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**The Uncanny in Henry James's
“Adina”, The Last of the Valerii”
and “The Madonna of the Future”**

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A mia sorella, per il suo continuo supporto
Ai miei genitori, senza i quali questa tesi non avrebbe preso vita

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INTRODUCTION

How does Henry James express his fascination for Italy in his early stories? What strategies does he use? What are the literary *topoi* that recur? What effect do they have on the reader? In the following dissertation, I have tried to answer these questions by focusing on James's early short stories: "Adina" (1874), "The Last of the Valerii" (1874), and "The Madonna of the Future" (1873). The first two are set in Rome, and the latter in Florence, two cities that James loved immensely. At first glance, they seem tales with an Italian setting and some flat characters. Indeed, they are James's initial attempts to incorporate Italy in his works, a country that he was starting to discover. As a matter of fact, James in these three stories explores his relationship with Italy that I would define uncanny. More precisely, the uncanny arises from the objects that recur in these stories. These artifacts own a force that direct the plot and rule the characters who become their victims. It is as if the artifacts were animated, endowed with power, and the characters act like mannequins under their influence. From this, in my opinion, this upsetting feeling derives and takes form. Ernst Jentsch was the first to introduce in psychology the concept of the uncanny defined as the intellectual uncertainty whether an obviously animated object is really alive or not; or, on the contrary, if an inanimate object could somehow be endowed with autonomous life. Clearly in these tales the objects are not alive in the true sense of the word but, metaphorically, they are. In addition, as Freud stated, the uncanny comes "when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed¹". This is what happens in these stories: the past comes back at a wrong time through these artifacts that come to light again. The past seems so near yet so distant; therefore, the result can only be a strange and mysterious sequence of events, with different endings for each tale.

In the stories these objects are the topaz of the emperor Tiberius, a sculpture of Juno, and a painting by Raphael. All have in common the overwhelming power they carry: the power of, respectively, Roman, Greek and Renaissance art that, and James knew it well, can bring fatal outcomes if faced.

¹ Freud Sigmund, "The Uncanny", first published in *Imago*, Bd. V., 1919; reprinted in *Sammlung*, Fünfte Folge, translated by Strachey Alix, 1925, p. 17.

The first chapter is an introduction on the concept of the uncanny. In the second chapter, the relationship between James and Italy is analysed, an ambiguous relationship made up of hate and love. For James, Italy is a *femme fatale*, a charming and ruthless “woman”. He is fascinated with it, but his Puritan roots often make him retreat by asking questions about the immorality of Italy that attracts him ambiguously. The third chapter deals with the story of "Adina" in which the topaz of the emperor Tiberius is the cause of a turning point that leads to the "ruin" of the American Scrope who in the end, to break the spell, throws it into the Tiber. Scrope has been enchanted for too long by the beauty and value of topaz, appropriating it undeservedly. In the end, it is Angelo, the ignorant and naive Italian, who wins. The fourth chapter deals with the story of "The Last of the Valerii" in which the sculpture (of probable Greek origins) of Juno is the cause of a bizarre obsession for Count Valerio, who begins to worship and venerate it. He falls into a strange neo-paganism for that time. He even makes a bloody sacrifice at the foot of the statue that has totally taken possession of him. His American wife Martha will make him return to reality by bringing Juno back underground. Unlike "Adina" here the American reacts promptly but a piece of the sculpture remains in the villa that could threaten their married life again. The fifth chapter analyses the story of "The Madonna of the Future" in which Raphael's painting "The Madonna of the Chair" leads to the demise of the American Theobald who wants to create his "Madonna of the Future", by taking inspiration from Raphael's masterpiece. Italian Renaissance art proves invincible for those who want to face it and the only outcome can be the extreme one: death.

The tales are ordered in this way for their different endings that become ever more tragic. In "Adina", Scrope brings the topaz back into the river and the story closes predicting a lasting friendship between the narrator and him. This is a positive ending, despite the tragedy of the plot. In "The Last of the Valerii", a sense of calm returns, albeit in an ambiguous and unclear way. On the other hand, in "The Madonna of the Future", Theobald, who lives only to create his work, fails and dies. Of the three stories the latter is the most pessimistic and tragic. The presence of Italy is ghostly and deadly in these stories, and it is indicative of an obsession with the past that invests the characters through its Italian artistic artifacts. Clearly, this was also James's own feeling.

By going against the grain, since the stories in which the concept of the uncanny has been analysed by critics are, to name a few, “The Turn of the Screw”, “The Jolly Corner” or “The Romance of Certain Old Clothes”, I discuss the uncanny choosing other stories that have a lot in common, starting with the object presented which often proves to be more alive than the characters, and becomes the bearer of a bewitching and destructive past. Obviously, the tales mirror James’s own complex experience of Italy. If in the travel essays he seems quite positive, in fiction he shows his hidden fears. As Macdonald argues:

The objects of James’s receptive vision seem to take on, as it were, a life of their own. Throughout the early Italian essays [and so tales] they vibrate with a seemingly independent force and with what Merleau-Ponty has called “internal animation”. Italy functions, then, not only as a tangible presence, but as an active agency which solicits response and commands attention. “At every step”, as James wrote of Rome’s “weighty” historical presence, it “confronts you, and the mind must make some response.” It speaks to the viewer, demands a response and invites him into an exchange. Florentine scenes, [...], do not merely await the interested gaze, they actively recruit the viewer’s attention and “force” themselves into view².

² Macdonald Bonney, *Henry James’s Italian Hours: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1990, p. 46.

THE UNCANNY

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today is the last day that I'm using words
They've gone out, lost their meaning
Don't function anymore
Words are useless, especially sentences
They don't stand for anything
How could they explain how I feel?

(Madonna, "Bedtime Story")

Das Unheimliche is a word of the German language, used by Sigmund Freud as a conceptual term to express, in the aesthetic field, a particular aspect of the more generic feeling of fear, which blossoms when a thing (or a person, an impression, a fact or a situation) is perceived as familiar and alien at the same time, causing generic anxiety combined with an unpleasant feeling of confusion and strangeness. This feeling was rendered with *Il perturbante* by the Italian translators of Freud. The Freudian literary critic Francesco Orlando used the translation of *Il sinistro* in his works. More recently, the translation *Lo spaesamento* has also been proposed.

In English the word is translated as "uncanny". Canny comes from the Anglo-Saxon root "ken": "knowledge, understanding, or cognisance". Thus, the uncanny is something beyond and outside one's familiar knowledge or perceptions. In fact, "uncanny" is the opposite of "canny", meaning shrewd, knowing. Yet the word canny shifts into his opposite: in Scottish English in particular, canny can suggest unnatural or excessive skilfulness or knowing. This capacity for a word to mean or to turn into its opposite is what Freud called the antithetical meanings of primal words.³

Even without identifying its unconscious origin, Ernst Jentsch was the first to introduce in psychology the concept of the uncanny, defined as the intellectual

³ Bennett Andrew & Royle Nicholas, *An introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, London, Prentice Hall, 1995, p. 42.

uncertainty whether an animated object is really alive or not; or, on the contrary, if an inanimate object could somehow be endowed with autonomous life. Jentsch refers to the impression given by the wax figures, the automata and the constructed puppets. Disturbing effects are also often obtained when the observer is placed in the presence of continuous, "automatic" repetition of the same situation, for example of the same movement. This is how Jentsch explains the sensation of perturbation that some feel during epileptic seizures or manifestations of madness. Jentsch points out that the narrative device of generating a disturbing sensation is used in literature by some novelists who introduce into their stories figures whose nature as a living being or automaton is not clarified in any way, leaving the reader in doubt and unable to decide. Since the disturbing situation or object has familiar and at the same time extraneous and unfamiliar connotations, it would generate a feeling of uncertainty. Jentsch analyses the stories of E. T. A. Hoffman, in particular "The Sandman" in which the Olympia doll is defined as the disturbing element of the story⁴.

With Friedrich Schelling the "Unheimlich" becomes the appearance of what needs to be hidden, the return of the repressed once alive in childhood.

Jentsch's studies were resumed and developed by Freud in the essay "The Uncanny" (1919) which is an in-depth analysis of the stories of Hoffman, judged by Freud "the undisputed master of the uncanny in literature". However, Freud points out that in "The Sandman" the most obvious example of a disturbing atmosphere is evoked not so much by the theme of the animated Olympia doll but by the figure of the Sandman, an adult capable of digging the eyes out of the eye sockets of children. The Sandman is a mythical character in Western and Northern European folklore who puts people to sleep and encourages and inspires beautiful dreams by sprinkling magical sand onto their eyes. Therefore, there is no uncertainty about an animate/inanimate subject, but the possibility that an adult can mutilate the body of a child, a clear reference to the castration process. In the essay Freud points out that the German term "Unheimlich", from a semantic point of view, is the opposite of "Heimlich" (from heim, home) which means quiet, comfortable, trustworthy, intimate, belonging to the house. "Un-heimlich" therefore means unusual, unfamiliar. Generally, the unfamiliar or unknown arouses

⁴ See Jentsch Ernst, *Zur Psychologie des Umheimlichen*, Whitefish, Kessinger Publishing, 1906.

terror and fright, however not everything that is unusual or new causes fright and terror. According to Freud, to be properly disturbing the object must therefore have some other characteristic and it must be an infrequent characteristic because most of the frightening or terrifying things are not also uncanny. Freud notes that a translated meaning of “Heimlich” present in the Daniel Sanders' dictionary of the German language is also “kept at home, hidden”, meanings that belong to two areas that are certainly in contrast with each other. “Heimlich” therefore presents a curious ambivalence of meaning, the second of which, the least used (that is, hidden) almost coincides with its opposite “Unheimlich”. Hence, “Un-heimlich” would also mean not concealed, come to light, surfaced. The perturbation arises when in an object or in a situation, characteristics of unfamiliarity and familiarity are combined in a sort of ambivalent dualism. The hidden, the repressed that somehow returns through the object or the upsetting situation, would generate this feeling of particular anxiety defined “uncanny”. The uncanny is, in final analysis, the “access to the ancient homeland” of every man, the place in which every man has been at least once, the womb. Everything that was once homeland and familiar becomes “Unheimlich” and the prefix un- is the sign of repression which is essentially an internal process of negation. The uncanny therefore arises when what was kept hidden is shown, when the repressed returns to awaken dormant infantile complexes. The “return of the repressed” interpreted as the “return of the same” anticipates the compulsion to repeat illustrated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of 1920.

Yet, going backwards, it can be argued that the eighteenth century “invented the uncanny”: the transformations that led to the glorification of the period as an age of reason or enlightenment also produced a new experience of strangeness, anxiety and intellectual impasse. The impulse of the age to regulate and bureaucratize was responsible for the creation of the conception of the uncanny that is so important in modernity.⁵ It was during the eighteenth century, with its refusal of superstitious explanations and valorisation of reason, that human beings first experienced that sense of strangeness and unease that Freud found so characteristic of modern life.⁶ Hoffmann’s uncanny effect is also the result of the urge of that age

⁵ Castle Terry, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 8-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

towards technological control. His uncanny story was dependant on a real invention: a specific innovation, the first working automata. The eighteen-century invention of the automata was also an invention of the uncanny, it was a piece of real life put into fiction to evoke dark desires.⁷

Thus, according to Freud, the uncanny is what returns from archaic infantile fantasies; Freud argues:

It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as “uncanny” fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression⁸.

He also points out another aspect of the uncanny, more disquieting:

This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes, and so on. It is this element which contributes not a little to the uncanny effect attaching to magical practices. The infantile element in this, which also holds sway in the minds of neurotics, is the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with physical reality—a feature closely allied to the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts⁹.

Thus, the uncanny is closely linked to magical practices, to what is supernatural. To sum up:

Let us take the uncanny in connection with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilments, secret power to do harm and the return of the dead. The condition under which the feeling of uncanniness arises here

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ Freud Sigmund, “The Uncanny”, *cit.*, p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

is unmistakable. We—or our primitive forefathers—once believed in the possibility of these things and were convinced that they really happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have surmounted such ways of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new set of beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something actually happens in our lives which seems to support the old, discarded beliefs, we get a feeling of the uncanny; and it is as though we were making a judgment something like this: “So, after all, it is true that one can kill a person by merely desiring his death!” or, “Then the dead do continue to live and appear before our eyes on the scene of their former activities!”, and so on. And conversely, he who has completely and finally dispelled animistic beliefs in himself, will be insensible to this type of the uncanny¹⁰.

Hence, the feeling of the uncanny manifests itself when repressed child complexes are called to life again from an impression or an object or when passed primitive convictions seem to have found a new validation, taking on various forms.

For example, the representation of the double can cause perturbation in situations of real life, in artistic representations or in thoughts, and in the presence of twins or doubles. In this case the disturbance derives from the return to consciousness of infantile narcissism evoked by the possibility that a double makes one immortal, which in the adult has long been relegated to the unconscious by the moral and critical action of the superego.

Also, automatic, repetitive, mechanical movements and processes seem to be produced outside ordinary mental activities and are perceived as fearful, strange, mysterious, inexplicable, often with supernatural connotations. According to Freud, the repetition of a gesture, a fact, a behaviour, can become disturbing because it evokes ideas removed from the adult and present in childhood (and in primitive men) such as the omnipotent animistic magical thought that would command the actions performed automatically, whose end is unknown. A typical example is that of situations in which someone gets lost and accidentally retraces the same procedures and actions (retraces their steps) in a useless attempt to get out of the impasse, or fortuitous coincidences that end up looking suspicious and disturbing.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Similarly, superstitions, beliefs and magic can evoke a disturbing feeling of the resurfacing of the infantile idea of mysterious forces acting outside our will. The uncanny originating from self-propelled mechanisms, limbs detached from the body that continue to contract, epileptic seizures, manifestations of madness was believed to have the same genesis. The disturbing effect in imagining or seeing represented someone who is buried alive is produced by the reappearance of the repressed desire to return to the womb, to the “first home”, “ancient homeland”. In analysing a masterpiece of E.T.A. Hoffmann – *The Sandman* - Freud outlines a series of themes such as the animation of the inanimate, the double, the obsessive repetition, the return of the dead, the burial of the living, making the uncanny one of the great aesthetic categories of the twentieth century.

Concerning the uncanny in fiction Freud says that “in the first place a great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life¹¹”. This is important to analyse because here Freud states that in fiction the situation is reversed and ambivalent. A fearful book can be read without the fear felt in real life, yet if that happened in real life, it would be so. In addition, the author of a book can create effects that evoke the uncanny. The author creates a fictional world where readers identify themselves completely with the atmosphere of the situations, the plot, the characters.

Moreover, it can be argued that Freud had two personalities: the Freud of the popular imagination, the patriarchal Freud who believed that everything had to do with sex. Second, there is the other Freud, the Freud who was not able to fully explain his theories in a mature and reasonable way. “The Uncanny” is a mixture of these two Freuds. On the one hand there is the Freud who believes that literature and psychoanalysis need to be separated; on the other hand, there is the Freud who shows that the literary can be stranger and more disturbingly mysterious than psychoanalysis or science. The essay shows two Freuds, a double Freud; and the double is one of the main motifs of the uncanny¹².

I suppose that in mental diseases, the uncanny manifests itself greatly; for example, in schizophrenia, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder

¹¹ Ibid., p. 18.

¹² Bennett Andrew & Royle Nicholas, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, cit., pp. 40-41

(repetition) and in Dissociative Identity Disorder (double, triple etc). In general, the patient who experiences these conditions does not know what really happens to himself/herself when there is a crisis. He/she experiences a condition that cannot fully comprehend, and here the definition of uncanny I think is perfectly appropriated. I think every mental disorder creates this feeling, more than a physical disease, because the mind is a territory still rather unexplored. The DSM-5 lists only the external symptoms of the disease. It is because the mind itself is uncanny. Unlike neurology, psychiatry has a more difficult task: to try not to list only the symptoms of the disease, but to analyse the causes and the root of it, how it came, how it develops among the neurons. Certainly, progress has been made, yet something is missing. Here there is a digression to the terrifying uncanny valley: the mind is uncanny, inexplicable, maybe it will avoid the want of rationalising forever. This is the only way for the uncanny to survive, giving wonderful and terrifying, familiar and unfamiliar effects, in fiction, life, in every aspect of the existence. The inexplicability of the unconscious is the secret to reveal in order to comprehend the uncanny and it is impossible to carry out because the unconscious is, by definition, not conscious; yet, here one gets to the realm of psychiatry and psychology, to the different schools that interpret the mind and it is not my task to explain them now. I just wanted to show how the realm of what is called brain, mind, thought, and their diseases, is a mysterious and fascinating territory perfectly linked to the notion of the uncanny.

FORMS OF THE UNCANNY

The English title of Freud's essay is in quotation marks and it is always so. Thus, the uncanny can be a ghost that haunts all the words, however familiar they might be. Hence, language becomes uncanny. The act of putting the word into quotation marks makes that word a little strange, different, ghostly, referring to something else, to all or nothing.¹³

As Punter argues:

Perhaps the uncanny has to do with those moments when the ceaseless whirl of desire stops [...]; perhaps what is uncanny about *déjà vu* is not that we have been here before, but that we have never escaped. Below the flux of activity would lie, then, a differently structured world, different in its sense of time, endlessly, slowly circling, but without forward progression. One way of referring to this world is as the unconscious. [...] The automaton, then, is not menacing because it seems to be a threat to the self; it is menacing because it suggests to us that it may well be a representation of the self, a repetition with no beginning, that all those eyes in "The Sandman" of which Freud makes play are locked in a circle, sterilised, moved into a pure realm of stasis – which is despair. [...] The uncanny, of course, lends itself also to the comic. It lends itself to odd moments of recognition, odd moments of not merely feeling that we have been here before, but that we genuinely recognise something even though we may have no ascertainable means of doing so¹⁴.

This is the phenomenon of the *déjà vu*: the *déjà-vu* is a psychic phenomenon that concerns the forms of alteration of memories; it consists of totally random facts of things, animals or people that come into contact with the subject, which cause the feeling of a previously lived experience. The experience of *déjà vu* is accompanied by a strong sense of familiarity, but usually also by the awareness that it does not really correspond to a lived experience (and therefore one experiences a sense of "supernaturality", "strangeness" or "mysteriousness"); the "previous" experience is mostly attributed to a dream or a fantasy. In some cases, however, there is a firm feeling that the experience "genuinely happened" in the past.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 41-42.

¹⁴ Punter David, *A Companion to the Gothic*, Malden, Blackwell, 2006, p. 201.

In addition, Freud states that we speak a foreign language. The foreign is that which is far from the comfortable home. So, Freud asserts that in the encounters with language, there are scenes with foreigners, strange words, strangers, words that are strange even to ourselves. Thus, the life of words, of language, is still foreign, different from our world, even if we try to give it some fixed meaning. Hence, in every story we hear, we experience also the absence of some other story we would wish to hear, more fit for our desires¹⁵. The voice of the text is mechanical, dead. We try to give voice to it but we still remain uncertain with a sense of loss, of absence of some other thing which remains unnamed and a stranger to us. This is true in literature, especially in the poetic text where the text is profoundly personal and we feel like intrusive visitors that try to interpret the poem. The deep meaning is known only to the writer. To me, this is true also in tales and novels, they can be interpreted, but maybe something escapes, maybe the deep meaning is the secret of the author and it will be unknown forever. Why did he write that novel? What is hidden in it? Is there something hidden?

Thus, the uncanny is the feeling concerning the struggle between what is known and what is unknown. Punter points out:

The boundaries between the “Heimlich” – the socially acceptable and explicable – and the “unheimlich” that which lies beyond the bounds of human reason – never become clear, and we are invited to accept a version of events which is, in the strict sense, “super-natural”, not relating to our normative experience but nonetheless suggesting another realm which we have perhaps only experienced in dream, in haunting, in our sense of something which exists in our everyday life but nevertheless continues to remind us of something archaic, something which indeed lies within our psyche but at a level so deep that we know it only phantasmally, only as something which leaves its imprint as it continues to surge upwards and threaten our everyday lives, even as it reminds us of something which, perhaps, we have once known but only in the remote past, whether that past be considered historically or psychologically¹⁶.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁶ Punter David, “The Uncanny”, in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 130-131.

According to Royle:

The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper [from the Latin *proprius*, “own”], a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private propriety including the properness of proper names, one’s so-called “own” name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events. It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was “party of nature”: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world¹⁷.

Hence, the uncanny could be also something cosmological, cosmic, that involves the profound meaning of our existence; why do we live? What is the goal of our life? What is there after death? These are mysterious questions; we will never know the answer and the uncanny nurture itself with these open questions. Royle made grand claims and Punter, analysing them, argues that in these passages there is the conception of the self that always “misconceives” itself as central to the universe: below our conceptions or self-conceptions there is another force at work which tries to overturn our beliefs by which we live every day. The uncanny always reminds us that there are no beginnings, we are composed of the past, some of them available, others swallowed in a primordial past which we cannot recover consciously; yet, it keeps influencing us and maybe denoting the sense of our life.¹⁸

Bennett & Royle have listed thirteen forms that the uncanny can take¹⁹; I list them here because they are important to fully comprehend in which forms the uncanny can appear in real life and fiction:

1. Repetition: strange repetitions of feeling, situation, event. For example, the experience of the *déjà vu* or the idea of the double;
2. Odd coincidences and the sense that things are fated to happen;
3. Animism: situation in which what is inanimate or lifeless is given qualities of life or spirit;

¹⁷ Royle Nicholas, *The Uncanny*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 1.

¹⁸ Punter David, “The Uncanny”, in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, cit., p. 132.

¹⁹ Bennett Andrew & Royle Nicholas, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, cit., pp. 36-40.

4. Anthropomorphism: situation in which what is not human is given qualities of human form or shape;
5. Automatism: this term is used when what is human is perceived as mechanical, for example, sleepwalking, epileptic fits, trance-states, madness;
6. Deep uncertainty about sexual identity – about whether a person is male or female;
7. A fear of being buried alive: for example, experiences of claustrophobia, enclosure and confinement;
8. Silence;
9. Telepathy: this idea involves the thought that maybe your thoughts are not your own, however private you might think they are;
10. Death: the conception of death seen as familiar and absolutely unfamiliar, unthinkable, unimaginable;
11. The death drive: this term refers to the idea that everyone at some level is driven by a desire to die, to self-destruct, to return to a state of inanimacy;
12. Ghosts: this is the perfect example of uncanniness; the notion of ghosts destabilises all distinctions between being alive and being dead, the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar; a ghost is the quintessential element of strange repetition or recurrence; it is a revived, it comes back, and maybe he will come back forever;
13. Language: an uncanny sensation is intimately linked to language, and more precisely with a crisis in relation to language; we are at loss, we feel uncertainty, we encounter the sense of something beyond language, unnamed.

In sum, the uncanny can be described as the feelings that may arise when the homely becomes unhomely, when the familiar becomes strange or the unfamiliar becomes familiar. Thus, the uncanny is a concrete experience even if it is unthinkable and unimaginable. Bennet & Royle points out that it is not a theme used by the writer or a quality that a text possesses, yet it is an *effect*. So, it has to

do with how we read or interpret and with the experience of the reader, it is like “a foreign body within ourselves²⁰”.

Art is one the most important field where we can experience the feeling of the uncanny; as for example, in Ernst’s “The Eye of Silence” where the painting itself is questioning the spectator, offering an enigma to resolve. Here there are familiar elements belonging to different realities in an irreal composition. The effect is uncanny. The feeling is not derived from the mind, but from the unconscious. Surrealism, cubism, abstract art, they all create this mysterious and disquieting feeling. The usefulness of the uncanny as a positive artistic tool is apparent: its ability to suspend and exploit one’s sense of reality within various artistic contexts.²¹ For example the artist and musician Natacha Diels chooses to work within several parameters to provide the feeling of the uncanny: the conflict between robotic actions and human sounds, the disembodiment of human movement, and the mixture of human and electronic sounds. Her artistic objective is to walk the line between humour and macabre²².

Thus, the uncanny is also present in dreams that escape control, and in phenomena like déjà vu, the return in a certain place, the slip etc. Carotenuto argues that:

Il ritorno non intenzionale nel medesimo luogo, il ritrovarsi cioè in un posto senza averlo voluto o deciso, ma apparentemente per puro caso, così come l’impressione di rivivere più volte le medesime esperienze relazionali, genera quella sensazione perturbante che ci fa sospettare, con un brivido di paura e smarrimento, che a guidare i nostri passi e i nostri gesti ci sia, oltre all’Io cosciente e a sua insaputa, un regista occulto, che mette in scena un “copione” diverso. Questa dimensione è [...] quella inconscia.²³

²⁰ Bennett Andrew & Royle Nicholas, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, cit., p. 43.

²¹ Diels Natacha, *Art and the Uncanny: Tapping the Potential*, Leonardo Music Journal, Vol. 24, 2014, p. 75.

²² Ibid., p. 76.

²³ Carotenuto Aldo, *Freud il Perturbante*, Milano, Bompiani, 2002, p. 12.

Human beings try to defend themselves from these terrible feelings, they cannot accept what is not explainable rationally. As human beings endowed with reason and rationality, they cannot accept what is “super-natural”:

Si preferisce negarli [i vissuti destabilizzanti], contro ogni evidenza, misconoscendoli come figli illegittimi. È la strategia vincente dell’Io quando si sente esautorato: proiettare all’esterno la minacciosa presenza che mette in discussione la sua sovranità, negarne l’origine interna. “Non ero più io”: quanto volte abbiamo sentito invocare quest’ultima difesa? Quando non è possibile individuare il nemico nell’altro, nel prossimo o nella società tutta intera, allora a minacciare il potere dell’Io è una forza misteriosa, ma comunque esterna, che a dispetto delle nostre intenzioni e dei nostri progetti decide, anzi ha già deciso secondo un suo disegno imperscrutabile, l’esito della partita; e ci prende letteralmente la mano, e guida le nostre mosse, spingendoci a fare il suo gioco. Caso, fatalità, sorte, necessità: con quanti nomi abbiamo battezzato questo “capro espiatorio”? “Era destino”: quante volte abbiamo sentito chiosare una vicenda umana, piccola o grande, con questa epigrafe acquietante e – soprattutto – deresponsabilizzante?²⁴

Yet, this force is not completely external; it can be regarded as an internal opposition which does not limit itself to sabotage the work of the self but pursues its own design, which is not necessarily subversive. It is our task to find out what it means in order to achieve a balance. In fact, this is the task of psychotherapy.

Yet it can be fearful and scary. Clearly, the main figure of the uncanny is the Ghost. The Ghost is always related to death and it is represented by the spectre in literature. There is nothing more mysterious to our understanding than mortality.²⁵ Death has this power because of its similarity with scientific doubt and primitive thought. Death does not have any form in life. The unconscious makes no place for the understanding of death and mortality. Only the dead know the secret and mystery of death. Death recognizes its victim, yet the victim does not.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 12-13.

²⁵ Freud Sigmund, Strachey James, Cixous Hélène & Dennomé Robert, “Fictions and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* (The “Uncanny”)”, in *New Literary History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1976, p. 542.

