which, whatever one's privilege, a person living with a grave disease in this particular culture is inducted ever more consciously, ever more needily, yet with ever more profound and transformative revulsion into the mangledly differential world of health care under American capitalism.) It was with joy, with chagrin, with intense discomfort that I was coming to feel such displacements more and more in the condensing and complexly representative space of the classroom as well—a classroom space regularly reconstituted by threat and mourning and by the bareness of the cognitive and performative resistances we were able to mount to them. Finding myself as teacher, as exemplar, as persuader, as reader to be less and less at the center of my own classroom, I was also finding that the voice of a certain abyssal displacement—and mine was certainly not the only such displacement going on in these classrooms—could provide effects that might sometimes wrench the boundaries of discourse around in productive if not always obvious ways.

Chapter 1

SHAME, THEATRICALITY, AND QUEER PERFORMATIVITY: HENRY JAMES'S

The Art of the Novel

In the couple of weeks after the World Trade Center was destroyed in September 2001, I had a daily repetition of an odd experience, one that was probably shared by many walkers in the same mid-southern latitudes of Manhattan. Turning from a street onto Fifth Avenue, even if I was heading north, I would feel compelled first to look south in the direction of the World Trade Center, now gone. This inexplicably furtive glance was associated with a conscious wish: that my southward vista would again be blocked by the familiar sight of the pre-September 11 twin towers, somehow come back to loom over us in all their complacent ugliness. But, of course, the towers were always still gone. Turning away, shame was what I would feel.

Why shame? I think this was, in effect, one of those situations in which, as Silvan Tomkins puts it, "one is suddenly looked at by one who is strange, or . . . one wishes to look at or commune with another person but suddenly cannot because he is strange, or one expected him to be familiar but he suddenly appears unfamiliar, or one started to smile but found one was smiling at a stranger" (Shame 135). Not that an urban vista is quite the same as a loved face, but it isn't quite different, either: the despoiled view was a suddenly toothless face, say, or suddenly preoccupied, or suddenly dead—to say nothing, even, of the historical implications surrounding that particular change of landscape.
These flashes of shame didn’t seem particularly related to prohibition or transgression. Beyond that, though it was I who felt the shame, it wasn’t especially myself I was ashamed of. It would be closer to say I was ashamed for the estranged and denuded skyline; such feelings interleaved, of course, the pride, solidarity, and grief that also bound me to the city. The shame had to do, too, with visibility and spectacle — the hapless visibility of the towers’ absence now, the shockingly compelling theatricality of their destruction.

Recent work by theorists and psychologists of shame locates the protoform (eyes down, head averted) of this powerful affect — which appears in infants very early, between the third and seventh month of life, just after the infant has become able to distinguish and recognize the face of its caregiver — at a particular moment in a particular repeated narrative. That is the moment when the circuit of mirroring expressions between the child’s face and the caregiver’s recognized face (a circuit that, if it can be called a form of primary narcissism, suggests that narcissism from the very first throws itself sociably, dangerously into the gravitational field of the other) is broken: the moment when the adult face fails or refuses to play its part in the continuation of mutual gaze; when, for any one of many reasons, it fails to be recognizable to, or recognizing of, the infant who has been, so to speak, “giving face” based on a faith in the continuity of this circuit. As Michael Franz Basch explains, “The infant’s behavioral adaptation is quite totally dependent on maintaining effective communication with the executive and coordinating part of the infant-mother system. The shame-humiliation response, when it appears, represents the failure or absence of the smile of contact, a reaction to the loss of feedback from others, indicating social isolation and signaling the need for relief from that condition” (765). The protoaffect shame is thus not defined by prohibition (nor, as a result, by repression). Shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication. Indeed, like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication. Blazons of shame, the “fallen face” with eyes down and head averted — and, to a lesser extent, the blush — are semaphores of trouble and at the same time a desire to reconstitute the interpersonal bridge.

But in interrupting identification, shame, too, makes identity. In fact, shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating. One of the strangest features of shame, but perhaps also the one that offers the most conceptual leverage for political projects, is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment by someone else, someone else’s embarrassment, stigma, debility, bad smell, or strange behavior, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me — assuming I’m a shame-prone person — with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable.

Lecturing on shame, I used to ask listeners to join in a thought experiment, visualizing an unwashed, half-insane man who would wander into the lecture hall mumbling loudly, his speech increasingly accusatory and disjointed, and publicly urinate in the front of the room, then wander out again. I pictured the excruciation of everyone else in the room: each looking down, wishing to be anywhere else yet conscious of the inexorable fate of being exactly there, inside the individual skin of which each was burningly aware; at the same time, though, unable to stanch the hemorrhage of painful identification with the misbehaving man. That’s the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality.

The conventional way of distinguishing shame from guilt is that shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is, whereas guilt attaches to what one does. Although Tomkins is less interested than anthropologists, moralists, or popular psychologists in distinguishing between the two, the implication remains that one is something in experiencing shame, though one may or may not have secure hypotheses about what. In the developmental process, shame is now often considered the affect that most defines the place wherein a sense of self will develop (“Shame is to self psychology what anxiety is to ego psychology — the keystone affect” [Broucek 369]). Which I take to mean, not at all that it is the place where identity is most securely attached to essences, but rather that it is the place where the question of identity arises most organically and most relationally.

At the same time, shame both derives from and aims toward sociability. As Basch writes, “The shame-humiliation reaction in infancy of hanging the head and averting the eyes does not mean the child is conscious of rejection, but indicates that effective contact with another person has been broken... Therefore, shame-humiliation throughout life can be thought of as an inability to effectively arouse the other person’s positive reactions to one’s communications. The exquisite painfulness of that reaction in later life.
harks back to the earliest period when such a condition is not simply uncomfortable but threatens life itself” (765–66). So that whenever the actor, or the performance artist, or, I could add, the activist in identity politics, offers the spectacle of her or his “infantile” narcissism to a speculating eye, the stage is set (so to speak) for either a newly dramatized flooding of the subject by the shame of refused return, or the successful pulsation of the mirroring regard through a narcissistic circuit rendered elliptical (which is to say: necessarily distorted) by the hyperbole of its original cast. As best described by Tomkins, shame effaces itself; shame points and projects; shame turns itself inside out; shame and pride, shame and dignity, shame and display. Shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove. Shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is performance. I mean theatrical performance. Performance underlies shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things. Shame is the effect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extraversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and—performativity.

Henry James undertook the New York edition of his work (a handsome twenty-four-volume consolidation and revision, with new prefaces, of what he saw as his most important novels and stories to date) at the end of a relatively blissful period of literary production (“the major phase”)—a blissful period poised, however, between two devastating bouts of melancholia. The first one of these, a scouring depression, was precipitated in 1895 by what James experienced as the oblitative failure of his ambitions as a playwright, being howled off the stage at the premiere of Guy Domville. By 1897, though, when the volumes of the New York edition were beginning to appear, James’s theatrical self-projection was sufficiently healed that he had actually begun a new round of playwriting and of negotiations with producers—eventuating, indeed, in performance. The next of James’s terrible depressions was triggered, not by humiliation on the stage, but by the failure of the New York edition itself: its total failure to sell and its apparently terminal failure to evoke any recognition from any readership.

When we read the New York edition prefaces, then, we read a series of texts that are in the most active imaginable relation to shame. Marking and indeed exulting in James’s recovery from a near-fatal episode of shame in the theater, the prefaces, gorgeous with the playful spectacle of a productive and almost promiscuously entrusted or “thrown” authorial narcissism, yet also offer the spectacle of inviting (that is, leaving themselves open to) what was in fact their and their author’s immediate fate: annihilation by the blankness of nonrecognizing responses from any reader. The prefaces are way out there, in short, and in more than a couple of senses of out.

