



Henry JAMES: The Bostonians

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H. JAMES : *THE BOSTONIANS*

James's art before *The Bostonians*

*The Bostonians*¹ was published in 1886, in the same year as *The Princess Casamassima*, which forms a sort of companion piece to the former. Both novels are set apart from James's other works "by having in common a quick responsiveness to the details of the outer world, an explicit awareness of history, of the grosser movements of society and civilization." (L. Trilling, *The Opposing Self*).

Unlike the preceding novels – *Roderick Hudson* (1875); *The American* (1877); *The Europeans* (1878), etc. – neither of them deals with the "international situation" which had so far provided the subject of his early works. What is the "international situation"? The phrase refers to what one might call "the mutual interrogation of America and Europe" (R. Hudson p. XXII). The confrontation of the distinctively American outlook and the distinctively European outlook, which lies at the heart of nearly all of James's fiction, was his great discovery for the American novel.

H. James was an American, of Irish antecedents, but America seemed to him a continent too immature for the production of great literature, while Europe was ancient and ripe with tradition; it also represented for him, as a critic pointed out, that romantic "otherness" which seemed to be necessary to him as an artist. In a way, one might say that H. James exemplified a unique case of "divided loyalty" hence the contradiction that is the motive power of his fiction writing. H. James was drawn to the international setting by temperament and training, as well as by what he judged to be the particular aesthetic requirements of the novel. In his study of N. Hawthorne, James had occasion to subscribe to the latter's statement that:

"No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land."

James made out the case for the *International situation* even more strongly when he declared:

"the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep...it takes a great deal of history to make a little tradition, a great deal of tradition to make a little taste, and a great deal of taste to make a little art." (L. Edel, 33).

No wonder then James turned to Europe for what was lacking in America *i.e.* tradition and. culture, but that pilgrimage was also the spiritual journey of an author in quest of selfhood:

« C'est cette quête de soi que la critique a pris pour la fascination de l'Europe, qui n'en est qu'une des formes, un objectif-corrélatif intermittent et superficiel. Le voyage n'est pas le déplacement dans l'espace du personnage qui en découvre, en inventorie ou en reconnaît les spécificités concrètes ;ce n'est que l'espace absorbé par la conscience individuelle et transmuté en dimension intérieure dynamisée qui permet au personnage de faire le tour de lui-même – de se chercher et, peut-être de se découvrir. » (Cf. M.-C. Bergeret in *L'Art de la Fiction*)

Thus, there is more in the international theme than meets the eye; a French critic, H. Cixous puts the reader on his guard against too simplistic an interpretation of James's voluntary exile:

« La situation internationale, expression inexacte, comme l'est l'idée du cosmopolitisme, qu'il faut réduire à l'opposition Europe (corps, objet, matière, mère, origine désirée, traversée de part en part, méprisée parce qu'elle est réduite à ses monuments, ses ruines, ses collections, ses os, parce qu'elle est cynique et desséchée, qu'elle a besoin du sang de ses enfants) et l'Amérique (âme, sujet, spiritualité, noblement dépouillée en ses puritains,

1. Édition utilisée dans ces notes : *The Bostonians*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Modern Classics, 1980. Sur ce roman, cf. P. CARMIGNANI, "The Bostonians ou la maison divisée," article publié dans la revue *Delta* et disponible sur Hal-archives ouverte (ref. hal-01754700).

avide, trompée). Et James, qui n'est ni Européen, ni Américain, se vit comme fils amoureux et trop lucide, désireux de régresser vers une enfance où la lucidité n'entraîne pas encore l'obligation du choix.»

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of *The Bostonians*, it would be well to place the novel in relation to James's other works. There are four periods in James's writing life:

- 1877-83: James explored the “effects of the Old World on the New (and occasionally of the New World on the Old).” This period reached a climax with *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881);

- 1884-90: James's production consisted mainly of studies of current social themes in his native and adopted countries. *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* obviously belong to this period.

- 1890-95: While keeping a steady output of fiction James tried to win a place in the theater. He dramatized *The American*, but the play did not run for long. He then wrote four comedies, but he was hissed at first night of his play *Guy Domville* and abandoned the theater for ever;

- 1895-1904: J. gave his mind to the theory of fiction and the question of point of view. The novels of this time marked the beginning of the celebrated “later manner” (by which is often meant a hypertrophy of technique) and they culminated in the publication of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904)

The Princess & *The Bostonians* are both concerned with the manners and customs of social milieus (with the exploration of London and Boston societies, respectively). *The Bostonians* is not a novel of **internal** contrast but of **intersectional** contrast. James had for a long time been contemplating a novel of social criticism on the USA. He was at the first peak of his creative power in the eighties and he determined to “do something great” and to “prove that I can write an American novel.” With regard to *The Bostonians*, he wrote:

“I wished to write a very American tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions, and I asked myself what was the most salient and peculiar point in our social life. The answer was the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation in their behalf.”

Once he got started on the novel in 1884, he wrote enthusiastically to his brother William:

“It is a better subject than I have ever had before, and I think will be much the best thing I have done yet. It is called *The Bostonians*. I shall be much abused for the title, but it exactly and literally fits the story, and is much the best, simplest and most dignified I could have chosen.”

James had had other titles in mind before deciding on the present one; he rejected such titles as: *The Newness*, *The Reformers*, *The Precursor*, *The Revealer*, each of which highlights an aspect of this many-faceted book. J. composed *The Bostonians* in 1884 and early 1885, i.e. a couple of years after his visits to America in 1881-82 and 1882-83 on the death of his mother and the subsequent death of his father; J. had not returned to the USA since 1876. It is doubtful whether these circumstances had any impact on the composition of the novels. Henry's sister, Alice James, certainly provided a more obvious familial influence. She was involved in one of those friendships between two women that, according to James, were quite common in New England. Shortly after J.'s return to England in the summer of 1883, Alice and her friend Katherine Loring followed and from then until the end of her life, Alice was in close contact with Henry. James's understanding of their relationship, though at times critical, was imbued with a genuine sympathy. Thus, the external context surrounding the conception of *The Bostonians* gives support for the peculiar relationship between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant. In spite of James's fond hopes of achieving popular recognition, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima* were unsuccessful with the public. *The Bostonians* got a very cold reception on the part of American reviewers, and numerous American readers – not to mention Bostonians – resented the highly satirical vein of this not always pleasant study of their society. However, the public's indifference did not prevent James from being a most prolific writer since he composed 22 novels (two unfinished), 7 plays and 112 tales, to say nothing of his critical work. Between 1907 and 1909, the 24 volumes of the New York edition of his novels and tales appeared. It is worthy of note that *The Bostonians* was excluded from this edition at the publisher's instance. We lack for this reason an elaborate preface to the novel, as is the case with the other works. Much later, J. confessed that:

“I should have liked to review it for the Edition—it would have come out a much truer and more curious thing (it was meant to be curious from the first); but there can be no question of that or of the proportionate Preface to have been written with it...” (Letter to Edmund Gosse)

You have here all that you need know about an author of whom T. S. Elliot said:

"Henry James is an author who is difficult for English readers, because he is an American; and who is difficult for Americans, because he is a European; and I do not know whether he is possible to other readers at all." (L. Edel).

As for the novel itself, which was published serially in 'Century' along with a section of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, M. Twain declared, in 1885, that he would rather have been "damned to John Bunyan's heaven than read *The Bostonians*." We will have to take up the challenge and prove that James is not only 'possible' to other readers, but also quite palatable.

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THE BOSTONIANS AS AN AMERICAN NOVEL

A work of fiction is often compared to a painting and the comparison is particularly apt in the case of James, who defined himself as "a painter in words" and insisted in *The Art of Fiction* that "the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete." (1884)

There are thus, theoretically, two possible approaches to the work of art; the 1st implies that one must get rid of everything but the picture within the frame; the 2nd posits that the picture may sometimes be better appreciated and comprehended by consulting material which lies outside the frame; this is how we shall approach the novel.

H. James has often maintained that "Fiction is history, human history or it is nothing" (Edel, 15) and one can read in *The Art of Fiction* that "as the picture is reality, so the novel is history." *The Bostonians* was not composed in a vacuum and is firmly anchored to a particular time and place in the period following the Civil War. The novel covers approximately two years during Reconstruction and is mainly set in Boston and New York with the exception of a few scenes taking place in Marmion. With *The Bostonians* James returned to the American scene; the book embraces the area where Hawthorne flourished (New England) as a writer and from which James had to absent himself in order to become one; in *The Bostonians* all this love-hate feeling for 19th-century American society is given full expression and the novel is described by the critic F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* as: "a rendering of the portentous efflorescences of American civilization as represented by the publicists, the charlatans, the cranks, the new religionists, the feminists, the newspapermen..." (156)

Roughly speaking, the novel covers two important periods, which might be defined from the point of view of the Civil War – the watershed of American history – as Pre-Civil War America and Post-Civil War America (1830-1860 [*Reform Era*]→**Civil War (1860-1865)**→1865-1895 [*The Gilded Age*]→1895...[*The Progressive Era*]). The Civil War is an important element in the background of the action depicted in the novel; Basil Ransom is an ex-Confederate and Olive Chancellor's two brothers have given up life for the Northern cause. A critic of James wrote that:

"In James's mythologizing of American history, the Civil War brought to the American consciousness a sense of differences, of shades, of complicated relationships: North & South, rural & urban, agrarian & capitalistic, Cavalier & Yankee, Eden & the Fallen world" (Poirier, *A World Elsewhere*, 100)

The first period or *Reform Era* is evoked through such characters as Miss Birdseye, the Tarrants, Abraham Greenstreet (Mrs Tarrant's father); this period witnessed the mushroom growth of reforming societies (hence its name) which were the natural outcome of the idealism and optimism that pervaded American society at the time. This idealism originated from Puritanism whose influence accounts for many traits of the "*Reform Era*":

« Bien que la vieille théologie puritaine qui se concentrait si fortement sur la vie future fût en perte de vitesse, l'élan spirituel qui avait été la force vive du Puritanisme ne s'était pas ralenti. Au contraire, il s'était coulé dans la pensée sociale, lui communiquant son dynamisme et l'incitant à entreprendre une immense croisade pour toutes sortes de réformes. » (*Histoire des U.S.*, Paris, Economica, 1980, 288)

Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the US produced an extraordinary variety of idealists: prophets, founders of new churches and utopian communities, reformers of the criminal code and penitentiary system, crusaders for peace, for temperance, for women's rights, moralists and philosophers. This idealism and Puritanism is represented by such characters as Olive Chancellor, Mrs. Farrinder and Miss Birdseye both in its nobler aspects (zeal for reform, renunciation, devotion to humanitarian causes) and its less appealing ones (coldness, righteousness, morality, attitude towards sex, etc.). As is clear from *The Bostonians*, in the turbulent 19th-century U.S., woman was more particularly entrusted with the task of supervising society's morale and education.

Women devoted themselves to charitable work, to temperance propaganda and to missionary activities; Miss Birdseye, for one, carried the Bible to Southern Negroes and preached Abolitionism as well as equality of status for the weaker sex. This is historically accurate; women were then growing more and more impatient with the social and civil restrictions imposed on them and they soon linked the issue of slavery and the inferior position of women. From 1830 to 1860, the Abolitionists waged an unrelenting moral warfare against the Southern slaveholders and *The Bostonians* bears traces of this antagonism:

“And I want so much to see an old Abolitionist; I have never laid eyes on one,” Basil Ransom added.

“Of course you couldn’t see one in the South, you were too afraid of them to let them come there!” (21)

Women were also quite vocal in the temperance crusade; Mrs. Farrinder, for instance, “lectured on temperance and the rights of women; the ends she labored for were to give the ballot to every woman in the country and to take the flowing bowl from every man.” (28); cf. also p. 44: “If she would fling down the glove on the temperance question...from taking his glass.”

The crusaders relied at first on moral persuasion to foster their ideal, but soon the extremists began to think that men ought to be protected against themselves by legal coercion. Therefore, the temperance crusade turned into a campaign for legal prohibition and Maine led the way in 1846 by voting the first statewide prohibition act, (the 18th Amendment was in force from 1920 to 1933).

American idealism also manifested itself in various experiments in new forms of social organization. Some tried to establish a new Eden on earth; the Oneida Community (set up in 1848, in Oneida in upstate New York) is a good example of this movement. The community has often been derided for its leader’s (John Humphrey Noyes) ideas on “complex marriage” but life there was founded on principles of strict equality and mutual respect. Selah Tarrant seems to have participated in some such community or at least a parody of it: “As the daughter of Abraham....the spiritualistic world.” (62)

Another movement must be mentioned in connection with *The Bostonians*, Transcendentalism. Miss Birdseye is depicted as an embodiment of the spirit of this philosophy: “...this frumpy little missionary was the last link in a tradition...Temple.” (157)

What is Transcendentalism? The name was attached to the doctrine of a small but influential group who rejected all that impeded man’s progress towards perfection and saintliness. Each human being, they claimed, has divine attributes that can be discovered by intuition. The Transcendentalists rejected expediency in politics, supporting only those causes that they considered, absolutely right, rejected formalism in religion for truly-felt, spontaneous, individual worship and rejected the tyranny of social conformity for a free personal ethical code. They were hostile to acquisitiveness and the relentless pursuit of material well-being. The Transcendentalists, whose Leader was Ralph Waldo Emerson, exhorted their fellow-men to live a nobler life by devoting more time to thought, meditation, serious reading, contemplation and, spiritually rewarding activities. One of them, George Ripley, founded a cooperative enterprise, *Brook Farm*, near Boston (1841-46). It was patterned on the model of Fourier’s *phalanstère* but it was a, short-lived success. It nevertheless inspired Hawthorne to write *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), a novel often cited as a possible source of James’s *The Bostonians*.

However, the issue that comes foremost in the novel is of course the battle that women were then fighting for recognition on various fronts. After the Civil War, the suffrage issue came naturally to be raised because the former slaves had been enfranchised by 14th and 15th Amendments whereas women were still excluded from the ballot. Many women had taken part in the abolitionist crusade – where they had been sensitized to their own condition of relative servitude – and they expected nothing less than the rights granted to the Blacks. It was a long struggle; Wyoming extended the vote to women as soon as 1869 but it was only on August 26, 1920 that the 19th Amendment granted the franchise to women in all elections. Susan B. Anthony, the great 19th-century crusader for women’s rights was instrumental in its adoption. Olive Chancellor, Mrs. Farrinder, Verena Tarrant are quite representative of the drive to obtain equal political and social rights for women.

The novel is particularly centered on the decades called “**The Gilded Age**” after the title of a satirical novel that Charles Warner and Mark Twain wrote in 1873. It is the period the Civil War and the Progressive Era, which started around the end of the 19th-century (the Progressive Movement was a powerful new idealist movement that aimed at reforming the paltry, disappointing reality of a money-grubbing society). The Gilded Age refers to the period when the nation was undergoing a dramatic alteration, passing from an agrarian-commercial economy to an industrial-capitalist one. It was a period of intense economic development that saw the birth of the industrial revolution, the extension of the railway network, the rise of social Darwinism and of the Labor movement. According to numerous historians, the intellectual and ethical atmosphere of the country was never as poor as during that “age”. Thus, the tag is quite appropriate since it calls up both the primary role played by capital and the spurious values of the age, “gilded” and not “golden”. Verna Tarrant prophesies the advent of a *Golden Age* to replace the present *Gilded one* that might sometimes more appropriately be called an “*Iron Age*”. The Press was then one of those spurious values or institutions; the crudest expression of the prevalent vul-

garity. As a critic points out, throughout his life, James never missed an opportunity to satirize American newspapers and newspapermen. It can partly be explained by his own unsatisfactory relationship with certain American periodicals and his contempt for their low standards. Matthias Pardon naturally epitomizes all that is worst in this democratic institution.

