

The French James,
or Henry James under the French Critical Gaze

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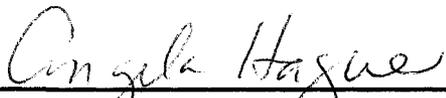
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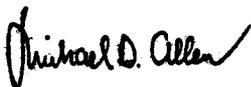
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Abstract

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The French James, or Henry James under the French Critical Gaze explores, through the analysis of how French critics approach Henry James, the influence of cultural factors specific to a country, including historical, institutional, and ideological ones, on literary criticism. While arguably counterintuitive in today's global world, this exploration of the French James demonstrates that local contexts significantly determine criticism in its practice and outcomes.

Examining Henry James's view and practice of literary criticism, Chapter I, "James, Criticism, and Culture," foregrounds the influence of cultural factors upon the conduct of criticism. A shrewd cultural analyst, James was sensitive to the differences between the Anglo-American and French literary and critical practices, which he explained by postulating a link between cultures and literary approaches. His own literary criticism testifies to this relationship.

Before discussing the cultural factors that presided over the birth of the French James, "The Making of the French James: The 'Secret' Master Trope and Textuality" and "French Jamesian Scholarship since the Eighties: An Unsuccessful Attempt to Break from Textual Boundaries?" identify the French James's salient traits through a survey of the scholarship produced in France since the 1950s. The author also analyzes the

circumstances surrounding the French construction of this writer to reveal the forces that shaped the French James.

Chapters IV and V, “The Textual Anchor of French Jamesian Scholarship” and “*Littérarité*, Universalism, and French Criticism: The Case of the French Reception of Cultural Studies,” explore the combined emphasis on textuality and rejection of contextualist or culturalist readings that characterize French Jamesian scholarship, but also French literary criticism. First focusing on French Jamesian critics’ defense of this particular critical perspective, chapter IV then widens its scope to include the larger French critical discourse. The bias for textualist readings results, the author argues, from the specific development of the literary studies field, marked by the competition between history and literature, the Sartrean legacy, and the prevailing conception of the critic’s role. In chapter V, the exploration of the forces behind the French James extends beyond the boundaries of the strictly literary field by analyzing the French reception of Cultural Studies. The author provides original translations of many of the French sources in this study.

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Introduction

In his contribution to *As Others Read US: International Perspectives on American Literature*, Marc Chénétier reports that British scholar Marcus Cunliffe

mentions the presence in world literature of two contemporary writers: a Frenchman by the name of Edgarpo and an American better known as Edgar Allan Poe, vituperated in his own country for his light-headed and gratuitous ‘tintinnabulations.’ Edgarpo, much admired by Baudelaire and by Mallarmé, [was] later praised by Paul Valéry, this most intellectual of French poets.... (Chénétier 81)

Worthy of a *doppelgänger* tale à la Poe, Cunliffe’s remark humorously dramatizes the drastic differences of appreciation that can exist between France and America when it comes to literary works. As Roger Asselineau’s “The French Face of Faulkner” and Paul W. Miller’s “French Criticism of Hemingway” suggest, this phenomenon is not circumscribed to Poe. Reminding his readers that America and France have a long history of interpretative differences, Chénétier comments upon the contrasted critical fortunes that various American authors have experienced at home and in France. Thus, from a “regional hick writer,” William Faulkner became a “novelist of Nobel stature” as a result of Maurice-Edgar Coindreau’s dissemination of his works in French and subsequent support of such high-profile French writers as “Sartre, Claude-Edmonde Magny, and André Malraux” (82). Herman Melville also was recognized in France before he was in America, where his more traditional adventure works left *Moby-Dick* in the shadows.

As regards these two authors, however, both sides finally reached a consensus. Such is not the case for Edgar Allan Poe, whose popularity in France, both in general and academic circles, constitutes a matter of surprise for American observers, especially when contrasted with the less happy French critical fate of other American authors who, contrary to him, are by now well-established in the American canon. Joining with “astonished American critics” who marvel at the attention that the “seemingly obvious Poe” garners in France, James E. Miller can thus only lament the “general neglect” that greeted “the subtle and ambiguous James” (303-305). Furthermore, Miller faults Tzvetan Todorov, the author of the main scholarly work done in France at the time on James, for using an inadequate approach resulting in a formulaic James. Nicola Bradbury hints at similar critical and methodological divergences when she describes Ian Watt’s 1960 “the First Paragraph of *The Ambassadors: An Explication*” and David Lodge’s 1966 “Strether by the River” as “un-English” in their “attention to stylistics” (2). However lacking, flawed, or simply different as they may seem, one cannot deny that international perspectives complicate but also enrich the critical field as they produce different Poes or Jameses.

In 2003, *The Henry James Review* (hereafter *HJR*) sought to bring to light some of these other Jameses in a special issue focusing on what editor Susan M. Griffin tagged “Global James.” As a living antithesis to provincialism, Henry James, the cosmopolite American author turned British and partly educated in France, has always been difficult to contain within one single national and cultural context, like his writing which systematically takes readers across borders and cultures. His texts, now disseminated

around the globe, have come under the scrutiny of a variety of non-American and non-Anglophone scholars, whose work *HJR* gathers in an endeavor to gain insight into “how ‘Henry James’ is configured and understood nationally.” The contributions from critics from Estonia, Japan, Korea, Italy, and Romania reveal, as Griffin points out, that James studies do not occur in a vacuum but are “indicative of, and imbricated with, [these critics’] countries’ global self-definitions.” James’s fluctuating visibility in Japanese criticism is, for instance, contingent upon the country’s “relation to the West” (203). Adopting a less political angle, David McWhirter further reveals in *HJR*’s following issue the extent to which different “cultural and critical traditions” produce various avatars of the Master or “new Henry Jameses” (185). Indeed, as he revisits the question of “[g]lobalizing Henry James” (186), McWhirter underlines the “profoundly historical” differences between what he calls, borrowing Jonathan Freedman’s words, “our Henry James” (qtd. in McWhirter 168)—recently opened to postmodern readings—and the “increasingly globalized” James (184). The Russian James, still viewed through the lens of Brooks and Parrington, or the strictly New Critical Korean James indeed stand in stark contrast with the American James; nevertheless, McWhirter is confident that the internationalization that James studies are experiencing will contribute to “shap[ing] the James of the future” (185-86).

The emphasis that the *HJR* special issue on “Global James” places on the multiplicity of Jameses, as well as the history of French criticism for voicing judgments “puzzling” to American observers (Miller 303), warrant a new exploration of an assumedly more familiar James: the French James. While the consideration by American

publications of scholarship produced in Japan, Korea, or Romania re-draws and widens the scope of James studies, revisiting the French James contributes some unexpected insight into the work of this author, but also into French critical practices. Geopolitical factors, such as France's relation to the West, might not play as large a role in the conduct of criticism as it does for the countries included in *HJR*. Nonetheless, one might expect to be faced with a James drastically different from his America counterpart since, as noted by Miller and Chénétier, the disparity of views between American and French critical readings can be so remarkable that it has become an object of mutual bafflement.

The phrase "French James" admits several possible interpretations of the relationship between the epithet and the name, some of which have previously been examined. Several critics have problematized the French James in a unilateral fashion by focusing on the novelist's relation to France and its culture and language. In their respective works, *The French Side of Henry James* and *Reading Henry James in French Cultural Contexts*, published in 1990 and 1995, Edwin S. Fussell and Pierre A. Walker establish France's preponderance in James's work both as text and context, as well as his intimate knowledge of its culture. Focusing on the "topography and language" appearing in several of James's works (ix), Fussell demonstrates that even in texts in which France or French fails to appear as concrete geographical setting or linguistic medium, as in *Princess Casamassima* or *What Maisie Knew*, it nonetheless forcefully emerges as a signifier or a "function" (111). "France," Fussell argues, "floats freely" in James's texts (78). For Walker, France, more specifically its literary culture, provides a necessary context to the interpretation of James's works. In his intertextual study of the author's

connections and allusions to both mainstream and popular French literary culture, Walker seeks, like Fussell, to define the “way French culture functions in James’s fiction” (xiii). He concludes that his work is “best read in a context at least partly French” since his novels “ask their readers to perceive connections with particular French texts” (xvii). Whereas several scholars have explored this topic, few French critics have dedicated book-length studies to the relationship between James and their homeland. Indeed, only two French publications directly engage this topic. In her 1970 *Henry James, The Vision of France*, Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, a Belgian scholar, adopts this research angle while avoiding the flaws of Marie-Reine Garnier’s 1927 *Henry James et la France*, the only study predating hers, which she describes as plagued with “nationalistic prejudices” and “a strong sense of personal outrage” at James’s representations of French characters (i). Rather than adjudicating on the veracity of his portrayal of the French, Delbaere-Garant aims to gain a better understanding of the “mind and fiction” of James who, similarly to his “Anglo-Saxon” characters, “defined himself through his attitude to the French mind,” by exploring his travel writing and criticism on French authors, but also the representation of France and French characters in several of his fictional works (iii). Scholarship on the “French James” has thus been construed as an exploration of his perception and novelistic use of France and its culture.

As the previous critics’ works demonstrate, focusing upon this specific aspect of the French James and exploring what France, as a place, a culture, a literature, and a language, meant to this author is warranted by James’s life and works. In addition to using French settings and characters in several of his novels and short stories, he also

wrote several travelogues and dedicated a significant part of his critical writings to French authors, be they novelists, like Gustave Flaubert or Honoré de Balzac, or critics, like Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve or Hippolyte Taine. However, focusing upon the place of France in James's mind and works does not constitute the sole avenue of critical inquiry available to critics, French or other. The terms of this relation can thus be inverted so as to consider what James as a literary figure means in France and who the French James—that is, James as seen through the eyes of French critics—is.

This aspect has been overlooked by American scholars and largely neglected by French ones, except for two publications. In her 1974 dissertation, “The Reception of Henry James in France,” Pierrette Frickey undertakes a review of French criticism dedicated to James's works published between 1950 and 1970. In her attempt to “sketc[h] the opinions of the reviewers,” Frickey mostly approaches the criticism as either positive or negative (25). Thus, whereas the latter faults James's fiction for being “lifeless and too complex” and “deplores James's puritanical ethic [and] the ambiguity of his style,” positive readings value (in a somewhat symmetrical fashion) his “subtlety, ... insight into the drama of man's inner life, ... lyricism, and his impact on the stream of consciousness novel” (239-40). As she finally tallies up her critical count, Frickey regretfully concludes that “James is not as popular in France as he is in the United States” (240) and that, as Philip Rahv observed in 1972, he “remains only a name” (344). More recently, Jean Bessière and Miceala Symington contributed an essay, written in English, on “The Reception of Henry James in France” to *The Reception of Henry James in Europe*, a work published in 2006 as part of the series on the “Reception of British Authors in

Europe.” In this essay, Bessière and Symington move beyond the merely evaluative dimension of the claims voiced by French critics and upon which Frickey focused to present what they view as the main directions followed by Jamesian scholarship in France. Woven throughout French critics’ work, who focus upon the “international theme, the fantastic, and ... Jamesian technique,” is “one basic idea.” James is indeed largely viewed as a “textual” and “reflexive author” (30, 35), and his works are consequently read through the lens of indeterminacy and the “secret,” itself construed as a “prevailing theme” (31). While Bessière and Symington offer some significant insights into French Jamesian scholarship, their attempt to contextualize the trends they identify remains limited by the essay format. In order to further understand the forces involved in the birth of the French James, one must pursue further the historicizing work towards which they gesture in their brief discussion of the “ideological implications” behind the publication of Jean-Bertrand Pontalis’s essay on Jamesian “indirectness” in Sartre’s *Les temps modernes* (23-24) or in their identification of the “Hegelian stand” as the foundation of French criticism (33). Besides, such work must take into account factors that extend well beyond the purely literary and critical realms.

In her introduction to *Henry James ou le fluide sacré de la fiction*, presented as an “inventory of James studies,” another French Jamesian critic, Sophie Geoffroy-Menoux, draws attention to this specific aspect of the question, which the internationalization of literary criticism begs as it throws into relief the differences existing among the scholarship produced in various countries. In her succinct snapshot of the scholarship dedicated to this author, Geoffroy-Menoux briefly contrasts the French and American

critical approaches, portraying French and American contributions to Henry James studies as falling within two distinct categories, each with its own questions of predilection and each disclosing specific orientations or values. She explains that:

si les méthodes divergent, les résultats eux convergent : se dégage ici les lignes de force d'une critique qui privilégie (pour des raisons historiques, épistémologiques, ou idéologiques ?) les questions de l'enfance, du mariage, de la guerre, du voyage, du fantastique, de l'intertextualité, de la musique, du théâtre, et autre questions formelles, alors qu'aux Etats-Unis, la critique, hantée par les problèmes éthiques, a privilégié la questions des mœurs, de la sexualité, et des rapports de James aux minorités. Mais, des deux cotes de l'Atlantique, tous reconnaissent la nature paradoxale de l'œuvre, monument érigé à l'absence, et fondé sur la division, et le vide.

(7)¹

While Geoffrey-Menoux indicates that a consensus regarding the “paradoxical nature” of James’s works exists between American and French criticisms, she also underlines that the two reach this common conclusion using different “methods”: the former, “haunted by ethical issues, has privileged questions pertaining to morals, sexuality, and James’s relation to minorities”; the latter has focused upon the themes of “childhood, marriage, war, travel, the fantastic, intertextuality, music, theatre, and other formal questions.”² The two critical gazes are, based on this appraisal, quite clearly distinct, be it in their object or methods. Expanding upon this description, one would identify American

criticism with a social and ethical type of critical approach, while the French would be labeled aesthetic by virtue of its concern with “formal questions.”

Fitting the two critical gazes into a neat dichotomy between pragmatic, or ethical, and aesthetic, or formalist, hermeneutics might conceal some finer points; nevertheless, Geoffrey-Menoux’s short introduction provides a starting point for exploring the French critical gaze. Furthermore, this critic raises a fascinating question when she asks whether French criticism’s orientation is explained by “historical, epistemological, or ideological factors” (7). Although Geoffroy-Menoux relegates it to a parenthetical aside, this issue has become more pressing as a result of the internationalization of literary criticism. The differences which one is unavoidably drawn to notice as the scholarship of various countries gains more visibility indeed lead to further questioning regarding their specific nature, as well as their source. Returning to the specific case of France, one must ask what in this country has contributed to the birth of Edgardo, or more importantly, which factors have determined the particular critical orientations that, according to Bessière, Symington, and Geoffroy-Menoux, characterize French Jamesian scholarship and produce the French James.

The epistemological validity of concepts like nation or borders, which the terms internationalization and globalization call to mind, has been challenged, and today’s increased rate of intellectual exchange might contribute to an overall homogenization of criticism. Yet, as globalized as our world may have become, James’s observation that “certain differences impose themselves” when “living about” still applies, including in the academic field (721). More traditionally, the interpretative outcome and the resulting

author's persona have been viewed as being significantly conditioned or even pre-determined by the choice of a specific critical approach. One can thus identify, among others, a Feminist and a Marxist James, as John Carlos Rowe shows in his 1984 *The Theoretical Dimensions of Henry James*. Today, one could add to the list a queer and, as McWhirter suggests, a postmodern James. As the editors and the contributors to the "Global James" issue demonstrate, the list of the theoretical Jameses that Rowe draws out in *The Theoretical Henry James* can be expanded to include yet other variations of the Master. Indeed, in addition to the chosen critical approach, the location or cultural affiliation of the critic can also influence how he or she perceives a text or literary figure, thus leaving an imprint on the object observed.

The terminology of literary studies, as well as the trend to engage in metacriticism and explore positionalities, points to a potentially significant relationship between critical practices and location. Whether through denominations such as the Constance, Geneva, or Chicago Schools, or national labels like French theory and Russian formalism, literary studies' discourse indeed often foregrounds place in relation to critical schools by identifying critical practices with their place of inception. Though the practice of attaching a national label to critical schools and movements might be dismissed as a mere convention, numerous critics have discussed the influence that the historical, social, and cultural factors peculiar to a specific country have upon both artistic production and critical discourse.

In *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner*, Carolyn Porter explores this phenomenon as it applies to artists.

Arguing that “American literature’s classic tradition” is actuated by a desire to “respon[d] to history and social reality,” rather than by the “flight from society” as proposed by D.H. Lawrence, Richard Poirier, Richard Chase, and R.W.B. Lewis (xiii, xvii), Porter demonstrates that escaping from the condition of “participant observer” proves, nevertheless, virtually impossible for the writers whose works she examines. The death of the “detached observer,” heralded by Heisenberg as he unveiled the “interference of our instruments of observation in the behavior of the phenomena being observed,” indeed spells out the impossibility of pure objectivity in perception (Porter 30-31). So pervasive is the influence of the socio-cultural context that these artists’ attempts to formulate a “response to reification,” defined as an idiosyncratic “feature of capitalist society” (xi), indeed proves unsuccessful (Porter 8-9). Although Porter’s argument focuses upon a specific category of writers and is restricted to American capitalism, her insight into the dependency between authors and historical context is applicable to literary critics, as the works of several theorists demonstrate.

As one approaches the question as it pertains to the practice of criticism, or, in other words, as one attempts to grasp the relation of the critical activity to the larger cultural structure, the names of several literary theorists and thinkers come to mind. French critic Roland Barthes reminds us that critics, in their quality of observers, are also subjected to a phenomenon comparable to the one described by Porter. In “What is Criticism?,” Barthes argues, as he did in *Critique et vérité*, that the “laws of creation” apply to both writer and critic. “[C]riticism,” he contends, “is not at all a table of results or a body of judgments, it is essentially an activity, i.e., a series of intellectual acts

profoundly committed to the historical and subjective existence (they are the same thing) of the man who performs them” (257). The “laws of creation” alluded to by Barthes find a clear definition in Michel Foucault. In “What is an Author?,” Foucault proposes that the subject be “stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse” to reveal “its functions [and] intervention in discourse,” as well as its “system of dependencies,” in other words the “rules [it] follows in each type of discourse” (1635-36). To the extent that the critic is an author, as Barthes observes (*Critique* 14, 50), one may attempt to determine his/her “system of dependencies” and explore the consequences of this particular position upon the direction and outcome of his/her work. Edward Said even more explicitly emphasizes the influence of culture upon criticism in his 1983 *The World, the Text, the Critic*. Said defines culture as “an environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals and their works are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole series of methodological attitudes” (8). Focusing more specifically upon the critic, he argues that there exists a “grid of research techniques and ethics by which the prevailing culture imposes on the individual scholar its canons of how literary scholarship is to be conducted” (9). This means that not only “instruments” or methods, but also the larger ideological, cultural, and institutional contexts within which the critic evolves, come to bear upon the critical activity and influence his/her specific critical gaze.

Adopting a metacritical approach, the present study focuses not so much on the nature of the assessment voiced in French criticism of Henry James, as Frickey does, but rather on the critical approaches applied by French critics to this author’s works and

resulting in the French James. Exploring the academic critical reception of James in France will also allow one to gain further insights into the specificity of French critical practices. Indeed, the nature of the reception of Henry James in France tells as much about the author as it does about the French critical gaze. The goal of this type of metacritical review of scholarship, thus, does not lie in passing value-judgments or in discussing the legitimacy or validity of critical findings. Rather, this approach intends to explore the extent to which literary criticism is culture-specific or to find out what criticism reveals about a particular culture.

Exploring the French criticism on Henry James requires that one first address some questions related to representation, as well as to the epistemological dilemma attached to this type of undertaking. How does one represent a national critical tradition without distorting or essentializing it? Avoiding these pitfalls will, to some extent, be impossible. While the representation intended here is not of an artistic nature, the process of “[s]election and simplification,” which James saw at work in mimetic art and which, according to Paul B. Armstrong, is also active in perception, must apply in a certain measure (58). Indeed, short of an all-inclusive annotated bibliography treating each book and article individually, an overview of French criticism on James aiming at representativeness will necessarily demand that one make some choices in terms of the material considered and proceed by grouping critical production under headings which, although enabling a synoptic picture of the field, will necessarily fail to reflect more individual or marginal tendencies.

Since the nature of the corpus of critical works here used to apprehend the French James clearly influences the outcome, the modalities of its constitution must be clarified. For the present study, only material published in France will come under consideration. While nationality might readily come to mind as a potential principle of selection, James's own life and his changing national allegiances testify to the caveat of resorting to this criterion. More specifically, a critic's perspective is subjected to various sources of influence, both national and extra-national, as the previous chapter on James's criticism shows. The nationality of the critic, thus, does not vouch for the representativeness of his/her work. Language of publication presents similar limitations. Contrary to these two criteria, place of publication offers a more reliable factor upon which to base one's selection of scholarship. Indeed, one may assume that French editors select pieces for publication because these demonstrate a relevance to the critical conversation involving their readers. As a result of this choice of criterion for inclusion, the work of some Anglophone critics will appear in the corpus. The nature of the Anglo-American critical works selected for translation into French and/or publication in French journals can also provide a further indication of the themes and issues prevalent in French critical discourse on Henry James. Once more, one will assume that publication choices are, if not dictated, influenced by audience expectations.

The works of French critics and scholars are presented in Chapters Two and Three. As they provide an overview of the Jamesian scholarship published in France since the 1950s to this day, these two chapters reveal the specificity of French Jamesian scholarship, thus introducing the reader to what may be called the French James, or

James as seen through the eyes of French critics. Focusing on the most salient traits, these overview chapters show that James has been associated with “the secret,” which constitutes the master trope of the French critical discourse on this author. Besides identifying the main traits of James as viewed by French critics, these chapters also contextualize this image within the critical developments taking place in France from the fifties to the seventies in order to show which circumstances have presided over the image of this American author in France.

Chapter Four turns to what may seem, to a reader educated in the United States, conspicuously absent from French Jamesian scholarship, namely a cultural approach. Indeed, French Jamesian scholarship is marked by a bias for the textual approach and a distinctive frigidity towards contextualist and culturalist readings. As the works of other French critics reveal, this critical stance is not restricted to Jamesian scholars. This idiosyncrasy is explored in Chapter Four, which demonstrates that the development of the field of literary studies, the cultural legacy of the Sartre years, and the conception of the critic’s role prevailing in France greatly contributed to this bias toward the textual dimension of literature. The recent debates triggered in France by the rising popularity of Cultural Studies in the United States are the focus of the final chapter. The widely negative reception of this critical paradigm further demonstrates how larger cultural factors influence the practice of literary criticism. Besides providing a compelling illustration of the French partiality for textual approaches to literature, these debates have impelled French critics and scholars to make explicit the assumptions underpinning their conception and practice of criticism.

Before delving into contemporary French Jamesian scholarship, one may take a page from the Master's book. In his quality of cultural analyst and literary critic, Henry James himself indeed provides a propitious starting ground for a study of the interaction between culture and criticism. His reviews of various French authors, as well as his attempt to formulate a theory of the novel, clearly foreground the differences between the Anglo-American and the French critical gazes while also offering some hypotheses as to what may cause them.

Notes to Introduction

¹“Although methods differ, conclusions are comparable: the criticism that emerges here favors (for historical, epistemological, or ideological reasons?) issues related to childhood, marriage, war, travel, the fantastic, intertextuality, music, theater, and other formal questions whereas American criticism, haunted by ethical issues, has privileged questions pertaining to morals, sexuality, and James’s relation with minorities. Nevertheless, on both sides of the Atlantic , all acknowledge the paradoxical nature of James’s work, a monument erected to absence and founded upon division and void” (translation mine 7).

²The six themes around which the collection of 21 essays edited by Geoffroy-Menoux is organized partly reflect the specifically Continental orientations she describes. The contributions included in “L’Étranger [Abroad]” explore James’s relationship to Europe and to his own country. In “Une Comédie humaine,” critics focus upon Jamesian characters’ psychological and seemingly moral makeup. The structure of Jamesian writing is the subject of the essays featured in “La Question de l’écriture [*Écriture*].” The role of absence foregrounded in this section also underpins the reflections of two translators of James’s works in “Traduire Henry James [Translating Henry James].” The essays located in “L’Art de la scène [The Art of the Scene]” and “Le Fantastique [The Fantastic]” all adopt a “transartistic” perspective, seeking to establish links between various art forms, such as painting, music, and opera, as they question the concept of representation (Geoffroy-Menoux 8).

Chapter I

James, Criticism, and Culture

Henry James, pondering the fate of the cosmopolite in "Occasional Paris," remarks that this particular way of life inevitably begets "the habit of comparing, of looking for points of difference and of resemblance, for present and absent advantages, for the virtues that go with certain defects, and the defects that go with certain virtues" (721). Placing him, in Edna Kenton's words, "'between' countries" (137), his cosmopolitan upbringing and lifestyle provided him with a privileged vantage point upon what he calls the "lights and shades of the foreign character" (James, "Occasional" 722). His fictional works clearly evince this sensitivity to cultural differences and their impact upon individuals. Yet, James displays a similar "habit" of mind in his own literary criticism and his metacritical reflections on the novel, its craft and criticism, which, taking for their object the American, British, and French artists and critics, are as international as his fiction was. However, in this specific field, mere "comparing" does not constitute an end in itself for James, but should lead to the adoption of comparatively superior critical practices. In an 1867 letter to T.S. Perry, he clearly demonstrates what Edward Said calls an "affiliative" propensity, whereby one lets one's "critical consciousness" be shaped by a "method or system acquired ... by social or political conviction, economical and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation" (25). After having expressed admiration for the contributions to the knowledge of their literary tradition made by the "best French critics," more specifically

by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, James declares that being “American born” constitutes “a great blessing,” for it entails the opportunity to “deal freely with forms of civilization not our own” and to “pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically etc.) claim our property wherever we find it.” James thus feels ideally poised to achieve “the vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world [which] is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen” (*Selected Letters* 15). This early statement reflects two characteristics that would remain constant throughout James’s literary criticism: a deep awareness of cultural differences doubled by a desire to transcend them, materializing in his eagerness to combine, or affiliate with, various literary traditions.

James and the French and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ critical traditions and cultures

A number of critics have remarked upon the hybrid nature of James’s criticism. In *The Art of Criticism: Henry James on the Theory and the Practice of Fiction*, William R. Veeder and Susan M. Griffin present “in-betweenness” as underpinning his entire critical stance, according to which the critic ought to embody a “compromise between the philosopher and the historian [,] the scholar and the man of the world,” as well as strike a balance between the “feminine” and the “masculine” (2-4). As Sarah B. Daugherty does in her 1981 *The Literary Criticism of Henry James*, Vivien Jones draws attention to another important dualism in James’s criticism throughout her 1985 study *James the Critic*. Her first two chapters, “American Morality” and “French Realism,” spell out the terms of this dualism and explicitly foreground their cultural or national nature. The associations among the four terms that Jones thus establishes, as well as the dichotomy

she implicitly sets up, reflect James's own perception of the difference between what he would call the "Anglo-Saxon" and French literatures, and also of their respective critical gazes.

James's acute awareness of the differences separating French and English literary and critical practices is tangible throughout his voluminous critical contribution.³ His remarks on the novel and the conduct of criticism are, indeed, most often occasioned or illustrated by a comparison of the two national critical practices' respective worth and problematized in terms of national differences. Featured in his 1879 *Hawthorne*, James's well-known tirade on "the items ... absent from the texture of American life," namely the "accumulation of history and custom" that characterizes Europe and that "form[s] a fund of suggestion for a novelist," provides an illustration of the causal relationship he perceives between cultural context and literary production (*LC* I 351). In one of his late essays, "The Future of the Novel," James returns to this relationship and further presents culture as weighing on both literary production and its reception. Indeed, he re-states the existence of an "intimat[e]" link between "fiction" and "the society that produces [it]" but also draws attention to the causal relationship between literature and the "society that ... consumes [it]," including criticism which, if "acute and mature," directly affects literary production. This essay also more specifically contrasts the situations in France and in Anglo-Saxon countries; thus, he argues that "a community mainly devoted to traveling and shooting, to pushing trade and playing football" rather than "addicted to reflection and fond of ideas" constitutes a poor milieu for the novel to evolve (*LC* I 106). The contrast staged in "The Future of the Novel" between the French and the Anglo-Saxon

literary cultures and practices recurs throughout James's career. Despite his hostility to generalizations and materialist doctrines, James draws a complex geography of criticism by consistently associating merits and flaws with one of the two nationalities or cultures. While France is portrayed as offering a model of theoretical sophistication lacking in English-speaking countries and its best critics as relying on sensibility rather than *a priori*, Great Britain provides the "moral leaven" absent from the French critical view (qtd. in Jones 43). As an early commentary on the relationship between national culture and criticism, James's metacritical essays offer some tracks for a reflection on the culture-specific nature of critical gazes. James indeed suggests that a variety of cultural factors—religious, economic, and social—influence both the nature of literature and the practice of literary criticism. Also, his critical essays, from which one may derive James's ideal criticism as he discusses the respective merits of French and American critics, demonstrate how his own cultural heritage shapes his approach to literature.

James's comparative approach to French and Anglo-Saxon criticisms

James's perception of French criticism is largely influenced by his frustration with the conduct of Anglo-Saxon criticism. His oft-quoted 1908 letter to W. D. Howells encapsulates the essence of his dissatisfaction, although he expressed, both privately and publicly, his grievances throughout his career. Referring to the Prefaces on which he was working at the time, James presents them to Howells as "a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on other than infantile lines—as against the so almost universal Anglo-Saxon absence of these things" (qtd. in Blackmur viii). As early as 1873, James condemns dogmatism and lack of close analysis. In a letter to Charles Eliot

Norton, he expands upon “criticism,” which had been the object of a harsh “hyperbolic speech” in a previous letter.² He thus complains about “the flood of precepts” and the dearth of “examples” that characterize criticism (qtd. in Gard 30). The Prefaces, which Jones views as “a model of critical reading” (168), afford James ample opportunity to register his impatience with the critical narrowness and superficiality characteristic, according to him, of English and American criticism. Thus, as he discusses “the scenic system” in Preface XI, he notes that “these finer idiosyncrasies of a literary form” constitute the object of only “small references” in English criticism, in which they are customarily “regarded as outside the scope of criticism” (qtd. in Jones 168). One can especially sense James’s frustration when, in the same Preface, he interrupts his discussion of treatment after remarking that one cannot assume that “many readers” actually do “care” to “feel ... how the theme *is* being treated” through the scenic method (*LC* II 1172). In Preface XIII, James even confesses to having possibly “bore[d]” his audience with his extended discussion of the “planned rotation of aspects and ... [the] ‘scenic’ determination of them” (*LC* II 1193), thus expressing his desire to engage in sophisticated critical discussions of literary craft, as well as his knowledge that his American audience does not share it.

These previous remarks all demonstrate that, in general terms, James took exception to the primitive, shallow, and pedestrian, or unsophisticated, nature of contemporary criticism. In several of his published critical essays, James further specifies the weaknesses he perceives in English criticism by contrasting English critics and critical practices with their French counterparts. James had previously remarked that the

English and the French were so utterly different that “your agreeable impression of the one implies a censorious attitude towards the other, and *vice versa*” (“Occasional” 722).

This observation reflects his discussion of the two critical traditions, in which comparatively positive references to the French critical climate and practices are mirrored by recriminations against English criticism.

The link between culture and literature according to James

“The Art of Fiction” (hereafter “The Art”) provides a privileged gateway into the relationship between criticism and culture established in James’s discourse. Besides offering an overview of the recriminations and recommendations which James expresses throughout his career, namely his plea for a serious discussion of the novel involving a theoretical self-awareness and his rejection of dogmatic or prescriptive approaches to the novel, this well-known essay sketches the dichotomy between Anglo-Saxon and French literary and critical traditions that organizes his reflection on the novel and its criticism. The French critical tradition is introduced in the second paragraph of this essay, which, as Mark Spilka observes, James deftly peppers with French terms, thereby “quietly invoking ... a theory more sophisticated’ than Besant’s” (qtd. in Davidson 123). James reminds his readers that “only a short time ago [,] the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*.” Employing another French adjective, he argues that the English tautological conception of the novel was “*naïf*.” The novel in England, he continues, is not self-conscious enough: “[i]t had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison” (LC I 44). Rejoicing at the opening of the “era of discussion” that Besant’s

essay heralds, James adds that “[a]rt,” indeed, “lives upon discussion,” which, along with “suggestion [and] formulation,” are “fertilizing” (*LC I* 44-45). Later, as he condemns the opposition between novel and romance, James points out, as if in passing, that the French, who do not recognize such an arbitrary distinction, have, nevertheless, “brought the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness” (*LC I* 56). While James demonstrates a concern for the lack of discussion and theoretical self-awareness, he strongly emphasizes the “danger” stemming from the “error” of prescription. In James’s view, defining “beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be,” as Besant does, is detrimental to the “good health” of the novel (*LC I* 49).⁴ Once more implicitly supplementing the deficient English critical lexicon, James resorts to another French term, *donnée*, when he pleads for a greater freedom regarding subject matters (*LC I* 56, 59). The recriminations and recommendations expressed in this seminal essay continually re-emerge in James’s subsequent discussions of critical practices. Yet, while James carefully accommodates his audience’s “enormous bias ... against the French novel” in “The Art” (Davidson 128), his contrast between French and Anglo-Saxon traditions would gradually become more marked and explicit.

