

The Typewriter's Tale: Re-Exploring the Historical Figure of Henry James through Fiction

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Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between historical fiction, history, and the portrayal of the character and identity of Henry James with specific reference to *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005) by Michiel Heyns. Furthermore, it explores how Heyns proceeds to strike a historically responsible balance in his portrayal of the identities of Henry James, Morton Fullerton and Edith Wharton as characters in the novel and the identities of these personae as historical figures. It also explores how Heyns imaginatively bridges the gaps in the historical record or relies on creative licence to reinterpret events and characters. Lastly, the contribution that historical fiction can make to our understanding of the identity and character of historical figures is considered.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die verhouding tussen historiese fiksie, die geskiedenis en die uitbeelding van die karakter en persoonlike identiteit van die roman skrywer Henry James in Michiel Heyns se historiese fiksie roman *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005). Verder verken die artikel hoe Heyns te werk gaan om 'n histories verantwoordelike balans te verkry in sy uitbeelding van die identiteite van Henry James, Morton Fullerton en Edith Wharton as karakters in die roman en hul identiteite as historiese figure. Dit word ook verken hoe Heyns verbeelding gebruik om die gapings in die historiese rekord te oorbrug en kreatiewe vryheid gebruik om historiese gebeure en karakters te herinterpreteer. Laastens word die bydrae wat historiese fiksie kan maak tot die verstaan van die identiteit en karakter van historiese figure oorweeg.

Keywords: Henry James; identity; character; historical fiction; history; Michiel Heyns; *The Typewriter's Tale*

UNISA 

Journal of Literary Studies

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/jls>

Volume 39 | 2023 | #13966 | 17 pages

 LASA

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1753-5387/13966>

ISSN 1753-5387 (Online)

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In his article “The Curse of Henry James” (2004), Michiel Heyns concludes that the enduring fascination of writers with fictionalising James sprouts from James’s own desire for privacy—a desire that led the elderly James to burn his correspondence. The effect of this action may be seen as the opposite of the outcome that James desired, seeing that this burning of the letters led to a heightened interest in the private life of Henry James. As an author who mastered the depiction of the psychological journey, James’s own elusive inner and personal life remains a mystery and a point of contestation amongst biographers—as Lyndall Gordon states: “Everything in James ... suggests that documentary truth is limited and needs the complement of imaginative truth” (1998, 370). In other words, the strictly controlled documentary evidence pertaining to the historical figure of Henry James leaves anyone interested in his private life with a much reduced and frustratingly insubstantial character, unless that character is fleshed out through imaginative speculation, extrapolation and inference.

The question that arises is, where should the author of historical fiction draw the boundary between historical truth and imaginative truth? This is especially the case when dealing with a character like James who attempted to control what posterity would know about him. In an era where immediate popular causes are anachronistically aligned to history, a historical figure with an elusive sexual preference—such as James—runs the risk of being posthumously ideologically appropriated—as has been the case with James in literary criticism where there is considerable “critical attention to the act of ‘outing’ James as a gay or queer writer” (Hannah 2007, 72), something that Lyndall Gordon regards as a “modish mistake” (1998, 391). A number of articles have explored the fictional depiction of Henry James, most notably J. Russell Perkin’s “Imagining Henry: Henry James as a Fictional Character in Colm Tóibín’s *The Master* and David Lodge’s *Author, Author*” (2010), which compares the respective depiction of James as a fictional character in the two novels mentioned; Daniel K. Hannah’s “The Private Life, the Public Stage: Henry James in Recent Fiction” (2007), which brings the spate of interest in fictionalising Henry James’s private life into relation with James’s own “conflicted, often queer responses to the private and the public” (Hannah 2007,70); Kathryn Kramer reflects on the possible reasons for the recurring fictionalisation of Henry James in her article “The Secrets of the Master” (2008), and in “The Jouissance of Influence: Being and Following the Writer in Michiel Heyns’s *The Typewriter’s Tale*” (2010) Karen Scherzinger explores the stylistic influence on an author of historical fiction when the major historical figure around which the novel is constructed is himself a celebrated author. This article explores the problem of how an author of historical fiction can responsibly depict the identity of a historical character who deliberately strove to keep his private life private, namely, Henry James as fictionalised by Michiel Heyns in *The Typewriter’s Tale* (2005)—in other words, how is a balance struck between documentary truth and imaginative truth.

