest. It was just this fervour that was threatened as, raising himself on his elbow, he stared at the foot of the bed.⁵⁷

The suggestion of moral uprightness, of conquest of temptation, is effected by the references to sacrilege and fervour in the above quotation, as well as by Eva's final pronouncement: "Of course, my dear, you do see. There they are, and you know I know you know we wouldn't, either of us,

56 Sir James A. H. Murray, ed., Op. Cit., vol. I, p. 1189.

57 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3-4.

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dip a finger into them [∟...∟] One doesn't violate the shrine--pick the pearl from the shell!"⁵⁸ and by the omniscient author's remark that "the bigotry of the convert was already discernible in the way that, averting his eyes, he [Keith] said 'One doesn't even peer'"⁵⁹ This act of renunciation on the part of the two children, who could actually visualise in the unevenness of the suspended stockings, the coveted and previously requested toys, is a travesty of the sacrifice which James was accustomed to demand from his characters.

James presents Morgan Moreen of "The Pupil" as a boy of eleven who

looked with intelligent innocent eyes at Pemberton, who had already had time to notice that from one moment to the other his small satiric face seemed to change its time of life. At this moment it was infantine, yet it appeared also to be under the influence of curious intuitions and knowledge.⁶⁰

The "gleams" of "precocity"⁶¹ so evident at that moment to the new tutor are not unusual in James's child-characters, and Beerbohm seems to be determined not to be outdone in his portrayal of exceptional children. In order to emphasize

58 Ibid., p. 8.

59 Ibid., p. 8-9.

60 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 422.

61 Ibid., p. 422.

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the incongruity of their prematurely adult intelligence, he, to all appearances, associates Keith and Eva, by implication, with the elderly Messes Bordereau and their male lodger of James's story "The Aspern Papers." A few comparisons will serve to demonstrate how he, by associative language and ideas, surrounds a childish incident with an atmosphere of dignity and momentousness, thus rendering more conspicuous the painstaking manner in which James aggrandizes the cases of moral conflict and renunciation recounted in his fiction. The selected examples will also call to mind the familiar puritanical Jamesian female and her less scrupulous but usually pliable male associate.

With studied deliberateness, Beerbohm borrows, embellishes, and utilises for his sport, words and phrases from "The Aspern Papers"(1888). For example, James's phrase "in the last analysis"⁶² is, in The Mote in the Middle Distance, mischievously extended to "if not perhaps in the last, certainly in the last but one analysis."⁶³ Each of the expressions: "sacrilege," "shrine," "pearl," "bigotry of the convert," "One doesn't even peer"⁶⁴--to be

62 Ibid., p. 308.

63 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 5.

64 Ibid., p. 4, 8, 9.

found in the parody--has its counterpart, if not directly used, in "The Aspern Papers." Jeffrey Aspern's papers are spoken of as his "relics"⁶⁵ and the elderly Miss Bordereau's "treasure."⁶⁶ Juliana's unnamed lodger wonders if her niece believes "that to part with them would be an impiety of the worst kind, a simple sacrilege."⁶⁷ To him the destruction of the papers would constitute "a dreadful sacrilege."⁶⁸ He fears that it is through his influence that Juliana has been "intensely converted"⁶⁹ to greed for gold, an avarice which he finds exceedingly repulsive, "a false note in my image of the woman who had inspired a great poet with immortal lines."⁷⁰ In his eagerness to procure the papers, he had been willing to pay large sums of money, "had kindled the unholy flame [∟...∟] put into her head that she had the means of making money."⁷¹ Beerbohm travesties this qualm of conscience when he has Keith Tantalus, "not without

65 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 399.

66 Ibid., p. 344.

67 Ibid., p. 394.

68 Ibid., p. 356.

69 Ibid., p. 360.

70 Ibid., p. 359-60.

71 Ibid., p. 360.

compunction,"⁷² trying to recapture his thoughts after a night's sleep, and remembering meanwhile that, on other occasions of attempted renewal of interrupted activity,

he had always offered rewards [...] had ever so liberally pasted the windows of his soul with staring appeals, minute descriptions, promises that knew no bounds. But the actual recovery of the cheque [...] had blankly appeared to him rather in the light of a sacrilege, casting, he sometimes felt, a palpable chill on the fervour of the next quest.⁷³

Juliana's lodger, troubled by her niece's avoidance of his company, says "it was as if she never peeped out of her aunt's apartment [...] it was more than keeping quiet-- it was like [...] feigning death."⁷⁴ He presumes that Juliana's eyes behind her green shade, "though invisible themselves, [...] kept me in view between the lashes."⁷⁵ And Beerbohm's Keith, while wondering if his sleeping sister "had peeped into 'her' stocking," realises that she "was now watching him between her eyelashes."⁷⁶ He dwells mentally on her "remoteness," her "magnificence," "her fine eyes,"⁷⁷ and is later startled into recovery of at least

72 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3.

73 Ibid., p. 3-4.

74 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 321.

75 Ibid., p. 325.

76 Max Beerbohm, Op. Cit., p. 4.

77 Ibid., p. 5.

a semblance of moral strength by "the gaze she fixed on [him]"⁷⁸ when, on his touching the stocking, "with startling suddenness, [she] sat bolt upright, and looked to him as if she were overhearing some tragedy."⁷⁹ Keith's submissive "One doesn't even peer"⁸⁰ echoes the lodger's "I must renounce"⁸¹ after his encounter with Juliana on the occasion when he attempted to open the desk where he suspected the Aspern papers were concealed. He was startled and "horribly ashamed" on beholding the old lady's "extraordinary eyes" glaring at him, and by her tone as "she hissed out passionately, furiously: 'Ah, you publishing scoundrel!'"⁸² Recalling this incident, after her death, he exclaims: "She was terrible. Then I saw her eyes. Lord, they were fine!"⁸³ There would seem to be ample evidence that Beerbohm was, by the process described above, intimating a kind of analogy between the children in the parody and the Bordereau ladies: "the niece [...] of minor

78 Ibid., p. 7.

79 Ibid., p. 7.

80 Ibid., p. 9.

81 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 395.

82 Ibid., p. 383.

83 Ibid., p. 395.

antiquity,"⁸⁴ and Juliana, of whom "she said amusingly, 'my aunt's a hundred and fifty,'"⁸⁵ and their lodger. Thus he was artfully recalling the precociousness of the Jamesian child-characters, the undue emphasis James was wont to place on the submissiveness of his characters to their conception of moral uprightness, and his tendency to portray his heroines as usually more disciplined, more conscientious, and more impelling than his representatives of the reputedly stronger sex.

In his essay "The Figure in the Carpet," Joseph Warren Beach comments on the quality and the consistency of the moral consciousness of the characters in James's fiction:

In the stories of other writers, men and women are shown us obsessed with desires and ambitions and opposed by material difficulties. And our interest is absorbed in the process by which they overcome their difficulties and realise their desires. But [...] What strikes us most [in the Jamesian characters] is their capacity for renunciation--for giving up any particular gratification in favour of some fine ideal of conduct with which it proves incompatible [...] the characters of James are not common men and women; and for the finest of them there is always something of more account than the substance of their experience, namely, its quality. They may, like other mortals, long for the realisation of some particular desire; but they long still more fervently for the supreme comfort of being right with themselves.⁸⁶

84 *Ibid.*, p. 294.

85 *Ibid.*, p. 340.

86 F. W. Dupee, ed., *Op. Cit.*, p. 95-6.

Beerbohm, in his Eva and Keith, provides appropriate counterparts for Maisie, whose "childhood dies, when she recognises that duty may sometimes compel a painful choice,"⁸⁷ and Morgan, who, while longing to retain the companionship of his tutor, whose desire to help the boy leads him to feign ignorance of the unsavoury conduct of the elder Moreens, feels impelled to warn him, at first by indirection, but finally with intense frankness, about the fraudulent practices of his parents. He even urges him to go away, though at what cost to his own feelings may be judged from the tragic ending of the story.⁸⁸ Obviously, there is nothing, morally speaking, to prevent the opening of the Christmas stockings, but the parodist succeeds in creating the illusion that Eva, by personal conviction, and Keith, by persuasion, choose to sacrifice the realisation of their lawful desire in favor of what Joseph Warren Beach denotes as "the supreme comfort of being right with themselves."

Observations thus far have necessitated references to the method by which the reader is acquainted with the Christmas morning experience recorded in The Mote in the Middle Distance. Beerbohm's parody is, of course,

87 Pelham Edgar, Op. Cit., p. 124.

88 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 475.

"constructed with a classical unity and economy of means"⁸⁹ peculiarly Jamesian. To achieve the required brevity and compactness, the parodist resorts to the analytical method commonly used by James, whereby experiences are revealed, not so much by the narration of incidents as by the introduction of the reader into the inner consciousness of the characters. The following section will deal with the use of this method by both parodist and victim.

4. James's Presentation of His Theme.

One of the main points of interest in The Mote in the Middle Distance is that it is not seen as a mere unfolding of events, or as a descriptive portrayal of character and emotional atmosphere. Rather, the reader is invited to enter into the setting by following a small boy's train of thought; and, even when the dominating position is conceded somewhat to his little sister, one's judgments are directly influenced by his attitude, his awareness or consciousness of all that is entailed in the related experience. Thus attention is directed by the parodist to a manner of narration which James exercised with enthusiasm and skill: his use of the individual consciousness as a mirror for his portrayal of character, his expression of moral sense, and

⁸⁹ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 31.

of whatever justifies the writing of a novel, "the only reason for the existence" of which, as he asserts in "The Art of Fiction," "is that it does attempt to represent life."⁹⁰

James's story-telling method is a rather complex one which needs to be elucidated if the Maxian reproduction of it is to be fully appreciated. Generally, it takes the form of progressive revelation of an individual's consciousness. Regarding James's story-telling techniques, Leon Edel states that "'the point of view' is to be found in nearly all of his fiction."⁹¹ Reference was made in Chapter Two of this work, to James's use of this technique in his novel Roderick Hudson, and James describes his use of the device in several of the Prefaces in his The Art of a Novel. D. W. Jefferson explains, as follows, the meaning of the point of view method as used by Henry James:

The increased use of the "point of view" meant a less direct portraiture of society, the aspects portrayed being part of the central character's vision. A character becomes known to us now either through our participation in his imaginative experience, or as he enters into the experience of the person whose consciousness provides for the main subject.⁹²

90 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 587.