This dual cultural context frames James’s call for a serious and expert discussion of the novel. As he shares in one of his letters to Perry the deception that he experienced regarding the reception of “The Art” and its relative failure to initiate a more stringent critical discussion of the novel, he implicitly contrasts the English literary atmosphere with a more auspicious environment. His “poor article” having failed to trigger any reaction in the press or in literary circles, James despairs that “[t]here is almost no care

for literary discussion here,—questions of form, of principle, the ‘serious’ idea of the novel appeals apparently to no one, & they don’t understand you when you speak of them” (qtd. in Gard 149). At the time, James lived in London, and the country to which he refers is obviously Great Britain. Although France is not identified as the counterpart to the ‘here’ mentioned in his letter, James quite probably refers to this country, where he resided from November 1875 to December 1876. Although his memory of his visits to Flaubert’s “literary fraternity” during his stay is tinted with a certain ambivalence (Edel 185-86), one may assume that his experience among its “uncommonly talkative” members approached more closely the vital “exchange of views and comparison of standpoints” he called for in “The Art” (*LC* I 44-45). In a later essay, “The Present Literary Situation in France,” published in 1899, James further praises the French “spirit of conversation,” as well as the constant “criticism and *causerie*,” which he here again portrays as necessary to the vitality of the novel (*LC* I 113).⁵ In addition to the overall literary or social atmosphere, James points to yet another cultural element likely to influence the development of criticism. His complaint about the lack of interest in “questions of form” evokes the criticism he levels at the “Protestant communities” in “The Art.” Indeed, he faults their “old evangelical hostility to the novel” and their conception of the novel’s purpose as solely “instructive or amusing” for preventing “artistic preoccupations” from being given “important consideration,” simultaneously stunting the development of the novel and of a sophisticated critical discourse (45, 47-48). Thus, James draws one’s attention to the direct influence that this very specific

aspect of culture, namely the conception of literature's purpose, has upon the conduct of criticism.

Discussion or exchange of views is essential since, in James's mind, it plays an instrumental role in fostering the self-awareness, or the "metaliterary self-consciousness" (Rowe, *Theoretical* 60), lacking in the English conception of the novel. In this area again, James opposes the Anglo-Saxon situation to the French. British novelist Anthony Trollope is the target of James's criticism on this point. In his 1883 commemorative article, James portrays him as the embodiment of the English reluctance "to be explicitly or consciously an artist—to have a system, a doctrine, a form." Trollope, he continues, has "never troubled his head nor clogged his pen with theories about the nature of his business" (*LC* I 1332). Hence, Trollope, whom Walter Kendrick calls "the least theoretical of realists" (qtd. in Rowe, *Theoretical* 59), is guilty of having "no reason to give for his practice" ("Art" 45). Faithful to his contrast of the "French and English mind[s]," James juxtaposes to Trollope's the names of several French writers, among them Émile Zola, whose *Nana* he reviews in 1880 (*LC* I1347). James's review of this French novel provides him with another occasion to contrast the two countries' literary traditions. In this otherwise negative critique, the French novelist's artistic self-awareness constitutes the only redeeming aspect. James laments the scarcity of novelists like Zola, "a novelist with a system, a passionate conviction, a great plan," in England and the United States where writers "are not conspicuous for general views" (*LC* II 868). "[T]he theory too is interesting," James reminds his readers in "The Art" (*LC* I 45), and while one wants to avoid "the dim wilderness of theory," an author's exposition of "his most

general idea, his own sense of his direction,” like the one Guy de Maupassant delivers in his preface to *Pierre et Jean*, is to be welcomed (*LC* II 521).

Cultural context and the conduct of criticism

Not only Anglo-Saxon artists fell short of exploring their own craft of fiction. The same lack of close scrutiny of the literary object plagued criticism, according to James. His dismissal of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s appreciation of Anna E. Dickinson’s novel as “a brave, noble book” is in this respect revealing. For James, “these vague random utterances” do not constitute “the language of criticism” (*LC* I 224). Stowe’s assessment falls short of fulfilling the “prime office of criticism,” which consists in “mak[ing] our absorption and our enjoyment of the things that feed the mind as aware of itself as possible” (*LC* I 124). James’s impatience with this brand of criticism would only grow more exacerbated with time, as the content and tone of an 1888 letter addressed to Robert L. Stevenson demonstrate. Then settled in Great Britain, James bluntly imparts his views on the state of criticism to his addressee. Being “of an abject density and puerility,” he simply considers criticism non-existent. Representative of this “Philistine twaddle” is Andrew Lang, whom James accuses of expressing nothing but “the view of the old lady round the corner or the clever person at the dinner party” (qtd. in Gard 184). If criticism is to be worthy of its name, it must engage in close analysis or “analytic appreciation.” The fact that this concept served as the “germ” of one of James’s short stories bespeaks the importance it held for him. The author indeed reveals in his preface to *The Figure in the Carpet* that he was prompted to write this short story by the desire “to reinstate analytic appreciation ... in English-speaking air” (*LC* II 1234). One may find additional

indications of what this “analytic” approach entails in a letter, in which James comments upon his review of Sir Sidney Colvin’s edition of Stevenson’s letters. To James, his article was deficient because it did not include “the things one would have liked most to say,” namely “all the critical (I mean closely analytical) things about his [Stevenson’s] talent, manner, literary idiosyncrasies, views, etc.” (qtd. in Gard 304).

Besides holding a fundamental place in James’s conception of criticism, this concept is the locus of a fundamental difference between French and Anglo-Saxon critical practices. While the latter strikes him as displaying a “marked collective mistrust of anything like close or analytic appreciation,” the former provides an illustration of the analytic approach (*LC* II 1234). In “The Science of Criticism,” written as a contribution to an 1891 *New Review* symposium on the same topic, James contrasts the state of Anglo-Saxon criticism with the situation in “places ... less desperate,” namely Paris, France. Contrary to the incessant “chatter” and “platitudes” synonymous with the former, he finds in France a criticism subjecting literary texts to a closer scrutiny (*LC* I 96-97). Echoing the comment he made to his brother in 1870 regarding the English “mortal mistrust of ... ‘keen analysis,’” viewed as a “maudlin foreign flummery” (qtd. in Jones 110), he explains that French criticism “goes further than with us [and] handles the subject ... with finer finger-tips” (*LC* I 97). While the phrase suggests the practice of a more analytic approach, James does not supply particulars. He, however, partly remedies this omission when he articulates the difference between the two criticisms in his essay on “The Present Literary Situation in France.” There, he once more directly contrasts critical performances. Taking as his point of comparison two similar critical works

published in France and Great Britain—the “English Men of Letters” series and “*Les Grand Écrivains Français*”—he observes that “the authors of English studies appear to labor ... under a terror of critical responsibility [whereas] the authors of the French ... hunger and thirst for it.” Again, “the authors of English studies ... hug the safe and easy shore of small biographical fact and anecdote” so as to avoid “any relation of their subject that may compel them to broach an idea.” On the contrary, the “French are impatient til they can put out into the open and sound its depths and breathe its air” (*LC I* 114). The images used in this passage denote clearly the comparatively more probing nature of the French critical approach as opposed to the more superficial English one. James’s assessment of Jules Lemaître and Émile Faguet, two French critics presented as illustrative of this specific critical approach, further defines what “analytic appreciation” involves. Through his “art of imperturbable charmed inquiry, vertiginous speculation and inconclusive thought,” Lemaître epitomizes the personal involvement and openness that the practice of criticism requires, while Faguet delivers in his “exhaustive ... analysis” of Flaubert a “masterpiece of consideration,” as well as “a proof of what, to the critic, is possible” (*LC I* 114, 117).

Criticism and the market

As he suggests a relationship between the Protestant view of the novel and the limited nature of Anglo-Saxon criticism in “The Art,” James attempts to establish in “The Science of Criticism” the impact that economic factors have upon criticism. By drawing a distinction between the “new and flourishing industry” of “reviewing” and the ‘art of criticism,’” James simultaneously exhibits his dislike for reviewers and identifies the

cause of the downfall of genuine criticism (*LC I 96-97*). The absence of close analysis in Anglo-Saxon countries results, he asserts, from the emergence of the new periodical press, which, subjected to economic imperatives of productivity, fostered “rough-and-ready reviewing” (96). This practice of reviewing, which simplifies “one of the most difficult, the most delicate, the most occasional” arts, represents the antithesis of criticism as James conceives it since it precludes the type of close analysis he favors (*LC I 97*). Reviewing is, instead, characterized by “the unexpected proportion [it] bears to the objects discoursed of,” as well as by a “paucity of examples, of illustrations and productions” (*LC I 95*). James draws a similar parallel between the demands of the periodical press and the quality of criticism when, in his letter to Sir Colvin, he blames the absence of close analysis from his review of Colvin’s work on “the conditions of space, attention, in which any literary criticism that is not the basest hand to mouth journalism can get itself uttered at all now” (qtd. in Gard 304). This charge finds its most extreme expression in “The New Novel,” in which he argues that, instead of fulfilling its “activity of control” by discriminating among literary works, criticism has fallen victim to the “incurable democratic suspicion of the selective and the comparative principles in almost any application” (*LC I 126*). For James, the critical activity is thus at the mercy of economic and social trends.

French critical shortcomings and culture

Based upon these remarks, it would seem that James consistently presents France and its critical culture as an example to emulate. Not only does it provide a model for the “mutual stimulation, public exchange and private community, [and] intellectual

fellowship” James sought after (Spilka 106), it also exemplifies the theoretical self-awareness and the type of critical inquiry to which he aspired. Yet, for all it seemingly has to offer, French criticism, at its most representative, also epitomizes for James some pitfalls to be avoided. As his numerous pieces contrasting and assessing French critics’ respective worth make clear, James only embraces certain aspects of the French critical tradition, and, through his critique of French criticism, he further typifies critical practice along cultural and/or national lines. While his condemnation of the aestheticism present in certain French works of art is well-known, this flaw does not come directly under attack in his comments on criticism. Instead, James targets what he views as a French proclivity: the tendency towards materialism and dogmatism.

Hippolyte Taine’s Determinism

Hippolyte Taine, one of the most influential critics in France at the time, appears to attract most of James’s criticisms. If James praises Taine’s “magnificent powers of eloquent and vivid statement and presentation,” he, however, remains highly skeptical of his method (*LC* II 845). Compagnon describes Taine as “the advocate of determinism in literary criticism, the founder of a sociology of literature searching for causal explanations to a work of art by following the well-known theory of the three factors determining the individual” (182). This French critic, who was also a historian and philosopher, indeed became known for the critical approach he exposed in his 1863 *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*. Reducing it to “a mechanical problem,” Taine pretends to answer the question of literary creation by establishing a “complete picture” of all its possible causes, namely “*la race, le milieu, le moment*” (xliv-xxii). James comments

amply, and negatively, upon the deterministic bent of the French criticism, whose materialism seems restrictive to him. He wonders whether approaching “man as a plant or ... a machine” and relying on Taine’s theory yields “an adequate explanation of the various complications of the human organism” (*LC II* 830). In the same piece, he goes beyond simple questioning and turns the theory against its maker. Hence, James remarks upon Taine’s “scarcely [being] a Frenchman,” his “style and manner” being “extremely individual.” Taine thereby provides a “signal example of th[e] possible futility” of the “national and local influences” for which he is “a great stickler” (*LC II* 826).

One might argue that James partly endorses Taine’s approach. Rowe, for instance, detects some of the French critic’s “determinism” in his *Hawthorne* (*Theoretical* 47, 49), and Jones suggests that Taine’s method might have held some appeal for James as he was attempting to reach definitive conclusions on the English and French literary traditions (105). Parts of James’s 1888 review of Pierre Loti appear to substantiate this comparison. In keeping with his conception of “a living work of art” as “pretend[ing] always ... to some good faith of community, however indirect, with its period and place” (*LC II* 1221), James indeed asserts in this review that “the study of connections is the recognized function of intelligent criticism” and adds that “to judge a book all by itself” constitutes “a comparatively poor exercise of the attention (for the critic...)” (*LC II* 482). Then, in a sentence evoking Taine’s reference to “the turn of mind ... of a race” (xxviii), James argues that attentiveness to these connections allows the critic to “stud[y] not simply the genius of an individual, but, in a living manifestation, that of a nation or of a conspicuous group.” Similarities, however, stop here. Reflecting his belief that the critic’s only

“natural and proper servitude” is to the text, James only conceives of these “connections” as “coincidences and relations with other works” (*LC* II 803, 483).

French Dogmatism

Even if James might have been seduced by Taine’s approach in some minor respect, the problem remained that it had hardened into a method and presented, as such, a limitation. As his comments on Taine and Sainte-Beuve demonstrate, dogmatism constitutes an even greater hindrance than materialism to the critical activity. Taine, who “perpetually sacrific[es] shades to broad lines” and reduces his subject to “the symmetrically and neatly presentable,” exemplifies this danger (*LC* II 806, 845). As the “man with a method, the apostle of a theory,” this French critic represents for James “the climax of dogmatism” (*LC* II 844, 827). In James’s view, this propensity to dogmatism is characteristic of the French. In this respect, the title “A French critic” that James chooses for his essay on one of the least dogmatic critic in France, Edmond Schérer, appears ironic. Anticipating his characterization of “Gallic” intellectual life in *Hawthorne* as marked by a “passion for completeness of theory” synonymous with “formulas, doctrines, [and] dogmas” (*LC* I 380), James expresses his dislike for totalization or system-building in his 1875 “Honoré de Balzac,” in which he compares this French novelist’s undertaking in *La Comédie humaine* to that of Auguste Comte in his “Positive Philosophy.” Both “enterprises” are “equally characteristic of the French passion for completeness, for symmetry, for making a system as neat as an epigram—of its intolerance of the indefinite, the unformulated.” “The French mind,” James continues, “likes better to squeeze things into a formula that mutilates them, if need be, than to leave

them in the frigid vague” (*LC* II, 41). Faithful to his Arnoldian conception of criticism, he considers the critic’s allegiance to a dogma of any kind as a significant hindrance to critical practice. As he pleads for the artist’s freedom in “The Art,” so he advocates unfettered critical practice.

James’s dislike of dogma is also what motivates his preference for other French critics, namely Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve and Edmond Schérer. Sainte-Beuve looms large in James’s critical landscape. Although it might be dismissed as the manifestation of juvenile enthusiasm, James expressed early in his career his desire to “acquire something of [Sainte-Beuve’s] intelligence and ... patience and vigour” in order to “do for our dear old English letters and writers *something* of what Sainte-Beuve and the best French critics have done for theirs” (*Selected* 15). In his “subtle interfusion of science and experience” and “his passion for details, for exactitude and completeness, for facts and examples,” Sainte-Beuve epitomizes James’s ideal critical practice (*LC* II 674, 683). More significantly, he is “the less doctrinal of critics [, who,] by his very horror of dogmas, moulds, and formulas ... effectively contributed to the science of literary interpretation” (844). In addition to praising his “flexibility” upon multiple occasions (646, 680), James commends the French critic’s imperviousness to “camps and coteries” (684). Sainte-Beuve stood as an “independent individual,” whose insistence upon abiding by his impression, “the thing in the world he most valued,” James admired (684-85).

Why James would place Sainte-Beuve above Taine might at first appear surprising. Sainte-Beuve’s own description of his method is, indeed, by his own admission, on some points similar to Taine’s (32, 14). In an essay on Chateaubriand

dated July 1862, he presents the difficulty to “judge [a work] independently from the knowledge of the man himself” as the justification for his “*méthode naturelle en littérature*” (32, 15). “What is more legitimate,” he asks, “than to take advantage of all the facts available so as to definitely do away with a certain admiration that is both too textual and too abstract...?” (71). He thus studies an author’s “native land,” his parents, as well as his “*premier lieu*,” or the first artistic group to which he belonged (18-23). All this information, Sainte-Beuve argues, “helps and guides” (20). He also advocates research into the aspects “the most foreign to the nature of [an author’s] work” (28); thus, knowing an author’s financial situation, religious beliefs, attitudes towards women, and daily life helps to “judge the author of a book and the book itself” (28). The image of Sainte-Beuve as a materialist becomes even clearer in his review of Deschanel’s *Essais de critique naturelle*. He indeed claims to embrace this other critic’s thesis according to which one must “study and note the influences of blood, parentage, family, race, place, and climate” (79). However, Sainte-Beuve anticipates charges of materialism and determinism and reminds his readers that whatever the care devoted to studying these factors, “there will always be a certain unexplained, and inexplicable, part, in which individual genius consists” (70). Thus, he does not pretend to exhaust the work of art by this approach, however materialistic. This, arguably, is the point at which James sees Sainte-Beuve differing from Taine: he is not looking for the “key to the truth,” while for Taine the “truth lies stored up in great lumps and blocks to be released and detached by a few lively hammer blows” (*LC* II 844). For Sainte-Beuve, as for James, criticism will always remain “an art” (17).

Another fundamental divergence in Sainte-Beuve's and Taine's respective critical methods truly makes all the difference for James. It lies in the former's advocacy of an inductive or immanent approach. In the *Nouveaux Lundis*, Sainte-Beuve specifies the nature of his approach as he responds to his critics who reproach him for, seemingly, lacking a theory. While he does not follow "a Code," he has "a method" that, he underlines, "has not preexisted and that has not manifested itself first as a theory." "It has formed in me," he stipulates, "from practice itself" (13-14). Sainte-Beuve emphasizes this adherence to the inductive method when he adds later in the same essay that "[t]o be in literary history and in criticism a disciple of Bacon appears to me to be the need of the time and an excellent condition to judge and taste with more security" (24). This methodological discrepancy between the two French critics is significant since it bespeaks a drastically different approach to literary works. Whereas Taine operates with an *a priori* theory and is thus guilty of letting "a design" determine his "opinions" (LC II 834), Sainte-Beuve gives priority to the work of art, hence practicing an immanent criticism. In this respect, the former can be said to fulfill what James views as "the philosopher's function," which is "to compare a work with an abstract principle of truth," while the latter epitomizes "the critic's," which is "to compare a work with itself, with its own concrete standard of truth" (LC II 805). Such immanent criticism demands that the critic be especially sensitive since this approach, by definition, eschews the assumptions that otherwise guide the critic in his work.

In place of dogmas, James calls for sensitivity, another critical quality that Sainte-Beuve epitomizes. In a review of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*, he presents the

British critic's "sensitive and generous" approach, summarized by the adjective "sympathetic," as the product of a "decided French influence" and, in this quality, comparable to Saint-Beuve's (*LC I 712, 723*). James underlines the sensitive dimension of the critic when he describes, in "The Science of Criticism," his/her primary quality as the ability "to feel and feel [,] to have perception at the pitch of passion." "[I]n proportion as he is sentient," he continues, "is the critic a valuable instrument" (*LC I 98*). This emphasis on sensitivity is consistent with James's definition of the critic as "a reader who prints his impression" (*LC I 223*). James finds Taine at his best when, instead of applying his formula, he lets his "sentiment" and "independent personal impression" guide him (*LC II 843, 844*). In this respect, one may argue that James demands from critics as much as he does from artists. As "[n]o good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind," he implies that no valuable criticism will come from a perfunctory engagement with a text. Like the novelist, the critic should strive to be "one of the people on whom nothing is lost" (*LC I 64, 53*). Striving to be sensitive implies for James that one practice a kind of immanent criticism which demands that the critic stay free from outside influences and understand a work of art on its own terms. This idea appears clearly in "Guy de Maupassant," an 1888 review of the French author that also provides several clues as to how sensitivity and disinterestedness are related. James and the French author both view a work of art as presenting one among several possible "impressions" of the world and, as such, as constituting "a *case*." Instead of "the more common method of establishing [his] own premises," the "intelligent" critic ought to follow "a course more fruitful in valid conclusions." This demands that he "giv[e] [him]self freely to [the work]" rather than

“quarrel with it because it is not another” (*LC* II 523-24). The critic must thus rely on his own impressions rather than apply preconceived critical notions.

Sainte-Beuve has been presented as a “lasting critical model” for James (Jones 14). The latter’s acknowledgment that “the measure of [his] enjoyment of a critic is the degree to which he resembles Sainte-Beuve” substantiates the privileged place of the French critic in James’s mind (*LC* I 723). Yet, Davidson and Daugherty draw attention to another French critic, a disciple of Sainte-Beuve, who deeply caught James’s attention: Edmond Schérer (134-37).⁶ The French and the American critics shared a strikingly similar view of Taine. Reacting against the scientific and positivist criticism emerging at the time in France, Schérer rejected Taine’s “mechanistic representation of the artist’s psychology” (Fayolle 64), as evidenced by his admission that “[he] never read M. Taine without thinking of these gigantic steam hammers, which strike with noisy and redoubled blows ... and under whose shock the steel is beaten out and shaped” (qtd. in Dowden 410). Instead of entering into an “outer servitude ... to a principle, a theory, a doctrine, a dogma, or ... a party” or of yielding to the “brutal impatience of order” that defines Taine, Schérer relies on “experience” and “reflection.” As a result, James viewed him as a critic with “no doctrine [but] love of liberty” (*LC* II 803). Schérer’s criticism furthermore displays a quality that, in James’s view, constitutes an additional strength: a “moral sense” (*LC* II 804). “Besides the distinction of beauty and ugliness, the aesthetic distinction of right and wrong, “ James observes, “there constantly occurs in his pages the moral distinction between good and evil” (*LC* II 806). Schérer, however, remained a favorite of his only as long as his criticism displayed a freedom from dogma and an acute

sensitivity. Initially representing a “solid embodiment of Mr. Matthew Arnold’s ideal critic” (*LC* II 803), Schérer lost James’s preference once he became involved in politics. As Veeder and Griffin indicate, the “‘lack [of] imagination’ and ... ‘odd lapses and perversities of taste’” which James resented certainly account for this fall from grace (40). Yet, James’s opening lines in his negative review of Schérer provide another motivation. In these, James indicates that the French critic has been “devoting himself with increasing zeal to practical politics” (*LC* II 807). This mention would seem inconsequential if it were not for the remainder of the essay. Indeed, as James discusses Schérer’s post Franco-Prussian war essay on Goethe, he questions his “impartial[ity]” towards the Germans and wonders how the then deceased Sainte-Beuve and his “subtilized and almost etherealized faculty of impartiality” would have dealt with a similar topic (*LC* II 811). It would thus seem that Schérer’s lack of disinterestedness disqualifies him as a valid critic in James’s eyes, which, once more, underlines the latter’s commitment to critical freedom.

Filiative and affiliative critical practices

One might be led to think that James found little of worth in the Anglo-Saxon conception of and approach to the novel and that he was, as a result, advocating a complete affiliation with the French critical and literary tradition. However, as Said underlines, affiliation is only the counterpart of filiation. “[T]he culture to which the critic is bound filiatively, [that is] by birth, nationality, [or] profession,” exercises a strong influence on his “critical consciousness” (Said 25), and James, indeed, retained a strong filiative tie to Anglo-Saxon culture. This is evidenced by his reaction to the works

of Maupassant and Zola, among other French artists. Marked by the “English genius for psychological observation” and for the “exposition of ... the mysteries and secrets of conscience” (*LC* II 839), he faults Maupassant for dispensing with “all complications, all dissertations upon motives” and Zola for the simplicity of his “psychology” (*LC* II 530, 894). James’s specific sensitivity to the psychological dimension of experience can be related to another trait, which he acknowledges and identifies as contributing to the American “national *cachet*” early in his career. Although he presents as highly desirable the “fusion and synthesis of National tendencies” in his 1867 letter to fellow citizen Perry, James specifies that “our moral consciousness, unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigor” ought to remain as the “distinctive and homogenous” feature (*Selected Letters* 15-16). As several critics observe, this identification and endorsement had significant consequences for his approach to both literature and criticism. Beyond his early condemnation of the “uncleanness” of French novels (Daugherty 60), Jones argues that James had to reckon with his “American moral consciousness” throughout his career (39). Since James subscribes to the “Arnoldian connection between the vitality of criticism and the health of literature” (Veeder and Griffin 237), some of the idiosyncrasies perceived in the realm of fiction transfer to his discussion of the two countries’ critical traditions. His condemnation of the “moral limitation” of French realism thus mirrors his preference for French critics demonstrating a moral sensitivity, like Schérer (Jones 51).

Paradoxically, James’s admiration for Sainte-Beuve constitutes an instance of filiation. Although James might seem to lapse into generalizations by reducing his object

to national types, he applies to his enquiry into national critical traditions his usual spirit of discrimination, which leads to his marked predilection or dislike for critics assumedly belonging to a similar tradition. James's preferences substantiate his own argument on the relationship between culture and criticism. His admiration for Sainte-Beuve, and potentially his dislike for Taine, provide a case in point. This French critic, whose "intellect, ... erudition, ... taste, ... tone, [and] style, were," according to James, "of a deeply national stamp" can be called unrepresentative. In fact, Sainte-Beuve's predilection for the Baconian inductive approach prompted a contemporary commentator, the Irish critic Edward Dowden, to argue, contrary to James, that Sainte-Beuve is hardly characteristic of the "French intellect" and its "systematic" approach. "[H]is own method," Dowden adds, was "in great measure our English method" (391). One may thus argue that James was most responsive to what was the most Anglo-Saxon in Sainte-Beuve. As aware as James was that a critic, like a reader, ought to "approach [an] author as nearly as possible in the supposed spirit of one of his [the authors'] own ... fellow-countrymen" (*LC* II 549-50), his reaction to the French literary and critical tradition hence reveals how powerfully one's culture can shape one's critical consciousness, thereby supporting his own conception of criticism as culturally marked.

The rhetoric of the "national stamp" or of the "genius of ... a nation" recurrent in James's discourse might strike one as essentialist and anachronistic in our so-called global era (*LC* II 673, 483). Yet, Rowe in "Henry James and the United States" reminds his audience that James lived in a time when "national boundaries were unavoidable," which promotes a perception based on "national types," and that, despite this nationalistic

discourse, he aimed at a “transnational cooperation” (234-35), a goal to which the hybrid nature of his criticism testifies. More significantly for the purpose of this study, dismissing James’s voluminous critical and metacritical contributions based upon their anachronistic and seemingly essentialist nature would deprive one of the views of a pithy and sophisticated observer upon the intersection of the practice of criticism and culture. James’s personal reactions to the works of French novelists and critics testify to this deep connection between criticism and culture, while his reflections upon this subject offer a thought-provoking representation of critical traditions along national lines, as well as of their relationship with culture’s various intellectual, spiritual, economic and social aspects. The hypothesis formulated by James will, thus, loosely inform the exploration of the French critics’ perception of this author in the next chapter, in which James is no longer the observer, but the observed.

Notes to Chapter I

¹Biographical information may be used to inform one's reading of fictional production. This practice has, however, been widely decried by French critics and writers, starting with Marcel Proust in his "Contre Sainte-Beuve," posthumously published in 1954. The reactions elicited by Charles Mauron's psychocritique constitute another instance of this reluctance to bring biography to bear too heavily upon criticism (Bellemin-Noël, "Foundations" 221-22).

² In a letter to Grace Norton, dated March 5th, 1873, James, referring to "criticism," prophesizes that "if nothing could be 'reviewed' for fifty years, civilization would take a great stride" (*Selected* 104). We can surmise that this is the missive referenced by Norton on March 31st. In this letter, Norton pronounced James "'perverse in [his] feelings in regard to Criticism. I can account for them by the fact that you have read only the critical notices of the *Atlantic Monthly* of late. I quite agree with you that the world would gain if they were silenced' (Unpublished Houghton MS)" (qtd. in Horne 53).

³ In the 1984 Library of America edition of his literary criticism, editors Leon Edel and Mark Wilson indicate that James's critical production between 1846 and 1916 totals over 300 texts in essay, preface, or note form (1359).

⁴ James returns to the issue of "*a priori* rule[s]" in his 1901 essay on Matilde Serao's works (*LC* II 953-55).

⁵ Already in *Hawthorne*, James, who bemoans fate of the “solitary worker” who “loses the profit of examples and discussion,” asserts that “[t]he best things come... from talents that are members of a group” (*LC I* 342).

⁶ Contrary to Daugherty who argues that Sainte-Beuve was “too much of a historian” for James’s tastes (4), Davidson concedes that Sainte-Beuve, as “the disinterested yet sympathetic reader,” remained James’s ideal (137-38).

Chapter II

The Making of the French James: The “Secret” Master Trope and Textuality

Anticipating by fifty years T.S. Eliot’s remarks on the proclivity of French critics to discuss an artist’s “*oeuvre* [or] his work as a whole” (31), James commented in one of his “American Letters” on the French and English audiences’ differing approach to literary works, focusing, like Eliot, upon the former’s habit of taking into account an author’s extended production as a basis for appreciation. Both critics thus seized upon the same idiosyncrasy, yet their reactions were quite different. Whereas Eliot questioned the French panoptic approach and the resulting perception of “essential unity” (31), James praised it for enabling readers to grasp a “particular identity, a recognizable character and cast” (LC I 667-68). Contemporary readers of criticism will find James’s observations on this cultural particularity corroborated by the French Jamesian scholarship produced over the last few decades. This body of criticism is, indeed, characterized by the prominent and persistent association of James’s name with a distinct and unique “character and cast.”

The secret as master trope

Unlike American critics who, in Ross Posnock’s account, shrunk from this author’s “ambiguity” (54-55), the French have seized upon this aspect and turned it into the master trope of French Jamesian scholarship. As Jean Bessière observes, the majority of French critical readings of James revolves around his “enigmaticity” (88), or what he refers to through the more general term of the “secret” in his joint overview of “The

French Reception of Henry James” with Miceala Symington (30). The emphasis upon this critical master trope has resulted in the emergence of a rather cohesive persona. Indeed, all the traits characterizing the French James are logically related and can be traced back to this trope and the host of ancillary concepts it spawned, including absence, contradiction, and the unsaid. One can readily perceive a connection between the James of the secret and another noticeable dimension of the author’s French persona: the psychoanalytic James. The constellation of concepts that composes the semantic field of the secret can indeed be transposed into the psychoanalytical field quite seamlessly. The relationship existing between the James of the secret and James’s second major avatar is less obvious than the previous; however, one may argue that what may be called the textual James follows in direct line from the secret master trope.

As general observers may be struck by the prominence of the secret trope, any reader coming to French Jamesian criticism with a prior exposure to American scholarship on the same author will not fail to notice the absence of certain critical themes that have had wide currency in America. The apparent indifference of French critics for the “ethical” question in James might thus surprise outside observers (Bessière 89). Similarly, the various critical paradigms that contributed to the emergence of what Richard A. Hocks calls the “second wave” of Jamesian criticism in the United States may seem underrepresented in France. As he reviews the “several canons” of James, Hocks observes that in American criticism, this author has been subjected to a multitude of critical approaches and thematics, hence becoming:

the iridescent prism of John Carlos Rowe's deconstructionist approach, the incandescent object of Paul Armstrong's phenomenological study, the power figure of Mark Seltzer's political and Foucaultian analysis, the subject of Alfred Habegger's feminist critique..., the principal example in Susan Mizruchi's new historicism, the protagonist in Marcia Jacobson's and Michael Anesko's cultural studies, the prime figure in Paul John Eakin's biographical narratology work, [and] the preoccupation of Donna Przybylowicz's Marxist and Lacanian analysis. (71)

In France, however, James is restricted to a more modest number of facets.