Leon Edel rightly asks the question: “Did nothing happen to Henry James except the writing of an extremely long shelf of books? ... And ... could a man produce so much having, as it is claimed, lived so little?” (Edel 1972, 19). James thus poses a “challenge

to the art of biography” (Edel 1972, 19). On the other hand, James’s literary and cultural influence proved to be extensive enough for a whole monograph—*Henry James’s Legacy: The Afterlife of His Figure and Fiction* (Tintner 1998)—exploring James’s pervasive influence on all forms of media throughout the 20th century. Thus, paradoxically, James’s private life seems to have been placidly uneventful and even obscure, whilst his cultural influence is vast. This discrepancy holds the key to his enduring fascination as a subject for fictionalisation—the manifestation of the imaginative truth mentioned earlier—for the question remains who this influential historical figure really was. James himself exhibited a strong aversion to leaving his private life open to posthumous prying. Edel deduces from James’s reservations that “the thing was indeed to burn papers, keep the secrets, challenge the biographer to dig harder for his facts, demand of him a genuine effort of inquiry and research” (1972, 144). If this course of action is followed, opined James, “the pale forewarned victim, with every track covered, every paper burned, and every letter unanswered, will, in the tower of art, the invulnerable granite, stand, without a sally, the siege of all the years” (quoted in Edel 1972, 144).

For James, then, discretion was of the utmost importance for posterity. The James family in turn posthumously set out to systematically “sanitise” James’s correspondence and to construct a public image of “the Master,” which has proved to be surprisingly resilient. At the time of James’s death, the question of who should be entrusted with the editing and compilation of his letters was much discussed within the family and amongst his friends. The latter were rightly apprehensive of the Jameses’ instincts in these matters; and indeed Percy Lubbock, who edited the first edition of James’s letters, frustratedly admitted that: “Simply in talking to the Master’s relatives, ‘one seems [...] to move in such a cloud of fine discretions and hesitations and precautions that it is difficult altogether to know where one is’” (quoted in Anesko 2012, 56). The manipulation of the public image of Henry James after his death would prove to be a lasting concern for the Jameses. Furthermore, regarding Leon Edel’s privileged access to the James archives, “Edel’s career epitomizes a logic of restriction that already had been put in motion before James died in 1916. Even then, family scruples (inflected more than a little by homophobic paranoia) seemed determined to perpetuate a discreet hagiography of the author, and his collateral descendants worked deliberately to frustrate what they considered unwanted speculation or investigation” (Anesko 2012, xii).

Yet, if the family could attempt to control the biographical material contained in the archives, they could not control literary criticism and interpretation of James’s art and what his art reveals, according to the interpreters, about his personal life and identity. The “outing” of James is not just an act narrowly focused on literary criticism but forms part of the broader shift within history and its relationship to the social sciences and art, where history has become much more important socially and politically, after the advent of post-modernism, because of “the way various publics now interact with the past [which may be termed] the new politics of memory” (Curthoys and Docker 2013, 17).

Thus, Henry James's personal identity, read into his literary creations and inferred from his literary creations, holds a broader significance within the context of the broader social/political concerns of the "various publics" with a vested interest in queer theory, gender and identity politics. Fred Kaplan states that James had, "at least since his Paris days, a dim sense of his homoeroticism, which his position, his personality, his background, and his culture all gave him every incentive to repress" (quoted in Levine 2002, 185), leading to a complex debate "about whether James was a 'homophile celibate,' homophobe, or 'sexually active proto-gay man'" (Levine 2002, 185). However, "James cannot of course resolve from the grave the debates about either the homosexual meaning of his works or his own homosexual inclinations" (Levine 2002, 185). Therefore, inferring James's identity from his creations, reading it into his creations to elucidate their meaning, or excising hints of homoeroticism from James's historical personal biography always runs the risk of what Paul Ricoeur would describe as "a concerted manipulation of memory and of forgetting by those who hold power. ... It is on this plane that we can more legitimately speak of the abuses of memory, which are also the abuses of forgetting" (Ricoeur 2004, 80). In the case of James, the collective memory pertaining to the historical Henry James was first manipulated by his relatives to conform to an agenda of heteronormative respectability and secondly by literary critics who deliberately pursued a reading of James's work, and in effect his historical identity, that would support a gay or queer interpretation of his art and the relationship between his life and art.