91 Ibid., p. xiii.

92 D. W. Jefferson, Henry James, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1960, p. 66.

Hence James refers to little Maisie's mind as "a register of impressions,"⁹³ and of the immoral entanglements in the novel What Maisie Knew, he says: "The one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it, ..." ⁹⁴ Of the Moreens he declares: "... all I have given in 'The Pupil' is little Morgan's troubled vision of them as reflected in the vision, also troubled enough, of his devoted friend."⁹⁵ Percy Lubbock's essay "The Point of View" demonstrates James's handling of this technique in The Ambassadors:

93 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 142.

94 Ibid., p. 144.

95 Ibid., p. 153.

And now for the method by which the picture of a mind is fully dramatized, the method which is to be seen consistently applied in The Ambassadors and the other later novels of Henry James. How is the author to withdraw, to stand aside, and to let Strether's thought tell its own story? The thing must be seen from our own point of view and no other [...]. The story passes in an invisible world, the events take place in the man's mind ...

The world of silent thought is thrown open, and instead of telling the reader what happened there, the novelist uses the look and behaviour of thought as the vehicle by which the story is rendered. Just as the writer of a play embodies his subject in visible action and audible speech, so the novelist, dealing with a situation like Strether's, represents it by means of the movement that flickers over the surface of his mind. The impulses and reactions of his mood are the players upon the new scene ... Nothing in the scene has any importance, any value in itself; what Strether sees in it--that is the whole of its meaning.

But though in The Ambassadors the point of view is primarily Strether's, and though it appears to be his throughout the book, there is in fact an insidious shifting of it, so artfully contrived that the reader may arrive at the end without suspecting the truth.⁹⁶

The "point of view" technique served as a unifying element in the "scenic method" introduced by James in his novel What Maisie Knew, a method by which "the author tends to construct his story in a sequence of self-explanatory scenes, similar, in many respects, to those of the drama."⁹⁷ By means of this technique, the fruit of one of James's

96 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 37-40.

97 Thrall, Hibbard, Holman, A Handbook to Literature, New York, The Odyssey Pressn, 1936, p. 440.

early childhood impressions,⁹⁸ he revolutionized, says

Stephen Spender:

the manner of presenting the scene in the novel [...] The scene, with accompanying dialogue and action, is used mainly as a means of aligning the characters: explaining what are the reactions of each to the other, what each reflects, and bringing characters together [...]. There are [...] scenes which are highly dramatic, but the emphasis of these is not revelatory: they are the climax of what has already been revealed.⁹⁹

It has previously been observed that James established as a bond of unity, as a connecting link between his scenes, the consciousness of a central character. What Maisie Knew is an admirable illustration of the usefulness of this device.

Maisie, James explains in the Preface to his novel, is the "extraordinary 'ironic centre' [...] lending to poorer persons and things by the mere fact of their being involved with her, and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity."¹⁰⁰ It is her point of view, ironic in its unsophisticated uttered conclusions, that is the vantage point from which one sees and judges the persons and actions of the story. The evil by which she is surrounded, but happily untainted, becomes

98 F. W. Dupee, ed., Henry James: Autobiography, New York, Criterion Books, 1956, p. 107.

99 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 104.

100 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 147.

more glaringly evident because, throughout the greater part of the novel, she is apparently unconscious of the questionable character of the conduct of her companions, and, indeed, in her own quaint fashion, she innocently encourages the adulterous relationships of her parents. D. W. Jefferson observes:

There is comedy in her being able, with her child's view of things, to thrive imaginatively and morally on varieties of relationship which to an adult intelligence signify disorder. Her capacity to see a fairy-tale quality in these sorry situations reduces their evil to impotence so far as she is concerned [...]. It is a stroke of satire to have made them of interest only when thus caught in the fact of their abysmal baseness; and the interest of this lies mainly in what her tender fancy makes of it.¹⁰¹

With mock-serious conformity to the Jamesian pattern, Beerbohm scrupulously details the innermost thoughts of what seems to be his central character, punctiliously touching, at least, upon every facet of

that amazing method by which a novel competes not with other novels, but with life itself; making people known to us as we grow to know them in real life, by hints, by glimpses, here a little and there a little, leaving us always guessing and wondering, till, in the fullness of time, all these scraps of revelation fully resolve themselves into one large and luminous whole, just as in real life.¹⁰²

In imitation of James, for whom "the exploring of the individual's consciousness was the most interesting and the

101 D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 72-3.

102 Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres, p. 700.

most revealing occupation in the world,"¹⁰³ Beerbohm's story opens with Keith Tantalus struggling to recollect his thoughts, to recall something regretfully obscured by a night's sleep. The experienced "consciousness of dubiety" evokes memories of former perplexing occasions when "he had run up against a good number of 'teasers.'"¹⁰⁴ His reminiscing is suddenly arrested by the sight of the stockings. This leads to further musings, and his views of Eva's personality and mode of behaviour are graphically and whimsically revealed by his unchildlike mental observations. Beerbohm takes care that it is Keith who supplies the touch of irony in the story, having in mind, no doubt, that "masterpiece of collective ironic portraiture"¹⁰⁵ "The Pupil" and the "small satiric face" and mocking insinuations of its Morgan Moreen, as well as the novel What Maisie Knew. The parodist cunningly arranges that neither of the children in his story goes unscathed. Eva's "magnificence"¹⁰⁶ loses a little of its lustre when it is disclosed that her brother

103 Henry Seidal Canby, "The Return of Henry James," in The Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 31, issue of Jan. 24, 1948, p. 34.

104 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3.

105 Krishna Baldev Vaid, Technique in the Tales of Henry James, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1964, p. 157.

106 Max Beerbohm, Op. Cit., p. 5.

had formerly been moved to reproach her, mentally, with having "caught her tone from the peevish young woman at the Central";¹⁰⁷ or that she could be "coy,"¹⁰⁸ or, indeed, subject to any normal feminine weakness. On the other hand, Keith himself is not excluded from the ironic implications since, with all his show of virility of speech and action, he is obliged to admit to at least a suspicion of defeat in that his "unspoken rejoinder [...] seemed to him [...] to lack finality,"¹⁰⁹ and since he eventually allows his counterpart of the customarily designated weaker sex to have her way.

Keith obviously is the central intelligence in this narrative, but, following the procedure of the author of The Ambassadors, Beerbohm allows the centre of gravity to shift eventually and insiduously in Eva's direction. Forewarned of her "magnificence" by the projected reflections of her brother, who appears to be not a little in awe of her, one is prepared for the succinctness of her pronouncements and for the determined stand she takes in the effort to convert Keith to her way of thinking.

107 Ibid., p. 6.

108 Ibid., p. 8.

109 Ibid., p. 6.

The almost complete absence of action in the parody scarcely justifies the consideration of its development in terms of the "scenic method." Beerbohm seems rather to have had in mind a "more finished method" of James, the "admirably controlled single situation"¹¹⁰ of "The Aspern Papers." Nevertheless, the doggedness with which he pursues his victim would lead one to anticipate the possible insinuation into his parody of some semblance of imitation of a method lauded by its inventor as "my absolute, my imperative, my only salvation [...] to see me out of the wood [...] of this interminable little Maisie."¹¹¹ On the basis of this assumption, it is well, perhaps, to consider a further aspect of the scenic method as outlined in A Handbook to Literature:

The construction of a typical chapter of a Henry James novel illustrates the "scenic method": such a chapter (it may be selected almost at random from The Portrait of a Lady) will usually open with a detailed description of setting and of the interior state of the character through whom the action is being presented [...]. then, when everything has been well prepared for, the action and conversation are presented directly, and in great detail, the action rising to a climax upon which the curtain figuratively falls, such a curtain being represented by the abrupt ending of the chapter.¹¹²

110 D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 66.

111 F. O. Matthiessen & Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., Op. Cit., p. 263.

112 Thrall, Hibbard, Holman, Op. Cit., p. 440.

There has already been occasion to note Beerbohm's "detailed description of setting and of the interior state of the" central "character." It will be seen that the other aspects of the method designated in the foregoing paragraph have been copied by him. Such action as there is, together with the dialogue, occurs mostly towards the end of the parody. Keith "raised himself to his knees, and, leaning with outstretched arm towards the foot of his bed, made as though to touch the stocking which Santa Claus had, overnight, left dangling there."¹¹³ As "he stared obliquely at Eva, with a sort of beaming defiance,"¹¹⁴ she

had, with startling suddenness, sat bolt upright, and looked to him as if she were overhearing some tragedy [...]. The gaze she fixed on her extravagant kinsman was of a kind to make him wonder how he contrived to remain, as he beautifully did, rigid.¹¹⁵

Little else happens until "leaning forward, he laid a chubby forefinger on the stocking, causing that receptacle to rock to and fro,"¹¹⁶ a motion not so startling to him as "the tears which started to Eva's eyes and the intensity with which 'Don't you,' she exclaimed, 'see?'"¹¹⁷ The story

113 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

114 Ibid., p. 6.

115 Ibid., p. 7.

116 Ibid., p. 7.

117 Ibid., p. 7.

reaches its peak, its climax, with Eva's dramatic utterance, as "with a vibrancy of tone that seemed to bring her voice quite close to him, "One doesn't," she added, "violate the shrine--pick the pearl from the shell!"¹¹⁸ And, with Keith's "One doesn't even peer,"¹¹⁹ spoken with averted eyes, the story abruptly ends, but not before the "omniscient author" assures the reader that he does not really know if the children ever, "in fact, 'peered,'" since he has never yielded to the temptation to question them on the matter. As "the curtain falls," he directs one final quip at James's self-disciplined characters:

But any regret I may feel in my invariable failure to 'come up to the scratch' of yielding to this temptation is balanced, for me, by my impression--my sometimes all but throned and anointed certainty--that the answer, if vouchsafed, would be in the negative.¹²⁰

Only at one other point in the story had the "omniscient author" made his presence felt, that is, when he interposed the comment: "It was characteristic of our friend--was indeed 'him all over'--that his fear of what she was going to say was as nothing to his fear of what she might be going to leave unsaid."¹²¹ The expression "our friend" coupled

118 Ibid., p. 8.

119 Ibid., p. 9.

120 Ibid., p. 9.

121 Ibid., p. 6.

with the author's ostensible knowledge of Keith's attitudes, and the reference later in the story to habitual visits to the children's house, suggest a bond of sympathy similar to that attributed by D. W. Jefferson to the later James:

The ramifying prose expresses his sense of the organic growth of an imaginative response, or of its exploratory character. Through this style the novelist himself is present as interpreter, sometimes near to his character, seeing the situation virtually in the latter's terms, and at other times further removed, allowing his poetic imagination, his humour, or his rhetoric scope to shape the situation more freely, but always with consideration for the character's central position and point of view. At all times it is the style of a writer who cherishes his subject personally, and this feeling communicates itself to the reader.¹²²

Beerbohm, it has been observed, took great pains, in the presentation of his story, to preserve that economy of language cultivated by the later James. To this end, he used as the medium of his narration that aspect of the point of view method whereby the reader is permitted to witness the ponderings of a central character who is also the ironic centre of the story. The omniscient author is also introduced for ironic effect. The knowledge thus supplied about situation and character is supplemented by the restricted amount of dialogue required to create the dramatic and scenic effect so closely associated with James's style. The question of dialogue is to be given further consideration.

