

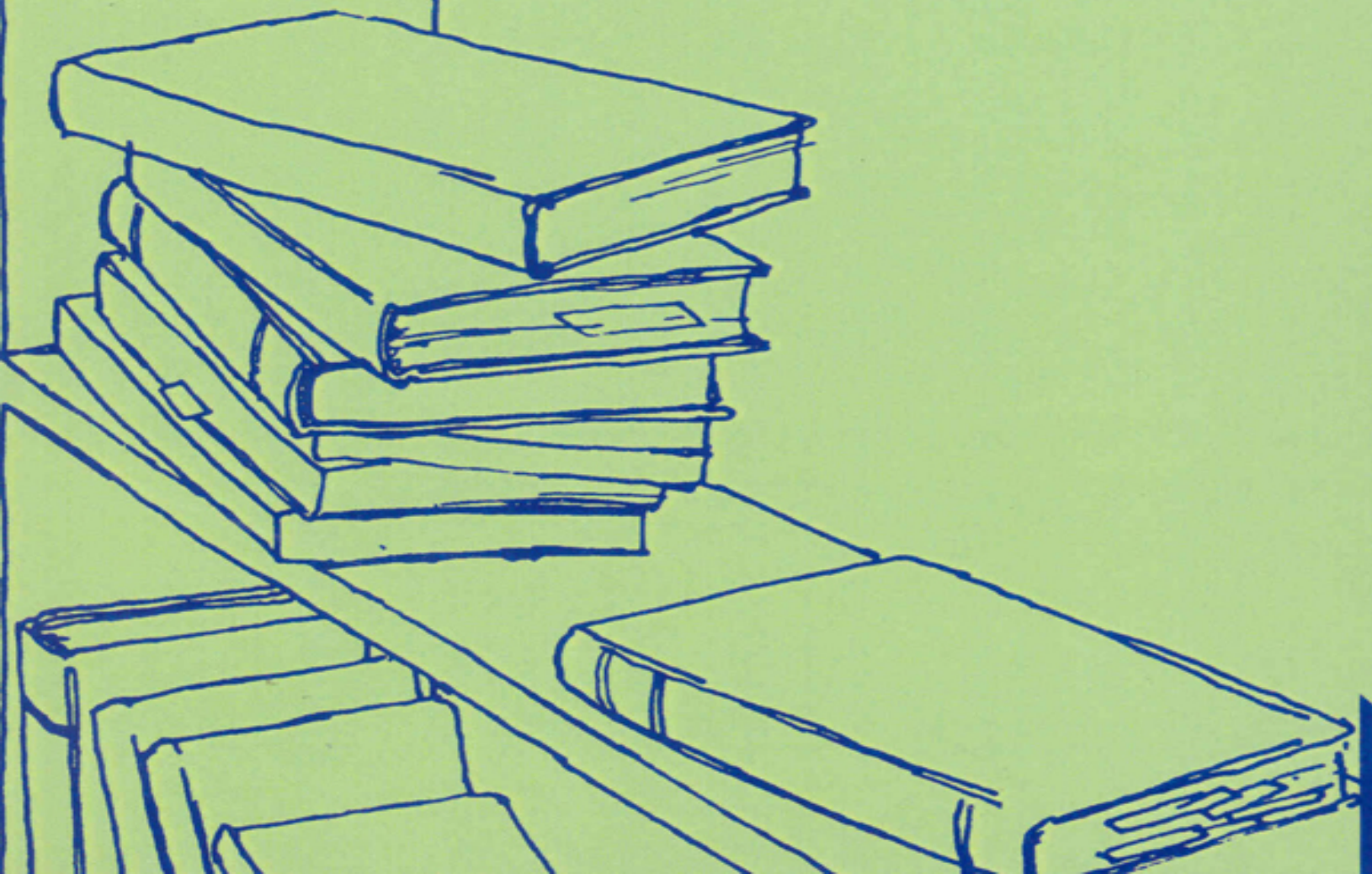
VINTAGE CLASSICS



Collected Essays

GRAHAM GREENE

'A triumph of a collection...a wise and stimulating book'
Guardian



VINTAGE CLASSICS

CONTENTS

Author's Note
Acknowledgements

PART I: PERSONAL PROLOGUE

The Lost Childhood

PART II: NOVELS AND NOVELISTS

[1]

