March 1975

Stalking the Beast: Egomania and Redemptive Suffering in James's "Major Phase"

Sara S. Chapman

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 11, no.1, March 1975, p.50-66

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mfkelly@colby.edu.
One of the conspicuously absent chapters in the steadily increasing volume of commentary on the career of Henry James derives from critics’ failure to appreciate his humanistic dimension, especially in what readers since Matthiessen have referred to as “The Major Phase.” James is usually believed to have become increasingly more absorbed by techniques of fiction-writing than by the lives about which he wrote. Many readers have thought him irreparably disillusioned by his last visit to America in 1904-05 and by the human race in general in the period immediately preceding World War I. Even more explicitly, he is said by no less authoritative a reader than Leon Edel to have possessed at the last a “barely concealed sacred rage,” to have “set aside his urbanity and good humor and howled like Lear” in the all-consuming power of his despair.  


Nothing could be further from the truth about James’s best short fiction in the last years than the above description. Admittedly, these stories are often about lives which have been limited and are full of sadness. More importantly, however, they are stories whose characters grow to possess great humanistic perception. They are stories both hopeful and affirmative, for each takes its protagonist to spiritual salvation by showing him the redemptive power of love, its strength to break the shackles of egotism. By 1903, when he published “The Beast in the Jungle,” James’s vision had so matured, both culturally and humanistically, that he could be most concerned only with
the profoundly moving experience of man's tragic failures of imagination and of feeling. Yet — and here is the crucial point — he could also recognize and affirm a hope in the individual's humanistic identification with others through love. The redemptive power of human love is beautifully projected in three stories more and more widely recognized as James's best work in short fiction in the 20th century: "The Beast in the Jungle," "The Jolly Corner," and "The Bench of Desolation."2

Students of modern literature generally will recognize a situation in careful study of these stories which is increasingly germane to their reading of much more recent fiction and drama. It becomes less possible almost daily to speak of the "hero" in modern literature and more necessary to think instead of what I call (in literature of any affirmative dimension) the "humanistic center." I suggest the widespread misreading of James's late short fiction derives in part from the modern reader's reluctance to abandon the concept of hero in a writer of James's vintage. He expects to find in James, at least among his admirable characters, one who is capable of recognizing and overcoming his own weakness by acting decisively to correct it.3 James has been unjustly chastised for his supposed failure to provide men of true tragic dimension, heroic characters, and this "failure" has earned him such adjectives as "frivolous" and "superficial." I contend, rather, that in the protagonists of these three late, great stories he did create men of tragic and profound greatness. They are, however, men of predictable human limitations whose extraordinariness lies in their courageous — and successful — quests to know the truths of their own natures. Their heroism lies in their painful examination of their most basic selves, in confrontation of the beasts which lurk within. The protagonist — or humanistic center — of each story seems on superficial reading to

2 Texts for these stories are from The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), XI and XII. All subsequent references to the stories are by volume and page number in this edition.

3 A fourth tale, James's last published short fiction, might well have been included in this study. A careful reading of "A Round of Visits" completed with "The Bench of Desolation" in 1916 helps to substantiate my thesis. See my study of that story, "The Obsession of Ego in Henry James's 'A Round of Visits,'" Arizona Quarterly, XXIX (Summer 1973), 120-138.

have succumbed miserably to human weakness, characteristic­ally manifest in James's fiction as egomania. Closer reading will reveal, however, that each is heroic in suffering toward an ultimate recognition of his ego-prison and in escape from it. Recognizing the truth of this statement changes profoundly the modern reader's assessment of James: it renders James perceptive and humane rather than superficial and aesthetically detached. It reveals a humanistic dimension of James's mind and art which is unqualifiedly great.