Negatively defining French Jamesian criticism, and consequently the French James, by attending to what it, from a comparative standpoint, may seem to lack will complete our portrait and provide additional insights on the relationship between culture and criticism. Yet, addressing the positive characteristics of this discourse allows us to draw a quite definite preliminary portrait of the French James and to explore the circumstances and factors that have presided over the emergence of such a cohesive and enduring persona. This analysis of the French James based on the scholarship produced since the 1970s in France demonstrates the resolutely dialectical nature of the construction of a literary persona, revealing how several factors—such as the choice of texts scrutinized, the context of reception, and the critical orientation of the commentators—intersect in this process. The last two factors have deeply and lastingly shaped the French James, yet the author first appears prisoner of the image generated from the study of specific texts.

The predominance of the short story in the French Jamesian canon

Establishing the canon of Jamesian texts upon which French scholarship focuses constitutes a logical first step in the approach of the French Henry James. Indeed, since what is most researched contributes to shaping an artist's critical persona, determining whether the French Henry is rather that of "Daisy Miller" or that of *The Golden Bowl*—arguably two very different texts—is crucial. The corpus is indeed one of the first elements that one might name when reflecting upon the factors that may come to bear upon the construction of an author's literary persona. While biographical material might influence it,¹ the representation of an author, the image he acquires among a specific audience, such as that composed of critics from a specific culture, is first dependent upon the texts that are the most widely scrutinized. In "What is an Author?," an essay in which he discusses the problematic process of selection through which an artist's work, or "œuvre," is constituted, Michel Foucault draws his readers' attention to the central role that texts play in representing an author and points to the potential "exclusion and inclusion" of certain texts as a defining factor (118-19).¹ A similar, though more localized, phenomenon comes under scrutiny in *Psychoanalytic Politics; Jacques Lacan and Freud's French Revolution*, in which Sherry Turkle explores the mechanisms through which the "French Freud" emerged. As she investigates the French enthusiasm for psychoanalytical ideas, Turkle points out that the "French Freud" is largely the product of Jacques Lacan's reading and publicizing of Freud's early texts, such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (50-51, 98).² Like Freud's, James's French persona can be

described as predicated upon a sustained emphasis on a specific category of text, the short fiction, which, starting in the fifties, deeply influenced subsequent scholarship on James.

The addition of James to the catalogue of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade in 2003 provides a striking illustration of the French preference for this category of texts. Born in 1931, the Pléiade has over time become a literary institution, and inclusion in its catalogue amounts to a consecration. The late date of James's entrance in this prestigious collection might strike one as a long-overdue acknowledgement of his stature, especially when the works of several Anglophone writers have previously been featured.³ Yet, the nature of the texts selected for this publication turns out to be even more puzzling than the belated date of this inclusion. Indeed, its editors, two prominent French James scholars, chose to usher James into the Pléiade through his tales rather than through the well-known novels of the late period or through more popular works like *Portrait of a Lady* (hereafter *Portrait*). Hence, after the release of the last two volumes, all of James's 112 tales, as well as the unfinished "Hugh Merrow," will be available in the Pléiade collection.⁴

Besides implicitly testifying to the significance that this category of texts has acquired for the French general public, this editorial choice also provides an initial insight into the French academic audience. The Pléiade, which enlists scholars in the preparation of each of its publications, also actively targets these readers; as a result, one can assume that the material selected for inclusion partly addresses this specific readership's expectations (Kaplan and Roussin 253-57). Recent publication history in French

Jamesian scholarship corroborates the French critics' predilection for the shorter fiction.⁵ Out of the nine monographs published in France between 1960 and 2000, only three take the Jamesian novel as their primary object of inquiry: Evelyne Labbé's 1990 *Écrits sur l'abîme: les derniers romans de Henry James*, Mona Ozouf's 1998 *La Muse démocratique: Henry James ou les pouvoirs du roman*, and Julie Wolkenstein's 2000 *La Scène Européenne: Henry James et le romanesque en question*. In addition to this attention to the shorter fiction, the works of scholars focusing upon the tales evince yet another peculiarity that partly explains the especially cohesive nature of the French James.

The 'strange and ghostly tales'

The French critical gaze has predominantly converged on a more restricted group of texts, namely the tales revolving around uncertainty. With the exception of Duperray, whose 1993 *Échec et écriture: essai sur les nouvelles de Henry James* bears upon the entire corpus of the shorter fiction, other critics have further restricted their work to what Duperray calls the "strange and ghostly tales" ("Introduction" 5).⁶ In *Miroirs d'outre-monde: Henry James et la création fantastique*, Sophie Geoffroy-Menoux explores a group of texts consisting of "ghost stories," texts featuring "psychical phenomena," as well as "supernatural or occult texts" (10),⁷ while Bernard Terramorsi dedicates his 1996 *Henry James et le sens des profondeurs* to the analysis of a smaller number of texts, namely "The Last of the Valerii," "The Altar of the Dead," "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Jolly Corner," and *The Turn of the Screw* (hereafter "The Last of the Valerii," "Altar," "Beast," "Jolly," and *Turn*).⁸ James's strange tales hold a place of choice even

for scholars working with a more varied corpus, such as Jean Perrot and Nancy Blake.

In their respective works, *Henry James: une écriture énigmatique* and *Henry James: écriture et absence*, these prominent Jamesian critics devote a sizeable portion of their discussion to such texts. Not simply the tales but those of the fantastic type have garnered the bulk of the critical attention in France.

One might be tempted to turn to the scholarship produced in the eighties in hopes of discovering what motivated this noticeable concentration on the “strange and ghostly” tales in recent scholarship. Located in the midst of the “heyday of James criticism” in Europe from the sixties to the nineties (Duperray 11), this decade indeed proved pivotal in French Jamesian criticism. Although necessarily more modest than the explosion of the American output during the same decade (Hocks 70), French Jamesian scholarship flourished in the eighties. The publication of special issues on James in both academic (*Delta* and the *Revue de littérature comparée*) and non-academic periodicals (*L’Arc* and the *Magazine littéraire*) accompanied that of three monographs by Jean Perrot, Nancy Blake, and Laurette Véza. According to Henri-François Imbert, editor of the special issue the *Revue de littérature comparée* dedicated to James, the “French silence” reigning around this author was over, and the “return of Henry James” could finally be proclaimed (261). This decade clearly marked a watershed in the development of Jamesian studies in France; however, the emphasis upon the strange tales appeared well before that date.

A genealogy of the popularity of the strange and ghostly tales

In her introduction to the recently published *The Reception of Henry James in Europe*, Duperray offers two explanations for the French predilection for this category of

texts within the Jamesian canon. As the modalities of the artist's initial entry into the French literary landscape in 1875 show, a preference for the fantastic has been a hallmark of the French public. Indeed, "The Last of the Valerii," the first of James's works that French editors decided to publish, without his knowledge (Edel 181), belongs to this genre. Coming closer to our time and turning more specifically to the critical and academic arena, Duperray also argues that Tzvetan Todorov's work in the early seventies proved instrumental in bringing these texts to the foreground (5, 11). This second hypothesis certainly appears probable since this critic's work displays a marked emphasis on the fantastic tales. In his prefaces to the 1969 and 1970 bilingual editions of four of James's tales, "Les nouvelles de Henry James" and "Les fantômes d'Henry James," later reprinted in the widely circulated *Poétique de la prose*, Todorov makes an explicit case for putting James's shorter fiction in the critical limelight. For this critic, the short fiction offers "a privileged gateway" into the Jamesian narrative "universe" (143). Yet, within this group, the texts composed between 1892 and 1903 hold an even higher critical value for Todorov on the grounds that they present James at the height of his craft, the tales predating this period being only a "preparatory work [,] brilliant yet unoriginal" (83). The adoption of Todorov's argument on the centrality of the tales by several subsequent critics testifies to the lasting influence it exercised. One can, for instance, hear Todorov in Duperray's and Labbé's introductory notes to the Pléiade edition of the complete tales. Although they underline the "impossib[ility]" of clearly distinguishing between novels and nouvelles (Duperray xxiii, Labbé xxix), the short fiction still appears as a privileged

gateway, as when they claim that “all the components of James’s narrative aesthetics” can be apprehended through the “nouvelle” (Duperray xxv, Labbé xxxi).

Todorov, the nouvelle, and the secret

Besides laying a heavy emphasis on the “nouvelle,” Todorov also provides an extended and detailed demonstration of the essential role played by the secret in Jamesian narratives. As he advocates specific attention to the texts produced between 1892 and 1903, he argues that their distinctiveness, hence that of James’s craft, resides in their emphasis on the secret, which “summarizes and serves as a foundation to his writings” (83). He thus contends in his two prefaces, collected under the more explicit title “The Secret of Narrative,” that the Jamesian text is propelled by a secret, “an unsaid [or] an absent and powerful force” (82). Redefining the secret as an absence, Todorov then proceeds to demonstrate that the secret, under four different guises or “variations,” permeates all of James’s texts (98).⁹ Whether providing an “explicit theme,” as in “Figure” and “Beast,” or a general structuring principle, the secret, he concludes, ultimately reflects “the fundamental Jamesian precept [:] the affirmation of absence” (114). Through these essays which portray the secret as the common denominator among James’s tales, Todorov thus appears to be, as Duperray claims, the instigator of the focus upon the “strange and ghostly” and the thematic of the secret that distinguishes French Jamesian criticism.

Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, and Philippe Sollers: the forefathers of the secret master trope

Denying the significance and impact of Todorov's work on the development of French Jamesian scholarship, whether regarding its choice of object or emphasis, seems difficult, inasmuch as the publication of his essays inaugurated the accrued critical production of the eighties. Nevertheless, Todorov's focus on the centrality of the secret in Jamesian narrative harkens back to a significant critical precedent set by the works of several commentators active in the mid-fifties and late sixties. In their essays on James's short fiction, Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, and also Philippe Sollers, seize upon the indeterminacy and 'secret' permeating such tales as "Figure," "Beast," "Jolly," and *Turn*. Although Todorov only makes a brief reference to Blanchot and Sollers and completely omits Pontalis (112), one may contend that his argument owes more to them. The germ of the master trope of French Jamesian criticism can be found in the works of these writers, who, also drawing attention to this same group of texts in the Jamesian canon, foreground some aspects of James's fiction that would re-emerge, arguably via Todorov's essays, in subsequent scholarship and become the most powerful trope of French Jamesian criticism. For this reason, these writers' readings, especially Blanchot's, can be said to constitute the critical unconscious of subsequent French Jamesian criticism.

Although Todorov only refers to the former, Blanchot and Pontalis both focus on late tales and discuss at length the central role of the secret, thus setting the critical foundations of the French James. Respectively published in 1954 and 1958 in two

prominent French journals, *La Nouvelle revue française* and *Les Temps modernes*, these two writers' readings of James are indeed founded upon the concept of the secret. In "Le Tour d'écrou," an essay in which he discusses James's craft alongside Franz Kafka's and Jorge Luis Borges's, Blanchot, in the oxymoronic fashion characterizing his writing, presents the concept of the secret as the key to James's art, which, nevertheless, remains the "cipher of the undecipherable" (161). As indicated by the essay's title, Blanchot focuses more specifically upon *Turn* and its "subject." Dismissing the "Freudian interpretation" for eschewing the "ambiguity of the story," Blanchot argues that the tale's "subject... is—simply—the art of James," which specifically lies in "this way of always turning around a secret" (159). In James, the secret, he specifies, is not "some fact [,] thought [,] or truth that could be revealed"; instead, "it escapes all revelation" (159). Although "hidden," the secret remains the "centre of everything" (157). In "La Douleur du dialogue," a later essay in which Blanchot discusses the conversations featured in Jamesian texts, he reiterates this view of the secret as the founding principle of James's art. His dialogues, he says, contain "the part of obscurity that is the center and the stake (*enjeu*) of each of his books" (189).

At this juncture, Pontalis joins Blanchot. The discussion of James's art, based upon "Figure" and "Beast," which Pontalis proposes in his 1958 "Le Lecteur et son auteur" also emphasizes the secret. Pontalis echoes Blanchot's description of the Jamesian secret when he asserts that "the purpose of the narrative is to trail/follow [the secret], not to capture it" (337). Despite this similarity, Pontalis perceives James's "art" as not simply lying in the secret, but in "contradiction." In a wording that recalls

Todorov's characterization of Jamesian narratives as underpinned by of a "double, contradictory" movement that both strives for and "protect[s] the revelation" (145), Pontalis argues that James, like Vereker in "Figure," is torn between the obligation "to tell and not to tell" (328-29). This compels him to resort to "complex calculations in order not to reveal what he said to himself and nevertheless to make himself understood" (341). Already expanded into absence and obscurity by Blanchot, the trope of the secret thus gains with Pontalis an additional aspect, contradiction, which Todorov later again emphasizes.

Pontalis and especially Blanchot not only "initiate[d] the effective updating of the French reading of James" (Bessière and Symington 24), but they lastingly influenced the direction of subsequent readings. Although they credit Blanchot in the construction of the French James, Bessière and Symington's treatment of his role is surprisingly cursory; in this respect, they fail to fully acknowledge his seminal role. Todorov's essays, in which the trope of the secret foregrounded by Blanchot holds center stage, testify to this impact. Although the filiation between Blanchot and Todorov is tangible, the works of another author must be inserted in the French James's genealogy between the readings delivered in the fifties and those of Todorov in the early seventies. In a 1966 essay simply entitled "The Secret," Philippe Sollers indeed comments once more on "Figure" and "Beast," and, although he does not explicitly cite him,¹⁰ he reiterates Blanchot's emphasis on the centrality and constitutive function of the impenetrable secret in Jamesian narratives, as well as his anti-referential conception of literature. Echoing Blanchot's reading of *Turn*, Sollers posits absence, namely of "the leap of the beast (of the hidden secret, of the

concealed death, of the forgotten memory),” as the narrative foundation in “Beast” (122-23). Yet, with the exception of this concluding remark on “Beast,” his discussion solely bears upon “Figure,” a tale that holds a “central” position within the Jamesian canon (118). Through Sollers’s reading of this short story, James, presented as having constantly reaffirmed “the central importance of the *text*,” appears as a kindred spirit who, like the French critic, resents the “absence of any *real* reading” (119). He thus warns that any attempt to “reduce the text to a transcendental meaning, to an exterior ‘truth’ and to dissipate its words” only takes one away from the “secret” (122). Described as “an enigma without solution,” “Figure,” according to Sollers, shows that “the secret” is located “*in the fabric itself... of narration*” (120-21). Sollers’s reading thus reiterates both the significance of the short fiction, as well as the centrality of the master trope that emerged from the 1950s discussions of James’s narrative craft.

The French reception of James that formed during the 1950s and developed into the late 1960s, as well as the persona it produced, thus demonstrates several specific traits. Its cohesion is especially remarkable. Extremely similar themes are underlined and presented as paradigmatic of James’s entire *œuvre*. Most obviously, this encounter between James and the French critics is shaped by a selection of texts specifically conducive to discussions of the secret. From Pontalis to Todorov, critical attention is largely circumscribed to a restricted number of texts from the late period, with “Figure,” “Beast,” and *Turn* emerging as the main contenders.¹¹ Each of these texts features elements, whether thematic or structural, that naturally steer critical readings towards the themes of the secret, absence, and indeterminacy. All three close on an unresolved

enigma, leaving the reader to wonder what, among other things, are the mysterious and elusive “Figure” sought after by the narrator in “Figure,” “the thing” anticipated by Marcher in “Beast,” or the apparitions witnessed by the governess in *Turn*. In this respect, one may argue that the French critical reception of James is overdetermined. Yet, while the nature of these texts undeniably shaped the direction taken by these commentators, the emphasis on the secret, and especially on textuality, cannot solely be ascribed to the texts. Like that of any literary persona, the construction of the French James results from an encounter, in which readers are as determining a force as are texts. A specific intellectual perspective and critical agenda can prompt readers to focus on the material the most adaptable to their larger goal.

The attraction of the Jamesian short story, or the Jamesian short story as a theoretical fit

The concept of “appropriability” that Sherry Turkle coins in *Psychoanalytic Politics* can help us understand this specific phenomenon. In this work, appropriability refers to a theory’s potential for penetration into a culture. While some theories appear “more appropriable than others” within a given culture, their appropriation is rarely wholesale (xvi). Certain aspects are adopted and adapted; however, others, viewed as incompatible, will be ignored (Turkle xxiii). Hence, France and America “each ‘invented’ a different Freud” based on “the national texture of [their] social, intellectual, and political life” (46). Although Turkle situates her inquiry within a “sociology of sciences of mind” (xvi), her concept of appropriability can be adapted to reflect a culture’s permeability to a specific author and texts; more specifically, it can be applied to explore

the modalities of James's reception in the works of Pontalis, Blanchot, Sollers and Todorov. The larger cultural context comes into play; yet, before addressing this element's decisive influence, one must clarify these writers' intellectual and/or critical orientation, not so much to explain away their readings as foregone conclusions but to gain a more specific understanding of the circumstances that have surrounded the invention of the French James and of the causes for the prominence that his shorter, strange fiction acquired. As the most discussed tale, "Figure" provides an apt case to explore the phenomenon of adaptability. While it had to wait until the 1990s to receive "attention [from] metafictionist scholars" in the United States (Hocks 79), "Figure" was granted a privileged position by the French commentators early on.

For both Todorov and Sollers, "Figure" holds a strategic value. Through the *mise en abyme* it effects, this text foregrounds metaliterary questions. As the narrator's desperate quest for the 'figure in the carpet' in Vereker's work proves unsuccessful, so is the reader of "Figure" left, at its close, without response. This text proves especially appropriable for Todorov. As a "metaliterary" tale dedicated to the "generative principle of the nouvelle," "Figure" provides him with a literary object particularly well suited to the elaboration of the "poetics of prose" that he was pursuing at the time and that entailed the laying bare of a "general plan... govern[ing] all the rest" (Todorov 111, 83). Todorov further views the tale's main thrust, the search for the "figure," as a justification of his own quest for a pattern in James's work (82). The attention he showers upon the tales of the late period also proceeds from Todorov's larger project. Indeed, as he himself indicates, they constitute a group of texts in which a pattern or "invariant," namely the

secret, emerges most clearly. Selecting relevant evidence is part and parcel of the critical enterprise, yet Todorov can be faulted for having selected the texts that serve his theory the most advantageously.

Sollers's écriture and James

Sollers's essay on James must also be located within the larger goal towards which he aspired at the time in order to understand his decision to focus on Henry James and his short fiction, as well as his specific reading. In *Logiques*, the collection in which "Le Secret" and some of his essays previously published in *Tel Quel* appear, Sollers offers a complete statement on *écriture* and the need to focus critical enquiry at this level. In his opening chapter, evocatively entitled "Programme," he presents a manifesto for the revision of the conception of literature and of its approach, in which he contends that it is now "impossible ... to turn *écriture* into an object that can be studied through another angle than *écriture* itself." Set in this larger context, Sollers's decision to discuss James and the tenor of his commentary upon this writer's work acquire a specific dimension. James, or more specifically "Figure," was especially well-suited to Sollers's purpose. As Marx-Scouras observes, "[t]he move from 'literature' to *écriture*" called, according to the *Tel Quel* writers, for "a new approach to the literary text [that] could only come from the practice of writing itself, from writers not only reflecting on their own practice of writing, but incorporating this reflection into the very act of writing" (57). Like Todorov, Sollers makes a paradigmatic use of "Figure" to support his interpretation of Jamesian texts in general and of literature as a whole. As if "Figure" were not explicit enough in foregrounding notions of self-referentiality, Sollers invokes the Russian formalists'

theory of the short story in order to gather arguments and support for the added emphasis on textuality and self-referentiality he advocates. In Russian formalism, the *nouvelle* is indeed defined as the genre exposing the most clearly the “interweaving” of the “novelistic and [the] critical,” or the “productive and reflexive” aspects of language, a property that “Figure” fully corroborates for Sollers (119-20). Concluding his reading of “Figure” with the statement that “[t]he secret of th[is] text” is the secret “of *any* text” Sollers clearly shows that his use of James’s tale fits within the larger project undertaken in *Tel Quel* (emphasis mine 121).

Due to its subject matter and marked self-referentiality, “Figure” obviously constituted an apt candidate; however, Sollers grants this text a more defining status. Indeed, he discusses James’s “Figure” in *Logiques*, along with other “*textes de la rupture*.” This category of texts, which includes those of Dante, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Artaud, Sade, and Ponge, stands at the “source” of the “grand theory” (théorie d’ensemble) that Sollers exposes in his “Programme.” Admittedly a heterogeneous group, these works, however, all share a common feature. Whether they effect, “‘announce’[,] or ‘further’” this rupture, or break, the texts which Sollers discusses all demonstrate a high “coefficient of theoretical contestation” and reveal a “crisis ... in readability (lisibilité)” (9-10). Although Sollers does not directly name the American author in his introduction, James, whose plea for “*real* reading” constitutes the core of Sollers’s discussion of the author, is included among the engineers of the “rupture,” of the break with a mimetic approach to literature.

Blanchot's ontology of literature and James

Blanchot's case is especially illustrative of the impact that a critic's orientation might have upon the representation of an author because his approach to James's work is in direct line with the ontology of literature he developed. Although he does not focus upon "Figure," Blanchot gravitates towards themes and concerns comparable to those raised by the other critics regarding this text. While giving center stage to the secret, the tale discussed by Blanchot, *Turn*, does not belong to James's blatantly metaliterary tales. Nevertheless, Blanchot focuses on the piece's self-referentiality, proposing that its "subject" is "the pressure of narration" itself. The pressure to which the governess subjects Miles and Flora in her quest for the truth is comparable to that exercised by James upon his work (164). Like Sollers's, Blanchot's reading of James must be reinscribed within the larger context of this writer's work on the ontology of literature, which he partly exposes in a 1948 essay, "Literature and the Right to Death." Based upon the definition of literature offered in this essay, Blanchot already perceives the essence of literature to be lying in its self-referentiality. As a "question addressed to language ... by language," literature shows its "concern ... with itself" (301). The novel, he adds, "must rely neither on the imitation of the world, nor of society, nor of nature" (157). Blanchot then concludes his reflection on the nature of literature by declaring that "[l]iterature denies the substance of what it represents" (310). In this earlier piece, one can readily perceive the self-referentiality and anti-mimetic view of literature which inform Blanchot's approach to "Le Tour d'écrou." One must here again marvel at Bessière and Symington's treatment of Blanchot. The conceptualization of literature that coalesces in

Blanchot's discourse makes even more surprising Bessière and Symington's superficial treatment of this writer in their overview of the French reception of James. Indeed, there exists a striking similarity between the substance-denying quality of literature as conceived by Blanchot and the "Hegelian" critical mode that, in these critics' view, has contaminated even the "most objective" Jamesian scholarship. The founding postulate of this Hegelian perspective, according to which "representation, that is, any realism" entails "the negation of its object," could have been uttered by Blanchot (33).

Sartre's shadow

The contextualization of these critics' readings of James's works within their own critical corpus explains the popularity of Jamesian tales as it illuminates specific aspects of their approaches. Yet, in order to better understand the French James, their work on this author must further be contextualized within a larger body of discourse. Indeed, one may argue that the specter of one of France's most well-known philosophers has significantly presided over the birth of the French James. Jean-Paul Sartre emerges as a figure of reference in the argument developed by Phillip Watts in *Allegories of the Purge: How Literature Responded to the Postwar Trials of Writers and Intellectuals in France*. In this work, Watts proposes that the historical event that, arguably, most deeply marked the French culture in the past century has had a lasting effect upon the manner in which literature is approached in this country. By "crystalliz[ing] the opposition between committed literature and 'art for art's sake,'" or *littérature pure*, the postwar "purge trials" that targeted French authors suspected to have collaborated with the Nazi occupiers influenced "literary studies in the second half of the twentieth century" (58).

Including discussions of the works of Blanchot, Paul Eluard, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, as well as a more cursory treatment of Marguerite Duras and Jacques Derrida, Watts's demonstration grants Sartre a fundamental role in the history of literary studies. French Jamesian criticism further testifies to the enduring presence of Sartre on the French critical scene. Indeed, Blanchot, but also Sollers and Pontalis all frame their readings of James within the Sartrean literary legacy.

Sartre's shadow looms large over Blanchot's theory. Indeed, "Literature and the Right to Death" demonstrates how Blanchot's ontology of literature was partly conditioned by his famous contemporary. Throughout this essay, often presented, in Denis Hollier's words, as "an 'anti-Sartrean manifesto'" (qtd. in Watts 93),¹² Blanchot carries out a conversation with an interlocutor who, although absent, can readily be identified as the existentialist philosopher. In his study of the two writers within the context of the aftermath of World War II, Watts carries out a close reading of Blanchot's "Literature and the Right to Death" and argues that he "rewrit[es] Sartre's vocabulary." Watts successfully demonstrates how Blanchot subverts the existentialist rhetoric and its key concepts of "*commitment, bad faith, liberty, existence, revolution and judgment*" (93-94); however, the specific difference existing between the two writers' conceptions of language and resulting approaches to literature is equally palpable and further illuminates the nature of the disagreement opposing Sartre and Blanchot. Opening his piece by mocking the answers so far provided to the eternal question of what literature is (302), which incidentally is also the title of Sartre's essay, Blanchot proceeds to respond to the view of literature advanced by Sartre and to disagree with virtually all the claims he

makes. Especially relevant are the passages where Blanchot's conception of literature, emphasizing obscurity, clashes with Sartre's mimetic conception, in which words are simply "transparent" (30). Whereas the latter conceives of language as an "instrument," of the writer as "a man who *uses* words" (emphasis in the original), and of words as merely "designat[ing] objects" (19, 25), Blanchot urges his audience to "hold on to words... and not revert back to things" (325). Blanchot makes his disagreement with Sartre especially tangible when he employs phrases coined by the existentialist philosopher in his 1948 work entitled *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* [*What is Literature?*] Thus, after dismissing the debate about "equivocation" and "the sickness of words" it is said to cause (310), a phrase used by Sartre (281), Blanchot derides the writer's "ideal," spelled out by Sartre, "to call a cat a cat," designating this attitude as "an hypocritical violence" and an "imposture" (311). Although Blanchot's antagonism to Sartre's theses is not as explicit in "Tour" as it is in "Literature and the Right to Death," his reading of James must be approached within the context of these literary polemics, which significantly inflected the reception of this American novelist.

Sollers's reading of James is, like that of Blanchot's, caught in the backlash against the Sartrean conception of literature predominating at the time. In addition to the apparently perfect theoretical fit between the American author's work and Sollers's critical project, other reasons can account for the French critic's eager appropriation of James. These can only be grasped by re-inscribing Sollers's work within French literary history. With the founding of *Tel Quel* in 1960, Sollers began a crusade against the "subordination of literature to politics," which Jean-Paul Sartre's "littérature engagée," or

committed literature, had favored and come to symbolize (Marx-Scouras 28). Viewing the application of this approach—in Watts’s words, the privileging of “the signified [over] the signifier” (71)—as having been effected at the detriment of a serious reflection on language itself, Sollers advocated instead a return to the text, or *écriture*. Rather than denying the political dimension of literature, Sollers and the editors at *Tel Quel* believed that “the subversive thrust of literature” was to be found in “the inherent practice of the text” (Marx-Scouras 25-26). Knowing that Sartre was cast as the enemy allows one to understand the strategic weight that an author like James had in Sollers’s discourse. Along with Theodore Dreiser, James was one of the authors whose work Sartre criticizes in a 1946 essay on “American Novelists in French Eyes.” Dismissing James on the grounds that he fails to contribute anything of value to the French literary landscape, Sartre more specifically faults him for falling short of embodying the conception of literature he would share in *Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* That the kind of “analytical nove[l]” written by James is a French “creat[ion]” already presents a problem for Sartre, but, more importantly, James’s works prove unable to “take into account ... Auschwitz [or] Franco,” contrary to those of Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, or Steinbeck (116-17). Through his championing of an author dismissed by the French philosopher, Sollers symbolically enacts his rejection of the Sartrean conception of literature.¹³ Once Sollers’s essay is set in this larger debate, his apparent misreading of James’s complaint regarding the dearth of “close ... appreciation” in Anglophone criticism also becomes a rhetorical strategy, as well as a striking illustration of the theory of appropriability advanced by Turkle. In his preface to “The Lesson of the Master,”

James's recrimination is clearly aimed at critics in "English-speaking" countries; however, Sollers, presumably addressing French readers, borrows James's words as such and faults "*our* culture" for its "mistrust of ... close or analytic appreciation" (emphasis mine, qtd. in Sollers 119). This spontaneous adoption shows how compatible James was with the French critic's endeavor to fight "this collective mistrust [or] taboo" against textuality (119). The author who represented for Sartre a regression becomes for Sollers the author of a defining text.

Pontalis: the early psychoanalytic James

Compared to these writers, Pontalis appears as the least ideologically motivated commentator, one who does not work, through James, on a hidden agenda. James's texts are involved in the erection of the critical paradigms or perspectives advocated by Blanchot, Sollers, and Todorov, yet the use Pontalis makes of this author's work, namely "Figure" and "Beast," might strike the reader as more innocuous and unrelated to the controversy regarding committed literature. Himself a psychoanalyst and author, with Jean Laplanche, of the renowned *Vocabulaire de la psychoanalyse*, or *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1967), Pontalis seems to simply illustrate and foreshadow the deep interest that James would elicit among psychoanalysts. Nevertheless, Pontalis's reading may also be approached within the Sartrean debate on committed literature. Thus, when they place it back in its publication context, Bessière and Symington detect an ulterior motive or "ideological implications" in his essay. Noting that it appeared in a 1958 issue of Sartre's *Temps modernes* debating communism, they argue that Pontalis's emphasis on the role or responsibility that James places upon his readers points to the political

relevance of the Jamesian narrative. By leaving his readers to decide for themselves, James, according to Pontalis, indeed renders them “able to resist alienation” (24).¹⁴ Viewed in this light, the “indirectness of [James’s] works” provided “French intelligentsia the means to account for the relevance of literary creation” (Bessière and Symington 24). Placing Pontalis’s discussion of James within the larger political and literary context of the time further reveals the hegemony of Sartrean literary theory. One must, however, acknowledge that in the light of subsequent developments in Jamesian scholarship, the psychoanalytic, more than the political, relevance of James became foremost.

The permanence of the secret and of textuality

Seen through the eyes of these four critics, James’s work becomes synonymous with the secret, itself equated with absence, the hidden, and the unsaid. Due to their critical perspective and their consequent emphasis upon specific texts, James’s name also became associated with textuality or *écriture*. The work of French narratologist Gérard Genette epitomizes this tendency of the French critical gaze to focus upon this dimension of James. That Genette contracted a debt regarding the American novelist has been noted by several scholars, among them Bessière and Symington, who hold that James’s prefaces were instrumental in the development of Genette’s narratology (35). David Carroll and Sonja Băsić echo this assessment when they draw attention to the role James played in the French literary and narrative theory of the 1970s. Băsić thus indicates that the legacy of the “Anglo-American critical tradition” in narratology, traced back to James via Percy Lubbock, Norman Friedman, and Wayne Booth, is especially tangible in

Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (205-206). Carroll similarly presents "the Jamesian tradition" as "very much alive ... in the work of French formalist-structuralist critics such as Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov" in *The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction* (52). While Băsić and Carroll both underline the Jamesian legacy in French narratology, they indicate that specific aspects of this legacy are favored. Carroll joins Băsić, who remarks that Genette's discussion of the typically Jamesian concept of the point of view displays "a markedly formalist and structuralist bias" (206), when he accuses "structuralist-formalists," especially Genette, of disregarding the "philosophical" dimension that James attached to questions of form to, instead, approach narrative as "a fact of language" (58). These differing interpretations and uses of James's theory of the novel figure prominently in *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present*, a work in which author Dorothy J. Hale contrasts Percy Lubbock's, Wayne Booth's, and Gérard Genette's readings of James. Although "the second wave of novel theory," exemplified by Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* and Genette's *Narrative Discourse*, is founded upon a common "attack" on "Lubbockian objectivism," or the "show, don't tell doctrine" that Lubbock extrapolates from James's work in *The Craft of Fiction*, Hale detects in Genette a similar bias as the one underlined by Carroll and Băsić when she points out significant differences in the American and the French critics' readings of James (66, 64). Whereas "narratorial 'distance'" reveals for Booth a "moral judgment" (87), it is stripped of any moral implication by Genette, who views it as a simple and "morally neutral function of the amount of 'information' a narrative supplies" (87). According to these

three scholars, the French narratologist thus eschews any ethical implications of the Jamesian concept of the point of view to retain only its formal dimension.