Ricoeur attributes the "manipulation of memory and of forgetting," and therefore of history, to "a disturbing and multiform factor that insinuates itself between the demand for identity and the public expressions of memory. This is the phenomenon of ideology" (2004, 82). He points out that

it is through the narrative function that memory is incorporated into the formation of identity. Memory can be ideologized through the resources of the variations offered by the work of narrative configuration. And, as the characters of the narrative are emplotted at the same time the story is told, the narrative configuration contributes to modelling the identity of the protagonists of the action as it molds the contours of the action itself. (2004, 84–85)

Thus, historical fiction can, to an inordinate extent, become instrumental in disseminating a specific ideology and in the process distort memory and identity; it not only draws on history for its subject material—already a component of the collective memory that is malleable and open to interpretation—but it also narrativises the history it depicts and fictionalises it through emplotment and characterisation and thus draws the reader into the world of the fiction and into the ideological framework underpinning it.

It should therefore be explored what Michiel Heyns's depiction of the personal identity of Henry James in *The Typewriter's Tale* is intended to achieve ideologically and to what extent this portrayal does justice to the complex character of the historical James

and resists or facilitates the manipulation of memory for ideological purposes. Haralson's reading of *The Ambassadors* shows, regarding the "overdetermined discourse of sexuality and the criteria of modern heteromascularity" that dominated the late 19th century, that Henry James resisted these notions and his novel suggests that "a man can qualify as a 'real man of action' without dramatic exploits on the battlefield or in the bedroom (as a site of heterosexual tournament), and that 'action' itself can occur in disparate venues, even in the privacy of one's imagination" (2003, 113). Thus, the historical James himself may not have felt any compulsion or regret pertaining to his sexuality and all the recent analysis so focused on sexuality and sexual orientation in his work may in fact be more focused on assisting contemporary readers to understand themselves than it helps to understand Henry James. Although Heyns himself has academically contributed to the queer reading of Henry James's work, commenting in the context of *The Ambassadors* on the oddity "that despite James's well-known 'strongly homoerotic' proclivities, [Lambert] Strether's outpouring to Little Bilham—'Live all you can'—and the experiential regrets this imperative implies have not been 'ascribed to an undeclared homosexual side' in the character" (quoted in Haralson 2003, 102), I would argue that Heyns's ideological stance in *The Typewriter's Tale* is far more reticent, hence also ideologically less self-assured and therefore counteractive of manipulation of memory.

Heyns opts to depict James from the viewpoint of an external source—his fictionalised typist, Frieda Wroth. Because he chooses not to portray James's consciousness and thought from James's own perspective, he manages to portray his actions—in other words what is historically known about him—whilst at the same time leaving the mystery of the many untold secrets of "the Master" intact, in this way bringing his character and life into sharp focus but leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. This approach stands in contrast to the approach followed by David Lodge in *Author, Author* (2004) and Colm Tóibín in *The Master* (2004) where "the figures of exposure and concealment foreground fictional biography's dependence upon the illusion of revelation, of unveiling the private life of the subject" (Hannah 2007, 72). In addition, I would argue that through the fictionalisations contained in *The Typewriter's Tale* Heyns wants to foreground the complexity of James's identity and character; he aims to show that, hidden behind a façade of respectability and discretion, was a highly subtle and perceptive consciousness that ultimately has to remain an entity that cannot be fully probed through biographical or literary analysis—and which cannot easily be appropriated for the ideological purposes of a contemporary agenda.