The Beast in the Jungle

Every reader of James is familiar with plot in "The Beast in the Jungle": how poor Marcher waits out his life expecting something extraordinary to happen to him and how in the process he is blind to experience, most tragically to the love of May Bartram. This love he recognizes only after her death as the thing which could have saved him from the beast of his own egotistic preoccupations. What readers of the story have failed to see, however, is the careful way James prepares us for an ending which is profoundly affirmative rather than disillu­sioned (as is usually believed), in Marcher's ultimate recogni­tion of self — his acquisition of tragic knowledge through suffering, which he himself images as his "doom": "One's doom... was never baffled, and on the day she had told him that his own had come down she had seen him but stupidly stare at the escape she offered him" (XI, 401). It is not too much to claim that this story is affirmative in the same way classical tragedy is: Marcher collapses upon the grave of May Bartram at the moment he achieves the light of truth, just as Oedipus, for example, really sees only at the moment of his blindness. Like heroes of classical tragedy, Marcher learns humility through suffering and his moment of truth is as pro­foundly moving.

James carefully prepares us for the affirmative power of his conclusion. Marcher's appalling egotism is, of course, ap­parent from the first: though he has uncharacteristically shared his secret with May before the fictional present of the story, he barely remembers her. Ironically, he notices that she has aged markedly in the ten years since their first meeting, dimly under-
standing that this may owe to her being at Weatherend "on harder terms than any one; she was there as a consequence of things suffered" (p. 353). When he finds that she remembers his secret, he is irrational in his idea of this second meeting: "No wonder they couldn’t have met as if nothing had happened," he concludes (p. 358). He thinks immediately of profit for himself in having met her a second time.

Many readers have noted that the movement of the story is in the dynamics of the May-Marcher relationship but have failed to understand that it is this vital tension which engenders the affirmative conclusion of the tale. The hasty reader misses the gentle ironies of their first conversation, where May reveals her awareness of Marcher’s egotism, which she at this point regards as merely pathetic, even faintly humorous. She says his account of the secret had been “simple.” When he challenges her adjective, she counters ironically that it had been simple “because I seemed, as you spoke, to understand it” (p. 359). In this early stage of their relationship, when she has not begun to fathom the depths of Marcher’s egotism, May can ask quite innocently, “Is it something you’re merely to suffer?” When he responds by describing an event which may annihilate him, “possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences” (p. 360), May quite characteristically concludes that the thing that is to happen will be his falling in love. This scene beautifully establishes the humanistic center of the story in May’s limitless capacity to give love and Marcher’s tragic failure to return it.

James’s first reference to this story in the Notebook came in 1895 in a sketch bearing resemblance to the published version but also to “The Bench of Desolation.”4 His idea was of a “man who has renounced his ambition, the dream of his youth . . . genius, talent . . . exchanged it for something different, inferior, but mercenary and worldly” (Notebooks, p. 183). In the same entry he shows that even the germ of his story had a humanistically affirmative center: “What I wanted not to let slip altogether was simply some reminder of the beauty, the little tragedy, attached to the situation of the man of genius.

who, in some accursed hour of his youth, has bartered away the fondest vision of that youth and lives ever afterwards in the shadow of the bitterness of the regret . . . . Then he recovers some of his lost joy in intercourse with some person, some woman, who knows what that lost self was, in whom it still lives a little. *This intercourse is his real life*” (underlining my own: *Notebooks*, p. 184). In his last note for the story, in 1901, he gives a sketch to which he is remarkably faithful in the story; his idea had matured and his emphasis is upon the woman’s love—the humanistic dimension—and the man’s recognition of it after her death, his moment of truth (see *Notebooks*, p. 311).

Re-read with proper understanding of James’s fundamentally affirmative intent, the story develops around May’s increasingly ironic references to Marcher’s ego-prison. When she says that Marcher’s obsession may “correspond to some possible reality,” she is acknowledging awareness of what could—and ultimately does—happen to him, but she has not yet accepted its inevitability. Chapter II is important for the development of Marcher’s impenetrable ego and for the illusion of time’s passing which brings the two characters to a point from which there is no return in May’s recognition of that ego. Near the end of II she calmly acknowledges, “I’m more sure than ever my curiosity, as you call it, will be but too well repaid” (p. 371). She has already given up hope that he can disengage himself from himself and even tells him, in his ignorance of her carefully concealed perception, “Considering what the danger is, . . . I’m bound to say I don’t think your attitude could well be surpassed” (p. 372). An important exchange about fear and heroism follows, which illumines the heroism James assigns to Marcher and in the later stories to Spencer Brydon and Herbert Dodd.