122 D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 94-5.

5. James's Use of Dialogue.

The modicum of conversation contained in The Mote in the Middle Distance has been included almost in its entirety in the quotations previously submitted. These examples alone suffice to show that Beerbohm was effectively mindful of James's manipulation of dialogue in his fiction. On this point, Pelham, Edgar, having noted that James's novel The Awkward Age is wholly conversational, and that The Outcry and The Sacred Fount are largely so, continues:

in his normal procedure he tended to confine dialogue within much narrower limits than it occupies in the work of our best writers of fiction. Where books are so much an affair of perspective, each word must be focused upon the centre of the theme, and discursiveness is fatal to a symmetrical design. He sacrificed liveliness, eloquence and wit in the interests of this higher economy [...]. Differentiation may be secured in a variety of ways, but James at an early date abandoned the cheap and easy device of oddity of gesture and eccentricity of speech [...]. While his conversations are generally, as we say, "in character," we have noted that he avoids the accent that marks the tonic difference of one individual from another. His interlocutors are merged in the monotony of their high civilisation, and they are so subtle that it is often by reticence, rather than by speech that they are betrayed to us.¹²³

It is, perhaps, this meaningful reticence that inspired the omniscient author's reference in the parody to Keith's habitual failure to divine his sister's trend of thought: "It was characteristic of our friend [...]. that his fear of

123 Pelham Edgar, Op. Cit., p. 218-9.

what she was going to say was as nothing to his fear of what she might be going to leave unsaid."¹²⁴ This virtual chuckle at the expense of the precocious lad followed the not-too-illuminating snatches of conversation recorded thus far in the story: Eva's sudden remark, indicative of her "remote-ness, which was a part of her magnificence"--"They so very indubitably are, you know!"¹²⁵ and Keith's hesitant "Oh, as to that!"¹²⁶--a reply which seems to have had no meaning or purpose except as a desperate, "rash" attempt to "feverishly 'hold [...] the line'," to encourage further speech by which he might hope to bridge the "too many dark, too many buzzing and bewildering and all frankly not negotiable leagues in between."¹²⁷ After a seemingly interminable pause during which, "conscious of the intervening leagues [...] he caught himself in the act of awfully computing, with a certain statistical passion, the distance between Rome and Boston,"¹²⁸ Eva uttered, with characteristic vagueness, "Well, one does, anyhow, leave a margin for the pretext, you know!"¹²⁹

124 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

125 Ibid., p. 5.

126 Ibid., p. 5.

127 Ibid., p. 5.

128 Ibid., p. 6.

129 Ibid., p. 6.

Veiled comments from his characters are nothing unusual in the stories written by Henry James. In his child-characters, though, they are perhaps more impressive because of their quaintness. The element of amused delight is never lacking to one who hears from the lips of unsophisticated children utterances surprisingly clever and subtle, but frequently fraught with meaning beyond the comprehension of the speakers. Eleven-year-old Morgan Moreen of "The Pupil,"

who liked intellectual gymnastics and who also, as regards the behaviour of mankind, had noticed more things than you might suppose, ...¹³⁰

and who despised the trickery of his parents when they had accused of "lying and cheating"¹³¹ a servant who had demanded her rightful wages, cloaked, with wisdom beyond his years, his concise warnings to his new tutor. For example, to Pemberton's "I hope you don't mean to dismiss me" he replied: "I think if I did right I ought to"; and his next retort was: "You're very young--fortunately." Ignoring the tutor's quip: "Oh yes, compared with you!" he added: "Therefore it won't matter so much if you do lose a lot of time."¹³² He leaves it to the tutor to interpret his meaning until,

¹³⁰ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 430.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 451.

¹³² Ibid., p. 431.

eventually, he feels obliged, in justice, to leave no room for misunderstanding.

In direct contrast to Morgan's wise, yet cautious, admonitions, are little Maisie's spontaneous effusions. She is "completely serious [...] unconscious of comic implications," but her "misconceptions have that element of disconcerting truth which serves to expose the falsities of her elders."¹³³ Her plea to the Captain on behalf of her mother, who has by now decided that he is the "biggest cad in London," is typical of her speech, which, though innocently conceived, can prove most disturbing to those to whom it is addressed. The Captain is not a little taken aback and embarrassed by her "Say you love her, Mr. Captain, say it, say it [...] don't do it only just for a little [...] Like all the others [...] Do it always!"¹³⁴ However, Maisie does possess a certain inscrutability sometimes baffling to her elders.

¹³³ D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 73-4.

¹³⁴ Henry James, What Maisie Knew, In the Cage, The Pupil, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908, p. 155.

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... while, like any precocious child, she takes in much more of the spectacle than her elders had reckoned on, she really does not understand what she sees, in at all the sense in which it is meant by grown-ups. She takes great pride in letting it be seen how much she "knows," and Mrs. Wix and Sir Claude are actually "taken in" by what seems to be her eventual development of a "moral sense" like their own.¹³⁵

James's theory about small children's capacity for self-expression is a possible explanation for the phenomenal speech of his child-characters:

Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary.¹³⁶

The remainder of the verbal exchange between Keith and Eva is indicative of Beerbohm's consciousness of the customary brilliance of speech of which Jamesian characters, even the children, are capable. When Keith finally decides to ignore the authoritative, penetrating gaze of his sister, and to take the first step towards satisfying his pardonable curiosity by touching the stocking, "causing that receptable to rock ponderously to and fro,"

135 Joseph Warren Beach, Op. Cit., p. 239.

136 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 145.

This effect was more expected than the tears which started to Eva's eyes and the intensity with which "Don't you," she exclaimed, "see?"

"The mote in the middle distance?" he asked. "Did you ever, my dear, know me to see anything else? I tell you it blocks out everything. It's a cathedral, it's a herd of elephants, it's the habitable globe. Oh, it's, believe me, of an obsessiveness!"¹³⁷

And Beerbohm sees that the dignity and sublimity of Eva's reply are in keeping with her "magnificence":

"Of course, my dear, you do see. There they are, and you know I know you know we wouldn't, either of us, dip a finger into them." With a vibrancy of tone that seemed to bring her voice quite close to him, "One doesn't," she added, "violate the shrine--pick the pearl from the shell!"¹³⁸

Keith's submissive "One doesn't even peer"¹³⁹ terminates the conversation.

Beerbohm has skilfully reproduced in the discourse of his parody a memorable quality of Jamesian dialogue. The dramatic, climactic impressiveness of Eva's final speech recalls passages in James, such as the puritanically bred Strether's admonition to Little Bilham:

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life [...]. Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!¹⁴⁰

137 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 7.

138 Ibid., p. 8.

139 Ibid., p. 9.

140 Henry James, The Ambassadors, New York, The New American Library of World Literature, 1964, p. 134-5.

or Miss Juliana Bordereau's "Ah, you publishing scoundrel!"¹⁴¹ Eva's emphatic pronouncement, like that of Strether and Juliana, is associated, despite the gravity of the speaker, with a whimsically incongruous situation. It is chiefly the ironic touch which causes the statements to linger in one's memory.

Thus, there are strikingly evident similarities in the dialogue of The Mote in the Middle Distance and in that to be found in the fiction of Henry James. Among these have been noted: tendencies to reticence and economy of speech, with resultant vagueness; and occasional flashes of brilliancy usually associated with dramatic and climactic, as well as ironic effectiveness. However, the oral expression of the characters of both parodist and victim contain certain other qualities worthy of consideration, characteristics which may also be found in the non-conversational portions of their narratives.

6. James's Mode of Expression.

Though much adverse criticism has been written about the excesses and weaknesses of James's literary manner, it cannot be denied that he was a skilled stylist.

¹⁴¹ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 383.

However, the point to be considered here is not his possible claims to aesthetic excellence, but the transformation of his mode of expression by the writer who facetiously attributed to him the authorship of The Mote in the Middle Distance. For this purpose, attention will be given to the stylistic traits, distinctively Jamesian, which are recognizable beneath the mask of Max Beerbohm's literary caricature.

a) Obscurity of language.--There have already been submitted from The Mote in the Middle Distance conversational passages pointedly reminiscent of the abstruseness of much of Henry James's language. Max Beerbohm, however, does not confine his mimicry to the verbal exchange of James's characters. Moreover, he procures the desired effect by innuendo as well as by his peculiar form of imitation.