Everything returns, except death. Why are we still afraid of the dead, questions Freud. It is because, he argues, the dead man has become the enemy of his survivor. If he returns to earth, it is to carry the reader into his new existence, into his home. In order to carry him off, it is always a question of displacement through which opposites communicate. It is the *between* that is contaminated with strangeness. The Ghost announces and proves nothing more than his return. What is intolerable is that the Ghost eradicates the limit which exists between two states, neither alive or dead; passing through, the dead man returns in the manner of the Repressed. It is his coming back which makes the ghost what it is, just as the return of the repressed that reveals the repression. In the end, death is the disturbance of limits. If all which has been lost returns, as Freud illustrated in the *Traumdeutung*, nothing is sufficiently dead; the relationship of presence and absence, with the uncanny in between, is death, a system full of the real and the phantomization of the real. The mysterious power of death moves in the realm of life.²⁶

Strachey observes:

As a Reserve of the Repressed, fiction is finally that which resists analysis and, this, it attracts the most. Only the writer “knows” and has the freedom to evoke or inhibit the Unheimliche. In other words, only the writer has the freedom to raise or to repress the Repression. But this “freedom” defies all analysis; as another form of the Unheimliche it is like that which should have “remained... hidden,” Still, this fiction does not escape the law of representation, and is mysterious to everything else but itself²⁷.

Puppets are also one of the forms in which the uncanny can take place and Gross analyses them in detail in his book. Puppets are closely linked to death, more precisely to a non-death that provides uncanniness. Some lines of his work are particularly interesting:

If [the puppets] echo our sense that our bodies are liable to become dead, intractable objects, such puppets also play out a fantasy of surviving so many outrageous forms of death, so much violence, dismemberment, and

²⁶ Ibid., p. 543.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 547.

devouring; they remind us of how inanimate objects themselves may supply what is lost or dead in us. [...] These puppets [...] afflict each other, taking on an always-ambiguous life of their own, a life close to that of something not alive.²⁸

Another form of the uncanny is technology. Lazzarin argues: “In effetti, la scienza e la tecnologia sono fonti inesauribili di stranezza perturbante. [...] Le nuove invenzioni, le scoperte tecnologiche, le novità generate nel costume e nella vita quotidiana dall’inesausto progresso della Tecnologia e della Scienza sono sempre, all’inizio, fonte di Unheimliche”²⁹. He focuses on trains:

Ogni grande rivoluzione scientifico-tecnologica è all’origine del sentimento dello strano in chi vi assiste; e la letteratura ha sempre trascritto fedelmente tale stranezza inquietante dell’oggetto scientifico-tecnologico. Soprattutto la letteratura degli ultimi due secoli. [...] Questi oggetti strani sono introdotti in letteratura mediante meccanismi stranianti. La modernità nel suo complesso [...] costituisce una novità affascinante e inquietante. Fra tutti questi emblemi [...] forse il più significativo è il treno. [...] La ferrovia è una delle invenzioni che ebbero la più forte influenza sulla società occidentale dell’Ottocento, e sulla letteratura che ne esprimeva desideri, ansie timori. [...] Nella letteratura otto-novecentesca esiste un vero e proprio topos del treno inquietante: vi sono treni orridi e delittuosi, treni perturbanti e treni infestati da spettri, e vi sono addirittura treni fantasma – tali da cima a fondo: carrozze fantasma, predellini fantasma, locomotive fantasma, e beninteso passeggeri e macchinisti fantasma³⁰.

The animation of the inanimate, the train that changes into a monstrous snake, is perhaps the most effective of all procedures to arouse the feeling of the

²⁸ Gross Kenneth, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, p. 35.

²⁹ Lazzarin Stefano, *Fantasmî Antichi e Moderni: Tecnologia e Perturbante in Buzzati e nella Letteratura Fantastica Otto-novecentesca*, Pisa, Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2008, p. 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

uncanny³¹, as Jentsch already recognized³² and Freud reiterated in his famous essay³³.

Straub considers the Puritans in his work; the new continent Puritans believed that some people, “the elect”, were saved, and the others, were damned. Every human being was sinful by nature. These grim people lived isolated in the American forest. What did they see in that forest, in that endless darkness? Maybe nature that resulted wicked in its nature. This seemed true. The most important aspect of the distrust of Nature is in the collapse of the individual will. The loss of agency caused horror. Trance, sleepwalking, mesmerism, possession, obsession, madness. What remains is the irrational, violent, mad, uncanny condition of mankind that every time can spring up and menace without clarified reason.³⁴

The automaton is another device of the uncanny; Marynowsky talks about the “Uncanny Valley” hypothesis by Masahiro Mori. This theory warned artists not to design robots as too human-like, otherwise the robot would repel the viewer and fall into the uncanny valley, a state of fear and disbelief. The research experimentally analyses how the feeling of familiarity and pleasantness experienced by a sample of people and generated by robots and anthropomorphic automata can increase as their resemblance to the human figure increases, to a point where extreme representative realism produces a sharp decline in positive emotional reactions, arousing unpleasant sensations such as repulsion and restlessness. Some robotics researchers like Hanson believes that this theory limits the freedom of artistic exploration. The question is: is the “Uncanny Valley” a limiting construct? Marynowsky answers yes; from the collected audience responses to his works, he agrees with Hanson’s in that the “Uncanny Valley” limits artistic freedom and should be utilised as a framework for the exploration of audience experience of an artwork³⁵.

The doll is a further device of the uncanny to convey its disquieting feeling. The doll takes back to the world of the first childhood loneliness, among those things that show themselves in a familiar and unfamiliar way, filled with

³¹ Ibid, p. 102.

³² See Jentsch Ernst, *Zur Psychologie des Umheimlichen*, cit.

³³ Freud Sigmund, “The Uncanny”, cit.

³⁴ Straub Peter, *American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps*, New York, Library of America, 2009, pp. 14-15.

³⁵ Marynowsky Wade, “The Uncanny Automaton”, in *Leonardo*, Vol. 45, N. 5, 2012, pp. 482-483.

unspeakable mysteries. Resnik states that Casanova makes love with Olimpia in the Fellini's film:

La sessualità meccanica diventa prigioniera del “pensiero meccanico” della bambola. La sessualità che si lega alla morte rappresenta uno sforzo disperato di rendere vivo ciò che è morto [...]. Questa mescolanza mai del tutto risolta tra sessualità e morte rinvia al lato sinistro dell'esistenza. La soglia tra l'ordinario e lo straordinario, tra la morte e la vita, tra il sogno, la morte e la veglia, diventa indefinita. Olimpia diventa il doppio meccanico della sessualità di Casanova, il suo specchio di sesso opposto, la sua ombra.³⁶

The meeting of the shadow takes back to the nightmarish characteristic of the uncanny:

Figure divise, separate dalla luce, che avvolgono in silenzio, misteriose, inquietanti, impure [...], figure d'ombra come trasparenza, proiezione, indistinzione. Nella soglia tra il sogno e la veglia il tempo è sospeso tra l'ombra della notte e l'ora luminosa del giorno. Le immagini della notte, indistinte dalla luce, assumono un'altra figurazione. Da questa zona più sfumata tra luce ed ombra possiamo volgere alla bambola uno sguardo diverso per scoprire forse cose che ancora non stavamo cercando. Frammenti di ricordi, di realtà, di desiderio. Bambole di cera, di avorio, di porcellana: sentieri segnati per lunghi secoli e in continua trasformazione. [...] Nella bambola possono vivere parti e fantasie altrimenti forse non vivibili³⁷.

Rilke concludes:

Di fronte a lei, come ci fissava – dice Rilke – provammo noi la prima volta [o m'inganno?] quel vuoto nel sentimento, quella pausa del cuore, dove

³⁶ Resnik Salomon, “Nosferatu o il Perturbante”, in *Bestiario*, I, 2 (1981), p. 24.

³⁷ Ruberti Lucilla, “L'anima della bambola”, in *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 1987, No. 16, La cultura della bambola, p. 61.

uno trapasserebbe, se poi l'intera natura procedendo oltre soavemente non lo sollevasse, come una cosa inanimata, a valicare gli abissi.³⁸

Therefore, the adult knowledge will be different and needs to recognize the past as a memory, I would say, a disturbing memory, given the distance that separates the use of the doll from its subsequent discovery. At first the child wishes the doll to be alive, then at some point the doll becomes independent, mechanical, dead, in all its materiality. By handling it as an adult, the doll creates a time lag that is distressing, as one becomes aware of the necessary loss to adult life; the memory of the doll is not useful in the present since it only creates disturbance. The doll must return to her place, ready to go back to staring, always making the owner aware of the loss of a stage, of a lost, mysterious and unknowable dimension, of another life.

³⁸ Rilke Maria, *Bambole*, trad. it. Di L. Traverso, Firenze, 1921, p. 27.

READING “THE UNCANNY”

Schlipphacke goes further than the conception of the uncanny as “the return of the repressed”. In her essay she states that Freud’s uncanny is more concerned with the surface than with the depths. The fear felt is oriented to the future than to the past, the point where trauma resides. In this sense, the notion of the return of the repressed that has dominated is complicated. As a result of new research, Freud concludes that anxiety is not a result of the repressed, but “it was not the repression that created the anxiety; the anxiety was there earlier; it was the anxiety that made the repression”³⁹. The ego allows fantasies of instincts to call forth an imagined danger to stimulate feelings of anxiety that induce repression. Thus, the dual relationship between anxiety and repression, one presented in the first lecture on anxiety and one in the 1923/33 lecture, exists side by side in Freud’s “Uncanny” essay, creating a unity within the essay itself. By the end of the later lecture, Freud has brought the two models together. Anxiety has a dual origin: “one as a direct consequence of the traumatic moments and the other as a signal threatening a repetition of such a moment”.⁴⁰ Trauma might signal the past, but it might also point to a future threat. The anxiety associated with trauma might be a product of the present, an affective experience out of nothing. Following this logic, the realm of the “return of the repressed” is lost and the realm far more upsetting of the “threat of the present and the present future”. The notion of trauma and anxiety as an experience that can be generated anew at any time is scary as the child’s fear of dark. If this is a mode of being that indicates a presence of quantity, then darkness is the manifestation of this concept. Thus, the anxiety exists temporally in a time in between the past and the now, a point in time for which we have no concept. Freud points to an in-between space, between below and above, a space we have no idea. Thus, the uncanny seems linked not only to the return of the repressed, but also to the present and the future, to the return of something that has always been there.⁴¹

³⁹ Freud Sigmund, “Anxiety and Instinctual Life: Lecture XXXII,” in *The Freud Reader*, Ed. by Gay Peter, New York, W. W. Norton, 1989, p. 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴¹ Schlipphacke Heidi, “The Place and Time of the Uncanny”, in *Pacific Coast Philology*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 2015, pp. 163-172.

Mccaffrey focuses on the omissions Freud makes in his essay “The Uncanny” that appear to be more mysterious since they are omitted. For example, when he talks about dead bodies, he discusses everything except dead bodies. He produces no specific example of uncanny dead body.⁴² By erasing textual embodiments of death, Freud enacts metaphorical deaths. He repeats this gesture many times:

Freud erases textual bodies by several different methods in “The Uncanny”. Sometimes he erases the text itself by failing to provide its identity. Sometimes he erases the part of a text which contains a literal body or a part of a body, thus dismembering the text itself, representing one of its features while leaving the others, often more pertinent, unacknowledged. These erasures [...] repeat each other thematically. They establish a consistent pattern; a few key motifs reappear over and over in these erasures, motifs which Freud methodically exiled from the manifest text of his essay.⁴³

For example, Freud omitted only one important topic which Jentsch discussed, the fact that children are more susceptible to uncanny feelings than the adults. In the final paragraph of the essay, Freud talks about silence, solitude and darkness only to say that they are treated elsewhere.⁴⁴ Mccaffrey concludes:

But the final result of this pattern of mirroring absences is that the Freudian body [...] physically incorporates these vacancies, these rhetorical graves, as evidential clues which speak more clearly through their absence than they would have by their presence.⁴⁵

According to Lloyd-Smith, the main uncanny figure exposed by Freud’s essay “The Uncanny” is the woman, the doll Olympia. Freud represses the idea of Olympia. The “Heimlich” which turns into its opposite is the woman: friendly,

⁴² Mccaffrey Phillip, “Erasing the Body: Freud’s Uncanny Father-Child”, in *American Imago*, vol. 49, No. 4, 1992, p. 371.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

intimate, belonging to man, to the house or the family; but also concealed, kept from sight. The association with the “angel in the house” of Victorian ideology is clear. She becomes bearer of “Heimlich” and “Unheimlich” at the same time. Woman, in Freud’s time, brings life, but also death. She threatens stability⁴⁶. The patriarchy of Freud’s time cannot recognise an adequate existence of the female, who must remain immature, childish, silenced: “No wonder this figure returns to haunt his text as an unsubduable threatening doll, and is pushed aside as satire”⁴⁷. Freud seems afraid of her. Better leave her unexplored. The fact is that, by leaving her so, she acquires power, a power that haunts all the essay between the lines. In the end, Llyod-Smith argues that:

The doll returns at the conclusion of Freud’s analysis of “The Sandman”. He confesses himself puzzled at the idea of a “living doll” excites no fear at all in children, who may even desire that their dolls come to life. Freud proposes that this contradiction [...] may only be a complication, which may be helpful to us later on, and so ends his analysis of the story with a question instead of a conclusion. The doll does not reappear, yet it haunts his remaining account.⁴⁸

The female, tame, silenced and obliterated, carries the power of mortality and sexual desire: “one of the faces of the woman is Medusa’s face, the unheimlich within the heimlich”.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Gardner Lloyd-Smith Allan, *Uncanny American Fiction*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1989, p. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

THE DANGEROUS LUXURY OF ITALY

SCATTERED IMPRESSIONS

So wherever you go
I'm your shadow
Desert to ice flow
I will follow

(Birdy, "Shadow")

Five years after his first visit to Rome, James said that he was "wedded to a preference for a life in Italy to any other"⁵⁰. In fact, his relationship with Italy, from the beginning, resembled almost a conjugal union, similar to a love story. A love story that he will collect in his book *Italian Hours*.

Italian Hours ends with the phrase "the luxury of loving Italy", and the book shows that Henry James, through subjective "impressions" rather than Naturalist descriptions⁵¹, enjoyed this luxury to the maximum degree. Italy was the country that amazed him extremely. In his life James wrote a lot about Italy in his travel writings, but also in his fiction, in fact many of his tales and novels are set in Italy. Italy, the "Old World", was essential to him because it was the total opposite of his "New World", the United States of America, the quintessence of a utilitarian Puritanism that did not please him at all. In fact, in America, where it was more important to work and earn, the James family had the time to think and create intellectually. As a matter of fact, Henry James's family was rich and, thanks to the grandfather's inheritance, they were able to think and study. Henry James travelled in Europe for the first time in 1855, when he was twelve.

⁵⁰ James William, *Correspondence of William James: William and Henry, 1861-1884*, vol. I, London, University Press of Virginia, 1992, p. 97.

⁵¹ Bell Millicent, "Nineteenth-century Europe (1843-1900)", in *Henry James in Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 24.

James's family decided that it was time to take their children away from America, a materialistic country. His father was worried for the life of their children: in fact, the parents were afraid if they would take the wrong way in the United States. This journey was necessary for the children in order to educate their mind and to learn languages. They remained in Europe three years staying in Geneva, Paris and London. During this travel, Henry James discovered Europe, the importance of the "international theme", the comparison between Europe, the past and history, and America, a young country, without the history, state, king, church, aristocracy of Europe. In fact, he always thought that history was essential to create and decided to move to Europe in order to achieve the inspiration for his work and to find the right material to write. In fact, James always believed that his talent for fiction might blossom best while he lived in an ancient society, an argument sometimes implied by his disapproval of his own "raw" America⁵². In this way, James looked at America from Europe to shed light on Americans and vice versa. His best-known motivation for his expatriation to Europe and for his choice of the international theme is in a famous passage in his 1879 book on Hawthorne; he says: "the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep [...] it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature [...] it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion."⁵³ To write a realistic novel, the American writer had to go to Europe, where historical signs were multiple⁵⁴.

The international theme had three main articulations for James. First, the American artist, unsatisfied at home, goes to Europe to find history and art, passion and human affection, to be inspired and happy. He will find that passion, affection, colours, richness are excessive there, so he emerges destroyed. Second, the businessman who goes to Europe to find relaxation and pleasure, possibly a wife. Yet, he is going to be defeated by the complexities of European society, the insidious practices and the corruption, the lack of morals, hidden under the façade of European manners. Third, the American girl who goes to Europe to express her freedom and her enthusiasm for life, only to find her innocence misinterpreted and betrayed, her aspirations disappointed, her identity trapped and imprisoned by the

⁵² Bell Millicent, "Nineteenth-century Europe (1843-1900)", in *Henry James in Context*, cit., p. 16.

⁵³ James Henry, *Hawthorne*, Ed. by Tanner Tony, London, Macmillan, 1967, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Perosa Sergio, "Italy in Henry James's International Theme", in *The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy*, New York, New York University Press, 1990, p. 48.

situations of life⁵⁵. Thus, the role of Europe is ambivalent and ambiguous: she is alluring, but deceitful; rich in history and art, but lacking in decency and morality, in honesty and kindness. Hence, Europe is up in manners, but low in morals, whereas America is down in manners, but up in morals. Yet, this is not a clear division. The interest of James is focused on problematic and ambivalent characters: the higher the level of morals, the lower the elegance of manners and vice versa⁵⁶.

Yet, this is not an unproblematic explanation. The theory would be that the innocent Americans go to Europe to find evil but it is not always so. Shifting in Henry James' development of the international theme, that is Europeans and Americans compared, can be linked to alterations in the international position of the United States. Whereas in his novels and stories of the 1870s/early 1880s (*Roderick Hudson*, *Daisy Miller*, *The American*, *The Europeans*, *Portrait of a Lady*), the Americans are generally the innocents and victims, when James returned to that theme in the early 1900s (*The Ambassadors*, *Wings of the Dove*, *Golden Bowl*), now the Europeans or Europeanized Americans are the victims of the Americans. This change can be related to James' own perceptions of the growing international power of the US, as shown in the Venezuela crisis and the Spanish-American War, and in his comments on the wealth of Americans. Although James is rarely thought as a political novelist, in reality at that time he commented abundantly on the changing international scene, particularly in correspondence with his brother William, who was a strong anti-imperialist and asserted resolutely against American policies. Again, one can argue that, in his later novels, the expatriates are now largely victims rather than the villains they have often been in earlier works⁵⁷.

Moreover, Italy lends itself congenially to a racial interpretation. The two national roles that (the American and the English) James and his characters interpret are disturbed by a third party, Italy. Racially speaking, the only dark hue admitted in James's world, Italy, disrupts a binary, white Anglo-American contrast and reveals the national limit of the international theme. In fact, black skin is almost

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵⁷ Roberts Priscilla, "The Geopolitics of Literature: The Shifting International Theme in the Works of Henry James", in *The International History Review*, Vol. 34, N. 1, 2012, p. 89.

absent in James. Italians are the only “dark race” in James but they bear the great responsibility of throwing a shadow on the Rooseveltian ideal of white and heterosexual US masculinity.⁵⁸

Thus, the international theme is the comparison always more complex between two different people and mentality and it is found in many Jamesian novels, for example, to cite some works, in *Roderick Hudson* where the protagonist decides to stay in Europe, and *The American*. In these novels it is evident the “international theme” that will influence the next forty years of the intellectual life of James. The American meets Europe with terrible outcomes. How come? The answer is to be found in the tale “The Madonna of the Future”, where Theobald says: “we Americans are condemned to be superficial!⁵⁹”. It seems that the American man is condemned to a sense of inferiority, of diversity, typical of the outcast, that is the feeling that James felt during all his life towards Europe and Europeans. In *Daisy Miller*, an American girl goes to Rome where she is seduced by a Roman gentleman; she will be affected by malaria and die. This was the first success of James and he will be criticised for having represented Daisy to be too naïve. Here the tale already foresees the dangerous sense of what Italy could be, namely, an endless beauty that could hide some terrible and deathly traps.

James has been a traveller since his childhood and followed the steps of many other important writers such as Goethe, Shelley, Byron, Hawthorne, Browning. Europe was criticised in some aspects, yet reached for its tradition and for the possibility it offered to live, study, reflect, work away from material pressures. So, these authors were on the edge between admiration and distrust, attraction and repulsion⁶⁰. Only in ancient, mysterious, complex civilizations, where good and bad are not discernible, James was able to create his psychological investigations and express the conflict between innocence and experience, appearance and reality⁶¹. Many American colonies flourished in Florence and Rome and James often enjoyed the company of many of them, for example of William Wetmore Story.

⁵⁸ Njegosh Tatiana, “The Good American: Henry James, U.S. American Studies and the Frontiers of National Identity”, in *Revisionary Interventions into Henry James*, Napoli, Università degli studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 2008, p. 234.

⁵⁹ James Henry, “The Madonna of the Future”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, Ed. by Edel Leon, Soho Square London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l’Italia*, Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1968, p. 10.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

His was the experience of the Grand Tour, the rite of passage which originated in the seventeenth century and reached its peak in the years before the Napoleonic wars. Originally designed to prepare a young wealthy man of the upper classes for the public life, the tour prescribed a combination of travel, education and leisure in a two-year journey by coach along a precise route through France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and other countries. With the opening of Europe and the beginning of public transportation, the era of the Grand Tour gave way to the modern tourism, the age of commercial tourism. In fact, travel became quicker, more convenient and available also for other classes of people. Thus, the term tourism and more generally the phenomenon of today's mass tourism originated from the Grand Tour. The appeal of Europe and Italy attracted many Americans and gave life to travel literature. Hence, James was participant in a number of traditions: The Grand Tour, the trend in commercial tourism, the new American interest in Italy and the travel writing by Americans authors⁶².

In James's Italy there is the picturesque description of the landscape, but also the penetrating consideration for the sense of the past. History had an immense value for James, but his Puritanism instilled in him a negative vision of history, as the suffering of men over time. Hence, the writer felt interest and fear, sought and ran away⁶³. Like Ruskin, James tried to escape the terrible past full of crime and suffering, but this past still attracted him. James highlighted the Italian past, especially for his literary needs. According to him, it was history that made good a page of paper. And in his works, what remains of history serves to delineate shady realities that wait for people who linger too long on the Italian soil. For instance, Rome is endowed with something mysterious and supernatural. In his essay "The Spirit of Rome", Rome is described as a "mere state of imagination⁶⁴", while its inhabitants are described as "victims⁶⁵". James himself will confess to be "the life-long victim" of Motherland Italy. Thus, Rome becomes the symbol of a bittersweet experience, where everything is beautiful, but could be also mortal and devastating. In fact, what James feared the most in Rome and in general in Italy was his

⁶² Macdonald Bonney, *Henry James's Italian Hours: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, cit., p. 13.

⁶³ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l'Italia*, cit., 1968, p. 26.

⁶⁴ James Henry, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, Ed. By Kaplan Fred., London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1994, p. 212.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

“intellectual laxity”⁶⁶ because he was always attracted by her, like a ruthless magnet, and was not able to work diligently as he desired.

On his first visit to Rome, James wrote in a letter to his brother: “At last-for the first time-I live. It beats everything: it leaves the Rome of your fancy-your education-nowhere. It makes Venice-Florence-Oxford-London-seem like little cities of pasteboard⁶⁷”. The power of Rome seems insuperable. He will temper this excitement. He will see Rome as a provincial city where papal power was declining more and more. For example, during his final visit to Rome, in 1907, James lamented in one letter of the “now highly-developed heat and dust and glare⁶⁸” and added in another letter, more violently, that “I feel that I shouldn’t care if I never saw the perverted place again⁶⁹”. Even his beloved Florence will be considered late in life “vulgarised⁷⁰”. In fact, many regions sacred to him were being polluted by streams of tourists and new industrial innovations that ruined the romantic landscape. Nonetheless, despite his travel letters developed a note of melancholy too quickly, James found reset, refreshment, artistic inspirations in the Italy he knew intimately; in fact, he returned there many times again and again, till the end of his life⁷¹.

In 1875 he decided to live in Europe for an imprecise period of time and Venice, Florence, Rome remained his favourite cities. Moreover, Southern Italy had also its role, in fact the Bay of Naples amazed James as “the last word”, Capri oddly seemed “beautiful, horrible and haunted” with its “splendid couchant outline”, Naples was “at best wild and weird and sinister” and yet during his last visit the city was “seated more at her ease in her immense natural dignity⁷²”. James will never explain why he never ventured in Southern Italy except Naples. Naples was not a predefined stage for the Grand Tour gentlemen. He will regret for not having done this and the missed visit of Sicily.

Hence, he wrote particularly about the trio of Venice, Florence and Rome. The latter was a world apart. It belonged to the pope before 1870. When James went

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁷ James Henry, *The Letters of Henry James*, Ed. by Lubbock Percy, Vol. 1, London, Macmillan, 1920, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. 2, p.74.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷¹ Gale Robert, “Henry James and Italy”, in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Vol. 14, N. 2, 1959, p. 159.

⁷² James Henry, *Italian Hours*, pp. 481, 482, 487.

to Rome a second time in 1873, secularised Rome started and the changes were enormous. James started to feel the nostalgia for the papal Rome and maybe religion, the great past that was going away. In addition, Venice was the perfect aesthetic city and it was the goal of the Grand Tour. The city on the water showed herself as the city of sadness, beauty, romantic death, where art and nature were so beautifully fused that it was like living in a work of art. It was a beautiful yet dark city because it recalled death and the tombs, in all their beauty, sadness, remembrance, eternity. With its decay it was the favourite place for writers, poets, artists. Venice echoed James's ambivalence between his "inexorable yankeehood", his wish not to over-romanticise Italy, and his own hidden and profound sensuality which he always expressed, the caresses of his eyes while they are observing, his tender feelings for the *gondolieri* for their grace and fortitude⁷³. Venice was:

[...] the place has the character of an immense collective apartment, in which Piazza San Marco is the most ornamental corner and palaces and churches, for the rest, play the part of great divans of repose, tables of entertainment, expanses of decoration. And somehow the splendid common domicile, familiar, domestic, and resonant, also resembles a theatre with its actors clicking over bridges and, in straggling processions, tripping along fondamentas⁷⁴.

Thus, Venice is dreamy, decadent and aesthetically perfect, Florence is picturesque and Rome is mortally overwhelming. This reaction was part of his education. James inherited the Anglo-Saxon conception that Italy was the result of the Roman Empire, perfect example of culture and history, a sensuous mix of wild nature and civilisation. On the other hand, it was the example of vice, corruption and treachery.

The three motifs of the Italian experience of Henry James in his fiction are the motifs of romance, treachery and sensuousness⁷⁵. The motif of romance derives from the historical circumstances under which James toured Italy. In 1869 Rome

⁷³ Edel Leon, "The Italian Journey of Henry James", in *The Sweetest Impression of Life: the James Family and Italy*, cit., p. 17.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵ Maves Carl, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the work of Henry James*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973, p. 6.

was still governed by the Pope and the rest of the country was still under foreign control. During his second visit, in 1872, the Republic had been founded and the old picturesque had ended forever. Thus, the romantic image of Italy was something that remained in James's mind to be cherished, while the actual Italy was completely different. The visitor was becoming aware of the split between the sentimental preconception of Italy and the real Italy of the Italian people. Every time James tried to bring to light this sentimental feeling, since he travelled alone and did not have a real contact with Italian people. In fact, it was common for Americans to naively idealise Italy. He was aware of this, but he could not talk about Italy without romanticising it; in a certain sense, it was a common custom for educated American people. But Italy could also deceive and here there is the second motif, the motif of treachery. Treachery is especially explored within close personal relationships against an Italian background. Thus, Italians are false, but also beautiful, and this beauty is mixed, it is a beauty of landscape, people, art, everything is fused and perfectly picturesque. The senses are stimulated and the carnal wins over the spiritual; it is clear that this is dangerous for a puritan man as James. Despite that, he did love Italy intimately. The last motif, sensuousness, is linked to the sexual instinct correlated to Italians; this was difficult for James to analyse and only in his latest main novels Italian sensuousness emerges. Italy, at the end, is like a transgression that cannot be accepted, yet cannot be ignored.