James’s ironic treatment of the theme of suffering as necessary to human experience in subsequent chapters of the story is well known: it culminates in Marcher’s late, desperate exhortation, “Then tell me if I shall consciously suffer” (p. 384). May, who now knows the nature of the “beast,” replies with confidence. “Never!” Marcher can think of nothing better than that, and May concludes their discussion by asking simply, “You think nothing is better?” Clearly, it has become neces-
sary for May to believe that Marcher can never suffer because he can never love. Yet, at their last meeting she tells him, "The door's open. . . . It's never too late" (p. 385). His failure then to comprehend her meaning is, for her, the thing that was to happen. May's last efforts are to protect Marcher from knowledge of himself which she has carried for years, knowledge which would induce the suffering he has so dreaded. Fortunately, she dies without seeing him experience it.

Thus we reach a crucial point in my case for profound humanism in "The Beast in the Jungle." Reputable critics have charged that Marcher does not renounce his ego until too late for his redemption and that his climactic experience is not redemptive because it comes through "the disrespect of chance, the insolence of accident," rather than through any "effort of thought" expended by Marcher himself (p. 401). To the first charge I reply that Marcher is all but destroyed by the terrible knowledge of his egotism, but that he is, nevertheless, redeemed by that knowledge: he is profoundly, inevitably changed by it. The end of the tale is not "happy," but it is hopeful, ennobling, in its insistence that even so monomaniacal a character as Marcher can be made to see the terrible prison of egotism and the redemptive power of suffering and love. I agree with Vaid that "after such knowledge there can be no rest" (Technique, p. 224), but when he insists that James's central theme is "the unlived life," I can only ask whether the essential affirmation of Marcher's experience is not clearly more vital to James's meaning. Marcher's moment of tragic knowledge is the climax of emotional tension toward which James has consistently built.

To the second charge cited above I say that "the disrespect of chance, the insolence of accident" do not prevent a truly redemptive experience. Cannot one reach his moment of truth as a result of events over which he has no direct control—especially if, as in this case, the "accident" is clearly ironic? Marcher sees the ravaged countenance of a suffering man in the cemetery by chance, but he sees it—really—only after he has himself suffered. Granted, his suffering is not as intense.

5 For the fullest presentation of these charges, see Krishna Baldev Vaid, Technique in the Tales of Henry James (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 223-232, especially 230-231.
as it becomes when he understands the difference between his own grief and the stranger’s. More to the point, Marcher has certainly sought the redemptive knowledge he gains in this scene. Blinded by egotism, he simply has not been able to find it. As Vaid has somewhat paradoxically suggested, at this point “the anti-hero, instead of remaining a mere pathetic figure, becomes a tragic hero, arousing pity and terror because of the single-mindedness with which he has looked forward to his destiny and the intensity with which he experiences his doom” (Technique, p. 231).

Allen Tate has objected to James’s technique in the story, finding that the grief-stricken stranger, the “accident,” is introduced too suddenly and “could better be described as deus ex machina.” Must we object to his sudden appearance? Even in realistic fiction of James’s special variety (where plot had by 1900 become increasingly insignificant), one need not avoid the special power of allegorical or obviously symbolic characters and details. I suggest that the sudden appearance of the mourner is further evidence of James’s movement throughout the story toward a humanistically affirmative conclusion in which Marcher’s courageous examination of his life is heroic.