One must acknowledge that, as Hale reminds her readers, Genette construed his enterprise “as different from interpretation and ethics” (70). In *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Genette explains that he elected to pursue the narratological approach, whose “respect for the mechanisms of the text” he underlines (9), in full awareness of other competing approaches, be they “thematic, ideological, [or] stylistic” (8). Genette’s partiality for the “mechanisms of the text” is, however, not a simple matter of personal preference. After distinguishing “thematic” narratology—described as “straddl[ing] the fence” that separates “narrative content” and formal analyses—from the strictly “formal ... analysis of narrative as a mode of ‘representation’ of stories,” he concludes that “there are no ‘narrative contents.’” “[T]he sole specificity of narrative,” he adds, “lies in its mode and not its content” (16). One may thus argue that his conception of the “science of narratology” logically prompted him to approach “fiction as a value-free linguistic activity” and the structures upon which narratology focuses as “amoral” (Hale 79). Carroll effectively summarizes this critical angle when he claims that “the task of structuralist critics” lies with “analyz[ing] the construction of ‘the machine’ [or text] and *how it produces*, not the sense of what it produces” (17). The seemingly irresistible pull towards textuality that James seems to favor can, however, be observed in the scholarship of critics whose goals markedly differ from Genette’s proclaimed science of narratology.

The textual dimension of James’s work emphasized most vocally by Blanchot and Sollers indeed seems to prevail even in the discourse of those critics who strive to

combine critical attention to both form and meaning. Such is the case in the works of Jean Rousset and, more blatantly, Michel Zérafra. In “Pour une lecture des formes [Towards a Reading of Forms],” the introduction to his 1962 *Forme et signification: Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel*, Jean Rousset advocates a literary criticism founded upon an organicist conception of literary works, according to which “structure and thought[,] form and experience” exist in “intimate reciprocity” (x). Nevertheless, Derrida argues in “Force et signification” that Rousset lapses into an “ultrastructuralism” in which “structure ... becomes *in fact and despite his theoretical intention* the critic's sole preoccupation” (Derrida 28, Bass 15). Whether or not one agrees with Derrida's assessment, it is interesting to note that James's name appears on the very first page of Rousset's book. Indeed, the well-known phrase “the sacred mystery of structure,”¹⁵ which the American novelist used to refer to the knowledge he gained from his otherwise unsuccessful foray into theater, serves as the epigraph to Rousset's “Pour une lecture des formes.” The choice of this specific quotation, which equates structure with a quasi-divine principle of narrative, clearly foregrounds the light in which James is approached and used. Although the novelist does not figure very prominently in the work of Rousset, the limited use to which the French literary theorist puts him demonstrates how closely connected to textuality his literary persona has become in the French critical mind.

A similar argument can apply to Zérafra, in whose works James's textual aura eventually subverts the other theoretical use and understanding that this French critic attempts. Author of several publications on the novel, Zérafra places his work under the

aegis of James and his correlation of form and substance. In his 1971 *Roman et société*, a work of *socio-critique* in which he deconstructs the dichotomy opposing “the novel as art” to “the novel as ‘social expression’” (12-13), Zérafra thus underlines that his work “heavily relies upon a principle ... formulated by Henry James” and according to which form and substance are linked (56). The principle to which Zérafra refers appears in a 1912 letter addressed to Hugh Walpole, whom James undertakes to persuade that the work of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky only results in “fluid pudding” due to these writers’ neglect of form. “Form alone,” he warns, “takes, and holds and preserves, substance” (Edel, *Selected* 400). Acknowledging the “apparently entirely aesthetic” import of this statement, Zérafra argues that it, nonetheless, holds a “sociological meaning” since form, equated with the Jamesian “indirect vision,” necessarily involves “a person’s consciousness” and its “reverberat[ion]” of a “social reality” (56). Zérafra’s characterization of “Figure” as a work “symboliz[ing] the necessary complementarity of a sociological approach that looks beyond the text to discover the meaning of its production ... and a search within the work’s texture itself” further spells out his conception of literary criticism, and of James’s art, as dually anchored in a textual and a sociological dimension (79). Although he once more foregrounds this dialectic in his 1978 *L’Art de la Fiction, Henry James*, Zérafra’s phrasing upon this specific occasion undercuts this work’s critical goal to highlight the Jamesian mediation between form and substance as it betrays a partiality towards textuality. In his introduction to *L’Art*, the first collection of essays on James published in France, he underscores that the contributions gathered all underline “the dialectical relationship between artistic signifiers ... and

psychological and social signifieds” that characterizes James’s “creative effort.”

However, Zérafra specifies, within a parenthesis, that “artistic signifiers” remain “paramount” in the dialectic he describes (“Introduction” 8). Although parenthetical, his acknowledgement of the predominance of “artistic signifiers” testifies to the fact that the French James remained a master of the text, first and foremost.

Notes to Chapter II

¹ Incidentally, Michel Foucault has also been the object of a selective attention in the United States; the works from his earlier period have garnered the bulk of critical attention whereas his later works, such as *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, which revisit the concept of subjectivity, have been largely ignored. See Richard Wolin, "Foucault the Neohumanist?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* 1 Sep. 2006: B12-B14.

² On the role of early texts by Freud on the inception of French psychoanalysis, see James M. Mellard, *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 6. For more on differences between American and French psychoanalysis, see Jane Gallop, "Psychoanalysis in France," *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston: Hall, 1980).

³ Far from being a Franco-French entity, the Pléiade has indeed welcomed foreign authors from its very beginning. Edgar Allan Poe, along with Baudelaire, Racine, Voltaire, Laclos, Musset, and Stendhal, was among the first authors to be honored in this collection. In addition to Poe, the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade catalogue today counts some 22 Anglophone writers. Before Henry James would come numerous British authors, as well as Ernest Hemingway in 1966, William Faulkner in 1977, and Vladimir Nabokov in 1999.

⁴ One may mention a parallel publication enterprise. La Différence has published *Œuvres Complètes de Henry James* in three volumes translated by Jean Pavans (vol. 1 in 1990 1864-1875); vol. 2 in 1992 1876-1888, vol. 3 in 2008 1888-1896). Pavans also adapted

several of James's works for the stage (e.g., *Les Papiers d'Aspern*, Comédie-Française, 2002).

⁵ The surge in the number of publications focusing on *Portrait of a Lady* in the late 1990s might seem to mitigate this statement. However, this increase in scholarship directly results from the inclusion of this novel to the 1999 program of the two national yearly licensure exams, the *C.A.P.E.S* and the *Agrégation*.

⁶ Duperray wrote her introduction in English.

⁷ These are: "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," "De Grey: a Romance," "The Ghostly Rental," "Sir Edmund Orme," "Sir Dominick Ferrand," "Owen Wingrave," "The Real Right Thing," "The Third Person," and "The Jolly Corner," "The Last of the Valerii," "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Author of Beltraffio," "The Altar of the Dead," "Maud-Evelyn," *The Sense of the Past*, "Nona Vincent," "The Friends of Friends," "Professor Fargo," "The Private Life," and "The Great Good Place." Geoffroy-Menoux also includes two longer texts, *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Sacred Fount*.

⁸ All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

⁹ These variations on the secret are the "hidden" in *In the Cage* and "Sir Dominick Ferrand" (83-86); ghosts in "Sir Edmund Orme," *Turn*, and "Jolly" (92-97); death itself in "The Friends of Friends," "Maud-Evelyn," "The Tone of Time," "The Altar of the Dead" (98-104); and the work of art in "The Death of the Lion," "The Real Thing," "The Private Life," "The Birthplace," and "The Velvet Glove" (104-11).

¹⁰ This absence of explicit acknowledgement of previous scholarship is common in French criticism. Even though more recent criticism tends to break this habit, Chénétier

remarks in “American Literature in France; Pleasures in Perspective” that it is customary to “not [find] *one* footnote” in French criticism (89). He suggests that such practice can be explained by the fact that “a perfectly integrated critical culture,” like the French one, “needs not resort to compulsory theoretical name-dropping.” Also, “voice ... and intellectual passion,” he suggests, “are substituted for academic role” (89).

¹¹ These three tales also happen to be the most translated texts. “Figure” and *Turn* come in at the second place with five translations each, followed by “Beast,” which has been translated four times (Bessière and Symington 17). Translation rates would seem to determine critical attention, yet the potential existence of a link between the two is gainsaid by the relative indifference on the critics’ part for the most translated tale. Despite its six translations (Bessière and Symington 17), *Daisy Miller* has elicited very little critical commentary.

¹² For a contrasting appraisal of Blanchot’s relationship with Sartre, see *Deconstruction and the Reminders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard* by Tilottama Rajan (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 80-83.

¹³ Although “American Novelists in French Eyes” was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* and might thus not have been known to Sollers, it is safe to say that the latter would have been familiar with Sartre’s ranking of American novelists.

¹⁴ This reading calls to mind the argument that J. Hillis Miller makes in his 2005 *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James*. According to Miller, “the novel’s refusal to confirm or deny specific ethical judgments ... while it simultaneously poses the

urgency of answering such questions teaches a meta-ethical lesson: that ‘you are on your own making any decision’” (qtd. in Hale, “Booth” 195).

¹⁵ Although often invoked, this phrase appears under two different versions in Jamesian scholarship. The most widely circulated version and also the one Rousset quotes in its French translation, refers to “the sacred mystery of structure” and appears in *The Notebooks of Henry James* edited by F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdoch for the University of Chicago Press (208). In Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers’s edition of *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, the text, however, reads “the sacred mystery or structure” (127).

Chapter III

French Jamesian Scholarship since the Eighties: An Unsuccessful Attempt to Break from
Textual Boundaries?

By instituting the secret as the essential trope of any critical discourse on James and textuality as the privileged object of critical scrutiny, Blanchot, Sollers, and Todorov created a heritage or horizon that largely conditioned subsequent critical works. Even though a significant number of critics would inscribe their readings within the parameters set by these commentators, by the early eighties several construed this conception of the secret as reductive and attempted to break away from, or at least qualify, this critical horizon. The nature of the foreign Jamesian scholarship featured in French periodicals at the time testifies to this impetus. Both published in the 1983 issue of *Delta*, John Carlos Rowe's and Millicent Bell's essays on *Turn* can indeed be interpreted as an indication of this desire to look beyond the horizon of the secret and to effect a shift in critical paradigms. In "Screwball: The Use and Abuse of Uncertainty in Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*" and "*The Turn of the Screw* and the recherche de l'absolu," Rowe and Bell both offer readings that transcend the strictly textual boundaries to which the secret had been restricted by connecting indeterminacy to "wider social implications" (Rowe 5) and to morality (Bell 41). A similar purpose can be ascribed to an essay by J.E. Miller featured in the *Revue de littérature comparée* special issue on James published in the same year. In this piece, Miller fully condemns Todorov's "idea-ridden and abstract" commentary tending to "formulas" (309-310) and further contends that, in *The Poetics of*

Prose, the artist is “summarily dismissed as a theorist and his tales reduced to formulaic patterns and placed in the service of an arcane theory” (305).¹ The enterprise of critical revision that these critics advocate, however, received its impetus from French critics a few years earlier. The attempt to break from the established perspective is clearly illustrated in the works of the critical generation following the critics previously discussed; nevertheless, subsequent explorations of James’s works never ventured very far away from the text.

Breaking the hegemony of the secret master trope

Published in 1982, Jean Perrot’s *Henry James: une écriture énigmatique* [*Henry James’s enigmatic writing*] illustrates this endeavor to break from the approach to James publicized by previous critics. As his title indicates, Perrot does not question the presence of a secret or enigma in James’s works, yet he argues that the enigma that they present remains intelligible provided the reader pay attention to two elements so far disregarded by critics. Dismissing Todorov and Sollers’s obsession with the “myth of depth” (9), Perrot denies that meaning in James is “hidden.” Rather, he contends, it is “deliberately ‘displaced,’ multiplied by rhetorical figures operating on the text’s surface” (8). Chief among James’s “rhetoric of ‘surface effects’” is the anamorphosis. Originally pictorial,² this technique, which requires a viewer to adopt an appropriate angle in order to perceive a hidden element in a painting, results in an “oscillat[ion] between the literal and the figurative” meaning when applied in a verbal medium (258). “Figure,” presented as an “exceptional illustration” of this technique, features several anamorphic manifestations (10). The “organ of life,” the expression used by Vereker to refer to the yet undetected

essence of his work, achieves such an effect. The phrase can accommodate two distinct meanings; indeed, the “organ of life” can refer to both heart and sex. By creating a “double point of view,” the superimposition of these two interpretations provides insight into the characters’ “latent thoughts,” hence into “their repressed desires” (258-59). Thus, the deaths of several characters, namely Mrs. Warden in “Sir Edmund Orme,” Miles in *Turn*, and Morgan in “The Pupil,” can receive a “double interpretation,” in which what the narrator describes as death is only a *petite mort* (318). This procedure that lets the repressed irrupt through the surface of the text not only heralds, according to Perrot, the “entrance of the forces of the unconscious in the modern text” (262), it is emblematic of James’s writing that “only reveals itself in double meanings and allusions” (“L’Anamorphose” 354).³ Perrot brings his hypothesis to bear upon a wide array of tales and novels composed during James’s early career, such as “A Light Man” (1896), and the late years, with *The Ambassadors*.⁴

One might fault Perrot for simply replacing the master trope of the secret with the figure of anamorphosis. This technique, he boldly asserts, “unifies the entire *œuvre*,” thus providing the magical key to his “wide novelistic universe” (258, 252). Yet, by bringing the cultural and historical contexts to bear upon his reading of James, Perrot addresses the second element so far disregarded by critics. From this combined analysis of the rhetorical and cultural dimensions of Jamesian narratives, Perrot reaches a distinctive interpretation of James’s works, which, while hinging fully upon the rhetorical device of anamorphosis, extends beyond textual boundaries. According to Perrot, whose doctoral dissertation focuses upon *Henry James et la décadence*, the cultural atmosphere in which

James lived motivated both the form and content of his works. Besides enabling him to circumvent “the taboos imposed by puritan censorship” (258), anamorphosis allowed the author, who viewed himself as a “privileged agent of culture and [guardian] of the future of civilization,” to expose Victorian society’s “‘aberrations’ and ‘perversions’” (329, 331), including “masochism [,] fetishism, sadism and necrophilia” (162).⁵ For Perrot, the Jamesian secret does not endlessly fold back upon itself. By associating a “synchronic problematic” with a “diachronic perspective” and thus pay attention to both surface and context (“L’Anamorphose” 339), one can crack the code of the Jamesian narrative, thereby revealing a dimension that goes far beyond the textual.⁶

Only in more veiled terms, the prevailing conception of the Jamesian secret is called into question in another work published in the mid-eighties, *Écriture et absence*. Author Nancy Blake expresses a similar dissatisfaction with the essentially textual approach so far favored. Like Perrot, she agrees upon the centrality of the secret to James’s fiction but does not subscribe to the apparently compulsory self-reflexivity that accompanies this notion. Although her goal is not “biographical,” she contends that any narrative is necessarily “a narrative of the subject.” Hence, “the concept of text” cannot be understood “without articulating it on life,” even less so since the “formalist fad” has died (11). Taking issue with what can readily be identified as the position Sollers expresses in *Logiques*, Blake argues that “it does not suffice to say that its [the secret’s] tenor is the secret itself, that the secret ... is nothing but the fact of the secret.” On the contrary, she continues, “too many details” show that “the secret talks about something else” (173). It is this “something else” that Blake’s work, employing “Freudian theory,”

sets out to unveil (13). Here again, one may argue that one paradigm simply chases another. Indeed, after her announcement that writing is essentially “oedipal,” that is, built upon “sexual [and] generational difference” (11), her claim that James’s “subject ... simply [is] sexual difference” sounds like a foregone conclusion (27).

Psychoanalytic James

Based on Perrot’s and Blake’s discussion of James’s craft, the psychoanalytic perspective has appeared as a critical paradigm likely to bring about the renewal the French James’s image. Respectively hailed as the author of the “first complete study in French” on James and the “leading French expert on Henry James” (Anzieu 193), Perrot and Blake can be said to have largely contributed to opening the field of French Jamesian studies to the psychoanalytical literary approach. Yet, the psychoanalytic James made his entrance on the French critical scene prior to the 1980s, when these critics’ works were published. The explosion of psychoanalytic discourse in the mid-sixties with the publication of Jacques Lacan’s seminal work, *Ecrits*, certainly influenced the development of Jamesian criticism (Turkle 21). Regardless of this large-scale phenomenon, the appearance of a psychoanalytic James can be viewed as an organic development of French Jamesian scholarship. Once more, the texts and themes brought to the fore by Blanchot, Sollers, and Todorov have a determining role in this evolution. Indeed, they prove especially relevant to the concerns of psychoanalytical critics. All the variations of the secret that stem from readings performed during the fifties and sixties—absence, the unsaid, contradiction, obscurity—are especially amenable to the psychoanalytical literary approach. The perception of James as a precursor of

psychoanalysis further favored this type of approach.⁷ Whether applying a full-fledged psychoanalytical approach or not, the majority of French critics underlines the distinctively “phantasmatic” nature of Jamesian narratives; that is, their imaginative and escapist nature. With very few exceptions, the portrait that emerges from these readings remains consistent with what might be called the conventional appreciation of James and his works.

Psychoanalytic approach and the text's unconscious: Cixous, Green, Pingaud

The exploration of James's works along psychoanalytical lines in France significantly grew during the seventies and eighties. One can isolate three authors, all psychoanalysts by profession, who, producing a body of works upon which academic critics would draw quite consistently, significantly contributed to the emergence of the psychoanalytic James. Although Pontalis's 1958 essay and its emphasis on contradiction influenced subsequent critics, a full-fledged psychoanalytic reading of James would not appear until 1970, the year of the publication of Hélène Cixous's “Writing as investment or the ambiguity of interest.” In her reading of four novels (*Portrait*, *Washington*, *What Maisie Knew*, and *Wings*) and three short stories (“Pupil,” “Figure,” and “Beast”) selected for their “representativeness,” Cixous emulates the paradigm-building tendencies of previous critics by advancing a “theory” applicable to “any other text of James's mature period” (203). Once more echoing the close tie between secrecy and narrative perceived by other critics, she presents the secret and *écriture* as deeply intertwined: “should the enigma be unveiled,” she argues, “... the text unravels” (218). Adopting a more clearly psychoanalytic approach, Cixous draws attention to the role that repression

plays in Jamesian art and proposes a solution to the “enigma” presented by James’s texts. James, who “replaced *everything* that constitutes life by writing” (205), represses an “immense and obscure Id,” which Cixous links to “bestiality [,to] this terrifying and repulsive flesh” (221). “The book,” she concludes, “is the product of a suppression that reveals itself only on the edge of silence” (222). The secret, obscurity, and the hidden all return in Cixous’s reading under the psychoanalytic guise to portray James as an author withdrawn from life, both in person and in his writings.

Green’s “negative narcissism” and the text’s unconscious

Unlike Cixous, whose attention to James remained occasional, the engagement of André Green with James is more sustained. A prominent psychoanalyst and strong advocate of the cause of psychoanalytical literary criticism, Green has authored several readings of James, in addition to works written for a strictly psychoanalytic audience.⁸ Green strikes a chord similar to Cixous’s in his 1978 essay on *The Private Life*, in which he argues that art becomes in this tale “the substitute for productive sexuality” (249).⁹ However, Green’s exploration of James’s works has also yielded several novel concepts, which, while failing to release James from the ivory tower in which he was placed, have proven influential both inside and outside of French Jamesian scholarship. As can be expected, Green treats two of the tales widely discussed by previous critics, “Beast” and “Jolly,” yet he approaches them through a new perspective. In “L’aventure négative,” published in the *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* in 1986, Green interprets “Beast” through the concept of “negative narcissism” that he developed.¹⁰ According to this specific psychological configuration, an individual may “tend ... towards always less

desire, always less object, and, ultimately, always less alterity.” Indeed, “a full encounter with the other” would jeopardize the “unity” achieved through this type of narcissism (220). Green thus proposes that “Beast” be read as a “narcissistic version of the Oedipal myth,” in which the negative narcissism, or the “non-desire for the object,” afflicting Marcher is punished, rather than the “transgressive desire” as in the classical version (219). This concept also largely informs his 1980 reading of “Jolly.” In this text, which again showcases James’s “art of the unsaid” (152), negative narcissism is, however, overcome. Following the encounter of the protagonist, Spencer Brydon, with his “ghostly double,” “object-oriented love” for Alice prevails over the “narcissism and homosexuality” signified by the alter-ego (146-47).

While Green discusses the tales most germane to his specific perspective, such as “Jolly,” “Beast,” or “The Private Life,” he also brings the psychoanalytic paradigm to bear upon less obvious candidates. In “Le Double et l’absent” (1973), one of his early essays purporting to explore the potential of psychoanalysis for the study of literature, he introduces a notion that proves seminal for subsequent Jamesian critics—among others. Reminding his readers that “what it [the text] chooses not to say is even more essential” than what it does say (284), Green demonstrates that *The Ambassadors* hinges upon an “absent reference,” namely Strether’s barely mentioned deceased son (278-79). Green further uses his discussion of James as a springboard to introduce the notion of the “unconscious of the text.” Distinct from the author’s, the text’s unconscious can be grasped in its “thematic articulations, its brutal silences, its shifts of tone, and especially

in the blemishes, incongruities, and neglected details which only interest the psychoanalyst" (284-85).

Pingaud and the omega of writing

Green's psychoanalytical construct would be adopted more or less closely by other psychoanalysts and critics. In "Ω," an essay also published in the *Nouvelle revue de psychoanalyse*, Bernard Pingaud provides additional proof of the existence of an "unconscious of the text" through his analysis of "Figure," a text that makes us question our assumptions about narratives, their linearity and their secret, and thus leads us to a new understanding of literature. Pingaud perceives in the narrative's "dérive" or drift, corroborated by the discrepancy between James's *Notebooks* and his finished works, a clear indication that the text has a life of its own (251). His theory on the "double movement" of narrative reiterates this argument. According to Pingaud, the narrative consists of a succession of dual movements, an alternation between "linearity" and "circularity." During the first linear phase, the author "discovers," while in the second phase, involving a circular movement, the author "recognizes" what he wrote as something he already knew (252). This phenomenon, which, visually represented, draws the shape of the omega, proves that "in a work, it is not the writer who speaks," but "the text itself" (257). Although Green's and Pingaud's theorizations of the unconscious of the text overlap to a large extent, they part ways on the question of the place of the author. Citing James's statements on the "absence of [the] creator" as expressed in "The Private Life," "The Birthplace," "The Velvet Glove," and "The Death of the Lion" (259), Pingaud completely evacuates the author from the type of reading he proposes, whereas

Green allows him/her some room despite his strong statement on the autonomy of the text's unconscious. The "study of the writing" remains foremost and can be carried out "without necessarily referring to the author," yet Green points out that "the text of writing" must then be put in perspective with "the text of life," including the author's life and the larger context within which the text "circulates" (284).

Epistemological questions

The place of the author also proves a stumbling block for several other psychoanalysts, whose names routinely appear in French Jamesian criticism focusing upon the phantasmatic dimension of James's works. Asserting that "literary fiction ... speaks of itself," Jean Bellemin-Noël, author of *Vers l'inconscient du texte* and most prominent advocate of this concept and its related praxis of "textanalyse," advocates the abandonment of some "embarrassing traditions" (267). He contends that considering the writer amounts to "psychoanalyzing a patient's mother" and advises to keep him/her "within parentheses" (6, 255). For Didier Anzieu, on the contrary, a work necessarily relies on a "'double reference,' psychological and social" (199). This psychoanalyst indeed considers that a text cannot be read in isolation from its author. In *Le Corps de l'œuvre*, a 1981 work theorizing the psychoanalytical mechanisms involved in literary production, Anzieu explains that creation constitutes one of the possible human responses to a personal crisis (49, 95). Following this precept, Anzieu reads "Jolly" as "an allegory of literary creation," in which James "stages the creative crisis from which he emerged as esthete, artist, writer" (249). Turning to James's autobiographical account of his nightmare in the Gallery of Apollo, Anzieu demonstrates that "Jolly"'s structure stems

from the combination of the “universal myth” pitting a deity against “a monster” with a “personal event,” namely James’s “triumph ... over interior ... monsters,” whether it be “the collapsed father, the brilliant elder, the puritan Superego, ambiguous and threatening sexual pulsions” (248-49).

The disagreement between Pingaud and Green regarding the place of the author that Bellemin-Noël and Anzieu re-enact echoes a divergence within the French critical institution and within French Jamesian scholarship. One must point out that these writers are contemporary of the intense debate on the author question. Yet, even recent Jamesian critics seem compelled to make a statement regarding the level of biographical material they allow to influence their readings.¹¹ Geoffroy-Menoux and Terramorsi provide two examples of critics who, pursuing the exploration of Jamesian narratives along psychoanalytical lines, embrace the concept of the “text’s unconscious” or, after Bellemin-Noël’s revision, of the “unconscious work of the text” to varying extents (269).

Geoffroy-Menoux, Terramorsi, and the text’s unconscious

Attempting to find a middle term between the “overly sociological interpretations of art” and the “naïve reading[s]” that place artists and their creations “on the margins of society” (58), Geoffroy-Menoux sets out to determine the nature of the dialectic between the artist’s works and his personal life and culture, more specifically the decadent era. Despite her proclaimed attention to the historical and cultural contexts, this critic’s approach can largely be described as structuralist. As she indicates in her introduction, her study focuses upon the “narrative structure,” whose analysis will enable her to grasp the shift from non-fantastic to fantastic, itself characterized in structuralist terms as the

“architectural organization of recurrent and significant thematic elements” (11-12).

Geoffroy-Menoux actually claims the structuralist affiliation and rebuts the charge of “panorographie” levelled by Derrida against the structuralists.¹² She recognizes that her critical enterprise entailing a “structuralist bias” combined with “a deep reading à la JP Richard, careful not to disintegrate the work to the point of exhausting it without reaching it” (13). Reiterating the commonplace argument on their centrality to the “Jamesian technique,” she hopes that her analysis of the fantastic tales, which combines a comparative and psychoanalytical perspective, will lead to a “more total, global understanding” of James himself (11). Although the “secret” is protected by “an ambiguous writing” (58), Geoffroy-Menoux tracks the “phantasmatic scenarios” underpinning the Jamesian fantastic to both “his *roman familial* and his personal myths.”¹³ Thus, the tales stage his fear of a potentially hereditary “neurotic atavism,” his “phobic vision of sexuality,” or the “irrepressible narcissism of the esthete” (274).¹⁴ From this study, she concludes that the fantastic acts as a “psychoanalytic cure” (85). This genre provides James, described as “neurotic,” with a space in which to “re-interpret and transcend ... a reality sometimes experienced as overwhelming and traumatizing” (79, 85). From the standpoint of the reader, the fantastic provides insight into James’s “nostalgia for values of the past” and his “judgment on a ‘decadent’ era” (273).

Like Geoffroy-Menoux, Terramorsi seeks to unveil the “structural elements” and “thematic networks” of the “Jamesian fantastic” (202, 205).¹⁵ However, with only five tales (“The Last of the Valerii,” “Altar,” “Beast,” “Jolly,” and *Turn*), Terramorsi’s corpus is much more modest and his use of biographical elements much more restricted. Unlike

Geoffroy-Menoux, who contends that the “obsessive fears of the decadent era” left their mark on James’s work, even if he brought his personal touch to them (73), Terramorsi argues that he never resorts to the “gynophobic topoi” idiosyncratic of the “fin-de-siècle” (302). As a result of this divergence, the two critics’ appreciation of James’s representation of women significantly differs: whereas one charges him with a “decadent anti-feminism” (Geoffroy-Menoux 126), female Jamesian characters appear to the other as “psychopompe[s]” or “vestal[s]” rescuing those around them (Terramorsi 306). Rather than residing in the decadent era’s culture, James’s fantastic topoi are to be found, according to Terramorsi, in the traces of the text’s unconscious. Defining his study as adopting a “perspective close to Jean Bellemin-Noël’s textanalyse,” in which “the author’s subjectivity is viewed as marginal” (16), Terramorsi announces a “return to the text” in order to locate the “traces of an unconscious work” therein (10, 11). Despite this novel perspective, some of Terramorsi’s conclusions echo earlier readings of James. In a phrasing similar to Sollers’s, he thus declares that “there is no secret *in* the text, but there is a secret *of* the text.” As a “variant of [James’s] enigmatic writing,” the fantastic only “reveal[s] the mystery of its own functioning” (11, 293). His description of the Jamesian text, after Kristeva’s use of this psychoanalytic term in *Soleil Noir*, as “cryptophoric,” similarly evokes earlier theses on the founding role of absence. The presence at the heart of the text of a “crypt,” defined as an inaccessible space holding an “ineffable secret” (Terramorsi 109), recalls Blanchot’s location of the secret in a “region that is not that of the light” (159). Notwithstanding these similitudes, Terramorsi contributes to the re-definition of the Jamesian secret through his exploration of the text’s unconscious.

Drawing attention to the images of the tiger and the abyss cropping up in each of the tales under scrutiny, he argues that these metaphors must be taken into account by “the theory of the Jamesian ‘secret’” since they partake in the “originality” of the Jamesian text (301, 290). As “traces” of the text’s unconscious, the abyss and the tiger signal the “irrepresentability of the real” (301, 297). While purely biographical elements are discarded as irrelevant, Terramorsi reaches this hypothesis by putting the “oceanologic reference,” a “topos of the Jamesian fantastic” (294), in perspective with the intellectual climate of the time, namely with his brother William’s work on “Hindu mysticism” and the “oceanic sensation” (296). From this plunge into the text’s unconscious, Terramorsi concludes that James’s texts foreground “the submersion by the real and the real as submersion,” as well as “the inability of language to represent the real” (296, 311).

Both published in the late nineties, these works once more demonstrate the pivotal role that the short and strange fiction still holds in French Jamesian criticism. Both focus exclusively upon this category of texts, the study of which will enable them to “define [James’s] ‘grand œuvre’” (Geoffroy-Menoux 12) or “to approach the ‘mystery of the structure’ of the whole œuvre” (Terramorsi 298). More importantly, they illustrate how the nature of the primary material taken into consideration combined with the application of specific critical methods collude to produce a particular persona for James. Whether he is portrayed as someone in whom “the fear of the real” replaces “the fear of the unreal (the ghosts)” (Terramorsi 107) or as neurosis-ridden being (Geoffroy-Menoux 274), James’s French persona has remained cohesive throughout time.

The self and the other in James

Charles Du Bos, one of the first French critics to discuss James, characterized him in a manner that may seem quite conventional. In his appreciation, posthumously published in 1946, James's most distinctive trait is his "fear of life" (Bessière and Symington 13). This quality is already tangible in the James of the secret that emerged from the fifties-sixties reception. Blanchot's commentary partly goes in this direction, especially with his conception of literature as negation of reality. Except for Perrot, who casts James as a subversive writer aiming to affect the world in which he lived through his writing, subsequent critics have further represented James as an artist withdrawn from reality. The charge that Bessière and Symington level against psychoanalytical criticism for the recurrent statements on James's "reclusion" and "refus[al] to involve himself with the world" appear irrefutable (26). The works of several French psychoanalytical critics have indeed contributed to picturing James as secluded in an ivory tower. The "fear of alterity" disclosed by the constant "desire to negate the difference and the desire of and for the other" to which Geoffroy-Menoux points upon several occasions has been the subject of several book-length works (215, 274). This representation finds its most explicit expression in the works of three critics designated by Bessière and Symington as the authors of "the best academic studies" (35).