By 1860 James he had toured Europe three times. In 1869 he went for the first time in Europe alone. During this time, he returned alone to England, France and Switzerland, this time crossing the Alps to descend to Italy, a still unknown country and culture - his parents had never ventured there. He labelled Italy as a "beautiful dishevelled nymph". His entering into Italy was highly ceremonial. In making the descent from the Simplon, it was like, as Leon Edel said, James was "walking into his future" through rites of passage, namely, the uncovering of a former self and the task of tempting a new one, the liberation from pre-perceived beliefs in favour of fascinating new ones⁷⁶. Northern Italy, i. e. the Alpine crescent and the Po valley with all the cities between Milan and Venice, was seen as a neutral area where North and South meet in a coexistence of opposites, a crucial ritual of

⁷⁶ Perosa Sergio, "Henry James and Northern Italy", in *Studies in Henry James*, Venezia, Cafoscarina, 2013, p. 88.

passage. This “borderline region” is characterised by two extremes, West and East: Lake Como, represented as a garden of Eden, a mix of natural beauty and peace; and Venice, a symbol of absolute and unique artistic beauty. In-between, the movement towards Southern Europe allows to mediate between the masculinity, dignity, gravity of Northern and Central Europe, and the elegance, vivacity and femininity of the South. In these encounters, mountain passes are for James dear metaphors of felt life: they open lovely views through physical restriction and limitation. Mont Cenis, the Simplon, the Old Saint-Gothard appear in this purpose in many of his letters and essays. Northern Italy is, at the end, a manifest mediator between North and South, i. e. between aloofness and felt life⁷⁷, a place of transformation and ambivalence. So ritualistically did Henry himself feel that he decided to walk back into Switzerland and make the descent again. This was very important for a man of sensibility as James and he needed to feel again the picturesque and maybe the heroic feeling that that passage had aroused in him. He was again in Italy.

He went from Como to Milan and then proceeded across northern Italy. In a state of delightful ecstasy, he visited Milan, Verona, Padua, Venice, Pisa, Naples, Genoa, Florence, Rome. He discovered "the luxury of loving Italy", the country that more than France (where he frequented Zola, Maupassant, Turgenev) and England (where he moved permanently in 1876) would have most influenced his extraordinary literary production. This tour marked the end of a quiet decade with his family, the end of American life and the beginning of life and work in Europe. From Venice he moved to Florence. His response to Florence was mixed. At first it did not seem a cheerful city, it was gloomy. But once out to visit it better, its vitality, varieties of people, collection of works of art immediately captured him. Yet, Rome killed him. Once he arrived, he visited almost the whole ancient city, with the Forum, the Colosseum, Campidoglio, the Pantheon, Castel Sant'Angelo, and other piazzette and monuments.

The essential fact is that he was developing a deeper interest into Italian art and Italian artists. The artists that captured him the most were Michelangelo and Raphael. Michelangelo was a genius but Raphael was unique, he was a simple and pure genius, unmodified by the struggle of experience. When he stared at the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

sculpture of Moses at San Pietro in Vincoli, Henry felt that the greatness of Michelangelo was that he was a man of action. James was giving voice to the fact that creativity involved risk, courage, struggle, adventure, action. The work of art needs to be constituted by a series of difficulties or it is nothing⁷⁸. He could not find the words to fully describe what he saw because there was always something that was being excluded, something unspeakable that was the mystery of Italy. His love remained beyond the reach of words and also his writings became full of this magic. For example, the decline of Catholicism had transformed the church of Santa Maria Maggiore into a deserted temple in which the mind could fly with the imagination, by imagining the rich variety of people that have crowded it over time. James loved such beautiful decorations but said that the true beauty was elsewhere. It was an enchantment that cannot be explained, it was constituted by “tones and notes”, something difficult to capture with words. James assimilated the pure pleasure of the aesthetic experience; once the object has been identified, the mind could enjoy its nameless pleasure. Only Italy could give him the so-called aesthetic luxury. Yet, he needed to be alone, not disturbed, distractions constituted a threat to the ecstatic rapture of the sensitive observer⁷⁹.

From his very early days James’s curiosity had been nurtured by paintings of Tuscan vistas which adorned the salon of the family house in New York and they stimulated his prolific imagination, creating his “sense of Italy”, his “myth of Italy”, together with his readings. It proved to be one of those myths of adolescence which, instead of dissolving with maturity, gain new vitality at every contact with it. James remained always an outsider; the myth was never effaced⁸⁰. In fact, as a traveller, James wanted opportunities to occupy privileged “inside” spaces, but in his fiction, the “surface-relations” and “outside” positions of tourism revealed productive ground for his exceptional mind and imagination⁸¹.

⁷⁸ Lewis Richard, *The Jameses: A Family Narrative*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1991, p. 215.

⁷⁹ De Biasio Anna, *Romanzi e musei: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James e il Rapporto con l’Arte*, Venezia, Ist. Veneto Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2006, pp. 106-107.

⁸⁰ Mariani Umberto, “The Italian Experience of Henry James”, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 19, N. 3, 1964, p. 239.

⁸¹ Jolly Roslyn, “Travel and Tourism”, in *Henry James in Context*, cit., p. 353.

ITALIAN HOURS

Henry James frequently travelled across Europe between the late 1860s and the middle 1890s, visiting Switzerland, France, Britain and Italy before he settled in London in 1878 and finally in Rye in 1897. He collected his experiences and thoughts about these travels in *Transatlantic Sketches* (1875), which contains his essays on England, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Holland, and Belgium written between 1872 and 1874. Later, he published another collection, *Italian Hours* (1909), which reprinted selected Italian travel essays from *Transatlantic Sketches* with some revisions alongside his later travel essays on Italy.

Italian Hours is a travel notebook by Henry James published in English in 1909, with illustrations by Joseph Pennell, in which James collected essays on Italy written over a period of about forty years, from 1872 to 1909. The work is made up of twenty-two chapters, almost all of which have the date on which they were composed; only two chapters, besides the introduction, were unpublished. Compared to their first composition, the collected pieces were extensively revised and modified so as to constitute an organic collection. The author, who confesses to be suffering from a sort of *mal d'Italia* ("the luxury of loving Italy"), for each place describes in order (and in subjective order of importance) the monuments and works of art, landscapes, men and the social environment. In the earliest writings the places are compared with the author's impressions prior to the visit.

In *Italian Hours* James explored art and religion, political turmoil and cultural revolutions, and the nature of travel itself. The book starts with five essays on Venice, early and late; its centre contains six essays on Rome and its neighbourhoods. He wrote much less about Florence. There are two essays on that city, and in addition essays on the Umbrian hill towns, various Tuscan cities, Siena, Ravenna, Naples, and Capri, together with mixed essays on his returns to Italy. He revised his Italian essays and added notes that were elegiac and nostalgic.

He moved from early romanticism to deeper reflection, distinguishing between Italy as a museum-country and Italy as a modern state. James's appreciation of the Italian cities is marked by a pervasive regret for the disappearance of the past and the ambivalence regarding the transformations that Italy was going through. When James first arrived in Italy, the country was rapidly

changing and the book shows these transformations. James's itself had an ambivalent opinion: he liked the form of the republic because it was important about the new rights of the population, but he was also aware that the old, romantic Italy was gone forever and the industrial modernisation had a main role in it. Italy was "the epitome of a national-museum city being modernised by a vulgar curator"⁸². *Italian hours* shows a "lost face of Italy"⁸³ and the modern tourist viewed a different, new and modernised country, less indoctrinated and sanctimonious. James agreed with John Ruskin that Italy was being ruined by the vulgarisation of the modern world and the rush of tourists. The commercialisation of Italy worried James and this is shown especially in his essays on Rome and Venice. Hence, these essays are pervasively characterised by a sense of the loss, the loss of a romantic and old Italy that was gone forever. James posed questions about "the durability of civilization itself"⁸⁴ and each essay recorded the "death of a vision that had come before"⁸⁵. Rome was not eternal; it was being modified by civilization and invaders. James was very concerned about this in many of his passages.

Yet despite all this, despite the so-called loss of the picturesque, the essays eventually celebrate diversity, vitality, energy. It was important that any belief in civilization would suppose that culture would not die and in fact culture did not die, was still there, time was stood still as James said about Venice, where, despite the flourished restaurants and the innovations of every type, the historical effect of Venice was still unvaried. James tried to mix civilization and romantic beauty in a sort of vitality and he succeeded⁸⁶.

In addition, these essays talk about the last days of the papal Rome, which James experienced only once, during his first visit, a year before the secularisation of Italy. These passages are crucial because he will make some comparison between what Italy was and what Italy is now. He visited Italy fourteen times, over a period of forty years. His last visit was in 1907. So, Italy was different to him over all this time. It was beautifully romantic in 1869, he found it changed and melancholic in 1907. His letters move from youngish excitement to nostalgia for the time that passes inexorably and the changes it carries with itself.

⁸² James Henry, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, cit., p. 14.

⁸³ James Henry, *Italian hours*, Ed. by Auchard John, New York, Penguin Books, 1994, p. 11.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

In *Italian Hours* James wanted to explore the Italian pagan and Christian culture, in fact his homeland but also France and England did not provide him this profound pleasure typical of Italy. Italy was the country of art. He went there to see Renaissance art, Roman sculpture and architecture. Air, light, landscape and visual beauty were fused, they were inseparable. Life and art were united in Italy, more than anywhere else. His Italian experience can be described as the combination of the natural and the artistic⁸⁷. It was as if the ghosts of the masters were living there, perpetually and eternally. Italy, on the other hand, was difficult to manage because it was hard to work there. The beauty of Italy demanded constant attraction and adoration. This beauty had its dangers, especially for a man with a strong ethic. But he was carried by it. Italy was feminine, luxuriant, sensual and romantic. It did not seem a Christian country, it seemed a pagan country. He enjoyed the appreciation of nature, the daily life without any moral rule to observe. Italy was delight of the senses and a premonition of sinful collapse.

Stylistically, James in *Italian Hours* assumes a number of voices, one self-conscious mirroring an awareness of a public captured through frivolous but pleasing statements, another evoking membership of an exclusive elite, characterised by position and privilege and reverberating with famous historical names and memories. Finally, there is the observer of human beauty suggesting a yearning that was to be sublimated into a desire for place rather than people. In such moments of semi-disclosure, the authority of assumptions and history is lost. Everything is individual and private, yet resolutely coherent and fluid. This last tone could seem hesitant, yet the contrasting voice that reinforces norms and rules speaks directly to the America represented by the New England readers of the *New York Nation* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. In these pages, there is an identity constructed by experience, often characterised by a rhetorical and paternalistic way. In the so-called moment of semi-disclosure, American place-names offer some secure hold for the reader and suggest James's "new-world eyes". Of course, the want of understanding this foreign land is one of the goals of the book, yet sometimes it is reduced to a merely parochial significance⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ James Henry, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, cit., p. 11.

⁸⁸ Collister Peter, "Levels of Disclosure: Voice and People in Henry James's *Italian Hours*", in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 34, 2004, pp. 194-195.

In addition, though the material for James's picturesque was Italian, its tendency to fall into the grotesque or arabesque was American⁸⁹. By adopting formulas of the picturesque, James used an apparently innocuous code for the expression of hidden desires and transgressive senses of himself in an arena full of their performances. Frequently the picturesque is of course the carnival with its potential for the grotesque. In the fractures, silences, frequently bizarre moves of James's travelogue and meditations, and in their search for the grotesque, there are registrations of the divisions between "the strange and the illicit, the perverse and the perverted, the attractively picturesque and the erotically desirable".⁹⁰

⁸⁹Grotesque decoration (so called as found in ancient grottoes, as the Italians termed excavations) combines plant, animal, and human motifs. Arabesque uses only flowers and calligraphy. See Thomas Ollive Mabbot, in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, 3 vols (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1978), II, 474n.

⁹⁰ Rawlings Peter, "Grotesque Encounters in the Travel Writing of Henry James", in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 34, 2004, p. 171-172.

ROME: THE OMINOUS TORPOR

In 1873 Henry noted some changes since his last visit to Papal Rome in 1869. After Paris, Rome seemed a sleepy *ville de province*. All was silent and deserted. Secularisation had started. The new Rome seemed to Henry hostile to the picturesque. The ceremonious *monsignori* were gone. There were no more ostentatious coaches of the Cardinals. The Pope was no longer to be seen, sitting in pompous coach. Instead, while Henry passed the Quirinal, there was the King in person, receiving petitions by the people. Henry remarked that never had royalty been in such hand-to-hand relations with its subjects. The traces of the *Risorgimento* were visible and multiple. Yet Italy still had its beggars and children pleading for coppers with their fine eyes and intense smiles.⁹¹ So in a certain sense the picturesque was saved; he had the confirm of it when he went to the Colosseum, to reflect on Rome present and past, pagan and Christian, medieval and modern, and the “contrast between bright light and mouldering cruel ruin”⁹².

In his essay about Rome “A Roman Holiday”, James was really disturbed by the carnival which he considered vulgar and pathetic. In fact, it represented the spirit of the Mediterranean temperament so at odds with the isolated provincialism of the New England people⁹³. Aware of the fact that Rome had been secularised, he went around a city full of “dandies” and pagan festivals to look for some outlying parts of Rome to retire into. He retired into a small church; Henry found himself in a small poor white interior. The candlesticks were tarnished, the altar was adorned with muslin flowers. He saw a kneeled priest praying and the priest was to be compared to these frivolous people seen before. It was the little church of st. Bonaventure. Here James made a comparison between the pagan and the Catholic, a double face Rome that appalled him. Apparently, here James preferred the priest, who delivered a respectable religious passion, something more serious, worthy and respectable. He seemed a stern satire of the thousands in the street⁹⁴. Edel states:

⁹¹ Edel Leon, *The Conquest of London 1870-1881*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1962, p. 82.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 83

⁹³ Collister Peter, “Levels of Disclosure: Voice and People in Henry James’s Italian Hours”, *cit.*, p. 198.

⁹⁴ Edel Leon, *The Conquest of London 1870-1881*, *cit.*, p. 84.

Henry regarded religious passion as “the strongest of man’s heart”. He accepted “some application of the supernatural idea” as an essential part of life. But like his father, he turned his back on religious controversy and the earthly religious forms. Among the “churchiest churches” in Europe-those of Rome-he was interested above all in the social role of religion, the fact that the man-made houses of God had been “prayed in for several centuries by a singularly complicated and feudal society”, forming the constant background of human drama. Abroad, in the streets of Rome, Henry felt himself a part of this continuing drama.⁹⁵

He was also truly moved by the statue of Marcus Aurelius and said that “it is singular that in a Christian city the most beautiful work of art was of a pagan emperor”⁹⁶. Moreover, the picturesque always remained his main goal, for example when he saw four *contadini* sleeping and a monk next to them, he said that nothing was more “sketchable”⁹⁷. This is important because it reflects the fact that James did not get in touch with them, he did not know really common Italians due to the fact that maybe he was afraid of discovering how Italians really were and so the romantic image of Italy would be irremediably destroyed. He remained at distance, like in front of a painting that needs to be observed, adored, studied. His Italy was all on his mind. As a spectator he looked for something that could raise his spirit and, despite the civilisation and the ugly people, he will say, about an admirable building, that “the imagine of the great temple depresses the balance of your doubts, seem to rise above even the highest tide of vulgarity and make you still believe in the heroic will and the heroic act”⁹⁸.

One day toward the end of January 1873, when he had been in Rome a month, James hired a horse and rode out to the Roman Campagna. As he rode, the beauty of the landscape, the feeling of power, took possession of him. The experience was bright, yet sad. Alive, yet charged “to the super sensuous ear, with the murmur of extinguished life”⁹⁹. The experience was sublimely strange. From the ancient stones, great arches and towering aqueducts, he felt that “emanation of

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

⁹⁶ James Henry, *Italian Hours*, cit., pp. 127-128.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

⁹⁹ Edel, Leon, *The Conquest of London 1870-1881*, cit., p. 97.

grandeur and that echo of imperium he had known from the first”.¹⁰⁰ He felt that there lied the real sense of history, what has been lost, what was gone forever; the campagna, with a sense of sad pleasure, was able to infuse a heroic sense of being part of history itself. The experience was illimitable and the sense of the past touched him intimately. Thus, the campagna is described as an *Arcadia*. In literature, Arcadia has always represented an idealized land, where men and nature live in perfect harmony. In a passage, James saw a shepherd and he was immediately captured by him. He said that “the poor fellow [...] little fancied that he was a symbol of old-world meanings to new-world eyes¹⁰¹”. This was what James was looking for: a profound sense of history that his homeland lacked and Rome, for its picturesqueness and history, was perfect for his imaginative world.

When he rode in the Campagna, he felt exhausted by all the sights, sounds, senses. The scenes showed not only the place itself, but also its surroundings, for example schoolboys, *contadini*, beggars, staying outside the monuments as if it was a painting. The scenes had a force behind them, the setting, the air, the reverberations are all fused, it was too much to endure. But James did endure it wonderfully. All these reverberations remained unnamed. An impression was not alone, it carried many details. They were too suggestive because they resonated with unseen meanings and associations. Of course, there was an initial impression, but then the observer was saturated with many associations, impressions and multiple expectations. This something else was elusive and unspecified for James. Thus, what is seen in Italy is not only something pleasant, but is something representative of the magic of Italy, the mystery of Italy. James expanded his vision to meet all the surroundings, everything his caressing eyes meet. Words could not describe the beauty of Italy because there was too much to see. He embraced the saturated, he wanted to immerse in it even if words could not describe the intensity of the immersion. Hence, James starts to list the glories of the Italian landscape. His catalogue is non-hierarchical and appreciates everything caught by his attentive and curious eye. He does not select or discriminate. The eye is innocent and naïve, in this way it can be saturated with the landscape. It must be empty and free from preconceptions, so it can be filled with the magic spell of Italy. For example,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 99.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 150.

churches, especially the one of Saint Peter, is so overwhelming that transcends everything and the spectator stays there and wonder if this is real or if it is only imagination, almost a miracle. The admirer cannot leave the scene; it is like a miracle that needs to be witnessed. It delights the senses and the viewer to a reality that transcends the present moment.¹⁰²

James thought many times about the disinherited Pope, talking about the “shrunk proportions of Catholicism¹⁰³”, in fact to him Italy appeared pagan, not Catholic. While he moved inside the church of St. Bonaventure, he saw a crone and a peasant and reflected about the connection between Guido and Caravaggio and these poor souls. His idealised Italy starts to creak. What do these louts have to do with the beauty and excellence of the church? Chigi palace gave him a sense of feudalism and all the Italian scene delivered him a sense of the Dark Ages. Thus, the Italian past seemed mysterious, dark, ancestral. Another place visited by James was the Alban lake. It was described as a legendary pool haunted by vague pagan influences. The city of Rome was the best during the spring. James said that it was like the old papal paradise had come back together with a lovely springtime. Papal Rome seemed the representation of the grandeur, the heroic, the romantic Italy he sought. He visited the pyramid of Caius Cestius, where the pagan shadow was so strong; he also visited the protestant cemetery where the presence of the past was tremendously heavy. He visited Santa Sabina, enriched with marble column of pagan origins. Again, here paganism and Catholicism are mixed together.

When James saw the tomb of the Valerii, said that “strange enough to think of these things surviving their immemorial eclipse in this perfect shape and coming up like long-lost diver from the sea of time¹⁰⁴”. Like an uncanny presence, these things come back like ghosts that haunt. Thus, Rome is dreadful and the “Roman air is filled with an elixir, the Roman cup seasoned with some insidious drop, of which the action is fatally, yet none the less agreeably, lowering”¹⁰⁵. Rome is a fatally mortal city. If he stayed too long there, he would have emerged dead and empty because its beauty is mortal, its past too heavy. He visited Villa Madama, where he said: “something human seems to pant beneath the grey pall of time and

¹⁰² For an in-depth analysis see Macdonald Bonney, *Henry James's Italian Hours: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, cit., 1990.

¹⁰³ James Henry, *Italian Hours*, cit. p. 154.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

to implore you to rescue it, to pity it, to stand by it somehow. But you leave it to its lingering death without compunction, almost with pleasure; for the place seems vaguely crime-haunted-paying at least the penalty of some hard immorality”¹⁰⁶. He visited Villa D’Este with the ruined fountains that seemed to wait mystically for the “spirit of the place¹⁰⁷”. Rome is ghostly, haunted and beautifully cruel.

In Rome James could identify with the great men of the past and could reflect upon the ancient stones where pagan and Christian were mixed together. For him ancient stones meant grandeur rather than decay. He found a fascination in things recently excavated. All these relics spoke to him as the products of the human genius¹⁰⁸. If he admired the Roman relics as symbols of endurance of art and nature, he also experienced a deep uneasiness in their presence. Power was acceptable to him only in some attenuated or disguised form. Unadulterated power had the scary qualities of open attack. For example, the statue of Marcus Aurelius was admirable to him, where power was masked with kindness.¹⁰⁹

The image of the Colosseum in James is symbol of the terrible human past and several aspects of the structure’s traditional meanings are evoked: above all, its monumentality and beautiful architecture, its memory as a place of barbaric entertainment, a negative image which has its positive side, namely, the demonstration of heroism and courage, and finally its character as a melancholy imperial ruin covered with flowers and visited by peasants, pilgrims, tourists. Thus, the colosseum becomes multivalent, a monument sacred and malignant, dreadful and magnificent, ravaged and enduring¹¹⁰.

James was particularly interested in how different historical fates might work in the shadow of previous civilisations. This attitude is evident in James’s use of Roman ruins in his fiction and travel writings. James interpreted the fall of the Roman Empire as a natural consequence of its disruption to integrate the new communities. For example, the Colosseum in *Daisy Miller* is the site of the dramatic climax and here James wants his readers to remember that the Christian martyrdom that was there may repeat itself in the destiny of the protagonist Daisy. James also recalls how the ancient glory of Rome depended on military despotism. He used

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁰⁸ Edel Leon, *The Conquest of London 1870-1881*, cit., p. 100.

¹⁰⁹ Edel Leon, *Henry James: A Life*, New York, HarperCollins, 1985, p. 144.

¹¹⁰ Vance William, *America’s Rome*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 44.

Rome as a reference point for making ethical judgements of modern nations, especially the imperialistic ones. This is clear in the tales “The Last of the Valerii”, “Adina”, “The Asper Papers”. In James’s modern world, the US and Great Britain are vying for economic, cultural and moral authority.¹¹¹ Yet he was not a radical critic. In his neglect of colonised people in his fiction, James excluded himself from his contemporaries who criticised and worked to challenge the developing imperialism of Great Britain and the US, but his internal critique, I dare say, implied, maybe might have had more impact than a direct criticism.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Rowe John, “Nationalism and Imperialism”, in *Henry James in Context*, cit., p. 247.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

FLORENCE: THE HAPPY HARMONY

Florence is another city that fascinated James. He found Florence charming enough but defined it as queer, promiscuous, polyglot. The past was present, thanks to “old things, old places, old people, old races¹¹³” and the city appeared “grey¹¹⁴” and “melancholy¹¹⁵”. The past was a haunting presence. The structures of Florence reminded of an ancestral architecture, “the simple nobleness of Greek architecture¹¹⁶”. The whole city was a memorial of the past, as he wrote in his essays on Florence. However, Florence was happier and more benevolent than Rome. The old Florence provided felicity, the sense of saving sanity, humanity, the nature was sympathetic, joyous¹¹⁷. Moreover, the art of Florence worked spells and almost miracles. “The Madonna of the Chair” by Raphael was seen as a miraculous manifestation and it will inspire the tale “The Madonna of the Future”. James visited the Palazzo Corsini and affirmed that “in such places lived in so long [...] the past seems to have left a sensible deposit, an aroma, an atmosphere. This ghostly presence tells you no secrets, but it prompts you to try and guess a few¹¹⁸”. It is an enigma similar to a De Chirico’s painting, where you have to stare at it and try to guess something that maybe will happen but it does not.

While he is wandering, James asked what remains of the Medici family. It is “a mere tone in the air, a faint sigh in the breeze, [...] a passive accessibility [...] to the yearning guess”¹¹⁹. Italy, Rome and Florence [the latter first gloomy, then happy, then ghostly] become an unnamed and undefined enigma that cannot be guessed for its past is too strong to be resolved. You can only stare at it and be fascinated by it. A melancholy note pervades the essay “From Italy Revisited”:

Your sense of the fineness of the finest is of something very grave and stately; your sense of the bravery of two or three of the best something quite tragic and sinister. From what does this latter impression come? You gather it as you stand there in the early dusk, with your eyes on the long,

¹¹³ James Henry, *Italian Hours*, cit., p. 238.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

pale-brown facade, the enormous windows, the iron cages fastened to the lower ones. Part of the brooding expression of these great houses comes, even when they have not fallen into decay, from their look of having outlived their original use. Their extraordinary largeness and massiveness are a satire on their present fate. They weren't built with such a thickness of wall and depth of embrasure, such a solidity of staircase and superfluity of stone, simply to afford an economical winter residence to English and American families. I don't know whether it was the appearance of these stony old villas, which seemed so dumbly conscious of a change of manners, that threw a tinge of melancholy over the general prospect; certain it is that, having always found this note as of a myriad old sadnesses in solution in the view of Florence, it seemed to me now particularly strong. "Lovely, lovely, but it makes me 'blue,'" the sensitive stranger couldn't but murmur to himself as, in the late afternoon, he looked at the landscape from over one of the low parapets, and then, with his hands in his pockets, turned away indoors to candles and dinner¹²⁰.

Yet despite this, Florence was the city he loved the most because the Tuscan city seemed happy, cheerful, sunny, human. Florence becomes an important stage for the maturation of the characters at the cost of great suffering. In fact, as Giorcelli argues, the city can be also cruel towards those who do not balance their passions¹²¹, towards those who approach its art with excessive ardour and become chosen victims, such as Theobald. So, Florence can be also threatening. Yet unlike Rome and Venice, salvation still seems possible in Florence, as Mariani argues:

Florence has another function in James's economy. It is the place in which one tries to regain one's equilibrium, to recover one's lost strength [...]. The city's landscape, history, and architecture permit this. The cypresses have the gothic austerity of many Florentine churches; the hills are higher and more severely shaped than in Rome; the palaces too, in the absence of the baroque, are more austere; the countryside is hilly, windy, and green, lacking the sleepy opulence of the flat Campagna; the atmosphere is clearer

¹²⁰ James Henry, *Travelling in Italy with Henry James*, cit., p. 263.

¹²¹ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l'Italia*, cit., p. 38.

than in Rome, love is more spiritual; Tuscany, evidently, has no corruptive influence¹²².

Mariani states that in Florence a salvation is possible, but not in Rome: Rome is endowed with a fatal beauty that numbs and destroys. James's spirit led him to appreciate palaces, gardens, cloisters, but from the bottom of his spirit he always felt a terrible warning that made him flee from places that have seen the suffering of numerous generations of people. Yet, the feeling of death derived from Rome, and I add Florence and all Italy with its deadly past, may solace human beings because it may link their personal suffering to the common destiny of humanity¹²³. Hence, with descriptions and evocations of landscape, James therefore often represented moral situations and we understand why he so admired the compositional technique, the pictorial fusion that gave the painting that balance that he has always tried to establish in his characters¹²⁴.