The Jolly Corner

In this familiar story, Spencer Brydon returns to America after 33 years abroad to convert certain real estate into rental property. Though expecting dramatic change, he is not prepared for the horror which business enterprise—American materialism—has wrought in New York. Critics have seen this story in two major contexts: as one of James’s “American tales,” since it is most condemnatory of America, appearing to reflect what many have mistakenly taken to be James’s late, total disillusionment with his homeland, and as one of James’s stories of the supernatural, since most of it concerns Brydon’s stalking the person he might have been if he’d remained in America. I suggest that, although these elements are important, they are mainly functional to James’s greater interest in producing the humanistic affirmation of his conclusion. Whatever horror Brydon and Alice Staverton discover in the “jungle”

of New York and whatever the intensity of Brydon's obsession to know the man he might in America have been, these problems are, in fact, overcome by the redemptive purgation of egotism Brydon experiences and by the mutual love of Brydon and Alice, so beautifully presented in the closing scene.

As in "The Beast in the Jungle," James carefully prepares us for his protagonist's ultimate moment of truth, the point to which the story, for all its richness, ultimately builds. Egotism is again the villain. In the opening paragraph Brydon admits that even if he could answer people's questions about his responses to New York, "My thoughts would still be almost altogether about something that concerns only myself" (XII, 193). He reveals immediately, too, that his early response to Alice is to see her as a "disposition and ... resource, a comfort and support" (p. 193). "Failing other sweeteness, she was a sufficient reward of his effort" to be friendly (p. 197).

There is, of course, great opportunity (which others have taken) to draw lengthy comparisons between the protagonists of this story and Marcher and May Bartram. The similarities are many, both superficial and profound, all easily accessible to careful readers. Not so obvious among them is Alice's early, ironic perception of Brydon's egotism as revealed in his pride in a newly discovered but rapidly developing talent for business. At first mention of this detail, James writes, "it amused ... even more Alice Staverton, though perhaps charming her perceptibly less" than Brydon (p. 196). He continues, "She had afterward said to Brydon (though to a slightly greater effect of irony) that he had clearly for too many years neglected a real gift. If he had but stayed at home he would have anticipated the inventor of the skyscraper" (p. 197). Like May, Alice early perceives her friend's egotism with a gentle but humane irony, which does not mitigate her capacity to love him.

Brydon understands his own egotism much more clearly than does Marcher; he acknowledges it early and in fact thinks of himself so obsessively that his only antagonist is an alter ego whom he passionately desires to meet! James's calculated irony is clear when Brydon admits to Alice, "It was mere vain egotism, and it was, moreover, if she liked, a morbid obsession. He found all things come back to the question of what he
personally might have been, how he might have led his life and ‘turned out,’ if he had not so, at the outset, given it up” (p. 203). For Brydon, America has no interest except in this potential recognition of himself. He does, of course, ultimately see this self and is reassured that, despite his weaknesses, he is “better” than what he would in America have become.

Throughout the story the reader recognizes Alice’s love for Brydon. Their relationship is not, however, as dynamically vital as the May-Marcher affair in the earlier story. More central is Brydon’s obsession to hunt out and confront his other self. Alice secretly watches his struggle and, in a series of dreams, divines his progress toward the purgative confrontation near the end. James masterfully controls language in the Brydon-Alice scenes during this period, revealing levels of awareness in each through irony. For example, Brydon asks her, “Do you believe then — too dreadfully — that I am as good as I might ever have been?” ‘Oh no! Far from it! . . . But I don’t care,’ she smile[s]. ‘You mean I’m good enough?’” he asks. Exasperated, she retorts, “Oh you don’t care either — but very differently: you don’t care for anything but yourself.” Failing totally to understand, Brydon answers with reference only to the other self: “He isn’t myself. He’s just so totally the other person” (p. 206).

James carefully prepares us for Brydon’s heroism by moving him through elaborate patterns of resolution, courage, fear, defeat, and regained resolution as Brydon stalks the beast, who he believes lurks within his now-empty ancestral home. This movement, recalling a similar but less vital fear and courage pattern in “The Beast in the Jungle,” is set as Brydon begins to analyze his attitudes (pp. 210-211). He thinks first that he may frighten the other “person”! His intellectual and emotional development is easily traced from this point: he takes pride in the courage of the “presence” to confront him and would be shamed if it lacked such courage, yet he fears for his own life; he desires “above all, to move, to act, to charge somehow and upon something — to show himself . . . that he is not afraid” (p. 214); he is proud of his resistance to terror.