Henry James: The Private Universe
Henry James: The Religious Aspect
The Portrait of a Lady
The Plays of Henry James
The Dark Backward: a Footnote
Two Friends
From Feathers to Iron

[2]

Fielding and Sterne
Servants of the Novel
Romance in Pimlico
The Young Dickens
Hans Andersen

[3]

François Mauriac
Bernanos, the Beginner
The Burden of Childhood
Man Made Angry
G. K. Chesterton
Walter de la Mare's Short Stories
The Saratoga Trunk

Arabia Deserta
The Poker-Face
Ford Madox Ford
Frederick Rolfe: Edwardian Inferno
Frederick Rolfe: From the Devil's Side
Frederick Rolfe: A Spoiled Priest
Remembering Mr Jones
The Domestic Background
The Public Life
Goats and Incense
Some Notes on Somerset Maugham
The Town of Malgudi
Rider Haggard's Secret
Journey Into Success
Isis Idol
The Last Buchan
Edgar Wallace
Beatrix Potter
Harkaway's Oxford

PART III: SOME CHARACTERS

[1]

Poetry from Limbo
An Unheroic Dramatist
Doctor Oates of Salamanca
Anthony à Wood
John Evelyn
Background for Heroes
A Hoax on Mr Hulton
A Jacobite Poet
Charles Churchill
The Lover of Leeds
Inside Oxford

[2]

George Darley
The Apostles Intervene

Mr Cook's Century
The Explorers
"Sore Bones; Much Headache"
Francis Parkman
Don in Mexico

[3]

Samuel Butler
The Ugly Act
Eric Gill
Herbert Read
The Conservative
Norman Douglas
Invincible Ignorance
The Victor and the Victim
Simone Weil
Three Priests:
1. The Oxford Chaplain
2. The Paradox of a Pope
3. Eighty Years on the Barrack Square
Three Revolutionaries:
1. The Man as Pure as Lucifer
2. The Marxist Heretic
3. The Spy

[4]

Portrait of a Maiden Lady
Film Lunch
The Unknown War
Great Dog of Weimar
The British Pig
George Moore and Others
At Home

PART IV: PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT

The Soupsweet Land

Copyright

EX LIBRIS



VINTAGE CLASSICS



COLLECTED ESSAYS

Graham Greene was born in 1904. On coming down from Balliol College, Oxford, he worked for four years as sub-editor on *The Times*. He established his reputation with his fourth novel, *Stamboul Train*. In 1935 he made a journey across Liberia, described in *Journey Without Maps*, and on his return was appointed film critic of the *Spectator*. In 1926 he had been received into the Roman Catholic Church and visited Mexico in 1938 to report on the religious persecution there. As a result he wrote *The Lawless Roads* and, later, his famous novel *The Power and the Glory*. *Brighton Rock* was published in 1938 and in 1940 he became literary editor of the *Spectator*. The next year he undertook work for the Foreign Office and was stationed in Sierra Leone from 1941 to 1943. This later produced the novel, *The Heart of the Matter*, set in West Africa.

As well as his many novels, Graham Greene wrote several collections of short stories, four travel books, six plays, three books of autobiography - *A Sort of Life*, *Ways of Escape* and *A World of My Own* (published posthumously) - two of biography and four books for children. He also contributed hundreds of essays, and film and book reviews, some of which appear in the collections *Reflections* and *Mornings in the Dark*. Many of his novels and short stories have been filmed and *The Third Man* was written as a film treatment. Graham Greene was a member of the Order of Merit and a Companion of Honour. Graham Greene died in April 1991.