¹²² Mariani Umberto, "The Italian Experience of Henry James", in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, cit., p. 247.

¹²³ Giorcelli Cristina, "Beguiling City, Bewitching Landscape, Bewildering People", in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 33, N. 3, 2012, p. 218.

¹²⁴ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l'Italia*, cit., p. 56.

THE JAMESIAN ITALY

Reflecting on James's vision of Italy, critics have often emphasized the ambivalence that defines his production. According to Maves, Italy is supremely beautiful but also a place of betrayal and death; Perosa states that the international theme rests on the threat of the country's splendour; for Leon Edel it passes from lively naivety to composed sophistication. According to De Biasio, the Italian experience is also a place of personal investment and enjoyment. For James, aesthetics is pleasure. He therefore rejects a didactic or prescriptive approach. By going against Ruskin, he clearly says that rules and moral evaluations make no sense in art. Questions of morality are different from those of art. Morality concerns the artist and not his product. Fatigue is important and reveals ethics¹²⁵. I fully agree with Maves, the Italian experience of James has always been an ambivalent addiction, something not relaxed and happy, but sinister, spectral and deadly. In fact, he took possession of Italy by degrees; he had to place himself slowly to the different levels of civilisation. He perceived the Romantic Italy of Stendhal, then came another phase, the discovery of the ancestral and threatening early centuries. In fact, by translating this concept into his fiction, Roderick Hudson is killed by his love for Italy; Daisy Miller dies of indifference and a Roman fever; Isabel Archer discovers the treacheries of the expatriate Americans in Florence and Rome; Milly Theale goes to Venice, the city of beauty and ruins, to die¹²⁶. His was the Italy of "historical impressionism", filled with a total and saturated aesthetic experience carefully reworked by his "archaeology of feeling"¹²⁷.

In James's early stories Italy is the land of the picturesque, of artistic, historical, sentimental elevation. Yet she is represented as a background, a mere setting for trivial plots. She is not really connected with the development of the narration¹²⁸. It seems that James wanted to use Italy to be "fashionable", to show that a refined country should be the best one to use as an ornament to his early plots,

¹²⁵ De Biasio Anna, *Romanzi e musei: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James e il Rapporto con l'Arte*, cit., p. 109.

¹²⁶ Edel Leon, "The Italian Journeys of Henry James", in *The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy*, cit., p. 9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²⁸ Perosa Sergio, "Italy in Henry James's International Theme", in *The Sweetest Impressions of Life: The James Family and Italy*, cit., p. 51.

according to the tastes of that time. Italy, for most of James's characters, implies turning innocence into experience, an encounter with evil, often a premonition of suffering and death. This is of course an idealised conception, almost romanticised and not related to actual reality.

Hence, in his fictional universe, based abundantly upon reality and artistic experience, Italy had the main role, even if his Italy was not a real country: he had scarce contact with Italians which is the reason he slowly entered our culture; his characters are conventional, literary, operatic, he frequently misspelled Italian words and idioms, and had vague knowledge of Italian literature¹²⁹. There is no doubt that the Italy of the *Risorgimento*, does not really exist for James. What exists is the Italy of the past, not so much of the historical past, as of the artistic past. Thus, Italy is not only a huge museum with many works of art. Italy is not only where James can expand his knowledge and enjoyment of paintings, sculpture and architecture, guided by the supreme Ruskin. Italy is not only a series of charming views, towns, streets, cathedrals, squares, elegantly described. Italy is first a metaphor of art which all elements – natural, artistic, historical, human – participate to create the page of the paper to enter the deeper side of it, to unveil its secret meaning¹³⁰. Yet, Italy is no *Arcadia* for James in the true sense of the word. The relationship with it creates anxiety, effort, struggle, similar to the effort of the job of the artist. It is no *Arcadia* also for the characters which repeat the experience of the author. If the American experience in Europe can be quiet and tranquil in England or France, in Italy it cannot be so. Italy, the most beautiful country in the world, is deadly poisonous inside. Thus, for many characters, Italy is sorrow, solitude, illusion, death. They are surrounded by wonderful views and palaces, but this view never causes happiness. On the contrary, this excessive beauty accentuates the negative outcome of the Italian journey. Italy is quiet and perfect only in the imagination, in reality it hides deceit and traps of various sort¹³¹.

Hence, Italy is identified with the artistic experience which is connected with death. This connection is evident in the description of the Bronzino painting observed by Milly in *The Wings of the Dove*:

¹²⁹ Lombardo Agostino, "Italy and the Artist in Henry James", in *The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy*, cit., p. 230.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 231-232.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 234-236.

[...] she found herself, for the first moment, looking at the mysterious portrait through tears. Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair—as wonderful as he had said: the face of a young woman, all magnificently drawn, down to the hands, and magnificently dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with her slightly Michaelangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage—only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead¹³².

The characters in Italy suffer and die because the artist, in order to create, must die into life and because the artistic object leads to that supreme, sacred moment of death. The work of art is full of joy, harmony, and at the same time it destroys itself, revealing its illusory nature. What remains true? It is the human condition with its destiny of sorrow, mystery, death. This is true for all art and especially here, for the Jamesian works. Yet, James knows that the harmony of his works is illusory, that happiness is only artificial, that truth is hell that art cannot exorcise. In all his works, then, and in the Italian ones, it is evident the double process by which through the representation of life and beauty, the vision of death manifest itself. This is certainly true in *The Wings of the Dove* where all the beauty of Venice is constantly flanked by the future death of the protagonist Milly¹³³.

Thus, the theme of the artist is the main Jamesian theme, yet, there is a difference from the artists of aestheticism like Wilde and D’Annunzio:

Italy is the great metaphor of art, but the relationship with art so pregnantly represented through the relationship of the characters with Italy is, in its turn, for James, symbolic of the human condition. By adding, through Italy and the Italian stories, the artistic element to his fictional universe [and to the “international theme”] James also shows the necessity of art, its

¹³² James Henry, *The Wings of the Dove*, Penguin Books, 1999, p. 152.

¹³³ Lombardo Agostino, “Italy and the Artist in Henry James”, in in *The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy*, cit., pp. 237-238.

centrality in the human experience not as “decoration” or “ornament” but as a metaphor of life, the revelation of truth, the knowledge of our destiny¹³⁴.

Moreover, Henry James’s adventure in Italy, unlike his travels in France and England, made him see things only from the outside, “scraping the surfaced of things”¹³⁵. Mariani points out the main reasons of this:

The difference between his grasp of English and French life and his grasp of the Italian is clearly shown by his early travel essays. The Italian group of the Transatlantic Sketches contains singularly little human observation, amidst a waste of common- place and uncritical generalizations; his style is often predictable, at times pseudo-poetic, or rather lushly hyperbolic. Just as unprepared for a critical appreciation of both places and works of art as the American tourist he frowned upon, he is constantly searching for the "picturesque," missing the true quality of the towns along the Baedeker and Murray circuit. Yet, more than journalistic superficiality and occasional rhetoric, the dominant characteristics of James's first contact with Italy are his romantic distortion and consequent exaggerated enthusiasm¹³⁶.

James has always been happy with his position of “outsider” and it was hard for him to use his Italian material realistically. His Italian characters remained in a certain sense away from reality and never assumed the features of complex individuals. Later, he will use his Italian material to suggest atmosphere to create contrasts and comparisons. In his best fictions, Italians are kept in the background as a part of the landscape; and only in this way his “types” created by his romantic vision entered the fictional world actively¹³⁷. The Italian myth, as a consequence, played in James's fictions the same role later played by the American myth in the work of certain European writers. It made him the representative of a generation of

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 239.

¹³⁵ James Henry, *The Letters of Henry James*, cit., p. 36.

¹³⁶ Mariani Umberto, “The Italian Experience of Henry James”, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, cit., p. 238.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 242.

Americans, for whom he created and refined an ideal conception of Italy that had been present in the Romantic movement, especially in England¹³⁸.

The lack of a realistic introduction to the country, due to both the romantic character of James as well as to his inability, once he had gone there, to penetrate the real spirit of the Italian world, is the cause for the superficiality of his early representation of Italy. Yet this situation away from reality helps to explain why, later, with the growth of his intimacy with the country, James used a symbolic appraisal of his experience. In earlier works, James thought of Italy as a place encouraging and reactive to the life of those who choose to live there; in more mature works he created again the Italian world as the atmosphere most appropriated to the moral and aesthetic examination of his characters, and as a symbol of moral values which, as they come into conflict, reveal the moral values of a different world, this time a legendary America¹³⁹.

Thus, the Henry James's Italian experience can be described as a familiar thing, since he was truly interested and knew so much about Italy, yet so unfamiliar and alienating, since his Puritan roots tried to take him away from it. In this clash, Italy became for James a place of mysterious spectrality, in which time and space were two worlds apart. Moments and images were repeated, or ignored, or forgotten, or underrated, or overrated. Time moved through anticipations and flashbacks. Thus, we have spectres haunting the writer, taking on various shapes and leading him to more and more places¹⁴⁰.

This is clear in a passage narrated by Leon Edel:

Twenty-four hours later they had negotiated the Mont Cenis tunnel. Old sensations suddenly came to life and made him aware how intense had been his 1869 experience of Italy-the balcony, the Venetian blind, the cool floor, the speckled concrete; the Castello in Turin's square with its shabby rear and its pompous front: the brick campaniles in the mild, yellow light; the bright colours, the soft sounds-it was the Eternal Italy and also his personal Italy. Under the arcades the human scene was unchanged.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 243

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 254

¹⁴⁰ Gutorow Jacek, "Figures of Fulfillment: James and "a Sense of Italy"", in *Henry James's Europe: Heritage and Transfer*, Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2011, p. 96.

¹⁴¹ Edel Leon, *The Conquest of London 1870-1881*, cit., p. 67.

Eventually, Italy becomes the expression of a superiority of the US, so the Jamesian Italy is profoundly correlated to his social status as an American. Simonini states:

[...] it was effectively through symbolic possession of "Italy," i.e., cultivated sentiments of "Italophilia," learned insight into Italian artistic achievement, first-hand knowledge of the country and its people, and the ability to speak the language of Dante that literary figures such as Fuller, Hawthorne, Howells and James signified and validated their superior American social status. In other words, nineteenth century Americans both signified and affirmed their upper-class status through expressions of Italophilia. Howells and James, in particular, [...] inhabiting a "common culture of letters" through which they parlayed their Italian experience/expertise to advance both their literary and social standing. They read and reviewed each other's works, assuming what Susan Griffin describes as a "tutelary tone" aimed at educating their readership in a superior class of taste in social comportment as in literary style.¹⁴²

This final citation explores James's complex aesthetic-melancholic-ironic relation to the complexity of Italy in comparison with Goethe, which leads to death; at the end, the splendour of Italy is a deadly beauty, the fatal end of Italy is a bittersweet death; Italy reminds of a past, a lost, something remained from other times:

It is a formative factor in every culture, and the traveller must be prepared to capture the fusion of these different worlds in a glance [the aesthetic-melancholic-ironic¹⁴³]. James's theme in his travels was not a change in himself, a kind of inner distancing, as it was, as we will see, for Goethe. He was not seeking "new life" for himself but the "old" life of Italy. James's multiple crossing of the borders to the Italy of the past still present

¹⁴² Simonini Carla Anne, "Constructing America by Writing about Italy: How Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing Informed Ethnic Identity Construction in Italian-American Literature", in *Italian Americana*, Vol. 33, N. 2, 2015, p. 140.

¹⁴³ My addition.

in diminished form remained to the end fundamentally an aesthetic, not an existential, quest. It culminated in “perceptions and affections” [IH 34], an elegant mixture of “sensuous optimism” [IH 107] and a kind of melancholy for a lost world. But the lost world of James, which Goethe knew but was not really attracted to, was not the world sought by Goethe, the classical world, with its grounding of art and beauty in the very laws of nature itself. It is hard to think of James, a hyper experiencer of the first order, with his intense interest in the twisting nuances of the flow of consciousness, agreeing with Goethe’s deepest conviction that “nature is, indeed, the only book whose every page is filled with important content” [IJ 187]. Rather, more positively, in his travels James, while not insensitive to the natural world, treated it, rather, as the active-recessive and socially constructed background for “the whole adventure of one’s sensibility.” Such an adventure leads to the practically unavoidable consequence that “one has really vibrated too much,” resulting in “an incalculable number of gathered impressions” [IH 193], which could lead to the fatal result of the Stendhal syndrome, death by the hands of beauty. This is the fateful result of infection by “the lust, the landscape lust, of the eyes” [IH 236], bordering on a “small wanton aesthetic use” of “the indestructible mixture of lived things” [IH 234], a description that fits remarkably Stendhal’s relationship to Italy and the source of the deadly illness to which his name is attached¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴⁴ Innis Robert, “Traveling Toward Distance: Italian Lessons”, in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 29, No. 1 2015, pp. 45-46.

ADINA

THE RULING TOPAZ

Betrayal, betrayal
One gun on the table
Headshot if you're able
Is this happiness?

(Lana Del Rey, "Is this happiness")

"Adina" first appeared in *Scribner's Monthly* during May, June 1874. This split across two monthly issues may account for the bipartite structure of the tale. It next appeared in book form in the collection of tales *Travelling Companions* published in 1919 by Boni and Liveright, New York.

The narrator and his friend Scrope are in Rome, going on horseback in the countryside, when they encounter Angelo, a handsome young man who has just found an old gemstone. Scrope buys it at a low price, takes it from him and runs away. He is aware of his dishonesty, but the narrator has reservations about the strange purchase. Scrope cleans and polishes the stone, which turns out to be a golden topaz, the personal intaglio of the Emperor Tiberius. He incites the narrator to secrecy about the discovery and he in turn advises Scrope not to reveal the matter to a possible mistress. When Scrope's cousin Mrs Waddington arrives in Rome, he falls in love with her step-daughter Adina. Mrs Waddington and the narrator cannot understand why a pretty young girl should fall in love with an unattractive man such as Scrope. When they all go to Christmas Mass at St Peter's, Scrope and Adina stay out alone. The next day Scrope reveals that he and Adina are engaged. Later, the narrator walks out alone and meets Angelo, who is full of anger over the dishonest affair of the topaz. The narrator decides to help both men. Scrope agrees to meet Angelo, but when they do, he refuses to pay more for the jewel. Moreover, Adina says she will not wear the topaz because Tiberius was a cruel emperor. One day, they all meet Angelo in the Borghese gardens. He threatens to 'hurt' Scrope at some

point in revenge for having been unfairly treated. One day Mrs Waddington and Adina go to Albano. The narrator visits them, and on his way back to Rome, he meets Angelo, who lives nearby. Later he meets Adina alone, praying in a church. She begins to act strangely, and Scrope confesses to the narrator that he is worried about her. When Adina suddenly breaks off her engagement to Scrope, the narrator suspects that she has somehow fallen under the “spell” of Angelo. He advises Mrs Waddington to leave Albano the very next day. The following morning a note reveals that Adina has married Angelo and eloped with him. Some time later the narrator goes to see Adina and Angelo who live in Rome. Angelo is brightly happy, whilst Adina appears pale and serious. She wishes to remain with Angelo and “be forgotten” by her relatives. When the narrator reveals this state of affairs to Scrope as they stroll in the city centre, Scrope throws the golden topaz into the Tiber to end the spell.

This tale has many elements of the medieval romance and the fairy tale which James explored at the time: the discovered gem, the Italian setting, the young girl’s elopement. In fact, James draws attention to this very aspect of the tale during the narrative. Lured by only smiles and glimpses, she agrees to marry somebody she hardly knows:

The shutters and the handkerchief suddenly acquired a mysterious fascination for me. [...] I thought it ought to be out of a novel – such a thing as love at [first] sight; such a thing as an unspoken dialogue, between a handsome young Italian with a wrong, in a starlit garden, and a fanciful Western maid at a window. [...] There was a nameless force in the girl.¹⁴⁵

Geography and places are essential in this story and they combine to form the structural axis of the tale. The story starts in Rome, where Scrope and the narrator are based. They ride out into the countryside and encounter Angelo – it happens, near Albano, which will feature later in the tale. Albano Lake is depicted in *Italian Hours* and it is described as haunted by vague pagan influences. When Mrs Waddington takes fright at the prospect of the famous Roman fever, she decamps with Adina to Albano where the turning point will take place and also to Lariccia, which is where Angelo lives. Angelo thus pays court to Adina, and his

¹⁴⁵H. James, “Adina”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., pp. 250-251.

own uncle will celebrate the marriage. The romance elements are there – but they are blocked by factual details in the tradition of realistic narrative fiction. Angelo and Adina even go to live in Rome after the marriage ceremony – which completes the geographic symmetry.

The most obvious feature in terms of artistic devices is Angelo and his full name – *Angelo Beati* – (blessed angel) – because he does triumph with the ‘prize’ of Adina, who he says to be the more valuable, better than the topaz. As to the name Angelo Beati, the narrator says that “a name, certainly, that ought to have been to its wearer a sort of talisman against trouble”.¹⁴⁶ Actually, the angel in him will turn out to be a vindicative ghostly figure, so his initial innocence is marked by his name. His is a journey from initial pastoral innocence to the experience of evil, necessary to become a modern man. Progressively, he haunts the other characters with his returns, he “comes back” three times and his are perfect ghost-like and spectral apparitions. The narrator knows it: “I had felt, as we lost sight of our friend Angelo that [...] we should hear of him again.”¹⁴⁷ The first apparition is at the Colosseum, the locus of archaic, ancestral and powerful ancient Rome. After the barter, he metaphorically dies and revives to seek revenge. His described “stillness” increases in him the spectral configuration. The second one is when the group meet him at the Borghese gardens where Adina meets Angelo in a strange encounter. James does not make it explicit so the reader must imagine it. The only thing he exposes is that the girl walks away and then comes back “with an air of suppressed perturbation”¹⁴⁸. After the third encounter, the narrator says: “but for several days I was haunted with a suspicion that something ugly, something sad, something strange, at any rate, was taking place at Albano”¹⁴⁹. The spectrality of Angelo is particularly evident when the narrator and Scrope talk about him:

He has passed me in the village, or on the roads, some half a dozen times. He gives me an impudent stare and goes his way. [...] you see how much there is to be feared from him! [...] He hangs about the inn at night; he

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 244

roams about the garden while you're in bed, as if he thought that he might give you bad dreams by staring at your windows.¹⁵⁰

There is also an ironic prediction of the story-line in Scrope's observation:

[...] some knowing person would have got word of the affair, and whispered to the Padre Girolamo that his handsome young nephew had been guided by a miracle to a fortune, and might marry a contessina¹⁵¹.

Angelo does exactly that, twice. First, he attempts to impress his village girlfriend Ninetta with the few *scudi* he has gained, but nothing comes of it, because the reward is not big enough to impress her. But then he succeeds on a much larger symbolic level by enchanting and marrying Adina, more precious than the topaz.

At the beginning of the tale, the narrator describes his friend Scrope, when at a certain point he says:

The truth was that the picturesque of Italy, both in man and in nature, fretted him, depressed him strangely. He was consciously a harsh note in the midst of so many mellow harmonies; everything seemed to say to him—"Don't you wish you were as easy, as loveable, as carelessly beautiful as we?"¹⁵²

This is clearly related to the apparent superiority of the Italian landscape and Italian identity, in contrast to the New England one. Yet, in this passage there is something inexplicable and strange that foresees the future events. Here the landscape seems to speak to Scrope. The union of people and nature, the main characteristic of the picturesque so dear to James, is already creating a perturbation in him. At the end the victory of Angelo is the victory of a man equally "easy", "loveable", "carelessly beautiful". So, nature works with Angelo to get the last prize. Not only Angelo is against him, but nature itself, the places themselves, Rome itself, the ruins themselves that have Mediaeval and ancestral connotations. It is a

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

union of man and nature and, if this is perfectly picturesque, it can be also dangerous for an American who violates the mysterious sacredness of this union¹⁵³.

After all, the stone has the main role in this tale and it seems to have a strange and unnamed force in itself that influences people and events. As the narrator says:

I began to hate the stone; it seemed to have corrupted him. His ingenious account of his motives left something vaguely unexplained-almost inexplicable. There are dusky corners in the simplest natures; strange, moral involutions in healthiest. Scrope was not simple, and, in virtue of his self-defiant self-consciousness, he might have been called morbid; so that I came to consider his injustice in this particular case as the fruit of a vicious seed which I find hard to name¹⁵⁴.

What are these motives? The last one is the most upsetting and may have prompted the narrator to his bitter thoughts; Scrope says:

I mean never to turn my stone into money. There it is that delicacy comes in. It's a stone and nothing more; and all the income I shall derive from it will be enjoying the way people open their eyes and hold their breath when I make it sparkle under the lamp, and tell them just what stone it is¹⁵⁵.

Not only did he steal the topaz, obviously he could easily turn it into money, but he does not do it, he prefers something vague and deeper: people stunned in front of such a jewel. The spell of the topaz is starting to influence the plot. The topaz does not renounce to its materiality and does not destroy itself; it will continue to show off its mysterious beauty. In fact, the beauty of the topaz seems mysterious, sublime, ancestral and when it is polished, the narrator says:

¹⁵³ I agree with Leslie's opinion that in "Adina" James tries to make is readers aware of the dangers of viewing the Italian characters as merely innocent and picturesque. See Leslie Louis, *Writing Consciously for a Small Audience: An Exploration of the Relationship between American Magazine Culture and Henry James' Italian fiction 1870-1875*, London, University College London, 2014, p. 169.

¹⁵⁴ H. James, "Adina", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 221

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221

[...] but I was not prepared for the portentous character of image and legend. In the center was a full-length naked figure, which I supposed at first to be a pagan deity. Then I saw the orb of sovereignty in one outstretched hand, the chiselled imperial scepter in the other, and the laurel-crown on the low-browed head. All round the face of the stone, near the edges, ran a chain of carven figures-warriors, and horses, and chariots, and young men and women interlaced in elaborate confusion. Over the head of the image, within this concave frieze, stood the inscription DIVUS TIBERIUS CAESAR TOTIUS ORBIS IMPERATOR. The workmanship was extraordinarily delicate; beneath the powerful glass I held in my hand, the figures revealed the perfection and finish of the most renowned of antique marbles. The color of the stone was superb, and, now its purity had been restored, its size seemed prodigious. It was in every way a gem among gems, a priceless treasure.¹⁵⁶

In this mysterious and ecstatic vision, Scrope makes himself grotesque when he says that “I’ve annulled the centuries-I’ve resuscitated a *totius orbis imperator*. [...] This is where Caesar wore it [...] Tremble, sir!”¹⁵⁷ The immensity and inexplicability of the gem is expressed when the narrator asks Scrope its value in Roman scudi. He answers that: “It’s impossible. Fix upon any sum you please”¹⁵⁸. In addition, the narrator says about the Imperial power of the topaz: “We rarely spoke of the imperial topaz; it seemed not a subject for light allusions. [...] the mere memory of its luster lay like a weight on my own conscience.”¹⁵⁹ A girl like Adina seems not fit for the magnificence of the topaz. She would feel overweighted with a “mysterious pain¹⁶⁰”. The power of the topaz seems to weigh down and annihilate the wearer or even just who talks about it. Also, its color has a meaning on its own, in fact yellow (the imperial topaz is yellow) worn by a man denotes secrecy and it is appropriated for the silent lover¹⁶¹. Adina, Scrope and Angelo can be regarded as silent lovers, since they establish secret associations: the secret appropriation of the stone, the apparent secrets of Adina, the secret courtship between Angelo and

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹⁶¹ Kobbe Gustav, “Precious Stones and Their Lore”, in *The Lotus Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Feb., 1915), pp. 224-225.

Adina, the secret marriage between them. Moreover, the topaz has a power typical of amulets¹⁶² and this power is linked to the imperial past, to its glory and splendor. So, it is the past that, through the topaz as its emissary, guides the tale and at the end makes Angelo win a better topaz, Adina. In fact, the topaz is for Scrope an amulet:

In the broadest sense of the word, an amulet is any object which by its contact or its close proximity to the person who owns it, or to any possession of his, exerts power for his good, either by keeping evil from him and his property, or by endowing him with positive advantage [...] Belief in the efficacy of amulets depends upon certain primitive concepts of the mind, namely, notions that supernatural power may be inherent in some person, animal, or material object, or that it may at least reside there temporarily. The latter lies at the root of fetichism, as it is known among the negroes of West Africa; [...] A fetich, or an amulet, may be apprehended as something that can give any sort of benefit that the possessor may desire; but it is probable that from the beginning certain objects were believed to have powers peculiar to themselves, and the special powers imputed to them were often determined by the principle of similarity¹⁶³.

This is exactly what Scrope does. I would like to give an occult interpretation to the story. Scrope, once he steals the gem, comes to worship it almost religiously, as if it was a fetish. Even if the story does not express this concept explicitly, in my opinion it does implicitly. Scrope has unconsciously bestowed supernatural powers on the topaz because with this he wants to take possession of Adina even more. But in the end its power is an independent power, it is ally of Angelo, and will destroy Scrope for having violated the dignity of a relic of the ancient Roman past. It is also curious to note here the ambiguity of the stone itself. In fact, generally topaz is seen as a positive stone. Through the ages, it has been popularly associated with wealth. However, topaz symbolism and lore has also covered many other areas, such as health, love, and astrology. If worn on the left

¹⁶² Will Frederic, "Amulets", in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 49/50, 2006, pp. 249-260.

¹⁶³ Bonner Campbell, "Magic Amulets", in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Jan., 1946), pp. 26-27.

arm, some believed a topaz amulet could protect the wearer from dark magic. In addition, this could relieve arthritis pain, improve digestion, aid in weight loss, and attract love. If taken in a potion, some believed it could cure an even wider range of ailments. If kept in the home, some believed a topaz could ward off accidents and fires. If kept under a pillow, it could prevent nightmares. Clearly these are positive effects. Here instead the topaz has totally opposite effects. It looks like a haunted object, full of "cruel emblems" that will be fatal to Scrope. Therefore, it has an independent power, connected to Angelo, his original discoverer of the same Roman race, the same as the emperor Tiberius. Here the matter acquires a moral value, in fact Scrope has stolen the topaz by deception, appropriating it in a dishonest way. It seems that James, through these negative effects, wants to give a moral lesson about American dishonesty by warning that it is dangerous to awaken what sleeps buried in the Roman Campagna. Objects with their allies could bring ruinous consequences. In fact, "Adina" is a story of the "dark past of Italy, a past that James sees well up into the present to create suspicion, horror and paganism. [The tale seems to express] James's peculiar impression of how the Italian past does exist in the present¹⁶⁴".

On the other hand, Adina Waddington is only apparently a complex character. Rowe states that she is a mere plot device, hardly a character¹⁶⁵. Indeed, she is a mere puppet/doll at the command of Scrope and Angelo. The tale clearly describes her uncanny beauty:

There was a sweet stillness about her which balanced the widow's exuberance. Her pretty name of Adina seemed to me to have somehow a mystic fitness to her personality. She was short and slight and blonde, and her black dress gave a sort of infantile bloom to her fairness. [...] but I confess that I found a perturbing charm in those eyes¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶⁴ Kraft James, *The Early tales of Henry James: 1864 – 1880*, New York, Fordham University, 1967, p. 91.

¹⁶⁵ Rowe John, "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality", in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 20, Fasc. 2, 1999, p. 16.

¹⁶⁶ H. James, "Adina", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., pp. 225-226.