The novel illustrates another interesting fact, viz. that in their criticism of the Gilded Age or the Age of Sham – as it was also labelled – Northern writers used the South or the Southern hero, past or present, to pass judgment on the shortcomings of the new Yankee order. Thus three Northern writers, three of the most discerning critics of the age, resorted to a Confederate censor as a useful foil for the unlovely present brought forth by Capitalism; they were H. Melville, H. Adams, and H. James:

“Melville employed this point of view in his long narrative and philosophical poem *Clarel* (1876), Adams in his satirical novel *Democracy* (1880), and James in his novel *The Bostonians* (1886). In each of these works, a Southerner, a veteran of the Confederate Army, is introduced in a sympathetic role. His importance varies with the work concerned, but in each of the three works the Southerner serves as the mouthpiece of the severest strictures upon American society or, by his actions or character, exposes the worst faults in that society. He does not necessarily express the author's views, but the views he does express and the tradition he represents are assured a sympathetic reception.” (C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, Baton Rouge, La State U. Press, 1974, 110-111)

This goes a long way toward explaining the role and function of Basil ransom. James makes the presentation of the social milieu all the more convincing by referring to real events or people through a thin fictional guise:

“Ada T. P. Foat might have been recognized by James's readers as Mrs Foyt; the Summer Land lectures were given, not by Mrs Foyt but by Cora hatch, a lovely young woman remarkably like Verena; the Cayuga community [...] was actually the Oneida community...” (S. Wolstenholme, “Possession & Personality: Spiritualism in *The Bostonians*”)

Miss Birdseye was, according to William James, who wrote to his brother to blame him for this, a recognizable portrait of the respected Bostonian philanthropist Miss Peabody, Hawthorne's sister-in-law. Doctor Mary J. Prance may have been modelled on Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman ever to graduate from an American medical school in 1849.

All the above remarks make it quite clear that *The Bostonians*, though a work of fiction, is deeply grounded in history and incorporates a solid fabric of factual detail. *The Bostonians* echoes with “the hum and buzz of implication” of the culture of its time so much so perhaps that it was detrimental to its success with American readers.

ASPECTS DE LA TECHNIQUE NARRATIVE

Brève étude – dans le cadre théorique défini par G. Genette dans *Figures III* – des questions de technique narrative relevant des catégories de l'ORDRE (relation entre le temps de l'histoire ou **diégèse** (l'univers spatio-temporel désigné par le récit et l'énoncé narratif ou texte), du MODE (c'est-à-dire tout ce qui concerne la régulation de l'information narrative, régulation effectuée par le jeu de la **distance** = fidélité, précision de la représentation ou de l'information narrative et de la **perspective** ou vision/focalisation = choix ou non d'un point de vue restrictif) et de la VOIX (façon dont se trouve impliqué dans le récit l'instance narrative productrice du discours narratif et avec elle ses deux protagonistes : le narrateur et son destinataire, réel ou virtuel). H. James, le Maître, était très au fait des questions de technique narrative sur lesquelles il a conduit une constante et profonde réflexion aussi convient-il de ne pas s'embarquer dans l'étude d'un quelconque de ses romans sans un minimum d'outils d'analyse ; la présentation, sommaire et un peu scolaire, qui suit n'a d'autre ambition que de fournir au lecteur de James quelques-uns de ces indispensables instruments.

1. L'ORDRE

a) La durée ou vitesse

C'est le rapport entre la durée de l'histoire (secondes, minutes, heures, jours, mois, etc.) et la longueur du texte (lignes, pages, chapitres...) produisant des effets de rythme (anisochronies) :

Pause descriptive : TR (temps du récit) = n, TH (temps de l'histoire) = 0

Scène : TH = TR

Sommaire (narration en quelques pages de plusieurs journées, mois, années, sans détails d'actions ou de paroles) : TR < TH

Ellipse : TR = 0 ; TH = n

b) Anachronies

Rapport entre l'ordre de succession des événements et la disposition de ces mêmes événements dans le récit → deux types de discordances : l'*analepse* (retour vers l'amont) et la *prolepse* (projection vers l'aval). Cf. plus bas.

c) Fréquence

Relations entre les capacités de répétition de l'histoire et celles du récit

2. Le MODE

a) Focalisation

b) Distance

3. La VOIX

a) Métalepse

b) Fonctions du narrateur

SYNOPSIS

Chapitre 1. Basil Ransom//Mrs Luna

Chapitre 2: Basil Ransom/ /Olive Chancellor

Chapitre 3: Dining-room scene + 1st clash over "old and new truths"

Chapitre 4: Miss Birdseye. Doctor Mary J. Prance. Doctor and Mrs Tarrant + Verena Tarrant.

Chapitre 5 : Mrs Farrinder/ /Olive Chancellor.

Chapitre 6: Basil Ransom//Doctor Prance//Matthias Pardon.

Chapitre 7: Basil Ransom//Mrs Farrinder//Verena Tarrant.

Chapitre 8: Verena's performance.

Chapitre 9: Olive Chancellor---Verena Tarrant---Basil Ransom.

Chapitre 10: Verena's visit to Olive Chancellor. The Tarrants' background.

Chapitre 11: Verena//Olive Chancellor.

Chapitre 12: Verena//Olive Chancellor//Basil Ransom + Mrs Luna.

Chapitre 13: Verena. Mrs Tarrant. Mr. Tarrant. Worship of the Press.

Chapitre 14: Verena's attraction to Mrs Luna. Mrs Tarrant's visit to O. Chancellor---O. Chancellor's visit to Mrs Tarrant. M. Pardon.

Chapitre 15: Mr. Tarrant//O. Chancellor ("some image of this transaction", p. 100). M. Pardon.

Chapitre 16: Mr. Pardon//O. Chancellor. Verena//O.C. ("promise me not to marry").

Chapitre 17: O.C. gives up V.T.'s pledge. M. Pardon wants to play his "card" – "The battle had begun"

Chapitre 18: V. T. turns down M. Pardon's suit. Mr. Burrage comes on stage. Visit to his bachelor's nest---Music = Truce.

Chapitre 19: V. T. moves into O.C.'s house. Mrs Luna. O. C. strikes a bargain with Selah Tarrant.

Chapitre 20: H. Burrage proposes to her. Study (books + music). Miss Birdseye. V.T. converted to O.C.'s views.

Chapitre 21: Basil Ransom's background. Mrs. Luna's advances.

Chapitre 22: B.R. // Mrs Luna. Conversation about Verena (Europe/Female Convention),

Chapitre 23: B.R. goes to O. C.'s; meets Miss Birdseye and gets V. T.'s address.

Chapitre 24 : Visit to Verena Tarrant.

Chapitre 25: The Memorial Hall of Harvard. Growing intimacy. B.R.'s impulse to test her good nature.

Chapitre 26: B.R. invited to Mrs Burrage's party at V. T.'s request. Olive Chancellor//Basil Ransom.

Chapitre 27: Mrs Luna//Basil Ransom

Chapitre 28: Verena's speech. B.R.//O.C. Basil gets Verena's address in New York

Chapitre 29: O. C.//Mrs Luna who puts her wise to the relationship between V.T. and B.R..

Chapitre 30: V.T.'s confession. ("I am learning to dissimulate" /"I wanted him to be here")

Chapitre 31: B.R.'s letter to V. T. Growing misunderstanding between the two women. Mrs Burrage's letter to O.C. First manifestation of impatience on the part of V.T. ..false feeling of safety: "victory is really sitting on our banner" (p. 261).

Chapitre 32: B. R.'s visit to V.T. – O.C. pays a visit to Mrs Burrage (ordeal/home truths/new bargain..).

Chapitre 33 : B.R. and V. T. : stroll in the Park. Spell/Will. – B.R.'s conservative credo.

Chapitre 34 : B.R./Verena. Will. B.R.'s failure. "...a change had taken place in V.T."

Chapitre 35 : Nature = Marmion. B.R. + the Bostonians. Doctor Prance

Chapitre 36 : B.R.'s visit to the ladies. Elation and success. B.R.'s first article published. Verena confesses to Olive Chancellor : « He has come to marry me »

Chapitre 37 : Verena wants to "fight it out". Olive's conditions

Chapitre 38 : Verena's passion and revolution. B.R.'s victory. Miss Birdseye's death. Verena's repentance and recantation.

Chapitre 39 : B.R.'s effacement (Provincetown). Verena Tarrant : "I can't I can't" (351). The Tarrants. OC's backward clearness (355) O.C.//V.T. = "they were beyond each other's help now". Verena's flight

Chapitre 40 : BR // Mrs Luna at O.C.'s. M. Pardon reappears.

Chapitre 41 : B.R. in the Music Hall. Convulsive scene...

Chapitre 42 : B.R.+ V.T. // O. C. the Tarrants -- Verena's surrender

Quelques remarques générales :

The Bostonians est un roman où l'on se déplace beaucoup ; les lieux sont très variés – les deux protagonistes, Olive Chancellor et Verena Tarrant font même une incursion en Europe, mais à la différence des premiers romans de James, cet épisode a une importance secondaire – et imposent une certaine circularité à la structure du roman : l'action débute à Boston, se prolonge à New York puis à Marmion et à Provincetown et trouve son dénouement à Boston.

Les relations entre les personnages principaux déterminent également un aspect essentiel de la structure (et du rythme) du roman, c'est-à-dire la formation et le renversement alternés de relations duelles (dyades/duos) et triangulaires (triades).

Par exemple :

Chapitre 1 : relation que l'on peut qualifier « d'euphorique » selon la terminologie de l'analyse structurale des contes et romans (entente, symbolisée par //) entre Basil Ransom et Mrs Luna : BR//Mrs Luna ;

Chap. 2 : relations neutres (symbolisées par /) entre Basil Ransom et Olive Chancellor ; *idem* au chap. 4 entre Doctor Prance et B.R., puis Olive Chancellor et Mrs Farr ;

Chap. 9 constitution de la triade C. Chancellor-Verena Tarrant-B. Ransom ; chap. 10-11 : OC/VT puis Mrs Luna/B.R.

À partir du **Chap. 12** : Basil Ransom disparaît de la scène.

Chap. 13 à 20 : O. Chancellor va tout faire pour maintenir des relations privilégiées avec Verena Tarrant, ce qui la conduit à l'exclusion de tout élément tiers, de l'Autre (relation *dysphorique* symbolisée par ≠) → OC ≠ S. Tarrant ; OC ≠ M. Pardon ; OC ≠ H. Burrage ; voyage en Europe.

Chap. 21-42 : Affrontement entre les membres de la triade : BR-VT-OC

Chap. 22 : BR//Mrs Luna

Chap. 23 : Alliance tactique BR//Miss Birdseye → Chap. 35: BR/Doctor Prance

Chap. 24-25 : BR//VT → exclusion de l'autre, du tiers: OC

Chap. 26 : OC ≠ BR

Chap. 27 : Mrs Luna ≠ BR

Chap. 28 : BR ≠ OC

Chap. 29 : OC ≠ Mrs Luna

Chap. 30-31 : OC ≠ VT

Chap. 32 : OC ≠ Mrs Burrage

Chap. 33-34 : BR ≠ VT

Chap. 35 : BR//Dr Prance

Chap. 36 : BR//VT

Chap. 37-38 : Verena agrees to fight it out but she is fooling herself: BR ≠ VT en apparence, mais en réalité: BR//VT

Chap. 39 : OC ≠ BR → BR//VT

Pour Olive Chancellor et Basil Ransom, il y a une évidente « valorisation » du couple que chacun peut former avec Verena Tarrant, ce qui implique le rejet de tout élément étranger risquant de perturber l'entente souhaitée ; dualisme fondamental sur lequel repose toute dialectique, tout effort, tout combat, tout mouvement ; exprime une rivalité, une réciprocité, qui peut être de haine autant que d'amour, une opposition qui peut être contraire et incompatible, aussi bien que complémentaire et féconde. « Deux » est bien le nombre de la différenciation relative, de la réciprocité antagoniste ou attractive. Il y a cependant d'autres tentatives de « fusion » dans le roman : Mrs Luna/Basil Ransom ; H. Burrage/Verena Tarrant ; M. Pardon/ VT, sans oublier l'ineffable Selah Tarrant dont la frénésie « unitaire » est manifeste.

Si l'on considère ces divers éléments avec un peu de recul – en les intégrant dans le mouvement d'ensemble du roman – il est possible de dégager trois parties :

1. Chap. 1 à 20 : Mise en place

L'action se déroule essentiellement à Boston et dans la même année, c'est-à-dire d'octobre à février 187~. Présentation des personnages principaux (il n'y aura ensuite que deux ou trois nouveaux venus d'importance mineure) ; mise en place de la problématique et de la thématique (possession ; féminisme, etc.).

2. Chap. 21-34 : L'engagement

Il se produit au chap. 21 une rupture temporelle très nette (février de l'année suivante : 187~+1)

Unité de lieu : New York (hormis les épisodes à Cambridge)

Conflit entre O. Chancellor et B. Ransom : approches, escarmouches, ruses, feintes, etc. → Verena's flight (Chap. 24) – Rupture – Echec de B. Ransom – Victoire de OC

3. Chap. 35-42 : Bataille/Siège/Reddition

Lieu : Marmion, Provincetown puis retour à Boston

Chap. 35-39 : Flight 1 – Flight 2 – Echec de B. R. – Victoire d'OC

Chap. 40-42 : Reddition – Victoire de BR

On pourrait résumer l'ensemble du mouvement ternaire en : **Fight → Flight → Surrender**

Cette structure où alternent fuites et rapprochements, apparitions et disparitions justifie le rôle capital que joue la correspondance entre Basil Ransom et Verena Tarrant ; il y a sept références à des missives et notes diverses (pp. 252 ; 255 ; 338 ; 314 ; 347 ; 348 ; 350). Elles permettent d'expliquer certaines invraisemblances ou incohérences apparentes (cf. à Marmion, p. 314 : "*It was by my letter....*") ; elles forment aussi la trame d'énigmes secondaires (cf. la relation tendue entre OC et Mrs Luna p. 240 *et seq.*). C'est une lettre d'OC qui attire BR à la page 12.