ALSO BY GRAHAM GREENE

Novels

The Man Within
It's a Battlefield
A Gun for Sale
The Confidential Agent
The Ministry of Fear
The Third Man
The End of the Affair
The Quiet American
A Burnt-Out Case
Travels with my Aunt
Dr Fischer of Geneva or
The Bomb Party
The Tenth Man
Stamboul Train
England Made Me
Brighton Rock
The Power and the Glory
The Heart of the Matter
The Fallen Idol
Loser Takes All
Our Man in Havana
The Comedians
The Honorary Consul
Monsignor Quixote
The Captain and the Enemy
The Human Factor

Short Stories

Collected Stories
The Last Word and Other Stories

Travel

Journey Without Maps
The Lawless Roads
In Search of a Character
Getting to Know the General

Essays

Yours etc.
Reflections
Mornings in the Dark

Plays

Collected Plays

Autobiography

A Sort of Life
Ways of Escape
Fragments of an Autobiography
A World of my Own

Biography

Lord Rochester's Monkey
An Impossible Woman

Children's Books

The Little Train

The Little Horse-Bus
The Little Steamroller
The Little Fire Engine

GRAHAM GREENE

Collected Essays

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In selecting what essays to reprint over a period of more than thirty years I have made it a principle to include nothing of which I can say that, if I were writing today, I would write in a different sense. The principle applies as much to my hatreds as to my loves. Some of these attacks, reprinted after so many years, are directed at what might seem now rather diminished objects, but I would feel a serious lack in the book if they were omitted. A man should be judged by his enmities as well as by his friendships.

Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS are due to the following publishers for permission to reprint essays contained in this volume :

Chatto & Windus for 'Henry James : The Private Universe'; Elkin Matthews for 'Henry James : The Religious Aspect'; Oxford University Press for the introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady*; Hamish Hamilton for 'The Young Dickens' and for 'Edgar Wallace'; Casselle for 'Fielding and Sterne'; The Bodley Head for 'The Burden of Childhood'; Faber & Faber for 'Walter de la Mare's Short Stories'; Librairie Plon for 'Bernanos, the Beginner'; Methuen for 'The Town of Malgudi'; Heinemann for 'Norman Douglas'; and McGibbon & Kee for 'The Spy'.

Acknowledgements are also made to editors of the following periodicals.

New Statesman, Spectator, Time & Tide, the London Mercury, Night and Day, France Libre, Horizon, the Month, the Tablet, the Listener, the Observer, the Sunday Times, London Magazine, Life, and the Daily Telegraph Magazine.

'The Spy' was first published in *Esquire* under the title 'Reflections on the Character of Kim Philby'.

PART I

Personal Prologue

THE LOST CHILDHOOD

PERHAPS it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our lives. In later life we admire, we are entertained, we may modify some views we already hold, but we are more likely to find in books merely a confirmation of what is in our minds already: as in a love affair it is our own features that we see reflected flatteringly back.

But in childhood all books are books of divination, telling us about the future, and like the fortune-teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death by water they influence the future. I suppose that is why books excited us so much. What do we ever get nowadays from reading to equal the excitement and the revelation in those first fourteen years? Of course I should be interested to hear that a new novel by Mr E. M. Forster was going to appear this spring, but I could never compare that mild expectation of civilized pleasure with the missed heartbeat, the appalled glee I felt when I found on a library shelf a novel by Rider Haggard, Percy Westerman, Captain Brereton or Stanley Weyman which I had not read before. It is in those early years that I would look for the crisis, the moment when life took a new slant in its journey towards death.

I remember distinctly the suddenness with which a key turned in a lock and I found I could read - not just the sentences in a reading book with the syllables coupled like railway carriages, but a real book. It was paper-covered with the picture of a boy, bound and gagged, dangling at the end of a rope inside a well with the water rising above his waist - an adventure of Dixon Brett, detective. All a long summer holiday I kept my secret, as I believed: I did not want anybody to know that I could read. I suppose I half

consciously realized even then that this was the dangerous moment. I was safe so long as I could not read – the wheels had not begun to turn, but now the future stood around on bookshelves everywhere waiting for the child to choose – the life of a chartered accountant perhaps, a colonial civil servant, a planter in China, a steady job in a bank, happiness and misery, eventually one particular form of death, for surely we choose our death much as we choose our job. It grows out of our acts and our evasions, out of our fears and out of our moments of courage. I suppose my mother must have discovered my secret, for on the journey home I was presented for the train with another real book, a copy of Ballantyne's *Coral Island* with only a single picture to look at, a coloured frontispiece. But I would admit nothing. All the long journey I stared at the one picture and never opened the book.