The dialectic between self and other is central to the readings of tales and novels developed by Blake, Labbé, and Duperray in their monographs, respectively published in 1985, 1990, and 1993. This problematic affects their representation of James himself. Unlike Perrot who, viewing James's narratives as a "Menippean carnival," perceives a

critical distance between the author and his characters (328), these three critics do not. Indeed, while their readings are all influenced, to a lesser or greater extent, by psychoanalysis and, as such, can be expected to focus upon language, their statements all point to Henry James. Although invoking the “unconscious of the text” (17), Labbé, for instance, claims that the author “inscribes his own secret,” defined as the “search for an identity, both sexual and generational,” within his last three novels (*Ecrits* 252). “It is *him*,” she asserts, “that it [James’s œuvre] aims to represent” (“L’Art” 25).

The emphasis that Blake places upon contradiction and the unsaid in her description of James’s writing in *Henry James: écriture et absence* certainly turns his works into “an object of choice ... for Freudian theory” (13). Defining “James’s art,” in a Pontalis-like manner, as a “conjunction of ‘saying everything’ and ‘saying nothing’” and the “Jamesian novel” as the “triumph of the un-said” (21, 65), Blake completes her characterization of his artistic achievement by emphasizing negation. James indeed “negate[s] the body [and] life” by “substituting language” in their place (209). This enterprise is linked to secrecy and fear, which, Blake concludes from her reading of a selection of both novels and tales,¹⁶ constitutes James’s “hallmar[k]” (153). These two traits converge upon the object of James’s “fearful fascination”: sexuality. A “promise of knowledge,” sexuality also represents a “risk to damage one’s self through the contact with the other.” According to Blake, James turns this “fearful fascination” with sexuality, “normally” experienced by “the precocious child, the adolescent, and [by] a few bachelors,” into a “universal” fact (25). Based on this thesis, Blake proposes a new interpretation of the “Jamesian renouncement” as a means to “achieve jouissance through

the radical withdrawal from the object and the world” (71). Thus, as Cixous already observed (209), James’s writing displays “an enormous effort to transfer a corporeal investment into an artistic placement” and expresses for Blake an attempt to return to “childlike innocence” and its “idealized state of primary plenitude” (25, 210).

The studies of Labbé and Duperray both offer additional explorations of the dialectics of the self and the other; however, they reach opposing conclusions. Whereas the latter departs from the essentially narcissistic portrait drawn by previous critics, the former pursues this interpretative track to its most extreme point. In *Ecrits sur l’abîme*, which focuses upon James’ last three complete novels, Labbé reaches a similar conclusion to Blake’s. “[F]ear and desire” appear as constants in Jamesian narratives, and [James’s] “originary and unitary phantasm” as underpinning *Ambassadors*, *Wings*, and *Golden* (15-17). As indicated by the recurrent references to depth that they feature, these texts indeed create an “interior space,” which Labbé presents as “the privileged dimension of regression,” in which the “boundaries of the subject” are dissolved, thus allowing the primal unity of the subject to be recaptured (14-15). As Strether’s case shows, cultivation of this interior space, however, entails the cancellation of difference; that is, of anything that proves “incompatible with his interior universe” (40). The ““real”” becomes for Strether a “monster” that he strives to elude through his “subterfuges of thought and desire, of ‘vision en tableau’” (54).¹⁷ According to Labbé, the upshot of “Strether’s subjective adventure” solely lies in “the revelation of the fear of the other” (32). A desire to ignore difference also motivates the development of Merton Densher, the central character of a novel that essentially stages the “drama of sexual

identification” (98, 150). Caught between the “awareness of Kate’s potential alterity” and the reassuring “immutability” symbolized by Milly (120, 152-53), Densher opts for “a *representation* of the self offered by a dead woman” (135). In this respect, his movement from his Venice apartment, the place of his sexual encounter with Kate, to the Leporelli palace duplicates the “movement of the phantasm” determining Densher’s story, namely the desire to return to “the lost time of [an] undifferentiated [state]” (154).¹⁸

The fear of alterity that Labbé perceives in the two previous novels comes to a head in *Golden*. Once more pitting “interior visions” against “the perception of the real,” this novel epitomizes for Labbé the denial of reality, but more specifically of the other (163). Green’s concept of negative narcissism strongly influences her reading of *Golden*.¹⁹ Constantly affirming the “desire to return to the continuity of childhood,” this text foregrounds “the intrusion of ‘difference’ at the heart of undifferentiated plenitude” through the separation of Maggie from her father (176). Labbé, who in another essay describes *Golden* as an attempt to “represent the integrity of an ego freed from the threat of the other” (“L’Art” 26), argues that in this novel permeated by a “refusal of division and difference” (237), the “dependency of the ego on an object and on desire” constitutes “the primary fear” (242). Hence, in Maggie’s “intensely narcissistic universe,” both object and desire must be rejected for the ego to maintain its integrity (237). Labbé reiterates this view in her introduction to the Pléiade. Whether focusing on “the love of the image, the desire for the Same, [or] the refusal of alterity,” most nouvelles, she argues, address “one of the various aspects of a narcissism that the whole oeuvre constantly explores” (xliii).

Unlike Labbé, who represents James as always aiming towards less alterity, Duperray demonstrates in *Echec et écriture* that his tales follow the opposite movement. As her title indicates, Duperray focuses in her study on the distinctive place that “failure” holds in this author’s tales (11). Failure, however, is endowed in his works with a “positive” if paradoxical value since they show, according to Duperray, that “true life and liberty” can only be attained through a “renunciation of success” (15). While she perceives an overarching unity in James’s entire œuvre in the “permanence of a mood” that Denis Donoghue, referring to American literature, describes as a “desperate metaphysics,” Duperray argues that a chronological approach to the 112 tales reveals a “cyclothymic” pattern (15, 13). Combining Lacan’s theory on the constitution of the self and René Girard’s thesis on the gradual and painful process through which “the novelist ... outlives the romantic he first was and that refuses to die” (qtd. in Duperray 24), she argues that these texts spell out the fluctuations marking relationships between self and other as they slowly introduce the “romantic subject ... to the laws of alterity” (101). Initially denoting a “romantic sensibility” in which the self is viewed as “autonomous and sovereign” and “able to develop despite the obstacle that alterity represents” (31), James’s works follow a torturous course made of “returns and detours” towards the apprehension of the “truth,” expressed by Girard, that “accession to being” is predicated upon violence (292). The vicissitudes of the relationship between self and others thus fully underpin Duperray’s reading of James’s tales. This critic, however, perceives in the death of the romantic ego a positive development picturing a James in search of what Mannoni calls a “genuine communion” (qtd. in Duperray 269). In her contention that the

outcome of “Jolly” shows that James seeks a “positive exploitation of the violence” caused by the encounter with the other, Duperray appears as the only major Jamesian critic who does not read Jamesian narrative as a victory of the self over the other (295, 381).²⁰

Self-referentiality

The portrait of the artist that emerges from the readings of these psychoanalytic critics places both James and his works in an ivory tower. His fiction is viewed as heavily phantasmatic, and he is described as pathologically afraid of the other, whether the term, taken in its psychoanalytic meaning, stands for reality or for the human other. This representation is only reinforced by the attention to the textual level noticeable in all these French critics’ works. This prominence of the text can be deduced from the very appearance of French monographs, in which frequent and long quotations are woven into the argument. Far from a simple typographical exaggeration, this reverence for the text or for the narrative as a textual entity informs the perspective of numerous critics. Indeed, the problematic of enigmaticity and negativity towards which a significant number of the French readings converge logically leads to an emphasis on self-referentiality. Thus, Terramorsi defines the fantastic as “self-reflexive and metalinguistic” (310). Sollers makes this critical preference for the self-referential or the textual level explicit when discouraging any search for “a transcendent meaning, [or] an exterior ‘truth’” (122). The partiality for the self-referential mode of interpretation that critics like Terramorsi or Sollers exemplify becomes especially tangible in the criticism addressing the group of texts in the Jamesian canon that seems the most prone to elicit a realistic reading. Several

critics have indeed adopted this self-referential perspective in their exploration of the international fiction, which reinforces the image of James as cut off from reality and as a writer's writer, obsessed with textuality.

The international theme in French Jamesian criticism

Julie Wolkenstein's 2000 *La Scène européenne : Henry James et le romanesque en question* provides a telling illustration of the prevalence of the textual approach.²¹ For Wolkenstein, James's international texts "speak less of nations than of themselves" (341). While she acknowledges that the presence of European "landscapes and monuments," as well as "the representation of the human" encourages a realist reading, Wolkenstein questions James's "realistic intention" and the "traditional and prevailing" critical approach predicated upon a "Manichean and moralizing interpretation of the confrontation" between America and Europe (335-37).²² Such a critical approach, she contends, not only amounts to a "simplification" of James's intention but "almost presupposes a realist reading" (10). Instead, Wolkenstein views the representation of Europe as predicated upon James's "resolute and unique literary project" to "question the very principles of representation" (335). According to her reading, centered upon *Portrait* as the "oeuvre programmatique," paradigmatic of Europe's treatment in James, this geographical and cultural entity indeed becomes a "fictive territory," whose function lies in "representing the powers of fiction upon the reader" (18). The predominance of the technique of the point of view, as well as the ambiguity it generates, constitutes for Wolkenstein a definite indication of James's desire to break free of the realist framework, as well as a proof of the pervasiveness of the fantastic. Indeed, the subjection of the

representation of the “object” to the “phantasms” of the perceiving agents can be observed in both the fantastic and the international fiction, from *Daisy Miller* on (336-38). Presented as a filter through which to decipher the function of the “European space” in the international fiction, the Jamesian fantastic once more acquires a paradigmatic value.²³ In addition to restating this commonplace of French Jamesian criticism in this corollary argument, Wolkenstein presents James’s fiction as fully self-reflexive in its “staging [of literature’s] own functioning” (340). One might say that, with Wolkenstein, we have come full circle. Her work epitomizes the French critical concern with James’s textual dimension while her argument reiterates the centrality of the Jamesian fantastic and secrecy.

French Jamesian studies at a crossroads?

This perception of James’s craft as operating solely at the textual level constitutes a significant idiosyncrasy of French Jamesian scholarship. Whether working within the parameters of the secret or of psychoanalytical criticism, French critics have mostly focused upon the textual and phantasmatic dimension of James. Duperray’s comment on “textual analyses” of James provides an explicit statement of the French critics’ predilection for the textual. She indeed asserts that this type of approach allows James to be “rea[d] in his proper dimension” (Introduction 9). The turn towards textuality has, however, come to be viewed as a limitation in the critical exploration of James. However strongly Duperray endorses the textual, she acknowledges the need for “a ‘twin aesthetics’” that addresses both the “textual” and “cultural” dimensions (9, 13). Bessière and Symington advocate a similar turn for Jamesian studies in France. Recontextualizing

the opposition that Duperray establishes between the textual and the cultural within the larger dichotomy opposing “deep [and] surface structure[s],” they recommend that James’s work be re-interpreted in the light of this pair, which ought to no longer be viewed in a self-exclusive but in a dialectical relationship (32).

For these critics, the renewal of French Jamesian criticism demands a return to the type of scholarship practiced in the early eighties. Unlike Todorov and Perrot, whose work, according to Bessière and Symington, illustrates the pitfalls of focusing critical attention entirely on a “structural” or “surface” reading (31-32), such scholarship mediates between depth and surface. In addition to the criticism practiced by Zérafra, Bessière and Symington point to Wladimir Krysinski’s work, which combines “structural... and surface reading[s],” as epitomizing the future of French Jamesian criticism (34, 32). “Les pratiques signifiantes dans *The Ambassadors* [Signifying Practices in *The Ambassadors*],” a theoretically dense article featured in Zérafra’s 1978 *L’Art*, places Krysinski in direct filiation with Zérafra and Pierre Vitoux,²⁴ a critic joining Zérafra regarding the “non-gratuité” or purposefulness of James’s “formalism” (Zérafra, “Absence” 59). Krysinski indeed demonstrates, through a “relational interpretation,” that the pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic dimensions of James’s text are “logically” connected and ought not to be “detached” from one another (107, 120-21). Bessière and Symington also find examples to emulate in more recently published criticism. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s 1980 essay on *In the Cage*, “1874: Three Novellas, or ‘What Happened?’” contributes to redefining the “willed contradiction” detected in James’s work by numerous French critics as “a means of being committed to the world

and presenting any agent as a case which questions society, norms and social communication, without negating the necessary recognition of social norms” (Bessière and Symington 35).

Among more recent scholarship, Mona Ozouf is presented as significant since, unlike most French critics, she replaces this artist’s work within its historical context. Although the concepts of undecidability and indetermination also figure in *La Muse démocratique; Henry James ou les pouvoirs du roman*, Ozouf adopts an approach that can be described as less textually-based than the other French Jamesian scholars. While she discusses Jamesian uncertainty, a common issue in textual approaches, she accounts for it by placing James’s work within its historical context, namely the emergence of democracy. In her reading, James employs uncertainty as a means to counterbalance “the determinism of democracy” (283). In Ozouf’s argument, which largely reiterates the ‘Hawthornian dilemma,’ James views democracy and its corollary “religion of equality” as a threat to the Muse. In its attempt to “eradicate differences, to always privilege similarities, ... to smooth over characters and ... destinies,” democracy indeed depletes the world from the stuff of art, hence depriving the Muse from the “private and personal inspiration” essential to her (285-86). This awareness prompts James to “resist ... the fixity and the homogenizing tendency of his era” (289) by displaying in his post-*Portrait* novels “the extraordinary variety of situations and cases[,] the unforeseeable nature of the reality, [and] the undecidability of life.” Hence, the novel, as a form, channels his “genuine protest against the conformity resulting from democracy” (286-87). Taking into account James’s attitude regarding the social developments he witnessed, Ozouf is able to

approach the “uncertainty” permeating his texts as more than a solely textual phenomenon. She thus epitomizes the Jamesian reconnection of depth and surface that French Jamesian criticism must embrace (Bessière and Symington 34-35).

With the exception of Perrot’s portrayal of James as a subversive writer, the French James may appear one-dimensional and rather conventional compared to his multi-faceted American counterpart. Throughout the years, this writer has acquired a quite definite image in French critical discourse. His name has, indeed, been recurrently associated with the secret, which appears, following Roland Barthes’s expression, as the “word-as-manna” of French Jamesian criticism. As the word-as-manna that pervades an author’s discourse and that, by virtue of its “ardent, complex, ineffable, and somehow sacred signification,” seems to “answer for everything,” the notion of the secret, characterized by its obscurity, ubiquity, and flexibility, becomes in the French critical discourse on James “a signifier taking up the place of every signified” (Barthes, *Roland* 129). Regardless of studies’ specific purposes, the secret is invoked as the ultimate answer to the Jamesian narrative.

The prominence of the secret master trope and, consequently, the identity of the French James itself largely results from the limited corpus of texts discussed by critics in the fifties and sixties. Contrary to what James describes in his “American letter” contrasting the French and English responses to writers, the “cast and character” persistently attributed to James does not result from the consideration of his whole *œuvre*—even though the conclusions reached are often brought to bear on the entire corpus. Instead, the emphasis on the secret stems from the study of a quite restricted

sample of his work. As demonstrated in the essays of Blanchot, Sollers, and Todorov, as well as in the more recently published monographs, the Jamesian fantastic, including the strange or enigmatic tales, has attracted a significant amount of critical attention in France. Despite the limited number of texts scrutinized and the specificity of their genre, the secrecy they display certainly struck the French critical imagination and became the master trope of Jamesian scholarship in this country. Similarly, the tales have been recurrently presented as paradigmatic of James's whole *œuvre*.

Perceived as germane to some of the concerns of the time, his tales indeed struck a chord with several Jamesian critics, but also with literary theorists, who viewed them as more readily adaptable to their critical goals than others. In an article challenging the "unilaterality of the traditional account" of the interaction between American and French criticism, Christine Van Boheemen-Saaf makes a similar argument on the innate compatibility motivating transcontinental adoptions. She thus remarks that "what the United States ... imported as radically other had its roots in aspects of Anglo-American tradition."²⁵ This critic also underlines the roles played by various Anglophone authors in the emergence of French theory. The "styles of revolutionary textuality" epitomized by *Tel Quel* and adopted in the United States, she argues, were largely "model[ed]" upon "Anglo-American writing" from Poe to Joyce (55-56). James's impact upon the French critical world does not compare with the one James Joyce made upon the *Tel Quel* writers, including Sollers, or that Edgar Allan Poe had on psychoanalytic criticism through Lacan's discussion of "The Purloined Letter"; nevertheless, his work was

involved in the genesis of some landmark critical concepts in France, such as *écriture* and the text's unconscious.

The specific scope of James's reception undeniably circumscribed the identity of the French James, who seems prisoner of his initial reception. Even though one may detect an evolution, his image has remained largely tethered to the trope of the secret and has re-surfaced under different guises in most scholarly works. Indeed, one may argue that the psychoanalytic and the textualist James simply constitute organic developments of this master trope. While treading new grounds in the field of French Jamesian studies, the most recent scholarship corroborates this conclusion. The criticism published in the 2005 issue of *Revue d'études anglophones* (or *EREA*) further shows how confined within the bounds of textuality French critics remain. In these essays, initially composed for the 2004 international colloquium on "The Reception of Henry James in Text and Image"²⁶ held at the Université de Provence, James's texts are juxtaposed or enter into a dialogue with other texts, such as the works of French critics and novelists, and stage, opera, and film adaptations. Bessière and Symington respectively discuss James's "enigmatic nature" as it relates to his "representational strategies" and the influence of his use of the image on *Nouveau Roman* practitioners, and Richard Anker draws a link between James's and Maurice Blanchot's works based on the "repetition" of a "ghostly female figure" in both their works (96). *The Princess Casamassima* is the focus of Anne-Claire Le Reste, who analyzes the "proliferation" of "intertexts" within this novel in order to reveal the "experimental" nature of James's realism, which, she concludes, offers only "a marked literary reality, a conspicuous construct—and thus no reality at all" (25, 28-29).

The adaptation of James's work in other media constitutes the subject of several contributions. Jean Pavans, translator of several of the author's works and adapter of "The Aspern Papers" and *Beast* for the stage, broaches the questions of "legitimacy and plausibility" involved in the stage adaptations (34) while Tredy dissects the film adaptations of *Turn* by J. Clayton, D. Curtis, and A. Aloy. The operatic transpositions of this novella by Benjamin Britten in 1954 and of "The Aspern Papers" by Dominick Argento in 1988 are respectively examined by Hubert Teyssandier and Nelly Valtat-Comet.²⁷ Andrea Ionescu focuses on the publication history of James's letters. In his reading of *The Europeans*, T.J. Lustig proposes that the "distinctive achievement" of this work, but also "possibly of James's writing generally," lies "not in presenting pictures ... but in establishing certain tones and rhythms" (16). As this body of criticism indicates, French Jamesian scholarship remains largely concerned with formal issues.²⁸

Based on the themes recurring in the scholarship, one can thus draw a positive portrait of the French James. However, as several French scholars remind us, what is absent from a text is a richer source of meaning than what is present. Thus, a further investigation into the French Jamesian scholarship, focusing this time on the critics' silences and the negative image of James they adumbrate, will complete the portrait of the French James while furthering the exploration of the relationship between critical discourse and culture.

Notes to Chapter III

¹ One may ascribe a similar goal to the translation and publication of the works of two other American critics in the early nineteen-seventies. Featured in the 1971 and 1974 issues of *Poétique*, “Henry James et le style de l’intangibilité,” an excerpt from Seymour Chatman’s *The Later Style of Henry James*, and “The Jamesian Lie” by Leo Bersani both reflect critical approaches comparable to those pursued in France, inasmuch as both authors closely focus on the text’s mechanisms. However, these two critics also attempt either to re-connect the structural dimension of James’s work to the semantic one or to make tangible the contradictions existing in the novelist’s structuralist stance. As his essay title indicates, Chatman relates the stylistic choices idiosyncratic of James’s late novels, especially his use of the deictic ‘it’ and of “metaphorical expressions” (169), to intangibility. Through this approach, Chatman demonstrates the adequacy of James’s style to his subject matter and purpose, which, according to him, consists in foregrounding “abstract constructs” (172). Leo Bersani also engages James’s structuralism, yet to a different end. In his essay, in which he claims that the American novelist “should constantly be referred to as a model of structuralist criticism” (53), Bersani emphasizes James’s self-proclaimed structuralist approach to the novel only to reveal its flaws or what he refers to in his title as “The Jamesian Lie.” Showcasing “[t]he purity of [his] structuralist approach” (58), James’s Prefaces indeed constitute for Bersani “the best example ... of a criticism which constantly redirects our attention from the referential aspect of a work of art (its extensions into ‘reality’) to its own structural

coherence as the principle source of inspiration” (53). While the first part of this essay foregrounds James’s structuralist will and attempt to disconnect art from life, Bersani’s purpose lies in demonstrating that the structuralist stance displayed by James in the Prefaces is only a façade, which his novels destroy. Both Chatman’s and Bersani’s works can thus be viewed as the premise of a critical shift.

² Anamorphosis is most famously illustrated in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, a painting which, Perrot contends, James saw while it was displayed in the Longford Castle in 1896 (262-63).

³ Perrot also draws attention to other techniques, such as “the condensation of portmanteau words, [la condensation des ‘mots-valises’], the “use of hypograms and of analogical transpositions” [“le recours aux hypogrammes et aux déplacements analogiques”] (275).

⁴ In “Le Tour d’écrou du coeur; De Maupassant à Henry James,” Perrot suggests that although various other writers would influence James, Maupassant and his *Notre Cœur*, published in 1890, fulfilled an “essential function” for James. As Perrot demonstrates in his book-length study, James’s work is characterized, from the early years on, by the presence of “ambiguous images” (159). In this context, Perrot further argues that Maupassant’s use of metonymies in *Notre Cœur*, more specifically the “heart metonymy,” would thus have inspired James, as demonstrated in “The Pupil” (156, 164).

⁵ Taking as his “usual model” for a hero a “specific ‘case’ of psychopathology” (299) and resorting to “narrateurs pervers,” or unreliable narrator “projecting his own obsessions” (128, 162, 260), James exposes “masochism” in *Spoils* and “The Last of the Valerii”

(148); fetishism and necrophilia in *Rose-Agatha* and *Maud-Evelyn* (183); “social sadism” and the “alienation of woman” in *Roderick Hudson* (188).

⁶ In his 1998 essay, “L’Aveu et le secret,” Roger Bozzetto takes issue with the perceived “homogeneity” of James’s oeuvre and exposes the limits of an anamorphic reading of James (221). He demonstrates that the technique of the anamorphosis fails to reveal the secret in both realist and fantastic texts. For certain texts, such as *Turn* and “The Pupil,” one must settle with Borges’s description of James’s technique as revolving around a ‘willful omission of a part of the novel’ and accept that “no explanation” is available (230, 232). Although Bozzetto’s argument contradicts Perrot’s on several points, he establishes, like Perrot, a link between social constraints and the enigmatic nature of James’s writing. Bozzetto indeed argues that “when the confession pertains to areas, whose secrecy is motivated by social censure, i.e. in realist texts, the procedures of reflection and anamorphosis function perfectly and account for the quasi-totality of meaning” (232). Yet, when the material is of the order of “the unthinkable,” “the text organizes itself around a dead angle.” “It is this work of the secret and of the impossible confession,” he concludes, “that constitute the Jamesian fantastic” (234).

⁷ Expanding upon Georges Markow-Totevy’s initial remark in 1952 that James prefigures Freud (“presque du Freud avant la lettre”) (qtd. in Terramorsi 44), several critics view James as anticipating advances in the field of psychoanalysis. For Sophie Geoffroy-Menoux and Bernard Terramorsi, the “Nouvelle Psychologie,” and more specifically the findings of the Society for Psychological Research established in 1882, deeply influenced James’s work (Geoffroy-Menoux 35, Terramorsi 22, 56). For Terramorsi, the “Jamesian

fantastic,” characterized by its “censorship and repression, its taste for the secret [,] for signifying games [, and for] sophisticated metaphors” (10), “mimic[ks] the psychoanalytical approach” (39). Geoffroy-Menoux further presents James as offering a significant extension of this research. In her view, James was not simply “stimulated” by the works of Charcot and of his brother William on the unconscious; through his representation of characters’ “latent elements and drives,” he “anticipates” their works and Freud’s (39).

⁸ Green served as president for the Société Psychanalytique de Paris (1986-89) and for the Association Psychanalytique internationale (1979-80). His works on the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis include “La Déliaison” in *Littérature* 3 (1971); *Un Œil en trop : Le complexe d’Œdipe dans la tragédie* [*The Tragic Effect: The OEdipus Complex in Tragedy*] (1969, 1977); *La deliaison ; Psychoanalyse, anthropologie et littérature* (1992). The publication, as late as 1994, of an article by Green on “The Functions of Writing: Transmission between Generations and Role Assignment within the Family, in Henry James and his Family” in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* testifies to the sustained interest in the psychoanalytical dimension of James.

⁹ In “La Vie privée: identités alternatives and identité privée,” Green interprets the “double secret” underpinning this 1893 tale as a representation of the impossible integration of the private and public selves (233, 250). In this text, opposing Vaudrey, a successful playwright, whose wit and genius vanish when in company of others to Lord Mellifont, a mediocre painter, who, literally, only exists in society, James presents art as a “secret phallus” and, “through the association of the private life with artistic creativity,”

effected in Vaudrey's character, "as the substitute of productive sexuality, transposed in the narcissistic field" (252, 249).

¹⁰ Green's psychoanalytic research has largely focused on the negative. See *Le travail du négatif*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1993 (*The Work of the Negative*, Trans. Andrew Weller, London: Free Association Books, 1999).

¹¹ Bessière and Symington point out that James's non-narrative works were late to be translated onto French. His *Notebooks* and prefaces to the New York edition came out in French in 1954 and 1980 while his letters to Stevenson and *A Small Boy and Others* were postponed until 1987 and 1989. The publication of this material has had, according to these critics, "no real influence upon the French interpretation of James," adding that the "perception of the reflexive nature of his writing" arose from a "particular reading of the texts" and not from a consideration of "extra-textual material" such as the prefaces (18, 30). One must, however, point out that the prefaces and/or the notebooks have played a determining role in several critics' approaches. Blanchot opens his essay with a remark on James's *Notebooks*, which he compares to Kafka's (155-56), and views them as providing insight into the scaffolding that "disappears from final draft" or that re-appears as "negative values, incidents alluded to as what precisely did not happen" (163). Sollers finds in the preface to "The Lesson of the Master" statements supporting his own reading method (119); Green in "L'Aventure" uses both the letters and the preface for support of his argument on negative narcissism (211, 221, 222) and in his seminal essay on the text's unconscious, "Le Double et l'absent." The *Notebooks* also figure prominently in

Pontalis (340-41, 337, 334, 332). It would seem that this “extra-material” had more influence than Bessière and Symington are willing to acknowledge.

¹² In *L'Écriture et la différence* [Writing and Difference], Derrida argues that critics, like Jean Rousset in *Forme et Signification. Essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel*, excessively focus on structure, thus lapsing into “panoromagram” or spatialization—a “confidence in mathematical-spatial representation,” whereas they claim “the unity of form and meaning” (12-13, 34). Little attention is devoted to “force,” which “resists the geometrical metaphorization” and thus constitutes “the proper object of literary criticism” (35). [English translations come from Alan Bass’s *Writing and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, 1978].

¹³ A Freudian concept, the “roman familial,” or family romance, refers to a child’s fantasizing about his origins. Marthe Robert expands upon this concept when theorizing about the genesis of the modern novel in her 1972 *Roman des orgines et origines du roman*. Robert proposes in this work that the origin of the modern novel lies in the family romance, which includes two stages: the myth of “l’enfant trouvé,” or the foundling myth, and that of “l’enfant bâtard,” or the bastard myth. Each corresponds, according to Robert, to a “novelistic attitude.” While the former is linked to “pure fiction,” the latter is linked to the “realist or naturalist novel” (qtd. in Anzieu 218).

¹⁴ Based on Edel’s biographical work, Geoffroy-Menoux identifies additional “obsessional themes”: “rivalry between brothers, man’s powerlessness against woman’s cunning and sensitivity,” as well as “the strategy of ailure and its attendant ideology of self-censorship and (masochistic) aesthetics of sacrifice” (78-79).

¹⁵ Terramorsi's structural approach is reified in the inclusion of a chart summarizing the various "thematic networks," such as "the abyss[,] pathological bereavement[,] ghosts, woman, excavation, mystery[,] and the tiger," occurring in James's texts (205).

¹⁶ Blake discusses *Portrait*, *Spoils*, *Turn*, *What Maisie Knew*, *The Awkward Age*, *Wings*, "Beast," *The Ambassadors*, and *Golden*.

¹⁷ Using his "pictorial, historic, literary imagination" to transform reality into art, into "tableaux" (51), Strether strives to "keep intact ... the shimmering beauty of the surfaces ... for fear that one perceive through them some terrifying secret" (67). The "essence" of *The Ambassadors* thus lies for Labbé in "the faith ... in the freedom of illusion that imagination provides" (82).

¹⁸ Although following a different route, Labbé brings her reading of *WD* to a similar conclusion in "L'écriture du retournement [Writign and Reversal]." Linking the "reversals" abounding in the Jamesian text to the Freudian "structure and interpretation of fantasy" (145-46), Labbé argues that *WD* points to the "absolute 'aversion' of a body of difference that one must imperatively turn, circumvent, and overturn because it remains, in the Jamesian imaginary, the unacceptable Other of the self" (153).

¹⁹ Negative narcissism also informs her interpretation of *Portrait* in "'The Reality of Absent Things': la portée du négatif dans The Portrait of a Lady." This psychoanalytical concept allows Labbé to grasp the novel's "psychological depth" that Bersani considers inaccessible and to push the study of the negative in James beyond the "literary" realm explored by Sallie Sears (qtd. in Labbé 425-426). Ruled at the linguistic level by a "grammar of negativity" marked by the abundant use of "litotes [,] negative forms [, and]

privative terms” abound (427), *Portrait* features several manifestations of negative narcissism. The claim for “in-dependence” successively voiced by the characters testifies to the conception of self/other relationships as “a threat of annihilation” (428, 431). For Isabel, the relationship with the other is synonymous with pain, since fraught with the “risk of a loss of object,” an experience she already had during childhood through her mother’s death and her father’s abandonment (424-25). Under these circumstances, the “indifference and independence” demonstrated by Osmond are a welcome absence of threat (432).

²⁰ Displacement and narcissism constitute key terms in an essay antedating both Blake’s and Labbé’s works. In “Portraits de demeures, un essai psychanalytique,” published in the 1983 special issue of the *Revue de littérature comparée*, Nicole Berry argues that James displaces “unsaid phantasms” upon dwellings, but also objects (300). Victim of a “narcissistic wound” as a result of witnessing his father’s collapse, James effects in his novels a “restoration of the father” through his representation of houses, which are “symbolic of a past splendor” and offer “reassuring tranquility” (296, 299). Berry’s perception of narcissism compares with Labbé’s. She indeed underlines the deleterious aspect of this narcissistic quest for identity, which, finding its narrative resolution in images of architectural integrity and stability, transposes onto places and objects the “libidinal investment destined to persons” (296). Self, once more, prevails over the other.

²¹ There is an entire tradition of approaching the international fiction at the textual level. Thus, in a 1978 study of the “dynamic of space in James,” Marie-Hélène Bergeret presents the function of the voyage in James as a purely “structural” one allowing for the

dramatization of characters' "interior voyage" (181, 196). Consequently, what critics have mistakenly interpreted as a "fascination for Europe" is really a "quest for the self," of which the voyage to Europe is "only... a superficial and intermittent objective correlative" (199). Within the context of her psychoanalytical reading, Blake also interprets the international situation as a mere "staging of the identity problem" and views Europe as not constituting "a real referent" (36, 198). In a more recent piece, Laura Incollingo argues that through the "isotopie théâtrale," or the "semantic field of the theater," permeating *Wings* and enabling a "*mise en abyme*," James foregrounds the "artificiality of the novel," which thus "affirms its own self-referentiality" (157, 165). Contrary to realistic authors, James does not resort to "other semiotic systems" in order to foster "a 'referential plenitude,'" but to "empty the sign and to question traditional mimesis" (164). See also Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard's essay on "Italy in *The Portrait of a Lady*: Transcultural Consumerism vs. Art" in *Lecture d'une oeuvre*.