The following comments by Pelham Edgar recognize the merits as well as the defects of the intricacies of James's style:



By any standard of appraisal save that of consistent clearness he is one of the great masters of our English speech, and, needless to say, his obscurities never develop out of slovenliness of thought, nor from the converse desire to be brilliant at his reader's expense. At times he makes us work laboriously to fill out the interstices of his thought or read meanings into the capacious silences of his characters, who traverse sometimes between their speeches more space than our laboring minds can compass; but more usually his obscurity arises from his multiplication of subtle discriminations. In his eagerness to leave no shade of meaning unexpressed, he often makes the sentence groan under a paragraph's burden [...]. He grew too lavish of his verbal wealth and clothed his later books in tissue of cloth-of-gold.¹⁴²

Beerbohm's entire composition is geared to creating the illusion of mental conditions and emotions too deep and too bewildering for completely intelligible words. The Jamesian peculiarities noted by Pelham Edgar are readily perceivable within the parody, as, for example, in the opening sentence:

It was with a sense of a, for him, very memorable something that he peered now into the immediate future, and tried, not without compunction, to take that period up where he had, perspectively, left it.¹⁴³

The following sentence: "But just where the deuce had he left it?" and, to the end of a quite lengthy paragraph, several other sentences which comprise a confusing hodge-podge of idiomatic expressions, symbolic imagery, contorted

¹⁴² Pelham Edgar, Op. Cit., p. 208-9.

¹⁴³ Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3.

phrases, parenthetical intrusions, modifiers, and uncommon word arrangements,¹⁴⁴ are evidently intended by the parodist not only to illustrate the puzzled consciousness of his central character, but also to suggest the bewildering labyrinths and dark recesses of meaning in which readers of James's works often find themselves, especially in the later novels and in the Prefaces. Richard P. Blackmur suggests a possible cause for the difficulty of comprehension of James's later writings:

He enjoyed an excess of intelligence and he suffered, both in life and art, from an excessive effort to communicate it, to represent it in all its fullness. His style grew elaborate in the degree that he rendered shades and refinements of meaning and feeling not usually rendered at all.¹⁴⁵

Some of the complexity of James's language derives from the implications and the ambiguities by means of which he either conveys a greater depth of meaning than could be expressed in a multiplicity of words or challenges the imagination of his readers into drawing their own conclusions. In his Preface to The Turn of the Screw, which, according to a notebook entry dated 1895, is based on a supposedly authentic ghost-story of the continued corruption of two children by wicked, depraved servants even after the death of the

144 Ibid., p. 3-4.

145 Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. xiii.

latter,¹⁴⁶ James explains why he is not completely explicit:

Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself [...], and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) and horror (of their false friends) will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications. This ingenuity I took pains--and indeed great pains--to apply.¹⁴⁷

What James has left unsaid in this story has resulted in a number of conflicting opinions and theories regarding the true nature of the evil confronting the children. Throughout The Mote in the Middle Distance Beerbohm represents this clever technique of Henry James, as well as his use of symbolic imagery, a device which enriches, but also complicates still further for the reader the language of James's literature.

b) Symbolic imagery.--Henry James's autobiography reveals how his daily habits from early childhood formed a solid basis for the future enrichment of his literary efforts. Recounting his childhood experiences, he muses: "And I cherish the moment and evoke the image and repaint the very scene."¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere he recalls how, as a small

¹⁴⁶ F. O. Matthiessen & Kenneth B. Murdock, ed., Op. Cit., p. 178.

¹⁴⁷ Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 176.

¹⁴⁸ F. W. Dupee, ed., Henry James: Autobiography, p. 3.

boy, he was accustomed to "dawdle and gape." He adds:

He is a convenient little image or warning of all that was to be for him [...]. For there was the very pattern and measure of all he was to demand: just to be somewhere--almost anywhere would do--and somehow receive an impression or an accession, feel a relation or a vibration.¹⁴⁹

He speaks with gratitude of the encouragement he and his brother William received from their elders to "Convert and convert [...]" and simply everything that should happen to us, every contact, every impression and every experience we should know, were to form our soluble stuff."¹⁵⁰ The manner in which Henry James continued throughout his lifetime to convert his impressions into the "precious metal"¹⁵¹ of symbolic imagery has contributed to his literary productions an added aesthetic appeal as well as an intellectual challenge to the reader.

Henry James's writings are dotted with imagery ranging from "a single figuratively used word" to "a single imagistic unit [which] may run to five hundred or more words, a proliferation most often encountered in the works written between 1902 and 1909."¹⁵² Perhaps the most

149 Ibid., p. 17.

150 Ibid., p. 123.

151 Ibid., p. 123.

152 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 5.

outstanding example of the elaborated type of figurative passage is the symbolic representation of the enormity of the problem confronting Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl regarding the relationships between the Prince and Charlotte, as "some strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda [...] a Mahometan mosque,"¹⁵³ and so on. Harold T. McCarthy observes that James

wanted to fashion a prose medium that has a rich sensuous surface, and, when he used symbols, wanted to make them aesthetically vivid and yet organically related to the whole substance of the work of art [...] He was impressed by things seen, heard, felt, and in turn he tried progressively in his writing to impress his readers via their senses.¹⁵⁴

Beerbohm's parody would not be complete if, in its characteristic fashion, it did not exhibit the fruits of James's aesthetic zeal. Any suspicion regarding his outright disapproval of James extreme tendencies towards this form of embellishment of his creations may be dispelled by reference to Beerbohm's Around Theatres. Speaking of his "aesthetic delight"¹⁵⁵ in the books of Henry James, "that very conscious and devoted artist," he says: "I know no

¹⁵³ Henry James, The Golden Bowl, New York, Dell, 1963, p. 273-4.

¹⁵⁴ Harold T. McCarthy, Op. Cit., p. 122.

¹⁵⁵ Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres, p. 699.

fictionist so evidently steeped as he is in the passion for literature as a fine art."¹⁵⁶ Such a tribute would appear to embrace all the major elements of James's writings. Beerbohm's appreciation of the artist does not, however, preclude a little "aesthetic" laughter at the latter's expense.

Keith's reply to Eva's "Don't you see?" is a witty reminder, on the part of the parodist, of the multiplicity of impressions which were the sources of James's imagistic creations:

"The mote in the middle distance?" he asked. "Did you ever, my dear, know me to see anything else? I tell you it blocks out everything. It's a cathedral, it's a herd of elephants, it's the habitable globe. Oh it's, believe me, of an obsessiveness."¹⁵⁷

Alexander Holder-Barell notes that "about half the images James introduces form part of the dialogue [...] The more sensitive persons frequently use images in the talk, and they are also inclined to speak in elaborate metaphors."¹⁵⁸ Elsewhere he observes that in James's stories,

156 Ibid., p. 701.

157 -----, A Christmas Garland, p. 7.

158 Alexander Holder-Barell, The Development of Imagery and Its Functional Significance in Henry James's Novels, Switzerland, Francke Berlag Bern, 1959, p. 55.

... excited, sensitive persons show a tendency to use more images in their talk than usual, and above all they use them in quick succession. Most emotional images have a characteristic in common that they are dynamic.¹⁵⁹

Keith Tantalus's speech in reply to his sister's agitated question is Beerbohm's way of demonstrating the practice described above. In one small compact paragraph he has crowded a series of images and a number of questions and exclamations which conjure up in the mind of the reader, not only memories of Jamesian intimations, but implications of Maxian origin flavored with an irony commonly used by both parodist and victim. Eva's next and final speech is equally rapid and laden with symbolic significance.

The possible implications of the expression "the mote in the middle distance" as the title of the parody, were discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It was thought that the word "mote" would justify the supposition that Beerbohm was being especially mindful of James's own application of terms such as "germ" and "air-blown grain" to the frequent minute sources of ideas for his narratives. The words of Keith just quoted from the parody open up other avenues of insight into Beerbohm's allusions. Obviously he is making fun of James's seemingly inexhaustible fund of ideas and his almost slavish devotion to the task

159 Ibid., p. 59.

of expressing them, as he himself would say, "Beautifully." "Did you ever, my dear," Keith says, "know me to see anything else? [...] Oh, it's, believe me, of an obsessiveness!" Apropos to James's excessive striving for perfection, Philip Rahv, in an essay entitled "Attitudes Towards Henry James," has this to say:

The strain shows in the stylisation of his language, a stylisation so rich that it turns into an intellectual quality of rare value, but which at times is apt to become overwrought and drop into unconscious parody. It is further shown in his obsessive refinement--a veritable delirium of refinement--which again serves at times to remove us from the actuality of the represented experience.¹⁶⁰

The symbolic meanings applied by Keith Tantalus to "the mote in the middle distance" recall some of the ideas which obsessed the mind of Henry James. With unmistakable ardor, Keith says: "The mote in the middle distance? [...] It's a cathedral, it's a herd of elephants, it's the habitable globe." The significance of the symbols used by Keith can be relished sufficiently only if the implied identity of situation is recognized: Keith's somewhat awe-inspired subservience to the impelling influence of his sister and Maisie's dread of her mother, who to her was more terrible than a "wild elephant";¹⁶¹ the association of cathedrals

¹⁶⁰ F. W. Dupee, ed., The Question of Henry James, p. 276.

¹⁶¹ Henry James, What Maisie Knew, In the Cage, The Pupil, p. 114.

with women like Charlotte of The Golden Bowl¹⁶² and Mme de Vionnet of The Ambassadors¹⁶³ at moments when their devastating influence over men was being particularly felt; or the fear of repercussions experienced by Strether when he felt obliged to incur the displeasure of Mrs. Newsome, whose "tact," when she was making known the dictates of her will by letter, "had to reckon with the Atlantic Ocean, the General Post Office, and the extravagant curve of the globe."¹⁶⁴ It seems not unlikely also that Keith's virtual groan: "Oh, it's believe me, of an obsessiveness!" is a subtle allusion to his sense of the futility of trying to escape from his dilemma, a feeling by no means alien to the people most in dread of the persuasive females referred to above.

James's images are borrowed from a variety of sources, including, among others, animals, birds, insects, fish, reptiles, money, jewels, painting, architecture, literature, music, drama, eyes, seashells, flowers, war, games, and religious and classical terms and incidents.

162 Henry James, The Golden Bowl, p. 242.

163 -----, The Ambassadors, p. 179-81.

164 Ibid., p. 109.

The most diverse things could take on symbolic value for James [...]. The titles of several of his novels are enough to suggest a symbolic value that pervades the whole story: The Madonna of the Future, The Golden Bowl, The Death of the Lion, and The Figure in the Carpet, for example.¹⁶⁵

Keith Tantalus's dramatic utterance about the significance for him of "the mote in the middle distance" would seem to embrace a wide range of Jamesian imagery. However, of special interest here are the symbolic images appropriated or imitated by the parodist.