7 “The Jolly Corner” is James’s fullest treatment in his 112 tales of this theme of what it would mean to have lived one’s life in America. The theme is pervasive, however, and is especially prominent in “A Round of Visits” (see footnote 2).
On the night he sees his other self he is alternately paralyzed by fear and fiercely courageous, indulging a verbal agony worthy of Hamlet: "Oh to have this consciousness was to think — and to think . . . was, with the lapping moments, not to have acted! Not to have acted — that was the misery and the pang — was even still not to act; was in fact all to feel the thing in another, in a new and terrible way" (p. 218). Standing before the closed door, his responses are even more complex, for he prolongs the moment (almost as to savor it), which has so irresistibly attracted him. Finally, he decides to spare his other self the confrontation which is so near: he will permit them both to rest. Significantly, this decision emerges from his own restraint. It is made on his terms, for, as he says, "You affect me as by an appeal positively for pity: you convince me that for reasons rigid and sublime — what do I know? — we both of us should have suffered" (p. 219).

To emphasize Brydon's traumatic struggle, James repeats the pattern. Brydon leaves the scene, then decides he must go back, both to test his courage and to see if the door is now open, so he will know whether he can leave the house without fear. Returning, he cannot really look, however, for he knows that "should he see the door open, it would all too abjectly be the end of him" (p. 222). He succumbs to terror and tries to escape. A tremendous intellectual conflict with his fear ensues, which, to his ever-lasting credit, Brydon both wages and survives. He then sees in the entry-way "something all unnatural and dreadful, but to advance upon which was the condition for him either of liberation or of supreme defeat" (p. 224). He heroically stares down the beast: it cannot show its face at first, though moments later, with "the betrayal of a braver purpose," it does so (p. 225). Brydon looks long and searchingly into its ravaged countenance and then faints dead away. Only later, knowing Alice's love for him as either personality, can Brydon unravel what he has seen and felt. Somewhat reassured about his life as he has lived it, he can accept only with great difficulty the idea that he could ever have become the monster both he and Alice have so courageously looked upon.

As Edel has suggested, James apparently conceived and
wrote "The Jolly Corner" very quickly. In a Notebooks entry for 1914, six years after the story was published, James wrote that its "most intimate idea" was the hero's turning the tables on a ghost "otherwise qualified to appall him; and thereby winning a sort of victory by . . . the evidence that this personage or presence was more overwhelmingly affected by him than he by it" (Notebooks, p. 367). Although this late, brief reference gives no evidence of an essentially humanistic germ in James's idea for the story, we are obligated to speculate about what James meant in bringing Brydon so tortuously to the moment when he could comprehend the monster of his alter ego. What does Brydon so painfully achieve but a redemptive purgation of egotism "in the flesh," so to speak? Seeing his other self is a great spiritual victory for Brydon, heroically earned, because he has enabled himself to see, perhaps more clearly than he ever could have otherwise, the depths of his own character and of Alice's love for him. His capacity to respond to that love, shown in one of the tenderest love scenes in all James's fiction, will enable him to remain free of the shackles of egotism which have so limited his life in the past. Alienated, fragmented as Brydon has always lived, his quest to know his complete identity is, nevertheless, productive. That, together with his newly discovered capacity to love, provides the humanistic affirmation James built toward throughout the story.

The Bench of Desolation

"The Bench of Desolation" was the last story James wrote. Completed too late for inclusion in the famous New York Edition of his works (1907-09), it appeared in his last collection of stories, The Finer Grain, published in 1910. Its relative obscurity must be attributed in large part to its exclusion from the New York Edition. In his collection of James's tales, Edel dismisses this story by remarking simply that it "belongs to a series having its origin in the idea of 'too late'" (XII, 10). He is equally superficial in the James biography, referring to it only as "a long tale of passivity and despair" (The Master, p. 443). As careful readers of the story will attest, it deserves much more attention: Vaid has called it "the last and perhaps

---

best omniscient narrator nouvelle” James wrote.9

The relevance of this story to a study of James’s late, pro­found humanism is interestingly suggested by his *Notebooks* entry for it in 1908 (pp. 330-332). The story developed from an anecdote told James by a friend, but did not, in its final form, take the focus sketched in the *Notebooks*, where his in­terest is mainly in the woman of the story — in the way she lives to provide financially for the man in later life. As the editors suggest, however, “James followed his sketched plot very closely to produce another variation on the theme of suffering” (p. 332).