But there on the shelves at home (so many shelves for we were a large family) the books waited – one book in particular, but before I reach that one down let me take a few others at random from the shelf. Each was a crystal in which the child dreamed that he saw life moving. Here in a cover stamped dramatically in several colours was Captain Gilson's *The Pirate Aeroplane*. I must have read that book six times at least – the story of a lost civilization in the Sahara and of a villainous Yankee pirate with an aeroplane like a box kite and bombs the size of tennis balls who held the golden city to ransom. It was saved by the hero, a young subaltern who crept up to the pirate camp to put the aeroplane out of action. He was captured and watched his enemies dig his grave. He was to be shot at dawn, and to pass the time and keep his mind from uncomfortable thoughts the amiable Yankee pirate played cards with him – the mild nursery game of Kuhn Kan. The memory of that nocturnal game on the edge of life haunted me for years, until I set it to rest at last in one of my own novels with a game of poker played in remotely similar circumstances.

And here is *Sophy of Kravonia* by Anthony Hope - the story of a kitchen-maid who became a queen. One of the first films I ever saw, about 1911, was made from that book, and I can hear still the rumble of the Queen's guns crossing the high Kravonian pass beaten hollowly out on a single piano. Then there was Stanley Weyman's *The Story of Francis Cludde*, and above all other books at that time of my life *King Solomon's Mines*.

This book did not perhaps provide the crisis, but it certainly influenced the future. If it had not been for that romantic tale of Allan Quatermain, Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good, and, above all, the ancient witch Gagool, would I at nineteen have studied the appointments list of the Colonial Office and very nearly picked on the Nigerian Navy for a career? And later, when surely I ought to have known better, the odd African fixation remained. In 1935 I found myself sick with fever on a camp bed in a Liberian native's hut with a candle going out in an empty whisky bottle and a rat moving in the shadows. Wasn't it the incurable fascination of Gagool with her bare yellow skull, the wrinkled scalp that moved and contracted like the hood of a cobra, that led me to work all through 1942 in a little stuffy office in Freetown, Sierra Leone? There is not much in common between the land of the Kukuanas, behind the desert and the mountain range of Sheba's Breast, and a tin-roofed house on a bit of swamp where the vultures moved like domestic turkeys and the pi-dogs kept me awake on moonlit nights with their wailing, and the white women yellowed by atebirin drove by to the club; but the two belonged at any rate to the same continent, and, however distantly, to the same region of the imagination - the region of uncertainty, of not knowing the way out. Once I came a little nearer to Gagool and her witch-hunters, one night in Zigita on the Liberian side of the French Guinea border, when my servants sat in their shuttered hut with their hands over their eyes and someone beat a drum and a whole town stayed behind closed doors

while the big bush devil – whom it would mean blindness to see – moved between the huts.

But *King Solomon's Mines* could not finally satisfy. It was not the right answer. The key did not quite fit. Gagool I could recognize – didn't she wait for me in dreams every night, in the passage by the linen cupboard, near the nursery door? and she continues to wait, when the mind is sick or tired, though now she is dressed in the theological garments of Despair and speaks in Spenser's accents:

The longer life, I wote the greater sin,
The greater sin, the greater punishment.