Keith's defiant and purposeful contact with his Christmas stocking drew from his horrified and tearful sister the pronouncement "One doesn't violate the shrine-- pick the pearl from the shell!"¹⁶⁶ the solemnity of which plea wrought in Keith the conversion so earnestly desired by his sister. In the section of this chapter dealing with James's moral sense, there was occasion to denote certain words and phrases borrowed directly, sometimes with slight alterations, by Beerbohm from "The Aspern Papers." It was suggested that in this way the parodist was implying an identity of circumstances from a moral viewpoint at least. Thus the symbolic "One doesn't violate the shrine," and, elsewhere in the parody, "sacrilege," "fervour," "quest," "bigotry of the convert," "temptation," "throned and

165 Harold T. McCarthy, Op. Cit., p. 123.

166 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 8.

anointed certainty" evoke mental visions of references in James to sacred treasures, relics, not to be defiled by the touch of the unhallowed. But eventually the vision fades, and the mundane contents of the stockings resume their proper perspective. But Beerbohm's point has been well made. The "quest" image has the further significance of being a possible allusion to the quest of the Holy Grail recounted in Malory's mediaeval stories of chivalry, "Le Morte Darthur (printed 1485), a book destined to transmit Arthurian stories to many later English writers, notably Tennyson."¹⁶⁷ Thus it is a subtle reminder of James's honorific images, and perhaps especially those of "The Aspern Papers." The latter story reveals the troubled thoughts of Juliana's lodger, who fears that the Aspern papers, the objects of his zealous quest, are in danger of destruction at the hands of their jealous possessor: "The worst of it was that she looked terribly like an old woman who at a pinch would, even like Sardanapalus, burn her treasure."¹⁶⁸ Occasionally James selected his images from "the high and hallowed world of culture."¹⁶⁹ To the unnamed narrator of "The Aspern Papers" Jeffrey Aspern and

167 Thrall, Hibbard, Holman, Op. Cit., p. 36.

168 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 344.

169 -----, Henry James, p. 129.

his women were "Orpheus and the Maenads!"¹⁷⁰ and to Juliana Aspern "was a god."¹⁷¹ Beerbohm's "my throned and anointed certainty"¹⁷² may also be considered honorific in that it could be a veiled reference to the long standing traditional Catholic belief in the infallibility of their "spiritual king,"¹⁷³ the Pope. Finally, Beerbohm's application of "Tantalus" to Keith's name recalls the Tantalus in Greek mythology, who

was punished in Hades by being set [...] under fruit trees whose branches the wind tossed aside when he tried to pick the fruit. Another account [...] a great stone was suspended over his head threatening to overwhelm him, so that he was prevented from enjoying the banquet set before him.¹⁷⁴

The description of Keith Tantalus, prevented from ascertaining the contents of his well-filled Christmas stocking by reproachful, penetrating stare of his little sister, and who, when he eventually "laid a chubby forefinger on the stocking, causing that receptacle to rock ponderously to

170 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 295.

171 Ibid., p. 340.

172 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 9.

173 -----, And Even Now and A Christmas Garland, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1960, p. 25.

174 Sir Paul Harvey, ed., The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937, p. 414.

and fro,"¹⁷⁵ was persuaded by Eva's dramatic speech to renounce the coveted pleasure, is an indication of Beerbohm's aptitude for clever imitation of James's use of classical references in his fiction.

James made frequent use of jewel images, sometimes in a general sense, but occasionally he named specific gems, including pearls. In The Golden Bowl, for example, as Prince Amerigo is about to begin his cathedral tour with the intention of indulging freely in his illicit affair with Charlotte, he rejoices that circumstances have made it possible that "his freedom [...] should at present be as perfect and rounded and lustrous as some huge precious pearl,"¹⁷⁶ and the plan-filled moments during which his now-enlightened wife awaits his return from the expedition "she could [...] count again like the firm pearls on a string."¹⁷⁷ These examples clearly demonstrate Robert L. Gale's opinion that "The pearl came to symbolize for James priceless knowledge to be found in the depths of experience,"¹⁷⁸ and that pearls "help express his awareness

175 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 7.

176 Henry James, The Golden Bowl, p. 242.

177 Ibid., p. 278.

178 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 35.

of ambivalences and deceptive appearances in life."¹⁷⁹ Maggie's comparison of the magnitude of her dilemma and her reluctance to dwell on the matter to "a Mahometan mosque with which no base heretic could take liberty"¹⁸⁰ preceded those moments when she permitted herself to draw conclusions that would lead to a solution of her problems, moments that "she could [. . .] count again like firm pearls on a string." Hence, in the parody, Eva's "One doesn't violate the shrine--pick the pearl from the shell." Evidently the implied sacredness lies, not in the material contents of the stockings, but in the "priceless knowledge" within the power of the children to attain, but awe-inspiring in its mysteriousness--they cannot be sure that the stockings contain exactly what they have requested. It seems unnecessary to comment on the function of the symbolic "shell" in Eva's exclamation. Its significance is obvious. However, it is to be noted that James sometimes used sea-shell imagery, as in The Portrait of a Lady, where the Countess Gemini is compared to "a bright shell, with a polished surface, in which something would rattle when you shook it."¹⁸¹

179 Ibid., p. 196.

180 Henry James, The Golden Bowl, p. 274.

181 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, Toronto, The New American Library of Canada, 1963, p. 414.

It has been noted that "The Aspern Papers" and the parody contain references to the "fine eyes" of Juliana and Eva. Juliana's lodger is unable to forget her "extraordinary eyes" when she found him at her desk. "They glared at me," he recalls; "they were like the sudden drench for a caught burglar, of a flood of gaslight; they made me horribly ashamed."¹⁸² Robert L. Gale observes that

Eyes do not often appear in the figurative half of images in James, but literal eyes [...] inspire graphic and occasionally unusual similes and metaphors [...] James often compares the vivid quality of the eye to some kind of light: a spark, a smouldering fire, a smoky torch, a fitful lamp, a glowing coal, and so on.¹⁸³

Beerbohm also uses literal eyes, but he uses them to develop his telephonic metaphor: "If you didn't try to meet her fine eyes, it was that you simply couldn't hope to: there were too many dark, too many buzzing and bewildering, and all frankly not negotiable leagues in between."¹⁸⁴ Very soon, however, Keith was to realize how clearly and how effectively those same eyes could transmit a message in his direction. As he

182 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 383.

183 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 225.

184 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 5.

raised himself to his knees, and, leaning with outstretched arm towards the foot of the bed, made as though to touch the stocking [...] She had, with startling suddenness, sat bolt upright, and [...] The gaze she fixed on her extravagant kinsman was of a kind to make him wonder how he contrived to remain, as he beautifully did, rigid.¹⁸⁵

Beerbohm's graphic account is a clever illustration of James's immense "respect for the inscrutable human eye and its powers of penetration and revelation."¹⁸⁶

In both "The Aspern Papers" and The Mote in the Middle Distance there are references to money, but only in the latter story is it used in a figurative sense. However, there is in Jamesian fiction an abundance of imagery concerning money, investments, and general wealth. In The Golden Bowl, the Prince sees in Charlotte "a likeness [...]" to some long, loose silk purse, well filled with gold pieces,¹⁸⁷ and Spencer Brydon of "The Jolly Corner" "knew what he meant and what he wanted; it was as clear as the figure on a cheque presented in demand for cash."¹⁸⁸ Of Major and Mrs. Monarch in "The Real Thing" it is said that

185 Ibid., p. 6-7.

186 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 231.

187 Henry James, The Golden Bowl, p. 46.

188 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 560.

"Their good looks had been their capital."¹⁸⁹ Beerbohm's Keith had, for some purpose not clearly defined, "always [...] offered rewards [...] But the actual recovery of the article--the business of drawing and crossing the cheque [...] had blankly appeared to him rather in the light of a sacrilege"¹⁹⁰--a figure also patterned after passages in "The Aspern Papers."

While Keith is waiting, perturbed, for his sister to speak, he is depicted as having "caught himself in the act of awfully computing, with a certain statistical passion, the distance between Rome and Boston."¹⁹¹ His figurative mathematical problem demands efforts apparently no less strenuous or perplexing than those of Spencer Brydon of "The Jolly Corner," who knew the difficulty of finding his way to Alice Staverton's address "among the dreadful multiplied numberings which seemed to him to reduce the whole place to some vast ledger-page."¹⁹² Lambert Strether, having read Mrs. Newsome's letters on the second day after his arrival in Paris,

189 Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., The Portable Henry James, New York, The Viking Press, 1951, p. 150.

190 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3-4.

191 Ibid., p. 6.

192 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 547.

felt it in a manner his duty to think out his state, to approve the process, and when he came in fact to trace the steps and add up the items, they sufficiently accounted for the sum. He had never expected [...] again to find himself young, and all the years and other things it had taken to make him so were exactly his present arithmetic [...]. Oh, if he should do the sum, no slate would hold the figures!¹⁹³

And Maisie's "choice [...]" was there before her like an impossible sum on a slate,¹⁹⁴ just as the troubles brought upon Maggie by her father's decision to marry Charlotte had "mounted up again, to her eyes, like a column of figures [...]" it was her father's wonderful act that [...] made the sum wrong."¹⁹⁵ Robert Gale suggests that "the three score or more of images deriving from simple arithmetic and geometry, which occasionally dot the fiction, show James unconsciously harking back [...] to unpleasant hours of drill in sums and angles."¹⁹⁶ Beerbohm has succeeded in capturing the suggestion of repugnance and extreme difficulty by his combination of "awfully" with "computing" and the additional qualifying phrase "with a certain statistical passion."

193 Henry James, The Ambassadors, p. 52-3.

194 -----, What Maisie Knew, In the Cage, The Pupil, p. 341.

195 -----, The Golden Bowl, p. 324.

196 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 211.