Central to the plot-structure of *The Typewriter's Tale* is an intricate web of historical personal relations that Heyns fictionalises in order to open up a dialogue between the readers of *The Typewriter's Tale* and James's life and art. The triangular friendship between Henry James, Edith Wharton and Morton Fullerton constitutes the major biographical/historical core around which the novel is constructed. Heyns makes use of this triangle to exhibit all the complexities of James's character and personal identity: his intense friendships with both men and women, his love of society and his love of

solitude, the homoerotic element in his friendships with young men, his sincerity in human relations and his understanding of a measure of duplicity, his propriety, discretion and unjudgemental stance pertaining to knowledge about that which might be improper.

The timeframe in which the novel is set—from November 1907 to July 1909—largely corresponds with the historical/biographical facts around which the novel is constructed, namely, the love affair between Fullerton and Wharton, the revision and preparation of the New York Edition of James’s work, a downturn in his health in 1909 and the burning of his correspondence. The carefully selected timeframe, although only constituting a small portion of Henry James’s biography, enables Heyns to touch on various elements of James’s life and therefore becomes biographically representative of the whole. It is also significant that James spent months revising the New York Edition of his work during this time, which supposes a reckoning with life as well as art, the outcome of which is fictionalised by Heyns to be the destructive bonfire of 1909. Although Heyns draws on history to create the timeframe and plot of the novel, he goes on to draw actual historical events into a fictional relation with each other in order to create a unique plot that is able to address and encompass several major themes that also echo major themes from James’s own artistic creation.

This approach, however, raises questions pertaining to the relationship between history and historical fiction. The historical events that Heyns uses to create his fictional plot have been extensively researched and in this regard many of the connections between these events have been emplotted in works of academic history already. What Heyns does through fictionalising these events into a unique new plot is to create a platform where he can reflect imaginatively on the nature of these characters, and relationships, and in the process posit new speculative possibilities as to the underlying meaning of certain historical actions—such as James’s burning of his archive—whilst simultaneously thematically engaging with James’s creative work. However, the following problems deserve consideration: if Heyns makes use of already emplotted actual historical events in order to construct a newly created fictional plot, is the “historical” component within the “historical fiction” eventually so contorted as to become a misrepresentation misleading the audience? In addition, what then is the contribution made to our understanding of history by such a work of historical fiction?

A brief reflection on Hayden White’s ideas about the relationship between history and literature is warranted. White posits that writers of history “emplot” facts into meaningful narratives, but that this also means that *all* historical narratives are fictionalised; he holds that “[a]ll stories,” therefore also factual historical narratives, “are fictions. Which means, of course, that they can be true only in a metaphorical sense and in the sense in which a figure of speech can be true” (White 1999, 9). White, however, is not an extreme historical relativist who rejects the factual basis of writing history. In this regard, he explains his stance: “The distinction between facts and meanings is usually taken to be the basis of historical relativism. This is because in

conventional historical inquiry, the facts established about a specific event are taken to be the meaning of that event. ... But the facts are a function of the meaning assigned to events, not some primitive data that determine what meanings an event can have” (quoted in Doran 2010, 7).

Thus, in incorporating the existing historical/factual emplotments into a newly created fictionalised plot, Heyns constructs a space for interpretive meaning pertaining to those already emplotted historical events. However, one could argue that this approach runs the risk of misleading the audience pertaining to the historical facts. I would contend that in White’s view this would still be acceptable and not misleading as long as the constructed and fictitious nature of the plot/narrative is foregrounded. This does place a large measure of responsibility on the audience of such fictions to discern between the factual and the fictional; however, there is in this regard not much difference between the constructions of academic history and the constructions of historical fiction.

Furthermore, the contribution historical fiction then makes to our understanding of history is embedded in its contribution to our understanding of the specific human beings that constitute these stories, their actions and the society in which they function—understood in this context, the importance of a purely factually accurate depiction diminishes. Through the foregrounding of fictionalisation, the author also reminds the historical fiction audience that the rendering of the context in which the work of fiction is set is a contemporary interpretation of that context and in this way, ideally, a dialogue should be opened up between the present understanding of historical figures and eras and the figures and contexts in themselves. I would argue that Heyns employs fictional devices, at the expense of factual accuracy, to enhance a better understanding of the character and person of the historical Henry James in the present.