Gagool has remained a permanent part of the imagination, but Quatermain and Curtis – weren't they, even when I was only ten years old, a little too good to be true? They were men of such unyielding integrity (they would only admit to a fault in order to show how it might be overcome) that the wavering personality of a child could not rest for long against those monumental shoulders. A child, after all, knows most of the game – it is only an attitude to it that he lacks. He is quite well aware of cowardice, shame, deception, disappointment. Sir Henry Curtis perched upon a rock bleeding from a dozen wounds but fighting on with the remnant of the Greys against the hordes of Twala was too heroic. These men were like Platonic ideas: they were not life as one had already begun to know it.

But when – perhaps I was fourteen by that time – I took Miss Marjorie Bowen's *The Viper of Milan* from the library shelf, the future for better or worse really struck. From that moment I began to write. All the other possible futures slid away: the potential civil servant, the don, the clerk had to look for other incarnations. Imitation after imitation of Miss Bowen's magnificent novel went into exercise-books – stories of sixteenth-century Italy or twelfth-century England marked with enormous brutality and a despairing

romanticism. It was as if I had been supplied once and for all with a subject.

Why? On the surface *The Viper of Milan* is only the story of a war between Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, and Mastino della Scala, Duke of Verona, told with zest and cunning and an amazing pictorial sense. Why did it creep in and colour and explain the terrible living world of the stone stairs and the never quiet dormitory? It was no good in that real world to dream that one would ever be a Sir Henry Curtis, but della Scala who at last turned from an honesty that never paid and betrayed his friends and died dishonoured and a failure even at treachery – it was easier for a child to escape behind his mask. As for Visconti, with his beauty, his patience, and his genius for evil, I had watched him pass by many a time in his black Sunday suit smelling of mothballs. His name was Carter. He exercised terror from a distance like a snow-cloud over the young fields. Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in *The Viper of Milan* and I looked round and I saw that it was so.

There was another theme I found there. At the end of *The Viper of Milan* – you will remember if you have once read it – comes the great scene of complete success – della Scala is dead, Ferrara, Verona, Novara, Mantua have all fallen, the messengers pour in with news of fresh victories, the whole world outside is cracking up, and Visconti sits and jokes in the wine-light. I was not on the classical side or I would have discovered I suppose, in Greek literature instead of in Miss Bowen's novel the sense of doom that lies over success – the feeling that the pendulum is about to swing. That too made sense; one looked around and saw the doomed everywhere – the champion runner who one day would sag over the tape; the head of the school who would atone, poor devil, during forty dreary undistinguished years; the

scholar . . . and when success began to touch oneself too, however mildly, one could only pray that failure would not be held off for too long.

One had lived for fourteen years in a wild jungle country without a map, but now the paths had been traced and naturally one had to follow them. But I think it was Miss Bowen's apparent zest that made me want to write. One could not read her without believing that to write was to live and to enjoy, and before one had discovered one's mistake it was too late - the first book one does enjoy. Anyway she had given me my pattern - religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there - perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done. Man is never satisfied, and often I have wished that my hand had not moved further than *King Solomon's Mines*, and that the future I had taken down from the nursery shelf had been a district office in Sierra Leone and twelve tours of malarial duty and a finishing dose of blackwater fever when the danger of retirement approached. What is the good of wishing? The books are always there, the moment of crisis waits, and now our children in their turn are taking down the future and opening the pages. In his poem 'Germinal' A. E. wrote:

In ancient shadows and twilights
Where childhood had strayed,
The world's great sorrows were born
And its heroes were made.
In the lost boyhood of Judas
Christ was betrayed.

1947

PART II

Novels and Novelists

[1]

HENRY JAMES: THE PRIVATE UNIVERSE

THE technical qualities of Henry James's novels have been so often and so satisfactorily explored, notably by Mr Percy Lubbock, that perhaps I may be forgiven for ignoring James as the fully conscious craftsman in order to try to track the instinctive, the poetic writer back to the source of his fantasies. In all writers there occurs a moment of crystallization when the dominant theme is plainly expressed, when the private universe becomes visible even to the least sensitive reader. Such a crystallization is Hardy's often-quoted phrase: 'The President of the Immortals . . . had ended his sport with Tess', or that passage in his preface to *Jude the Obscure*, when he writes of 'the fret and fever, derision and disaster, that may press in the wake of the strongest passion known to humanity'. It is less easy to find such a crystallization in the works of James, whose chief aim was always to dramatize, who was more than usually careful to exclude the personal statement, but I think we may take the sentence in the scenario of *The Ivory Tower*, in which James speaks of 'the black and merciless things that are behind great possessions', as an expression of the ruling fantasy which drove him to write: a sense of evil religious in its intensity.