1. Lettre de BR à VT après la visite à Cambridge (252)

2. Note de BR à VT à New York pour demander un rendez-vous (255)

3. Lettre de BR suite à la fuite de VT qui quitte New York (338)

4. Lettre de VT à BR après son départ de New York (314)
5. Note de VT demandant à BR de s'éloigner (347)
6. Note de BR à VT (348)
7. Note de BR à VT pour annoncer son retour (350)

Ordre

On note une relative augmentation de la vitesse du récit ; par ex. la première journée occupe 8 chapitres ; la seconde 4 chapitres ; l'hiver de "187-" (138) 8 chapitres ; on a ensuite trois chapitres pour combler la rupture/césure de près d'un an qui se situe entre la fin du chapitre 20 et le début du chapitre 21. Entre les chapitres 22 et 23, trois semaines s'écoulent. Les chapitres 26 à 32 occupent environ un mois (*March*) ; 34 à 36 : trois mois ; le chapitre 39 couvre dix semaines et les chapitres 40-41-42, une seule journée. La mise en place est donc longuement décrite ; s'ensuit une progressive accélération puis un évident ralentissement pour la phase finale.

Anachronies

On relève d'importantes discordances ; le récit disloque l'ordre de succession des événements rapportés et les dispose d'une manière qui lui est propre.

– *Analepses* : évocations après coup d'un événement antérieur au point de l'histoire où l'on se trouve ; elles sont presque toutes internes (c'est-à-dire ne dépassant pas le point de départ du récit) et de nature complétive, c'est-à-dire elles combleront après coup une lacune antérieure du récit. (chapitres : 21-22-23)

Basil Ransom disparaît au chapitre 12 puis est rapidement mentionné ch. 19 (p. 138) et accède pleinement au statut de "*most important [male] personage in the narrative*" (p. 6) à partir du ch. 21.

Analepses : p. 12 : "*In the spring...*"; p. 111: *Luncheon party*; p. 205: *Female convention*; p. 314: *Letter...*

– *Prolepses*: narrent ou évoquent d'avance un événement ultérieur au point de l'histoire où l'on se trouve, cf. p. 141 : *The Grand Female Convention* ; p. 149 : *Europe* ; 177 : annonce : "*she would end by giving Miss Chancellor a cut*"

– *Ellipse* : référence au laps de temps éliidé par le récit

p. 172 : "*...in Boston a year ago last October*"

p. 176 : "*...the case a year and a half before, etc.*"

p. 386: "*So I was for a few weeks...*"

Mode

Il n'y a pas un seul point de vue ni de protagoniste privilégié pendant la durée du roman mais de constantes ruptures ou passages de l'un à l'autre : "*The Bostonians is a novel of tension*" (H. James) → pas de personnage central : "*I go 'behind' right and left...in The Bostonians*" (H. James)

Perspective ou focalisation (filtrage des données)

The Bostonians se présente essentiellement sous la forme d'un récit à narrateur omniscient, perspective classique du roman écrit à la 3^e personne. Le narrateur jouit de privilèges qui l'apparentent à Dieu par rapport à sa création ; invisible mais omniprésent, il voit tout, sait tout et entend tout. Il y a cependant plusieurs paragraphes dans le roman où intervient une sorte de filtrage de l'information narrative qui est orientée en fonction de la présence de tel ou tel personnage.

Distance (degré de fidélité et de précision de la narration)

Pose le problème de l'opposition entre ce que Platon appelait *diegésis* (récit pur, c'est-à-dire non mêlé d'éléments mimétiques) = le poète « parle en son nom sans chercher à nous faire croire que c'est un autre que lui qui parle » et *mimésis* (imitation à la manière du drame) = « le poète s'efforce de donner l'illusion que ce n'est pas lui qui parle » (Genette, 184). Dans cette perspective, précise G. Genette, le « récit pur » sera tenu pour plus distant que l'imitation : il en dit moins (condensation) et de façon plus médiate (indirection). Cette opposition, neutralisée par Aristote, a resurgi dans la théorie du roman à la fin du XIX^e siècle chez H. James et ses disciples sous les termes de *showing* (montrer) vs. *telling* (raconter)

Nota Bene : La notion de *showing* est illusoire car aucun récit ne peut montrer ou imiter l'histoire qu'il raconte (Genette, 185) – le langage signifie sans imiter, à moins, bien sûr, que l'objet signifié (narré) ne soit lui-même du langage → la mimésis verbale ne peut être que mimésis du verbe.

H. James, à la suite de son expérience de dramaturge, a voulu précisément dramatiser l'action au maximum, d'où l'accent mis sur la notion de *showing* par opposition au *telling*.

Les deux préceptes cardinaux du *showing* sont chez H. James, la prédominance de la scène (récit détaillé) et la transparence du narrateur. Ces données étaient déjà présents dans les remarques de Platon :

plus grande quantité d'information narrative et absence (ou présence minimale) de l'informateur, c'est-à-dire du narrateur. Ce dernier point renvoie à un fait de « Voix » (présence de l'instance narrative).

Mimésis-Showing = maximum d'information et minimum d'informateur.

Pour James, la meilleure forme narrative est un « récit focalisé, raconté par un narrateur qui n'est pas l'un des personnages mais qui en adopte le point de vue » (Genette, 189). Ainsi, « le lecteur perçoit l'action filtrée par la conscience d'un des personnages, mais il la perçoit directement, telle qu'elle affecte cette conscience en évitant la distance qu'entraîne inévitablement la narration rétrospective à la 1^{ère} personne. » (Friedman). Contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait attendre, le roman à la 1^{ère} personne parvient rarement à donner l'illusion de la présence et de l'immédiateté. Loin de faciliter l'identification au héros, il tend à sembler éloigné dans le temps.

Dans le roman qui nous occupe – roman antérieur aux recherches et préoccupations de James – l'auteur « *does not use the device of seeing his story through the opportunity and sensibility of some more or less detached witness or reporter* » (Lee, 12); « *it is worthy of note that the central matter is presented by expository rather than dramatic methods.* »

L'absence de personnage central explique peut-être le conseil donné au lecteur, à savoir qu'il faut lire « *with the senses as well as with the reason* » pour obtenir « *a complete image* » (6) ; il faut suppléer les défauts, les manques, les insuffisances du récit et le travail d'élaboration (de l'expérience, des impressions) d'une conscience centrale privilégiée.

Les confrontations entre personnages que nous évoquions précédemment se prêtent bien à une représentation « scénique », mais les sommaires (narrations en quelques pages de plusieurs jours, mois, années, etc. sans détails d'action ou de paroles) et les pauses descriptives occupent une grande place dans le roman (pp. : Back Bay, 15 ; number 756, 24 ; New York, 160 ; Cambridge, 203 ; Central Park, 281 ; Marmion, 297 ; Boston, 369-370). Elles sont toujours en rapport très étroit avec le personnage → caractérisation de l'intérieur par l'extérieur ; c'est un des *topoi* de la tradition réaliste, mais aussi tentative d'idéalisation d'une civilisation urbaine et technologique par référence à la tradition pastorale. Un des constantes de ces passages – comme d'ailleurs du reste du roman – c'est la présence du narrateur comme source, garant et organisateur du récit, comme analyste et commentateur, comme styliste...

Voix

Les manifestations les plus évidentes de la présence de l'instance narrative sont les *métalepses* ou intrusions d'auteur. C'est une des caractéristiques de ce roman et cela pose le problème des fonctions du narrateur :

1. Fonction narrative ;
2. Fonction de régie : le narrateur se réfère au texte pour en marquer les articulations, connexions, etc. = fonction poétique, c'est-à-dire commentaire du narrateur du point de vue formel ;
3. Orientation vers le narrataire : fonction phatique (maintenir le contact) ; fonction conative (agir sur le narrataire) ;
4. Orientation vers le narrateur lui-même : fonction émotive ou testimoniale = part que le narrateur prend à son histoire d'un point de vue affectif, moral, intellectuel, idéologique ;
5. Fonction idéologique : la seule qui ne revienne pas nécessairement au narrateur (commentaire autorisé de l'action ; discours didactique, etc.)

Exemples :

"*It is not in my power to reproduce...vain. And yet...field*", p. 6 et "*these considerations were not...here*", p. 11 = fonction phatique-conative: action sur le narrataire pour imposer un certain mode de lecture + fonction poétique : le narrateur se réfère à la problématique du récit, à l'imperfection du medium utilisé ; "*it may be confided to the reader...I shall be under the necessity of...*" p. 10: fonction émotive-testimoniale (le narrateur se excuse, dégage sa responsabilité; noter le paradoxe: il s'affirme comme narrateur dans le même temps qu'il s'efface). Cf. également : "*I am but the reporter of his angry formulae* (44) / *the historian* (232) / *her chronicler* (288);

"*this however was in the future*" (17) et "*...of which she had a hint*" (40): fonction de régie

"*I apply that adjective to her fine mask*" (p. 27) et "*I despair of presenting it to the reader with the air of reality*" (328) : fonction testimoniale ou d'attestation ; effort de motivation du récit ; lutte contre l'arbitraire de la phrase et du récit.

"*I speak of ten minutes, but to tell...*" (53) : fonction testimoniale

"No italics can represent...": fonction poétique ; la fiction est brisée par la référence aux limitations du récit (cf. p. 6) ;

"It would have seemed to you" (68) : référence concrète au narrataire ;

"I know not, 70; As I have said, 77; the reader perhaps sees, 90; as we have seen, 93; I may mention" = fonction de régie. Cf. également : "The account of the relation of effect to cause is not complete ...unless I mention" (213); "the leonine fall of which I mentioned in the first pages" (216);

Il y a de nombreuses intrusions se référant au mode de la narration: "Basil Ransom through whose ears we are listening to it" (232) ; "If we were...an inside view of Mrs Birdseye (a liberty we have not yet ventured upon)" (270); "since we have begun to look into her mind we may continue the process" (270).

Certaines intrusions sont à mettre au compte de l'humour de l'auteur et de son ironie→fonction ludique du récit ; jeu avec le texte, l'écriture, le lecteur, le personnage, tout ceci relève d'une forme de « plaisir du texte », mais aussi d'un parti pris de « double vision » : "his [Jame's] conscientious efforts to be fair all round, to take every possible aspect into consideration" (Putt, 91). Cf. "It is a pleasure to be able to say..." (257); "I use the word..." (146); "I shall perhaps espouse our young man to the contempt..." (278); "If the moment I speak of...my difficult duty to describe..." (287) = pudibonderie affectée; "From Olive's condition...propriety...delicacy...in averting our head" (329).

Comme on le constate, on est loin de l'idéal jamesien des grands romans de la dernière période où « the novelist's function is to mediate between his material and his audience, not to pop up between scenes for exhibition like a puppet-master. » (Lee, 75)

Le système des personnages

Les personnages du roman s'organisent en deux classes autour de l'opposition fondamentale: *Female* vs. *Male* (cf. A. Bennett, *Sacred and Profane Love* : « There are only two fundamental differences in the world – the difference between sex and sex and the difference between youth and age. »)

Women: Olive Chancellor; Adeline Luna; Verena Tarrant; Miss Birdseye; Mrs Farrinder; Dr. Mary J. Prance; Mrs Burrage; Miss Catching; Mrs Crouchet

Men: Basil Ransom; Mr. Selah Tarrant; Mr. Pardon; Mr. Burrage; Mr. Filer; Mr. Gracie

À l'intérieur de ce système, le personnage se trouve soumis à un double réseau de dépendances dont le premier tient à la distribution des personnages en classes sémiologiques distinctes (le personnage peut se réduire à un ensemble de traits différenciateurs pertinents à la fois physiques et moraux...) et le second au rôle et à la fonction de chacun d'eux dans le processus narratif. Le premier système concerne essentiellement la façon dont le personnage se construit mot à mot, phrase à phrase, selon le principe de la différence qui est à la base du récit ; chaque personnage s'organise autour d'oppositions du type :

Angularité vs. rondeur ; froideur vs. ardeur ; générosité vs. rapacité ; devoir vs. plaisir ; roideur vs. souplesse ; sécheresse vs. fraîcheur ; instinct vs. inhibition, etc.

Le langage descriptif des personnages devient un langage de connotation par lequel le récit produit ses propres significations, auxquelles contribue d'ailleurs la signification des noms propres :

Olive : symbol of peace ; olive garland worn by Athenian brides

Chancellor: etymologically, "keeper of the barrier, secretary"→authority; power

Verena: *Ver*, *veris*: spring; name of a martyr under Diocletian

Tarrant: the name means "trespasser, flooder"

Adeline: Old German word meaning "nobility"

Luna←→Moon

Matthias: "the gift of the Lord"

Selah: A Hebrew word occurring frequently at the end of a verse in the Psalter, etc. supposed to be a musical or liturgical direction perhaps indicating pause or rest.

Amariah: "The lord says", etc.

THE CHARACTERS IN *THE BOSTONIANS*

The Bostonians presents a fine array of characters ("the richly stocked portrait galleries of *The Bostonians*", Putt) and offers an interesting cross-section of northeastern society in post-war America. The numerous types of men and women from all walks of life described in the novel account for its importance as a social document; it is no detractor from the artistic value of James's work to stress this point. The very number and diversity of the characters appearing in the novel preclude our dealing extensively with each of them. For clarity's sake, we'll confine our study to the main characters *i.e.* according to James's own definition in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*: "those who are of the essence of the work [...] or belong to the subject directly", namely: Olive Chancellor; Verena Tarrant; Basil Ransom. Those "who are only of the form [...] – *i.e.* those that have been christened '*ficelles*' by Henry James because – they belong to the treatment" will be given short shrift (Matthias Pardon, Selah Tarrant, etc.).

As the title suggests, the characters fall into two obvious, congenial yet often-warring categories: females and males. The novel dealing with the situation of women in American society, it is only fit that we should give precedence to the weaker sex and turn our attention first on Verena Tarrant.

Verena Tarrant

This is the central figure in the novel, the one around which action and characters revolve. Verena represents the stakes in the battle royal described in the novel; she is the prize all want to carry off. Her uniqueness and strangeness are stressed almost from the start in the portrayal of her physical appearance; she strikes those who come near her as "an odd mixture of elements" (51) and it is true that with her "red hair" contrasting with her paleness, "her curious radiant liquid eyes" (52), "her fantastic dress" suggestive of "an Oriental" or "an Esmeralda", she has little in common with the other types of "Yankee females" (36) appearing in *The Bostonians*. O. Chancellor points up the same peculiarity when she says that the young prophetess "seemed to belong to some queer gypsy-land or or transcendental Bohemia." (70) Unlike the other females, Verena is "of many pieces" (128) and embodies many opposing qualities as her first public appearance reveals: "And yet there was a strange spontaneity in her manner, and an air of artless enthusiasm, of personal purity. If she was theatrical, she was naturally theatrical."² (46)

What are the qualities Verena is endowed with? As often happens in James's fiction, the names of almost all the characters in a novel convey some degree of symbolical innuendo; thus, the heroine's Christian name, Verena (derived from the Latin "*verenus*" ← "*ver/veris*": spring; youth) is evocative of Spring, life and freshness; there is a flower-like quality in Verena as numerous images suggest:

"It was impossible to see how this charming blooming, simple creature, all youth and grace and innocence, got her extraordinary powers of reflection." (73)

"The sweetest flower of character (as one might say) that had ever bloomed on earth." (93)

Verena's qualities are as genuine as fruit and flowers, as the glow of the fire or the splash of water." (101) There is a hint of something "elemental" in Verena's nature; she delights in being outdoors – whereas O. Chancellor secludes herself in her house – and the epithet "natural" or the name "Nature" are often associated with her. Verena is also portrayed as a "gifted being" – she has great powers of eloquence ("*divine afflatus*", 124) – who is "outside and above all vulgarizing influences" (292), a "woman of wonders" whose "springing up between Selah and his wife was an exquisite whim of the creative force." (100) To all these outstanding qualities must be added a radical innocence; "the pure young sybil" (137); "the nymph" (193); "the maiden" (261) reminiscent of the "vales of Arcady" (194) has "dropped straight from heaven, without filtering through her parents" (73) and lived with them "perfectly uncontaminated." (74) The narrator is actually drawing with a few deft strokes the picture of an American Eve, an ideal type of New World creature always present in James's fiction:

2. Note the oxymoronic quality of the phrase: "naturally theatrical"; further down the text, there is a reference to "all her artlessly artful facilities" (328), a perfect example of a combination of contradictory words.