Heyns’s choice of representing the historical facts contained in *The Typewriter’s Tale* in a newly emplotted comical/satirical rendering further advances the foregrounding of the fictionally constructed nature of the text. If it is an unusual choice to construct a satirical text around the historical Henry James—in the popular imagination so stolid and serious—this choice does not in itself undermine the possible value of the contribution it makes to the reader’s understanding of the history it contains. I would argue that in writing the novel in a satirical vein, Heyns is attempting to overcome the very serious and respectable existing popular conception of Henry James. The James that Heyns aims to depict is at one and the same time “the Master” and the James who possessed a “devastating sharpness of wit” and “Rabelaisian powers of innuendo,” who could be “idiosyncratic, eccentric [and] at times even comical” (Edel 1972, 171).

The most important instrument that Heyns employs to foreground the fictionality of the text and to create a new thematically interactive plot is the character of Frieda Wroth, James’s young typist. The reader is constantly aware that Frieda is a fictional character and therefore her experiences of characters and events are also interpreted by the reader to be fictionalised.

Although Frieda is only loosely based on the real historical figure of Theodora Bosanquet, James's actual typewriter, Heyns relies on many details provided by the reminiscences of Bosanquet to create an authentic character in Frieda Wroth, and through their interaction, of Henry James, by employing the accurate detail of the experience of the actual historical figures. Bosanquet thus described her first meeting with James: "He reminded her, in figure, of Coleridge, and she felt that he ought to be wearing a flowered waistcoat, very expansive, 'unrestrained' in the lower part. In fact, he wore green trousers and a blue waistcoat with a yellow check and a black coat, a combination which surprised her ... Nor had he the self-possession she expected" (quoted in Hyde 1969, 157). Heyns's fictionalised meeting depicts James as "a portly, middle-aged man. His air of gravity was oddly contradicted—or emphasized, she couldn't have said which—by his green trousers and blue waistcoat with a yellow check, over which he wore a black coat" (Heyns 2005, 14). However, through the perceptions of the fictional Frieda, Heyns can now make overt what was only very respectfully and covertly implied in Bosanquet's original account: that there is an unexpected discrepancy between the popular public image of Henry James—as very correct and self-possessed—and the surprisingly garish outfit he wears and the warmth he exudes, in person; through fictionalisation Heyns manages to move beyond the established image and prompt a re-evaluation of what the reader assumes about the historical Henry James's personality.

In creating Frieda, Heyns is depicting the generation of women en route to becoming fully emancipated, just as James's novels would portray a new kind of heroine in a character such as Isabel Archer. Frieda occupies a space between the accepted norms of an older society and a new set of norms that still has to finally crystallise in a different society—the crossover between the 19th and the 20th centuries. In this regard, she mirrors James, who also occupies a space in between the aforementioned centuries, conventionality and unconventionality, the traditional and the avant-garde, both in his life choices and in his art. The character of Frieda, therefore, functions as a reflector board for the character of James, at times mirroring each other, at other times contrasting one another.

Frieda can be interpreted as a composite of different Jamesian heroes. Scherzinger posits that: "Throughout the novel, Heyns conflates Frieda and two of James's most admired characters, Isabel Archer [...] and Lambert Strether" (2010, 6). The character, therefore, becomes instrumental to Heyns's interaction with James's own creative work. *The Ambassadors* is intertextually referenced throughout *The Typewriter's Tale*, most notably when the character of Henry James encourages Frieda to go to Paris "and live all you can" (Heyns 2005, 87). James described the plot of *The Ambassadors* as "the picture of a certain momentous and interesting period ... in the history of a man no longer in the prime of life" (quoted in Edel 1972, 69). *The Ambassadors* proved to be a return to "the 'international' subject by which [James] had first established his fame ... [it] was to be the story of an elderly hero who, in the French capital, breaks out of the

shell of his New England conscience—and discovers how much he has looked at the world with innocent eyes, in spite of his advanced years” (Edel 1972, 70).