Mrs Waddington says that “She tells me nothing¹⁶⁷”, that she is “a strange child; she is fanciful without being capricious”¹⁶⁸. These statements only increase the aura of mystery that surrounds the young girl. Adina does not want the topaz because it was from Tiberius the Emperor and because “Wasn’t he one of the bad Emperors-one of the worst?”¹⁶⁹ From the silent encounter in the Borghese gardens, the narrator says: “I was particularly struck [...] with something strange in our quiet Adina. She had always seemed to me vaguely, innocently strange; [...] a mystic undertone seemed to murmur – You don’t half know me!”¹⁷⁰ Later, Adina is met by the narrator in a Catholic church where she is praying. This might seem strange, that a Protestant girl from New England goes to pray in a Catholic church. I believe that James wanted to merge the two religions to show that now Adina is a new girl, no longer tied to puritanical repression, but renewed by a Catholic and Italian rebirth, although it can also be interpreted as a forced conversion. These are only interpretations because Adina is inscrutable, her innermost motives are unknown. Here it is expected that perhaps Adina will change religion to meet Catholicism, she becomes Italian and, just like Angelo, follows his “indolent nature¹⁷¹” and “immediate feeling¹⁷²”. She goes to church, next to the Capuchin convent: Capuchins, since the origin of their order, were noted for a particular attachment to prayer and to the care of the poor and the sick. Fundamental is their support to the last people of the cities and campagna, adopting a simple homiletical style imbued with everyday life. Thus, Adina is metaphorically meeting Angelo in his entirety as an Italian, Roman, Catholic man. The church itself registers this between the lines, going against the contemptuous behaviour of the American Puritan Scrope, who despises Angelo for being a modest man and almost also for being Italian. The narrator asks himself that “Was she turning Catholic and preparing to give up her heretical friends?”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 226

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 236. Leslie states that the ‘degenerate’ lifestyle of the Romans emperors was to be alluded to in “Adina”, where the topaz belongs to Tiberius, infamous at the time for his corruption. See Leslie Louis, *Writing Consciously for a Small Audience’: An Exploration of the Relationship between American Magazine Culture and Henry James’ Italian fiction 1870-1875*, cit., p. 167.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 233

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 233

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 245

In her note she says that “I could never explain” and “Only forget me”; she repeats it when she is visited by the narrator. “I only ask to be forgotten”¹⁷⁴. Here the death-drive is evident: this term refers to the idea that everyone at some level is driven by a desire to die, to self-destruct, to return to a state of inanimacy¹⁷⁵. After her journey, the puppet and doll Adina can return to her stasis with Angelo and destroy herself. Obviously, the character of Adina can also be interpreted as active and vital. According to me, she is passive, despite her symbolic rebirth, as she lets herself to be completely enraptured by Angelo, an almost ghostly figure who attracts with "signs, and glances, and other unspoken vows, two or three notes, perhaps¹⁷⁶". It is a positive passivity, however, because she now seems happy in her final stasis. I also consider her a puppet and a doll because throughout the story she is completely at the mercy of events, of Scrope and Angelo, it is unknown why she loved Scrope and Angelo, because she did not explain it in both cases. Like a puppet, she does not speak. She has no real character; she is always indefinite and the uncanny to me happens when such a figure manages to perform this overwhelming act of leaving Scrope to join Angelo. From being inanimate, the doll becomes animate and takes action. Thus, the object Adina becomes uncanny when she shows up and breaks off her engagement by running away with Angelo. Angelo describes Adina as a “pearl” putting her in a similar comparison with the topaz. So, in this way Angelo has re-appropriated the topaz and the pearl and the objectification of the Adina is complete. To support my interpretation of her as a doll guided by death-drive, I cite a passage of an essay by Simms:

In [...] “The Economic Problem of Masochism”, Freud expresses the thought that an early stage of human development the death instinct is actually the primary instinct ruling the organism, and that the desire to regress to an inorganic state expresses a fundamental tendency of all life forms. [...] Ultimate regression would be a regression to a state of primary masochism, which is characterized by the absence of Eros and the desire to level all tensions through "inorganic stability," that is death. As primary narcissism is the first stage of erotic development, primary masochism

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett Andrew & Royle Nicholas, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, cit., p. 43.

¹⁷⁶ James Henry, “Adina”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 256.

represents Eros's primordial counterpart, the death instinct, in its early and unsublimated form. Through Freud's concept of primary masochism, we have come a step closer to understanding the uncanniness of the doll. Through her "thick forgetfulness," her unresponsiveness, her coldness, her inanimate body we encounter an image of the human form in the ultimate realization of the death instinct: inorganic stability. [...] The uncanniness of the doll is a reminder that primary masochism is still familiar and present, albeit repressed and forgotten. Although dismissed by Freud, the doll can show us the vicissitudes of an instinct other than Eros. Its uncanniness reveals and conceals the dynamics of the death instinct.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Simms Eva-Maria, "Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud", in *New Literary History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1996, pp. 674-677.

SOLVED PUZZLES?

Leslie, in his dissertation¹⁷⁸, argues that Angelo is described as “Endymion” and that this refers to the statuesque features of him, an allusion to Canova’s sculpture. This links Angelo to beauty and picturesque. By referring to the myth of Endymion, James makes allusion to the goddess Diana, who watches over Endymion. In fact, Horell¹⁷⁹ notes that Adina is anagram for Diana, the chaste goddess of the hunt, so maybe there is a hidden side in Adina’s personality, her name could have “a mystic fitness to her personality”; so, in this sense, Leslie argues that referring to Angelo as Endymion could be seen as James prefiguring the outcome of the tale. He is described also as having the frame of a young Hercules. By definition, a person of great physical strength is thus defined. In my opinion, metaphorically, this definition is a characteristic of Angelo that is still repressed and that, due to certain situations, can come out and influence events. In fact, Angelo, on his journey to become a modern man, begins to change by becoming vengeful and aggressive towards Scrope. Thus, Endymion refers to its beauty and romantic sleepiness; instead, Hercules refers to his action and revenge. In my opinion these two references by James to Endymion and Hercules are not accidental, they refer to a double personality of Angelo which will give life to the plot of the story. Leslie goes on arguing that the pictorial description of Adina places her alongside Angelo, suggesting the future elopement with him and that, by setting the finale scene at the place in Rome most associated with Saint Angelo, James seems to suggest that the events of the tale may have been engineered by some sort of divine power outside of the realm of Scrope or the narrator’s control, some power that is protecting Italians from the commodification of their ancient culture for financial gain.

Leon Edel argues that the evil of the past is dangerous to love and life. Things buried lose none of their menacing force when restored to the present. The topaz contains within it a witched beauty, a terrible destructive power. Edel adds that there is something morbid in disinterring them; they conveyed a feeling of

¹⁷⁸ Leslie Louis, *Writing Consciously for a Small Audience': An Exploration of the Relationship between American Magazine Culture and Henry James' Italian fiction 1870-1875*, cit., pp. 185-199.

¹⁷⁹ Horrell Joyce, “A "Shade of a Special Sense": Henry James and the Art of Naming”, in *American Literature*, Vol. 42, N. 2, 1970, pp. 208-209.

“mouldering decay”; it was like an “uncovering of the dead”. Edel continues arguing that if Henry shows the role of the past in these extreme terms, it is because his feeling for evil had in it all the mysterious awe and horror of his father’s religious rebellion. Adina shows the buried fear of evil in Henry. Adina contains the sense of shock which Henry experienced in discovering the endless beauty of the pagan and the endless threat to modern civilisation. On another level, according to Edel, Adina suggests that James had to bury his personal past, his American past, and make his way in a mysterious European present.¹⁸⁰

Melchiori asserts that the Campagna Romana where Adina is set is “un paesaggio libero e afoso insieme, sensuale e ambiguo”¹⁸¹. Thus, it is able to create beautiful and contradictory feelings. It attracts and disturbs.

Giorcelli states that the meaning of the Roman Campagna is to be found in states of mind that it stimulates in James and that an invisible, demonic, dimension of nature is made visible thanks to a profound attention to it and to an awe that is transformed into admiration. This ambivalent apparently other, non-human and distant natural space turns out to be close to human beings’ inner essence¹⁸². Giorcelli adds that:

Both in the travel essays and in the short-stories, shepherds are the focus of either James’s or his characters’ gaze that lingers on their attractive bodies. Although they are meant to suggest natural beauty and innocence, it is impossible not to wonder [...] whether the visual possession of these bodies is not also employed to negotiate homoerotic desires.¹⁸³

The author continues arguing that in Adina the narrator wonders about the final marriage of Angelo and Adina. In fact, the simplicity of Angelo will appear to the narrator as a mysterious thing precluded to Americans: he was “a mystery”, a great “enigma”, while he is “basking in a sort of primitive natural, sensuous delight”¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁰ Edel Leon, *Henry James: The Conquest of London: 1870-1881*, cit., pp. 103-105.

¹⁸¹ Barbara Melchiori, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, Torino, Einaudi, 1974, p. 106.

¹⁸² Giorcelli, Cristina, “Beguiling City, Bewitching Landscape, Bewildering People”, in *The Henry James Review*, cit., pp. 226.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.229.

According to Vance, within this Arcadian framework, James tells the story of the transformation of a true innocent into a man driven by revenge. Cheated by Scrope, he is moved to entrap Adina who is the embodiment of American innocence. He loses the genuine Arcadian simplicity because of his encounter with the modern world¹⁸⁵. Moreover, the experience of the Arcadian Campagna is illimitable, romantic in its highest degree, yet possibly fraught with strange dangers to be found underground.

Francescato argues that the consumeristic vision of Scrope “double-binds subject and object in a dead-end game of hollow reflections”. As the object is imprisoned in a cushion of white velvet, the subject’s freedom of appreciation is limited by the imprisonment of the object. Francescato continues arguing that Scrope does not appreciate the gem, but only the effect that the gem has on other people. By avoiding the free interaction with the gem, the collector Scrope reduces appreciation to the showing off how his idealized self, something that allows him to establish a strange similarity: the value that he attributes to the object is also the value that other people must associate to himself. The possession of the object allows Scrope to enjoy the thought of being a modern Tiberius.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, his project is disturbed by the picturesque atmosphere, the happy dialogue of art and reality, animate and inanimate, past and present, which so strongly characterizes the countryside that surrounds him. The mellow harmonies of the Campagna frustrate the collector as they always interfere with the accomplishment of his idealization. In addition, Adina is turned into a private collectible, similar to the stone.¹⁸⁷ Finally, the incursion of the uncontrollable happiness of Adina when she escapes with Angelo is the affirmation of a vitality at odds with what characterizes Scrope. The narrator at the end closes the tale with a meditation on the gem and its mysterious value.¹⁸⁸ Francescato in another essay argues that the unnamed narrator introduces Scrope as an eccentric character, describing his passion for rare antiquities as a strange habit.¹⁸⁹ Scrope is unable to harmonise with the picturesque beauty of the Italian campagna because otherwise he would face a confrontation

¹⁸⁵ Vance William, *America’s Rome*, cit., p. 137.

¹⁸⁶ Francescato Simone, *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2010, p. 46.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁹ Francescato Simone, “A Discordance between the Self and the World: The Collector in Balzac’s Cousin Pons and James’s Adina”, in *Henry James’s Europe: Heritage and Transfer*, cit., p. 142.

with a reality that would remind him of his ugliness and mental limitations. In addition, the appropriation and restoration of the gem appear as a decontamination in order to recover an intrinsic value in the object, completely separated from Angelo. So, Scrope identifies secretly with the imagined past materialised by the object, dreaming that its possession makes him a true descendant of the old and noble Roman race. Scrope seems a forerunner of the modern consumerist tourist who enjoys an ambiguous position of involvement and detachment from every manifestation of alterity. He enjoys an extreme physical proximity to art works, places and people, but also, he keeps himself well segregated from a more intimate contact with them. One of the consequences of this is that his experience is restricted to his travel program and material appropriations.¹⁹⁰ Since Scrope finds himself in this dual position, such a powerful object upsets this ambiguous and ambivalent balance regarding the collector's item. Given that he cannot sustain this oppositional balance and since he is no longer able to avoid an intimate contact with the object, the equilibrium falls apart in an extremization that creates an upheaval that, given his position as a modern consumerist, he is unable to sustain. In addition, in my opinion the historical strength of the object is directly proportional to Scrope's appreciation. The more the object has historical value, the more Scrope fails to remain in his usual ambiguous position. In fact, he indulges in the adoration of topaz, creating an intimate bond with it. Finally, according to Francescato, the collector not only fails to replace human affection through art objects, but contribute to their aesthetic obsolescence and destruction. Once Scrope understands that his collectible gem cannot replace the love of the lost Adina, he completely loses interest in it and throws it into the Tiber.¹⁹¹

According to Izzo, Scrope decides to keep the stone all to himself confirming its symbolic connection to a woman figure and establishes a connection between the woman and the topaz, a connection implicit in the barter. But his two belongings tend to repel each other.¹⁹² Angelo defines Adina as a pearl, expressing the basic equivalence between the lost topaz and the woman to be won. Moreover, Adina's almost automatic acceptance of her equivalence with the topaz is

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁹² Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 2001, p. 78.

significant: it means that she is the victim of a logic based on male ownership. Her approval of this logic is a joyless gesture. Adina's mask of reserve and her request of being forgotten are unconvincing as acts of happiness, they are acts of unhappiness and forced sacrifice.¹⁹³

Brilli believes that topaz is a metaphor for a mysterious legacy of the past:

È un atteggiamento tipico dello scrittore americano alla svolta del secolo porsi al cospetto delle più pregnanti testimonianze della storia con un atteggiamento profondamente contraddittorio di attrazione per il panorama sconfinato in cui giacciono le sue radici lontane, e allo stesso tempo di smarrimento e di angoscia per la saturazione dell'occhio e dei sensi di questa ossessiva immanenza del passato. Ove si consideri che la sua stessa tradizione puritana gli inculca una visione tutta negativa della storia quale umana sciagura, tetra, insondabile, sterminata, sarà agevole comprendere il tradursi di questa nera fascinazione nel sussurro spiritualistico di voci, nell'umbratile agglutinarsi di larvali presenze, nell'affiorare dei segni infidi e preziosi della sedimentazione dei secoli.¹⁹⁴

Brilli warns the reader:

Guai tuttavia a scompagnare il velo di polvere, a scalfire la guaina di terra, a frugare fra le vestigia sepolte. Ciò significa destare forze assopite da secoli. [...] ["Adina"] mette in evidenza l'insospettabile vulnerabilità del moderno vivere civile da parte di un passato pagano, crudele e sanguinario.¹⁹⁵

Ascari focuses on the scene of Adina praying in the Capuchin convent:

La ragazza come è dato intuire al lettore, sta cercando illuminazione riguardo alla scelta dell'uomo della sua vita. Il mattino seguente sposerà Angelo Beati. [...] [Per James] il cattolicesimo "fu essenzialmente una *mise-en-scène*, una sorta di spettacolo"¹⁹⁶. [...] A toccare l'anima di questi

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁹⁴ Brilli Attilio, "Nota introduttiva", in *Adina*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1994, p. 12.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹⁶ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l'Italia*, cit., p. 151.

personaggi [le sue protagoniste] non è la profondità spirituale di qualche mistico, ma la raffinatezza dell'arte cattolica. Sotto un certo aspetto, dunque, la spinta che esse avvertono non differisce dall'attrazione che Adina matura per il pastore romano. [...] Mentre ciò che domina nella relazione tra Adina e Sam Scrope è la parola, l'elemento intellettuale, [...] le virtù di Angelo risiedono tutte nel suo aspetto esteriore¹⁹⁷.

Adina, contaminated by Angelo's pictorial grace, opens up to a new emotional, spontaneous and instinctual life. Yet the other aspect of the Italians is their animality, the absence of a conscience and a spirit. Love for Angelo is in fact only a pleasant physical sensation and I would add sexual. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon characters are characterized by an intense spiritual life, the Italians, on the other hand, are serene and mentally asleep, a sign of a stereotyped vision of the Italian people by James¹⁹⁸.

According to Mackenzie, the American encounters in Europe a sphere of protection, a graduated secrecy, a secret society.¹⁹⁹ As a consequence, he will possess a secret on his own and will use it to assert himself. He resorts to the lie or he conspires. Only when the hero can accommodate his false position this revengeful conspiracy can dissolve. Mackenzie states that the tale shows an injury-resentment psychology:

The hero surprises his adversary in an unready, exposed, or disadvantaged attitude only to find that the latter is a surprising revelation of his own secret, incomplete and disadvantaged self; Angelo Beati is the other self, [...] that self who is always feared and expected but whose actual appearance is [...] shocking. [...] The inferior other self is also innately superior: the American looks common [...], but the Italian is [...] the ideal, indeed almost pastoral European that the American secretly craves to be. The American is thus embarrassed and then re-embarrassed. [...] Suffering this double exposure of self unto himself, he reacts compulsively by concealing himself. [...] More than ever exposed, he is the more compelled

¹⁹⁷ Ascari Maurizio, "Note ai testi", in *Racconti Italiani*, Ed. by M. Agosti, Torino, Einaudi, 1991, p. 348.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹⁹⁹ Mackenzie Manfred, "Communities of Knowledge: Secret Society in Henry James", in *ELH*, Vol. 39, N. 1, 1972, p. 147.

to conceal himself. The upshot of the encounter is that he carries off the jewel to make an esoteric cult of it. [...] The disputed jewel turns out to be emblematic, a dynastic jewel bespeaking social power.²⁰⁰

Yet the American cannot be the European: he can only have an aesthetic relation to Europe, he can only adorn himself with its symbols. The Jamesian hero is in fact a “social aesthete”: by adorning himself, he prepares himself for an “initiation rite” because the jewel bestows on him a superfluity that is limitless. In this way, he will aggrandize himself with a secret.²⁰¹ In “Adina” there is a revengeful “secret society”. Yet Scrope finds that Angelo has a secret too, so there is a revenge cycle that culminates in the secret association of Angelo and Adina. The destruction of the topaz stops the revenge cycle²⁰². So, the American Jamesian hero is included only to be precluded. His life in Europe cannot be authentic, it is false and secret.

Slabey highlights the role of Catholicism in James’s life by focusing on the the character of Adina Waddington. Adina in fact seems to profit from her meditation in the chapel of the Capuchin convent. She says she found the light to understand that she must leave Scrope. The next morning, she will elope with Angelo²⁰³. This reveals what James thought of Catholicism, a religion characterised by quiet and peaceful places that offer solace for the troubled soul; it also reveals that from 1870 to 1875 James was deeply attracted and interested in Catholicism. He adored its aesthetics but also the sincere religious sentiment.

Rowe maintains that the early Jamesian stories are notable for their explicit treatments of homoerotic and heterosexual themes and plots, reflecting James’s unstable sexuality. According to Rowe, in “Adina” homoerotic imagery structures the plot. The tale contains vague gothic effects that James borrows from Hawthorne. Rowe states that a variant of the name Adina is Edna; so, Adina would derive from a Hebrew word meaning “full of menstrual fluid” and more generally “rejuvenation”. This meaning can be related to her rebirth during her meditation in the Catholic church, she reborns strong and vital, possibly Catholic, fertile,

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 148-149.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 150.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 151-152.

²⁰³ Slabey Robert, “Henry James and “The Most Impressive Convention in all History”, in *American Literature*, Vol. 30, N. 1, 1958, p. 98.

internally rejuvenated, but her erotic power is the result of the phallic sexuality evoked by the conflict between Scrope and Angelo for the topaz. So, she is ambivalent and ambiguous. According to Rowe, Angelo discovers the gem in a scene so charged with erotic significance and his name is clearly a symbol of Catholicism at odds with the Puritanism of Scrope and Adina.²⁰⁴ Moreover, James introduces Angelo in the pose of many fauns, satyrs and classical shepherds that were erotic figures for nineteenth-century neoclassical sculptors. According to Rowe, Angelo suggests an easy, familiar and innocent sexuality that James associates with the charm and appeal of Italy.²⁰⁵ In addition, Hawthorne's themes of sin, fall, and redemption (mainly represented by Adina's refusal of the topaz) are charged with the erotic conflict of Adina subjected to a fetish phallic power²⁰⁶. In the final act, standing in ritual secrecy, Sam Scrope and the narrator achieve a bond that links homosocial authority with homoerotic desire. According to Rowe, for James the conflict among homosocial, homosexual, and heterosexual relations is more evident in early fiction like "Adina". It is clear that this tale is important to understand how James's hidden and repressed sexual desires, (homoerotic, homosexual, ascetic, homosocial, onanistic, heterosexual) contributed to the tensions that shaped his literary narratives for what they teach about changing cultural values.²⁰⁷

According to Walker, "Adina" relies on allegory and mythology to make political points, struggles between classes, in this case between Scrope and Angelo. In addition, the topaz becomes a symbol of cruel world power. The absolute power is corrupting because the reign of Tiberius was believed to be full of corruption and murders. So, the topaz has its corrupting effect: Scrope's life is ruined and Angelo is shaken from his initial state of naïve lethargy.²⁰⁸ Moreover, in the tale there is no redemption. In fact, Scrope throws the topaz into the Tiber in the bridge of St. Angelo, in front of Castel Sant'Angelo, a symbol of tyrannical power. This means that the structural power of the Castle is a reminder for its glory, even if the topaz is submerged. And its name is also the name of Angelo Beati. But the Castel Sant'Angelo is not the blessed angel: it is a bad a repressive angel, a dark side of

²⁰⁴ Rowe John, "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality", in *The Henry James Review*, cit., pp. 116-117.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

²⁰⁸ Walker Pierre, "Adina: Henry James's Allegory of Power and the Representation of the Foreign", in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 21, N. 1, 2000, p. 19.

the angelic.²⁰⁹ Walker at the end states that, regarding the political turmoil of James's time:

Adina is the one whose subject matter is mostly ostensibly political; for all its allegorical and "literary" elements, "Adina" does represent contemporary characters in a power struggle that does bear comparison to local, contemporary political and historical events [the Risorgimento and American expansionism].²¹⁰

According to Maves, "Adina" is a tale with no answers. We never understand how Adina is strange, nor why she runs off with Angelo; we never see their courtship either directly or indirectly, since the narrator is not in their confidence. These lacks, Maves states, deadens the impact of a tale which is interesting in itself. Scrope is antiromantic and unimpressed by the Italian splendour. He hates idealism and mocks Italy saying that is a country of vagabonds, declaimers and beggars. This is a clear sign of the Protestant ethic and Puritan moralism, of a background unimaginative and ascetic.²¹¹ He represents the first of James's corrupted expatriate Americans and he is the exact antithesis of James's characteristic Italian. He is ugly, a moralist and foolish sophist.²¹² Instead, Angelo is James's initial attempt to portray character development in an Italian.²¹³ He is romantically ineffectual and slow when he tries to take revenge on Scrope, a hint of that passive fatalism James seems to find so typical of the Italian temperament.²¹⁴ Angelo becomes a figure of amoral and timeless carnality, a fact of nature. In fact, the story ends with the marriage of these two mysterious figures, this is what the tale leaves us with, the celebration of Italian sensuality. In Italy one can enjoy a vacation from morality. In the final Italian marriage, it is not rectitude that is valued, but splendour and passion and the narrator must relish it and accept it²¹⁵.

Yet Maves at the end points out James's fear and consequent limit in the tale:

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹¹ Maves Carl, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Work of Henry James*, cit., p. 40.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

James himself could not “serenely” accept “this doctrine” without major qualifications, but its influence on his own treatment of Italy never ceased to be profound. [...] [James provides us with] the danger of idealizing Italy, or confusing Sacred and Profane Love, of attempting to emulate the Italians rather than merely observe them. [...] In “Adina” he points out Sam Scrope and clearly warns us that the celebration of moral holidays is best left to the natives²¹⁶.

Adina deals with typical romance topics but it does it in a particular way, making them implemented in common life in James's time. In this, in my opinion, lies the uncanny in the story, especially in the unexpected flight of Adina with Angelo and in the topaz full of cruel spells that direct the plot and the actors on stage. Adina shocks when she promotes such an unexpected and risky action, even if she leaves in doubt whether she is really happy, but she denies us even this. She just wants to be forgotten, getting away from her family, self-destructing and self-annihilating. In the end there are many doubts left, and what is more disturbing than doubt, silences, the unspoken, the incomprehensible? In “Adina” James shows his fears through an antiquated, pastoral and picturesque novella full of ghostly meanings softened by a provincial and pastoral atmosphere.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

THE LAST OF THE VALERII

“HIS JUNO’S THE REALITY; I’M THE FICTION!”²¹⁷

I’ve turned into a statue
And it makes me feel depressed
'Cause the only time you open up is when we get undressed

(Marina and the Diamonds, “Starring Role”)

I would like to introduce the analysis of the story with some enlightening words by Leon Edel:

The ruins were picturesque; yet, like Hawthorne, he [James] felt that they harboured within them memories of the cruel centuries, and some emanation of primordial passion. In “The Last of the Valerii” he wrote a tale which is deceptively Roman surface and sunny warmth, but the substance of which contains the writer’s sense of a morbid mouldering antiquity and nightmare evil²¹⁸.

If Henry states his case in these clear-cut and even extreme terms, it is because his feeling for evil had in it all the mysterious awe and horror of his father’s religious revolt and vastation. These tales [here *The Last of the Valerii*], like the casual turn of an excavating spade, show the buried fear of evil in Henry. The tale of the Juno [...] contain[s], [...] a sense of shock which Henry experienced in discovering the endless beauty of the pagan and the endless threat to his civilized heritage.²¹⁹

On January 4, 1873, Henry James with a friend stopped at the Basilica of Santo Stefano in Rome and here the young writer, aged 29, examined the tomb of the Valerii unearthed from under the foundations of the church. Also, in February of the same year, James noted that he had lounged back and forth on a sunny day

²¹⁷ James, Henry, “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 117.

²¹⁸ James, Henry, “Introduction”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 9.

²¹⁹ Edel Leon, *Henry James: The Conquest of London: 1870-1881*, cit., p. 104.

in front of the great excavations then underway in Rome. In April, after a visit to Villa Ludovisi, while he was examining the sculptures preserved in the greenhouse, James noticed the head of a large Juno behind a shutter. So here there is a series of various elements introduced in the story: the name of the Valerii, the spectacle of the spades that bring the sleeping stones of the past back to life, the neglected head of Hera in the Roman villa.²²⁰

“The Last of the Valerii” first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* for January 1874. It was reprinted the following year in James’s first published book, *The Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales*. It is sometimes included amongst collections of James’s ghost stories. It is a story that deals with the international theme, mixing elements of Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun*²²¹ with the morbid suggestion James had felt from his adolescent reading and translation of Mèrimèe’s “La Vénus d’Ille”²²². It is also influenced by European folklore tradition of classical goddesses threatening mortal marriages²²³.

The un-named narrator, an American painter, is in Rome where his god-daughter Martha is engaged to Count Marco Valerio. After the marriage the narrator is a frequent visitor to their antique villa. The couple seem idyllically happy, but the narrator finds the count emotionally empty, if polite. Martha decides that she wants to excavate the villa’s grounds in search of antiquities, but her husband thinks that old things should be left in their place. However, when a statue of Juno is unearthed, he will be delighted to madness, excited and happy as a Maenad²²⁴. He becomes very possessive and secretive about the statue, and it is thought that he has confiscated a detached hand and regards it as a sort of holy relic. Marco becomes

²²⁰ James Henry, *Racconti di fantasmi*, Ed. by M. Agosti, Torino, Einaudi, 1988, p. 648.

²²¹ *The Marble Faun* was the last of the four major romances by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and was published in 1860. *The Marble Faun*, written on the eve of the American Civil War, is set in a fantastical Italy. The romance mixes elements of a fable, pastoral, gothic novel, and travel guide.