"Though she had grown up among people who took for granted all sorts of queer laxities, she had kept the consummate innocence of the American girl, that innocence which was the greatest of all, for it had survived the abolition of walls and locks..." (106)

Verena Tarrant is, in Olive Chancellor's own words "a flower of the great Democracy" (96). It is hard to say whether not all these qualities are just, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder. A portrait, however, always comprises light and shade and Verena's is no exception to the rule; the girl also is "the most extraordinary mixture of eagerness and docility" (93), and her innocence sometimes borders on mere absence of perception of right and wrong (96). Verena's main flaw is at once her most endearing quality: it is "the extraordinary generosity with which she would expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her." (328) This aspect of Verena's character is underlined more forcibly still in the following passage:

"It was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne. She could be silent when people insisted, and silent without acrimony. Her whole relation to Olive was a kind of tacit, tender assent to passionate insistence, if this had ended by being easy and agreeable to her [...] it may be supposed that the struggle of yielding to a will which she felt to be stronger even than Olive's was not of long duration." (285)

In a world where it takes great strength of character to have one's own way, Verena is, from the outset, at a disadvantage and her too great susceptibility to other people's demands accounts for the various disappointments she will suffer later on. We have so far given but a static portrait of Verena Tarrant, but a character is essentially "a process and an unfolding" (G. Eliot) i.e. it is liable to develop (cf. Forster's definition of a "round character"). In the case of the heroine, this evolution will spring from the double influence of Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom; the latter will prove the more important agency in Verena's evolution, but will become effective in a second stage only.

In her great need to find "someone who would know how to handle her" (87), Verena puts her fate into Olive's hands. Perhaps it would be more to the point to say that she gets into Olive Chancellor's clutches, as there is something rapacious in the latter's behavior:

"Olive had taken her up, in the literal sense of the phrase, like a bird of the air, had spread an extraordinary pair of wings, and carried her through dizzying void of space." (69)

This is further illustrated by the following passage: "It was this glance that was the beginning; it was with this quick survey, omitting nothing, that Olive took possession of her." (69) The association with O. Chancellor proves at first rewarding; the two girls "read a great deal of history together" (153), attend concerts (155), social functions and even make the grand tour of Europe; consequently, Veran "expands, develops, on the most liberal scale" (146). The image of the flower occurs again: "Among these soft influences Verena herself bloomed like the flower that attains such perfection in Boston." (151) O. C. enlists Verena on her side in the great crusade for women's rights: "she had opened Verena's eyes to extraordinary pictures, made the girl believe that she had a heavenly mission, given her, as we have seen, quite a new measure of the interest of life." (93)

Yet O's solicitude soon assumes a too exclusive form and the bonds of friendship turn into shackles: "The girl was now completely under her influence" (121). Olive wants to force upon Verena a kind of priesthood (119) and involves her in a "scheme of renunciation" (71) entailing unconditional surrender on the young girl's part. Verena must "give up" everything, repress all impulses and desires to fit the limiting pattern established by her mentor. Olive's grasp becomes tighter and tighter, and her jealousy more and more morbid: "Olive expressed her reasons very frankly, admitted that she was jealous, that she didn't wish to think of the girl's belonging to anyone but herself." (95)

The second stage in the two girls' relationship is quite detrimental to Verena's own self-fulfillment; Olive tries to bring Verena around to her own narrow view of things; she reduces life and youth to a series of phases one must go through as quickly as possible ("this was a different affair from any of the phases of which she had hitherto anxiously watched the development", 324) and would like to convince her protégé that as far as men are concerned "it war upon them to the knife" (119). Fortunately, Verena will resist that "brainwashing" because it is diametrically opposed to her true nature: "Verena was fond of human intercourse; she was essentially a sociable creature; she liked to shine and talk and listen...", 147. As for men, Olive soon realizes, to her great displeasure that:

"the great trouble was that weak spot of Verena's, that sole infirmity and subtle flaw, which she had expressed to her very soon after they had begun to live together in saying [...] 'I'll tell you what is the matter with you – you don't dislike men as a class!' Verena had replied on this occasion, 'Well, no, I don't dislike them when they are pleasant!'" (249)

Verena's complete estrangement from OC is brought about by Basil Ransom who vies with his cousin for the possession of the coveted gifted girl. The way he sets about it is quite different from his northern relative though the intention is basically the same (even if sometimes Basil Ransom entertains the illusion that he is 'rescuing' her, cf. p. 215): it is to detach her from her ties, from her belongings "to take possession of her" (301); "He wants me to give up everything" says Verena, p. 321.

To foil OC, who apparently cramps Verena's nature, Basil appeals to the girl's innermost self, in the full conviction that she must be let to act out her true nature (144). Basil's tactics is based on the assumption that there are two sides to Verena's personality; "an inflated little figure" (293) playing a part on an empty stage as opposed to "her real self" (293) which is responsive to life, love, and even passion. Thus, Verena is made to discover that:

"She loved, she was in love – she felt it in every throb of her being. Instead of being constituted by nature for entertaining that sentiment in an exceptionally small degree (which had been the implication of her whole crusade, the warrant for her offer of old to Olive to renounce), she was framed, apparently, to allow it the largest range, the highest intensity." (332)

There's an obvious split in her personality: "...and all her artlessly artful facilities, were not a part of her essence, an expression of her innermost preferences." (328).

Just like the other men Verena had met before him, Basil introduces at first an element of easy and convenient relaxation "into a life now a good deal stiffened by great civic purposes" (147) – "stiffened" is one of the key words in the novel and forms with the opposite notions of "thawing"/"kindling" one of the basic oppositions of the system of values underlying the narrative). Basil's interference plays havoc with Verena's intimate beliefs:

"The words he had spoken to her there about her genuine vocation, as distinguished from the hollow and factitious ideal with which her family and her association with Olive Chancellor had saddled her – these words, the most effective and penetrating he has uttered, had sunk deep into her soul and worked and fermented there. She had come at last to believe them, and that was the alteration, the transformation. They had kindled a light in which she saw herself afresh and, strange to say, liked herself better than in the old exaggerated glamour of the lecture-lamps." (332)

Of course, the change in Verena did not take place overnight; it was a gradual process the principal stages of which we shall briefly sketch out. Early in the story, we find indications of slight differences between O.C and Verena, who even goes to the length of confessing on the question of female suffrage: "Do you know, Olive, I sometimes wonder whether, if it wasn't for, I should feel it so very much!" (136). There is also this interesting comment on the heroine: "there were so many things that she hadn't yet learned to dislike, in spite of her friend's earnest efforts to teach her." (106) An ironic way of saying that some of Olive's pet aversions simply go against the grain as far as Verena is concerned! However, the turning-point in the young Bostonian's evolution is Basil Ransom's visit to her home town and the walk they take together on the grounds of Harvard (outings punctuate her movement away from OC, cf. 282). On that occasion, Verena let her nature be her guide: "An impulse pushed her; she obeyed it with her eyes open. She felt as a girl feels when she commits her first conscious indiscretion." (249)

Her initiative has far-reaching consequences because to keep "the only secret she had in the world – the only thing that was all her own" (250), Verena must practice deception: "I am learning to dissimulate." (249)

Verena grows more and more impatient with Olive ("it produced the first manifestation of impatience – the first, literally, and the first note of reproach – that had occurred in the course of their remarkable intimacy." 260) and the alienation from her companion becomes complete:

"But at present, suddenly, Olive's earnestness began to appear as inharmonious with the schemes of the universe as if it had been a broken saw."; "the two young women stood confronted [...] might have taken them for enemies rather than friends." (321)

Verena has, to use her own phrase, considerably “cooled off” (344) and only Miss Birdseye’s death will make her hesitate: “A wave of contrition, of shame, had swept over her – a quick desire to atone for her secret swerving by a renewed recognition of the nobleness of such a life as Miss Birdseye’s” (345) Ironically, Verena frees herself from one tyrant only to fall into the hands of another; she can’t escape the Charybdis and Scylla the two cousins stand for (in trying to escape one danger she runs into another); Olive is perhaps right when she feels that “after all Verena in her exquisite delicacy and generosity, was appointed only to show how women had from the beginning of time been the sport of men’s selfishness and avidity...” (353)

Olive Chancellor

Unlike Verena Tarrant, Olive Chancellor is “all of one piece” (128) and the representative of the “lady reformers” produced by the northeastern brand of idealism and Puritanism, even if it is embodied in this ludicrous type of an “old maid”, a bluestocking, “a female Jacobin” (7) who is “unmarried by every implication of her being” (17). Just like Miss Birdseye, OC has “never had needs but moral needs” (27) There are no redeeming features in the description of OC; James’s portrait of her is unrelieved in its harshness and totally unsympathetic in its severity: “This pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid.” (11) Besides her morbidity, OC’s introverted and neurotic personality presents various peculiarities; she has a very curious “theory of duty” (241; “It was her nature to look out for duties, to appeal to her conscience for tasks”, 12); her conscience is likened to “an attentive organ, earnestly consulted” (*Ibid.*). Her devotion to duty culminates in a secret longing for martyrdom (“The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day [...] be a martyr and die for something.” 13). Her highly-strung nature sharpens her powers of perception and she often has forebodings: “She told her that such forebodings were a peculiarity of her organization, that she didn’t know what to make of them, that she had to accept them.” (68) But her most characteristic trait is her taste for contention, she just thrives on it: “She delights in the shock of battle” (80); “she had been born to lead a crusade” (33); “Of all things in the world contention was most sweet to her” (14); “if she had supposed he would agree, she would not have written to him.” (14)

Although OC stands for rectitude (5), lofty principles (22) and righteousness, she is guilty of numerous defections from her standards. Thus, she would like to “put off invidious differences and mingle in the common life” (21), but “in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offence and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste” (27). OC is a *bourgeoise* to her fingertips and “would have been much happier if the movements she was interested in could have been carried on only by the people she liked, and if revolutions, somehow, didn’t always have to begin with one’s self – with internal convulsions, sacrifices, executions.” (98) She also appears terribly searching in her honesty yet she is “willing to corrupt [Selah Tarrant] as a father, with the most extravagant orders on her bank” (145). OC’s plan of life is not to lie “but such a plan was compatible with a kind of consideration for the truth which led her to shrink from producing it on poor occasions” (244), and last but not least, if her great striving is for justice, she yet “sometimes failed to arrive at it in particular cases.” (255) So OC is far from representing as pure a specimen of New England moral type as Miss Birdseye; this is particularly pointed up in her dealings with Basil Ransom on the one hand, and Verena Tarrant, on the other.

In spite of their differences, both cousins – like the North and the South – share some common traits, the most notable of which are: the same egotistical grasping nature; a similar (perverted) sense or theory of duty; a tyrannical volition and the same general dissatisfaction with society at large (they are in agreement on at least one point, *i.e.* “there is too much water in the blood of all of us” 267) However B Ransom remains the arch enemy, the representative of the detested “Charlie” whom OC always finds in her path (32). The first meeting of these two imperial characters – the chancellor and the king, as it were – gives further currency to the popular opinion that “when spirit meets spirit there must either be mutual absorption or a sharp concussion” (141). From then on, relations between OC and BR will assume no other form than perpetual contention, competition culminating in the fight for the possession of Verena Tarrant. This conflict superimposes itself on the basic antagonism between man and woman. OC regards BR’s “resolute pursuit of Verena as a covert persecution of herself” (338) and will use all means – fair and foul – to get rid of him, trying first to foist him on her sister, Mrs. Luna, then to strike an alliance with the Burrages (265). Between both cousins, it is war to the knife (“a house divided against oneself” to resume Lincoln’s description of the situation the USA was in during the Civil War):

"Olive, quivering in the storm, inquired of Ransom what he wanted her to do, what humiliation, what degradation, what sacrifice he imposed.

'I'll do anything – I'll be abject – I'll be vile – I'll go down in the dust!'" (384)

If OC's relations to BR are best described in terms of battle (exclusion), her relations to VT assume the form of the most jealous possession (inclusion). OC wants to "enter into her life" (73), to achieve a "union of soul" (70), in other words, "to take possession of her" (69). Numerous expressions associated with OC are suggestive of a certain rapacity; the Bostonian evokes the image of a bird of prey or a spider: "The fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail" (146). The identification will become closer and closer: "Success for Verena was success for her" (229); "Miss Chancellor has absorbed me – there is no doubt about that" (198). Jealousy is, of course, its natural corollary: "Olive expressed her reasons very frankly, admitted that she was jealous, that she didn't wish to think of the girl's belonging to any one but herself" (95). Like BR, OC presents her attempted seduction in the guise of rescue:

"if she could only rescue the girl from danger of vulgar exploitation, could only constitute herself her protectress and devotee, the two, between them, might achieve the great result" (73)

Ironically, the spinster who wants to "give herself up to others" (32) will force a similar scheme of renunciation ("*Entsagen sollst du, sollst entsagen*", 75) on Verena Tarrant. Her narrow conception of life reduced to a series of "phases", her obsessive fear of marriage ("she was haunted in a word with the fear that Verena would marry", 103), her perverted sense of what "real life" is (250) would, if Verena accepted them, "cut off a whole side of her life" (271) or nature.

OC exercises an unconscious tyranny over Verena; any deviation from the straight narrow path chosen by OC is to be atoned for by a further act of renunciation on Verena's part: "and yet perceiving how solemn Olive looked about it, how she blanched and brooded at the prospect, she offered to give it up..." (246). Under the disruptive influence of BR, "the intruder" (319), the relationship between OC and VT gradually deteriorates and eventually comes to complete estrangement: "For an instant the two young women stood confronted, and a person who had seen them at that moment might have taken them for enemies rather than friends." (321) It is gradually borne in upon OC that Verena is "not sincere" (325), that she does not really "wish to be saved" from BR (325) and above all, that her protégée was not "made to suffer but to enjoy" (253). They are definitely poles apart and OC reaches the painful conclusion that: "The reality was simply that Verena had been more to her than she ever was to Verena." (354). OC is seen, in the last image we have of her, to rush to the rostrum "to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces." (388) Poor OC will be refused the supreme solace of martyrdom, for, even "when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous." (390); this is the unkindest cut of all!