The plot concerns Herbert Dodd, who, in his youth, pro­poses marriage to Kate Cookham. For reasons directly trace­able to his own crochety egotism, he then changes his mind. She threatens a breach of promise suit, which proves much later to have been groundless, and extorts from him 270 pounds. He is bitter and impoverished, but finally marries Nan Drury. After several years, she and their two children die. Dodd is then completely bankrupt — financially, emotionally, intel­lectually. Finally, Kate Cookham reappears with more than 1260 pounds which she wants to give Dodd, along with assurance of her continuing love for him. The story cannot end “happily,” but it does bring the two of them together in the dignity of quiet mutual suffering and shows each capable of forgiveness.

Summarizing James is, of course, travesty, for his plots are second in importance to his characterizations, especially in his late work, and never lend themselves easily to restatement. “The Bench of Desolation” is one of his most subtle and most difficult stories. It plays out the theme of suffering in a minor key. Part of its complexity derives from the relationship of the narrator to the protagonist, Dodd. That Dodd is weaker than either Marcher or Brydon is witnessed by his frequent indulgence of a considerable capacity to weep uncontrollably. He is at the same time blindly egotistical, and we feel through­out the story that James (or his omniscient narrator) really does not like Dodd, though he does assign him some redeeming strengths, if only of understanding, at the end. The quality of

9 See Vaid’s discussion of the story in *Technique in the Tales of Henry James*, 173-191. He is the first critic to treat the story with any thorough­ness, though his concern is mainly with James’s technical mastery.
Dodd's egotism is illustrated by an early passage where he wonders whether his face has revealed his hatred of Kate: "Probably not at all; no man's face could express that immense amount; especially the fair, refined, intellectual, gentleman-like face which had had . . . so much to do with the enormous fancy she had originally taken to him" (XII, 371). Later, thinking desperately of his situation in Kate's suit, he wonders, "Who should be assured against coarse usage if a man of his really elegant, perhaps in fact a trifle over-refined or 'effete' appearance, his absolutely gentleman-like type, couldn't be?" (p. 375).

Dodd's egotism is marvelously complicated by an almost masochistic clarity in vision of himself: "He knew what he was, in a dismal, down-trodden sphere enough — the lean young proprietor of an old business that had itself rather shrivelled with age than ever grown fat . . . . Thus, from as far back as he could remember, there had been things all round him that he suffered from when other people didn't; and he had kept most of his suffering to himself — which had taught him . . . how to suffer and how almost to like to" (p. 374). To enjoy suffering is an emotional indulgence which is in James a sign of moral weakness. Dodd's kind of pain, significantly, lacks the transforming power of genuine suffering in the other stories. Nevertheless, James anatomizes it with the precision of a surgeon. Dodd's greatest talent is for self-pity. Like Marcher, he perceives his "doom," though it will be suffered "in the almost redeeming light . . . that it would all have been because he was, comparatively, too aristocratic" for Kate Cookham. James's handling of Dodd's peculiar suffering is perhaps best seen when Dodd decides that, come what may, he can only be aristocratic and that "Of course he should exquisitely suffer — but when hadn't he exquisitely suffered? How was he going to get through life by any arrangement without that?" (p. 376). Great irony is clear in that Dodd, like Marcher, does not know the meaning of real suffering. And, though he moves toward the understanding Marcher reaches, he never achieves it as profoundly.