In them, at least two different circuits of the hyperbolic narcissism/shame circuit are being enacted, and in a volatile relation to each other. The first of these, as I’ve suggested, is the drama of James’s relation to his audience of readers. In using the term “audience” here, I want to mark James’s own insistent thematization of elements in this writing as specifically theatrical, with all the implications of excitement, overinvestment, danger, loss, and melancholia that, as Joseph Litvak has argued in Caught in the Act, the theater by this time held for him. The second and related narcissism/shame circuit dramatized in the prefaces is the perilous and productive one that extends between the speaker and his own past. James’s most usual gesture in the prefaces is to figure his relation to the past as the intensely charged relationship between the author of the prefaces and the often much younger man who wrote the novels and stories to which the prefaces are appended—or between either of these men and a yet younger figure who represents the fiction itself.

What undertaking could be more narcissistically exciting or more narcissistically dangerous than that of rereading, revising, and consolidating one’s own “collected works”? If these, or their conjured young author, return one’s longing gaze with dead, indifferent, or even distracted eyes, what limit can there be to the shame (of him, of oneself) so incurred? Equal to that danger, however, is the danger of one’s own failure to recognize or to desire them or him. As Tomkins writes, “Like disgust, [shame] operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both. The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy. Hence any barrier to further exploration which partially reduces interest . . . will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure” (Shame 135). To consider interest itself a distinct affect and to posit an association between shame and (the incomplete inhibition of) interest makes sense phenomenologically, I think, about depression, and specifically about the depressions out of which James had emerged to write his “major novels”—novels that do, indeed,

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seem to show the effects of a complicated history of disruptions and prodigal remediations in the ability to take an interest. Into such depressions as well, however, he was again to be plunged.

The James of the prefacing revels in the same startling metaphor that animates the present-day popular literature of the “inner child”: the metaphor that presents one’s relation to one’s own past as a relationship, intersubjective as it is intergenerational. And, it might be added, for most people by definition homoerotic. Often, the younger author is present in these prefaces as a figure in himself, but even more frequently the fictions themselves, or characters in them, are given his form. One needn’t be invested (as pop psychology is) in a normalizing, hygienic teleology of healing this relationship, in a mawkish overvaluation of the “child”’s access to narrative authority at the expense of that of the “adult,” or in a totalizing ambition to get the two selves permanently merged into one, to find that this figuration opens out a rich landscape of relational positionalities—perhaps especially around issues of shame. James certainly displays no desire to become once again the young and mystified author of his early productions. To the contrary, the very distance of these inner self-figurations from the speaking self of the present is marked, treasured, and in fact eroticized. Their distance (temporal, figured as intersubjective, figured in turn a notion of the subject) seems, if anything, to constitute the relished internal space of James’s absorbed subjectivity. Yet all that the distance itself is prized, James’s speculation as to what different outcomes might be evoked by different kinds of overture across the distance—by different sorts of solicitation, different forms of touch, interest, and love between the less and the more initiated figure—provides a great deal of the impetus to his theoretical project in these essays. The speaking self of the prefaces does not attempt to merge with the potentially shaming or shamed figurations of its younger self, younger fictions, younger heroes; its attempt is to love them. That love is shown to occur both in spite of shame and, more remarkably, through it.

Not infrequently, as we’ll see, the undertaking to reparent, as it were, or “reissue” the bastard infant of (what is presented as) James’s juvenilia is described simply as male parturition. James also reports finding in himself “that finer consideration hanging in the parental breast about the maimed or slighted, the disfigured or defeated, the unlucky or unlikely child—with thishapless small mortal thought of further as somehow ‘compromising’ ” (Art 80–81). James offers a variety of reasons for being embarrassed by these

waifs of his past, but the persistence with which shame accompanies their repeated conjuration is matched by the persistence with which, in turn, he describes himself as cathecting or eroticizing that very shame as a way of coming into loving relation to queer or “compromising” youth.

In a number of places, for example, James more or less explicitly invokes Frankenstein and all the potential uncanniness of the violently disavowed male birth. But he invokes that uncanniness in order to undo it, or at least do something further with it, by offering the spectacle of—not his refusal—but his eroticized eagerness to recognize his progeny even in its oddness: “The thing done and dismissed has ever, at the best, for the ambitious workman, a trick of looking dead if not buried, so that he almost thaws with ecstasy when, on an anxious review, the flush of life reappears. It is verily on recognizing that flush on a whole side of “The Awkward Age” that I brand it all, but ever so tenderly, as monstrous” (Art 99). It is as if the ecstasy-inducing power of the young creature’s “flush of life,” which refers to even while evoking the potentially shaming brand of monotony, is the reflex of the flush of shame or repudiation the older man in this rewriting doesn’t feel. Similarly, James writes about his mortifyingly extravagant miscalculations concerning the length of (what he had imagined as) a short story: “painfully associated for me has “The Spoils of Poynton” remained, until recent reperusal, with the awkward consequence of that fond error. The subject had emerged . . . all suffused with a flush of meaning: thanks to which irresistible air, as I could but plead in the event, I found myself . . . beguiled and led on.” “The thing had ‘come,’” he concludes with an undisguised sensuous pleasure but hardly a simple one, “the flower of conception had bloomed” (124). And he describes his revision of the early fictions both as his (or their?) way of “remaining unashamed” and as a process by which they have “all joyously and blushingly renewed themselves” (345; emphasis added). What James seems to want here is to remove the flush from its terminal place as the betraying blazon of a ruptured narcissistic circuit, and instead to put it in circulation: as the sign of a tenderly strengthened and indeed now “irresistible” bond between the writer of the present and the abashed writer of the past, or between either of them and the queer little conceptus.

You can see the displacement at work in this passage from James’s most extended description of his process of revision:

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Since to get and to keep finished and dismissed work well behind one, and to have as little to say to it and about it as possible, had been for years one’s only law, so, during that flat interregnum . . . creeping superstitions as to what it might really have been had time up to gather and flourish. Not least among these rioted doubtless the fond fear that any tidying-up of the uncanny brood, any removal of accumulated dust, any washing of wizened faces, or straightening of grizzled locks, or twitching, to a better effect, of superannuated garments, might let one in, as the phrase is, for expensive renovations. I make use here of the figure of age and infirmity, but in point of fact I had rather viewed the reappearance of the first-born of my progeny . . . as a descent of awkward infants from the nursery to the drawing room under the kind appeal of enquiring, of possibly interested, visitors. I had accordingly taken for granted the common decency of such a case — the responsible glance of some power above from one nursing to another, the rapid flash of an anxious needle, the not imperceptible effect of a certain audible splash of soap and water . . . .

“Hands off altogether on the nurse’s part!” was . . . strictly conceivable; but only in the light of the truth that it had never taken effect in any fair and stately . . . re-issue of anything. Therefore it was easy to see that any such apologetic suppression as that of the “altogether,” any such admission as that of a single dab of the soap, left the door very much ajar (Art. 337–338).