'Art itself', Conrad wrote, 'may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe', and no definition in his own prefaces better describes the object Henry James so passionately pursued, if the word visible does not exclude the private vision. If there are times when we feel, in *The Sacred Fount*, even in the exquisite *Golden Bowl*, that the judge is taking

too much into consideration, that he could have passed his sentence on less evidence, we have always to admit, as the long record of human corruption unrolls, that he has never allowed us to lose sight of the main case; and because his mind is bent on rendering even evil 'the highest kind of justice', the symmetry of his thought lends the whole body of his work the importance of a system.

No writer has left a series of novels more of one moral piece. The differences between James's first works and his last are only differences of art as Conrad defined it. In his early work, perhaps, he rendered a little less than the highest kind of justice; the progress from *The American* to *The Golden Bowl* is a progress from a rather crude and inexperienced symbolization of truth itself: a progress from evil represented rather obviously in terms of murder to evil *in propria persona*, walking down Bond Street, charming, cultured, sensitive - evil to be distinguished from good chiefly in the complete egotism of its outlook. They are complete anarchists, these later Jamesian characters, they form the immoral background to that extraordinary period of haphazard violence which anticipated the first world war: the attempt on Greenwich Observatory, the siege of Sidney Street. They lent the tone which made possible the cruder manifestations presented by Conrad in *The Secret Agent*. Merton Densher, who planned to marry the dying Milly Theale for her money, plotting with his mistress who was her best friend; Prince Amerigo, who betrayed his wife with her friend, her father's wife; Horton, who swindled his friend Gray of his money: the last twist (it is always the friend, the intimate who betrays) is given to these studies of moral corruption. They represent an attitude which had been James's from very far back; they are not the slow painful fruit of experience. The attitude never varied from the time of *The American* onwards. Mme de Bellegarde, who murdered her husband and sold her daughter, is only the first crude presentation of a woman gradually subtilized, by

way of Mme Merle in *The Portrait of a Lady*, into the incomparable figures of evil, Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant.

This point is of importance. James has been too often regarded as a novelist of superficial experience, as a painter of social types, who was cut off by exile from the deepest roots of experience (as if there were something superior in the Sussex or Shropshire of the localized talent to James's international scene). But James was not in that sense an exile; he could have dispensed with the international scene as easily as he dispensed with all the world of Wall Street finance. For the roots were not in Venice, Paris, London; they were in himself. Densher, the Prince, just as much as the redhaired valet Quint and the adulterous governess, were rooted in his own character. They were there when he wrote *The American* in 1876; all he needed afterwards to perfect his work to his own impeccable standard was technical subtlety and that other subtlety which comes from superficial observation, the ability to construct convincing masks for his own personality.

I do not use superficial in any disparaging sense. If his practice-pieces, from *The Europeans* to *The Tragic Muse*, didn't engage his full powers, and were certainly not the vehicle for his most urgent fantasies, they were examples of sharp observation, the fruits of a direct objective experience, unsurpassed in their kind. He never again proved himself capable of drawing a portrait so directly, with such command of relevant detail. We know Charlotte Stant, of course, more thoroughly than we know Miss Birdseye in *The Bostonians*, but she emerges gradually through that long book, we don't 'see' her with the immediacy that we see Miss Birdseye:

She was a little old lady with an enormous head; that was the first thing Ransom noticed – the vast, fair, protuberant, candid, ungarnished brow, surmounting a pair of weak, kind, tired-looking eyes. . . . The long practice of philanthropy had

not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. . . . In her large countenance her dim little smile scarcely showed. It was a mere sketch of a smile, a kind of instalment, or payment on account; it seemed to say that she would smile more if she had time, but that you could see, without this, that she was gentle and easy to beguile. . . . She looked as if she had spent her life on platforms, in audiences, in conventions, in phalansteries, in seances; in her faded face there was a kind of reflexion of ugly lecture-lamps.