Taking into account the preceding interpretation of *The Ambassadors*, it becomes clear that in the context of *The Typewriter’s Tale*, the description of the hero’s development is applicable to both the characters of Frieda and James. James’s initial attitude is one where he is clearly the experienced Master responding to Frieda’s inexperience; however, as the plot of the novel unfolds, it opens up the question to what extent James himself has, akin to Lambert Strether, looked at the world with innocent eyes despite his sophisticated stance—or is it actually a case of James’s own discretion hiding the true extent of his worldly life experience and knowledge?

Frieda both mirrors and differs from James in her restricted life experience. Frieda has experienced “[l]ife as a creature requiring a certain sum of money per week to sustain itself,” and she finds it an unwelcome realisation, with the failure of the New York Edition, that she is to “confront again that dour familiar in this little mansion of plenty” (Heyns 2005, 150). Although this is a reference to Henry James’s more comfortable material circumstances that have cushioned him against the harsher material realities, even he cannot escape the restrictive practicalities of the world, as suggested by his explanation that: “In a word, Miss Wroth, I need the money to live, and was looking to the Edition to provide some of it” (Heyns 2005, 150). On one level, then, both Frieda and James have led sheltered lives, contained within definite boundaries of material means and inherited moral stricture and have had to use their imaginations to gain access to other realities. And just as Frieda has “turned her back upon the fray” of life “and found her refuge in literature” (Heyns 2005, 7), so, it is suggested, has James.

Heyns uses the fictional Frieda to explore the intricate triangular entanglement of James, Wharton and Fullerton, and through this exploration to ponder the identity and character of James. The historical/biographic heart of the novel centres on the blackmailing of Fullerton by a French landlady who apparently stole some letters from Fullerton, which contained reputation-damaging content. During the time of Fullerton’s romantic involvement with Wharton, she and James attempted to rescue Fullerton from the blackmailer by, amongst other things, advancing him funds. Heyns takes the basic premise of the dangerous letters and adds an entirely fictional concern of Fullerton’s about letters he had written James that may be misconstrued as homoerotic, and that Fullerton fears may fall into the wrong hands if James’s health should suddenly deteriorate.

The character of Fullerton goes on to draw the fictional Frieda into a plot of deception, after seducing her, where she agrees to “retrieve” the letters on behalf of Fullerton. In this way, Fullerton becomes the quintessential Jamesian villain, whose villainous conduct—like Osmond in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Kate Croy in *The Wings of the Dove*—selfishly leads astray Frieda and betrays both James and Wharton. However, in

true Jamesian style, Fullerton's betrayal of his friends is only one of the betrayals all three members of the triangle perpetrate through their discretion and duplicity.

Edel gives the following brief overview of Fullerton's earlier life and connection to Henry James:

William Morton Fullerton ... [a]n epicurean son of a New England clergyman, Fullerton had graduated from Harvard and gone abroad distinctly as a lover of the life of letters, and of women, and he was capable of intimate male friendship as well. He had known Oscar Wilde; he had been a friend too of the sculptor, Wilde's friend, Lord Ronald Gower. He had had a passionate love affair with James's friend, Margaret Brooke [...]; Blanche Roosevelt [...] had crossed his path, and there were others. James had always [...] found Fullerton appealing and sought his company; they were constantly together when the novelist was in Paris. (Edel 1972, 411)

Edel's description makes it clear that Heyns has authentically depicted Fullerton's incorrigibly duplicitous and promiscuous character. A French mistress, Henrietta Mirecourt, would turn out to be Fullerton's blackmailer; yet they not only remained good friends, but it is quite possible that they were also still lovers at the very same time that Fullerton was romantically involved with Wharton. Secondly, the nature of the blackmailing letters is alluded to in the references to Oscar Wilde and Lord Ronald Gower. Mainwaring explains that Lord Ronald Gower "had introduced Wilde to aristocratic society" and that through Lord Ronald Gower, "Wilde and Fullerton were acquaintances" (2001, 30). Mainwaring connects the persons and the timeline and concludes that:

(1) As a young man in Paris M[orton] F[ullerton] lived with a Frenchwoman. (2.) In 1893 he was visited, perhaps in her house, by R[onald] G[ower] a lover or ex-lover. (3.) In 1899 he distanced himself, callously one may think, from the disgraced Oscar Wilde. ... (5) In 1907 he wrote to James, whose replies indicate that Morton lived in the house of an ex-mistress who had evidence linking him with R[onald] G[ower] ... and threatened to expose him. (2001, 30)

If Heyns fictitiously introduces Fullerton's concern that his letters to James may be misconstrued as homoerotic in nature, it is within the context of the preceding historical background that he constructs his embellishment. Furthermore, enhancing the authenticity of the re-creation is of course the fact that James's letters to Fullerton are a testimony to the deep bond of attachment that existed between the two men.