The passage that begins by conjuring the uncanniness of an abandoned, stunted, old/young Frankenstein brood (reminiscent of the repudiated or abused children in Dickens, such as Smike and Jenny Wren, whose deformed bodies stand for developmental narratives at once accelerated and frozen by, among other things, extreme material want) modulates reassuringly into the warm, overprotected Christopher Robin coziness of bourgeois Edwardian nursery ritual. The eventuality of the uncanny child’s actual exposure to solitude and destitution has been deflected by an invoked domesticity. Invoked with that domesticity, in the now fostered and nurtured and therefore “childlike” child, is a new, pleasurable form of exhibitionistic flirtation with adults that dramatizes the child’s very distance from abandonment and repudiation. In the place where the eye of parental care had threatened to be withheld, there is now a bath where even the nurse’s attention is supplemented by the overhearing ear of inquiring and interested visitors. And in the place where the fear of solitary exposure has been warded off, there’s now the playful nakedness of ablation and a door left “very much ajar” for a little joke about the suppression of the “altogether.”

This sanctioned intergenerational flirtation represents a sustained chord in the New York edition. James describes the blandishment of his finished works in tones that are strikingly like the ones with which, in his letters, he has also been addressing Hendrik Anderson, Jocelyn Persse, Hugh Walpole, and the other younger men who at this stage of his life are setting out, with happy success, to attract him. Note in this passage (from the Ambassadors preface) that “impudence” is the glamorizing trait James attributes to his stories — impudence that bespeaks not the absence of shame from this scene of flirtation, but rather its pleasurably recirculated afterglow: “[The story] rejoices . . . to seem to offer itself in a light, to seem to know, and with the very last knowledge, what it is about — liable as it yet is at moments to be caught by us with its tongue in its cheek and absolutely no warrant but its splendid impudence. Let us grant then that the impudence is always there — there, so to speak, for grace and effect and allure; there, above all, because the Story is just the spoiled child of art, and because, as we are always disappointed when the pampered don’t ‘play up,’ we like it, to that extent, to look all its character. It probably does so, in truth, even when we most flatter ourselves that we negotiate with it by treaty” (Art 315). To dramatize the story as impudent in relation to its creator is also to dramatize the luxurious distance between this scene and one of repudiation: the conceivable shame of a past self, a past production, is being caught up and recirculated through a lambent interpersonal figuration of the intimate, indulged mutual pressure of light differentials of power and knowledge.

James writes about the writing of The American, “One would like to woo back such hours of fine precipitation . . . of images so free and confident and ready that they brush questions aside and disport themselves, like the artless schoolboys of Gray’s beautiful Ode, in all the ecstasy of the ignorance attending them” (25). (Or boasts of “The Turn of the Screw”: “another grain . . . would have spoiled the precious pinch addressed to its end” [170].) Sometimes the solicitude is ultimately frustrated: “I strove in vain . . . to embroil and adorn this young man on whom a hundred ingenious touches are thus lavished” (97). The wooing in these scenes of pederastic revision is not unidirectional, however; even the age differential can be figured quite differently, as when James finds himself, on rereading The American, “cling[ing] to my hero as to a tall, protective, good-natured elder brother in a rough
place” (39), or says of Lambert Strether, “I rejoiced in the promise of a heroic
so mature, who would give me thereby the more to bite into” (310). James
refers to the protagonist of “The Beast in the Jungle” as “another poor sensi-
tive gentleman, fit indeed to mate with Stran’son of “The Altar [of the Dead],”
adding, “My attested predilection for poor sensitive gentlemen almost
embarrasses me as I march!” (246). The predilective yoking of the “I”
with the surname of John Marcher, the romantic pairing off of Marcher in
turn with the equally “sensitive” bachelor George Stran’son, give if any-
things an excess of gay point to the “almost” embarrassment that is, however,
treated, not as a pretext for authorial self-convert, but as an explicit source
of new, performatively induced authorial magnetism.

James, then, in the prefaces is using reparenting or “reissue” as a strategy
dramatizing and integrating shame, in the sense of rendering this poten-
tially paralyzing affect narratively, emotionally, and performatively produc-
tive. The reparenting scenario is also, in James’s theoretical writing, a ped-
agogic/pedagogical one in which the effect of shame becomes an affecting
and eroticized form of mutual display. The writing subject’s seductive bond
with the unmerged but unrepudiated “inner” child seems, indeed, to be the
condition of that subject’s having an interiority at all, a spatialized subjec-
tivity that can be characterized by absorption. Or perhaps I should say: it is
a condition of his displaying the spatialized subjectivity that can be charac-
terized by absorption. For the spectacle of James’s performative absorption
appears only in relation (though in a most complex and unstable relation)
to the setting of his performative theatricality; the narcissism/shame cir-
cuit between the writing self and its “inner child” intersects with that other
hyperbolic and dangerous narcissistic circuit, figured as theatrical perfor-
manoeuvre, that extends outward between the presented and expressive face
and its audience.

I am developing here the hypothesis that James’s reflections on per-
formativity will appear most interestingly in his ways of negotiating the
intersection between absorption and theatricality, between the subjectivity-
generating space defined by the loved but unintegrated “inner child,” on the
one hand, and on the other hand the frontal space of performance. James
works in the prefaces on developing a theoretical vocabulary for distinguishing
(in the structure of his novels) between what Austin will provisionally
come to call the constative and the performative, and between different
senses of performativity. None of this differential vocabulary, however, re-
tains its analytic consistency intact as it gets recruited into the scenarios
of the prefaces’ performance. Among the diacritical pairings that get more
or less mapped onto differentials around performativity — and, that accom-
plished, get more or less explicitly deconstructed there — are romance ver-
sus reality (e.g., *Art* 30–31), substance versus form (e.g., *Art* 115–116), anec-
dote versus picture (e.g., *Art* 139), anecdotical versus (and note the shift here)
developmental (e.g., *Art* 233).

An example of the more or less explicit self-deconstruction of these differ-
entials: each scene of *The Awkward Age*, precisely because it “abides without
a moment’s deflexion by the principle of the stage-play,” is said to “help us
ever so happily to see the grave distinction between substance and form in
a really wrought work of art signal break down. I hold it impossible to
say, before ‘The Awkward Age,’ where one of these elements ends and the
other begins: I have been unable at least myself, on re-examination, to mark
any such joint or seam, to see the two discharged offices as separate. They
are separate before the fact, but the sacrament of execution indissolubly
marries them, and the marriage, like any other marriage, has only to be a
‘true’ one for the scandal of a breach not to show” (*Art* 115–16). Seemingly,
the theatrical performativity of *The Awkward Age* is supposed to mesh with
its speech act performativity, as its substance is supposed to mesh with its
form, as man and wife are supposed to be “indissolubly” unified in the ex-
emplary speech act of marriage. But one hardly has to look to *The Awkward
Age* itself (though of course one could), nor need one look ahead to the sly
deflations in Austin, to see that the indissoluble unity of marriage offers
no very stout guarantee of the stability of this chain of homologies. Bad
enough that marriage is a sacrament of *execution*; bad enough that, only a
score of words after it has been pronounced indissoluble, marriage turns
out to be efficacious not in preventing a breach, not even in preventing the
scandal attending a breach, but only, for what it’s worth, in keeping the scan-
dal of a breach from showing. But the worst news is that to guarantee even
these limited benefits, the marriage “has” (“only”) “to be a ‘true’ one.” The
Jamesian scare quotes call attention to how weaselly the qualification is. In
what sense must a marriage be a “true” one to guarantee that the scandal
of a breach not show? Perhaps it must be true in the sense that its parties
are “true” to each other, or to their vows, or that the marriage “takes” at
some ineffable level — in the sense, that is, of partners rendering their vows
constantly precise descriptions of their behavior. Thus there’s no occasion

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for a breach, and the guarantee is guaranteed unnecessary—that is to say, as a guarantee, meaningless. To bring in the truth qualification at all is to suggest that a speech act may be performatively efficacious only to the degree of (which is to say, only through) its constative validity.