²²² Melchiori Barbara, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, cit., p. 34. Leslie argues that “Where the Venus in ‘La Vénus d’Ille’ is portrayed as a sexual object, with a face full of character, foreshadowing the statue’s supernatural ability to come to life, James’s Juno is decidedly not sexual but a historically-accurately described piece of sculpture”. See Leslie Louis, *Writing Consciously for a Small Audience’: An Exploration of the Relationship between American Magazine Culture and Henry James’ Italian Fiction 1870-1875*, cit., pp. 178-179.

²²³ Foeller-Pituch Elzbieta, “Henry James’s Cosmopolitan Spaces: Rome as Global City”, in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 24, N. 3, 2003, p. 293.

²²⁴ The Maenads, also called Bacchantes, were women in ecstatic frenzy and possessed by Dionysus, the god of wine. In my opinion James, in the figure of the count, also alludes to their figure since at a certain point the latter says cursing “By Bacchus”, he refers subtly to the Dionysian orgies in front of the statue of Hermes and, finally, the excavation and burial of Juno is sanctioned by a symbolic toast with wine.

distant from the people around him, including his wife. The narrator fears that some of Marco's ancestral vices might re-surface, and he challenges him over his moody attitude. Marco insists that he is entirely sane and happy. Martha, on the other hand, is becoming increasingly unhappy. After a while the narrator meets Marco in the Pantheon and finds that he is deeply immersed in a form of neo-Paganism, which he sees as part of his historical birth right as an Italian. One night the narrator comes across the Count prostrate in reverential worship before the statue. The excavation chief tells the narrator that such cases are common – because there are still traces of primitive belief amongst some Italians. The narrator shares his concerns with Martha, who is sympathetic to her husband if only he will share his beliefs with her. When they go to see the statue, they discover blood on an altar that has been placed before it, and the Count is nowhere to be found. The next day Martha and the narrator arrange for the statue to be re-buried in the grounds. This breaks the spell, and the count returns to normal, though he retains the detached hand as a memento of his relationship with the 'Greek' goddess.

This fanciful tale is sometimes included in collections of James's ghost stories. At that point of his career, he was quite prepared to give qualified consideration to various forms of the supernatural. Roy Miner defines the tale a "metaphysical romance":

[James] found that a convenient form in which to express this complex was the metaphysical romance, because realistic considerations might be held in abeyance for a time. [...] The fact that the supernatural is emancipated from realistic detail enabled him to write short stories which would still involve significant human problems and values. [...] James saw little intrinsic value or use in the ghosts themselves, but their effect upon one or more of the characters through whom the reader might participate in the horror was of prime artistic concern. [...] These marked qualities of moral intensity and psychological insight in the context of supernaturalism [...] can best be characterized as "metaphysical"²²⁵.

²²⁵ Miner Earl, "Henry James's Metaphysical Romances", in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 9, N. 1, 1954, pp. 17-21.

Hence, no actual ‘ghost’ inhabits “The Last of the Valerii”, but Marco Valerio explains to the narrator how strongly he feels his Pagan ancestry as a citizen of Rome. Roman history was deeply Pagan for seven centuries before the arrival of Christianity, and it was also part of the Greek empire – something that Marco acknowledges in considering the Greek origin of the unearthed goddess. It is interesting to note that at the outset of the tale, Martha offers to change her religion to Marco’s, but he protests that he is not a devout Catholic. This turns out to be true in that he is far more deeply moved by Paganism. It is a neat turn of irony, given the events of the tale, that she wishes to excavate old Italy, whereas Marco thinks it should be left alone. He knows where his history is – because he feels it inside of himself. “The Last of the Valerii” is a story of the pre-Christian Italian past casting its influence into the present.

Juno is a divinity of the Roman religion, linked to the lunar cycle of the primitive Italic peoples. She was the ancient divinity of marriage and childbirth, often represented in the act of breastfeeding, which later assumed the functions of protector of the state: by the ancient Romans, in fact, she was gradually assimilated to the Era of Greek mythology, becoming the wife of Jupiter, therefore the most important female deity. To Mariani the tale represents the count’s initiation to adult love “through the intermediation of an image, that is, through the feminine archetype of Juno, the wife goddess par excellence²²⁶”. Although the use of Juno can be traced back to a mere literary device by James to represent the Roman past, it is curious to note how, being the goddess of birth and fertility, she is ironically doubly threatening against the Count who in the end will be the *last* of the Valerii, therefore a symbolic sterility of the couple is expected. The count becomes the victim of Juno, a sacrificial victim, a symbol of the apparent annihilation of paganism. Through his sterility, pagan worship will not continue to haunt through a possible heir of this “religious mania” not fit for the present civilization. In this sense the past is seen as something to be removed and buried, but which is able to remain secretly, ready to threaten again the normal flow of events: it is symbolic the severed hand of the statue. Although the count's euphoria can be seen as something excessive, comic and grotesque, it is the product of a past that clashes

²²⁶ Mariani Andrea, *Il sorriso del fauno*, Chiesti, Solfanelli, 1992, in Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, cit., p. 125.

with the present causing these reckless reactions, a sign of a primordial paganism that ceased and that was replaced by the arrival of a repressive Christianity, in this case Catholicism, a religion suitable for the present in Italy. In this case, given the end of pagan religion, the pagan devotion to the sensual pleasures that returns and the ruling and rigid Catholic doctrine that represses the pleasures, collide as two extremes that do not find union, creating a mismatch, a madness, a detachment from reality, which in the story is represented by the count.

If the uncanny element is mostly provided by the Juno statue, an almost vampiric figure as it was argued²²⁷, which is treated as if it was an actual living being through a sapient use of prosopopoeia²²⁸, it is important to note how, in a sort of equivalent correspondence, the Count is compared to a sculpture in all its materiality. There seems to be an underlying exchange of roles: the sculptures act like human beings and human beings act like statuettes manipulated by the living Juno²²⁹. For example, the count is compared to a “statue of the Decadence²³⁰”. In the initial description, the Count is viewed as “one more monument in a country full of them”²³¹, being likened to a classical statue²³²:

He had a head and throat like some of the busts in the Vatican. [...] It sustained a head as massively round as that of the familiar bust of the Emperor Caracalla, and covered with the same dense sculptural crop of curls. [...] His complexion was of a deep glowing brown which no emotion

²²⁷ Rogers believes that the statue, as a Greek, must have originally been a Hera, but the Romans appropriated and renamed her so that she would keep two identities in one body like a true vampire. The fact that in the tale she is named "Proserpine" emphasizes the association of the story of Juno with the "Queen of death". Her identity therefore makes Juno the 'living dead', an immortal who has gone through death and has returned to feed on the vital essence of the count to the full moon, like a real vampire. See Rogers Susan, *Vampire vixens: The female undead and the Lacanian symbolic order in tales by Gautier, James, and Le Fanu*, Irvine, University of California, 1981, pp. 85-132.

²²⁸ See Miller Joseph, *Versions of Pygmalion*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 211-243. Miller believes that James, in talking about the Count only being able to “look at the statue”, is making a reference to the Pygmalion myth. In addition, the tale shows the disasters that can follow when the figure of prosopopoeia is taken too literally, for example in the case of the Count and Juno.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²³⁰ James Henry, “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 93.

²³¹ Ballinger Leonora, *Apparitions and Night-fears: Psychosexual Tension in The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, New York, New York University, 1996, p. 104.

²³² See Gale Robert, “Art Imagery in Henry James's Fiction”, in *American Literature*, Vol. 29, N. 1, 1957, p 61.

would alter, and his large, lucid eyes seemed to stare at you like a pair of polished agates.²³³

To Giorcelli he is merely a “personaggio decorativo²³⁴”: “Egli non è dunque un vero e proprio attore sulla scena della vita, ma un imbellè manichino manovrato a piacere da forze esterne²³⁵”. Thus, he is treated by the narrator as if he were a statue, devoid of human characteristics:

He had moods in which his consciousness seemed so remote and his mind so irresponsive and dumb, that nothing but a powerful caress or a sudden violence was likely to arouse him. [...] [Regarding Martha] How could he advise her, instruct her, sustain her? And if she became a mother, how could he share her responsibilities?²³⁶

Yet he “comes alive” and goes mad when Martha tells him about the excavation project, fearing the statues that will be brought to light:

What do you want of them? We can't worship them. Would you put them on pedestals to stare and mock at them? If you can't believe in them, don't disturb them. [...] I am superstitious! [...] There have been things seen and done here which leave strange influences behind! They don't touch you, doubtless, who come of another race. But they touch me, often, in the whisper of the leaves and the odor of the mouldy soil and the blank eyes of the old statues. I can't bear to look the statues in the face. I seem to see other strange eyes in the empty sockets, and I hardly know what they say to me. I call the poor old statues ghosts.²³⁷

In the initial part of the story there is an initial aborted “desecration” of the tomb which already foretells the next one: “She had found them scraping the sarcophagus in the great ilex-walk; divesting it of its mossy coat, disincrusting it of

²³³ James Henry, “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 90.

²³⁴ Giorcelli Cristina, *Henry James e l'Italia*, cit., p. 133.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²³⁶ James Henry, “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 96.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

the sacred mould of the ages!”²³⁸ In the tale there is an obsessive concern towards the sacred antiquities kept in the villa and a morbid pleasure in their contemplation. In fact, the narrator says about Martha: “it was the rusty complexion of his [the count’s] patrimonial marbles that she most prized”²³⁹. This is already a hint of “fetishism”. Moreover, when they are all at St Peter’s, after a brief verbal exchange about changing religions²⁴⁰, the count says: “This heavy atmosphere of St Peter’s always stupefies me.”²⁴¹ There seems to be a connection to what James felt in St. Peter²⁴²:

[...] to a traveller not especially pledged to be devout, St. Peter’s speaks more of contentment than of aspiration. The mind seems to expand there immensely, but on its own level, as we may say [...] And yet if one’s half-hours at St. Peter’s are not actually spent on one’s knees, the mind reverts to its tremendous presence with an ardor deeply akin to a passionate effusion of faith. When you are weary of the swarming democracy of your fellow-tourists, of the unremunerative aspects of human nature on the Corso and Pincio, [...] the image of the great temple depresses the balance of your doubts and seems to refute the invasive vulgarity of things and assure you that nothing great is impossible. It is a comfort, in other words, to feel that there is at the worst nothing but a cab-fare between your discontent and one of the greatest of human achievements.²⁴³

The narrator becomes intimate not so much with people, but with the art objects of the villa:

I grew to have a painter’s passion for the place, and to be intimate with every tangled shrub and twisted tree, every moss-coated vase and mouldy sarcophagus and sad, disfeatured bust of those grim old Romans who could so ill afford to become more meagre-visaged. [...] [no villa] seemed to me

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁴⁰ Izzo believes that in this exchange, in Martha’s words the religion is seen as a substitute for the sexual. Religion as sublimation. See Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, cit., p. 67.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁴² To examine James’s relationship with Catholicism and religion, see Slabey Robert, “Henry James and “The Most Impressive Convention in all History”, in *American Literature*, cit., pp. 89-102.

²⁴³ James Henry, *Transatlantic Sketches*, Boston, Boston J.R. Osgood, 1875, p. 132.

more deeply picturesque, more romantically idle and untrimmed, more encumbered with precious antique rubbish, and haunted with half-historic echoes. It contained an old ilex-walk in which I used religiously to spend half an hour every day. [...] It was filled with disinterred fragments of sculpture, - nameless statues and noseless heads and rough-hewn sarcophagi, which made it deliciously solemn. The statues used to stand there in the perpetual twilight like conscious things, brooding on their gathered memories. I used to linger about them, half expecting they would speak and tell me their stony secrets, - whisper heavily the whereabouts of their mouldering fellows, still unrecovered from the soil.²⁴⁴

Again, the narrator continues by saying that: “The place was so bright, so still, so sacred to the silent, imperturbable past”.²⁴⁵ The villa is compared to a sacred pagan temple. When the statue of Juno is disinterred, the narrator says: “Her marvellous beauty gave her an almost human look”²⁴⁶. Another supernatural element is present in the dream, in fact the count had dreamed the Juno, in a sort of premonitory dream. As Lind points out:

If we remember that this story is a Romance, and also recall that mythology credits the inhabitants of ancient civilizations with a sixth and supernatural sense, then Valerio's dream of Juno and her white hand, and his subsequent corroboration of his dream become artistically plausible.²⁴⁷

Shortly after, the narrator tells Martha: “She’s beautiful enough [...] to make you jealous”.²⁴⁸ The Juno acquires power. The count is becoming jealous of her: “I’m to see her: that’s enough!”²⁴⁹ The excavation director says that the count treats the Juno as if she was a sacred image of the Madonna²⁵⁰ (a figure “merely decently pious”²⁵¹, according to Gale). Clearly there is an underlying sexual drive

²⁴⁴ James Henry, “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 94.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²⁴⁷ Lind Sidney, *The Supernatural Tales of Henry James: Conflict and Fantasy*, New York, New York University, 1949, p. 80.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105

²⁵¹ Gale Robert, “RELIGION IMAGERY IN HENRY JAMES'S FICTION”, in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 3, N. 1, 1957, pp. 64-72.

that the count represses and therefore he transfers his repressed desire on the statue in an exceptional fetishism. Fetishism is originally a form of religiosity which involves the worship of fetishes, or objects (often anthropomorphic or zoomorphic artifacts) considered to have magical powers. Fetishism by evolutionary anthropologists was considered one of the most primitive stages of human religiosity, and was considered a variant of animism: in reality it was later seen how the two religious practices are distinguished under numerous aspects. The term *fétichisme* was first used by the French philosopher and linguist Charles de Brosses in 1760. Currently the definition of "fetish" is used especially for those objects considered loaded with sacred power in the cults of the natives of West Africa. Later Sigmund Freud (in the wake of 19th century sexologists Alfred Binet and Richard von Krafft-Ebing) used the term fetishism to describe a form of paraphilia where the goal of desire is an inanimate object or a specific part of the person. The whole tale can be seen as a celebration of the ambivalent meaning of fetishism, the sexual and the religious, a sexual desire that cannot be expressed properly. Hence, the use of pagan elements could be a sign of James's want to express his hidden desires, as critics did by linking this meaning to James's private life.

The statue of Hermes, being adored by the count, plays an important role in story. The statue brings him happiness, a clear sign of ancient beliefs, imbued with Dionysian images related to wine, inebriation and the pleasure of the senses. First the statue reminds him of a severe Catholic priest, a sign of the Catholic repression of the senses, but now it "suggests the most delightful images".²⁵² Thus, the "there's a pagan element in all of us"²⁵³ can be interpreted as the sexual one²⁵⁴, at odds with progress and civilization.

More precisely, I would argue that here "pagan" could stand for the Freudian "id". Lind asserts that the narrator "is urging Martha to arouse herself from the lethargic resignation into which Valerio's *dislocation of personality* has thrown her by taking the drastic step of disposing of the statue"²⁵⁵ and this is what I want to

²⁵² James Henry, "The Last of the Valerii", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 108.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁵⁴ Clark Michael, "The Hermes in Henry James's "The Last of the Valerii", in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 10, N. 3, 1989, pp. 210-213. Clark believes that in the story the Hermes evokes the issue of pagan sexuality in marriage. James's real concern would be the way human sexuality remains at odds with the civilizing process. Thus, the burial of Juno appears necessary for the sake of the civilizing process.

²⁵⁵ Lind Sidney, *The Supernatural Tales of Henry James: Conflict and Fantasy*, cit., p. 79.

focus on and discuss. According to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the id is the intrapsychic stance that contains those instincts of an erotic character (Eros), aggressive and self-destructive, that are the human way in which instincts have evolved. It is the most archaic intrapsychic stance of our mind and is also defined as the unconscious. Literally the term derives from the German and corresponds to the neutral pronoun of the third person singular. It is the sphere characterized by complete extraneousness to the ego: it is the place of psychic contents that are repressed - that is, discarded from consciousness through the process of repression - the territory of contrasting drives and of the continuous pressure incessantly directed to the satisfaction of pleasure and egoistic needs. In the id the laws of logic do not apply, there are no value judgments, the mechanisms of memory work to such an extent that the contents of this sphere are not changed over time. The id identifies with the unconscious whose contents - albeit latent - are decisive for the psychic activity of man. The id, according to psychoanalytic theory, consists of instincts which represent the individual's reserve of psychic energy. According to Freud, one of the primary instincts, and one of the primary sources of psychic energy, is the sexual one. It is capable of storing an enormous amount of repressed, especially from childhood, memories. Precisely for this reason, according to Freud, its activity can be the cause of neurosis that arise from the conflict between conscious elements (Ego) and memories that the Superego censures.

Hence, the count's ego and superego are replaced by the complete dominion and regression to the id, typical of the child²⁵⁶, and, at the end, Martha works as the superego through the ban of Juno, a decision which is typical of her puritanical character. According to Freudian theory, the term superego indicates one of the three intrapsychic stances which, together with the id and the ego, make up the structural model of the psychic apparatus which originates from the internalization of the codes of behaviour, prohibitions, injunctions, value schemes (good / evil; right / wrong; good / bad; pleasant / unpleasant) that the child implements within the relationship with the parental couple. The superego is made up of a heterogeneous set of behavioural models, as well as prohibitions and commands,

²⁵⁶ Rogers states that: "he is not quite subjectivized, he is not quite socialized into the symbolic order and its restrictions and responsibilities. Like a spoiled child, he seems to get everything he wants without restrictions". See Rogers Susan, *Vampire vixens: The Female Undead and the Lacanian Symbolic Order in Tales by Gautier, James, and Le Fanu*, cit., p. 90.

and represents the hypothetical ideal towards which the subject tends with her behaviour; Martha would tend to her idea of perfect woman and wife, the “Victorian sexless angel”. As a result of this, a mechanism is determined that leads to the breaking up of the count’s ego and its subsequent modification. However, if on the one hand, this sphere plays a positive function, limiting human desires and impulses, on the other, it causes a continuous sense of oppression and non-fulfilment, which becomes clear in the end of the story. Only after the reburial of the statue the count is able to retake his ego and return to a “normal” life, almost apparently.

On a deeper level, I would argue that the count's madness can be interpreted as psychosis²⁵⁷. Psychoanalysis interprets psychoses as a rupture in the relationship of the ego with external reality, due to the pressure of the id on the ego. According to Freud, the ego yields to the id to then partially recover the construction of its own reality through delirium, recovering the object relationship²⁵⁸. I believe that the tale shows the journey of a formation of a balanced personality hit by psychosis and the severed hand at the end would suggest its possible reappearance in the future. The count represents the pagan and psychotic id revealed by Juno’s archaic beliefs and Martha acts as the superego that will modify his ego in order to save their marriage. Having said that, the following citation needs to be read with the tale in mind; Freud maintains:

[...] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego – that is, that an object-cathexis²⁵⁹ has been replaced by an identification [...] At the very beginning, in the individual’s primitive oral phase, object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other. We can

²⁵⁷According to Treccani's medical dictionary, neurosis is a general category of mental disorders in which, unlike psychosis, cognitive functions are mostly preserved and the patient is aware of his own limitations and symptoms. Instead, psychosis is a set of serious psychopathological conditions characterized by the loss of contact with reality and the ability to criticize and judge, by the presence of pervasive disorders of thought, perceptions and affectivity and by an impairment of skills and social relationships. See Freud Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, Ed. by Strachey James, London, The Hogarth Press, 1961.

²⁵⁸ See Naiburg Suzi, “Archaic Depths in Henry James’s “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 14, N. 2, 1993, p. 162. Naiburg argues that the tale shows the necessity of establishing a conscious relation to such primitive drives and archaic depths in the psyche lest they produce obsessions.

²⁵⁹ Cathexis is a psychoanalytic term used to indicate the investment of mental energy or emotion versus an object, a person, an idea.

only suppose that later on object-cathexes proceed from the id, which feels erotic trends as needs. The ego, which to begin with is still feeble, becomes aware of the object-cathexes, and either acquiesces in them or tries to fend them off by the process of repression. When it happens that a person has to give up a sexual object, there quite often ensues an alteration of his ego which can only be described as a setting up of the object inside the ego, as it occurs in melancholia; the exact nature of this substitution is as yet unknown to us. It may be that by this introjection, which is a kind of regression to the mechanism of the oral phase, the ego makes it easier for the object to be given up or renders that process possible. It may be that this identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects.²⁶⁰

Other hidden and ancestral meanings are discernible when the narrator faces the count through a self-righteous rant, even if it can be argued that the narrator's simultaneous exasperation and fascination with the Count reflect "James's ambiguous feeling towards Americans' engagement with the Roman past and with contemporary Romans burdened by the past²⁶¹". If Freud talked about "childhood repressed memories", here the focus is on the count's "pagan repressed memories" that led him to delirium; James seems obsessed with "tainted ancestry"²⁶²:

The Count became, to my imagination, a dark efflorescence of the evil germs which history had implanted in his line. No wonder he was foredoomed to be cruel. Was not cruelty a tradition in his race, and crime an example? The unholy passions of his forefathers stirred blindly in his untaught nature and clamored dumbly for an issue. What a heavy heritage it seemed to me, as I reckoned it up in my melancholy musings, the Count's interminable ancestry!"²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Freud Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, cit., pp. 28-29.

²⁶¹ Foeller-Pituch Elzbieta, "Henry James's Cosmopolitan Spaces: Rome as Global City", in *The Henry James Review*, cit., p. 293.

²⁶² Ballinger Leonora, *Apparitions and Night-fears: Psychosexual Tension in The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 105.

²⁶³ James Henry, "The Last of the Valerii", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 107.

The Pantheon is where the narrator meets the Count. The building was saved from the destructions of the early Middle Ages because already in 608, the Byzantine emperor Phocas had given it to Pope Boniface IV (608-615), who in 609 transformed it into a Christian church with the name of Sancta Maria ad Martyres, consecrating it with a solemn procession of clergy and people. The title comes from the relics of anonymous Christian martyrs that were translated from the catacombs into the Pantheon's basement. It was the first case of a pagan temple transposed to Christian worship. This fact makes it the only building in ancient Rome to have remained practically intact and continuously in use for religious purposes since its foundation. As Vasi maintains:

Questo meraviglioso tempio, secondo il sentimento comune, [...] si disse Panteon, perché era dedicato a tutti li Dei immaginati da' Gentili. Nella parte superiore [...] erano collocate le statue delli Dei celesti, e nel basso i terrestri, stando in mezzo quella di Cibele; è nella parte di sotto, che ora è coperta dal pavimento, erano distribuite le statue delli dei penati. [...] Bonifazio IV. per cancellare quelle scioccherie, e sozze superstizioni, l'an. 607. purgato lo d'ogni falsità gentilesca, consagrollò al vero Iddio in onore della ss. Vergine, e di tutti i santi Martiri; perciò fece trasportare da varj cimiteri 18. carri di ossa di ss. Martiri, e fecele collocare sotto l'altare maggiore; onde fu detto s. Maria ad Martyres.²⁶⁴

This historical shift is essential to understand the role of the Pantheon as a meeting place of pagan and Christian religions. James used it consciously. In fact, no Roman building “verifies more forcibly those prodigious beliefs which we are apt to regard as dim fables”.²⁶⁵ As explored so far, the whole tale is full of stone artifacts that replace reality through a mysterious and ancient power; the characters seem mere puppets under their uncanny influence.

Ironically, to complete the concatenation of reversed roles, towards the end of the tale the narrator says about Martha: “To rival the Juno, she’s turning to marble

²⁶⁴ Vasi Giuseppe, *Itinerario istruttivo per ritrovare le antiche e moderne magnificenze di Roma*, Napoli, Nella Reale Stamperia, 1770, pp. 158-159.

²⁶⁵ James Henry, “The Last of The Valerii”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 109.

herself”²⁶⁶, and Martha says: “His Juno’s the reality; I’m the fiction²⁶⁷” and “it makes me feel almost as if she were alive²⁶⁸”. Thus, the narrator declares: “There is a woman in the case! Your enemy is the Juno”²⁶⁹. The statue is evil and threatening, indeed Melchiori states that the physical grandeur of Juno acquires, in James’s imagination, “un significato ancor più sinistro, opprimente e terrificante²⁷⁰”.

Hence, the parts are reversed: the sculptures and various relics, thanks to their pagan past, threaten the present living and arouse upsetting feelings in the somewhat static characters of the story. It will be the heroine's task to bring peace by bringing the Juno underground. Yet the relic of the hand will be kept by the count, sign of a possible future menace: a Greek relic, the count mutters in the final lines, in order to emphasize the continuum between Greek civilization and the flourishing Roman one, lost in the abyss of time. Fletcher states that “there is a third moment where the subject of Schelling’s uncanny is located inside the house once again but is no longer at home there, because what ought to have remained hidden has come to light, a strangeness breaks out from within”²⁷¹. I believe that this is the function of the severed hand that will haunt the count *from within*, even if the statue is reburied. It has been argued that this hint at the Greeks shows the undermined reference to Hera rather than Juno, the former more related to the unconscious world, the latter more “political”. In Naiburg's opinion, the Count's clarification that the statue was Greek shows that “his affinities are more with Hera than with Juno, with the more poetic and older religious tradition of the Greeks than with the more functional, civic and secular tradition of the Romans”²⁷². The final lines of the story reflect on the immense distance that separates the characters from the Greek genesis

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 116. However, Izzo believes that the humanization of the statue has its counterpart in the dehumanization of Martha, since prosopopoeia is the rhetorical counterpart of the reification of woman. See Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, cit., p. 65.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁷⁰ Melchiori Barbara, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, cit., p. 43.

²⁷¹ Fletcher John, “The Haunted Closet: Henry James's Queer Spectrality”, in *Textual Practice*, 14:1, 2000, p. 60.

²⁷² Naiburg Suzi, “Archaic Depths in Henry James’s “The Last of the Valerii”, in *The Henry James Review*, cit., p. 160.

of the sculptures, highlighting the fact that “the classical statues are themselves expatriates in Rome, alien through distance of space and time”.²⁷³

²⁷³ Foeller-Pituch Elzbieta, “Henry James's Cosmopolitan Spaces: Rome as Global City”, in *The Henry James Review*, cit., p. 293.

HENRY'S HIDDEN AND UPSETTING ANXIETIES

It has been argued that the excavation and reburial of the statue of Juno is emblematic of James's efforts to engage and then repress the threatening power of the New Woman feminine authority:

The power of the new woman, connected rhetorically with heroic Greek women, virtually feminizes Count Valerio [...], who must surrender to his wife, Martha's, command that they rebury the unearthed sculpture of Juno if he is to preserve his masculinity. In "The Last of the Valerii", homoeroticism is suggested in the switching of gender roles between Count Valerio and his stony "Juno", who assumes a phallic authority over him, even down to the fetish of her hand that he will secretly after the statue is safely reburied²⁷⁴.

Giorcelli shares the same idea, defining the count "passive and feminized", perhaps suggesting that he might be the alter ego of James himself:

In his travel essays and in his fictional narratives [particularly the early ones], James repeatedly deprives Rome and its people of dynamic historical agency, of the willingness/capacity for self-determination, notwithstanding the Roman Revolution of 1848, their part in the Risorgimento, and all the battles fought to build the nation. So, too, in the private sphere, in "The Last of the Valerii" (1848), for instance, Count Valerio, passive and feminized, needs the entrepreneurial determination of his American wife to free him of his predicament.²⁷⁵

Merivale argues that these rare appearances of a classical artifact in a Gothic setting (in Poe's body of work, Brown's *Wieland* and Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*) suggest the antithesis between "classical" and "gothic" that serves to suggest "light" in "darkness". Yet there is a place for the statue within the gothic dogma

²⁷⁴ Rowe John, "Hawthorne's Ghost in Henry James's Italy: Sculptural Form, Romantic Narrative, and the Function of Sexuality", in *The Henry James Review*, cit., p. 116.