In a fictional letter from James to Fullerton, written to Fullerton after his request that James should return his letters, James expresses his indignation that Fullerton should class "as a source of peril and insecurity, your letters to me with those of Lord Ronald to you, not to mention those effusions of Oscar Wilde which so exercised the moral imagination of the public" (Heyns 2005, 73); this is indicative of both the intensity of James's friendships with other men—indeed suggestive of homoeroticism—and of the

high-minded value he attached to these friendships, where the possibility of casual and passing sexual attraction is precluded, in James's mind at least, from the outset. Heyns also depicts James's unjudgemental loyalty to those closest to him. At the beginning of the letter James declares that: "I have once again been pondering your quite overwhelming confidences ... What comes over me ... is my own sense of having been left ... outside the ante-room of your life" (Heyns 2005, 72). The James that Heyns depicts is not indignant, or scandalised as such, by the possible impropriety of what Fullerton confides in him but is instead deeply hurt by the fact that he was not trusted enough to have received those confidences sooner. Yet, the James of Heyns's depiction also (naively) does not seem to suspect that his friend's duplicity will ultimately extend to their own friendship.

On the other hand, Heyns seems to suggest that James's indulgence of his closest friends' vices through his discretion was in itself a form of duplicitous betrayal of other friends. This last observation becomes particularly relevant within the context of Fullerton's affair with Wharton as depicted in *The Typewriter's Tale*, since it prompts several tantalising historical questions: How much did James really know about Fullerton? How much of what he knew pertaining to Fullerton was shared with Wharton? To what extent was James aware of the love affair between Wharton and Fullerton? And if he was aware of their affair, was he not in his own right misleading Wharton, through his discretion?

Tredy observes that "duplicity is one of the key literary and rhetorical strategies within [James's] vast and infamous arsenal of techniques of 'ambiguity', a signature feature of the author's method more often associated with his penchant for open endings, for elusive signifiers and for systems of representation that allow for varied or even contradictory interpretations of his works" (Tredy 2013, viii). As such, the open-ended questions Heyns poses regarding what exactly the character of James knows and what he does with this knowledge thematically connect with James's own artistic creation but also with the enigmas of the historical James's life.

Edel quotes Edith Wharton as stating that "Henry James was perhaps the most intimate friend I ever had" (quoted in Edel 1972, 205). He observes that "James would not have used the word 'intimate'. Mrs. Wharton was always for him the *grande dame*; but he admired her intellectual and literary qualities and her style. His affection was genuine, his reservations were strong" (Edel 1972, 205). If Heyns depicts Wharton as a great lady, also portrayed is Henry James's wariness of what he called "'the great ones' of the earth" (Edel 1972, 206). This latter point certainly formed part of James's reservations pertaining to Wharton—"James liked to mock forceful ladies" and that to his friends he "spoke of [Wharton's] 'devouring, burning and destroying energy'" (Edel 1972, 207). This suggests that though James thoroughly enjoyed Wharton's company, he maintained his emotional distance.

For this reason, Wharton was the ideal female companion for James—because he could keep his distance. As a married woman she could harbour no dangerous romantic expectation—unlike in the cases of two earlier intense attachments to women: his cousin Minny Temple and the novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson. In both their cases James somehow “failed” them. Minny Temple suffered from consumption and the youthful James, residing in Italy, resisted his cousin’s overtures to invite her to join him there. Years later, he would fail to respond to Woolson’s need of his emotional support; when she subsequently committed suicide, he struggled with feelings of guilt and culpability. It is likely that *The Wings of the Dove* also owes much to these earlier female influences in James’s life, with Minny Temple being a possible source of inspiration for the dying Milly Theale and Venice being the city where Woolson committed suicide. Just as Merton Densher has to aid Milly in living “all she can” but ultimately fails, so James had seemingly failed Minny Temple and Woolson.