The most sustained of the differentials through which James works out the meanings of performativity is the near-ubiquitous opposition between drama itself (or the "scenic") and "picture." The high instability and high mutual torsiveness of the terms of this opposition are occasions for both shame and excitement:

I haven't the heart now, I confess, to adduce the detail of so many lapsed importances; the explanation of most of which, after all, I take to have been in the crudity of a truth beating full upon me through these reconsiderations, the odd inveteracy with which picture, at almost any turn, is jealous of drama, and drama (though on the whole with greater patience, I think) suspicious of picture. Between them, no doubt, they do much for the theme; yet each baffles insidiously the other's ideal and eats round the edges of its position. (Art 298)

Beautiful exceedingly, for that matter, those occasions or parts of an occasion when the boundary line between picture and scene bears a little the weight of the double pressure. (300)

Characteristically, James's aesthetic asseveration of the beauty of the "double pressure" between picture and scene is embedded in psychological narrative at several textual levels. It adheres to a pederastic relation between characters, and equally again to the one between the author and the anthropomorphized novel, the attaching character. Rereading The Ambassadors, James notes there "the exquisite treachery even...the straightest execution may ever be trusted to inflict even on the most mature plan" (Art 325). He locates this lapse, which is a lapse in authorial technique, a lapse, he says, from the "scenic" into "the non-scenic form" (325), at a particular foundational crux of the novel: the scene in which Strether, whom James (as we've already noted) finds lovable for his maturity, suddenly becomes infatuated with a young man, Chad Newsome. Chad, however, is destined to disappoint in turning out to be quite ordinary, self-ignorant young heterosexual, incapable of responding to Strether's intensities even as he is incapable of doing real justice to the love he evokes in women. "The ex-

quisite treachery even...the straightest...may ever be trusted to inflict even on the most mature" is at once something Chad inflicts on Strether, something the novel (or its characters) inflict on James, and something that "picture," as a descriptive or propositional principle of composition, inflicts on "scene" as a performative one. At each level, in a characteristic location, it represents "deviation (from too fond an original vision)" (325). The author's fond, mature original vision of an uncorrupted "scenic" technique suffers the same fate as his mature hero's fond first vision of Chad, and is destined equally to be "diminished...compromised...despoiled...so that, in a word, the whole economy of his author's relation to him has at important points to be redetermined" (325-26). But note again that the treachery is described, however ambiguously, as "exquisite," and the certainty of treachery is something in which one is invited, however ironically, to "trust." It is the very instability among these relations, and in particular, I infer, their ability to resist clear representation at any given, single level, that confers value: "The book, however, critically viewed, is touchingly full of these disguised and repaired losses, these insidious recoveries, these intensely redemptive consistencies" (326). In James's theorizing of the novel, consistency is the name, not for any homogeneous purity of the speech act at a given level, but rather for the irreducible, attaching heterogeneity and indeed impurity with which each meets the "touch" of another.

- What should also be specified is the imaged sexual zoning and sexual act in which these relations repeatedly dramatize themselves in the prefaces. In a footnote to a previous essay on James, "The Beast in the Closet," I quoted a passage from James's notebooks, written during a visit to California only a few months before he started on the New York edition, which still seems to me the best condensation of what these prefaces press us to recognize as his most characteristic and fecund relation to his own anal eroticism:

I sit here, after long weeks, at any rate, in front of my arrears, with an inward accumulation of material of which I feel the wealth, and as to which I can only invoke my familiar demon of patience, who always comes, doesn't he? when I call. He is here with me in front of this cool green Pacific—he sits close and I feel his soft breath, which cools and steadies and inspires, on my cheek. Everything sinks in: nothing is lost; everything abides and fertilizes

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and renews its golden promise, making me think with closed eyes of deep and grateful longing when, in the full summer days of L[amb] H[ouse], my long dusty adventure over, I shall be able to [plunge] my hand, my arm, in, deep and far, up to the shoulder—into the heavy bag of remembrance—of suggestion—of imagination—of art—and fish out every little figure and felicity, every little fact and fancy that can be to my purpose. These things are all packed away, now, thicker than I can penetrate, deeper than I can fathom, and there let them rest for the present, in their cool darkness, till I shall let in upon them the mild still light of dear old L[amb] H[ouse]—in which they will begin to gleam and glitter and take form like the gold and jewels of a mine. (Notebooks 318)

At the time, I quoted this as a description of "fisting-as-écriture" (Epistemology 208); I am sure it is that, but the context of the prefaces brings out two other saliences of this scene of fisting equally strongly—saliences related to each other and, of course, also to the writing process. These involve, first, wealth, and second, parturition. One of the most audible intertexts in the passage is surely "Full fathom five thy father lies," with the emphasis, perhaps, on "five," the five of fingers. The other important intertext seems to be from Book 4 of The Dunciad, the passage where Annions describes the Greek coins he has swallowed to protect them from robbers and anticipates their being delivered, in the course of nature, from "the living shrine" of his gut to the man who has bought them from him:

this our paunch before
Still bears them, faithful; and that thus I eat,
Is to refund the Medals with the meat.
To prove me, Goddess clear of all design,
Bid me with Pollio sup, as well as dine:
There all the Learn'd shall at the labour stand,
And Douglas lend his soft, obstetric hand. (Pope, book 4, ll. 387–94)

In the context of The Dunciad, the obstetric hand feeling for wealth in the rectum seems meant to represent the ultimate in abjection and gross-out, but under the pressure of James's brooding it has clearly undergone a sea change to become a virtually absolute symbol of imaginative value.

Sharply as this thematic emphasis may differ from a received understanding of James's aesthetic proccupations, any reader interested in Henry James's bowels is, as it turns out, in fine company. "I blush to say," William James writes to Henry in 1869, "that detailed bulletins of your bowels . . . are of the most enthralling interest to me" (Correspondence 73). Maybe it seems, to some, an odd site for such a civility, but I would nonetheless argue that to attend passionately or well to much of James's strongest writing is necessarily, as it were already, to be in thrall to what had long been his painful, fuzzy, immensely productive focus on the sensations, actions and paralyses, accumulations and expulsions of his own lower digestive tract. The recent publication of the two brothers' early correspondence, including pages upon pages about Henry's constipation ("what you term so happily my moving intestinal drama" [138]), begins to offer an objective correlative—startling in its detail and intimacy, if not in its substance—for what had before been inferential readings of the centrality of an anal preoccupation in James's sense of his body, his production, and his pleasure.

Even from these early letters, it is evident that there is no such thing as the simple fact of James's constipation: it informs not only his eating, exercise, and medical attendance but also his travel destinations (during a part of his life defined by travel), his reading, his family relations, and the composition and circulation of his writing. The need to discuss his condition with the brother at home, for instance, mobilizes a drama of secret complicity (William: "It makes me sick to think of your life being blighted by this hideous affliction. I will say nothing to the family about it, as they can do you no good, and it will only give them pain" [Correspondence 113]) that both mimics Henry's internal blockage and seemingly invokes the atmosphere of a sexual secret. William advises Henry, for instance: 'A good plan is for you to write such on separate slips of paper marked private, so that I may then give freely the rest of the letter to Alice to carry about & re-read . . . If you put it in the midst of other matter it prevents the whole letter from circulation. Sur ce, Dieu vous garde" (84). The organizing question in the brothers' long consultation is: What available technology (chemical, electric, thermal, hydraulic, manual) can best be mobilized to reach into and disimpact Henry's bowel? William advises: "Inject . . . as large & hot an enema as you can bear (not get it, more two, scaling) of soap suds & oil. . . .—Electricity sometimes has a wonderful effect, applied not in the piddling way you recollect last winter but by a strong galvanic current from the spine to the abdominal muscles, or if the rectum be paralysed one pole put inside the rectum. If I were you I wd. resort to it" (113). And from Henry:

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The diet here is good — both simple & palatable. But the only treatment for my complaint is the sitz-bath. I was disappointed not to find here some such mechanism (i.e. that injection-douche) as you found at Divonne. (63)

I may actually say that I can’t get a passage. My “little squirt” has ceased to have more than a nominal use. The water either remains altogether or comes out as innocent as it entered. For the past ten days I have become quite demoralised & have been frantically dosing myself with pills. But they too are almost useless & I may take a dozen & hardly hear of them... Somehow or other I must take the thing in hand. (105)

What I have called the “crisis” was brought on by taking 2 so-called “anti-bilious” pills, recommended me at the English druggist’s. They failed to relieve me & completely disagreed with me — bringing on a species of abortive diarrhoea. That is I felt the most reiterated & most violent inclination to stool, without being able to effect anything save the passage of a little blood... Of course I sent for the... Irish physician... He made me take an injection, of some unknown elements, which completely failed to move me. I repeated it largely — wholly in vain. He left me late in the evening, apparently quite in despair... Several days have now passed. I have seen the doctor repeatedly, as he seems inclined (to what extent as a friend & to what as a doctor &c) to keep me in hand... He examined [my bowels] (as far as he could) by the insertion of his finger (horrid tale!) & says there is no palpable obstruction... I find it hard to make him (as I should anyone who hadn’t observed it) at all understand the stubbornness & extent — the length & breadth & depth, of my trouble. (108)

From this intense, acutely unhappy relation of a young writer to a part of his body were also to emerge, however, pleasures and riches. In particular, the valences attaching to digestive accumulation and to manual penetration were to undergo a profound change. Let thirty years elapse, and more, in the career of this deeply imagined erotic and writerly thematic. The early letters’ accounts give particular point (the point of distance and imaginative transmutation, as much as the point of similarity) to a passage like the 1905 notebook entry with which I began this section.

By the time of the writing of the prefaces, the images of the obstetric hand, the fisted bowel materialise as if holographically in the convergence of two incongruent spatialities: the spatiality of inside and outside on (as it were) the one hand, and on the other the spatiality of aspects (“aspects — uncanny as the little term might sound” [Art 110]), of presented and averted, of face and back. They go together like recto and rectum.

The condensation of the twon spatialities, frontal and interior, adheres insistently to invocations of the medal or medallion, perhaps through an association with the Dunciad passage quoted above. In the preface to The Wings of the Dove, for instance, James suggests that the novel’s two plots are the sides of an engraved and fingered coin: “Could I but make my medal hang free, its obverse and its reverse, its face and its back, would beautifully become optional for the spectator. I somehow wanted them correspondingly embossed, wanted them inscribed and figured with an equal salience; yet it was none the less visibly my ‘key,’ as I have said, that though my regenerate young New Yorker [Milly], and what might depend on her, should form my centre, my circumference was every whit as treatable... Preparatively and, as it were, yearningly — given the whole ground — one begArt in the event, with the outer ring, approaching the centre thus by narrowing circumvallations” (294). To make any sense of how a geography of the concentric, involving a “key” and the penetration of rings inner and outer, supervenes in this passage on a flat, two-sided geography of obverse and reverse virtually requires that obverse and reverse be read as recto and verso — and that “recto” as the (depthless) frontal face be understood as opening freely onto “rectum” as the (penetrable) rear. James writes about What Maisie Knew of “that bright hard medal, of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody’s right and ease and the other somebody’s pain and wrong” (143). If indeed “face” and “back” “beautifully become optional for the spectator,” that is because recto and verso, the straight or “right” and the “turned” or perverted or “wrong,” converge so narrowly onto what is not a mere punning syllable, but rather an anatomical double entendre whose interest and desirability James (and I can only join him in this) appears by this time to have experienced as inexhaustible.

Hard to overstate the importance of “right” and some other words (direct, erect) from the Latin /rect/ in mediating for James between, as it were, recto and verso of the presented and enjoyed body: “For the dramatist always, by the very law of his genius, believes not only in a possible right issue from the rightly-conceived tight place; he does much more than this — he believes, irresistibly, in the necessary, the precious ‘tightness’ of the place (whatever the issue)... So that the point is not in the least what to make of
it, but only, very delightfully and very damnably, where to put one’s hand on it” (Art 311–12). “A possible right issue from the rightly-conceived tight place”: a phrase like this one can refer at the same time to the “straight” (proper or conventional) avenue of issue from the “straight” place of conception and to the rectal issue from the rectal place of conception, “straight” only in the sense of pleasurably tight. Whatever the “issue,” “nothing is right save as we rightly imagine it.”

This family of words, insisted on as in these constructions, positively swarm in James’s late writing (the novels as well as the prefaces), as if such syllables enjoyed some privileged access to “the raw essence of fantasy”: “This is the charming, the tormenting, the eternal little matter to be made right, in all the weaving of silver threads and tapping on golden nails; and I should take perhaps too fantastic a comfort—I mean were not the comforts of the artist just of the raw essence of fantasy—in any glimpse of such achieved rightnesses” (69). Nor, as we’ll see, is the associated invocation of the hand at all less frequent.

Considering that The Art of the Novel is taken (when discussed at all) as the purest manifesto for the possibility of organic form and the power of the organizing center of consciousness in fiction, it is striking how much of it constitutes a memorandum of misplaced middles. There is nothing unproblematic about centers or circumferences in any of the prefaces. James speaks of

a particular vice of the artistic spirit, against which vigilance had been destined from the first to exert itself in vain, and the effect of which was that again and again, perversely, incurably, the center of my structure would insist on placing itself not, so to speak, in the middle..., I urge myself to the candid confession that in very few of my productions, to my eye, has the organic center succeeded in getting into proper position.

Time after time, then, has the precious waistband or girdle, studded and buckled and placed for brave outward show, practically worked itself, and in spite of desperate remonstrance, or in other words essential counterplotting, to a point perilously near the knees.... These productions have in fact, if I may be so bold about it, spurious and spurious centres altogether, to make up for the failure of the true. (Art 85–86)

“Center” is clearly being used in a multivalent way in passages like these, as much as when it had conjured the impossible orifice by which a flat round medallion opens out into depth. Here it offers a pretext for the comically explicit anthropomorphization of the novel as a body, a body celebrated for its way of being always more than at risk of “perverse” reorganization around a “perilously” displaced and low-down zone. But, confusingly, these spatial metaphors refer to the interrelation among characters’ points of view (e.g., as “centers of consciousness”) but also (and quite incommensurably) to the relation between the first half and the latter (or, anthropomorphically, the lower and/or back) half of each novel. As when James in the preface to The Wings of the Dove diagnostically probes “the latter half, that is the false and deformed half” of the novel, maintaining his “free hand” for “the preliminary cunning quest for the spot where deformity has begun” (302–3). Incoherent as it is, however, the relation between the halves is one whose very perils can be pleasures, and whose pleasures have the rhythm of climax: James celebrates in The Tragic Muse “a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick, as into the rich density of wedding-cake. The moral of all which indeed, I fear, is, perhaps too trivially, but that the ‘thick,’ the false, the dissembling second half of the work before me... presents that effort as at the very last a quite convulsive, yet in its way highly agreeable, spasm” (88).