There is also in Dodd a revealed attitude toward sexuality found nowhere else in James's short fiction which contributes to the reader's reluctance to respond to him sympathetically.
He claims that many women have made love to him, but that he has cared little for them. His perception of the relationships with Kate and later with Nan Drury are pathetic in his disgust at the women's gestures and his grotesque intellectualizing of his own passion. He speaks coldly of Kate's having made "the straightest and most unabashed love to him" and of Nan, "to whom he was now at last . . . going to make love, absolutely unreserved and abandoned, absolutely reckless and romantic love, a refuge from poisonous reality, as hard as ever he might . . . All that blighted summer, with Nan . . . he gave himself up to the reaction of intimacy with the kind of woman, at least, that he liked." He remembers how "Nan began to take off and fold up and put away in her pocket her pretty, dotty, becoming veil; as under the logic of his having so tremendously ceased . . . to be engaged to another woman" (p. 377).10 The pathos of Dodd's love-making with Nan is clearly stated in his knowing, "They could afterward have dated it, their full clutch of . . . freedom and the bliss of their having so little henceforth to consider save their impotence, their poverty, their ruin" (p. 378).11

After Nan's death, the remainder of the story may be seen in two parts: first, Dodd's peculiar state of suspension in misery—his apprehension of it and flickering desire to understand his complicity in causing it, and, finally, the complexity of his grappling with the fact of Kate Cookham's return. The real strength of the story is in the intensity of focus and the subtlety of insight James achieves in these developments. Dodd fascinatedly watches himself "in a cold lucidity, do punctually and necessarily each of the deplorable things that were inconsistent with his keeping afloat" (p. 384). It is inevitable that

10 A measure of James's intent in these details of Dodd's sexuality can be taken by comparing them with the tenderness of May's love for Marcher or with the reciprocated love of Brydon and Alice Staverton in the last scene of "The Jolly Corner."11 As Vaid has noted, James is rarely "scene" in this story, as he is in "The Beast in the Jungle" and "The Jolly Corner." He depends, rather, upon elaborate images, "a poetical compression to express the duration and intensity of Herbert Dodd's suffering" (Technique, 152). One of the best examples of this "compression" comes in Dodd's ultimate sexual perception of his wife: he sees "Nan's flat infelicities, which for the most part kept no pace with the years or with change, but only shook like hard peas in a child's rattle, the same peas always, of course, so long as the rattle didn't split open with usage or from somebody's act of irritation. They represented . . . her intellectual alternative, the one that didn't merely consist in her preparing herself for his putting his arm round her waist" (382-383).
he suffer. He cultivates ignorance of his own motives and actions and shields himself from thoughts of the future. His tragedy is clearly failure of imagination in crisis, for "there was nothing at all near home . . . for his imagination, numb and stiff from its long chill, to begin to play with" (p. 386). This failure is reaffirmed just prior to James's introduction of a new and all-important element into Dodd's awareness. He has begun to contemplate seriously whether he might have acted more imaginatively, more courageously, to prevent the disasters which followed Kate's extortion of the money. He has never really considered this possibility and can do it now only by dredging up from the very depths of his being a latent desire to understand and, perhaps, to justify his life. His complete passivity ends on this important note: "That he hadn't made sure of what might and what mightn't have been done to him, that he had been too afraid — had the proposition a possible bearing on his present apprehension of things? To reply indeed he would have had to be able to say what his present apprehension of things, left to itself, amounted to; an uninspiring effort indeed he judged it, sunk to so poor a pitch was his material of thought — though it might at last have been the feat he sought to perform" (underlining my own; p. 387).

This passage offers the illusive thread which Dodd may grasp to save himself. It is a tentative suggestion that he wants to act to understand his responsibility in the tragic events of the past. Even in a character as limited and unattractive as this, James says, lies the germ of noble action, the will to find the truth and act upon it.

