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not thinking of some of its prospective passages as harsh. Here it is, no doubt, that one catches the charm of rigours that take place all in the aesthetic and the critical world. They would be invidious, would be cruel, if applied to personal interests, but they take on a high benignity as soon as the values concerned become values mainly for the mind. (if they happen to have also a trade-value this is pure superfluity and excess.) The thought of the acres of canvas and the tons of marble to be turned out into the cold world as the penalty of old error and the warrant for a clean slate ought to have drawn tears from the eyes. But these impending incidents affected me, in fact, on the spot, as quite radiant demonstrations. The Museum, in short, was going to be great, and in the geniality of the life to come such sacrifices, though resembling those of the funeral-pile of Sardanapalus, dwindled to nothing (p. 192).

Here James takes the view of the true artist, that if the end is beauty, all means are justified. There is a ruthlessness about his judgment, and a single-mindedness, which may show us why James was one of the few nineteenth-century novelists to appreciate that ruthless and single-minded type character, the American businessman.



HENRY JAMES JUVENILIA: A POEM AND A LETTER

By RICHARD CARY

I. *The Poem*

THE EXCRUCIATING interlude of Henry James's public agony and failure as a dramatist (1890-1895) has been extensively chronicled by his critics and biographers. No such absorption has marked another, much earlier literary misfire — his private failure as a poet. The cause of this neglect lies in (a) James's disinclination to show his callow compositions to family or friends, and (b) his quick and silent abandonment of the medium.

It comes as a surprise to most — even to seasoned James scholars — that the incipient prose-master ever tried his hand at meter. Looking backward, at age 70, he in fact took particular pains to deny it. "The muse was of course the muse of prose fiction — never for the briefest hour in my case the presumable, not to say the presuming, the much-taking-for-granted

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muse of rhyme, with whom I had never had, even in thought, the faintest flirtation."¹ Evidence to the contrary is slender but irrefutable. On May 28, 1860, Henry's mischievous younger brother Garth Wilkinson wrote to Thomas Sergeant Perry (1845-1928) from Geneva: "Harry has become an author I believe, for he keeps his door locked all day long, and a little while ago, I got a peep in his room, and saw some poetical looking manuscripts lying on the table, and himself looking in a most authorlike way."² Perry himself noted that during the James family stay abroad in 1859-1860 "H. J. and I had kept up a lively correspondence. Most unfortunately all his letters, which I had faithfully preserved, were destroyed during one of my absences in Europe, and among them a poem, probably the only thing of the kind he ever tried, a short narrative in the manner of Tennyson's 'Dora.'"³

A third testimonial — the most vital because it may be the only poem by James to move beyond the manuscript stage — has newly come to light among the surviving Perry papers. James and Perry first met in 1858 when the Jameses came to live in Newport, Rhode Island, Perry's native town. The boys, fifteen and thirteen respectively, walked, talked, attended church, and read in the library together, discovering mutualities that lasted their lifetime. In 1914 James spoke warmly of the old Newport days and "Thomas Sergeant Perry, superexcellent and all-reading, all-engulfing friend of those days and still, sole survivor, of these."⁴ Thus, when James learned in 1873 that Perry was soon to marry Lilla Cabot, daughter of the distinguished Boston surgeon Samuel Cabot, James could respond in facetious full confidence on his friend's choice: "Congratulate you I do most heartily, and I even regard Miss Cabot as a victim whose lot has some alleviations. Give her my kindest

1 Henry James, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (New York, 1914), 342-343.

2 Virginia Harlow, *Thomas Sergeant Perry: A Biography* (Durham, N.C., 1950), 249. When James discovered this small betrayal he carefully evaded — behind a screen of protective irony and grandiloquence — any direct implication with verse: "A fearful vengeance awaits Wilkie's foolhardy imprudence in disclosing, as he did, my secret employment. You ask upon what style of work I am employed. I may reply that to no style am I a stranger, there is none which has not been adorned by the magic of my touch. I shall be most happy to send you fifty copies of each work, the payment of which can await my return" (Harlow, 255).