That Keith should be racking his brain in trying to determine the distance between Rome and Boston is possibly a Maxian quip at James, the international novelist. Perhaps Keith, with well-founded dread of imminent disappointment, was, in fact, contrasting Eva's puritanical convictions regarding the duty of renunciation with his own more European inclination to enjoy the pleasures life had to offer. Expressions such as "the [..] hardly generous fear that Eva had already made the great investigation 'on her own',"¹⁹⁷ and

when Eva, replying, "Well, one does, anyhow, leave a margin for the pretext, you know!" made him [..] wonder whether she were not more magnificent than he had ever given her credit for being. Perhaps it was to test this theory, or perhaps merely to gain time, that he now raised himself to his knees.¹⁹⁸

would seem to indicate Keith's insight into Eva's moral views. At any rate, the fantastic idea of the little boy's "act of awfully computing, with a certain statistical passion, the distance between Rome and Boston" does recall James's international tales, and his "extraordinary play of intellectual humor as he shows Americans looking at Europe and Europeans looking at America."¹⁹⁹

197 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 4.

198 Ibid., p. 6.

199 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 122.

James's use of music and toys for symbolic purposes did not escape the parodist's notice. Keith "had, in his converse with her [Eva] been never so conscious as now of the intervening leagues; they had never so insistently beaten the drum of his ear."²⁰⁰ This unusual arrangement of the word "eardrum" seems to have been purposely designed in imitation of James's music imagery. In The Ambassadors, Little Bilham and his artist friends, "the ingenuous compatriots [...] made the place resound with the vernacular [...] They twanged with a vengeance the aesthetic lyre--they drew from it wonderful airs."²⁰¹ Since the "vernacular" in this instance involved "enthusiasms and execrations," one can appreciate the humorous implications of the Jamesian figure of speech as well as that of the parody. Morgan Moreen appeared to his tutor to have "a whole range of refinement and perception--little musical vibrations as taking as picked-up airs,"²⁰² and, disappointed with "an odious want of seriousness" in Ralph Touchett's manner of talking, Isabel Archer "often found herself irritated by this perpetual fiddling."²⁰³ Considering the

200 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

201 Henry James, The Ambassadors, p. 80.

202 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 430.

203 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, p. 56.

whole range of imagery in Jamesian fiction, his use of music and toy symbols is comparatively small. Maybe this accounts for Beerbohm's only slight reference to the first and his merely literal use of the second.

Morgan Moreen of "The Pupil" is described as

a pale lean acute underdeveloped little cosmopolite, who liked intellectual gymnastics and who also, as regards the behaviour of mankind, had noticed more things than you might suppose, but who nevertheless had his proper playroom of superstitions, where he smashed a dozen toys a day.²⁰⁴

Adam Verver, while enjoying a short holiday from responsibility, seems "caught in the act of handling a relic of infancy,--sticking on the head of a broken soldier or tying the lock of a wooden gun."²⁰⁵ These two childhood images have been selected as examples because of their whimsical portrayal, on the one hand, of a prematurely adult child seen habitually reverting to practices peculiar to his chronological age; and, on the other hand, an adult temporarily displaying a certain immature irresponsibility in his nature. The mental picture of the adult-like condemnatory manner in which Keith, while contemplating the contents of stockings, passes judgment on his too rigid sister could very well have been painted by Henry James:

²⁰⁴ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 430.

²⁰⁵ Henry James, The Golden Bowl, p. 96.

Over and above the basis of (presumably) sweet-meats in the toes and heels, certain extrusions stood for a very plenary fulfilment of desire. And since Eva had set her heart on a doll of ample proportions and practicable eyelids--had asked that most admirable of her sex, their mother, for it with not less directness than he himself had put into his demand for a sword and helmet--her coyness now struck Keith as lying near to, at indeed a hardly measurable distance from, the border line of his patience. If she didn't want the doll, why the deuce had she made such a point of getting it?²⁰⁶

Even though Beerbohm does not here resort to symbolism, he evokes memories of interesting images in the writings of his victim.

The elaborated metaphor also features in The Mote in the Middle Distance. There are two, in fact, which together constitute about one-third of the parody. As Keith contemplated his sister, whose "voice emerged somewhat muffled by the bedclothes," he was reminded that "She was ever indeed the most telephonic of her sex."²⁰⁷ The "telephonic" figure is sustained for a full page, as Keith's idea of Eva's "magnificence" elicits from him the ironical analogy between the difficulty of predicting her utterances or of getting the last word in a debate with her, and the complexities of communication by telephone.

206 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 8.

207 Ibid., p. 5.

In talking to Eva you always had, as it were, your lips to the receiver. If you didn't try to meet her fine eyes, it was that you simply couldn't hope to; they were too many dark, too many buzzing and bewildering and all frankly not negotiable leagues in between [...]. With Eva, he had found, it was always safest to "ring off." It was with a certain sense of his rashness in the matter, therefore, that he now, with an air of feverishly "holding the line," said, "Oh, as to that!"²⁰⁸

The second metaphor is a comic imitation of James's painting imagery. Evidence of the author's interest in painting is to be found in his autobiography, in his travel books, and in the abundant and varied types of images scattered throughout his fiction. Of his early leanings towards this branch of art he recalls:

... my small "interest in art," that is my bent for gaping at illustrations and exhibitions, was absorbing and genuine. There were elements in the case that made it natural: the picture, the representative design, directly and strongly appealed to me, and was to appeal to me all my days.²⁰⁹

His travel books tell of his many visits, later in life, to the great European art galleries. But perhaps the most telling evidence of his interest in painting is embodied in his fiction. Painters are the leading characters in some of his novels and stories, such as Roderick Hudson and "The Madonna of the Future"; and in the numerous painting images in his writings are included the names of painters or their

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰⁹ F. W. Dupee, ed., Henry James: Autobiography, p. 149.

productions, and "all the mechanical phases of painting-- from preparing canvas, through chalking in outlines and mixing pigments, applying paint, retouching, varnishing, and changing work in a crowd-filled gallery."²¹⁰ For example, Ralph Touchett is so impressed by the charming Isabel Archer that "'A character like that,' he said to himself, 'is the finest thing in nature. It is finer than the finest work of art--than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral.'"²¹¹ Lambert Strether sees Jeanne de Vionnet as "a faint pastel in an oval frame [∟...∟] the portrait of a small old-time princess";²¹² and Prince Amerigo's "eyes rested, as they had already often done, on the brave darker wash of far-away water-colour that represented the most distant of the cathedral towns."²¹³ The last two examples illustrate the continued appeal, throughout his lifetime, of "the picture, the representative design" for James. Characters of his late novels especially view with undisguised pleasure sights which give impressions of some beautiful painting or which suggest an excellent subject for the

210 Robert L. Gale, Op. Cit., p. 126.

211 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady, p. 59.

212 -----, The Ambassadors, p. 159.

213 -----, The Golden Bowl, p. 241-2.

painter-artist. Lambert Strether has just such an experience when, in beautiful country surroundings, he perceives Chad Newsome and Mme de Vionnet approaching in a canoe:

The valley on the further side was all copper-green level and glazed pearly sky, a sky hatched across with screens of trimmed trees, which looked flat, like espaliers; and, though the rest of the village straggled away in the near quarter, the view had an emptiness [...]. What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing around the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture [...]. to fill up the measure.²¹⁴

Beerbohm, who knows quite well that James has "a passionate eye for what is fine in the arts of sculpture and painting and architecture, and for what is fine in nature,"²¹⁵ begins his painting metaphor with an illustration, even supplying the word as if to ensure that the reader does not miss the point. Cautiously watching for possible reactions from his sister, Keith

raised himself to his knees, and leaning with outstretched arm towards the foot of the bed, made as though to touch the stocking [...]. His posture, as he stared obliquely at Eva, recalled to him something seen in an "illustration"²¹⁶

Momentarily quelled, it appears, by the horrified gaze fixed upon him by his sister, his independent spirit soon

214 Henry James, The Ambassadors, p. 333.

215 Max Beerbohm, Around Theatres, p. 569-70.

216 -----, A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

reasserted itself:

His prop was possibly the reflection that flashed on him that, if she abounded in attenuations, well, hang it all, so did he! It was simply a difference of plane. Readjust the "values," as painters say, and there you were!²¹⁷

Thus Beerbohm, both here and in his inclusion of "the middle distance" in the title of the parody, presents a ludicrous demonstration of James's preoccupation with the art of painting. At the same time he elaborates his ironical picture of Keith at the mercy of his female companion, the penetrating stare and its upsetting potency, and the expression "if she abounded in attenuations" suggesting a somewhat analogous degree of momentary male helplessness in "The Aspern Papers"²¹⁸ and in The Ambassadors (Mme de Vionnet was "full of attenuation"),²¹⁹ respectively.

It has been demonstrated that, despite his sustained deliberate economy of language, Beerbohm has succeeded in directing attention to a sizable quantity of Jamesian imagery, enhancing, in the meantime, the ironic quality of the writings of his victim by an additional ironic touch of his own. Naturally, he did not fail to interject into his figurative language homely and

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

²¹⁸ Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: Selected Fiction, p. 383.

²¹⁹ Henry James, The Ambassadors, p. 187.

idiomatic expressions such as abound in Jamesian fiction, and are occasionally incorporated into an elaborate symbolic image. The following section will consider Beerbohm's comic reproduction of some of the mannerisms for which James is perhaps more widely known than for the intrinsic value of his works.

c) Mannerisms.--It is sometimes startling, even a little shocking, to find in James's writings, in the midst of a profusion of sonorous and dignified language,--and, to add to their conspicuousness, frequently encircled by quotation marks--idiomatic expressions, familiar colloquialisms, and euphemisms. "James's English characters," it is said, "speak more slang than those of his fellow novelists of English nationality. Sometimes perhaps it is overdone, but James saw expressive possibilities in the idiom of the leisured."²²⁰ Edmund Wilson notes that during the second of James's literary periods, he "acquired a new flexibility and a personal idiom,"²²¹ and Ezra Pound says: "I think half the American idiom is recorded in Henry James's writing."²²² Beerbohm accordingly seasons the sentences of the parody with expressions, duly

220 D. W. Jefferson, Op. Cit., p. 60.

221 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 65.