Basil Ransom

According to the narrator, OC's cousin is "as a representative of his sex, the most important personage in his narrative" (6) As a Southerner ("his being a Southerner gave a point to the whole thing", 344). As a Southerner, Basil Ransom stands in sharp contrast to the other characters; the differences are marked in his physical appearance: he has "magnificent eyes" and a "fine head" (6) with:

"a character of elevation which fairly added to his stature; it was a head to be seen above the level of a crowd, on some judicial bench or political platform, or even on a bronze medal [...] These things, the eyes especially, with their smouldering fire, might have indicated that he was to be a great American statesman..." (6)

What is more, his tone of voice is "pervaded by something sultry and vast, almost African" (such qualifications remind one of the oriental qualities of Verena Tarrant). But his distinctiveness is more forcibly expressed in his opinions; whereas most other characters in the story evince a genuine or affected interest in the emancipation of "the great sisterhood", Basil Ransom gives voice to the most conservative views and the narrowest male chauvinism:

"This boldness did not prevent him from thinking that women were essentially inferior to men, and infinitely tiresome when they declined to accept the lot which men had made for them. He had the most definite notions about their place in nature, in society..." (167)

BR is deeply read in the works of Tocqueville, Carlyle, and Comte and "as a result of a considerable intellectual experience, he was, in social and political matters a reactionary." (164). It is not surprising that BR should take a hard look at democracy and find fault with it:

"It's an age of unspeakable shams, as Carlyle says" (291)

"He was sick of all the modern cant about freedom and he had no sympathy with those who wanted an extension of it [...] It was of a piece with his denouncing the spread of education; he thought the spread of education a gigantic farce – people stuffing their heads with a lot of empty catchwords that prevented them from doing their work quietly and honestly." (284)

BR has "an immense desire for success" (15) after taking part in "one of the biggest failures that history commemorates, an immense national fiasco" (16), he leaves the South for the North with the intention of "enter[ing] the game and win it" (13). BR seems to have espoused the Yankee credo of "success", but the "game of life" (163) in New York soon turns out to be a variant of "the struggle for life" and the Mississippian is not up to the mark: "He was finally obliged to confess to himself that he was unpractical" (162) Being thwarted in his ambitions of a professional career, and "losing faith in his earthly destiny" (181), he will turn to a new field of endeavor:

"It came home to him that his opinions were stiff, whereas in comparison his efforts were lax; and he accordingly began to wonder whether he might not make a living by his opinions. He had always had a desire for public life..." (163)

The territory is already occupied by the weaker sex clamoring for reform, and BR is in direct competition with his cousin, O. Chancellor. He sets himself the task of saving his own sex from the great evil of the age – feminization: "The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age...to recover." (290). BR's deadly foe is "the new old maid" embodied by O. Chancellor:

"I don't object to the *old* old maids; they were delightful; they had always plenty to do, and didn't wander about the world crying out for a vocation. It is the new old maid that you have invented from whom I pray to be delivered." (292)

As he wants Verena Tarrant to be spared such horrible fate, he sets his heart on detaching her from Olive Chancellor:

"She was a touching, ingenuous victim, unconscious of the pernicious forces that were hurrying her to her ruin. With this idea of ruin there has already associated itself in the young man's mind, the idea – a good deal more dim and incomplete – of rescue." (21)

This noble, chivalrous intention covers in fact less respectable motives and more selfish aims:

- a) "to possess her on his own terms" (323); "My plan is to keep you at home and have a better time with you there than ever" (291)
- b) to wield complete authority over a sensitive being ("In playing with the subject this way, in enjoying her visible hesitation, he was slightly conscious of a man's brutality – of being pushed by an impulse to test her good nature, which seemed to have no limit" (212)
- c) to prove to himself that he can achieve some sort of success: "By the time...his ambition, his resolution had rekindled." (180)

Through Verena, BR tries to get at OC with whom he is at war: "it was not displeasing the idea that he should be avenged upon the wanton young woman who had invited him to come and see her in order simply to slap his face" (177-78). It is also a means of asserting his manhood ("he saw that he could do what he wanted, that she begged him, with all her being to spare her...helpless", 382) and of making up for previous failures.

The turning-point in the relationship between the Mississippian and the New England girl is represented by their meeting at Cambridge (= epiphany: "a creature of brightness...she irradiated", 193) and the Memorial

Hall scene ("conscious that in a moment they had become more intimate", 211). BR, who is often associated with books (cf. his habit of picking up and dipping into any book that presents itself: 5; 192), whose life unfolds like an uninteresting book (174), whose ambition is to make a name for himself in the field of literature, a bit sadistically rejoices in the fact that "the way he **had read his nature** was the right way (she was tremendously open to attack, she was meant for love, she was meant for him", 316, emphasis mine). BR's deepest feeling in relation to Verena is "the conviction that she was made for love" (287):

"She was profoundly unconscious of it, and another ideal, crude and thin and artificial, had interposed itself; but in the presence of a man she would really care for, this false, flimsy structure would rattle to her feet and the emancipation of Olive Chancellor's sex would be relegated to the land of vapours, of dead phrases." (287)

Verena's nature is, in his opinion, "odiously perverted" (206) and her apostleship ridiculous, "all nonsense" (233): "He occupied the time in asking himself by what perversity of fate or of inclination such a charming creature was ranting upon platforms and living in Olive Chancellor's pocket." (203).

On the strength on this assumption, but also of the knowledge that Verena will yield to a stronger will, BR will set about winning her heart, military fashion as befits an ex-Confederate: he wants to drag her "former standard in the dust" (334), to carry on his siege (334) and then "to press, to press, always to press" until Verena gives up everything, surrenders herself to him: "She's mine or she isn't, and if she is mine, she is all mine!" (383) / "She had evidently given up everything now—every pretense of a different conviction and of loyalty to her cause " (385). It is worthy of note that BR can get his opinions published at the same moment he debars Verena from appearing on the public rostrum: "they have accepted one of my articles; I think it's the best" (317); thus, his victory is complete: he conquers the object of his love, frustrates the feminine firebrands of Boston and crushes O. Chancellor: "Basil Ransom palpitating with is victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous." (390)

LE DÉSIR ET LA QUÊTE (LE PARADIGME DU DÉSIR: GOLD→GILT→GELT³)

Les personnages du roman forment entre eux une sorte de système pouvant se décrire de façon achronique – hors-récit ; cependant, une fois pris dans le discours narratif, dans le mouvement diachronique qui traverse le roman du début à la fin, les personnages vont s'animer, passer d'une situation à une autre, d'un équilibre (ou déséquilibre) initial à un équilibre (ou déséquilibre) final. Le principe moteur de ce mouvement constituant la trame du récit, c'est le **Désir** qui va se heurter à une série d'obstacles divers venant retarder ou contrarier sa réalisation. Tous les personnages de *The Bostonians* partagent une problématique commune : il s'agit de combler un manque, d'où le motif de la **Quête**, qui s'articule sur le double registre de *l'Être* et de *l'Avoir*. Ce mouvement est à mettre en parallèle avec le thème de la **Possession**, terme pris tout à la fois au sens de domination occulte, mais aussi d'appropriation d'un **Objet** défini comme « moyen contingent de la satisfaction », c'est-à-dire, dans l'univers du roman : la femme, le pouvoir, l'argent, etc.

Un personnage se distingue de tous les autres par le fait que semblent converger vers lui les désirs multiformes des autres protagonistes : Verena Tarrant. Si sa fonction reste à peu près identique dans le roman – c'est le pôle de projection du désir d'autrui – sa signification ou sa valeur passe par plusieurs stades ponctuant sa lente mais inexorable dégradation conduisant de la valeur symbolique – valeur suprême – à une valeur dépréciée, d'abord sociale, puis sexuelle et enfin, marchande.

Les divers attributs appliqués à Verena (spontanéité, innocence, pureté, dons divins, etc.) confèrent au personnage un statut symbolique ou mythique. Verena, la nymphe (193), la naïade (54), associée ou comparée à la déesse Minerve (204), à Jeanne d'Arc (74), à Corinne, la muse lyrique (228) apparaît sous les traits d'une Ève américaine, symbole d'un Âge d'Or auquel a succédé un Âge doré sinon de fer :

“Still, however, her glance was as pure as it was direct, and that fantastic fairness hung about her which had made an impression on him of old, and which reminded him of unworldly places – he didn't know where – convent-cloisters or vales of Arcady*.” (193-94)

*L'Arcadie, région de l'ancienne Grèce où se maintinrent longtemps les traditions patriarcales, mais aussi lieu mythique. Dans le mythe, ses montagnes Érymanthe et Lycée étaient fréquentées par les Dieux et hantées par la présence de Pan, ses fleuves-dieux voyaient se baigner les nymphes. Dans la poésie bucolique grecque et latine, l'Arcadie est représentée comme le pays du bonheur calme et serein. La littérature de la Renaissance a renouvelé cette fiction, prolongée dans l'art classique.

La lutte que se livrent Olive Chancellor et Basil Ranson – le Nord et le Sud – pour la possession de cette « *spotless consecrated maiden* » (261) n'est qu'une tentative de reconquête d'une innocence première, d'un paradis perdu, image d'une Amérique pastorale qui a présidé à la conception de la nouvelle République. La guerre de Sécession marque l'intrusion brutale et sanglante de l'histoire dans un monde qui naquit précisément de la rupture avec l'histoire européenne et pensait l'avoir définitivement exorcisée. De la même manière, l'essor de l'industrie et d'une civilisation matérialiste transfigure ou plutôt défigure la vision de l'Amérique comme Nouvelle Jérusalem. Verena, qui semble investie d'une mission de rédemption, retrouve tout naturellement dans ses discours l'image du jardin édénique :

“Good gentlemen all, if I could make you believe how much brighter and fairer and sweeter the garden of life would be for you, if you would only let us help you to keep it in order! You would like so much better to walk there, and you would find grass and trees and flowers that would make you think you were in Eden. That is what I should like to press home to each of you, personally, individually – to give him the vision of the world as it hangs perpetually before me, redeemed, transfigured, by a new moral tone.” (231-32)

Quittons le niveau symbolique et mythique où nous nous étions placé pour observer la scène sociale et politique. Verena y est toujours l'enjeu d'un conflit idéologique entre féministes et conservateurs représentés respectivement par OC et Basil Ranson. À ce niveau, la pastorale cède le pas à la croisade ; la « *maiden* »

3. “*Gilt*” = superficial brilliance (dorure/toc) ; “*Gelt*” = money in Old English (1520s, from German and Dutch *Gelt* = “gold, money”)

s'efface devant « *Joan of Arc* » et, au messianisme moral et spirituel, évoqué précédemment, succède le militantisme social. Les valeurs symboliques et mythiques de l'Âge d'Or se corrompent déjà au contact des fausses valeurs d'un Âge doré (« *The Gilded Age* »). La justice et la morale ont peu de poids comparé au désir de domination qui se donne libre cours dans le domaine social. Arracher Verena Tarrant à l'emprise d'OC revient, pour BR, à mettre un frein) « *the most damnable feminization* » (290) de son époque, à préserver « *the masculine character* » mis en danger par « *a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age* » (290/164), mais surtout à asseoir sa puissance, son pouvoir sur l'asservissement de la femme :

“Am I to understand, the, as your last word that you regard us as quite inferior?” – ‘For public, civic uses, absolutely—perfectly weak and second-rate. I know nothing more indicative of the muddled sentiment of the time than that any number of men should be found to pretend that they regard you in any other light. But privately, personally, it’s another affair. In the realm of family life and the domestic affections—” (294) // “The use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man happy.” (206)

L'accès à la parole, au discours social passe également par Verena Tarrant ; le discours de Basil Ransom ne peut s'élever que sur le silence de la femme et celui des féministes – notamment OC – ne peut se faire entendre ou se manifester que par la voix de Verena :

“The voice of their silent suffering was always in her ears, the ocean of tears that they had shed from the beginning of time seemed to pour through her own eyes...” (33)

“To Olive it appeared that just this partnership of their two minds – each of them by itself, lacking an important group of facets – mad an organic whole which, for the work in hand, could not fail to be brilliantly effective.” (137)

“...after a short contact with the divine idea...she [Verena] resolved herself into a magical voice, became again the pure young sybil.” (*Ibid.*)

Cette voix, cependant, n'est pas désincarnée ; elle est issue d'un corps qui est aussi objet de convoitise sinon d'amour, objet libidinal en un mot. Il y a ici réduction de la valeur symbolique à une valeur sexuelle ou érotique. Chez OC, la passion est dévorante (l'oralité et les fantasmes d'incorporation dominant) : “*a friend of her own sex with whom she might have a union of soul.*” (70) // “*Miss Chancellor has absorbed me – there is no doubt about that.*” (198). Elle est aussi exclusive : “*She was haunted, in a word, with the fear that Verena would marry.*” (103).

Pour BR, Verena est essentiellement la femme-objet (“...*his wife*”, 320) sur laquelle pourra s'exercer sa pulsion d'emprise (“*instinct for mastery*”), pulsion dont le but est de dominer l'objet par la force et qui devient sadisme lorsqu'elle se met au service de la pulsion sexuelle :

“He doesn't think life is very delightful, in the nature of things ; but one of the best things a man can do with it is to get hold of some woman...whom he may draw close to him.” (326, emphasis mine)

“But Ransom had already by muscular force, wrenched her away, and was hurrying her out.” (2389)

“She said no more but all her face entreated him to let her off, to spare her; and as this look deepened, a quick sense of elation and success began to throb in his heart, for it told him exactly what he wanted to know. It told him that she was afraid of him...” (316)

“To go away proved to himself how secure he felt, what a conviction he had that however she might turn and twist in his grasp he held her fast. The emotion she had expressed...she would be quiet.” (347-48)

Enfin, ultime étape dans la dégradation de l'objet symbolique, celui-ci n'est plus perçu que sous l'aspect de sa valeur d'échange ou marchande et devient donc objet de transactions et d'opérations comptables. C'est le dernier avatar de Verena Tarrant, désormais réduite à n'être plus qu'une sorte d'atout – de “*card*” (90 ; 123 ; 126) – susceptible de se monnayer, de se transformer en espèces sonnantes et trébuchantes. Les termes économiques abondent, soulignant l'importance de l'argent (“*money was a tremendous force*”, 263) dans le milieu que décrit le roman. L'accord passé entre OC et Mrs Burrage est décrit en termes révélateurs : “*At present she saw it was a question not of Verena's lending herself, but of a positive gift or at least of a bargain in which the terms would be immensely liberal.*” (272). La prestation de Verena apparaît aux yeux de BR comme “*an article for which there was more and more demand...for evermore.*” (277-78). La jeune fille est pour son père, Selah Tarrant, “*a remunerative daughter*” (90) : “*Meanwhile, at any rate, Selah was sure he had a card ; he felt there*

was money in the air. It might already be said there were receipts from Charles Street...” (90. OC soupçonne, dès le départ, qu’avec lui, les relations “*would have the stamp of business*” (114), de sorte que “*their intercourse was to be conducted by means of cheques.*” (145) Quant à Mrs Tarrant, “*she had embraced tenderly, the idea of a pecuniary compensation...cheque.*” (145)

Matthias Pardon, le digne représentant de la presse américaine, partage le même système de valeurs – valeurs marchandes s’entend – que Selah Tarrant. Verena a, à ses yeux, une certaine valeur sentimentale, mais surtout une indéniable valeur commerciale. C’est un produit qu’il faut lancer sur le marché à grand renfort de publicité et dont on peut attendre et espérer de substantiels bénéfices : “*The fact was, she was a great card, and someone ought to play it.*” (113); “*Couldn’t they run Miss Verena together?*” (124) D’où, l’idée proposée à OC “*that they should constitute themselves into a company for drawing profit from Verena.*” (124) Ultime avatar du symbole devenu objet de consommation !