²² In "Encore *The Ambassadors*" (*Etudes anglaises*, 1976), Cyrille Arnavon illustrates this type of dualistic interpretation. Arnavon argues that, in *The Ambassadors*, James "reconciles a High Tory program ... and an ultraconservative Americanism" and "once more rejects a continental, especially French and Italian, culture which has lost sight of the moral imperative" (423).

²³ In "Aphoristic Patriotics: Henry James and the 'Cosmopolite,'" an essay published in a 2002 issue of *Revue française d'études américaines*, Daniel Katz develops an argument that also grants the Jamesian fantastic a pivotal role. Equating "cultural" with "ghostly strangeness," Katz argues that the "well-known 'international theme' and the 'ghost

stories' both partake of the same problematic—that of an originary subjective alterity" (98). In this Lacanian perspective, the 'alien' quality of both sends the subject back to his/her own otherness (109).

²⁴ Employing the distinction drawn by Gérard Genette in his 1972 *Figures III* between mode and voix, Vitoux argues in a 1975 article on "Le Récit dans *Les Ambassadeurs*" that far from being a mere "technical decision" on James's part, the "focalization interne fixe" is "an integral part of the subject," namely Strether's "adventure of discovery" (461, 468).

²⁵ In "Hum 6, Or Reading Before Theory," Richard Poirier anticipates Van Boheemen-Saaf's argument as he criticizes poststructuralism and theory while simultaneously claiming them as his—or his colleagues'—invention. Taking issue with the idea expressed by Terry Eagleton that "only with a French benchmark called poststructuralism was Anglo-American criticism alerted to a 'concern with the devious stratagems of language,'" Poirier instead argues that poststructuralism is nothing but "some conversion to a kind of verbal [as well as theological and cultural] skepticism ... familiar to readers of ... Charles Sanders Peirce[,] William James [,or] Wallace Stevens." Going back even further in time, Poirier states that these three thinkers are merely heirs to "Emerson's linguistic skepticism" before concluding that "a good scholar will find Emerson full of de Man, Derrida, and Barthes."

²⁶ Or "Esthétique de la réception: l'exemple de Henry James."

²⁷ In 2004, Pierre Degott focuses on another aspect of the relation between arts when he contrasts the “representation of the opera” in two Victorian and Edwardian novels, namely *The American* and E. M. Forster’s *Where Angels Fear to Tread*.

²⁸ The 1999 program for the *CAPES* and *Agrégation* illustrates this attempt to enlarge the analysis, but only to include another type of text or *écriture*. Indeed, the 1999 exam session instructed candidates to focus their discussion of *Portrait* and Jane Campion’s screen adaptation on “the mechanisms of the two modes of expression,” including their “narrative structure, use of dialogue, [and] dramatisation and focalisation.”

Chapter IV

The Textual Anchor of French Jamesian Scholarship

The development that has characterized American Jamesian scholarship in the last few years can be described as a post-modernization of James, as several critics, both American and European, have observed.¹ In this context, the encounter with French Jamesian criticism may come as a surprise. As shown in the previous chapter, the Jamesian scholarship hailing from France is indeed marked by a focus on textuality combined with a certain coldness regarding the critical orientations that have flourished in the U.S. In their overview of Jamesian criticism in France, Jean Bessière and Miceala Symington remark upon an aspect of French Jamesian scholarship that strongly differs from its American counterpart. In stark contrast with the tendency of American criticism to favor what may be called culturalist readings of James, the “temporal and historical character” of this author’s works is widely disregarded by French critics (34), as is their “ethical” dimension (Bessière, “Enigmaticité” 89).

Context of perception of French criticism—“French Theory”

This surprise can only be compounded by one’s perception of French criticism in general, which may be pre-conditioned by what one may call the mystique attached to it. Edward Said warns his audience against the distortion that “crude national labels” may create (140), and one must acknowledge that one unavoidably comes to French criticism with a number of preconceptions regarding the nature of this critical tradition. As a result, whereas the “new Henry Jameses” presented in *HJR*’s 2003 special issue on “Global

James” all hail from countries, whose criticism—except for Russia—has not enjoyed much prior publicizing, the French James comes entrenched in a host of preconceived ideas regarding the nature of criticism in France. The phrase “French criticism” indeed carries a burden of meaning invoked by the epithet “French” so often appearing in conjunction with “theory.” Refracted through the mirror of American literary studies, the phrase has acquired a distinct connotation. Hence, one might expect the criticism produced in a country widely associated with the rise of poststructuralism to exemplify this specific critical trend, but also the developments it led to, such as post-colonialism, feminism, and queer studies, among others. This is, however, not the case.

On the occasion of the 1999 conference *Où en est la théorie littéraire?* held at the Université Paris 7-Denis Diderot, Antoine Compagnon pointed out what another observer of continental academic and intellectual life, François Cusset, has called a “persistent ... intellectual isolationism” (336). In his presentation on “L’Exception française,” Compagnon more bluntly summarizes the situation when he exposes “the French isolation” and its “seemingly reactionary ... loyalty to the theoretical and the literary” (44, 47).² “[T]he whole series of movements that represent, everywhere else, the cutting edge of theory”—namely and in English, “New Historicism, Cultural Studies, Feminism, Deconstruction, Multiculturalism, Post-Colonialism, Queer Studies, Media Studies”—“have almost completely been ignored in France,” he observes (45). One must indeed point out the lasting influence that the critical developments of the sixties and seventies have exercised over subsequent criticism in France. In “The Politics of French Literary History in the US and France Today,” Richard J. Golsan demonstrates how deeply the

structuralist school has influenced French criticism and literary studies. The proclivity of the participants in a 2002 colloquium on the contemporary French novel to cite primarily authors like “Genette, Barthes, and Todorov (in his structuralist period), as well as Gaston Bachelard and Jean-Pierre Richard” testifies to the status that structuralism and “various critical formalisms” have acquired in French criticism, but also to the relative parochialism of the French critical purview (25). These few critics’ portrayal of the French critical scene is largely corroborated by the works of French scholars, including Jamesians, who appear reluctant to adopt or, at times, utterly hostile to the various critical trends now popular in American academia and whose attention *littérarité* has entirely claimed. Perusal of the French critical and metacritical discourse reveals that this peculiarity is, in the first place, traceable to the specific course that the development of literary criticism followed in France. In addition to these discipline-specific circumstances, the nature of criticism is also further determined by cultural factors that may initially seem extraneous to the literary field but that nevertheless deeply shape the practice of criticism as demonstrated in the recent debates about Cultural Studies.

The relative absence of cultural angle in French Jamesian scholarship: Jamesian critics on contextualization

French Jamesian critics reject much of what has now become the staple of American criticism, and the few who bring historical and cultural contexts to bear upon their readings either remain rarities in the French critical landscape or fall short of delivering a full-fledged culturalist interpretation of James. Cultural context plays a significant part in the work of Perrot, who establishes a direct connection between the

repressive Victorian atmosphere and the subversive intention that he ascribes to James's art, as it does in that of Geoffroy-Menoux, who brings the Decadent era to bear upon her reading. Similarly, psychoanalytical discoveries contemporary with James play a role in the work of Terramorsi, who also executes a brief foray into cultural history when he argues that the preponderance of the figure of the abyss in the Jamesian fantastic may result from a "reactivation of a personal phantasmatic" through the popularity of bathymetry (200-201).³ However, the text and its mechanisms remain paramount for these three critics. Terramorsi thus pledges allegiance to the *textanalyse* developed by Bellemin-Noël and characterized by its fundamental disregard for any factor exterior to the textual space, while Geoffroy-Menoux and Perrot respectively present their studies as resolutely structuralist and stylistic. With the exception of these few authors, the majority of critics working on James dismiss contextual and culturalist readings based on their excessive determinism and their inability to account for literary subtleties.

Several authors of recent monographs and essays have voiced their reluctance to practice this type of criticism, especially explicitly. Ozouf argues that the determination of cultural materialists to deny the influence of nature prevents them from perceiving the role played in James's works by "love" and "nature," which she construes as manifestations out of the purview of determinism. Allowing for the possibility that Verena, in *The Bostonians*, is "in love" and that her actions, rather than being dictated by external factors, result from a personal or individual inclination would grant "nature" a role that the "fervent advocates" of cultural, historical, or political determinisms refute (107).⁴ Judith Fetterley's reading of *The Bostonians* exemplifies for Ozouf this

determination to scorn the concept of the individual. In *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Literature*, Fetterley indeed argues that the novel's "massive fatalism" can fully be grasped only when one recognizes that "the true subject of [the novel] is not love but power" as evidenced by "Verena's ultimate yielding to Ransom" (131, 150). In Ozouf's view, Fetterley's interpretation of Basil and Verena's eventual elopement as materializing the "victory" of "naturalized tradition," namely "the immemorial power of men over women," as opposed to that "of nature," or in Ozouf's view of a reciprocal attraction between members of different gender, testifies to this "unremitting determination" to deny the role of the individual and to instead defer to external factors (106).⁵ Duperray adheres to a similar, if more generalized, precept through her refusal to (over)contextualize. While acknowledging the impossibility of completely ignoring the "*endroit du décor*," or the front of the scene, she carefully avoids in her own monograph "the naturalist 'misreading,'" that is, the "explanation of the work by its context," already denounced by Jacques Cabau in his 1966 *La Prairie perdue: histoire du roman américain [The Lost Prairie; History of the American Novel]* (13).

Even works purporting to present a James that differs from the "conservative" and withdrawn image usually attached to him and to instead reveal his "astonishing modernity" prove similarly hermetic to the culturalist approach (Geoffroy-Menoux 5). Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugregard's essay, "Italy in *The Portrait of a Lady*: Transcultural Consumerism vs. Art," offers an explicit example. As she explores the function of Italy in *Portrait* through its relationship to the Italian "hypo-text" (or anterior text) constituted by previous artists (63-64), Costa de Beaugregard delivers a scathing critique of Brodhead's

preface to the Penguin 1990 edition of *The Marble Faun*, a work she identifies as one of the hypo-texts of *Portrait*.⁶ His interpretation of Hawthorne's last novel is seriously limited by "the now fashionable cultural studies approach to art" that Brodhead chooses to adopt. Illustrating what Costa de Beauregard views as the caveat of Cultural Studies, which either "dismisses" or "systematically mistakes [irony] for satire," Brodhead is accused of missing some of Hawthorne's subtleties and "irony," such as his turning the Italian Donatello into a faun and a criminal (65-66). For this French critic, Brodhead's culturalist approach is directly related to his inability to decipher the text's intricacies. In the critical epistemology adumbrated in these critics' remarks, context is not granted much significance.

Labbé's indictment of New Historicism

Prominent French Jamesian critic Evelyne Labbé offers further insight into what is deemed the appropriate critical epistemology. In "Henry James, Sitting Bull, et les autres," she delivers an almost total indictment of the New Historicist approach now prevalent in James studies, as demonstrated by Millicent Bell's defection to the historicist camp (474).⁷ Besides taking issue with "contextualist practices" that New Historicism privileges, Labbé condemns the "dominating culturalist discourses" and their "*prêt-à-porter*" or ready-made "critical categories"⁸ informed by "race, gender and class" (479, 471-72). Her contrasted evaluation of two recent works by American scholars, David Minter's *A Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner* and Ross Posnock's *The Trial of Curiosity: Henry James, William James and the Challenge of Modernity*, more specifically reveals what Labbé denounces. According to

her, the disaffection for the “masterpieces” of the “formalist” era, evidenced by the near absence of “major phase” novels in Minter’s study, offers a distorted representation of James but also betrays a specific agenda (474). Out of the three texts composing Minter’s Jamesian corpus, two, *The Bostonians* and *Princess*, “incidentally” are the ones in which the historical and sociological dimensions most readily appear, thus allowing Minter to draw a questionable parallel between James and Jack London. Minter’s corpus, but also his method, proves problematic for the French critic. Beyond the distortion of James it creates, the texts selected by Minter within the Jamesian corpus denote a partiality for “moral and democratic” values at odds with a “scientific” approach (473-74).

Furthermore, the New Historicist approach, devolving into what Labbé calls a “pseudo-historicism,” acts as a deforming lens while failing to “renew” the novel’s reading.

Minter’s contextualization of *Portrait* within the expansion to the West thus exemplifies for Labbé the “illogic[al]” and “forced” juxtapositions characteristic of this discourse (475-76).

Place of the text as the bone of contention

Labbé’s condemnation of the “pluridisciplinary references” that pepper Minter’s treatment of James’s *Portrait* and reduce it to “nothing else but a re-writing of American history” is quite virulent (474), yet it is largely matched by her bafflement at the “*absence de spécificité du fait littéraire*” in the New Historicist approach, or the indifference to the “specificity of the literary object,” whereby “text yields to context” (472). Her positive review of Ross Posnock’s study indeed demonstrates that Labbé’s allegiance lies first and foremost with the text. Posnock’s work figures in her article as an example of a moderate

historicism in which the critic lives up to his vow to avoid “dissolv[ing] the primacy of the individual subject or text into a larger network or structure of relations and commitments” (qtd. in Labbé 478). According to Labbé, this type of approach legitimately “contributes to the redefinition of the Jamesian canon” because it leads to the “addition and rehabilitation” of Jamesian texts, such as *The American Scene* or his autobiographical work, rather than to the shrinking of the canon (478). As such, Posnock’s “historical analysis of Jamesian curiosity” constitutes a valuable critical approach. More importantly, while he, like Minter, engages in “the re-writing of American cultural history,” he accomplishes this without neglecting “literary history” (479-80). Labbé’s concluding comment on the outcome of Posnock’s reading of *The American Scene* is especially informative about the hierarchy of critical concerns informing her reaction. Often presented as a work of cultural analysis—as Posnock himself does, going on to underline its “culturally exemplary status” (*Trial* vii, ix), *The American Scene* holds for Labbé another value, which, fortunately, Posnock highlights. She thus, “above all,” commends Posnock’s study for “its acknowledgment of *The American Scene*’s remarkable stylistic success” (480). Attention to literariness similarly constitutes the *sine qua non* of Duperray’s qualified call for cultural readings. While she cautions against “the current trend of cultural studies” and its productions of “ideologically biased re-evaluations which seriously warped and distorted the subtleties of James’s texts,” she concedes that “the best readings” result from a combination of “textual investigations and cultural considerations.” “[R]ehistoricization,” she continues on, “is at its best when it tries to define the politics at work within the textual space”

(Introduction 13, 14). Both French critics not so much advocate a purely aesthetic or literary approach to texts as they regret that adopting a cultural one should entail a disregard for the literary dimension of literature, or *littérarité*.

The primacy of the text on the larger French critical scene

Contrary to what one might assume, the call for a sustained attention to the textual dimension of literature combined with the condemnation of culturalist approaches is not idiosyncratic of, and thus circumscribed to, French Jamesian scholarship. One can indeed readily find in the French critical landscape other occurrences of the discourse promoted by these critics. The 1995 special issue of *Revue française d'études américaines*, laconically entitled “Y-a-t-il une critique américaine? [“Is there an American criticism?”],” in which Labbé’s essay “Henry James, Sitting Bull, et les autres” appears, features several other comparable pieces. The conception of criticism conveyed in several French critics’ contributions to this special issue of *RFEA*, a peer-reviewed publication, is underpinned by the same critical assumption that informs a majority of the Jamesian criticism, namely the primacy of the text. These critics only represent a limited sample of the French metadiscourse on criticism, and their comments might be read as mere wishes as opposed to a reflection of what is actually being done on the French critical scene. Nevertheless, they allow some insight into the main directions or expectations of the French interpretative community.

The quite explicit position taken by the contributors on the question of the actual existence of an American critique indicates what seems to be a consensus among French critics and literary theorists and could be summarized as a yearning for more textual or

formalistic approaches. The issue opens with an especially pitiless article by André Bleikasten, a scholar otherwise known for his work on Faulkner. To the question posed by the title of the special issue and his eponymous article, Bleikasten answers that while there might exist such an entity as “American criticism,” it is, as a result of a “quasi-colonial dependency” upon Europe, only a “*doublure frelatée de la nôtre*,” an adulterated version of ours (406, 417). The two main lines of argument which Bleikasten develops in this piece clearly indicate where the adulteration lies.

Bleikasten’s discourse on the privilege given content motivated by moral imperatives, as well as his condemnation of cultural approaches, recall Labbé’s recriminations. Here again, the “New Historicist or ... Americanist,” represented by Donald E. Pease and Jonathan Arac, comes under attack (410). Echoing Antoine Compagnon’s observation according to which “avant-garde literary theory” has turned into “a good old content analysis” due to its abandonment of formalism (“L’Exception” 48), Bleikasten argues that the popularity of Michel Foucault led to an increased, and exclusive, emphasis upon content—or the “represented,” which is “invariably” approached and analyzed along the lines of class, race, and gender. This “new holy trinity of American criticism” thus produces “reductive and distorting reading grids” demanding that a work of art be reduced to one of the three terms of predilection and leading to two main strategies: “*la mise en accusation*” or “*la mise en conformité*.” In the former, the West—“patriarchal, capitalist, imperialist, colonialist”—stars as the usual suspect while, following the latter, works of literature become the object of a rescue operation aimed at sparing them the “infamy of a trial” (410-12).

Underpinning Bleikasten's arguments is a plea for the reinstatement of the text as the primary stuff of criticism. In order to grasp fully the tenor of his contribution to *RFEA*, this essay must be put in perspective with another of his addresses to American critics. In view of Bleikasten's earlier publication, one might accuse him of simply being antagonistic. Indeed, in a 1983 essay, "For/Against an Ideological Reading of Faulkner's Novels," he faults American Faulkner criticism for "the conspicuous absence ... of any sustained and serious consideration of the ideological aspects of his fiction" (30), and, while rejecting Marxist aesthetics and its "reflection theory," enjoins his American colleagues to attend more closely to the texts' ideological dimension (27). One might thus argue that Bleikasten contradicts himself from one essay to the other. However, even in his call for an increased attention to ideology, the text remains foremost since ideology is to be found, for Bleikasten, in the text itself. He indeed carefully stresses the necessity to interrogate, in addition to the "social, geographical, and historical co-ordinates" of Faulkner's work, the "text's surface" and "technical matters such as 'point of view,' narrative voice, and ... situation," lest one produce "gross misreadings" of the kind Sartre delivers in his work on *The Sound and the Fury* in which he turns Quentin's "philosophy of time" into Faulkner's own ("For" 38-40). Thus, throughout these seemingly contradictory statements, one element remains constant: the primacy of the text.

As he concedes in a subsequent essay, "Faulkner and the New Ideologues,"⁹ his "prayers" for an approach more attuned to ideological dimensions were "answered beyond [his] worst fears" through the emergence of Cultural Studies and New Historicism, which regards "the relationship of text to context" as "all that matters" (4,

6). Hence, in “*Y a-t-il une critique américaine?* [Is there an American Criticism?]”

Bleikasten indulges in a bout of nostalgia for *explication de texte* when he bemoans the disappearance of what used to constitute the “critic’s bliss” and pictures the contemporary American critical production as plagued with a “refusal [to engage in] meticulous commentary and stringent analysis” aggravated by “an insensibility to irony, nuance, and detail” (413). To the “*pensée fine*” synonymous, for Bleikasten, with valuable criticism, American criticism has substituted a “*pensée-meccano*” characterized by an assembly of “excessive quotation[s]” through which the critic, “as if scared to find himself alone with the text,” overindulges in references to other critics or thinkers. Because of this “compulsive quoting,” intertextuality becomes the text (416-17). This neglect of the primary text appears to Bleikasten even more paradoxical and detrimental, given that these critics seek to analyze the ideology at work in literary works. Invoking Barthes, who argues in *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* that the “relationship between fiction and ideology” is first and foremost a “matter of structure and form,” he once more reminds his audience that ideology can only be unearthed through a close textual scrutiny (qtd. in Bleikasten 413).

A similar plea for the primacy of the text can be heard in other contributors’ essays. Taking a longer view of the issue, Jean-Claude Barat delivers a diachronic analysis of the place afforded to text and textuality in American criticism over the last sixty years. Despite his comparative tolerance for American criticism’s “outrances,” or foibles, such as “its pluralism [and] ethical concern with social utility” (447), Barat joins Labbé and Bleikasten when he underlines the shrinking place of the text in American

criticism and, ultimately, this criticism's tendency, illustrated by the pronouncement of various "heresies" and "fallacies" (435), to "radicalize ad absurdum" (446). He, however, does not stigmatize the most recent developments in American criticism as Labbé and Bleikasten do. Through an analysis of the conflicting interpretations of Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," Barat takes his readers through the successive eras of New Criticism, Deconstruction, and Neo-Pragmatism, thus charting an evolution characterized, he argues, by a gradual movement away from the text or successive "reductions" of its place. Barat follows what he views as manifestations of the "reductionist mania of our American colleagues," from the exclusive focus or "reduction to 'text itself'" in New Criticism, to "intertext" with Deconstruction, and finally to "context" with Neo-Pragmatism (436). This overall movement, he claims, resulted in "emptying out of its meaning the very notion of textuality" (446). A reiteration of the significance that text holds for Continental observers, Barat's essay epitomizes the *RFEA* selection.¹⁰

The main charge leveled against American criticism by the contributors to the *RFEA* special issue, namely the slighting of literariness that New Historicism represents, crops up in more recent articles, as in the argument offered by Sabine Loucif in a 2002 essay on the study of the French novel in American universities. Denouncing "the propensity of American criticism to focus on the explicit" (75), Loucif claims that the predominance of the "*esthétiques de l'identitaire*" and the "growing hegemony of cultural studies" in the United States has resulted in the restriction of the canon of French authors studied there. French novelists who "cannot easily be associated to [an] identity

group” have indeed been the object of diminishing scholarly attention in the United States (72).¹¹ While she acknowledges the benefits that literary criticism can reap from “interdisciplinarity,” she contends that this syncretism is also “accompanied by a negligence for *littérarité*” or literariness (74). Thus, in the case of novelist Hervé Guibert, a victim of AIDS, American critics “consider that homosexuality and disease ‘make’ the work instead of asking how this thematic is inscribed within an *œuvre* that exceeds it.” Loucif concludes by resenting that the “capacity of certain works to relate to contemporary issues” takes precedence over “the complexity of the process of writing as refraction of the real” in American researchers’ choice of object (77). Loucif’s critique recalls the allegations of restriction to content made by such critics as Bleikasten and Compagnon. Adopting a typically structuralist viewpoint, she indeed demonstrates that the analysis of a text’s mechanics, or how it integrates a specific subject or theme, constitutes the object of literary studies, rather than the subject itself.¹²

Amidst this unified front for the centrality of *littérarité* as the object of literary studies and criticism, a few dissenting voices have, however, recently started to make themselves heard, even if they always carefully retain a place for literariness in their arguments. A proponent of a “transcultural curriculum,” Yves-Charles Grandjeat supports the implementation of a multicultural corpus yet specifies that this should not necessarily result in the abandonment of “aesthetic considerations” (37). André Kaenel arguably qualifies as one of the few advocates for a culturalist approach among French literary scholars, as evidenced by his work as one of the editors of the first work on Cultural Studies in France. In “Moby’s Dick and Ahab’s Wife: Melville, Gender and

Cultural Studies,” a piece in which he argues for the adoption of a Cultural Studies angle, Kaenel carefully balances his claims. Asserting that Cultural Studies have demonstrated that “literary texts cannot be fully explained in terms of their ‘literariness,’” itself a “contingent and historically produced” concept, he nevertheless warns, following Wai Chee Dimock,¹³ that “reinscribing [an author] and his writing in their historical context” cannot “solely” exhaust a text’s “meanings ... nor [its] cultural meaning or significance” (158).

The sources so far quoted repeatedly demonstrate that the focus on text, concurrent with a dismissal of culturalist approaches to literary works assimilated to contextualism, is not idiosyncratic of French Jamesian scholars but constitutes a widespread phenomenon in French academia. One may readily apprehend some of the motivations for what may seem, in the current context, an anachronistic or, in Compagnon’s harsher estimate, “seemingly reactionary” critical practice (“L’exception” 47). As some critics emphatically express, *littérarité* is at stake, as well as the finer readings that serious engagement with it purportedly yield. However, one may further interrogate these critics’ claims and the assumptions upon which they rest by setting them into the larger context of the development of criticism in France, including its founding principles and conception of its object and function, in order to gain a deeper understanding of French criticism’s peculiarities. Prior to exploring the impact of these factors upon the nature of criticism, one must examine the role of the structure within which this activity is inscribed.

Institutionalizing a critical epistemology: the role of the national examinations

While admitting to the “tautolog[ical]” nature of the statement, Gerald Graff asserts in his “Ideological Map of American Literary Criticism” that “all disciplines are socially produced” (101), and indeed, several institutional and social factors influence the tenor of French criticism in general and of James studies in particular. The centralized nature of the French university, as well as the correlations existing between academic research, publication, and national examinations, significantly contribute to the consensus among the French critics regarding the place of the text in critical practice. Indeed, the plea for the primacy of the text issued by individual critics is largely broadcast at the institutional level, which enforces a compulsory textualism, most notably through the two national competitive examinations the *CAPES* and the *Agrégation*.¹⁴

The comments voiced by the contributors to *American Literary Scholarship*'s section on “Foreign Scholarship” illustrate the “institutional control of interpretation” described by Frank Kermode in 1972 as they point out the very direct impact of the *CAPES* and *Agrégation* on the production of French scholarship. The two nationwide competitive exams, whose programs are published every year in the *Bulletin officiel du ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*, indeed dictate the object of research and scholarship. This influence has proved positive for certain periods and authors that had fallen in the shadow and received, as a result of their appearance on the program, a boost. Echoing Michel Gresset's 1989 comment, Françoise Clary and Daniel Royot thus contend in 1998 that “some portion of 19th-century and early 20th-century literary production” owes its being “read, taught, and

researched on a nationwide basis” to the existence of these two exams. Indeed, “[g]overnment policies of mass education,” Clary and Royot argue in 1998, have spawned a generation of students whose only interest lies with “the latest trends in popular culture” or post-sixties authors (453).¹⁵ In this context, the *CAPES* program appears as a means to rescue the “academic study of English and American literatures” viewed as presently “jeopard[ized]” by higher education policies (453). “The return of Henry James” on the French critical scene invoked by Imbert in 1983 might thus partly be credited to *The Bostonians*’ presence on the 1982 *CAPES* program. Also, although a large portion of the work published on *Portrait* was produced in the years preceding and following the examination, Geoffroy-Menoux’s reaction to the inclusion of Jane Campion’s film adaptation of this novel to the 1999 *Agrégation* program demonstrates how closely the course of scholarship is linked to these examination programs. She indeed views this novelty as leading to a “salutary renewal of Jamesian criticism” (5).¹⁶

While the *CAPES* and *Agrégation* are credited with positive consequences for research, some view their impact as negative since they push scholars to write for the program instead of following original lines of inquiry. Jean Kempf, author of the 2001 *Rapport sur les études nord-américaines en France* [*Report on North-American Studies in France*], suggests that these programs do more than determine the object of investigation; they also bear upon the manner in which it is studied. Although he concedes that the national examinations have created “an expansion of the ‘canon’ for the French *Américanistes*,” Kempf contends that they “shape too deeply thematics and research methods, a phenomenon to which dissertation topics and journal publications

testify” (15). Kempf does not further discuss this statement, yet the comments and “recommendations” expressed by graders in the reports on the 2006 exam session for the *agrégation externe* in English clearly adumbrate the recommended line of critical inquiry. One can thus note that the jury members repeatedly warn against excessive contextualization. Conceding that “contextualization can always be enlightening,” they complain that “beyond a certain point, it turns the question posed ... into a mere pretext and empty the exercise of its object” (2-3). They indeed note that respondents tend to explore “cultural themes” to the detriment of the “text’s stylistic aspects,” adding that psychoanalytic approaches, or feminist ones, fail to “do justice to the subtleties of the text” under scrutiny (20-21). The same expectations apply to the *CAPES* candidates. The graders of the 2006 session once more emphasize “textual analysis” and explicitly indicate that they “expect candidates to produce readings able to account for the *functioning* and the *specificity* of the passage” (74). This goal can only be reached if “very close attention is dedicated to the text, to details (a ‘microlecture’ in critic Jean-Pierre Richard’s words)” (39). The same despair at the neglect of the text and its “*littérarité*” permeates the 2007 reports. The French commentators featured in *ALS* do not imply that the government “impose[s] valuations and validate[s] interpretations” as Kermode describes (169); nevertheless, their comments explicitly and repeatedly connect literary research, publication, and government policies. The concreteness of this link is especially palpable in the examination reports. Based on these reports’ content, the French critics’ approach appears to be, to a large extent, institutionally conditioned.

The feud between history and literature

As pointlessly virulent as Labbé's and Bleikasten's tirades against historicism may appear, they gain further significance once understood within the context of the competition in which history and literature have entered in France since the advent of the Third Republic in the 1870s. In *La Troisième République des Lettres, de Flaubert à Proust*, Compagnon chronicles one episode of the relationship between the two disciplines, focusing more specifically upon the circumstances that presided over the "reduction of literature to history" occurring at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as upon the instrumental role played in this process by Gustave Lanson, the founding father of *histoire littéraire* (83). At a time when historians occupied the highest position of power in the French university and history represented the "basis, center, and goal of all sciences" (14, 29), literary studies had no choice but to adopt the historical method (41). Following the precept according to which "a writer and his *oeuvre* must be understood within their historical situation," the focus of inquiry shifted from the text itself to its context, the *explication de texte* being "first an explanation by context," including "sources and influences" (Compagnon, *Démon* 238, 241). In addition to ensuring the survival of literary studies within the history-centered university, approaching literature through the historical perspective, with its veneer of scientificity, allowed scholars to avoid subjectivism and to keep "personal impressions" in check (Compagnon, *La Troisième* 78, 168).¹⁷ This concession to the historical mode, however, ushered in the "long and absolute monopoly of the historical treatment of literature" (5).

More than a century separates these events from the statements featured in the *RFEA* special issue. During this time, “literary theory” interrupted the hegemony of history (Compagnon, *La Troisième* 5). Nevertheless, the tug-of-war between history and literature and the nefarious effects of what has come to be known as *lansonisme* have remained alive in the French critical unconscious for many decades. Commenting upon the “feud between history and interpretation” in 1984, André Helbo indicates that history operated as an “organizing principle” until the thirties, which saw “the literary fact ... free itself from history ... to create its own space” (a1-a2). Bernard Toussaint’s perspective on the same topic is less optimistic, for he views the hegemony of history as persisting well past the mid-twentieth century. He indeed considers that literary criticism remained “historical ... until around 1960” (b2). Despite slight differences in appreciation, these two critics’ overviews of the development of French criticism revolve around and emphasize the enduring and central place of history in literary studies in France. History represents the entity against which literary studies define themselves. The critical paradigm that developed in the 1960s and 1970s—whether in its “formalist or poetic” variety or its “properly critical,” or “interpretative, thematic, psychoanalytical, etc.”—is thus predicated upon the “exclusion of the historical dimension” of literature (Compagnon, “Que faire” 177). Approached within this narrative of the relationship between the two disciplines, the reactions of French literary critics and theorists to the advent of what may generally be called contextualist approaches to literature appear as specifically motivated: historicism is viewed as encroaching, once more, on the territory of literary studies, as did the notion of *engagement*.¹⁸

Legacy of the Sartrean backlash

The territory of literary studies indeed already had to fend off the Sartrean onslaught and, to a certain extent, the French reaction against culturalist readings can be viewed as proceeding from a fear of seeing the Sartrean scenario replay itself. If, under the effect of the “rehabilitation of philosophy,” literary criticism broke from the stronghold of history, it was only to “once more, fin[d] itself indentured.” Existentialism, engagement, and their “confused semantics” replaced history, pushing literary studies to “forge[t] ... the ‘style’ of the *récit*” (Toussaint b5-b6). The intellectual context of transition—namely the move away from the prevalent Sartrean conception of literature as *engagée*—in which the exploration of James was conducted undeniably shaped the outcomes of the critical reading. The critics from the fifties and sixties who set the critical horizon of Jamesian criticism in France exemplify this reluctance regarding this specific type of contextual reading of this writer’s works. Intent on reestablishing the primacy of the text, these critics designed a critical epistemology that eschews references to factors or elements outside the text. While the intellectual situation has changed, a similar epistemological stance can be said to underpin more recent Jamesian scholarship in France, which testifies to the lasting influence of the views advanced by these critics.