Kate's return is developed by James's showing that she has suffered no similar failure of imagination or courage. Dodd perceives that "she had had a life, a career, a history, something that her present waiting air and nervous consciousness couldn't prevent his noting there as a deeply latent assurance" (p. 392). What follows is a terribly complex series of attitudes in Dodd: he is attracted to her beauty and refinement, but very

12 At this point (384-387), Dodd and "The Bench of Desolation" invite illuminating comparison with Tommy Wilhelm and Saul Bellow's novella *Seize the Day*. Like Wilhelm, Dodd fails to "seize the day." Both men have masochistic pleasure in the intensity and inevitability of their suffering and finally realize their complicity in it because of egotism. As will be shown below, Dodd, like Wilhelm achieves a kind of redemption through identification with others' suffering.
suspicious, thinking she has come to pity him; he will provide no opportunity for that, wishing a “social relation” with her as an “adventure,” yet desiring mainly to keep himself “remarkable . . . imperturbable . . . impenetrable . . . incomparable.” James’s precision here is amazing: “Dodd didn’t — and this assuredly was wondrous enough — want to do anything worse to her than let her flounder; but he was willing to do that so long as it mightn’t prevent his seeing . . . where he was” (p. 396). He is mean in calculated reminders of the past, outwardly restrained, inwardly tumultuous. James so thoroughly anatomizes Dodd’s egotism that, despite his loss, the reader sympathizes much more with Kate for her sensitivity than with Dodd.

A second tearful meeting and a week’s tense separation follow, during which Dodd strives desperately for discipline, restraint, and sincerity. He decides not to return to Kate’s hotel, though he knows she loves him. He will let her take the money and go. Meanwhile, he has begun to understand something of the depth and beauty of her love. James’s previous ironic treatment of Dodd is dropped at this point: “There beat on Dodd this strange and other, this so prodigiously different beautiful and dreadful truth that no far remembrance and no abiding ache of his own could wholly falsify” (p. 409). His memory of the poverty which shortened the lives of Nan and his children is, nevertheless, very real and is a part of the blame which must be assigned Kate, for all her virtues. Dodd labors “under this queer torment of irreconcilable things, a bewildered consciousness of tenderness and patience and cruelty, of great evident mystifying facts that were as little to be questioned as to be conceived or explained, and that were yet least to be lost sight of” (p. 412).

Before leaving Kate and Dodd to whatever relationship they can create, James shows Dodd and the reader that Kate has managed to establish between them nothing less than a balance on the scale of suffering (see p. 419). A marvelously illuminating conversation, replete with the usual Jamesian levels of awareness (pp. 417-425), brings us to a profoundly humanistic conclusion: “Dodd looked at her with the sense somehow that there were too many things and that they were all together, terribly, irresistibly, doubtless blessedly, in her eyes and her whole person; which thus affected him for the moment as more
than he could bear . . . . So he stayed, saying nothing; only, with the sense of her own sustained, renewed, and wonderful action, knowing that an arm had passed round him and that he was held. She was beside him on the bench of desolation" (p. 425).

Leon Edel concluded his Introduction to the Complete Tales, XII, by stating that “James could sail to no Yeatsian Byzantium. For him there seems to have been only the cold bench and the desolation of . . . metropolitan jungles” (p. 10). Surely Edel exaggerates beyond belief whatever attitudes James may have held, as revealed in the late fiction. These stories demonstrate that, no matter what James himself may have been experiencing, he had not lost faith in an innate human potential to nobility. His late characters, exemplified by the men of these stories, are “real,” not superficial; their experiences are traumatically involving, not aesthetically detached; and their fates are affirmative, not disillusioned.

---

**HARDY'S POETIC DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF “DURING WIND AND RAIN”**

**By DENNIS TAYLOR**

Hardy is supposedly a poet whose poetic skill never evolved in any important way. He is also supposedly a poet whose successful poems are few and are as likely to occur early as late in his career. These two assumptions, accepted by much modern criticism of Hardy, are interrelated. Unable to see how Hardy develops, we are unable to see the consistent high quality of his poetic production.

To refute this view in a short space, we might consider one of Hardy’s most famous poems, “During Wind and Rain.” It was the end product of some years of experimentation whose precise stages we can trace. Thus the case of “During Wind and Rain” may suggest that Hardy’s greatest poems are the culminating results of many lesser known poems.

The success of “During Wind and Rain” seems to consist in