L’image de la carte est à mettre en parallèle avec celle de “jeu” (“*game*”), qui revient très souvent dans le roman. Le désir de promotion sociale, la quête du succès s’inscrivent tout naturellement dans la thématique du roman du XIX^e siècle. Fidèle à cette tradition, BR est venu à New York pour y faire fortune (“*here he would enter the game and here he would win it.*”, 41), mais la fortune refuse de lui sourire : “*He had been diligent, he had been ambitious, but he had not yet been successful.* » (161) Son échec le conduira, après avoir envisagé d’épouser Mrs Luna (“*the moral law commanded him to marry Mrs Luna*”, 171) – l’idée d’unir sa destinée à OC comparée, il est vrai à une « firme prospère », l’avait déjà effleuré – à se tourner vers la vie politique, publique où sa solide formation intellectuelle – il a tout lu – lui permet d’espérer un avenir plus brillant. Ce calcul semble juste ; Basil publie son premier article dans la “*National Review*” au moment même où il réduit au silence Verena Tarrant, son adversaire dans le domaine politique : “*At any rate, the simple fact that it is to be published makes an era in my life.* » (318) ; “*It makes me believe I may do something; it has changed the whole way I look at my future.*” (318).

Olive Chancellor, qui possède une fortune suffisante, ambitionne donc autre chose : c’est de jouer un rôle de premier plan dans la croisade pour la libération de la femme et de goûter grâce à Verena, l’ivresse du succès :

“Then Olive perceived how fatally...and together they would triumph. » (137)

“...she was not insensible to the pleasure of appearing in a distinguished New York circle as a representative woman, an important Bostonian, the prompter, colleague, associate of one of the most original girls of the time.” (247)

Mrs Tarrant, quant à elle, vise tout bonnement une position sociale et apporte à la réalisation de ce grand dessein toute l’énergie d’une nature tenace : “*What she clung to was ‘society’, and a position in the world which a secret whisper told her she had never had, and a voice more audible reminded her she was in danger of losing.*” (62). Le docteur Prance se dévoue entièrement à sa petite révolution personnelle et à sa réussite professionnelle ; bref, de tous les personnages, il n’est peut-être que Miss Birdseye pour se désintéresser des biens matériels et n’avoir d’intérêts que philanthropiques (“*she had never had any needs but moral needs*”, 27)

H. James a parfaitement rendu l’âpreté au gain de cette période où le dollar acquiert sa position de valeur suprême scellant ainsi la disparition de l’âge héroïque de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, de cet Âge d’Or à l’aune duquel il mesure un nouveau siècle d’argent. L’itinéraire de Verena Tarrant en est l’illustration la plus parfaite : d’abord symbole de générosité – c’est le don de soi – elle devient ensuite l’enjeu d’intérêts politiques et idéologiques et, en fin de compte, simple valeur d’échange ou, par le mariage, objet de consommation et de satisfaction égoïste.

L'AFEMME : ZONE DE SILENCE (LA RECONNAISSANCE DU SUJET FÉMININ)

À travers l'histoire de Verena Tarrant, c'est tout le problème de la reconnaissance du sujet féminin qui se trouve posé. Verena est, en quelque sorte, le symbole de la condition féminine, « de cette moitié de l'humanité pour laquelle le manque, commun à tous, se double d'une différence fantasmatiquement connotée par un moins. » (Lacan, *L'Arc*, n° 58, 34). Verena dont la docilité, la passivité, et dans une certaine mesure, l'inanité (ou la vacuité, cf. "*Hollowness of character*", 54 ; "*docility*", 122 ; "*submissive*", 285) sont constamment mises en relief, est enfermée dans un dilemme, soumise à l'influence de deux êtres à la volonté impérieuse qui lui demandent, au fond, soit d'être belle et de se taire, soit, au contraire, de se faire entendre et d'oublier qu'elle est désirable ! Le choix qui lui est proposé se réduit à deux formes différentes d'aliénation : se dévouer à une cause ou à un homme ("*To give him up or to give Olive up – this effort would be the greater of the two.*" 334) Ce dilemme traduit « le profond antagonisme, présent dans chaque être humain, entre son aspiration à un bonheur personnel et son aspiration à se fondre dans une collectivité, laquelle pèse de tout son poids pour l'attirer... » (*Éros et Antéros*, 8)

Le drame de Verena Tarrant, c'est qu'elle doit taire ce qu'elle est – sa nature profonde – pour croire à ce qu'elle n'est pas, d'où toute cette dialectique de l'apparence et de l'essence, du masque et de la vérité, qui se manifeste dans l'œuvre (cf. "*Hollow and fictitious ideal*" vs. "*genuine vocation*", 332 ; "*an inflated little figure*" vs. "*her real self*", 293).

Il semblerait qu'il n'y ait point de salut pour Verena – et donc pour la femme – condamnée à faire appel au regard de l'Autre pour répondre de son identité Or, OC et BR ont ceci de commun qui est de ramener, chacun à sa manière, Verena à la position d'objet désirable plutôt que de la faire passer à la situation de sujet désiré ou, mieux encore, désirant. La jeune femme doit se plier au désir d'autrui, renoncer, s'abstenir : « douloureux dilemme où l'identification (l'être-comme) prend le pas sur l'identité (l'être-soi) et où le faire semblant prend la place de l'authentique. » (C. Olivier, *Les Enfants de Jocaste*, 27).

Pour se faire reconnaître comme sujet véritable, pour acquérir une certaine individualité, Verena devrait accéder à une parole pleine, authentique. Elle nous apparaît essentiellement comme un être de représentation, aliénant son moi pour jouer des rôles imposés par autrui : celui de la jeune femme douée ou de la future bonne épouse. Verena parle beaucoup, mais nous livre plus souvent les pensées et les propos d'OC ou des féministes que les siens propres. Elle ne semble pas avoir perçu la nécessité de se dégager de la tutelle du discours féministe et du discours masculin ; c'est le second qui est, de loin, le plus dangereux si l'on en croit Ch. Olivier (*op. cit.*, 145) :

« Le discours de l'homme est mortifère pour la femme dans la mesure où, la prenant comme objet, il lui enlève sa place de sujet et décide pour elle de ce qui lui est bon. Ainsi c'est l'homme qui définit la place et le langage féminin, et ce ne peut être qu'une place de morte et qu'un rôle de muette puisque ce n'est pas elle qui décide. »

C'est bien là l'avenir que BR réserve à Verena :

"On the other hand it was no possible basis of matrimony that Verena should continue for his advantage the exercise of her remunerative profession; if he should become her husband he should know a way to strike her dumb." (278)

Tout ce que BR trouve à proposer à Verena, c'est l'aliénation d'un rôle social et familial : celui de l'épouse, de la mère, de la femme au foyer :

"It's a remarkable social system that has no place for us!" the girl went on, with her most charming smile. – "No place in public. My plan is to keep you at home and have a better time with you there than ever." (291)

Le seul royaume qu'il lui ouvre est celui de la vie de famille ("*In the realm of family life and the domestic affections...*", 294) où le destin d'une femme ne pouvait être alors que "*an endless crucifixion of instinct*" (A. Bennett). Il sera difficile à Verena d'échapper au destin que Mrs Tarrant évoque, non sans déplaisir, pour l'avoir déjà connu : "*She supposed Verena would marry some one, some day, and she hoped the personage would be*

connected with public life...should meet her sterner fate.” (86). La maternité fera, comme l’a écrit une psychanalyste, « disparaître la femme et naître la mère en même temps que l’enfant. » (Ch. Olivier, 181)

BR ne laisse guère d’espoir à Verena quand celle-ci, finissant par se rendre compte que sa vie sera un long renoncement, lui demande ingénument :

“I confess I should like to know what is to become of all that part of me, if I retire into private life, and live as you say, simply to be charming with you. [...] Isn’t it a great waste, a great violation of nature... the poor faithful dismissed servant.” (336)

La réponse, malgré le ton enjoué de BR, est plutôt cynique: “*My dear young woman...conversation.*” (336-37). Le Sudiste pousse l’ironie sinon la perfidie jusqu’à donner à l’épithète “*social*” son sens le plus étroit, c’est-à-dire celui de “*sociable*” : “*Think how delightful it will be when your influence becomes really social. Your facility...in America.*” (337). Voilà Verena fixée une bonne fois pour toutes ! **L’Afemme. Zone de silence**⁴. Alors si Verena veut parler, si la femme/les femmes veut/veulent se faire entendre, comment y parvenir ? L’alternative est aussi simple que redoutable :

« Car, si elles entrent dans le discours masculin, elles en adoptent l’antiféminisme et parlent à l’encontre d’elles-mêmes, et si elles prétendent parler autrement, elles aggravent encore la différence entre les sexes et participent à l’éloignement édicté par l’homme lui-même qui ne pense à aucun moment pouvoir parler comme une femme et soutient mordicus l’existence de deux natures et de deux discours. » (C. Olivier, 144)

C’est OC qui évoque avec le plus de lucidité les conséquences d’une telle situation :

“it was no use striving [...] the world was a great trap or trick, of which women were ever the punctual dupes, so that it was the worst of the curse that rested upon them that they must most humiliate those who had most their cause at heart! Did she say...and fortified?” (354)

La grande ironie du roman est que Verena Tarrant, qui accepte de polémiquer avec BR “*to make him give in just at two or three points – that I should like better than anything I have done*” (256), finit elle-même par renoncer sur tous les points: “*He wants me to give up everything, all our work, our faith, our future, never to give another address, to open my lips in public...*” (322). Il est donc permis de se demander si la finalité de toute cette histoire n’est pas de démontrer que “*after all, Verena, in her exquisite delicacy and generosity, was appointed only to show how women had from the beginning of time been the sport of man’s selfishness and avidity*” (353)? En tous les cas, *The Bostonians* illustre parfaitement le fait que si “l’homme joue son rôle d’homme de peur d’être assimilé à une femme – [c’est BR qui résiste au danger de la “*womanization*”] – la femme joue son rôle de femme de peur d’être assimilée à “rien”. » (Ch. Olivier, 117). La condition féminine n’est pas une frustration épanouissante...

4. Le concept et l’expression sont de la linguiste, philosophe et psychanalyste féministe française d’origine belge, Luce Irigaray, auteur, entre autres, de *Ce sexe qui n’en est pas un* et *Speculum de l’autre femme*.

THE WORLD OF ART

(Life and art / Life as art / Life vs. art, or the relation of art to life)

H. James once stated that “the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it should attempt to represent life”; however, such a statement of faith does not automatically turn the author of *The Bostonians* into a realistic writer, for at least two simple reasons: firstly, the function of the novel is not just to “represent life”, it also aims at “lending composition to the splendid waste that is life”; secondly, James consistently sees the “real” world through the prism of art. Reality is rarely described in itself and for itself; it is systematically rendered – or better still – filtered through some key metaphors pertaining to the world of art, viz. embroidery and/or tapestry-weaving, painting, literature and the theatre and I propose to give some insight into the role of such metaphors through which James hoped to find new ways to enable his readers “to read with the senses as well as with the reason.”

In reference to *The Wings of the Dove*, James declared that men represented the canvas and women the embroidery; now, this allusion to embroidery recurs throughout his work and its significance is essential to an understanding of James’s work and conception of art. To quote just a few instances in *The Wings of the Dove*: “she continued thus agreeably to embroider...” (127); “It came back to Lord Mark...he was being worked in.” (133). It is necessary to stress that “text” originally meant “a woven material” and that, as R. Barthes put it: « *le texte se fait, se travaille dans un entrelacs perpétuel* » (*Le Plaisir du texte*, 101); cf. also quotation on « *la tresse* » from S/Z :

« Le texte, pendant qu’il se fait, est semblable à une dentelle de Valenciennes qui naîtrait devant nous, sous les doigts de la dentellière : chaque séquence engagée pend comme le fuseau provisoirement inactif qui attend pendant que son voisin travaille ; puis, quand son tour vient, la main reprend le fil, le ramène sur le tambour ; et au fur et à mesure que dessin se remplit, chaque fil marque son avance par une épingle qui le retient et que l’on déplace peu à peu : ainsi des termes de la séquence : ce sont des *positions* occupées puis dépassées en vue d’un investissement progressif du sens. Ce procès est valable pour tout le texte. L’ensemble des Codes, dès lors qu’ils sont pris dans le travail, dans la marche de la lecture, constitue une tresse (*texte, tissu et tresse*, c’est la même chose) ; chaque fil, chaque code est une voix ; ces voix tressées — ou tressantes forment l’écriture : lorsqu’elle est seule, la voix ne travaille pas, ne transforme rien : elle *exprime* ; mais dès que la main intervient pour rassembler et entremêler les fils inertes, il y a travail, il y a transformation. On connaît le symbolisme de la tresse : Freud, pensant à l’origine du tissage, y voyait le travail de la femme tressant ses poils pubiens pour fabriquer le pénis qui lui manque. Le texte est en somme un fétiche ; et le réduire à l’unité du sens, par une lecture abusivement univoque, c’est *couper la tresse*, c’est esquisser le geste castrateur. » (165)

It is also interesting to note that just like lace-making, James’s text are formed around a central blank, a void (cf. author’s statement: “All my reserves are blanks”, Zérafra, 64) hence the characteristic dialectics of presence and absence at work in James’s style (Cf. *Wings of the Dove*: “The subject was made present to them...only by the intensity with which it mutely expressed its absence”, 394) a contention borne out by critic N. Blake :

« Dans l’œuvre de James, nous trouvons constamment un double mouvement : exposer pour refouler, montrer pour cacher, développer et interroger pour, en fin de compte, ignorer. Les métaphores familières de l’auteur, celles de la tapisserie ou de la broderie sont là pour souligner ce trait de son travail. »

« Il faut relire les conversations des Ailes de la colombe pour voir qu’elles sont de vastes dispositifs énigmatiques construits à partir du vide, du rien : non-dit ou dit à demi mot ; flottaison des signifiants vagues, toujours sur le point de basculer dans le silence. » (L’Arc, “Figures et métaphores de la séduction”, 67)

Embroidery and weaving are thus archetypal symbols for the nature of the literary text and the process of fiction-writing.

The theatrical metaphor also accounts for some of James’s idiosyncrasies as a stylist. James, who would have “loved to be popular”, turned to the theatre in the early nineties to achieve this aim. His popularity as a fiction-writer had declined at the time and he felt that a great theatrical success would restore it. He enjoyed the problems of the dramatic form, and *The American* had a moderate success, but the reception of *Guy Domville* made him decide to put an end to his unrequited flirtation with the drama. However, James returned to novel-

writing with a new technique, which was largely influenced by his work for the theatre as witness his wish “to produce a novel all dramatic, all scenic.”

The pictorial metaphor is also of paramount importance; it must be borne in mind that James went so far as to state that “a psychological reason is to my imagination an object adorably pictorial.” James’s texts are punctuated with references and allusions to painting and various pictures. A case in point being in *The Wings* Milly’s coming face to face, while staying at Matcham, with “the image of the wonderful Bronzino”, i.e. the portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi, Milly’s painted sister. The painterly metaphor comes to a climax when Milly moves into the Venetian Palace to live up to the ideal the other characters imposed on her: there she is literally “housed in a Veronese picture”.