Contemporary critics also take a page from the book of their forebears and present the Sartrean legacy as a cautionary tale. In “Faulkner and the New Ideologues,” Bleikasten anchors his critique of Cultural Studies and New Historicism, viewed as granting center stage to ideology, within his experience as “a close observer of the French intellectual scene, long dominated by the Sartrean imperative of *engagement*.” To

Bleikasten, who portrays himself as “uncomfortably aware of the ravages of ideological criticism, and too familiar with the crude aesthetics of most Marxist theorists,” the new critical approaches thus only seem to repeat the mistakes and/or excesses of Sartrean criticism (3-4). In this respect, contemporary French critics can be said to once more wage their predecessors’ battle against engagement.

The function of criticism and of the critic in France

The nature of criticism, and by extension the stance adopted by critics regarding contextualization, is necessarily predicated upon the conception of literature and of the critic’s role. The manner in which critics construe their object dictates the nature of critical approaches to a large extent. For an American observer, the French conception of literature may appear striking. Indeed, the pragmatic conception of literature informing Anglo-American criticism is absent in France. Alice Kaplan and Philippe Roussin call attention to this difference in their article “A Changing Idea of Literature: The Bibliotheque de la Pléiade.” Unlike its “American equivalents” founded upon a “democratic rhetoric of self improvement,” the Pléiade collection was actuated by the project to foster the “appreciation of a literature rendered approachable, and available” (241-42). The contrast drawn by Valentine Cunningham between “basic Anglo-American” and Continental criticisms points to a similar and lasting dichotomy. Defining the former as “lean[ing] towards some moralizing posture” generally animated by a “Christian-humanist insistence on the effects ... of reading,” he more specifically relates this pragmatic inclination to a distinctively American cultural attitude, namely the “Protestant idea about the legibility of the Word of God” (142-43) or the belief in “the

knowable and legible text” (147).¹⁹ The emphasis on the secret and its impenetrable nature that permeates French Jamesian criticism, as well as other French scholars’ pronouncements on the subject, runs counter to such notions of literature. The conception of the novel that Bleikasten offers as he concludes his essay on the pitfalls of ideological readings is in this respect revealing. The novel, he contends, claims a special status, exceeding that of a “mer[e] ... ‘object of knowledge’” (“Faulkner” 15). Bleikasten explains that

[b]y rendering language visible and reality opaque, the novel offers nothing in the way of positive affirmation. It does not add to our stock of useful knowledge, nor does it sustain our creeds or foster our hopes. And yet, by thwarting our need to believe and by robbing us of our private fantasies and common illusions, it brings us closer to what might well be ... the scandalous truth ... that no single Truth is available. (“Faulkner” 17-18)

In its denial of the potential “useful[ness],” hence of the pragmatic dimension of the novel, this conception is diametrically opposed to what Cunningham describes. Anchored in a mostly aesthetic conception and approach to the function of literature, the nostalgia for a more clearly text-oriented and thus formalist brand of criticism that imbues most of the *RFEA* essays corroborates the contrast established between French and Anglo-American respective conceptions of literature. The French critical discourse also provides insight into another complementary and fundamental aspect of the practice of criticism: the conception of the critic’s function.

A charge recurrently cropping up in these critics' discourse points to an essential value of French criticism and its conception of the critic's function, which may strike one as reminiscent of Julien Benda's stance in *La trahison des clercs* [*The Treason of the Intellectuals*]. In this work, first published in 1927, Benda advocates "a division of functions," whereby the activity of "clerks" remains, as it should, disconnected from "the pursuit of practical aims" and "political passions" (111, 30). Echoes of Benda's conception of the intellectual can be heard in several French critics' essays. Besides expressing a mistrust of "doxa" (Bleikasten 414) or, in Barat's words, of radicalization, these essays all decry the American ethical and pragmatic conception of criticism and literature. In his sarcastic tone, Bleikasten observes that, for American criticism, a work of art will become even more "valuable" if "contributing ... to the emancipation of oppressed minorities" since it is the "duty" of writers, as well as of "critics and instructors," to "make themselves useful in the revolutionary battle against injustice and oppression" (411). In Bleikasten's view, literary criticism has been unduly turned into a "matter of morals" under the effect of what Gerald Graff calls a "textual leftism" (409-10). This opinion is largely shared by Labbé, who also quotes Graff on the palpable "longing to recover a social function" for literature and criticism animating American criticism. While John Carlos Rowe argues that the 1980s were marked in the United States by the intellectuals' "recognition ... of the political consequences of their debates and work" (which, in turn, favored the emergence of Cultural Studies) ("John" 193), the French critical sensitivity, illustrated by Labbé's commentary upon Minter's creed of "changing reading ... to change life," seems diametrically opposed to this awakening.

Indeed, she dismisses the American critic's phrase as a "naïve formulation" betraying "a form of nostalgia," thereby refuting the potential impact of the critical activity beyond academia (471-72).²⁰

Besides further exposing the predominance of the aesthetic dimension in the French critical realm, Marc Chénétier also reveals the purpose of French criticism as he reflects on the place afforded to socio-cultural factors in canon formation in the United States. The canon wars that have so deeply shaken the American critical landscape for the past two decades simply have, he claims, no place in France, where, in both the critical and academic realms, American writers are apprehended "from an angle less sociological, cultural, or mythical than theoretical and aesthetic," the former type of approach attracting the "attention of American criticism" (83). In "Report from the Other Academy: Non-American Voices and American Literature," William Dow expresses a comparable opinion. While he acknowledges literature's "deep implications for class, race, gender, [and] economics," he contends that it is not "reducible to any of these categories" and goes on to complain that these "topical" approaches favored in American criticism have, paradoxically, restricted the field (485-86). These critics' dismissal of the socio-cultural dimensions of literature begs the following question: which criteria ought to be favored? Chénétier partly answers this question when he goes on to explain that critical scrutiny and assessment are founded in France upon consideration of a writer's "merits rather than on some vague affirmative action approach." This critic's wording leaves little doubt as to his stance on the latter approach; however, one may contend that his appeal to merit incurs the same criticism as the one he levels at the so-called

affirmative action approach. Yet, the vagueness regarding the nature of the merits granting authors critical attention partly dissipates when he adds that “[o]ne does not teach Djuna Barnes or Grace Paley to fill a quota, but because they are so very good. One does not praise Clarence Major or Ishmael Reed for being good black writers, but for being artists of the written word” (91). Foregrounding what may be called several writer’s writers, Chénétier’s attempt at clarifying the critical criterion that ought to take precedence over socio-cultural factors once more underlines the predominance of the textual dimension in the French critical purview. Literature is considered, first and foremost, as the “ar[t] of the written word.” His additional comment upon the practice of criticism in France, evoking in its language Benda’s discourse, also sheds light on the purpose of this activity. The study of literature is motivated, Chénétier argues, by the potential “enrich[ment]” of the “human mind” that it permits rather than by the “promot[ion of] of this or that parochial and fleeting preoccupation” (91). Setting the “human mind” as the beneficiary of the critical activity, this rationale for the study of literature orients this endeavor towards what may be deemed an idealist goal. From these critics’ discourse emerges a distinct and relatively cohesive trend in the French critical scene, where factors extraneous to the text enjoy only limited consideration.

To counter-balance this representation, one can mention, among others, the recent essays of two prominent critics, Todorov and Compagnon, who respectively call for a greater consideration of the ethical and historical dimensions of literature in literary criticism. In “Critique et éthique: à propos de Maurice Blanchot,” Todorov delivers a vehement critique of Blanchot and the type of criticism he epitomizes. Denouncing the

absence of “relationship between criticism and ethics” as a century-old French idiosyncrasy, dually grounded in a Romantic conception of the work of art as autotelic and in the will to “objectiv[ity]” characterizing the formalist and structural critique (168), Todorov condemns Blanchot’s “renunciation of any and all transcendence” and, more specifically of “universal values,” entailed by his ontology of literature (172-174). Blanchot indeed does not construe literature as “signifying,” but only as “being” (170). Todorov, on the contrary, views literature and criticism as engaged in a similar enterprise in that they wage a “common battle ... in the name of truth and values” (174). Compagnon similarly argues for a paradigm shift in the practice of criticism in France. He asks whether it is not time, after the long ban to which history has been subjected, for literary criticism to re-consider the “historical dimension of literature” and “re-insert the isolated literary fact into the historical context without ... reducing it to it” (“Que faire” 177, 181). Despite these few dissenting voices, the portrait of the critic drawn by these scholars is remarkably cohesive in its eschewing of any ethical, pragmatic, or historical dimension.

The specific nature of the French James results from several determinants proper to the practice of academic literary criticism in France. In addition to factors specific to Jamesian studies, such as the focus upon a restricted corpus of texts, the priority ascribed to *littérarité* by literary theorists and critics and reinforced at the institutional level through national examinations significantly inflected the nature of the approach adopted towards James’s works and, consequently, the nature of his literary persona. These specific factors, and thus the French James, must also be further contextualized within the

larger French critical tradition. The critical bias towards *littérarité* indeed stems from the various developments that the field experienced over the years. The French Jamesian criticism produced in the fifties and sixties, namely by Blanchot and Sollers, is inseparable from their rejection of Sartrean conception of literature. Furthermore, the French James is contingent upon, or limited by, the specific construal of the critic's role operative in France. While the remarks of several scholars allow one to better understand the remarkable absence of culturalist readings that further distinguishes the portrait of James drawn by French critics, the French reception of Cultural Studies sheds some much needed additional light upon this idiosyncrasy. The analysis of the metacritical discourse triggered in France by the emergence of this critical paradigm also demonstrates that the French James must be situated within yet another larger framework, namely the construal of knowledge prevailing in this country.

Notes to Chapter IV

¹ Donatella Izzo, among others, identifies “feminist theory, gender studies, and critique of ideology” as “the three privileged domains of the new Jamesian scholarship” in her 2001 *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James* (6).

² The delay in translation of major American critical statements into French provides an index of the relative isolation of French academics. Initially published in the United States in 1991, Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* was only translated in late 2007, and Judith Butler’s 1990 *Gender Trouble* in 2005, to name only a few.

³ Bathymetry is the measurement of depths in bodies of water.

⁴ In Ozouf’s words, the “‘tout culturel’, ou le ‘tout historique’... ‘tout politique.’” In her foreword, Ozouf confesses to her own past adherence to determinism, to her belief in “the engendering of man by history” and not by his “nature” (10).

⁵ Ozouf dedicates the closing chapter of her 1997 *Women’s Words, Essay on French Singularity* to an exploration of the differences opposing French and American feminisms (229-83). She discusses the rhetoric of the “war between the sexes” that underpins the latter and, one may argue, that informs Fetterley’s reading of *The Bostonians* (277).

⁶ Costa de Beauregard does not indicate to which of Brodhead’s essays she refers, yet his work on the Penguin edition appears the most probable.

⁷ In a 1993 essay, "Class, Sex, and the Victorian Governess: James's 'The Turn of the Screw,'" Bell indicates that she now finds it "impossible" not to attend to issues of "class and sex" in her reading of *Turn* (qtd. in Labbé 474).

⁸ Labbé refers to these as "*catégories d'un prêt-à-porter critique*," thereby underlining the standardization process undergone by literary criticism.

⁹ A paper presented at the 1992 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference at the University of Mississippi and in which the bulk of Bleikasten's *RFEA* argument can be found in English.

¹⁰ The assessment of American criticism delivered in the *RFEA* is thus quite negative. Yet, in "*Simulacre/De la vérité littéraire (Critique et perversion)*," Christian Susini offers a less negative view of American criticism. He opens his essay (incidentally the most recognizably post-structuralist in its rhetoric and playfulness) with a rejoinder to Bleikasten's diatribe. While the latter searches for "an American literary criticism ... whose historical roots are properly American and whose identity is inscribed in a specifically American context" (405), Susini tosses aside the issue by questioning the legitimacy of such a concept as "*nationalité*" and charges Bleikasten with succumbing to a "*morale identitaire*" (421). Susini's concern lies with the issue of "liberating the text [without] pinning it down with theory" (422), a mission which the American critic Kenneth Burke is, according to Susini, fully qualified to solve, inasmuch as Burkean criticism allows for both "*plaisir et jouissance*" (431) by substituting to the "search for truth ... *le jeu de l'interprétation*" (423). Thus, although Susini voices an opinion

noticeably different from his co-contributors, his views compare with theirs, inasmuch as he grants the text a central place.

¹¹ Loucif claims that four categories of authors, corresponding to specific identity groups, attract the bulk of academic attention: female and homosexual writers, authors dealing with the experience of the victims of colonization and imperialism, and those focusing on Holocaust victims (71).

¹² Two articles by American scholars, both treating irony in James's works, illustrate the contrasted foci at play in Anglo-American and French criticism, namely the attention to meaning production for the latter and content for the former. Based on their adoption or rejection of "continental thought," these critics produce two distinct readings of irony. In "Beyond Irony in Henry James: *The Aspern Papers*," Barbara Currier Bell presents her essay as a response to critics like Sallie Sears who, because favoring "problems of epistemology" over "those of morality," views "Jamesian irony [as] an end," thus turning the author into "an 'anti-moralist.'" Bell argues that James makes morality a focal point in *The Aspern Papers* and uses irony only "as a means for highlighting an unqualified moral value: the responsibility of being human" (282-83). No longer an "anti-moralist," James, in Currier's perspective, exercises a "moral radicalism" (292). Peter W. Lock's perspective on the effects of poststructuralist thought on James's "The Figure in the Carpet" in "'The Figure in the Carpet': The Text as Riddle and Force" is quite different. Invoking the then "[r]ecent French criticism['s] attempt[s] to invent a critical discourse which approaches literature not as imitation of reality but as process of production of sense," Lock goes on to claim that unless one views "The Figure in the Carpet" as "an

exercise in production and interpretation,” James’s text remains “a tissue of inexplicable events, even of absurdities” (157-58). This conception of James’s short story as pure textual or semiological “exercise” anchors it in the realm of the aesthetic as it removes it from the ethical one. As a result, James no longer appears as the “radical moralis[t]” that Currier argues he is. In Lock’s view, continental criticism, with its propensity to shun reality, is the key that unlocks the chest whereas for Bell, it spells anathema. These critics’ readings apply to two different texts, yet, and regardless of the validity of their interpretation, they demonstrate the two very different methods and ends of literary criticism in the French and Anglo-American academic realms.

¹³ In “Reading the Incomplete,” Dimock exposes the limits of the New Historical approach and what she calls its “notion of *containability*” according to which “all meanings [are] localized meaning: meaning determined and encompassed by its moment of inscription.” In the New Historicist view, “History” thus becomes literature’s “hermeneutic limits, its bounds of meaning.” This reduction of “the ‘literary’ [into] a metonym for the historical” makes the study of literature obsolete. Indeed, “if the horizon of meaning in literature turns out always to be encompassed by history and collapsible in history, what is the point of studying literature to begin with?” Dimock asks (99-100).

¹⁴ The acronym refers to the *Certificat d’aptitude au professorat de l’enseignement du second degré*, a competitive licensure exam organized every year at the national level and required to teach in middle and high schools. The examination, which features a written and, contingent upon eligibility, an oral part, assesses applicants in three fields: literature,

civilization, and linguistics. Candidates for the more prestigious *Agrégation*, whose program expands upon the *CAPES*'s, must hold a Master's degree.

¹⁵ Clary's observation on the recrudescence of scholarship on Elizabeth Bishop and on Transcendentalism in 2002, two subjects that appeared on the *Agrégation* syllabus in 2003 and 2002, indicates that these nationwide examinations still influence research (452, 443).

¹⁶ Such dependency does not bode well for an author like Henry James, whose works were included in the *CAPES* and *Agrégation*'s programs only six times since 1951. (*Washington Square* appeared first, followed by *The Ambassadors* in 1957 and 1975, *The Bostonians* in 1982, *The Wings of the Dove* in 1991, and *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1999.)

¹⁷ In Lanson's eyes, preceding literary critics, such as Ferdinand Brunetière and Emile Faguet, were indeed simultaneously guilty of "*systematisme et le subjectivisme, le dogmatisme et l'impressionnisme*" (Compagnon, *La Troisième* 11).

¹⁸ It is also interesting to note that Gustave Lanson's name has been connected to "contemporary trends in the aesthetics of reception" based on his essay on "L'histoire littéraire et la sociologie" (Rand 222).

¹⁹ Daniel R. Schwarz suggests another explanation when he relates the nature of Anglo-American criticism to literary tradition in *The Humanistic Heritage: Critical Theories of the English Novel from James to Hillis Miller*. He presents "Anglo-American criticism of the English novel" as partly "derived from the very tradition of manners and morals that the English novel addresses" and suggests that "this criticism should be seen as a

response to the British novel's interest in content and its moral effects on readers. That is why it has tended to make its aesthetics subservient to its moral values" (3).

²⁰ In "Cultural Studies in French: The Situation," Suzanne Guerlac voices a judgement comparable to Labbé's when she states that Cultural Studies operate a "nostalgic return ... to a spirit of engagement," characteristic of the "Sartrean notion of prose" (54).

Chapter V

Littérarité, Universalism, and French Criticism: The Case of the French
Reception of Cultural Studies

The imperative to observe institutional directives, as well as the desire to guarantee the specificity and autonomy of literary studies and avoid repeating the Sartrean scenario, certainly help to explain why aesthetic matters are systematically given priority over the cultural dimension and weight a text might have and, consequently, why textualist approaches are favored over what critics refer to as contextualist ones. Yet, one may find corroborations of this trend and, more importantly, additional elements of response in the debates around Cultural Studies that have recently occurred on the French critical scene. The discussions to which the emergence of Cultural Studies has, finally, given rise offer a prism through which to approach the specificity of French Jamesian criticism and French criticism in general. The arguments repeatedly advanced, cohesive with the conceptions of the role of literature and of the critic expressed in the French critical discourse, provide further insights into the absence of cultural angles in criticism practiced in France, as they reveal deeper motivations that may appear extraneous to the practice of literary studies. Indeed, these specific debates, which have usually ended with the rejection of Cultural Studies, further bring to light some of the seemingly unquestioned assumptions that, although barely acknowledged in the French critical and metacritical discourse, constitute its base. One might indeed fault French critics for failing to examine the assumptions underpinning their practices. Notwithstanding the

solemnity or finality of the various concepts invoked, Chénétier's identification of literary 'merit' as the sole criterion of literary studies and of the development of the 'human mind' as the goal of academic study, as well as Guerlain's and Labbé's defenses of scientificity strike one as statements deserving further critical scrutiny. This necessary reflection is partly effected in recent debates on Cultural Studies, which have prompted French scholars to further reveal some of these assumptions, even if these remain largely unquestioned.

The paradoxical French reaction to Cultural Studies

Despite the popularity that Cultural Studies has acquired in American literary studies over the last decades, this critical paradigm did not enjoy much publicity or trigger much debate in France until the turn of the new millennium. Prior to this date, a handful of journals tackled this topic in greater or lesser detail, with social sciences publications displaying the most curiosity. Thus, whereas *Réseaux—Communication—Technologie—Société* dedicated a full issue to this field in 1996, Cultural Studies remained a non-issue among literary audiences until the turn of the millennium, with the exception of an article by Thomas Pavel in one of *Critique*'s 1992 issues, "Les études culturelles: Une nouvelle discipline?," and the more general special issue on American criticism of the *RFEA* in 1995. The early 2000s, however, saw the publication of a host of articles, as well as two works focusing on the Cultural Studies phenomenon. Both released in 2003, *Cultural Studies. Etudes Culturelles*—edited by André Kaenel, professor of American literature and *civilisation*; and Catherine Lejeune and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, both professors of American *civilisation*—and *Introduction aux*

Cultural Studies by sociologists Armand Mattelart and Erik Neveu aim to introduce this field to the French public. While Kaenel, Lejeune, and Rossignol present their topic in a positive light, the majority of commentators have proven less favorably inclined. The rhetoric employed in the few periodicals which dedicated issues to this phenomenon provides an initial insight into the nature of the reception of this field in France. As a result, the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* published in 2004 the proceedings of a roundtable conference under the title *Faut-il avoir peur des Cultural Studies?* [*Should One be Afraid of Cultural Studies?*]. In 2006, the *RFEA* released a special issue entitled *Qui a peur des nouveaux canons?* [*Who's Afraid of the New Canons?*]. As one can note from these editorial choices, the reaction to Cultural Studies in France is fraught with a marked disquiet.

Whether in the sociological and historical fields or in literary studies, the frigid reception to Cultural Studies may seem paradoxical on several counts. Puzzling over the invisibility of this field in France, Ann Garréta asks in mock wonder, “wasn’t ‘French theory’—whatever goes by the name—a key ingredient in the constitution of these (inter)disciplinary fields in the North American realm?” (145). This argument on the seemingly natural connection between French literary critics and Cultural Studies has also been brought up by other observers. Mattelart and Neveu underline in their introduction to *Réseaux*’s special issue that “the first generations of Cultural Studies were great importers of French scientific works, from Barthes to Goldman via Althusser.” Furthermore, researchers on both sides of the ocean have explored similar objects. From a sociological standpoint, Mattelart remarks upon the “partial homologies in objects of

study and concerns” that unite Cultural Studies and the sociological research that coalesced around Bourdieu from 1974 on (Présentation 6). The work of the French sociologist, as well as that of Barthes in *Mythologies* and of the historiographers of the *Annales* thus prompt Edward Ousselin to observe that the Cultural Studies angle is far from being “alien to ... the French intellectual and academic tradition” (91).¹ However puzzling, “the absence of curiosity” demonstrated by French researchers regarding Cultural Studies was still very tangible in 2005 (Le Brun-Cordier 180).

Returning to a more strictly literary field, the French academics’ reaction to Cultural Studies is no less remarkable and paradoxical. In addition to the French historiographic tradition and the type of semiological approach practiced by Barthes, there exists in France an academic field comparable to Cultural Studies. French university curricula for foreign languages indeed include a course entitled *civilization*, a term which, according to Pierre Guerlain, professor of American studies, refers to the “same object” as Cultural Studies (Review). Both fields are thus characterized by their interdisciplinarity. Contrary to what one may assume, this surface similarity does not facilitate the acceptance of Cultural Studies in France. Indeed, the existence and academic legitimacy of the French academic field most germane to Cultural Studies has been questioned, especially as regards its interdisciplinary character, which earned it the status of “discipline bâtarde,” or bastard discipline (Guerlain, “Malaise,” par. 10). A “buzzword” at the time of *civilisation*’s emergence as a field in the 1970s, interdisciplinarity has experienced a change of fortune among scholars, who, “out of concern for conceptual and methodological clarity,” now advocate a “return to the

disciplines” (Rossignol par. 6). Furthermore, in the French academic system, *civilisation* and *littérature* are two separate fields. Although initially “administrative,” this distinction has been accepted at the scientific level “as if it went without saying” (Guerlain, Review, par. 2). Researchers indeed have traditionally identified themselves as either *civilisationiste* or *littéraire*. As Guerlain underlines, Cultural Studies challenges this institutionalized separation, which, combined with its allegedly damaging interdisciplinary nature, may explain the French academics’ reluctance about Cultural Studies.²

Initially characterized by indifference, the stance adopted towards Cultural Studies by some critics, whether literary scholars or not, can largely be described as one of rejection. The criticisms that have been voiced against Cultural Studies over the last few years provide insight into the beliefs that underpin this attitude and reveal how deeply connected to a larger worldview the practice of criticism is. Some French scholars have suggested that some ingrained anti-Americanism might explain the frigid welcome that Cultural Studies has encountered in French academic circles. While hardly exhausting the problematic of the reception of Cultural Studies in France, this seemingly shallow thesis must be acknowledged. According to some scholars, the fear of an imperialist intellectual take-over at the hands of the United States constitutes a genuine obstacle to the acceptance of Cultural Studies. Edward Ousselin thus reports that this critical paradigm is, at times, viewed as “a more sophisticated and therefore insidious form of American cultural imperialism” (90).³ Discussing specific areas of research, namely “gender ... [and] gay studies,” Garréta contends that they are lumped with

“McDonald’s fast food” (147), and Geneviève Sellier, who explores the resistance of French film studies to Cultural Studies in Kaenel’s reader, excoriates what she views as this field’s fear of an “Anglo-American contamination” (122). One can not dismiss the possibility that such attitude is at play; however, critics also explicitly advance other arguments in support of their negative reaction from which one may grasp more fully what motivates the French response to Cultural Studies. The place granted to *littérarité* appears as the bone of contention, as illustrated most forcefully by Bleikasten, Loucif, Labbé and Costa de Beauregard. However, while the slighting of literariness at the hands of Cultural Studies regularly comes to the foreground, interventions by literary and non-literary critics clearly demonstrate that other values fundamental to the French critical and political cultures are threatened. Among the arguments most repeatedly invoked, Cultural Studies’ political inadequacy and, more significantly, its incompatibility with French universalism and republicanism emerge as major justifications for the rejection of this critical paradigm in France. Furthermore, the French critical discourse produced in the course of this debate exposes the ethos underpinning French literary criticism as it reveals another significant stumbling block to the adoption of Cultural Studies in France. Indeed, Cultural Studies challenges the ideals of objectivity and scientificity that still today inform the scholarly enterprise in France.

Cultural Studies and French universalism and republicanism

The comments of Pap Ndiaye upon the publication in 2008 of his book *La condition noire, Essai sur une minorité française* [*The Black Condition, Essay on a French Minority*], as well as the reactions elicited by this work, provide a synopsis of the

reactions regarding Cultural Studies in France. Hailed as the pioneer of “a new field of inquiry in French sociology,” dubbed by a *Libération* journalist as “Black Studies à la française” (Aeschimann), Ndiaye, assistant professor at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*, shared in an interview with *Le nouvel observateur* what may be called a diagnosis of the French academic field and its reluctance to embrace Cultural Studies. Although Ndiaye optimistically declares that “Black Studies” can develop in France as it did in other European countries, including Great Britain and Germany, he points to several significant stumbling blocks. The “color-blind, republican universalism,” as well as “the Marxist legacy that undermines inequalities not based on class; [and] the fear of essentialisation” all preclude, according Ndiaye, the emergence of Black studies in France (qtd. in Boltanski and Vigoureux). Another important keyword emerges from the online Questions and Answers organized by the newspaper *Libération* upon the publication of Ndiaye’s work. Echoing the issue of *communautarisme*, or communitarianism, brought up by *Le nouvel observateur* interviewers, one participant thus addresses the author in the following terms: “You are then more of a multiculturalist than a universalist? Why not openly say so? Are there several citizenships within the public space?” Based on this question’s wording, multiculturalism becomes a flaw to which to confess. Neither *Le nouvel observateur*, a newsmagazine, nor *Libération*, a daily newspaper, qualifies as an academic publication; nevertheless, they reflect quite closely the main arguments voiced in academic circles in France through Ndiaye’s observations on the weight of the rhetoric of Marxism and republican universalism, as well as the stigmatization of essentialism.

The ambivalent perception of Cultural Studies' political implications

Although on very different, when not opposed, grounds, Cultural Studies have been the object of a virtually total rejection in France. Within academic circles, it stands accused of two contradictory failings, contextualism and textualism, which results in its being simultaneously viewed as overly and insufficiently political. Yet, in both cases, this critical paradigm is held to be flawed. As can be expected based upon the conception of the function of criticism maintained by several French critics, the former accusation is the province of literary scholars, whereas the latter is that of sociologists, like Mattelart, Neveu, and Cusset. According to literary critics, Cultural Studies attempts to re-capture a political legitimacy and efficacy for literary studies, which, in addition to being viewed as diluting the essence and specificity of the field, are deemed out of the purview of the critic when not simply dismissed as illusory. Conversely, the discourse of social scientists faults Cultural Studies for its diminished political import, especially when compared with the British version initially practiced in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Due to the disappearance of the critique of capital and the change of object that, according to Cusset, characterize American Cultural Studies, the transatlantic heirs of British Cultural Studies lost their political edge (Cusset 146).⁴ For Cusset, the “*sursémiologisation*,” or hypersemiologization, whereby “cultural activities” cease to be approached as “social phenomena” to become “texts to decipher” drastically blunts their political dimension (168, 149). Mattelart and Neveu similarly “insist upon ... the process of de-politicization” of the field, starting from the mid-1990s, and go on to argue that

“the original sin” of Cultural Studies resides in its “neglect of history and political economy” (“Cultural” 29, 38).

These accusations are refined over the course of these three social scientists’ overview; in fact, all fault American critics for eschewing the original Marxian problematic of Cultural Studies, which carries dire consequences. Contrary to the founders of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Edward P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams, who favored “Marxian analyses” predicated upon the inseparability of culture from “power relationships” and the “resistance to the industrial cultural order,” American practitioners appear to submit to the existing order (Mattelart and Neveu, “Cultural” 17). Joining Mattelart and Neveu in their condemnation of the “virtual inexistence ... of a problematic” construing “cultural creation as a field of competition and interdependence among producers” (“Cultural” 28), Cusset believes that the “new *cult’ studs’* experts” have “lost sight of ... the larger context of the cultural industry and of commercial power” within which these phenomena are necessarily inscribed (147). Cultural critics’ failure to engage in a critical analysis of market forces and to approach their object of study as “commodit[ies]” afflicts and even perverts the field; indeed, they feed a “multicultural marketing” by making “marginal cultures” visible on the “radar of cultural industries” (Cusset 172-73) or, in Mattelart and Neveu’s words, they establish a disturbing “collusion of concepts between capitalist logic and the academic world” (“Cultural” 42). Especially indicative of this phenomenon is cultural critics’ focus on popular culture, which amounts to a capitulation on the part of American academics. Cusset indeed interprets this choice of object “less [as] a political

gesture than a full participation in one's era," defined as that of "the fully realized capitalist law" (146, 150).⁵ Compounded by the disconnection between the university—the "discourse society"—and society—the "political society," these shortcomings are viewed as curtailing Cultural Studies' political import (170, 166). A similar discourse can be heard from certain representatives of English studies, namely those specializing in *civilisation*. Eliane Elmaleh, professor of English, thus argues that the identity "labels" that have multiplied under the impetus of Cultural Studies only contribute to the "camouflage of economic exploitation" ("Les politiques" 70), a stance which Guerlain echoes when condemning the "erasure of significant political and social aspects" in Ethnic Studies and the field's "methodological flirtation with the marketing industry" (Review par. 32). Partly reflecting Ndiaye's observation on the Continental blindness to any differences but class-based ones, these scholars' discourse, whether stigmatizing Cultural Studies' interpretative or political inadequacy, clearly convey what constitutes only one of the recriminations routinely addressed to this critical paradigm in French debates.

The perceived divisiveness of Cultural Studies

Whether blaming Cultural Studies for its excesses or for its lack of political import, all factions agree with one aspect: the nefarious effects of the balkanization unavoidably implied by Cultural Studies. The frequency with which such terms as "balkanization," but also "fragmentation," or even "tribalism," (Finkielkraut qtd. in Ousselin 89) and "cultural 'Leninism'" (Cusset 336) occur in French scholars' writings demonstrates the preponderance of this specific aspect of the multicultural question in the

French opinion. Balkanization is thus at the root of Cusset's indictment of Cultural Studies' lack of political agency. The absence of "political *unity*" or "shared militancy" is traceable to the fragmentation effected by Cultural Studies, which has remained unrelieved due to the lack of a unifying critique of capital (201-202, 172). In less overtly political terms, Elmaleh also deplores "the automatic sexualization, racialization, and ethnicization" that now characterizes the American university and leads to "separatism" ("Les politiques" 70-71). Guerlain eloquently expresses this view as it pertains to the academic enterprise. Although his remarks reiterate several of the sociologists' criticisms, he depicts the "communitarisation of thought" as the "greatest danger" presented by Cultural Studies (par. 20), going as far as to denounce the advent of a "new inverted segregationism" favored by the creation of fields matching "an ethnic group or a gender" (par. 26). This multiplication of identity-based disciplinary fields presents several problems. Not only does it usher in a new "essentialism," but it also imperils the pursuit of knowledge.⁶ Fragmentation, Guerlain argues, thwarts "possibilities of shared dialogue" and compromises "scientificity." "If the university organizes its disciplines along the lines of an ethnic or gender-based activism," he warns, "dialogue and the development of knowledge, then contingent upon community approval, are hampered" (par. 20). Raising the specters of "biology à la Lyssenko" and "socialist realism," Guerlain concludes his review essay of Kaenel, Lejeune, and Rossignol's work by stating that European scholars balk at "the idea that knowledge could be the privilege, the possession, or the prerogative of a group, be that the proletariat of yesteryear or this or that cultural or ethnic group" (par. 26).