No writer's apprentice-work contains so wide and brilliant a range of portraits from this very early Miss Birdseye to Mrs Brookenham in *The Awkward Age*:

Mrs Brookenham was, in her forty-first year, still charmingly pretty, and the nearest approach she made at this moment to meeting her son's description of her was by looking beautifully desperate. She had about her the pure light of youth - would always have it; her head, her figure, her flexibility, her flickering colour, her lovely, silly eyes, her natural, quavering tone, all played together towards this effect by some trick that had never yet been exposed. It was at the same time remarkable that - at least in the bosom of her family - she rarely wore an appearance of gaiety less qualified than at the present juncture; she suggested for the most part the luxury, the novelty of woe, the excitement of strange sorrows and the cultivation of fine indifferencies. This was her special sign - an innocence dimly tragic. It gave immense effect to her other resources . . .

The Awkward Age stands formidably between the two halves of James's achievement. It marks his decision to develop finally from *The American* rather than from *The Europeans*. It is the surrender of experience to fantasy. He

hadn't found his method, but he had definitely found his theme. One may regret, in some moods, that his more superficial books had so few successors (English literature has too little that is light, lucid, and witty), but one cannot be surprised that he discarded many of them from the collected edition while retaining so crude a fiction as *The American*, discarded even the delicate, feline *Washington Square*, perhaps the only novel in which a man has successfully invaded the feminine field and produced work comparable to Jane Austen's.

How could he have done otherwise if he was to be faithful to his deeper personal fantasy? He wrote of 'poor Flaubert' that

he stopped too short. He hovered for ever at the public door, in the outer court, the splendour of which very properly beguiled him, and in which he seems still to stand as upright as a sentinel and as shapely as a statue. But that immobility and even that erectness were paid too dear. The shining arms were meant to carry further, the outer doors were meant to open. He should at least have listened at the chamber of the soul. This would have floated him on a deeper tide; above all it would have calmed his nerves.

His early novels, except *The American*, certainly belonged to the outer court. They had served their purpose, he had improved his masks, he was never to be more witty; but when he emerged from them again to take up his main study of corruption in *The Wings of the Dove* he had amazingly advanced: instead of murder, the more agonizing mental violence; instead of Mme de Bellegarde, Kate Croy; instead of the melodramatic heroine Mme de Cintré, the deeply felt subjective study of Milly Theale.

For to render the highest justice to corruption you must retain your innocence: you have to be conscious all the time within yourself of treachery to something valuable. If Peter

Quint is to be rooted in you, so must the child his ghost corrupts: if Osmond, Isabel Archer too. These centres of innocence, these objects of treachery, are nearly always women: the lovely daring Isabel Archer, who goes out in her high-handed, wealthy way to meet life and falls to Osmond; Nanda, the young girl 'coming out', who is hemmed in by a vicious social set; Milly Theale, sick to death just at the time when life has most to offer, surrendering to Merton Densher and Kate Croy (apart from Quint and the Governess the most driven and 'damned' of all James's characters); Maggie Verver, the unsophisticated 'good' young American who encounters her particular corruption in the Prince and Charlotte Stant; the child Maisie tossed about among grown-up adulteries. These are the points of purity in the dark picture.

The attitude of mind which dictated these situations was a permanent one. Henry James had a marvellous facility for covering up his tracks (can we be blamed if we assume he had a reason?). In his magnificent prefaces he describes the geneses of his stories, where they were written, the method he adopted, the problems he faced: he seems, like the conjurer with rolled sleeves, to show everything. But you have to go further back than the anecdote at the dinner-table to trace the origin of such urgent fantasies. In this exploration his prefaces, even his autobiographies, offer very little help. Certainly they give his model for goodness; he is less careful to obliterate *that* trail back into youth (if one can speak of care in connexion with a design which was probably only half-conscious if it was conscious at all). His cousin, Mary Temple, was the model, a model in her deadly sickness and her high courage, above all in her hungry grip on life, for Milly Theale in particular.