²⁷⁵ Giorcelli Cristina, "Beguiling City, Bewitching Landscape, Bewildering People", in *The Henry James Review*, cit., p. 219.

that provides horror and fascination as a model of, to cite Merivale's words, "Beauty and Art, those ambiguous enemies of Faith and Life²⁷⁶". She argues that "The Last of the Valerii" shows the myth of the artist, where a human being escapes the "dangerous vision of ideal beauty which would have created, and then destroyed, a true artist²⁷⁷". The Juno is seen as wonderful, though its aesthetics negates the claims of normal human life. Thus, classical artifacts bring horror and fascination to the present, an ambiguous feeling that is deadly mortal. The reburial of the Juno is seen as a preservation of the artist. Merivale concludes by stating that in "The Last of the Valerii" James employs the material of the fantastic tale to express "the psychological verities of the artist parable".²⁷⁸

Thomas analyses the story stating that in the tale the sculptural figure becomes an icon of desire that mediates between a "transcendental and a kinetic aesthetic engagement with the body and with bodily drives"²⁷⁹; she adds that "the association of the erotic with the transcendental that James captures is a curious and compelling feature".²⁸⁰ The tale talks about atavistic paganism, Catholic idolatry, the role of the new Yankee money and of the old cultural heritage of Europe²⁸¹, all shown through a perfect "international marriage". In addition, it shows the debate between the sculptural and the picturesque in which neither is vindicated, idolatry and the pure aesthetic response, transgressive and legitimate desires, and art and life. The tale represents the statue as the mediator between these states and also uses her power to foment buried bodily and sexual desires²⁸². Valerio's Villa carries the trace of Italy's pagan past. This is a knowledge which troubles yet fascinates the narrator's impassive vision of the world, that reduces everything to a range of "subjects", typical of his picturesque studies. The Count's bodily nature is a manifestation of his pagan heritage, objectified through racial stereotypes about the Romans and sculptural metaphors, reducing him to a level of inanimate soullessness, as when, for example, he is compared to a bust of the Emperor

²⁷⁶ Merivale Patricia, "The Raven and the Bust of Pallas: Classical Artifacts and the Gothic Tale", in *PMLA*, Vol. 89, N. 5, 1974, p. 960.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 961.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 965.

²⁷⁹ Thomas Jane, "Icons of Desire: The Classical Statue in Later Victorian Literature", in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 40, N. 1/2, 2010, p. 247.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

Caracalla, symbol of depravity, cruelty and barbarism of pre-Christian Rome. Thus, Marco's character would mirror his infamous predecessor's. In particular, Thomas, argues that "the connection with barbarism and Christian persecution is also emphasised by James's choice of Marco's patronymic with its echo of the Roman Emperor Valerian and its link to the larger heritage of the Valerii".²⁸³ Thus, Marco's mania is seen as a primitive bequest from his forefathers. According to Thomas, Juno transforms the past into the language of sculptural desire and turns the statuesque into the animate, namely, in the scene by the moon where she transforms herself from the material to the divine in which Marco himself turns out to be a marble petrified figure thanks to the moonlight; in this way, it offers the narrator and Marco "the chance of an unholy alliance with the hidden, suppressed realm of the primitive and the pagan"²⁸⁴ and so the statue becomes "an icon of platonic and earthly desire"²⁸⁵. At the end, the sculptural is only apparently defeated, since the severed hand remains. Thomas concludes:

The sculptural image in James's tale is hugely expressive. Its ancient pagan origins incite a response that threatens to cross the line of unacceptability, involving the actual sacrifice of a young animal and the implied sacrifice of Martha's right to a full erotic life. Its pose of arrested movement represents the fear that dark pagan forces, like Freud's mystic writing perhaps, might make themselves visible again on the surface of the modern consciousness.²⁸⁶

Francescato argues that the count "appears more as an inanimate assemblage of striking attributes"²⁸⁷. Yet he goes on taking into consideration various interesting aspects. According to him, the relocation of sculptures involves a rite that is similar to those happening between the worshipper and the idol in a pagan temple, but "also recall those between the collector and the objects in his private cabinet"²⁸⁸. The count's relics convey a pleasurable sensation derived from their

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 260

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁸⁷ Francescato Simone, *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption*, cit., p. 40.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 42.

immense distance. Instead, Juno erases such distance, producing a “ghostly humanization of the relic [...] which generates both reassuring nostalgia and superstitious terror²⁸⁹”. Thus, the Count “projects onto the statue the agency which he sees lacking in himself²⁹⁰”:

Relying on a sort of omnipotent thinking, the Count tries to counterbalance his exclusion from a modern world dominated by the Anglo-American powers that his new family embody. [...] By humanizing the statue and claiming it as exclusive property, Camillo tries to prevent his own history from being turned into an object of cheap consumption for idle tourists [...].²⁹¹

At the end, the preservation of the severed hand subverts a happy ending, suggesting a “problematic resolution” of the relationship between Old and New World, that is, respectively, Marco’s and Martha’s legacy.²⁹²

Izzo asserts that the case of the count is a clear case of delusion²⁹³ because of the statue of Juno which is at the same time active since she is the archetype of divinity, mother, wife; and passive, indeed, being a block of stone, she is a helpless and passive, a mere object for contemplation and possession²⁹⁴. Her reburial restores it to the unhuman quality of an archeologic object, yet at the same time, it consecrates its definitive humanization, since Martha is afraid of her. In order to become a love object to her husband again, Martha has to put herself in its/her place by powerfully commanding her reburial²⁹⁵. Through the story, canonical notions of femininity converged in her case with the wish to verify an aesthetic passion by making life coincide with it, changing it into a totalizing existential dimension: being in love with a statue-man, she extends her consistency to envisaging herself as a statue-woman²⁹⁶. After the reburial:

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁹³ Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, cit., p. 59.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Martha [is] changed from an unwitting china shepherdess into a conscious and therefore tragic crystallized image of a domestic goddess: an accomplice but also a victim of her own fixation into an “image of wifely contentment” whose conformity to the mind and feelings of an actual person no one will think again of questioning.²⁹⁷

Izzo concludes:

Like the delusion of the last of the Valerii, the tale also simultaneously conceals and manifests a “repressed psychic content”, and it states not just that content but the very machinery of its repression. It achieves as much by exhibiting the mechanism whereby an alternative “truth” is created – a mystifying account that in its turn, rather than accounting for behavior, manifests its deep content: the aesthetic reification of the Other, be it the foreign, the antique or the feminine. [...] Even though Camillo’s subject position is represented as economically and intellectually subordinate to his wife’s, this does not mean that there is no representative of patriarchal authority in the text: [namely] the godfather.²⁹⁸

Grover in his essay talks about the influence of Mérimée on James; in particular, he argues that “The Last of the Valerii” and “La Vénus d’Ille”, if similar, difference in one thing, namely, in James’s story the wife’s superiority is more evident and more central and, unlike the violent ending of Mérimée’s story, James provides a happy ending and “attempts to soften the fantastic element by placing the main area of conflict in the young Count Valerio’s mind which struggles against his own tendencies to revert to paganism”.²⁹⁹ He states:

This story has been interpreted as illustrating the struggles in James’s own mind as to the proper place of the past; it seems to me that it is not the past that is in question but the pagan element of the past, and the possibility of resuscitating practices, beliefs, customs, and morals of a pre-Christian, and to James’s mind therefore, dark, destructive, and primitive nature. I believe

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

²⁹⁹ Grover Philip, “Mérimée’s Influence on Henry James”, in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 63, N. 4, 1968, p. 811.

that James has, however, tied his hero too closely to his original model and the Conte Valerio is not a convincing portrait of a neo-pagan. By transferring the main interest to the mind of the young man and by trying to suggest an “explanation” for his behaviour [...] James has diminished the fantastic but has made the story frankly more incredible than Mérimée’s.³⁰⁰

According to Grover, both nostalgia and violence are involved in the concept of paganism³⁰¹ present in the story. The Count will be saved by his conscience and especially by the soul and morality of his wife³⁰².

Maves argues that when the Count says that he had dreamed, the story enters the realm of the occult. The statue rouses Valerio’s sleepy intellect, but also makes him imperfect for the exigencies of modern life. The vision of perfect and idealised beauty paralyses him, making him dysfunctional. Art creates its own romantic reality, yet the Count survives, pleading not guilty. Maves focuses on the haunting presence of the pagan past:

The count superstitious fears, his atavistic tendencies, real or supposed, completely excuse him from responsibility for the neglect of his wife. Everything reprehensible in Italy and in Italians [...] can be blamed on the horrors of the past or the inevitable harshness of existence – it is never the result of a human action consciously willed³⁰³.

Ascari believes that the supernatural element of Mérimée’s tale and the romance atmosphere that pervades Hawthorne’s novel are replaced in James’s tale by psychological analysis. This approach allows the reader an ambiguous reading of the facts, halfway between reality and the inexplicable, therefore, between novel and romance:

³⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 811-812. For a different opinion, see Tilby Michael, “HENRY JAMES AND MÉRIMÉE: A NOTE OF CAUTION”, in *Romance Notes*, Vol. 21, N. 2, 1980, pp. 165-168.

³⁰¹ For instance, in the scene where the count makes a bloody sacrifice to Juno.

³⁰² Grover Philip, “Mérimée’s Influence on Henry James”, in *The Modern Language Review*, cit., p. 813.

³⁰³ Maves Carl, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the work of Henry James*, cit., pp. 38-39.

James non è tanto interessato alla figura di Giunone in quanto divinità dotata di sinistri attributi, ma all'opera d'arte che attraverso i secoli di fa portatrice del messaggio di una civiltà tanto raffinata quanto immorale, di quel paganesimo, inteso più come una condizione dello spirito che non come una religione [...]. L'ambigua attrazione che questo mondo esercita su James risulta come di consueto temperata dalla sua dimensione più razionale. È così che nella conclusione del racconto la pericolosa tendenza estetizzante associata al Conte Valerio [...] viene esorcizzata dall'ordine morale di cui la protagonista americana [...] è portatrice.³⁰⁴

Berkson believes that the story is a story of a man trapped by a vision of the ideal, idealized image of woman, showing a man suffering from a sexual malaise usually associated with Victorian England and America:

The count is the victim of a dualistic vision of women so deeply rooted in western culture that it can be traced back to pre-Christian myths and icons. The most powerful images of this dualism, however, are the two biblical Marys, Magdalen and the Mother. The one epitomizes carnality and sin [...], the other motherhood, inspiration and sexless procreation. [...] What this dualism said to the nineteenth-century male was that a good woman cannot be sensual, that in fact, by definition, a sensual woman cannot be a good woman.³⁰⁵

Thus, the count is trapped in an absurd dilemma, in his neurotic obsession. The Juno hints that a woman can also be erotic, something denied by the Magdalen/Mary dualism. Thanks to Martha, the Count rejoices her wife, yet the ideal is buried, it is not dead. In fact, the title of the story can be referred to the fact that the Count has become a modern man; or maybe it can suggest sterility resulting from preferring a frozen ideal. Berkson concludes by stating that "the great danger from Henry James's characters often comes from a fuzzy idealism that cannot recognize or acknowledge human complexity".³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Ascari Maurizio, "Note ai testi", in *Racconti Italiani*, cit., p. 347.

³⁰⁵ Berkson Dorothy, "Tender-Minded Idealism and Erotic Repression in James's "Madame de Mauves" and "The Last of the Valerii"", in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 2, N. 2, 1981, p. 83.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Evangelista goes further and maintains that James draws on archaeology to investigate the relationship between the buried secrets of the earth and the hidden desires of the human mind.³⁰⁷ Like Freud, James uses the trope of speaking stones to confer a spectral agency to the material remains of antiquity. The aural atmosphere of the Villa Valeria and the Pantheon convey an impossible desire for knowledge and disclosure. James shows antiquity without archaeology, but through spectrality with which the stones of the past reveal themselves to the present.³⁰⁸ According to Evangelista, the currency that Martha brings to the marriage is not only money, but blood, a strong blood, in contrast with the weak one of the Count. Blood (health) and stone (disease) are the two symbols around which the narrative is constructed and they clash in the final scene of the sacrifice of the Count. For Evangelista this is a “clear indication of the wasting of the Count’s healthy sexual energy”.³⁰⁹ Evangelista concludes:

Borrowing Freud’s interpretation of Jensen, we can see “The Last of the Valerii” as a proto-psychoanalytic tale, arguing that James uses the archaeological fantastic in order to represent both the symptoms and the cure of a psychosexual neurosis. [...] Camillo is the last of the Valerii not [...] in the sense that he will be the last pagan in his family line, but in the literal sense that his marriage will remain sexless or at least sterile, stones prevailing over blood in the end.³¹⁰

Rowe argues that the tale is “full of images of an anxious, hardly sublimated sexuality”.³¹¹ He continues:

Juno’s “imperial wand”, her commanding look, and “implacably grave” mouth suggest phallic power and masculine legal authority. It is, according to this fantasy, Juno who penetrates Valerio, spilling his virginal blood on the altar. Such rhetorical cross-dressing is by no means unusual in James and has obvious relevance for James’s ambivalence about his own

³⁰⁷ Evangelista Stefano, “Henry James’s Spectral Archaeology”, *Transatlantica* [Online], 2 | 2015, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 4.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³¹¹ Rowe John, *The Other Henry James*, London, Duke University Press, 1998, p. 51.

sexuality. At this early stage in James's literary career, the reversal of gender roles is threatening, and James works out the denouement not only to achieve a satisfactory ending but also to allay his own anxieties regarding the improprieties his imagination has dug up. [...] What allows James to defend himself against what is a homoerotic fantasy of transvestism and sodomy is his caricature of Juno's power as merely a version of the New Woman. [...] Having uncovered such a threat to masculine authority, James reasserts the more attractive alternative of the domestic wife.³¹²

According to Rowe, James has undermined his own purpose by transfixing the attention of the count and the reader on the legendary sexuality of Juno, with its phallic suggestion of homoerotic power and neglecting the American Martha, associated with domesticity. So, the reader is supposed to be more attracted to the Count and the Juno rather than the traditional Martha. Thus, James identifies with such feminine power in association with the women's rights movement and its "more spectral suggestions of lesbian and homosexual alternatives to heterosexual culture".³¹³

Vanon Alliata argues that the tale is an "archaeological fantasy"³¹⁴ regarding the spectral presence of the past; it is a tale set in Italy, the preferred place of superstition, combining elements of the uncanny, romance and realism³¹⁵. Yet on a deeper level, the story seems concerned with "re-creating an upsetting emotional reality"³¹⁶ rather than showing only the international marriage between Marco and Martha. In addition, Vanon Alliata states that "the fantastic dimension appears completely interiorised, becoming the projection of the psychic life and of its unconscious fantasies and demons".³¹⁷ From the narrator's point of view, homoeroticism rather than "paternal benevolence" is hinted in the description of Valerio's appearance.³¹⁸ The statue itself evokes images of female threatening power and phallic dominion, provoking feelings concerning castration anxiety,

³¹² Ibid., p. 52.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

³¹⁴ Vanon Alliata Michela, *Haunted Minds. Studies in the Gothic and Fantastic Imagination*, Verona, Ombre Corte, 2017, p. 117.

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 119.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

especially regarding the narrator, the emblem of masculine authority over women:³¹⁹

“The Last of the Valerii” ends on a note of ambiguity, irresolution and sadness not uncommon in fantastic tales. The trace of the ghostly remains in the form of Juno’s detached hand [...]. The surviving fragment literally and symbolically calls forth profound anxieties about the dismembered body, the mutilated and fragmented self.

Hence, by referring to the traumatic event of James’s eerie injury while he was extinguishing a fire, Vanon Alliata concludes:

One closer inspection, however, one can see this traumatic event as related to the wrenching experience of separation implicit in James’s decision to make himself an indefinite exile from his native land in order to live in Europe for the sake of his art. Intimated by a plethora of mourning metaphors around burying, interment and survival, this melancholic closure of “The Last of the Valerii” subliminally echoes this psychic economy of wounding, impairment and disintegration, while Juno’s severed hand, in its beauty and immortality, incarnates the nostalgia for an impossible ideal of wholeness that is apparently lost to the modern world.³²⁰

Ballinger, by quoting Feinstein, provides a really interesting interpretation of the story:

[...] recent commentators on the story claim to find evidence that James had already begun to be preoccupied with the subject of homosexuality. For example, in a paper read at a conference on Henry James at New York University in 1993, Feinstein asserted that James used "Valerii" as a vehicle to examine his homoerotic feelings for La Farge. [...] Feinstein has suggested that the necessity to rebury the pagan Juno is meant to be a criticism of society's attitude toward homoeroticism, which had been

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

tolerated in ancient Greece and Rome. By age thirty, James was already emotionally conflicted about his feelings toward men, according to Feinstein, and "Valerii" reveals that the only acceptable choice for James at that time was to bury the forbidden emotions. As the Juno's hand is not reburied, such repression is incomplete, and the concealment of the hand in his study may indicate that the Count has masturbatory fantasies³²¹.

As explored so far, "The Last of the Valerii" has encouraged many interpretations especially regarding young James's sexuality. Person maintains that "James frequently opens the possibility of homosocial and homosexual attachment between men but then closes it off in favor of heterocentric plot developments [...] by inserting a woman into what becomes a heterosexually triangulated relationship³²²". I believe this is the case of the tale examined so far, with Martha and the trio of her, the count and the narrator. The veiled allusions and the accurate sculptural descriptions made to the count by the narrator suggest a latent homoeroticism that cannot be expressed and so it is translated onto the statues. The count Valerio must be the last because his too explicit behaviour cannot be proper in civilised life. It could also represent James's passion for art that made up for his forbidden sexual desires. Sculptures that work by sublimating forbidden sexual desires.

Stevens argues that "James's fiction negotiates the thrills and ravages and difficulties of sexual identity and of the failure of identity, working through masochistic fantasies".³²³ Translating this concept into the story where the count can be interpreted as the victim of a masochistic fantasy that cannot do him any good, it becomes clear how the first repressed and upsetting appetites of the young James regarding his homosexual sexuality begin to make their way projecting themselves into the figure of the Count and his neopagan and clearly erotic frenzy³²⁴; the count is a certain heterosexual character, but in himself and the

³²¹ Ballinger Leonora, *Apparitions and Night-fears: Psychosexual Tension in The Ghostly Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 106 and p. 115.

³²² Person Leland, *Henry James and the Suspense of Masculinity*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 30.

³²³ Stevens Hugh, *Henry James and Sexuality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 164.

³²⁴ If interested, see Kraemer Christine, "Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Paganism", in *Religion Compass* 6/8 (2012): 390–401. Kraemer states that neopagans, declaring that all acts of love and pleasure are the rituals of the Goddess, widely affirm the sacredness of the body and of sexuality.

excavation, the spectre of James's inner desire echoes and is excavated, satisfied and sublimated in the art of fiction. The id had found its way to be expressed. On the contrary, the reburial of the Juno expresses the necessity and the impossibility for James to reveal and live his homosexual desires, since he was a conservative at heart and it seemed that, regarding his friendships with other young men, he “enjoyed the fantasy of a relationship, a fantasy that he could invent and control, rather than the complications of reality³²⁵”. This of course is referred to the late and adult James yet according to me it is an illuminating observation since the young James was obsessively focused on his work and it could probably be assumed that his homoerotic desires and impulses were not buried and repressed but serenely lived in the mind, platonically. So, James's sexuality remains a mystery full of interpretations and interpreters, like this Roman story, dense in meaning and conceptual junctions. Yet I believe it is more appropriate to understand this tale as the expression of something certainly sexual, but “unconscious, a helpless expression of neurotic fears³²⁶” present in the young Henry.

³²⁵ Simon Linda, *The Critical Reception of Henry James: Creating a Master*, Rochester, Camden House, 2007, p. 127.

³²⁶ Novick Sheldon, “Introduction”, in *Henry James and Homo-erotic Desire*, edited by John R. Bradley, New York, St. Martin Press, 1998, p. 14.

THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE

UNATTAINABILITY AND FATALISM IN JAMES'S ITALY

And I can't tell you why
It hurts so much
To be in love with the masterpiece

(Madonna, "Masterpiece")

"The Madonna of the Future" first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* for March 1873. It was reprinted two years later as part of James's first book, *The Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales*, published by Osgood in Boston, 1875. It became a very popular tale and was frequently reprinted in James's short stories collections. The tale is closely based, although with key differences of emphasis, upon Balzac's short story "Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu" of 1832³²⁷.

An un-named outer-storyteller relays the account of an inner-narrator in which he describes a youthful visit to Florence. While he is admiring the sculptures in the Palazzo Vecchio, he meets Mr Theobald, a man who shows enthusiasm about the spirit of the place and its artistic heritage. He is an American and claims to be an artist with standards so punctilious that he has not sold or kept a single picture. The following day, the narrator meets him again in the Uffizi gallery. Theobald continues to rhapsodise about art, and when they proceed to the Pitti Palace the narrator himself is full of enthusiasm for Raphael's picture "The Madonna of the Chair". Theobald takes an idealist, almost metaphysical view of art criticism,

³²⁷Wrenn Angus, "Some Allusions in the Early Stories", in *Henry James's Europe: Heritage and Transfer*, cit., p. 161. "Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu" is a short story by Honoré de Balzac. It appears initially in two parts in the magazine *L'Artiste* and later in the same year it is included, in a reworked form, in the collection *Romans et contes philosophiques*. As in other works, Balzac analyses the mysteries of the human psyche, focusing in particular on artistic creation and the inability of the public to recognize and appreciate the revolutionary originality of a genius. Ross states that the tale takes inspiration also from Musset's "Lorenzaccio" and Browning's "Pictor Ignotus". Like Browning's unknown painter, Theobald rejects the dominant tendencies of his time and the vulgar lure of popular commercial success. The two artists are alike in their moral to disguise from themselves a failure of determination. Theobald's career becomes an ironically reversed counterpart to that of his literary kinsman, Andrea Del Sarto. See Ross Michael, "Henry James' "Half-man": The Legacy of Browning in "The Madonna of the Future"", in *Browning Institute Studies*, Vol. 2, 1974, pp. 25-42.

whereas the narrator offers a more realist interpretation of the picture. The two men meet every day for the next fortnight, and the narrator continues to be astonished by Theobald's passion, his knowledge, and his commitment to the world of high art. However, Mrs Coventry, a long-time American resident and *patronne* in Florence informs the narrator that Theobald is a talentless dreamer in whom people have given up believing. He claims to be painting a Madonna which will be a composite of all previous masterpieces of the Italian school.

The narrator invites Theobald to the opera, but he declines and instead invites the narrator to meet Serafina, who acts as his model. The narrator is disconcerted to find that she is an unexceptional and rather stout woman who is no longer young. Theobald reveals that she was an unmarried mother who he rescued and has maintained ever since, following the death of her child. In addition, Theobald shows him his portrait sketch of the child, which he admires. When Theobald asks the narrator for his opinion of Serafina, he tells him quite honestly that she is old. This harsh honesty shocks Theobald, who realises that he has spent years deceiving himself. The narrator feels somewhat guilty for bringing him to this realisation and encourages him to finish the long-awaited portrait of Serafina as Madonna. Theobald is discouraged but promises to finish it in a fortnight. Theobald then is not seen again, so the narrator goes back to Serafina's apartment in order to locate him. He finds Serafina entertaining another man – who is a vulgar and pretentious artist of trashy objects. He, unlike Theobald, is the bearer of an art oriented towards modern consumerism; it is an art without filters or embellishments that represents a bare, raw, and animalistic reality³²⁸. Serafina defends Theobald as an honourable friend of many years, and gives the narrator his address. The other visitor tries to sell the narrator his tasteless statuettes. When the narrator visits Theobald, he finds him in miserably poor conditions. He is also paralysed with inactivity in front of an empty canvas. He realises that for all his theorising, he has no creative power whatsoever. The narrator looks after him, but he is taken ill and dies. After the funeral, the narrator meets Serafina in a church, where she implicitly reveals to him that she is a prostitute.

³²⁸ Francescato Simone, "Introduction", in *Segreti d'Artista - Tre Racconti*, Potenza, Edizioni Grenelle, 2016, p. 3.

James wrote a number of stories about art, artists, their achievements, and their reputations. “The Madonna of the Future” is about an aspirant artist. Theobald has an enormous reverence for the world of Art and Italian Renaissance painters in particular. He is well informed about the history and the technical details of what they have produced. He takes a high romantic view of art – that is, his appreciation of its values offers entrance into a quasi-religious and transcendental realm. Theobald gives a very persuasive account of his eagerness in the face of the narrator’s more sceptical, materialist view of art appreciation. There are, however, two problems with Theobald’s position: the first is that he has no real creative life force, and the second is that he has been living ‘in denial’ with his plan for the ultimate work of art. His idea for the ideal Madonna has been gestating for two decades, without delivering a single picture; this is reflected in his relationship to Serafina. She might have been a virgin-like Madonna (with child) when he first met her, but now she is an old woman. She clearly gets by via her association with ‘visiting gentlemen’, implying that she was a prostitute. What makes the story admirable is the well-sustained pathos of Theobald’s characterisation, and his ultimate tragedy in defeat of an unrealised dream. Mrs Coventry is quite right: Theobald has been telling everybody about his grand scheme but has produced nothing. Yet the fact that the narrator follows his dreams provides a sympathetic pathos to this sketch of a clearly deluded man. James wrote about artists who could not paint, authors who could not write, great thinkers who could only talk – and yet he was enormously productive himself, for the whole of his fifty-year creative life span.

In the first lines of the tale James anticipates to the readers that Theobald is destined to “fatal mediocrity³²⁹”. Therefore, Theobald’s artistic failure and subsequent spiritual and physical ruin are already considered the product of an external, divine, merciless force, which is understood as the sacred Italian Renaissance art, composed of maximum, unattainable and non-repeatable masterpieces. Florence looks haunted: “It’s as if the ghosts of the past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream

³²⁹ James Henry, “The Madonna of the Future”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 11.

made visible”³³⁰. Danto focuses on the uncanny and ghostly appearance of Florence at the start of the tale:

There is an almost mystical moment, near the beginning of James’s story, where the past was “a living presence” and at the same time “an aching presence”. The narrator finds himself among daunting masterpieces [...] transfigured by moonlight and silence into a luminous whole. It was as if the reality of stone and space were, for a rare moment, perceived and dreamt at once in a dislocated apprehension made more dreamful still when a personage [...] steps out from the shadows. [...] For a brief interval the Piazza della Signoria hovered between two states of being, vision and reality simultaneously, its stones giving palpability to the vision, which in turn infuses them with spirit. It is a moment of transcendence, in which a masterpiece of the past, as the piazza was, acquires the immediacy of a vision. This is almost certainly what Theobald imagines the effect of a masterpiece to be. [...] The tragedy lies in the fact that history, and the history of art especially, is about to become short, and through its abbreviation to render the very concept of the masterpiece doubtful. The future would have no room for Theobald’s masterpiece save as a characteristic work of its time.³³¹

As an American, Theobald feels inferior to the great Italian masters, but the narrator encourages him by telling him that “the worthy part is to do something fine!”³³² Melchiori states that “[con ciò] James sembra rispondere alla sfida lanciata da Hawthorne in un famoso passo della sua prefazione a *The Marble Faun*, in cui affermava che l’America è terreno infecondo per l’artista³³³”. The problem is that for Theobald, who should free the Americans from their dogmas, that is something which is impossible to carry out. He has a grand ambition, yet this seems “narcissist

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

³³¹ Danto Arthur, “The Future of the Madonna”, in *The Henry James Review*, Vol. 19, N. 2, 1998, pp. 115-116. Danto adds that the narrator and James himself admire the ghostly achievement of Theobald by contrast with the clever manual gifts of the cat and monkey artist. James prefers his failure rather than accept the new commercialization of art.