And over the anthropomorphic mapping of these relations there constantly hovers the even more incommensurable image of the theater. “The first half of a fiction insists ever on figuring to me as the stage or theatre for the second half,” James writes, for instance, “and I have in general given so much space to making the theatre propitious that my halves have too often proved strangely unequal” (Art 86). Or, in a very different kind of mapping: “The novel, as largely practised in English, is the perfect paradise of the loose end. The play consents to the logic of but one way, mathematically right, and with the loose end [a] gross... impertinence on its surface” (114).

To trace the ramifications of these images through the prefaces would involve quoting from (literally) every single page of them. A more efficient approach would be, perhaps, to offer something brief in the way of a lexicon of a few of the main words and semantic clusters through which the fisting image works in these prefaces—since the accumulated and digested redolence of particular signifiers is one of the delights James most boasts of enjoying in “my struggle to keep compression rich, if not, better still, to keep accretions compressed” (232).

But in advance of offering this lexicon, I suppose I should say some-

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thing about what it is to hear these richly accreted, almost alchemically imbued signifiers in this highly sexualized way—and more generally, about the kinds of resistance that the reading I suggest here may offer to a psychoanalytic interpretive project. In her psychoanalytic work on James, Kaja Silverman declares herself (for one particular passage in one particular preface) willing to "risk . . . violating a fundamental tenet of James criticism—the tenet that no matter how luridly suggestive the Master's language, it cannot have a sexual import" ("Too Early" 165). I am certainly with her on that one—except that Silverman's readiness to hear how very openly sexy James's prefaces are is made possible only by her strange insistence that he couldn't have known they were. James's eroticized relation to his writings and characters, in her reading, is governed by "unconscious desire rather than an organizing consciousness"; "armored against unwanted self-knowledge," James is diagnosed by Silverman as having his "defenses" "securely in place against such an unwelcome discovery" (149). I am very eager that James's sexual language be heard, but that it not be heard with this insulting presumption of the hearer's epistemological privilege—a privilege attached, furthermore, to Silverman's uncritical insistence on viewing sexuality exclusively in terms of repression and self-ignorance. When we tune in to James's language on these frequencies, it is not as superior, privileged eavesdroppers on a sexual narrative hidden from himself; rather, it is as an audience offered the privilege of sharing in his exhibitionistic enjoyment and performance of a sexuality organized around shame. Indeed, it is as an audience desired to do so—which is also happily to say, as an audience desired.

Some terms that particularly clamor for inclusion in this little lexicon—though there could be many more, and indeed, any reader of even these few passages is likely to be able to generate a list of other repeated, magnetic, and often enigmatic signifiers that would need to be added—are fond/foundation, issue, assist, fragrant/flagrant, glove or gage, half, and, as we have already seen, right and a group of words around center/circumference, aspect, medal. I pick these words out not because they are commonplace "Freudian" signifiers in the conventional phallic mode, a mode that was scarcely James's, but instead because each underwent for him "that mystic, that 'chemical' change . . . the felt fermentation, ever interesting, but flagrantly so in the example before us, that enables the sense originally communicated to make fresh and possibly quite different terms for the new employment there awaiting it" (Art 249). Each opens onto—as it condenses—a juncture between the erotic fantasy-localization per se, and some aspect or aspects of its performative dimension.

For example, fond is one of James's most cherished words, especially when used self-descriptively: whether applied to the young author's "first fond good faith of composition" (13), to the older "fond fabulist" (318), or to the "fond . . . complacency" (21) of a personified fiction. It marks the place of the author's pleasure in dramatizing himself as all but flooded with self-absorbed delusion and embarrassment, but equally with pleasure. When he speaks of himself as having had a "fond idea," you don't know whether you're therefore meant to see it as having been a bad idea or whether you're hearing, in James's phrase, the still current "exhibit" of "an elation possibly presumptuous" (30). But the self-absorbing "fond" marks him, by the same token, as all but flooded with transitive, cathetic energy, the energy of interest, fond of . . . someone—in particular, as lovingly and interestedly inclining toward the other, usually younger male figures in this inter/intrapersonal drama, loving and interested "all sublimely and perhaps a little fatuously" (39). The fatuous "fond" notation of delight and self-delight already notable in the California journal passage is warp and woof of the fabric of the prefaces: "Inclined to retrospect, he fondly takes, under this backward view, his whole unfolding, his process of production, for a thrilling tale" (4).

Or, with a different use of emphasis: "Inclined to retrospect, he fondly takes, under this backward view, his whole unfolding, his process of production, for a thrilling tale." That fond is also the French word for bottom may explain its affinity with the "retrospect," the "backward view," even with the "thrilling tale." The fondness of the artist, as James paraphrases it in one preface, may lie in his "willingness to pass mainly for an ass" (Art 83).

The association between fondness and the fundament extends, as well, to James's interest in the foundation, in the highly (and always anthropomorphically) architectural image with which he describes his ambitions for the structure of his works: "Amusement deeply abides, I think, in any artistic attempt the basis and groundwork of which are conscious of a particular firmness. . . . It is the difficulty produced by the loose foundation . . . that breaks the heart. . . . The dramatist strong in the sense of his postulate . . . has verily to build, is committed to architecture, to construction
at any cost; to driving in deep his vertical supports and laying across and firmly fixing his horizontal, his resting pieces—at the risk of no matter what vibration from the tap of his master-hammer. This makes the active value of his basis immense, enabling him, with his flanks protected, to advance" (Art 109). Fond, then, is a node where the theatrics of shame, affection, and display are brought together with a compositional principle and at the same time lodged firmly, at the level of the signifier, in a particular zone of the eroticized body. (See also, if this were a completer lexicon, James’s quasi-architectural, quasi-anthropomorphic use of the terms arch, brace, pressure, weight.) Another thing it makes sense to me to speculate about fond: that this syllable provides the vibratory bass note in the “fun” that James was so fond of putting in flirtations scare quotes: “For the infatuated artist, how many copious springs of our never-to-be-slighted ‘fun’” (324)!”

“It all comes back to that, to my and your ‘fun’” (345). Au fond.

An important pair of pivot words in the prefaces is issue and assist. Each is significantly charged by allusion to the obstetric scene, as when the injunction “Hands off altogether on the nurse’s part!” (though “strictly conceivable”) is said to render impossible “any fair and stately . . . reissue of anything” (Art 337–38). Each, too, like brood and conceive, which ought rightly to have separate lexicon entries, is also specific to the compositional or dramatic scene. I’ve remarked on how the reissue cum revision of the books and the, so to speak, reparenting process of the prefaces seem to come together in the signifier issue. The “issue” is not only the edition and the child or other emitted matter but the birth canal, the channel by which the issue issues, the “possible right issue from the rightly-conceived tight place” (311). And as with the “backward view” of the fond “retrospect,” as also with the novels’ “latter” halves, the temporal can be mapped anthropomorphically as the spatial, the past issue becoming the posterior issue: “When it shall come to fitting, historically, anything like all my many small children of fancy with their pair of progenitors, and all my reproductive unions with their inevitable fruit, I shall seem to offer my backward consciousness in the image of a shell charged and recharged by the Fates with some patent and infallible explosive” (178).

Like issue, assist seems to begin by alluding to the scene of birthing; it links the obstetric hand with the applauding one, the childbed with, not publication, but the theater. In the preface to The Wings of the Dove, James seems both to assume the attending position of the novel’s master physician Sir Luke Strett, and at the same time, through a chain of suggestive semantic choices, to rewrite Milly Theale’s fatal illness as a pregnancy at which “one would have quite honestly to assist”: her illness is designated as “the interesting state,” with intensities that “quicken” and then “crown”; her part in the matter is “the unsurpassable activity of passionate, of inspired resistance. This last fact was the real issue, for the way grew straight . . .” (289).