She had [James wrote of her] beyond any equally young creature I have known a sense for verity of character and play of life in others, for their acting out of their force or

their weakness, whatever either might be, at no matter what cost to herself. . . . Life claimed her and used her and beset her . . . made her range in her groping: her naturally immature and unlighted way from end to end of the scale. . . . She was absolutely afraid of nothing she might come to by living with enough sincerity and enough wonder; and I think it is because one was to see her launched on that adventure in such bedimmed, such almost tragically compromised conditions that one is caught by her title to the heroic and pathetic mask.

Mary Temple then, whatever mask she wore, was always the point of purity, but again one must seek further if one is to trace the source of James's passionate distrust in human nature, his sense of evil. Mary Temple was experience, but that other sense, one feels, was born in him, was his inheritance.

It cannot but seem odd how little in his volumes of reminiscence, *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes of a Son and Brother*, Henry James really touches the subject of his family. His style is at its most complex: the beauty of the books is very like the beauty of Turner's later pictures: they are all air and light: you have to look a long while into their glow before you discern the most tenuous outline of their subjects. Certainly of the two main figures, Henry James, Senior, and William James, you learn nothing of what must have been to them of painful importance: their sense of daemonic possession.

James was to draw the figure of Peter Quint with his little red whiskers and his white damned face, he was to show Densher and Kate writhing in their hopeless infernal sundering success; evil was overwhelmingly part of his visible universe; but the sense (we got no indication of it in his reminiscences) was a family sense. He shared it with his father and brother and sister. One may find the dark source of his deepest fantasy concealed in a family life which for

sensitive boys must have been almost ideally free from compulsions, a tolerant cultured life led between Concord and Geneva. For nearly two years his father was intermittently attacked by a sense of 'perfectly insane and abject terror' (his own words), a damned shape seemed to squat beside him raving out 'a fetid influence'. Henry James's sister, Alice, was a prey to suicidal tendencies, and Willam James suffered in much the same way as his father.

I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth the greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them enclosing his entire figure. . . . This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I*, I felt potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour for it should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a sense of the insecurity of life, that I never knew before. . . . It gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go out into the dark alone.

This epileptic idiot, this urge towards death, the damned shape, are a more important background to Henry James's

novels than Grosvenor House and late Victorian society. It is true that the moral anarchy of the age gave him his material, but he would not have treated it with such intensity if it had not corresponded with his private fantasy. They were materialists, his characters, but you cannot read far in Henry James's novels without realizing that their creator was not a materialist. If ever a man's imagination was clouded by the Pit, it was James's. When he touches this nerve, the fear of spiritual evil, he treats the reader with less than his usual frankness: 'a fairy-tale pure and simple', something seasonable for Christmas, is a disingenuous description of *The Turn of the Screw*. One cannot avoid a conviction that here he touched and recoiled from an important inhibition.

To a biographer the early formative years of a writer must always have a special fascination: the innocent eye dwelling frankly on a new unexplored world, the vistas of future experience at the end of the laurel walk, the voices of older people, like 'Viziers nodding together in some Arabian night', the strange accidents that seem to decide not only that this child shall be a writer but what kind of a writer this child shall be.

The eleven-year-old Conrad prepares his school work in the big old Cracow house where his father, the patriot Korzeniow-ski, lies dying:

There, in a large drawing room, panelled and bare, with heavy cornices and a lofty ceiling, in a little oasis of light made by two candles in a desert of dusk, I sat at a little table to worry and ink myself all over till the task of my preparation was done. The table of my toil faced a tall white door, which was kept closed; now and then it would come ajar and a nun in a white coif would squeeze herself through the crack, glide across the room, and disappear. There were two of these noiseless nursing nuns. Their voices were seldom heard. For, indeed, what could they have had to