222 Ibid., p. 28.

parenthesized, and closely resembling those used so lavishly by James, such as: "teasers," "what for," "on her own," "come up to the scratch," "ring off," "holding the line," "him all over"; and with euphemistic expletives such as "hang it all" and "the deuce." The note of spasmodic informality is heightened, as in the writings of James, by the inflections effected chiefly by the italicizing and underlining of certain monosyllabic words, such as: was, are, she, had, not, as in "if she abounded in attentuations, well, hang it all, so did he!"²²³ and "the poor dear old woebegone and so very beguilingly not refractive mirror of the moment."²²⁴ In his introduction to The Selected Letters of Henry James, Leon Edel remarks with reference to the notable change in James's epistolary style:

The letters did become longer and more intricate. The late style, with its euphemisms, parentheses, ornate metaphors, nuanced expressions, cadenced sentences, was carried over from the novels into letter-writing.²²⁵

Few critics fail to mention at least some of his mannerisms, but it is doubtful if any body of criticism is as revealing, in this respect, as Beerbohm's parody of James.

223 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 6.

224 Ibid., p. 6.

225 Leon Edel, ed., The Selected Letters of Henry James, New York, Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1955, p. xxii.

In the very first sentence of his parody, Beerbohm leaves the reader under no delusion as to his comic intention regarding that style which G. K. Chesterton has described as "The Hampered, or Obstacle Race Style, in which one continually trips over commas and relative clauses; and where the sense has to be perpetually qualified lest it should mean too much."²²⁶ Beerbohm begins his story thus:

It was with a sense of a, for him, very memorable something that he peered now into the immediate future, and tried, not without compunction, to take that period up where he had, prospectively, left it.²²⁷

"Could anything," says Edgar Johnson, "more neatly underline James's fussily meticulous placing of modifiers and his old-maidish precision of punctuation?"²²⁸ The excesses involved in the Jamesian exploitation, as it were, of grammatical syntax would naturally prove fascinating to writers addicted to mimicry. "Parodists have found sport among his adverbs and far-flung parentheses," observes Pelham Edgar. "It is not to be disputed that the game abounds."²²⁹ These extravagances Max Beerbohm consistently

²²⁶ G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, London, Thornton Butterworth, 1913, p. 229.

²²⁷ Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 3.

²²⁸ Edgar Johnson, Op. Cit., p. 22.

²²⁹ Pelham Edgar, Op. Cit., p. 206.

employs with the usual self-revealing degree of distortion. The following sentence from the parody is an interesting example of Beerbohm's reproduction of the sentence structure which abounds in the writings of the later James:

"Oh, you certainly haven't, my dear, the trick of propinquity!" was a thrust she had once parried by saying that, in that case, he hadn't--to which his unspoken rejoinder that she had caught her tone from the peevish young woman at the Central seemed to him (if not perhaps in the last, certainly in the last but one, analysis) to lack finality.²³⁰

Beerbohm evidently was not blind to James's defects, nor did he hesitate to expose them to ridicule. However, despite the want of seriousness in the development of his theme, there are not lacking in the parody sentences which, because of their dignified rhythmical pattern and their dramatic intonation, have the effect of momentarily eclipsing the note of ridicule, and of drawing attention to the more admirable qualities of the style so ably defended by Pelham Edgar, who says:

230 Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland, p. 5.

... at the worst he is occasionally more orotund and magnificent in manner than a slight occasion may warrant, wrapping a single situation round with a bewildering web of words [...] with respect to the choice and manipulation of words and in the harmonious fall of his periods he is a sufficient master [...] there are in him more pages than we dwell on for the sheer beauty of expression. Infelicities there are, of course, but these are mainly constructional, such as his multiplied parentheses, and a mannerism that grew upon him of wilfully misplacing his prepositions [...] when James is at his best the great wash of his words flows like a tide into all the emotional recesses of his subject, and we are willing then to forgive the occasional heaviness and the not-infrequent over-elaboration.²³¹

Pelham Edgar's comprehensive criticism of James merely endorses the humorous, indirect, qualified tribute tendered by him by Max Beerbohm in The Mote in the Middle Distance.

7. Summary and Conclusions.

In The Mote in the Middle Distance Max Beerbohm reproduced in distorted fashion many of the peculiarities discernible in the writings of Henry James.

The symbolic title, while indicating the trivial proportions of Beerbohm's theme, recalls James's enthusiastic preoccupation with his life-long impressions, which provided him with a fund of ideas--in his parlance, the "air-borne particles" or "germs" for his fiction. The title reappears in the text of Beerbohm's story as

231 Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, p. 94, 99.

signifying the symbolic meaning which James was accustomed to derive from the most ordinary experiences, and to translate into an abundance of symbolic imagery for the enrichment of his literary productions. The parody also contains a generous supply of images, including elaborated metaphors which have the added interest of implied association with characters, incidents, or reflections in James's stories and novels.

The story in the parody is centred around a perplexing situation reminiscent of the Jamesian predicament, with its inevitable call for renunciation from individuals whose moral sense demands that, above all considerations, they cling persistently to the feeling of being right with themselves, regardless of the demands of conventional codes. Beerbohm chooses as his characters two children, apparently as a comic salute to James, who had insisted in his essay "The Art of Fiction," that "The moral consciousness of a child is [...] a part of life" and, therefore, an appropriate subject for novels; and who had demonstrated his theory notably in What Maisie Knew, The Pupil, and The Turn of the Screw.

The Mote in the Middle Distance was designed also to emulate James's striving for economy of means, and his knack of procuring this by substituting for a multitude of descriptive details of character and incident, the

progressive cerebrations of a central character. Beerbohm developed his parody according to the point of view pattern, appropriating as many aspects of the method as he presumably judged convenient.

Beerbohm presents as well an exaggerated imitation of James's restricted but meaningful use of dialogue: for the portrayal of character, for dramatic effect, as a medium for symbolic imagery, and as an illustration of the preciousness of language so prevalent in James's writings and so frequently used even by his child-characters. James's mannerisms: his long-windedness and obscurity of language; his involuted sentences and ever-recurring modifiers; his use of idiom even in the midst of high-flown language; his habitual ironic implications; his parenthetical asides; and underscoring of words: all are re-created in the parody.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this work was to examine The Mote in the Middle Distance, Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland, in order to study and evaluate it as an imitation of the literary style and method of Henry James.

The word "parody" is derived from the Greek "parōidiā," meaning "a mock-song or poem." The first recorded mock-imitations were Greek burlesques of the poems of Homer, and it was the Greek Aristophanes who, in adding to his mimicry a satirical tone, took the initial steps in the production of true parody. Mediaeval clerics introduced mock-imitation into English literature when they satirised and burlesqued, mainly in Latin, religious institutions, themes, and devotions, including the Bible and the Mass, and occasionally mingled ridicule of the Court of Love and chivalric love with that of religious themes. Chaucer's The Rime of Sir Thopas, which parodies the verse romances in general, constitutes an important advance towards the true art of parody because of the subtlety of its tone, and some of the answer poems of Tottel's Miscellany contain elements of purely literary parody.

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Dramatic burlesque, which was aimed chiefly at currently cultivated literary forms, was introduced in the Elizabethan period, and by the opening years of the seventeenth century dramatic parody had begun to flourish. This parody, though usually coarse and irreverent, is noteworthy in that it shows that humorists of that period tended to use parody as a weapon against adherence to outmoded literary forms and the current craze for extravagant modes of expression. During the Jacobean period and the later seventeenth century, there was little direct literary parody, though mockery abounded in the form of burlesque, travesty, and of mock-heroic poetry. A notable contribution in this age was the neat and economical method of parody used by Sir John Suckling. In the eighteenth century direct parody gave place almost entirely to burlesque, the mock epic, and direct satire. Literary parody, both in prose and verse, flourished in the nineteenth century, which has been called the golden age of parody in England. The excesses of the several literary schools of thought: the Romantics, the Victorians, the Pre-Raphaelites, the Aesthetes and Decadents, caused a great outburst of reactionary parody and burlesque, and much of the ridicule seems to have been written for preventive or curative purposes. Calverley, Swinburne, and J. K. Stephen excelled in verse parody and Max Beerbohm showed, as

Chaucer had done in mediaeval literature, the superior effectiveness of the stroke of subtlety both in prose and verse.

Very little English prose parody was written before, or indeed, during the eighteenth century. However, Swift's Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind, which mimicked contemporary pseudo-philosophical writing, and seventeenth century prose in general, and the fictional prose parodies of Fielding and Jane Austen are worthy of mention. The mock-review was introduced in the nineteenth century, chiefly by Douglas Jerrold and Thackeray. The latter's Novels by Eminent Hands, published in Punch in 1847, set a pattern by which imitations of a writer's excesses were written much more compactly than the works parodied. Prose parodists of the Aesthetes and Decadents include W. H. Mallock, G. S. Street, Hitchin, and Max Beerbohm. However, Beerbohm's best parodies are contained in A Christmas Garland (1906), a volume of mock-imitations of eighteen contemporary authors, including Henry James. Much has been said in praise of this book, most of the parodies of which were written at the expense of writers whom Beerbohm respected and admired. The parody of Henry James compares favorably with parodies of him written by Sir Owen Seaman and Philip Guedalla, and was greatly appreciated by the victim himself. Early in the twentieth

century parodists such as G. K. Chesterton and Father Ronald Knox turned to the past for targets for their mockery. By now burlesque was once more gaining ascendancy. The golden age of parody was coming to an end.

The examination of the historical development of parody revealed the evolution of the genre in the following stages: the origin of the name and form of mock-imitation of verse among the Greeks, with the addition of the satirical tone by the Greek Aristophanes; the introduction by Chaucer into his imitations of verse romances of the more effective weapon of subtle irony, a device that was revived and refined by Max Beerbohm in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the application of the form to drama and, to a lesser extent, prose, in the Elizabethan period, and the growing tendency to discountenance literary idiosyncrasies through the medium of parody; the invention of a neat and economical method of parody by Sir John Suckling in the seventeenth century, and the application of this method to parodies of prose fiction by Thackeray in the nineteenth century; the suggestion, particularly noticeable in the parodies of Max Beerbohm, of the parodist's respect and esteem for his victim. Thus by the opening decades of the twentieth century direct literary parody had evolved into a form of satirical mock-imitation of the literary excesses and

idiosyncrasies of a writer or of a school of writers or of a work or a class of writings; mimicry which was characterised at its best by a tone of subtle irony, a tone which failed to conceal the parodist's underlying respect and esteem for his victim.