But it is less easy to say which sense of “assist,” the obstetric or the theatrical, is operative in this account of the play of point of view in The American: “At the window of [Newman’s] wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we assist. He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it. A beautiful infatuation this, always, I think, the intensity of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature; the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest. . . . So much remains true then on behalf of my instinct of multiplying the fine touches by which Newman should live and communicate life” (38). “Assist” is in scare quotes here, and it’s not easy (it hardly ever is in James) to see why — unless to point to the word’s double meaning (obstetric/theatrical), or unless to signal flickeringly, as the scare quotes around “fun” do, that a not quite legitimate French pun is slipping about in the background: in this case, the association between being seated at the window and, “from that admirable position,” assisting. Assist (attending, as at childbirth or theater) and s’asseoir (to sit) aren’t actually related, even in French, but they do sound alike via the resonant syllable ass-. And firm though it may be with an architectural firmness, the unexpectedly dramatic associations of the seat, in particular of the relished ample seat, the “immense” “basis,” “wide, quite sufficiently wide,” are well attested in the prefaces. At one of the windows, for instance, at which James has done his writing, “a great house. . . . gloomed, in dusky brick, as the extent of my view, but with a vast convenient neutrality which I found, soon enough, protective and not inquisitive, so that whatever there was of my sedentary life and regular habits took a sort of local wealth of colour from the special greyish-brown tone of the surface always before me. This surface hung there like the most voluminous of curtains — it masked the very stage of the great theatre of the town. To sit for certain hours at one’s desk before it was somehow to occupy in the most suitable way in the world the proportionately ample interests of the mightiest of dramas” (Art 212).

One set of associations for all this seated labor has to do with the process

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of digestion and its products; no feasible amount of quotation could offer a sense of how fully these perfume the language of the prefaces: "[Art] plucks its material . . . in the garden of life— which material elsewhere grown is stale and unearable. But it has no sooner done this than it has to take account of a process . . . that of the expression, the literal squeezing-out, of value . . . . This is precisely the infusion that, as I submit, completes the strong mixture . . . . It's all a sedentary part” (Art 312). The most available language for digestion is that more or less ostensibly of cooking, each “thinkable . . . — so far as thinkable at all—in chemical, almost in mystical terms”.

We can surely account for nothing in the novelist's work that has n't passed through the crucible of his imagination, has n't, in that perpetually simmering cauldron his intellectual pot-aux-feu, been reduced to savoury fusion. We here figure the morsel, of course, not as boiled to nothing, but as exposed, in return for the taste it gives out, to a new and richer saturation. In this state it is in due course picked out and served, and a meagre esteem will await . . . if it does n't speak most of its late genial medium, the good, the wonderful company it has, as I hint, aesthetically kept. It has entered, in fine, into new relations, it emerges for new ones. Its final savour has been constituted, but its prime identity destroyed. . . . Thus it has become a different and, thanks to a rare alchemy, a better thing. (Art 230)

The products of cooking and of digestion seem interchangeable—and equally irresistible—because each is the result of a process of recirculation described as if it could go on endlessly, only adding to the richness of (what James usually calls) the “residuum,” the thing “picked,” “plucked” (Art 155), or, as in the California passage and many others, “fished” out. (“The long pole of memory stirs and rummages the bottom, and we fish up such fragments and relics of the submerged life and the extinct consciousness as tempt us to piece them together” (261.) In the artist's intellectual life, James says, “The 'old' matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed . . . the whole growth of one's 'taste,' as our fathers used to say; a blessed comprehensive name for many of the things deepest in us. The 'taste' of the poet is, at bottom and so far as the poet in him prevails over everything else, his active sense of life: in accordance with which truth to keep one's hand on it is to hold the silver clue to the whole labyrinth of his consciousness. He feels this himself, good man” (339-40).

To trace the career of the word fragrant (possibly including its more explicitly, indeed flamingly performative variant flagrant) through the prefaces would be to get at least somewhere with the digestive plot. One culminating usage:

The further analysis is for that matter almost always the torch of rapture and victory, as the artist’s firm hand grasps and plays it — I mean naturally, of the smothered rapture and the obscure victory, enjoyed and celebrated not in the street but before some innermost shrine; the odds being a hundred to one, in almost any connexion, that it does n't arrive by any easy first process at the best residuum of truth. That was the charm, sensibly, of the picture . . . the elements so couldn't but flush, to their very surface, with some deeper depth of irony than the mere obvious. It lurked in the crude postulate like a buried scent; the more the attention hovered the more aware it became of the fragrance. To which I may add that the more I scratched the surface and penetrated, the more potent, to the intellectual nostril, became this virtue. At last, accordingly, the residuum, as I have called it, reached, I was in presence of the red dramatic spark that glowed at the core of my vision and that, as I gently blew upon it, burned higher and clearer. (Art 142)

I don't want to make the prefaces sound too much like The Silence of the Lambs, but James does have a very graphic way of figuring authorial relations in terms of dermal habitation. As we've seen, he considers “the intensity of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature” to be “a beautiful infatuation,” indeed, “the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest” (Art 37). All the blushing/flushing that marks the skin as a primary organ for both the generation and the contagion of affect seems linked to a fantasy of the skin's being entered—entered specifically by a hand, a hand that touches. Some words James favors for this relation are glove, gage, French gageure: “That was my problem, so to speak, and my gageure—to play the small handful of values really for all they were worth—and to work my . . . particular degree of pressure on the spring of interest” (330-31). Indeed, the glove or gage is, for James, a prime image of engagement, of interest, motivation, and cathexis tout simple—of the writerly “charm that grows in proportion as the appeal to it tests and stretches and strains it, puts it powerfully to the touch” (111). Even more powerfully, it offers a durable image for the creation (which is to say: the entering of the skin) of personified characters. As when James sees "a tall quiet slim studious young man of admirable type," who offers habitation.
to a character whom James had before barely so much as imagined: "Owen Wingrave, nebulous and fluid, may only, at the touch, have found himself in this gentleman; found, that is, a figure and a habit, a form, a face, a fate" (259–60; first emphasis added).

And, of course, the animation of character by reaching a hand up its backside has a theater of its own: in this case, the puppet theater: "No privilege of the teller of tales and the handler of puppets is more delightful, or has more of the suspense and the thrill of a game of difficulty breathlessly played, than just this business of looking for the unseen and the occult, in a scheme half-grasped, by the light or, so to speak, by the clinging scent, of the gage already in hand" (Art 311). The scent that clings to glove, to hand, to puppet may not seem particularly inexplicable by this time. It is the smell of shit even as it is the smell of shame. It is the smell of a cherished identity performed through a process of turning inside out.²

Clearly, there are more lexicon entries that could be shown to work in comparable ways in the prefaces; I mention only bristle, interest, use, basis, uncanny, treatment, strain, express, elastic, the high/free hand, handsome, bear (v.), conceive, touching (adj.), rich, spring (n. and v.), waste/waist, postulate, preposterous, turn (n.), passage, and foreshorten. The variety of these signifiers answers to, among other things, the range of sexual aims, objects, body parts, and bodily fantasies and pleasures clustering however loosely around the fisting phantasmatic: there are flickers of the phallus, the womb, the prostate, as well as the bowel and anus; flickers between steady and climactic rhythms, between insertive and receptive, between accumulation and release, between the allo- and the autoerotic. I hope it’s evident enough that the prefaces do respond to this way of reading, "whenever the mind is, as I have said, accessible — accessible, that is, to the finer appeal of accumulated ‘good stuff’ and to the interest of taking it in hand at all":