³³² James Henry, “The Madonna of the Future”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 15.

³³³ Melchiori Barbara, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, cit., p. 7.

rather than artistic”.³³⁴ He says that art “can wait³³⁵”. The narrator starts teasing him to himself by saying that “everything was a pretext for some wildly idealistic rhapsody or reverie³³⁶” and defining him a “monomaniac³³⁷”. Over time he realizes that Theobald cannot put anything on canvas and that he never produced his own “Madonna of the Future”. After some time, Theobald “sees” again thanks to the narrator’s advice and realises that Seraphina is old and vulgar and that his life is ruined forever. His blindness concerns his senses and his soul. Since his only goal in life was to create his new Madonna, his life can end since its project has vanished. He realizes that he cannot compete with high Italian art, in this case “The Madonna of the Chair”, a work of great formal refinement. Its great visual richness makes the work “indubbiamente uno dei maggiori capolavori dell'arte rinascimentale”³³⁸. Indeed, the Florentine paintings seem more cruelly alive and powerful than the unsuccessful, weak and sterile characters; they haunt like ghosts:

I shall never forget our melancholy stroll through those gorgeous halls, every picture on whose walls seemed, even to my own sympathetic vision, to glow with a sort of insolent renewal of strength and lustre. The eyes and lips of the great portraits seemed to smile in ineffable scorn of the dejected pretender who had dreamed of competing with their triumphant authors; the celestial candor, even, of the Madonna in the Chair, as we paused in perfect silence before her, was tinged with the sinister irony of the women of Leonardo.³³⁹

Thus Theobald, with his “transcendent illusions and deplorable failure”³⁴⁰, dies of brain-fever. His death is upsetting and it seems a punitive death. It is eerie because he vanishes. James does not describe the moment when he dies, he simply makes him disappear. This makes his death more mysterious and disturbing. Does he die like a martyr for the cause of high art? Many questions are left open and

³³⁴ Pascarelli Pietro, “Postfazione”, in *Segreti d'Artista – Tre Racconti*, cit., p. 127. Pascarelli argues that Theobald is not able to transcend his own personality and vanity within the artistic path.

³³⁵ James Henry, “The Madonna of the Future”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 17.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³³⁸ Franzese Paolo, *Raffaello*, Milano, Mondadori Arte, 2008, p. 112.

³³⁹ James Henry, “The Madonna of the Future”, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 48.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

vague. Yet one concept seems clear: too much idealism can destroy art. Cutting refers to James arguing that “many of his characters are haunted by the lives they fail to live, whether through choice, wounds, repression, or missed opportunity³⁴¹”. He adds:

None of James’s novels and tales reports a suicide or murder scene directly. These deaths are particularly interesting because of their associations with dishonour and scandal, with climaxes of self-determination and desperate action in the face of personal crisis. By positioning the death offstage, beyond the narrated scenes of action and perception, James’s narratives allow their dead characters to vanish without the shame of becoming a visible corpse³⁴².

Cutting continues his interesting and fresh exploration of the Jamesian death and he focuses on the vanishing of some of his characters:

By not showing us the death-moment, and in most cases not the corpse, either, James’s fiction reclaims the dead body as something mysterious. [...] The vanishing of Daisy, May, and Milly (and I would add Theobald) entails transubstantiations recalling the Christian Eucharist and Ascension: their spirit becomes matter or their physical body becomes etherealised. Non-reporting of the death-moment and the corpse defers the finality of death as a material event subject to a scientific and secular worldview. [...] Vanishing names a power of imagination and writing to transform time, place, and the materiality of the corpse altogether.³⁴³

Thus, Theobald becomes a ghostly, eternal, at times disturbing presence, which survives in the imagination, beyond the end of the tale. Perhaps he does not share signs of a "Christian" etherealization but, if art and religion are made equivalent, it is possible to understand his death as an ineffective and tragicomic martyrdom, that is, the theme of the failure of the artist so dear to James. Indeed, for Theobald Italian art was like a religion and the text is full of religious and

³⁴¹ Cutting Andrew, *Death in Henry James*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 1-2.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

transcendental terms to understand it. Indeed, the martyr is the one who died or was subjected to corporal punishment for having testified to his faith or an ideal despite a persecution, without abjuring them. The term is also used by extension in secular form to honour acts of particular heroism carried out in defence of one's nation or in the performance of one's profession. By transferring the religious meaning into the field of art by an inept and incapable "artist", one can understand the merely symbolic meaning of Theobald's death: a monitory death that threatens those who want to approach the sacred Italian masterpieces too closely by profaning them with imitation. Their excessive beauty can paralyse. Since the boldness of his act is high, Theobald's fate can only be the ultimate punishment, that is, death. It seems that James wants to imply that art does not feed on imitation but on personal inspiration and artistic identity, which is what Theobald does not own. What resonates in the end is his death for having dared to challenge the supreme Raphael. Paintings win over characters.

However, for what reason does he die? Was he blinded by excessive idealism? It is important to delineate how Theobald comes to this exaggerated idealism. The cause is to be found in his American roots. At a certain point in the tale, he bursts out with the following famous passage:

"We are disinherited of Art!" [...] "We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren, artificial deposit. Yes! We are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, not tact, nor force. How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely circumstance, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist, as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ James Henry, "The Madonna of the Future", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., pp. 14-15. Edel states that dispossession, disinheritance, exile, usurpation are the themes explored in these lines. Theobald thinks of himself as deprived of his birth right, turned into spiritual wanderer, unable in his new strange state to enter into possession. On a deeper level, the tale pictures Henry's double exile, his sense of being an outsider at home, his fear of being an outsider in Europe. See Edel Leon, *Henry James: A Life*, cit., pp. 122-123.

Indeed Francescato states that “l’idealismo dell’espatriato Theobald trova origine in uno stato di frustrazione in cui verserebbero molti aspiranti artisti americani, sopraffatti dalla bellezza e dalla ricchezza della tradizione artistica europea”³⁴⁵:

Questo senso di privazione “congenita” alimenta nel pittore un’ammirazione incondizionata per la grande arte rinascimentale italiana (Michelangelo e Raffaello in primis) che si accompagna a un’ottusità pervicace nei confronti della realtà sociale e culturale che lo circonda. [...] Con il suo fervente credo nell’apprezzamento e nella creazione artistici come manifestazione assoluta del genio individuale, Theobald si staglia nel racconto come perfetto erede della tradizione romantico-trascendentalista del suo paese.³⁴⁶

Wrenn argues that “the painting is also an allusion to the debate in artistic circles between naturalism and idealism, a debate with which James would have been familiar from his reading of the French journal *La Revue des Deux Mondes*”.³⁴⁷ According to Wrenn, “idealism is essentially allusive, the mere real being transformed so that what is depicted alludes either to some ideal form which has not actually been perceived with the eye or to something remembered from the past”³⁴⁸ and that James may be alluding to “the artist’s status as a figure in the renaissance humanist movement”³⁴⁹.

Ruckstuhl argues that “there is no such thing as Realism in truly great art, there is only Idealism, which is but the realization of some kind of an Idea, or Ideal created by the artist. [...] Every human work, from a wedding cake to a cathedral, is a work of Idealism-because it expresses some idea, or conception”³⁵⁰:

Then why all this talk about Realism? Because there are some human works which do come under the category of, commonly called, imitative

³⁴⁵ Francescato Simone, “Introduction”, in *Segreti d’Artista – Tre Racconti*, cit., pp. 3-4.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁴⁷ Wrenn Angus, “Some Allusions in the Early Stories”, in *Henry James’s Europe: Heritage and Transfer*, cit., p. 162.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁵⁰ Ruckstuhl Frederick, “Idealism and Realism in Art”, in *The Art World*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1917, p. 253.

realism. [...] Such works are exponents of the lowest realism. Here we have nothing but technical copying, such as would be done by a camera in colors; there is no poetization, no lifting spiritualization, in one word-no creation. And what lifts the artist above a mere camera is just that one activity-Creation. And an artist is great in ratio of the originality and lifting beauty of his creations. Hence, the more power possessed by a work of art to lift the mind and soul above the commonplace, the more god-like is that work³⁵¹.

In addition, Rockstuhl talks about the main difference between Idealism (Theobald) and Realism (the creator of the statuettes); James shows how Theobald errs, he errs in both sides, he is deceived into believing that his subject is sublime and admirable, but he cannot even represent it; on the contrary, the merchant fits the following definition perfectly:

We may now define realism as follows: realism in art means, first: the choice of a subject dealing with things and human activities of a commonplace nature, and, second: the representation of the forms of nature in any subject chosen, by imitating those forms with the utmost possible truth to nature. idealism is the opposite of realism. and, in analyzing it, we will begin by defining it as follows: idealism in art means, first: the choice of a subject dealing with things and human activities above the commonplace in nature; and, second: in the representation of the forms of nature, in any subject chosen, in such a manner as to indicate that the artist searched for and chose such forms as are universally regarded as the most perfect of their kind³⁵².

Idealism is characteristic of Raphael's "The Madonna of the Chair" because of its effect on Theobald and other people with sensibilities to high art. Idealism "lifts us toward the empyrean, toward the infinite, away from daily nature, from the earth and our commonplace experience. Hence it stirs our highest emotions: Delight and Awe, and gives us the loftiest and most spiritual pleasure we can experience"³⁵³.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 253.

³⁵² Ibid., pp. 254-255.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 255.

The more deeply a work of art stirs these highest emotions, the greater the work of art. This kind of idealism was at the foundation of all great Greek and Renaissance art, the latter celebrated in this story. The material of “The Madonna of the Future” was to be used again, with greater maturity, in the novel of *Roderick Hudson*.

THE ROLE OF ART: CHANGES AND LOSSES

Anderson argues that “The Madonna of the Future” shows the “enervating effect of Italy's beauty on the young American artist”³⁵⁴. Tinter interestingly adds that:

The museum world of twenty-five stories out of a total thirty of the early period is valuable not because its mechanics set up and resolve plots, or because its situational complexity-its art-making, art-watching, art-collecting-created "type" cleavages (the artist, the amateur, the collector, each classifiable into defective, excessive, and perverted). Its chief service is to determine certain fixed modes of experience permitted in the presence of art and under its aegis. The high art of Europe can be a terrible god if violated, a benevolent god if properly worshipped. The application of this dogma distinguishes the heroes or high priests from the failures or heretics. And it is significant that to the latter group belong the practising artists. Theobald of *The Madonna of the Future* fails because his overconcern with the secrets of Raphael paralyzes his hand. His is the talent that "can't act, that can't do or dare"!³⁵⁵

Lewis argues that in the tale “for the first time in his fiction the city of Florence operated as "a motive" and "an inspirer."”³⁵⁶ Horvath examines the role of the artistic element of the story and, in general, of all the Jamesian art stories. The accounts of artistic production are defined in terms of stale and stolen because the art the Jamesian artist manages to produce is just that, trite and insipid, though overlaid with a veneer of originality: “removed from life and sitting on their pieces, the artists yet fail to produce, hatching instead the aesthetics of defeat³⁵⁷”:

³⁵⁴ Anderson Charles, “A Henry James Centenary”, in *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1976, p. 35.

³⁵⁵ Tintner Adeline, “The Spoils of Henry James”, in *PMLA*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1946, p. 241.

³⁵⁶ Lewis Richard, “The Names of Action: Henry James in the Early 1870s”, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1984, p. 481.

³⁵⁷ Horvath Brooke, “THE LIFE OF ART, THE ART OF LIFE: THE ASCETIC AESTHETICS OF DEFEAT IN JAMES'S "STORIES OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS", in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1982, p. 98.

If all the artists encountered are set up to be saved or to save [or to betray, as H— betrays Theobald in “The Madonna of the Future”] for James's own perverse pleasure, we find the artists themselves “holding off”—saving themselves—as often as not from the conception of their great pieces, waiting for inspiration and circumstance to unloose the Perfect: “They'll never be painted, I never began! I waited and waited to be worthier to begin—I wasted my life in preparation” [...]. Theobald has lived a life of dreamlike apprenticeship, preparing for the day he would finally be worthy to paint his Madonna, unaware that with the passage of years she had grown too old. Saving oneself becomes, then, part of the aesthetics, because it is better to create nothing from nothing than the tawdry little somethings those sham artists knock off—they who see life as nothing better than “cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats” [...]. Consequently, what art gets accomplished is plagiarism: it is not the art one waits to create, and so the quality, the integrity of what one does “while waiting,” matters little. James emphasizes this in his writing of the stories that contain these artists.³⁵⁸

Terrill explains that “art necessarily involves some compromise, to James, the bringing of the idea down to earth in its representation, something that Theobald and Roderick never learn to do³⁵⁹”. Terrill goes further:

What James suggests is that the true artist, the man whose genius for art is complete, must have both technique and vision, the ability to produce as well as the ability to imagine. Theobald has both talent and seriousness of purpose but never manages to distill from his experience anything sufficiently impure to admit of life. His vision is magnificent but sterile. His obsession with perfection, significantly composed of purity and innocence, leaves him impotent as a creator. Theobald is committed to a vision of art as the expression of ideal conceptions in the artist's imagination to which he must give material shape. [...] The artist who conceives of his craft as the conscious realization of the ideal is destined to fail: to elevate heart and mind over hand and craft is to become paralyzed

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

³⁵⁹ Terrill Robert, *Artist Failures in the Fiction of Henry James*, Loyola University, Chicago, 1974, p. 96.

as a creator. James suggests that it might be better for the artist to shape imperfectly, fully committed to the making of art, rather than to await the inspiration of the ideal³⁶⁰.

Leslie maintains that “Theobald romanticises the act of painting as a form of depicting ideals, whilst the narrator has a far more grounded view of art that is steeped in the world of patronage and art as a profession³⁶¹”; concerning Theobald, he adds that “His ability to recognise the two ‘moods’ – one which allows you to appreciate an artist’s shortcomings, and another that desires to see only the best – highlights his aesthetic sensitivities, but also demonstrates how little he understands the reality of being an artist, where there are inevitably failures as well as successes³⁶²”:

In conclusion, it is quite clear that James makes use of the Renaissance to build up an image of the deluded Theobald, who could have been a great artist if he had ever taken the time to practise his craft. Through Theobald, the past lives again, but not in a way that could be sustained in the nineteenth-century world. His unwillingness or inability to create art himself means he is to die in obscurity [...]. In the tale, the position of the next great American painter remains vacant. James developed this relationship between Italy’s historical influence on modern American visitors further, delving further into its history for new material³⁶³.

Kraft sees the tale autobiographically with a note of pessimism; according to him, in the tale “James as a writer is concerned with the possibility that he will not be able to produce effectively and might go dry: that he has the vision of his art only in his mind and will not be able to execute works as the less idealistic artist can so easily do. [...] James makes the artist in "The Madonna of the Future" [...] too absurd to be representative and too romantic to be real”³⁶⁴. I agree with him and I would dare to add that this extremization of the facts in the plot is a literary strategy

³⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 228-229.

³⁶¹ Leslie Louis, *Writing Consciously for a Small Audience': An Exploration of the Relationship Between American Magazine Culture and Henry James' Italian Fiction 1870-1875*, cit., p. 138.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 139.

³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 154-155.

³⁶⁴ Kraft James, *The early tales of Henry James: 1864 – 1880*, cit., p. 92.

on the part of James to clearly expose his thoughts on Italian art making it also "expendable" commercially. In other words, to make the story compelling and fascinating in a way that engages readers. This extremization of Theobald's idealism and subsequent death, must be read symbolically.

Edel believes that the tale shows the fear of the artist that may "run dry" at a certain point in his life. American artists knew that they took the risk of losing themselves in the European past. How be a painter and be a man of action as well? The tale, according to Edel, seeks to answer this question: the artist talks sharply about the painting, but he cannot paint it. The motto of this story seems to be that "an artist must be hard, unyielding, resolute, masculine, and if necessary an egotist³⁶⁵".

Lewis argues that it is probable that, in describing Theobald and his inexistent painting, Henry had in his mind his sometimes inadequate-seeming father and the book he had never (yet) written.³⁶⁶ In addition, during the main conversation between the narrator and Theobald, it is like the two Henrys are arguing with each other: the Henry of 1873, in the person of the narrator, disproving the Henry of a few years earlier.³⁶⁷

Melchiori asserts that the main topic of the story is the excess of dedication, of caution, to the detriment of creation³⁶⁸. More precisely, the topic is double: the Europeanised American cannot assimilate the European tradition fully and the lack of a past represents the greatest obstacle in the creation of an American national art³⁶⁹:

Il moralismo di James è invece nel 1873 ancora del tutto legato a quella che si suol chiamare l'etica puritana degli scrittori americani dell'Ottocento. [...] Il culto della perfezione estetica è condannato come empio e corrotto, e si risolve in mero cinismo; e il cinismo è espresso nell'esclamazione dello scultore che chiude il racconto³⁷⁰. [...] La purezza di intenti dell'artista idealizzatore e moralmente sano si risolve in sterilità creativa; d'altra parte l'indubbia arte e fecondità creative dell'artista

³⁶⁵ Edel Leon, "Introduction", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 8.

³⁶⁶ Lewis Richard, *The Jameses: A Family Narrative*, cit., p. 228.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁶⁸ Melchiori Barbara, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, cit., p. 10.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁷⁰ Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats – all human life is there!

appartenente alla grande tradizione europea è esecrabile sul piano etico. Nelle opere più mature James troverà sempre più facile accettare la posizione tollerante nei confronti della eticità dell'arte europea [...].³⁷¹

Francescato maintains that “Theobald voyeuristically turns the whole city and its art into an idealized object for a private and undisturbed consumption”³⁷² and that “the painting of him is a masterpiece that the artist produced in a prolonged moment of ecstatic rapture [...] and is nothing else but the blessed result of his privileged access to the Platonic world of perfection”.³⁷³ Francescato continues stating that for Theobald the consumption of a perfect woman-object replaces both the experience of the woman and the encounter with reality which causes the painful and necessary steps to the artistic creation. This kind of consumption originates both from Theobald’s inactivity and the eternal delay of his work, culminating in the white canvas at the end of the story. Plus, the democratization of the art market destroyed the “aura” of supreme masterpieces through the spread of copies and allowed the development of new art tendencies which included the serial reproducibility of works of art as a new artistic category. Representative of this new trend is the statuette-maker.³⁷⁴ This new form of art is associated with modern mass consumerism, embodied by the crowds of people looking for the most fashionable object to collect and show in their houses³⁷⁵:

The only moral that the reader may derive is that any “uncomplicated portrait of reality is inevitably destined to be a failure. [...] Theobald’s aestheticist impotence and the statuette-maker’s naturalist ugliness are hardly understandable, unless one takes into account their different involvement in a common aesthetics, which “invalidates” both men’s appreciation and production of art objects in the story. By severing the ties between art and life, Theobald ultimately causes a confusion which hinders their fecund exchange [...] and leads him to leave his portrait unfinished. On the contrary, by strengthening those ties [...] the statuette-maker

³⁷¹ Melchiori Barbara, *Il Gusto di Henry James*, cit., p. 113.

³⁷² Francescato Simone, *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption*, cit., p. 58.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

“dictates” the obsolescence of the traditional work of art and substitutes it with his plastic collectibles – modern perverse surrogates fit for the exploitation of an increasingly wider and democratized art market.³⁷⁶

Izzo asserts that the story offers a wide range of women’s roles: “whore and symbol of a city, blank soul and perfection of forms, wife and Virgin Mary, lover and marketable object, betrayer and scapegoat, love object as art object and love object versus art object”³⁷⁷. In James’s tale all these roles overlap into a single character that is the original creation in “The Madonna of the Future”, Serafina. Serafina is the living combination of the tradition Theobald wants to attain: “a real woman, but idealized in such terms as to make her the object of a simultaneously aesthetic and religious cult”³⁷⁸. By comparing her to a Madonna, Theobald takes no account of her sexual identity and of the passing of time: this is the reason of his failure. The painting is impossible because Theobald idealizes a woman who refuses to be idealized but wants to be recognized for what she is: a normal human being, with multiple dimensions and characteristics. Theobald’s failure, then, is the result of idealizing Italian art and of idealizing Serafina.³⁷⁹ Yet of course the Madonna’s painting, taken in this way, is an unrealistic model. Beauty, when too abstract and not actual, becomes unattainable. It is deprived of all present and future. “The Madonna of the Future” becomes an oxymoron³⁸⁰. Thus, the moral of the tale stages the confrontation of the ideal and the real, “opening a path, within its own texture, for a dialectical tension of opposites”³⁸¹. Izzo concludes by taking into consideration the character of Serafina, both Virgin Mary and maiden mother, both nun and lover, both creator of silver clothes and unscrupulous eater of delicious spaghetti: Serafina contains oppositions and embodies them. She claims her own identity rather to conform to cultural stereotypes. James denounces through her the terms of her projections, criticizing the ideology and creating a metafictional declaration, “a manifesto for an art that will critically confront the opposites of idealization and commodification and keep the suspended in an unsolved dialectic,

³⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

³⁷⁷ Izzo Donatella, *Portraying the Lady: Technologies of Gender in the Short Stories of Henry James*, cit., pp. 41.

³⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 47.

which is itself a staging of the dilemmas of modernity. The Madonna of the Future [...] is achieved [...] in the tale”³⁸². Her name is Serafina: with her real-life portrayal, Izzo believes she is the real Madonna of the Future.

Maves argues that in the tale “one attitude challenges another [...] but neither is allowed to triumph. James seems to want tension, not resolution”.³⁸³ Plus, “the story’s truth resides in the balance of extremes maintained by its central intelligence. [...] [the story] is a study in extremes, the extremes of Theobald and Serafina, idealism and pragmatism, art as religion and art as commerce, American innocence and Italian sophistication”.³⁸⁴ Theobald has verbalized art until it has become a matter “more of poesis than of pictura” and has abstracted it totally from the real world. For him, the connection between the ideal and the actual is lost, the result can be only artistic sterility.³⁸⁵ Theobald lacks practicality and Italy works to foster his ambition:

It is not just foolish, but even dangerous, to idealize Italy and Art – the two at this point are nearly synonymous. A healthy involvement with either seems to demand some combination of the romantic and the real which remains as yet hypothetical, though at least James is beginning to show us that life in Italy [...] prepares one for extremes, for the carnal in human experience as well as the spiritual, and hopefully for the two mixed and inseparable.³⁸⁶

Ascari believes that the tale is situated in a phase that shows the coexistence and conflict of romantic and real, of romance and novel and that Theobald and the sculptor can be interpreted as the two complementary halves of a true artist. In addition, their relationship can be read as the representation of the etic conflict between a moral vision and a mimetic conception of art.³⁸⁷

Shackelford argues that during the European travels of James of 1869 and 1870, James became always more disenchanted with Raphael’s works, which he

³⁸² Ibid., p. 48.

³⁸³ Maves Carl, *Sensuous Pessimism: Italy in the Work of Henry James*, cit., p. 27.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁸⁷ Ascari Maurizio, “Note ai testi”, in *Racconti Italiani*, cit., p. 343.

found too distant from reality. Hence, Theobald's love for Raphael allows James to censure excessive idealism in art, idealism that prevented Theobald from becoming a skilled painter.³⁸⁸ Thus, Henry James believed that good art mixes idealism and realism: "to revere only platonic glimpses of truth and beauty in art [...] not daring to risk imperfection by applying paint to canvas, is to waste one's talent".³⁸⁹ Shackelford adds that at a certain point in the story Theobald realizes that an artist must have not only a vision but also the hand and the will to execute it. James's example of such an artist is Michelangelo Buonarroti, the greatest genius because he was a man of action³⁹⁰. Thus, in the tale, through continued references to Michelangelo and Raphael, James delineates, respectively, the good artist and the idealist (and to criticize) artist. In fact, Michelangelo's statues of David, Moses and Lorenzo provide a moral parable to Theobald. They show courage, strength, and grandeur, and suggest that an artist must, like Michelangelo, "energetically attack his medium and not be inhibited by fear of failure".³⁹¹

MacDonald argues that the tale recalls the travel essays in its reverence for Italian landscape and art and echoes the early romances of Hawthorne with its allegorical tone, use of coincidence, and fascination with inner obsessions.³⁹² In addition, Theobald's reaction to Italy recalls much of James's own 1869 initiation. Like James he accepts Italy's spell, yet he worries about his capacity to do so.³⁹³ Theobald appears as caricature of James's most valued experiences of Italian travel.³⁹⁴ For the tale James begins to consider Italy as material for fiction, so he starts to explore "not only the force of his emerging craft but the revelatory and resistant power of his chosen subject as well".³⁹⁵ Thus, Italy can overwhelm the mind yet limit creation, it delights the sense yet can refrain and destroy.

"The Madonna of the Future" is a story in which the attention can be placed on various aspects: the conception of art, the figure of the woman, Theobald's death.

³⁸⁸ Shackelford Lynne, "THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RAPHAEL REFERENCES IN JAMES, HENRY THE 'MADONNA OF THE FUTURE'", in *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 27, N. 1, 1990, p. 101.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁹⁰ Shackelford Lynne, "MICHELANGELO, JAMES, HENRY ARTISTIC HERO IN THE 'MADONNA OF THE FUTURE'", in *Anq-A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles Notes and Reviews*, Vol.3, N. 3, 1990, p. 110.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁹² Macdonald Bonney, *Henry James's Italian Hours: Revelatory and Resistant Impressions*, cit., p. 71.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Generally, all critics agree in considering the theme of idealism and realism of art as the central theme. James wanted to warn his audience about the danger that art was facing. In this sense, Theobald's martyrdom and his arid career mark a watershed between an obsolete artist doomed to failure for his excessive idealism and the nascent commercialization of art destined to an always greater success. James agreed on the balance between these two philosophies for the good artist, but he had already sensed that the creator of the statuettes was becoming the symbol of a nascent current of "artists" that was destined to change the world of art forever. This concept is contained in the last famous and cryptic sentence of the tale: "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats; all human life is there!".³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ James Henry, "The Madonna of the Future", in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, cit., p. 52.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that James incorporates Italy in his early works, in particular in the short stories. In these stories, Italy reveals its dark and eerie side. It seems that James wanted to express all his concerns about this country that attracts yet shocks him with its sublime art and immorality that combine perfectly but clash with James's upright morals. By placing at the centre of the plot powerful art objects whose functions border on the occult, James uses them to make them bearers of his thoughts about Italy: it is dangerous to awaken topazes hidden in the Roman countryside, Greek sculptures buried under a Roman villa, or supreme paintings that peacefully sleep in museums. The wish of using them for purposes that go beyond their original function leads to unexpected implications; for instance, Adina running away from Scrope, Valerio obsessing over the sculpture, or the failure and consequent punitive and symbolic death of Theobald. The outcome can only be upsetting. Repression becomes necessary in order not to reveal the uncanny, relics need to sleep underground; otherwise, Italy could attract and destroy again and James was well aware of this. In his long career he will always treat Italy with admiration without being absorbed completely by it; these early stories already announce this awareness, exorcise his fears, reworked and sublimated into brilliant and capital fiction.

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