According to the modern concept, parody is mimicry of a work or works or of a style of art. Literary parody humorously exposes, by means of exaggerated imitation, the weaknesses, excesses, and outstanding peculiarities in a specific work, or works, or in the style and method of an author, or of a class of writers. In its indirect exposition of a writer's literary traits as exemplified in his works, parody may be a valuable form of criticism.

Parody is satirical in tone, but generally it is more subtle and more memorable when inspired by the parodist's respect and admiration for his victim.

Since the element of mockery is common to parody, burlesque, caricature, and travesty, it is possible for two or more of these forms of ridicule to appear in the same literary composition. For the same reason, it is inevitable that, in references to the wider applications of their uses, the terms should sometimes be used interchangeably. However, the special province of parody is mimicry of verbal expression, and it is in the purposeful, controlled exaggeration of an apparently close imitation of an author's

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mode of expression that the skill of the parodist is most plainly manifest.

From the beginning of his literary career in 1865 until his death in 1916, the style and method of Henry James evolved through three different phases. James's early style was characterised by rather melancholy, romantic, serious narratives, with their picturesque characters and detailed descriptiveness of character and situation, their emphasis on display of emotion in dialogue and in action, their looseness of plot, and their general lack of depth and complexity. The enriching experience of a trip to Europe (1869-70) resulted in an almost immediate transformation of James's writing methods, and the middle period of his career is noted for the production of his brilliant, witty international stories, with their epigrammatic style, their greater precision of detail, their point of view method, and, in time, their portrayal of the depth of experience. The international stories eventually gave place, for a time, to social and political tales, and, during the author's period of frustration, approximately 1885-95, to stories of struggling artists and writers and to the writing of drama. The failure of his play Guy Domville in 1895 caused James to return to the production of stories and novels, and his application to his already carefully developed literary

style and method of the ideas and techniques acquired during the years of his concentration on the writing of plays and short stories constituted what is known as his third, or later manner.

During his middle and later periods, James preserved in his writings a unifying thematic pattern. Two central themes are predominant in his profusion of literary productions: the theme of international contrasts concerned chiefly with the American image in Europe and the idea of Europeans as they appear to Americans either in an American or a European setting, and the theme of moral-aesthetic conflicts within the individual as a consequence of his contacts with other individuals or with society in general. Meanwhile, intermingled with one or both of the central themes are the constantly recurring motifs of: the significance of the arts in the lives of individual characters, the impelling passion for fullness of experience in living, and the prevailing presence of evil. In the three major novels of his final period, James fuses his two central themes, just as he succeeds, in The Golden Bowl, in realising his dream of reconciling in his two central characters the opposing cultures of America and Europe.

As a result of a lifetime of straining for the perfection of his art; James, by the time he had arrived

the major phase of his development, had greatly enhanced his peculiarly artistic manner of expression by his increasing use of a variety of devices of rhetoric. His adoption of a central consciousness for the development of his theme enabled him to eliminate from his method of narration considerable details of incident and character, to reduce his dialogue to the minimum needed for dramatic effectiveness, and to preserve a moral detachment in the portrayal of the conduct and decisions of his characters in their struggles for escape from inevitable dilemmas. Dialogue and revealed reflections in James's fiction are embellished with a profuseness of symbolic imagery and elaborated metaphors. James's propensity for using uncommon arrangements of equally uncommon words, for prolonging and complicating his convoluted sentences by the use of parenthetical, homely, and idiomatic expressions, and a multiplicity of modifiers, as well as his lavish use of symbolic imagery and subtly ironic implications, results in a language that is frequently difficult to interpret.

The analysis of The Mote in the Middle Distance demonstrates the ingenious manner in which Beerbohm simulates scrupulous conformity to Henry James's manipulation of his art. The implications of the title are manifold, suggesting, first of all, the trivial proportions of the

basic theme for the story in the parody. Its chief function, however, seems to be the exposure of James's obsession with "germs," "air-borne particles": ideas for his fiction to be gained from his impressions from human experience or from his assiduous observance of the masterpieces of art and architecture, drama, and other forms of culture. Its symbolic meaning is intensified with its reappearance in the text as signifying for the central character in the story, and to a degree of obsessiveness, all sorts of things. The use of the word "middle" could also constitute a form of apology to Henry James, whose frustrating experiences during the middle phase of his literary career had inspired stories of unappreciated writers, like the stories of the author of the novel "The Middle Years" and of the literary critic who is planning to write an article for The Middle. The title could thus be Beerbohm's way of assuring James that he had not ceased to appreciate the latter's literary genius.

The story of The Mote in the Middle Distance is indeed centred around states of feeling and a dilemma of existence, except that, in this instance, it is the account of the predicament of two small children burdened with the problem of having to decide whether or not to explore the contents of their Christmas stockings. True to the Jamesian pattern, the children eventually forego

the pleasure of possessing the coveted toys, but not without a struggle involving very serious thinking and some grave and rather abstruse conversation, the implications of which are conveyed by symbols and by an ironic and sometimes dramatic tone. Beerbohm surrounds the ridiculous situation with an air of momentousness by associating the children, by implication, with characters and situations in Jamesian fiction, such as The Turn of the Screw, The Pupil, What Maisie Knew, The Aspern Papers, and the three major novels published during 1902-4: The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl. Similarly, it is by associative language and ideas that the parodist exploits the moral sense of his original: his preoccupation with patterns of conduct not necessarily in keeping with the demands of the decalogue or of the conventional code, but artistically appropriate for his characters. Though their decisions frequently entail bitter renunciation of some ordinarily lawful pleasure, they must, above all else, preserve the feeling of being right with themselves.

The Mote in the Middle Distance is presented in accordance with the plan of James's point of view method, much of the information regarding character and situation being made available through revelation of the progressive behaviour of the inner consciousness of a central character, who is also the ironic centre of the story. The

omniscient-author makes his presence felt at two points in the story, contributing an added touch of irony, as well as a suggestion of the detachment associated with the point of view method, and an illusion of curtain-closing at the conclusion of a dramatic scene.

In his portrayal of the cogitations of Keith Tantalus, and in the restricted but meaningful dialogue between Keith and his sister, Beerbohm recaptures, always with exaggeration: James's use of irony; his obscurity of language, rendered more complicated by his involuted sentences; his use of symbolic imagery; and his mannerisms.

Thus it is evident that Max Beerbohm presented his materials in a manner reminiscent of the writing-process of Henry James, an accomplishment that could hardly be possible if he were not more than ordinarily familiar with the workings of James's mind, as well as with his manner of writing. His imitation of Henry James was unmistakably deliberate; distorted; humorous in the Jamesian fashion, with the additional revealing ingredient of Maxian piquancy; and, in his exaggerated reproduction of the excesses, weaknesses, and outstanding peculiarities of his victim, he recaptured, in a delightfully ingenious manner, some of the personality attributes of Henry James, as well as the style and method of his literary productions.

Obviously also, The Mote in the Middle Distance, in its portrayal, by mock-serious imitation, of the essential features of the style and method of the author parodied, may be classified as a body of both creative and cognitive criticism. The parodist's self-expression is to be found in the easily detected Maxian flavor of impishness, which highlights minutiae of characteristics both of Jamesian origin and of human frailties observed by him in his constant search for incongruities, and which evidently prompted the choice of his theme, the trivial proportions of which are implied by the title of the parody. In the creation of his parody, Beerbohm reveals not only James's excesses and defects, but also the finer qualities of his works. Hence it is concluded that The Mote in the Middle Distance meets the requirements of good parody, and that its imitation of the style and method of Henry James, delightful in the delicate subtlety of its implications and manipulated with refined and controlled exaggeration, is not only an indirect criticism of James's weaknesses and extravagances of style but constitutes also a generous tribute in its skillful reproduction of the general literary manner of its victim.

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ABSTRACT OF

The Mote in the Middle Distance: Max Beerbohm's
Parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland¹

In 1906, Max Beerbohm published in The Saturday Review a parody of Henry James entitled The Mote in the Middle Distance, which was included, in 1912, in the first edition of his volume of parodies, A Christmas Garland.

The purpose of this work is to examine The Mote in the Middle Distance, Max Beerbohm's parody of Henry James in A Christmas Garland, and to evaluate its imitation of the style and method of Henry James.

Chapter I surveys the historical development of parody in England as far as the age in which Max Beerbohm practised the art. It then explores the modern concept of parody, noting its inclusion of the elements found in the best parody written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, it establishes a working definition to serve as a basis for the analysis and evaluation of The Mote in the Middle Distance. It defines parody as a satirical mock-imitation which with controlled exaggeration, exposes in humorous fashion the excesses, weaknesses, and distinguishing traits in a particular

¹ Sister Mary Philippa, R.S.M., thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ottawa, Ontario, 1968, v-157.

work, or works, of an author, or a class of authors.

Chapter II studies briefly the evolution of the literary manner of Henry James, and presents a general picture of James's preoccupation with certain themes and of the devices of rhetoric used by him in the presentation of his themes. It is noted that, because of his constant striving for the perfection of his art, Henry James's style and method of writing gradually evolved through three different stages, generally called his early, middle, and later phases. A unifying element throughout the production of his literary productions was the author's preoccupation with the two central themes of international contrasts as seen in the American image in Europe and the American vision of Europeans in both an American and a European setting, and of the moral-aesthetic conflicts within the individual in consequence of his contacts with other individuals and with society in general. Intermingled with the central themes are the constantly recurring minor motifs: the significance of the arts in the lives of individuals; the impelling passion for fullness of experience in living; and the prevailing presence of evil. James's story-telling techniques include a variety of devices, the particular discussion of which is reserved for the third chapter of this thesis.

Chapter III consists of an exegesis of The Mote in the Middle Distance, concurrent with commentaries designed to demonstrate Beerbohm's imitation of the techniques and stylistic devices of Henry James. It concludes that, in the creation of this parody, Max Beerbohm did meet the requirements of good parody as stated in the working definition established in Chapter I. In his skilful reproduction of the distinguishing characteristics of the style and method of Henry James, he reveals not only the weaknesses and excesses, but also the finer qualities of James's literary manner, taking care, in the meantime, to preserve his own identity and self-expression by the choice of a theme, the trivial proportions of which are suggested by the symbolic title of his composition, and by the special flavor of Maxian piquancy which permeates the parody, and which is unmistakably his own.