For myself, I am prompted to note, the "taking" has been to my consciousness, through the whole process of this re-issue, the least part of the affair: under the first touch of the spring my hands were to feel themselves full; so much more did it become a question, on the part of the accumulated good stuff, of seeming insistently to give and give. (Art 341)

The simplest truth about a human entity, a situation, a relation… on behalf of which the claim to charmed attention is made, strains ever, under one’s hand, more intensely, most intensely, to justify that claim; strains ever, as it were, toward the uttermost end or aim of one’s meaning or of its own numerous connexions; struggles at each step, and in defiance of one’s raised admonitory finger, fully and completely to express itself. (Art 278)

Yet, however richly the text responds to it, this cumulative and accumulative, lexicon-driven reading remains a particular, hence a partial kind of reading — not so much because it is organized around "sexuality" as because it is organized around the semantic unit. To say that it is tethered to the semantic and thematic is perhaps also to say that it is unsublimatably (however unstably) tethered to the intensively zoned human body. Hardly the worse for that. Yet, obviously enough, the argumentational momentum of the prefaces is impeded as much as facilitated by a reading that indulges or honors James’s investment in the absorptive or (as he generally puts it) the "rich" (or strange) signifier. The clumsy, "food" rhythm of reading enforced by any semantic absorption or adhesion seems necessarily to constitute a theoretical deviance.

² To gesture at a summing up: The thing I least want to be heard as offering here is a "theory of homosexuality." I have none and I want none. When I attempt to do some justice to the specificity, the richness, above all the explicitness of James’s particular erotics, it is not with an eye to making him an exemplar of "homosexuality" or even of one "kind" of "homosexuality," though I certainly don’t want, either, to make him sound as if he isn’t gay. Nonetheless, I do mean to nominate the James of the New York edition prefaces as a kind of prototype of, not "homosexuality," but queerness, or queer performativity. In this usage, "queer performativity" is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma.

I don’t know yet what claims may be worth making, ontologically, about the queer performativity I have been describing here. Would it be useful to suggest that some of the associations I’ve been making with queer performativity might actually be features of all performativity? Or useful, instead, to suggest that the transformational grammar of "Shame on you" may form only part of the performative activity seen as most intimately related to queerness, by people self-identified as queer? The usefulness of thinking

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about shame in relation to queer performativity, in any event, does not come from its adding any extra certainty to the question of what utterances or acts may be classed as “performative” or what people may be classed as “queer.” Least of all does it pretend to define the relation between queerness and same-sex love and desire. What it does, to the contrary, is perhaps offer some psychological, phenomenological, thematic density and motivation to what I described in the introduction as the “tortures” or aberrances between reference and performativity, or indeed between queerness and other ways of experiencing identity and desire.

But I don’t, either, want it to sound as though my project has mainly to do with recuperating for deconstruction (or other antiantessentialist projects) a queerness drained of specificity or political reference. To the contrary: I suggest that to view performativity in terms of habitual shame and its transformations opens a lot of new doors for thinking about identity politics.

It seems very likely that the structuring of associations and attachments around the affect shame is among the most telling differentials among cultures and times: not that the entire world can be divided between (supposedly primitive) “shame cultures” and (supposedly evolved) “guilt cultures,” but rather that, as an affect, shame is a component (and differently a component) of all. Shame, like other affects in Tomkins’s usage of the term, is not a discrete intrapsychic structure, but a kind of free radical that (in different people and in different cultures) attaches to and permanently intensifies or alters the meaning of—of almost anything: a zone of the body, a sensory system, a prohibited or indeed a permitted behavior, another affect such as anger or arousal, a named identity, a script for interpreting other people’s behavior toward oneself. Thus, one of the things that anyone’s character or personality is is a record of the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instilled far more durable, structural changes in one’s relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others.

Which means, among other things, that therapeutic or political strategies aimed directly at getting rid of individual or group shame, or undoing it, have something preposterous about them: they may “work”—they certainly have powerful effects—but they can’t work in the way they say they work. (I am thinking here of a range of movements that deal with shame variously in the form of, for instance, the communal dignity of the civil rights movement; the individuating pride of “Black is Beautiful” and gay pride; various forms of nativist resentment; the menacingly exhibited abjere-
tude, leather, pride, SM, drag, musicality, fisting, attitude, zines, histrionic-
cism, asceticism, Snap! culture, diva worship, florid religiosity; in a word, "flaming."

And activism.

Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity — the question of identity — at the origin of the impulse to the performative, but does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted, which is also to say, as already there for the (necessary, productive) misconstrual and misrecognition. Shame — living, as it does, on and in the muscles and capillaries of the face — seems to be uniquely contagious from one person to another. And the contagiousness of shame is only facilitated by its anamorphic, protean susceptibility to new expressive grammars.

These facts suggest, I think, that asking good questions about shame and shame/performativity could get us somewhere with a lot of the recalcitrant knots that tie themselves into the guts of identity politics — yet without delegitimating the felt urgency and power of the notion "identity" itself. The dynamics of trashing and of ideological or institutional pogroms, like the dynamics of mourning, are incomprehensible without an understanding of shame. Survivors’ guilt and, more generally, the politics of guilt will be better understood when we can see them in relation to the slippery dynamics of shame. I suggest that the same is true of the politics of solidarity and identification; perhaps those, as well, of humor and humorlessness. I’d also, if parenthetically, want to suggest that shame/performativity may get us a lot further with the cluster of phenomena generally called "camp" than the notion of parody will, and more too than will any opposition between "depth" and "surface." And can anyone suppose that we’ll ever figure out what happened around political correctness if we don’t see it as, among other things, a highly politicized chain reaction of shame dynamics?

It has been all too easy for the psychologists and the few psychoanalysts working on shame to write it back into the moralisms of the repressive hypothesis: "healthy" or "unhealthy," shame can be seen as good because it preserves privacy and decency, bad because it colludes with self-repression or social repression. Clearly, neither of these valuations is what I’m getting at. I want to say that at least for certain ("queer") people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that, as

James’s example suggests, has its own, powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities.

NOTES

1. Or again, on going back to the magazine where an old story had been published: “I recently had the chance to ‘look up’ (and note these scare quotes), for old sake’s sake, that momentary seat of the good-humoured satiric muse — the seats of the muse, even when the merest flutter of one of their robes has been involved, losing no scrap of sanctity for me, I profess, by the accident of my having myself had the honour to offer the visitant the chair.” (Art 214).

2. That it is thus also the smell of excitement seem to involve grotesquely inappropriate affect, as the passage I’ve just quoted from continues: “No dreadful old pursuit of the hidden ‘love with bloodhounds and the rag of association can ever, for ‘excitement,’ I judge, have bettered it at its best” (Art 311). It is nauseatingly unclear in this sentence whether the “excitement” (note the scare quotes) attaches to the subject position of the escaping slave or of the enslaving pursuer. The way I’m inclined to read this sentence, though I could be quite wrong, ties it back up with the matter of puppetry: James’s ostensible reference, I think, with the flippant phrase “dreadful old pursuit of the hidden slave” is not to slavery itself but to the popular forms of theatrical melodrama and audience interpellation based on (for instance) Uncle Tom’s Cabin. But conformed in the flippantness of this citation are two occasions of shame that were enduring ones for James: first, that he did not enlist to fight in the Civil War, what he describes in another preface as the “deluge of fire and blood and tears” needed to “correct” slavery (Art 215), and second, the unattenuated but often fiercely disavowed dependence of his own, rarefied art on popular melodramatic forms and traditions.