Even more important than the painterly or pictorial metaphor is the literary metaphor at work in James’s novels; James had one of his characters declare that: « *la littérature, la vie: c’est tout un* », a contention borne out by much of what is depicted in *The Wings*. Women, for instance, are according to Densher “books one has already read. A whole library of the unknown, the uncut” (220) and he wonders in what “light Milly is to be read” (83): cf. C Richard :

« L’assimilation de [Milly] à une page – page que la lecture ne saurait épuiser – présente la situation fondatrice – le rapport homme-femme – comme une page encore mystérieuse qui appelle indéfiniment la glose, qui sollicite l’interprétation, qui provoque la réverbération : la romance est un texte à lire et à relire, toujours inachevé et toujours se faisant » (*Delta*, 105)

Both Milly and Susan tend to perceive reality through the prism of fiction (“the concrete world inferred from what one had read and dreamed”, 93) or, better still, romance. Now is the time to remember that American fiction is traditionally divided into two major categories viz. the novel and the romance. This fundamental distinction was originally made by Hawthorne: the main difference between those two forms is the way in which they view reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail; it attaches great importance to character, psychology, and strains after verisimilitude. Romance is free from the ordinary novelistic requirements of verisimilitude: it shows a tendency to plunge into the underside of consciousness and often expresses dark and complex verities unavailable to realism. Hawthorne defined the field of action of romance as being the borderland of the human mind where the actual intermingles with the imaginary. The distinction is still valid and may account, as some critics have argued – notably R. Chase in *The American Novel and its Tradition* – for the original and characteristic form of the American novel, which Chase calls “romance-novel” to emphasize its hybrid nature: “Since the earliest days, the American novel [...] has worked out its destiny and defined itself by incorporating an element of romance.”

What all the above observations point to is that in James’s universe, life and art are both antagonistic and complementary notions. The relationship between the two is all the more complex as it seems that the frustration of life is in James’s work one of the conditions of success in art. However paradoxical it may seem, James always insisted on the moral beauties of failure and the crudity of worldly success; he had one of his characters, Henry St George, who reduced the price of dedication to art, declare: “I’ve had everything. In other words, I’ve missed everything” and Milly, who likewise, has everything runs the risk of losing everything. However, she’ll escape that fate by giving away all her possessions and, above all, by agreeing to turn her life into a work of art: « *Milly fait de sa vie une représentation artistique* » (*L’Arc*, 31); she herself becomes « l’héroïne de son roman au moment où elle accepte l’image, la métaphore, qui la transforme en œuvre d’art. » (196) Milly gives up life for the sake of « intense living », i.e. to experience “the impossible romance...of image of never going down, of remaining aloft in the divine dustless air” (266) of course, Milly is going to be frustrated in her efforts to achieve this aim, but her failure is not complete since her memory becomes Densher’s love. Besides, as J.-J. Mayoux put it, for the typically Jamesian heroine: « vivre, c’est ainsi [et aussi] se retenir de vivre pour conserver intacte l’imagination illimitée de la vie » ; Milly’s domain is that of the “might have been”.

The absolutely gratuitous gesture with which she completes her life is as a “*beau geste*” akin to a work of art; it is an undeserved gift, beyond reciprocity, a transcendent gesture expressive of a lofty moral and aesthetic sensibility. It is necessary to stress the “and”, for in James’s fiction, the moral sensibility is never remote from the aesthetic; in other words, moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together, hence James’s definition of “taste as the active sense of life”.

L'ART DE H. JAMES : OBSERVATIONS SUR LE STYLE ET L'ÉCRITURE

H. James a été non seulement un grand praticien, mais aussi un remarquable théoricien du roman ; il a ainsi, dans ses préfaces et dans ses études, notamment *The Art of Fiction*, fait de nombreuses observations sur l'art du roman et la technique romanesque. Il convient cependant de noter que les préfaces ont, dans la majorité des cas, été écrites bien après la publication des œuvres et que les remarques qu'elles contiennent révèlent parfois un certain décalage par rapport aux textes et aux problèmes qu'elles se proposent d'éclairer : disons, en un mot, que la théorie ne se reflète pas toujours dans la pratique de même qu'il peut y avoir, comme l'auteur le reconnaît, un hiatus entre un projet de roman et sa réalisation effective ("*Yet one's plan, alas, is one thing and one's result another*"). Cela ne diminue en rien l'intérêt de ces divers textes, mais invite à la prudence : toutes les observations de James ne sont pas à prendre au pied de la lettre. Dans le cas qui nous occupe, les deux sources d'informations incontournables sont naturellement *The Art of Fiction*, crédo littéraire de H. James, et la préface de *The Portrait of a Lady* où l'auteur évoque un certain nombre de problèmes liés aux divers thèmes et personnages, mais surtout à la composition et à la structure du roman : ce sont naturellement, ces dernières que nous prendrons en considération dans cette étude dont l'objet est moins de présenter un relevé exhaustif des particularités du style et de l'écriture de H. James que d'expliquer et de légitimer certains aspects essentiels. Dans la préface de *The Portrait*, comme dans *The Art of Fiction*, James recourt pour qualifier son art à des images tirées de trois domaines essentiels : "*architecture*", "*painting*" and "*the drama*" auxquelles s'ajoutent les notions de "*indirection*" et de "*reflection*". Ce catalogue, moins disparate qu'il n'y paraît, présente en fait, à l'analyse, d'intéressantes convergences. C'est par rapport à une conception architecturale de l'œuvre ("*the house of fiction*") visant notamment à la solidité et à l'équilibre des blocs narratifs.

Mais la métaphore architecturale est redoublée par l'allusion au "*use of windows and balconies*" directement lié à la question du point de vue puisque l'objet du roman est notamment de construire "*the whole bright house of her [Isabel's] exposure*", en d'autres termes d'évoquer Isabel « à travers les fenêtres successives de l'intérêt que lui portent les autres » ("*through the successive windows of other people's interest in her*", 16). Formule capitale qui définit donc un principe de composition et d'exposition trouvant sa traduction dans l'utilisation de ce que James a appelé "*indirection*" et d'autres "*indirect approach*" i.e. "*all the events and actions are represented as they unfold before, and filter to the reader through, the particular consciousness of one of his characters*" (M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary*...). Ce qui revient à dire que l'auteur "*presents the reader not with a narrator's objective account of the characters but with the characters' subjective and therefore partial, colored and often warped accounts of themselves*" (R. C. McLean, "*Love by the Doctor's*..."). Ces personnages dont la conscience joue le rôle de miroir réfléchissant sont bien, ainsi que les a baptisés James, des "*reflectors*". D'où, conséquence stylistique importante, la fréquence du recours au style indirect libre avec un effet caractéristique de bivocalité (entrecroisement de la voix du narrateur, qui n'est jamais totalement absent cf. les multiples modalités et indications de régie par lesquelles le narrateur assure la gestion de son texte, et de celle du personnage : **Authorial intrusions** : it may interest the reader to ...33 ; it may be confided to the reader, 65/103 ; as the novels say, 104 ; our heroine's biographer, 109/115 ; the letter belongs to our history, 117 ; I can 121 ; 139 ; presented in a cluster for the convenience of the reader, 197 ; somewhat superficial perhaps, 207 ; I am far from wishing to picture her (Merle), 207 ; a small group that might have been described by a painter, 226 ; the working of this young lady's spirit was strange, 312 ; our attention is engaged in, 318 ; we, who know more about poor Ralph 338 ; if we look at her through his eyes, 368 ; it may seem to the reader, 416 ; it is our privilege to look over her shoulder, 457 ; to complete the metaphor, 485 ; this history, which has so many other threads to unwind, 502) pour exprimer les pensées du "réflecteur". Notons au passage qu'il convient de ne pas limiter cette fonction de "réflecteur" aux seuls personnages : les objets, les éléments du décor peuvent aussi à leur manière jouer ce rôle et dénoter ou connoter une situation, un état d'esprit ou tout autre aspect de la diégèse (cf. ce que K. L. Komar a appelé "*characterization by environmental implication*"). Autre particularité ayant trait aux principaux réflecteurs de ce roman "*the centers in *The Wings of the Dove* are both acting in the drama and organizing their involvement in it into coherent artistic patterns; they live their experience as if they were writing about it*" (L. Barsani, "*The narrator as Center*...", 134), impression qui se manifeste à travers une omniprésente métaphore littéraire par laquelle les personnages s'éprouvent comme phrase, texte, parenthèse, image, etc.

Dans la préface de *The Wings of the Dove*, la question du point de vue est abordée sous un autre angle : James utilise un autre image que celle des "*balconies and windows*", source du motif de la vision en surplomb : il s'agit de celle d'un point central que l'on approche "*by narrowing circumvallations*" à partir d'un "*outer ring*" (7). Ce mouvement, qui va du large à l'étroit, du lointain au proche, non pas directement mais après maints tours et détours ("*to approach circuitously*", comme le dit James).

Autre conséquence de cette "*circuitous approach*" qui permet d'aborder le sujet en décrivant des circonvolutions et d'en voir ainsi l'avvers et le revers, les images chez James, comme il le dit lui-même "*have sides and backs*" (9) ; ceci est à mettre en parallèle avec ce qu'écrit S. Gorley Putt (*A Reader's Guide*, 91) :

"For James, the poetic imagination was to be very largely a matter of seeing things from both sides: from the early tales to the final Prefaces his writing is full of images invoking the obverse and reverse, the back and the front, the passive and the active, the efficient and the visionary, the romance and the disillusion. [...] That complete honesty of the double vision in James's work...helps to explain the tortuosities of the high style where he makes the reader dizzy by his conscientious efforts to be fair all round, to take every possible aspect into consideration".

Ce désir de rendre justice à la complexité des situations et des motivations, mais aussi à la nature duelle des personnages et à la diversité des relations qui se nouent entre eux conduit James, selon le critique précédemment cité, à frapper "*the geminian notes of antithesis or parallel, dissonance or assonance, contradiction or compensation*" (p. 87). Un terme n'est pas plus tôt posé qu'on voit apparaître dans la même phrase son opposé et la multiplicité des formes duelles créées par le rapprochement ou la fusion des deux termes d'une polarité est facteur d'incertitude et d'indécision ; c'est aussi la preuve que James a pour objectif non pas le réalisme mais ce qu'il appelle "*the intensity of an illusion*". Le rôle d'un artiste tel que James est bien de faire voir le multiple, et non pas d'imposer l'unité. Cependant cette "*double vision*" est quelquefois contrecarrée par un principe opposé qui consiste à ne pas tout montrer, à ne pas tout dire. On a maintes fois insisté sur le fait que James est un remarquable illusionniste pratiquant avec talent l'art « d'exposer pour refouler, de montrer pour cacher » et de broder son discours autour de multiples non-dits : le texte de *The Wings* tourne ainsi autour de « pivots obscurs parce que non représentés » (Labbé, 90) tels l'union charnelle de Densher et de Kate, etc. de sorte que :

« laissées à l'imagination du lecteur et parfois des protagonistes, ces ellipses qui trouent le récit de brusques suspensions et de silences se transforment peu à peu en d'invisibles mais inépuisables matrices de significations, analogues, par leur dialectique de la plénitude et du vide, aux abîmes dont les gouffres, les tourbillons et les naufrages de la préface offrent autant de réfractions mélodramatiques » (Labbé, 90)

Ces ellipses mettent à l'épreuve une vertu/qualité que James juge essentielle : "*the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern*". Les deux autres métaphores "*the picture*" et "*the drama*" représentent "*the two rival techniques of the novel*" (L. Edel). Par "*picture*", il faut entendre "*narrative from a point of view*" et par "*drama*", "*direct representation*". Pour préciser davantage ces deux notions, rappelons que pour le théoricien P. Lubbock : "*a scene is pictorially depicted when it is the reflection of events in the mirror of somebody's receptive consciousness*". Donc le roman en tant que portrait ou tableau est construit à partir d'une conscience centrale et d'une sorte de soliloque sinon de théâtre intérieurs. Ajoutons que "*picture*" équivaut aussi par certains côtés au « sommaire », c'est-à-dire « un raccourci de plusieurs moments tel qu'il s'effectue dans la conscience d'un personnage » (C. Verley, 27). Le deuxième principe, à l'origine de la scène romanesque, consiste à effacer les marques de l'instance narrative pour donner d'emblée la parole au personnage : discours immédiat, émancipé de tout patronage narratif ("*Dramatize, dramatize*" écrivait H. James dans ses *Carnets*). Donc par opposition à "*picture*" ("*a non-scenic rendering of some character's consciousness of a situation*"), "*drama renders scenically the character's speech and behaviour*". Cette opposition recoupe celle qui existe entre les deux modes de régulation de la distance narrative que sont "*showing and telling*", principes associés au nom de H. James qui s'en fait le théoricien. Cette opposition est en réalité très ancienne puisqu'elle remonte à Platon qui distinguait entre "*diegesis*" (récit pur, c'est-à-dire non mêlé d'éléments mimétiques : le poète parle en son nom sans chercher à nous faire croire que c'est un autre que lui qui parle) et "*mimesis*" (imitation à la manière du drame : le poète s'efforce de donner l'illusion que ce n'est pas lui qui parle). Dans cette perspective, le récit pur sera tenu pour plus distant que l'imitation : il en dit moins (condensation) et de façon plus médiate (indirection). Cette opposition, neutralisée par Aristote, a resurgi dans la théorie du roman à la fin du XIX^{ème} siècle chez James et ses disciples sous les termes de

"*showing*" (montrer) vs. "*telling*" (raconter). Cependant, un théoricien aussi averti que G. Genette fait remarquer que la notion de "*showing*" est illusoire, car aucun récit ne peut montrer ou imiter l'histoire qu'il raconte : le langage signifie sans imiter à moins bien sûr, que l'objet signifié (narré) ne soit lui-même du langage : la mimésis verbale ne peut-être que mimésis du verbe. H. James, à la suite de son expérience de dramaturge, a voulu précisément dramatiser l'action au maximum, d'où l'accent mis sur la notion de "*showing*" dont les deux préceptes cardinaux sont pour lui, la prédominance de la scène (récit détaillé) et la transparence du narrateur. Ces données étaient déjà présentes dans les remarques de Platon : plus grande quantité d'information narrative et absence (ou présence minimale) de l'informateur *i.e.* du narrateur "*showing*" = maximum d'information et minimum d'informateur. Donc, pour James la meilleure forme narrative est un « récit focalisé, raconté par un narrateur qui n'est pas l'un des personnages, mais qui en adopte le point de vue » (Genette, 189). Ainsi le lecteur « perçoit l'action filtrée par la conscience d'un des personnages, mais il la perçoit directement telle qu'elle affecte cette conscience en évitant la distance qu'entraîne inévitablement la narration rétrospective à la première personne » (Friedman).