Several of these arguments may sound familiar to an American audience. Voiced by American academics, including J. Hillis Miller, John M. Ellis, Fredric Jameson, and Neil Postman, the objections to Cultural Studies that John Carlos Rowe broaches in “The Resistance to Cultural Studies” aptly describe the French situation. The recriminations evoked by Rowe—the field’s “impossible scope, failure to define its key terms, lack of theoretical self-consciousness, historical ignorance, the ‘easiness’ of its topics for teaching and research, obsession with ‘relevance,’ reflex treatment of ‘race, class, and gender,’ ... refusal to read *carefully*,” as well as its “politiciz[ation of] knowledge”—can all be encountered in French discourse (105, 113). More specifically, the charge that American Cultural Studies has shed the political dimension that characterized their British forebears, as well as the accusation of collusion with the market, have previously been made by, among others, Thomas Frank in his 2000 *One Market, Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* and, as Cusset indicates, by Fredric Jameson in “On Cultural Studies” (228). Also, the “theses” of Dinesh D’Souza and Arthur M. Schlesinger on the divisiveness of Cultural Studies have gained wide currency in France, as noted by Marie-Christine Granjon in her analysis of the French debate on multiculturalism (20-21). Hence, parts of the French discourse may also seem to overlap with some of the views expressed in the United States. Beyond this recognizable line of argument lies, however, another that speaks to the specificity of the French reception and, consequently, to the cultural specificity of criticism.

Cultural Studies and French republican universalism

In addition to being viewed as counter-productive in the pursuit of both political and academic aims, the divisiveness characteristic of Cultural Studies in most French critics' eyes also runs counter to two specific and related French values. Both the few advocates of Cultural Studies and its detractors acknowledge the incompatibility of this approach with the French traditions of universalism and republicanism—the former to denounce what they perceive as a willed blindness or even hypocrisy as regards matters of gender and race, the latter to reiterate the soundness of these French traditional values. The writings of Marie-Hélène Bourcier, a sociologist by training and one of the few practitioners of queer studies in France,⁷ and Elmaleh illustrate these two opposed stances, the latter being by far the most widespread. Bourcier ascribes the French rejection of Cultural Studies to the drastic, yet, in her opinion, salutary, threat they present for “the republican ideology and its universalist extensions” (par. 29) or “the *grands récits* of modernity” guaranteeing “social progress, justice, and equality” (par. 2). Conversely, Elmaleh contends in her article on Women’s Studies in the United States that the weakness of this field lies in the very fact that it undermines the “notion of universalism.” Considering “women as an autonomous object of inquiry” implies that “larger questions” are ignored, she concludes (“*Les Women’s*” 145). Based on these two representative viewpoints, no less than universalist and republican ideologies are at stake in this debate. Discussing the popularity of American opponents to multiculturalism among intellectuals from both ends of the French political spectrum, Granjon offers a hypothesis that can apply to the dismissal of Cultural Studies in French academic circles

when she suggests that the “genuine reason” for the unpopularity of multiculturalism resides in a perceived “incompatibility with the French republican tradition” (20, 23). In order to fully understand how it represents a hurdle to the adoption of Cultural Studies, one must grasp what the French concept of universalism entails.

In “The Culture(s) of the Republic,” one of the various essays that have tackled the problematic co-habitation of French republican thought and multiculturalism since the “headscarves affair” of the late 1980s, political scientist Cécile Laborde offers an overview of the tenets of republican universalism.⁸ Notwithstanding the multi-ethnic make-up of the French population, the principle of “undifferentiation between individuals” lies at the heart of the “French model,” as expressed by the government-appointed *Haut conseil à l’intégration* or “High Council on Integration” (qtd. in Laborde 719). Thus, Laborde further explains, the “bracketing-off” of cultural difference in the public sphere” is deemed “fundamental” in the French worldview (719). Naomi Schor describes this founding concept in layman’s terms as a “neutering operation” producing “subjects devoid of particularities [:] unsexed, ungendered, unraced, and unclassed” (348).⁹ Within this context, Elmaleh’s use of quotation marks around the word race throughout her essay on identity politics, or Denis Lacorne’s reference to the “obsédante conscience de race,” the haunting racial awareness prevailing in the United States, become legible (qtd. in Elmaleh, “Les politiques” 58).

As remote as it may appear from the concerns of literary studies, this foray into political science proves necessary to a thorough understanding of French academics’ reaction to Cultural Studies. One may perceive how this ideology of republican

universalism informs academic choice of object and practices. The concept of identity prevailing in France and according to which identity transcends “cultural attachments” indeed establishes the universal as the horizon of academic research (Laborde 718). The French universalist worldview, or in Charles Stivale’s words, its “ideological bias,” stands in direct contradiction to the conception of difference informing Cultural Studies and thus with the adoption of this critical paradigm (78). Cultural Studies is perceived as “un-French” as multiculturalism (Jennings 589), and embracing them would amount to undermining socio-cultural foundations. Within this ideology, groups cannot become an object of study for scholars since this very object cannot be thought within that particular system. This universalism not only sets boundaries to the nature of the object of study, it also informs its approach.

The consistency of the reactions to Cultural Studies in France, but also their paradoxical nature, is especially remarkable. The allegations voiced by recent critics and literary theorists against this paradigm have remained constant if one takes as a point of reference Pavel’s 1992 article “Les études culturelles: Une nouvelle discipline? [Cultural Studies: A New Discipline?]” The flaws upon which he remarks—the quest for “usefulness” inspiring efforts to “endow contemporary literary studies with the weight and prestige of political and social debates” (733-34), the “fragmentation of the political imaginary” and latent “essentialism” characteristic of this field (737), and its disciplinary inadequacy materializing in “conceptual laxity” and the inappropriateness of the “political lexicon” to literature’s “specific needs” (738, 741)—have all been reverberated, as such, and amplified in subsequent critiques of Cultural Studies. This brief overview

also brings to light several paradoxes in the French critical discourse. The depiction of American cultural critics' attempt to regain a political efficacy as naïve and the dismissal of these efforts as inconclusive collide with the otherwise alarmist portrayal of Cultural Studies. If literary criticism cannot pretend to any effects beyond the boundaries of the discipline, it is difficult to understand how Cultural Studies could bring about the downfall of the republican ideal. Furthermore, the paradoxical argumentation advanced points to what one may call a short-sightedness or lack of critical self-awareness in the French discourse. Critics who reject this critical paradigm on the ground that it treads in territories outside the perimeter of literary studies actually play into the hands of the universalist ideology. Through their refusal to venture into gender- or race-based critiques because they contradict the critic's function and necessarily deter from the primary focus on literariness, they fall, by omission, squarely within the authorized bounds. Thus, their Benda-esque ideal, which one may summarize as the wish to remain intellectually autonomous and politically neutral, a stance related to the will to objectivity or scientificity recurrently expressed by critics, remains unfulfilled.

Often constituting the ultimate appeal against the problems posed by Cultural Studies within the French system, the invocation of the concepts of scientificity, objectivity, and even truth that recurs in the writings of several French critics denotes a conception of knowledge that collides with the postmodern stance that informs the culturalist approach. Postmodernism can indeed be defined as a negation of these very concepts. The frigidity of French academia regarding postmodernism has been remarked upon by several scholars. Philippe Carrard presents the French reception of Hayden

White's thesis on historiography as epitomizing the more widespread French "resistance' ... against 'poststructuralism' and 'postmodernism,'" two terms, which, although ubiquitous in American scholarship, have little currency in French discourse (292).¹⁰ The conception of knowledge underpinning the practice of literary studies in France can be further grasped in the opinions about *discipline* recurring in the works of various French critics and theorists. In 1981, Todorov delivers a mild warning against the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and the potential weakening of literary studies' identity. While he acknowledges the possibility of adopting "philosophical, psychoanalytical, [or] sociological perspectives" on literature, he believes that, contrary to what was then done, such approaches ought to be subjected to the same "demands" that apply to practitioners of these disciplines. "I refuse," he explains, "this dilettantism that turns the literary scholar into a jack-of-all-trades, a man who ... specializes in nothing" (222). Specialization and the application of a specific methodology thus constitute two essential traits of a legitimate *discipline* and praxis.

Synonymous with interdisciplinarity, or the collapse of distinct boundaries between disciplines, as well as with a questioning of the very notion of objectivity, Postmodernism becomes especially problematic in a country where the notion of *discipline* retains a noticeable significance, as French *civilisationistes* can testify. Construed as warranting scientificity and objectivity, the very notion of discipline still acts as a structuring force in French academia today, hence framing French critics' discussion of Cultural Studies. Both sharing a strong interdisciplinary angle, *civilisation* and Cultural Studies are routinely criticized on the ground that, having no specific

methodology, they instead resort to a bricolage that seems synonymous for French critics with intellectual sloppiness. Expanding upon Todorov's argument, Pavel decries Cultural Studies' "a-disciplinary utopia" and its "motley lexicon" combined with an "undefinable methodology" (740). His condemnation of the blurry disciplinary affiliation of Cultural Studies, however, extends further. Pavel, inaugurating a stance that would be adopted by several subsequent critics, avers that the lack of disciplinary specificity "dissolves truth criteria and methodological clarity," thus producing a "universe of vague interpretations and unverifiable facts" (740). Maintaining boundaries between disciplines, namely by respecting specific rhetoric and methodology, is essential lest the goal of the pursuit of knowledge, that is, based on Pavel's words, the production of verifiable facts, be imperiled. One may conclude that French academics strive to maintain the modernist rhetoric of truth, scientificity, and objectivity that postmodernism has challenged.

Notes to Chapter V

¹ In his exploration of the international genealogy of cultural studies in *Culture and Critique: An Introduction to the Critical Discourses of Cultural Studies*, Jere Paul Surber discusses the relationship between the French “Annales School of historiography”—its emphasis on “everyday life” as defined by Fernand Braudel and Michel de Certeau—and the emergence of American cultural studies (253-63).

² Jean-Louis Jeanelle in “Introducing Queer Studies?” (2003) also faults the structure of the university for the lack of acceptance of Queer studies in France (143).

³ One may find this line of argument illustrated in Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant’s “On the Cunning of Imperialist Reason,” published in 1999. More recently, Julien Landfried, director of the *Observatoire du communautarisme*, included in his 2004 *Contre le communautarisme* a chapter tellingly entitled “‘Cultural, racial and gender studies’: l’autre néocolonialisme américain [Cultural, Racial, and Gender Studies: the Other American Neocolonialism].”

⁴ One must underline one surprising omission in Cusset’s overview of the development of Cultural Studies. Whereas he does mention the names of the founders of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Edward P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, and Raymond Williams, he neglects to include and discuss the role of Stuart Hall.

⁵ Cusset refers to the “ordre marchand accompli.”

⁶ One must note that Guerlain cites Judith Butler and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as scholars avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism and “reversed racism” (par. 20).

⁷ Bourcier published *Queer zone, Politiques des identités sexuelles, des représentations et des savoirs* in 2001 and *Sexpolitiques, Queer Zone 2* in 2005.

⁸ In 1989, three female students were expelled from their middle school for wearing a *hijab*, a practice viewed as contrary to the principle of secularism. On March 15, 2004, the French government issued a law forbidding the donning of “signs or outfits” that “conspicuously display religious adherence” in state educational institutions. For more information on this piece of legislation, see

<http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/dossiers/laicite/loi-15-mars-2004.shtml>.

⁹ This universalist precept of “un-differentiation” finds one its most tangible expressions in the absence of any statistical data regarding ethnic particularities.

¹⁰ Geert Lernout, in “Postmodernism in France,” also underlines the invisibility of the term on the French critical scene (353).

Conclusion

As this study draws the portrait of the French James by analyzing French Jamesian scholarship and exploring the connections of this specific body of criticism to larger French critical practices, it draws attention to how one's relationships to texts, whether they be those of a novelist or of a literary theorist, are deeply determined by context, and the expectations one may, as a result, be led to form. Indeed, it foregrounds the concrete tie linking critical practices and orientations to historical and cultural forces. Also, French criticism of James sheds light on French critical practices and motivations. It thus shows that the French critical world is still founded upon what may, in view of the recent developments in American criticism, be simultaneously viewed as obsolete and novel ideas. Finally, the transatlantic perspective that underpins this work ultimately draws attention to the benefit of examining one's critical practices in the light of others', an activity that allows one to engage in a necessary reflection upon the assumptions underlining our practices.

Jamesian criticism in France

The image of the French James and, consequently, of French criticism that emerges differs quite noticeably from what one would expect based upon what circulates in the United States under the name of "French Theory." The French James presents the reader with an unexpected aspect of the French critical scene, which appears strangely removed from the concerns that have shaped the practice of literary criticism in the United States. James's remark upon the surprise of the "Anglo-Saxon reader" of

Maupassant at the “omission of all ... lights” with the exception of the sensual one can also further describe the reaction of this same reader when faced with French Jamesian criticism (*LC* II 539). Two major and related characteristics indeed clearly rule French Jamesian criticism: the master trope of the “secret,” as well as the proclivity to favor textual literary approaches, largely to the exclusion of others.

Early on, French critics seized upon the enigmatic dimension of James, who so tantalizingly declines to bring his novels and short stories to a univocal conclusion. Favored by the sustained focus upon the “strange and ghostly tales” distinguishing the French criticism of James, the secret became the master trope of this discourse. While a few critics, such as Jean Perrot and Nancy Blake, follow what one may call a hermeneutics of suspicion and adopt a psychoanalytic approach in order to bring James’s secret to light, several present the secret as constitutive of Jamesian narratives and argue that the key to the Jamesian secret does not lie in some extratextual ideology or psychology, but in the text itself. In keeping with an anti-referential and self-reflexive conception of literature, these critics argue that the secret is not meant to be captured. In the words of Bernard Terramorsi, James’s “enigmatic writing” only “reveal[s] the mystery of its own functioning” (293). This proclivity to examine textual mechanics and to focus on how texts mean rather than with what they mean evokes structuralism, a critical paradigm that left noticeable traces in the French critical mind.

The nature of James’s literary persona is heavily influenced by this focus on textuality, and, as a result, one may indeed argue that the study of French Jamesian criticism does not exactly reveal a new James. Approaches remain largely confined

within the bounds of the readings based upon a handful of texts produced in the 1950s and 1970s. Only critics who consciously undertook to break from this tradition have produced a portrait of James that departs from the more conventional one, whether in France or the United States. While describing his study as a stylistic one, Jean Perrot argued, as early as 1979, for the presence of a consciously subversive thrust in James's works, hence portraying him as a highly critical observer of his time. Georges-Michel Sarotte, author of the 1976 *Comme un frère, comme un amant: homosexualité masculine dans le roman et le théâtre américain*, also contributed a perspective on James that was novel at the time, as noted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who views him as one of the few critics to have explored "the male-erotic pathways of James's personal desires" (204). According to Sarotte, James's epoch, "education and [,] temperament" conspired to keep his "homophilia within the confines of homoeroticism" (197). Returning to this theme in an essay published in 1998, "Frères et cousins: Henry James et la guerre de Sécession [Brothers and Cousins: Henry James and the Secession War]," Sarotte argues, more provocatively, that based on *The Bostonians* and *The American Scene*, one must conclude that had James enlisted, he would have done so on the Confederate side, due to his "identification" of the American South with "sophisticated Europe" (19, 16). With the exception of these critics, James has consistently been approached in France as a writer's writer, with the focus of study lying, first and foremost, with the textual.

Despite the plea of scholars, like Jean Bessière and Annick Duperray, to embrace a more culturalist approach to James's works, French Jamesian scholarship still does not seem ready to turn to cultural criticism. While scholarship on this novelist, viewed as "the

virtual embodiment of all that cultural studies targeted for demolition,” successfully negotiated its re-birth in the cultural age of literary criticism in the United States (Posnock, “Henry” 273), it is still not the case in France, where cultural criticism remains unpopular. As a result, James’s persona remains largely associated with textual concerns. A recently published article on *The American Scene*, a work whose cultural dimension American critics have largely discussed, demonstrates how James is consistently approached as practitioner of the written word as it illustrates French critics’ propensity to remain within the bounds of the textual. The argument that Marie-Odile Salati develops in “Entre le gris et l’opaque: le blanc dénaturé de l’Amérique retrouvé par Henry James dans *The American Scene* [Between grey and opaque: the adulterated white of America as found by Henry James in *The American Scene*]” focuses on James’s use of color. Through an analysis of “the rich chromatic and lexical nuances” present in this work (2), Salati aims to show that “the theme of whiteness,” which translates the author’s inability to impose an “aesthetic coherence” upon the “overload of signs” issuing from America’s “modern reality” (2), is to be linked, “*in the final analysis*,” (emphasis added) to “issues of *écriture*” or representation (13). Noticeable in both the French Jamesian criticism and in the larger critical discourse, this tendency to favor textual approaches and to focus on aesthetic concerns may, perhaps, ultimately serve, in Raymond Williams’s words, as an “instrument of evasion” (qtd. in Fluck 79), yet one may find in the immediate institutional context other direct explanations.

Historical and cultural encroachments on the French critical scene

As globalized as our world may have become, James's observation that "certain differences impose themselves" when "living about" still applies ("Occasional" 721). After spending a year in France, Jonathan Culler seizes upon such differences as indicated in "English in the Age of Cultural Studies," an article published in the 1996 bulletin *Société des Anglicistes de l'Éducation Supérieure*. As he contrasts the teaching of literature in French and American universities, he pictures the French academic climate as more auspicious to the textual study of literature, especially poetry. Culler advances specific reasons for this claim. Besides the logical focus on language resulting from the status of English department in France as foreign language departments, French university professors, he argues, are "in a good position to foster the study of poetry" due to the "tradition of programs established by departments or by state institutions" and the fact that French "students do not expect to be able to choose [to study] what they like" (20). Culler's characterization is apt, as are the explanations he advances for the existence of this climate. Yet, the present situation of criticism and literary studies in France is not due only to what, based on Culler's description, could be viewed as the fiat of state agencies.

As theorized by Edward Said and amply demonstrated by James in his critical work, the cultural context in which a critic operates significantly influences his/her production. However detached from practical concerns and steeped in the textual they may seem, literary theories and practices are not born in a vacuum. The nature and specificity of the French critical treatment of James must be placed within what Foucault

calls the “system of dependencies” to which scholars are subjected. When placed in this specific context, the seemingly anachronistic references to *littérarité*, scientificity, or the “human spirit” that recur in French critical writings gain significance. The emphasis on literariness that characterizes James’s critical reception in France results from a host of circumstances extending from the discipline-specific to the cultural via the institutional. The genealogy of literary criticism, more specifically the discipline’s competition with history, explains the emphasis on *littérarité*, hence on text to the exclusion of context. Initially defined by Roman Jakobson in “Linguistique et poétique [Closing Statements],” an essay in which he states the essential role of “the scientific and objective analysis of the art of language” (212), *littérarité* provides a distinct methodology by identifying the privileged gateway to the literary object. Textual scrutiny indeed appears as the only means to capture the essence of literature and to decipher its subtleties. Based on the premise that literature operates according to specific rules, the concept of *littérarité* implies that literature ought to be approached through methodologies that cater to this specificity and that the legitimate and particular object of study for literary studies and criticism resides in its analysis. An idiom of the formalist and structuralist discourses, two critical paradigms that attained a remarkable popularity in France, one may ascribe the predominance of text and *littérarité* to the status acquired there by these discourses. Yet, the election of this specific dimension of literature as the goal of literary studies also helps endow the discipline with a specific object of study and, thus, with a determinate identity. The latter was jeopardized upon several occasions in France, whether by the growing academic status of history at the turn of the nineteenth century or by

existentialism in the mid-twentieth century. It became necessary for the field of literary studies to acquire a definite and strong disciplinary identity to avoid potential annexation by other disciplines' methods and goals. The defense of literariness, which endows literary studies with a specific method and object of knowledge, thus amounts to a defense of the discipline's very identity, still understood within what can be described as a modernist framework founded upon the notions of truth and objectivity, both of which may be subsumed under the larger heading of scientificity.

Scientificity is often invoked by French critics, who view it as a defining and legitimating trait of research. Although it recurs in French essays, this term is never quite fully defined. One can nevertheless arrive at a definition of this apparently seminal and obvious notion by analyzing its use in French critics' writings. Based on her appraisal of David Minter's work in his *Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner*, scientificity stands for Labbé in opposition to moral concerns. Although Minter's argument might acquire a "semblance of scientificity" from its references to Bakhtin, it remains marred by its concern for moral issues and its collapse of literature and history ("Henry James" 473). Moral concerns, but also hybridity of research techniques seem incompatible with the ideal of scientificity. Guerlain adds two additional strains to this definition as he defends scientificity against the threat of Cultural Studies. Besides precluding the possibility of dialogue among scholars, the multiplication of fields of research dedicated to specific groups results, according to him, into the disappearance of scientificity, distinguished here from "localism" and "activism" (Review par. 20). One can, in turn, oppose these two concepts to universalism and

objectivity and further infer that scientificity refers to a quality that transcends particularism and subjectivism. This belief in the transcendent status of science can be witnessed in the rejection of Bruno Latour's constructionist theory of science, which directly challenges the discipline's essence (Cusset 338-40). In the minds of French scholars, "science," Cusset observes, constitutes "the last barrier against all relativisms, whether pertaining to identity or cognition" (339).

One may witness a slow yet difficult change in French literary scholarship. While 2003 saw the publication of two works advocating Cultural Studies, namely Kaenel, Lejeune, and Rossignol's *Cultural Studies, Etudes culturelles* and the *RFEA*'s 2003 special issue *Stemming the Mississippi*, other publications voiced additional reservations regarding this critical paradigm. The *RFEA* 2006 special edition *Qui a peur des nouveaux canons? [Who's Afraid of the New Canons?]* indeed sheds light on the circumstances in which this critical paradigm might be adopted in France. Although they acknowledge the "vagueness" of such criteria, Brigitte Félix and Marie-Claude Perrin-Chenour indicate in their introduction that the scholars contributing to this special issue "insist upon the necessity to include aesthetic criteria" or to bring "*littérarité*" to bear upon "canon formation" (7-8). The enthusiasm of Kaenel and his co-editors is also explicitly countered by Guerlain in his 2005 review of their work. Not only have newer critical orientations failed to gain popularity in France, but France's most prestigious research institution has favored critical angles that, besides further focusing on the text, pretend to a scientific status. Funded by the government through the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)*, *critique génétique* or Genetic Criticism can be presented as the

“official” criticism. It seeks to illuminate the mechanisms of literary creation by studying the *avant-text* or pre-text of a work, which includes the “manuscripts and all documents related to the genesis of a text” (Compagnon, “Introduction”). Although adopting a diachronic approach, genetic critics, “are primarily concerned with linguistic material,” observes Luca Crispi, a member of the *Institut des Textes et des Manuscrits Modernes (ITEM)*, the *CNRS*’s genetic criticism research group (317). In “Genetic Criticism and Its Myths,” Laurent Jenny characterizes Genetic Criticism as an attempt to supplant the “structuralist poetics of the 1970s” and to re-introduce “the ‘real’” into “literary analysis” (200); however, the real that is re-captured is not the real of “Life, History, Culture,” but the reality of the writing process through the tangible traces that manuscripts offer (212).

Besides the particular development of the field and the premises informing the conduct of research, French Jamesian critics' proclivity for the textual approach and attendant reluctance to adopt a contextual or culturalist approach is directly correlated to an ideological idiosyncrasy amply revealed in the debates around Cultural Studies that have recently animated the entire French intellectual scene. In addition to the literary scholars' fear that the contextualization entailed by a cultural approach to literature will necessarily be realized at the expense of attention for *littérarité*, and thus lead to the disappearance of their discipline, the ideology of republican universalism underpinning the French worldview constitutes a significant stumbling block to the adoption of American Cultural Studies in France and another explanation to the textual bias. The politico-social orders that abide in the two countries drastically differ. Whereas the United States recognizes identities based upon gender or ethnic affiliations, France denies

their existence as far as the public sphere is concerned. As a result, the structuring of academic study based on such groups becomes highly problematic. Because the practice of literary criticism in France is so deeply intertwined with the cultural and political principles that underpin the French worldview, its future is contingent upon their evolution, and while events such as the Headscarf affair effectively launched a debate in the late eighties on French universalist tenets, few advances have been made. This brief incursion into political theory may strike the reader as irrelevant. However, the light it sheds on the French reaction to multiculturalism and Cultural Studies demonstrates how deeply anchored in the country's culture, political and academic, the practice of criticism is, whether critics recognize it or not.

The swing of the pendulum

Although change is slow to come, this study of French criticism shows a desire and need for a balanced critical point of view that avoids both textualist and contextualist extremes. The attempt to steer French Jamesian scholarship towards a greater attention to contextual or cultural elements is symptomatic of a debate that has recurred within French and American criticism. Indeed, a comparable and familiar debate on the epistemology of literary studies is presently taking place in the United States. Through the repeated attempts to strike a balance between attention to text and attention to context, a polarization has most often been present, with the critical pendulum swinging more noticeably in one of the two directions at different times. Vincent B. Leitch observes that the evolution of American literary criticism since the 1930s has been ruled, "in the final analysis," by a "large-scale dialectic or allegorical division" opposing

“various ‘formalistic’ schools” and “certain ‘cultural’ movements” (ix). Notwithstanding the simplification that might potentially result from this dichotomous approach, which Leitch acknowledges, and contrary to his assumption that such critical polarization ceased in the 1980s, the debate between formalistic and contextualist critical approaches has recently re-emerged. After several years, during which the cultural angle has seemed to permeate the entire American critical scene, arguments in favor of more textually-anchored approaches are voiced. The inclusion in one of the *PMLA*'s 2007 issues of an essay entitled “What is New Formalism?,” by Marjorie Levinson, thus appears as a sign of the times, as does the 2005 conference “Theory/Analysis: Henry James and New Formalisms,” organized by Eric Savoy and Sheila Teahan. Even more explicit is Teahan’s claim that “‘close reading’ is currently making a significant comeback in literary studies, in part under the aegis of James studies” (28). These developments reflect the departure from what may be called extrinsic approaches and voice the desire for a return to the text that one can witness in academia at large and that the recent publication of several scholarly works illustrates. *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today* edited by Michael P. Clark in 2000, *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age* edited by Emory Elliott in 2002, and *Close Reading: The Reader*, a 2003 work edited by Andrew Dubois and Frank Lentricchia, all corroborate this new shift in the practice of literary studies in the United States. The description of *Close Reading*’s implicit though “polemical” claim by Lentricchia constitutes the most convincing instance of such change. Once one of the most vocal advocates of a more political criticism, Lentricchia indeed declares that “the newer modes of literary interpretation are most persuasive when

they do not break with the older formalist protocol” (qtd. in Tinari). Also explicitly testifying to this new swing of the critical pendulum is the presentation of 35th annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, held in 2008, tellingly entitled “Faulkner: The Returns of the Text.” The organizers of this conference take stock of a recent “shift” in the practice of literary criticism, whose tendency, as demonstrated in “Faulkner criticism” and “literary studies in general,” has so far been to “emphasiz[e] the significance of various historical and cultural forces as the determining factors of what texts say and how readers interpret them.” However, they note that literary critics now seek to “re-affir[m] the formal dimension of literature, the way in which texts assert an original response to culture through their formal qualities.” What is advocated by the organizers of the Faulkner conference is, however, not an indifference to “cultural context.” Rather than “approaching the literary text as a reflection, a representation of that context—historical, economic, political, and social,” they now wish to draw attention to “the role of the text as a challenge to the power of external ideological systems to dictate textual expression.”

While these scholars’ work certainly testifies to the paradigm shift presently occurring in American academia, they indeed do not intend an unqualified and total return to a purely formalist treatment of literature. Echoing Leitch’s appraisal, Dubois claims in *Close Reading: The Reader* that “a genuine (perhaps central) debate in twentieth-century literary criticism is a debate between formalist and nonformalist methods of response” to literature, yet *Close Reading* aims at “obscur[ing] the assumed clarity of these categories” and posits itself against any concept of “methodological purity” (1). *Revenge of the Aesthetic* adopts a similar stance. The essays gathered in this

publication, Clark underlines, “all insist on some form of dialectical relation between work and world that ... contests the facile elevation of either work or world as the determining factor of literary experience” (10-11). The same desire for a balanced critical practice that accounts for the circumstances in which a work is born, as well as for its aesthetic dimension, underpins the 2003 *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*.

The benefits of a transatlantic dialogue

A comparable debate on the appropriate place of the aesthetic and the cultural in literary studies is presently taking place in France and the United States. However, French and American critical practices appear to proceed in opposite directions. While the French presently attempt to carefully integrate cultural elements in their critical perspective, the Americans attempt to wean themselves of it. In this context, both American and French scholars and their respective research could benefit from a sustained transatlantic dialogue. While the linguistic barrier certainly poses a problem, scholars from both sides of the ocean ought to strive to become more familiar with their counterparts' work, not so much to reach a global consensus but to benefit from the exchange of critical and intellectual views that, while mostly differing, ultimately grapple with similar questions. At a time when scholars and critics in the United States seek to re-establish a balance between attention to text and context, French Jamesian criticism, which, in its reluctance to adopt newer contextualist trends, might find itself “in synch with the avant-garde ... without having moved,” emerges as a likely interlocutor for American scholars (Compagnon, “L'Exception” 47). Conversely, French critics stand to benefit from the arguments advanced by some of their American colleagues, especially

those who propose a critical practice equally anchored in the textual and the contextual. When it comes to specifically Jamesian criticism, such transatlantic exchanges would also prove beneficial. As Duperray indicates in her review of Labbé's work, published in a 1992 issue of *HJR*, her fellow-citizen's depiction of *The Golden Bowl* as representing James's "final phase of solipsistic separation" stands in stark contrast to David McWhirter's thesis on the same novel (214-15). One certainly does not suggest that Labbé should uncritically adopt her American colleague's view, yet addressing it would make for a richer argument. Similarly, insights into the work of André Green on "The Jolly Corner" would have enriched the argument made on the same text in "Narcissism and the Conditions of Self-knowledge in James's 'The Jolly Corner,'" an article published in *HJR* in 2005. Indeed, Green's work on narcissism would have proven especially germane to the purpose of this article, which consisted in addressing the absence of critical analysis, or even note, of the "the similarities between the Narcissus myth and 'The Jolly Corner'" (199). A greater awareness of the critical work completed in the French and American contexts would allow critics to build further upon their fellow-scholars' findings and thus to advance their common knowledge of a specific author.

Perhaps even more importantly, transatlantic exchanges, like transnational ones, enable a reflection on the practice of criticism in general and the nature of knowledge. As this study shows, the phrase "Henry James" does not refer to the same critical reality in France and in the United States. The transatlantic viewpoint adopted in this study, which underlines the close relationship between context of inception and critical practices and theories and exposes one to another critical perspective, reminds us that we should

always remain cognizant of the situated nature of one's own critical practices and statements. These exchanges can prove especially valuable inasmuch as they afford participants the opportunity to gain insight into the otherwise familiar from an outside perspective, thus facilitating a difficult yet necessary reflection on one's critical practices and the principles that underpin them. Henry James eloquently argues in favor of such perspective. In "Occasional Paris," a piece in which he enjoins his readers to "compare ... as often as the occasion presents itself," he pictures countries as "room[s]," in which one can "very comfortabl[y] ... sit," provided "the window [remains] open" (722). This image, which emphasizes the importance of being able to retain a perspective on the outside, holds a special significance when applied to the practice of literary criticism. When remaining within the same context of practice, assumptions that underpin one's critical practice can easily become naturalized, and, for this reason, approaching these critically can prove difficult. However, being exposed to different practices and systems of thought can enable one to return to one's own practices with a renewed critical perspective. Indeed, whether one agrees or not with the charges leveled at Cultural Studies by French critics, taking into consideration their observations affords an opportunity for reflecting on this critical paradigm. Although sustaining transatlantic and transnational exchanges can prove difficult, it would greatly contribute to turning our globalized world into an opportunity for knowledge.

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