3 Percy Lubbock, editor, *Letters of Henry James* (New York, 1920), I, 8.

4 James, 108.

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regards and tell her I have known you from childhood and when I sported with you on the village green, never dreamed that you were marked out for so brilliant a destiny I know Miss Cabot but slightly: but you'll not think me too adventurous if I say that I suspect that you will have a wife at once very clever and very devoted. You are in good hands."⁵

And indeed he was. Lilla Cabot Perry (1848-1933) was an attractive, vivacious, talented consort capable of upholding her own station against the formidable social and intellectual credentials of her husband. A charming hostess, she entertained an eminent array of friends at their permanent home in the Back Bay of Boston, at their summer cottage in Hancock, New Hampshire, and at their several temporary residences during four long sojourns in Europe.⁶ A niece of James Russell Lowell, she had ready access to the intelligentsia of Concord and Cambridge. Her literary accomplishment includes translations of Turgenev and Greek poetry, in addition to three volumes of original verse. A painter of no small competence, her portraits and landscapes in the Impressionistic manner of Monet and Pissarro are still subjects of special exhibit.

At sporadic intervals in both New England and old Europe Henry James came to know her better and to realize the accuracy of his characterization. He evinced more than common interest in her verses, applauding them as "full of feeling, force and felicity."⁷ After the shattering crisis of his commitment to British citizenship, it was to Lilla Perry that he dispatched a lengthy exposition of his motivations.⁸ So it does not strike as unlikely that she came to possess — by what means is regrettably unknown — the text of an untitled early poem by this trustful, admiring friend. In the Colby collection of Henry James memorabilia is a white envelope across the face of which Mrs. Perry wrote in ink: "Youthful poem of Harry James." Inside are two yellowing white sheets (4½ x 5¾) upon which Mrs. Perry transcribed in pencil the following seven stanzas:

⁵ Harlow, 289-290.

⁶ One of the Perrys' guest books, begun in 1904 and intermittently maintained thereafter, contains these signatures among numerous others: John LaFarge, James M. Peirce, Oliver Hazard Perry, Joseph E. Grew, William James, William Lyon Phelps, Claude Monet, Isabella S. Gardner, Henry James, James F. Rhodes, William Dean Howells, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Haven Schaffer, Hervey Allen, Percy MacKaye, Josephine Peabody.

⁷ John T. Morse, Jr., *Thomas Sergeant Perry: A Memoir* (Boston, 1929), 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-54.

*I cannot see the truth of love
I cannot feel the hope of life
In all this gross unequal strife
Of man below and God above.*

*The hollow sofa where she lay
The couch beneath the spreading spruce
The phantoms of exhausted use
All lead my belief the other way.*

*I hoped for good that never came
I mourned for ill that never went
I cursed the maledictions sent
To make my blessings but a name.*

*When life was weak and death was strong
And all our issues choked with clouds
When all our hopes lay out in shrouds
The victims of this bitter wrong*

*When loving hearts were worse than none
When it was cruel to be kind
When all the majesty of mind
Had stumbled reeling from its throne.*

*When faith could neither give nor take
[This line is blank in the manuscript]
When joining hands about her bed
Could not a magic circle make,*

*I could not see the truth of love
I could not feel the hope of life
In all that gross unequal strife
Of man below and God above.*

One wonders, did James some time show Mrs. Perry a script of this boyish effusion, did he perhaps recite it once (more or less mordantly) and she reproduced it from memory, or did she copy it from an original among her husband's papers which

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were subsequently destroyed? The last speculation seems the least tenable since this poem bears no resemblance to Tennyson's "Dora," although it is possible that Perry may have forgotten this second flight into poesy. At any rate, Mrs. Perry's ascription of the lines to "Harry" James leaves no doubt about *her* knowledge of their origin. One would hazard that they are a product of the Newport era. They resound with just the right mixture of adolescent bleakness, alienation, and melodrama.

II. *The Letter*

Henry James could not have been much past six years old when he addressed this outrageously captivating message to Katharine Barber James Prince (1834-1890), youngest daughter of his father's half brother, the Reverend William James. To judge from content, the date may well be assigned to the Christmas season of 1849, or conceivably 1850. Recalling the austere photographs and the mandarin style of the mature Henry prompts an inevitable smile — how far this spunky little boy traveled! And how prophetically ironic is his desire for a martial weapon now in view of the "horrid . . . obscure hurt" that debarred him from enlistment in the Civil War. "Billy" is his brother William, the philosopher, older by one year.

Dear cous in

Kitty I shall be very

glad to draw 12 animals

for you.

I should like more than

anythin a good strong

tin sword.

Billy wan a bottle of seltzer

with love harry⁹

⁹ The poem is the gift of Miss Margaret Perry; the letter, of Dr. J. Seelye Bixler. Copyright is retained by Mr. Alexander R. James, who graciously granted permission to publish them.

I can come in
Kitty & shall be very
glad to draw 12 animals
for you.

I should like more than
anything a good strong
tin sword.
Billy want a bottle of seltzer
with love Harry