Passons à présent du niveau des principes théoriques à celui de la phrase de James. Comme l'ont montré les divers exemples cités lors des commentaires d'extraits, sa structure est en grande partie déterminée par des oppositions binaires, "*the famous law of contraries*" : e.g. *old/young* ; *speech/silence* ; *die/live*, etc. En outre la phrase jamesienne se caractérise par une syntaxe d'enchâssements et d'incises ; et cette syntaxe que E. Labbé a qualifiée de « pantelante » à cause de ses multiples ajouts, excroissances et méandres labyrinthiques traduit effectivement un évident refus de la fluidité : la phrase de James laisse apparaître comme les anneaux dans l'aubier d'un arbre les diverses étapes de sa croissance et de sa formation. La langue est également très riche et parfois très complexe du fait de sa nature quelque peu hybride sinon cosmopolite : cf. l'opinion de T. S. Eliot précédemment citée. En fait, la langue de James, une variété d'anglais unique en son genre, traduit "*his ambition of appearing to write from a sort of detached equipoise in Mid-Atlantic*" (M. Swan).

Enfin, dernier point méritant d'être rappelé, l'art de James peut se définir selon Chase comme étant "*an assimilation of romance into the substance of the novel*", et à ce propos, il convient de rappeler la définition que James a donné du "*romance*" par opposition au réel :

« Le réel représente à mes yeux les choses que nous ne pouvons pas vraiment ne pas connaître, tôt ou tard, d'une façon ou d'une autre [...]. Le romanesque, d'autre part, représente les choses qu'avec toutes les facilités du monde [...] nous ne pouvons jamais connaître directement, les choses qui peuvent nous atteindre seulement à travers les beaux circuits et subterfuges de notre pensée et de notre désir ».

ODDS AND ENDS: FURTHER INSIGHTS INTO *THE BOSTONIANS*

Il s'agit d'observations diverses, qui n'ont pas été intégrées dans le cadre du cours et ont fait l'objet, d'une présentation succincte en fin de préparation (CAPES/Agrégation) : nous avons conservé leur forme originale et un peu décousue de « notes » (*jottings*) éclairant cependant quelques aspects intéressants du roman de H. James.

1) Intertext

"Books are influenced by books; books imitate, parody, transform other books" (R. Wellek & A. Warren)

The Bostonians is one of the few novels for which James acknowledged a literary source. Daudet's *Évangéliste* has given me the idea of this thing..." (James's letter to publisher, April 1883)

The novel has also been likened to a Greek tragedy – it bears some resemblance to *Antigone*: the heroine devotes her life to a cause and, like Antigone, she tangles with a male whose views on the subject are quite different.

Olive Chancellor: a composite of several Greek tragic heroines whom she resembles

2) Humor

L'aspect tragique – indéniablement présent dans l'œuvre – est parfois atténué par une veine comique, humoristique. H. James se situe dans la tradition du roman américain dépeignant « *a world of tumblers and mountebanks* », réserve de personnages hauts en couleur où M. Twain notamment a largement puisé.

Les Tarrants représentent deux de ces « *flat characters* », stéréotypes de personnages ambigus, comiques et pathétiques parce que tout entier dominés par une seule idée, une seule passion (briller en société, etc.). Humour dans la création des personnages (*characterization*) : « his smile as noiseless as a patent hinge » (88) ; « he was known as the irrepressible Tarrant » (92); "Selah still sported his immemorial waterproof" (354/381); humour verbal : "in report" (en rapport), 53; "fam'ly" (104); "prop'ty" (103)

Ces personnages permettent à James d'exercer la plus féroce des ironies :

« What she clung to...losing » 62 ;

"The young couple...foothold" 62 ;

"That was where the shoe pinched...Selah was slim" 65 ;

"Selah possessed as a substitute...the eloquence of the hand. The Greenstreets had never set much store on manual activity; they believed in the influence of the lips" 65

"his tone of high deliberation increased in proportion as the subject was trivial or domestic" 89

"the only refreshment *he* ever wanted was the sense that he was doing some good" 91;

"the irrepressible Tarrant...talked with the compositors till they set up his remarks by mistake" 92

On retrouve dans *The Bostonians*, cette peinture du charlatanisme « maladie d'enfance ou vice endémique de la démocratie qui atteindra son plein développement dans les œuvres de Melville et de M. Twain » (Béranger/ Gonnard)

D'autres personnages que les Tarrants se prêtent à une certaine forme d'humour ou d'ironie : Basil Ransom, 7/9 ; Mrs Farrinder, 28 ; O. Chancellor, 332/33 ; Miss Birdseye, 48 ; Newton, 166/175 ; les p. 366/368, etc.

3) La Pastorale

Thèse d'un critique américain (R. A. Morris, *Classical Vision and the American City*, 1973) : « James was groping towards the creation of an urban mythology, a means of imaginatively interpreting his increasingly technological era. » James "tried to invest the American urban scene with an aesthetic significance which in James's opinion, it sorely needed. What James was attempting was the idealization and enrichment of the urban environment" cf. his use in the novel of a strain of landscape imagery...its often stylistic contrasts of urban and rural landscape scenes.

As James proceeds to develop the scene in Central Park, a number of motifs and thematic concerns – originally introduced at earlier points in the narrative – begin to coalesce imaginatively for the first time. However, James's efforts to harmonize the city are strangely qualified by a satiric impulse:

“they went up to Central Park...gipsy” (282); “they emerged into...perspective” (295)
 “they knew that the Bostonians had been drawn thither... He had tasted the breath of nature” (298/99)
 “the ripeness of summer...eternal peace” (298)
 “He thought...turning” (310)
 “they wandered...patches of Arcady” (331)

One of James's major concerns was the effort to come to grips imaginatively with the difficult, anomic facts of contemporary American urban life→failure suggested by the continual tendency of his aesthetic and classical schemata to break down in the face of the intractable realities of urban life. It is clear from the novel that James's aesthetic needs often jarred with his artistic discretion and with his awareness of the inevitable falseness in any attempt to interpret the modern age through a historically remote classical ideal.

Importance des rythmes saisonniers, de l'opposition nature/ville, authentique/artificiel (cf. quand OC veut voir VT sous un arbre, elle le fait livrer chez elle : “She is going to have a tree in, next week ; she says she wants to see me sitting under a tree....she says this has more nature than most”). OC est associée à “l'intérieur” BR à l'“extérieur”: cf. “the grey walls of a sedentary winter”, 147; “safe when you are between four walls?”, 281.

“BR holds his visits with her in the freshness and openness of parks and the countryside; James sets his lovers' meetings in progressively more open and remote areas and on increasingly milder days, as if nature herself favors the courtship”.

But I won't go as far as a critic who claims that:

“Ransom does, as his metaphorical name suggests, rescue her from an unnatural union with Olive, brings back, one might almost say, the vernal to a recognition of her place in the rhythms of nature.”

Nous avons là un élément important de l'approche jamesienne, si l'on en croit la définition qu'en a donné T. S. Eliot « who effectively categorized the Jamesian focus as ‘a situation, a relation, an atmosphere’ ” (Galloway)

4) Witchcraft

Un thème important dans le roman – celui de la sorcellerie. James a écrit de nombreuses « *creepy stories* », des nouvelles essentiellement (Cf. *The Turn of the Screw*) qui le rattachent ainsi à la tradition littéraire illustrée par Hawthorne et associée depuis à la Nouvelle-Angleterre. Ce thème est annoncé dès la p. 7 : “What kind of meetings do you refer to? You speak as if it were a rendez-vous of witches on the Brocken⁵”

On peut relever dans le texte un grand nombre d'expressions appartenant à ce domaine; la plus fréquemment employée est le mot “*spell*” (10 ; 33 ; 121 ; 124 ; 171 ; 285) + “*effect*” (274 ; 275 ; 285) associé à “*charm/magic/influence*”→toutes ces données militent en faveur d'une interprétation faisant du roman une histoire d'envoûtement, de luttes entre puissances maléfiques, de lieux où s'exercent des influences occultes et où se jettent des sorts...

Importance du regard : “I shall be under the necessity of imparting much occult information...[OC] was subject to fits of tragic shyness, during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror” (10)

Verena est subjuguée par le regard d'Olive Chancellor : “It was this glance that was the beginning...”, 69. C'est également par le regard que Verena Tarrant, à son tour, séduit BR et communique avec lui : “This glance was a sufficient assurance...” (229) Réciprocité : “She felt his eyes on her face...individual” (332)

Importance de la Voix dans l'opération/effet du charme : Verena Tarrant est le simple relais d'une voix venue d'ailleurs : “some power outside” (49/69) ; “magic in it” (237) ; “mystic faculty” (50) ; “the tough subject from Mississippi were under the charm” (53/238) ; M. Pardon is “under the spell” (124)

Renversement de situation : “there was a spell upon her [Verena] as she listened” (285)

Tout ceci est, bien évidemment, à rattacher au thème de la **possession** maintes fois évoqué : VT est une jeune femme sous influence, celle d'OC d'abord (“the girl was now completely under her influence” 121/146) puis de Basil Ransom qui veut rompre le lien magique (“the magic”, 329) entre les deux femmes ; c'est moins une cour assidue qu'il mène qu'une opération de contre-envoûtement : “Why Basil Ransom had been deputed by fate to exorcise this spell...wizard's wand in her pocket” (332) ; “she felt it must be a magical touch”. BR

5. Brocken = a peak in the Harz Mountains in Germany. Brocken spectre: an atmospheric phenomenon seen by an observer between the sun and a cloudbank, in which his vastly enlarged shadow is projected on to the clouds and is often circled by rings of coloured lights.

possède un charme plus puissant que celui d'OC – il est lui-même le dépositaire de « l'esprit » des Cavaliers : cf. 164 : "He had a longish pedigree (it had flowered at one time with English royalists and cavaliers) and he seemed at moments to be...might come after him"). Verena est donc, au sens fort du terme, "séduite", c'est-à-dire victime d'un sort, d'un charme ensorcelant, c'est, du moins, l'interprétation que propose Olive Chancellor :

"Harassed and embittered as she was, OC...regarde her as the victim of an atrocious spell and reserved all her execration and contempt for the author of their common misery." (352)

"...he saw that Verena had not refused, but temporized, that the spell upon her – thanks to which he should still be able to rescue her – had been the knowledge that he was near." (382)

Cf. aussi l'interjection de Mrs Tarrant : "I don't know where your father's spirit is, to let him away." (383)

C'est bien là un affrontement d'esprits, de médiums cf. l'image finale de l'enveloppement p. 389 : "Ransom...thrust the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head, to conceal her face and identity."

À la lumière de tout ceci, on comprend mieux que certains critiques aient pu écrire que le roman "is a story about a girl who is manipulated psychologically, economically and physically. At the same time, the reader is made aware that he too is being manipulated..."

The Bostonians is an "inverted fairy-tale embodying the ancient parable of the corruption of innocence"; on y trouve "the romance of rescue", le preux chevalier, la pure jeune fille et la méchante sorcière:

"fairy-tale. It was still a part of the fairy-tale when..." (61); "She liked to think that Verena in her childhood, had known almost the extremity of poverty...past" (97); "The added luxuries in the little house...compensations" (151)

L'aspect que nous venons de mettre en lumière nous amène à reparler de la traditionnelle distinction entre « *the romance* » (histoire sentimentale, romanesque) et « *the novel* » (récit s'appuyant sur une réalité psycho-sociale) que James a d'ailleurs toujours récusée. Pourtant, à partir de *The Bostonians*, on peut définir l'art de James comme étant selon R. Chase : "*an assimilation of romance into the substance of the novel*" (125) :

"James was able to achieve supremely the 'circuit' of the real and the ideal, of action and fantasy, and thus to capture along with the realistic substance of the story the wonder and beauty of romance while at the same time rejecting the conventional devices of romance."

Cet art du roman pour James ne saurait procéder d'une opposition entre l'art et la vie. Tout le texte de James [*The Art of Fiction*] implique et explique la nécessité d'un rapport d'interférence, de réciprocité entre l'esthétique et le vécu :

« Le point essentiel, c'est d'être saturé par quelque chose, c'est-à-dire, d'une manière ou d'une autre par la vie ; et je choisis la forme de ma saturation. » La fiction relèvera d'une expérience « propre à capter dans la trame – immense toile d'araignée tendue dans la chambre de la conscience – les moindres particules de l'air » (M. Zérafra, 43)

5) Images, comparaisons, symboles

– Domaine religieux :

Vocabulaire important : priest/hood/ess ; heresy, 43 ; oath, 352 ; vow, 245 ; contrition/atone for, 345 ; apostasy, 337 ; to receive the vow of eternal maidenhood, 329 ; the path of self-sacrifice, 333; expiation, 388; a martyr, 34/156; regeneration, 105; saved, 120; apostlship, 233, etc.

« Priests – when they were real priests – never married...priesthood » (119)

Selah: "He looked like the priest of a religion" 88

Mrs Tarrant: "Priestess of maternity" (98)

– Veine antique/mythologique:

Golden Age/voice; Arcady ; naiad, 54 ; nymph, 193; Helen of Troy, 80; Plutarch, 89; Electra or Antigone, 121; Faustina, 153; the goddess Minerva, 204; Corinna, 228; Hypatia, 388.

– Culture française:

Napoleon Bonaparte, 41; Empress of France, 80; *gentilhomme de province*, Joan of Arc, 74/106/126; Marie Verneuil, 196; monarchical *émigré*, 179; Paris revolution, 388; *enfant de la balle*, 108 ; a female *Jacobin*, 7, etc.

– **Métaphore du livre/thème de la lecture :**

5 ; 32 ; 174 ; 192 ; 234 ; 308 ; 309 ; 323 ; 335

– **Symbolisme monétaire :**

Basil Ransom = a long sum in addition, 5 ; suffering = cash, 97 ; OC = a firm, 16 ; any undue expenditure of speech, 165 ; shopkeeping age, 168 ; the firm, 238 ; the sinews of war, 263 ; full of interest, 264 ; business (265)

– **Symbolisme animal :**

minx, 177 ; leonine ; gazelle ; goose ; bat, etc.

– **Lieux :**

Importance de l'opposition intérieur/extérieur : garden of life, 231 ; comparaisons renvoyant aux éléments (eau, air, etc.)

Villes : **Boston** : the city of reform, 8 ; a city of culture, 15. Riche passé culturel mais aussi, peut-être, atmosphère étriquée, puritaine ("unprevaricating city", 5) ; certain provincialisme (Back Bay, 17) ; hiérarchie sociale nettement marquée (31)

Topographie sociale de Boston : the Mill-dam, Beacon Street, State Street = aristocratie, "the exclusive set", 31

Charles Street: Olive Chancellor: Bourgeoisie

Cambridge = the academic suburb

Monadnoc Place: The tarrants, 190

A typical Bostonian must belong to a "set", 154. Société compassée, un peu dépassée (thés, réceptions, théâtre, musique) ; « Boston is less a place than a condition of consciousness »

New York : ville moderne, à la fois sordide et somptueuse (cf. 160) ; the sister city, 181 : espace, enthousiasme, rythme différent : "there was something in the air....the Boston earnestness", 251 vs. Boston: ville sur le déclin.

"It's New York trying to be like Boston" (222) → "to make New York society intellectual"

Marmion: se rattache à un passé légendaire: souffle de l'aventure maritime (Melville) ; quelque chose d'originel, de primitif, de pur ; hommes durs à la peine – marins – bien éloignés des préoccupations des autres cités. Proximité de la nature, des éléments → Arcady ; "no bolts and bars", 304 ; land of dreams, 310 et 331