Something of this aspect of James’s relationship with women is made apparent through the character Henry James’s inertia in helping Frieda to “live all” she can. This becomes apparent when Frieda mentions to Fullerton that James admitted to feeling “guilty at bringing [her] to Rye before [she] had seen Paris, that the proper time to see Paris was in one’s youth,” to which Fullerton replies, “If he felt that way, why did he not [take] you with him, as he very well might have done?” (Heyns 2005, 99). Similarly, if the historical James knew about the relationship between Fullerton and Wharton, it remains unclear whether he tried to enlighten her as to Fullerton’s past or whether, despite having substantial information pertaining to the source of the blackmail, his discretion prevented him from sharing this with Wharton and in effect exposed her to emotional disappointment.

Heyns depicts James as evasive in his letter to Wharton, which Frieda deduces has bearing on “Mr Fullerton” and “his situation”: he professes to be “deeply distressed ... at the situation you describe” and that he “move[s] in darkness” and does not “pretend to understand or to imagine” (Heyns 2005, 146), all of which may be true whilst not giving away any of the knowledge to which he may be privy. Frieda’s ironic reflection that she knew “Mr Fullerton was less enamoured of Mrs Wharton than she evidently was of him, though, no doubt, she would have represented her infatuation to Mr James as no more than deep friendship” (Heyns 2005, 146) also leaves open the question to what extent Wharton had taken James into her confidence about the nature of her relationship with Fullerton, yet it is also indicative of Fullerton’s deception of Frieda and Wharton whilst at the same time not eliminating the possibility that James would have drawn his own conclusions.

Discretion as a theme and possible source of deception is a prominent feature in the creations of both James and Wharton. Heyns’s depiction of the interpersonal relations between James, Wharton and Fullerton alludes to this aspect of Wharton’s and James’s novels as well as to the culture in which they find themselves. Levine explains that “Henry James and Edith Wharton were drawn to the subject of illicit sexuality

throughout their careers. ... They were also interested in the ways the characters they depicted either observed or violated the codes of discretion demanded by the American Victorian social order or by European manners” (Levine 2002, 1). Heyns’s fictional plot construction enables him to present the biographical/historical details at his disposal within the timeline of the Wharton/Fullerton affair, in the same way as James and Wharton presented their plot constructions centred around illicit sexuality, where “[i]n their early works, James and Wharton place innocent (i.e., sexually inactive) characters in what I will call the *foreground* of the narrative. Secondary plots about sexually active characters are not absent, however. They appear in the *background*” (Levine 2002, 3; author’s italics). However, in *The Typewriter’s Tale*, through the early seduction of Frieda by Fullerton, illicit sexuality and deception are foregrounded, though Frieda’s limited life experience still places her within the orbit of relative innocence. This in turn mirrors James’s own development as novelist:

During the latter part of his career, James became witness to a loosening of sexual mores in British society, what he called the “*déchéance* of the aristocracy,” “the great modern collapse of all the forms and ‘superstitions’ and respects, good and bad.” ... The progression of James’s career thus presents an increasingly polarized dialectic between an impulse to present scandalous material and an impulse to disguise it. (Levine 2002, 6)

An example from James’s later work illustrating this observation would be Merton Densher’s insistence in *The Wings of the Dove* that Kate Croy should consummate their affair before he will agree to her plan for him to marry Milly Theale in order to inherit her money. Although Densher is not part of the aristocracy, Kate moves in aristocratic circles on the strength of her influential aunt’s connections and through her experience an aristocracy in steep moral decline is portrayed, where the need for money and status compels illicit sexuality and disguises this coercion under a cover of outward respectability. Whether this mirrors James’s own development in his personal life as well—where he would willingly serve as a respectable façade to the illicit sexuality of his friends, thereby disguising it, remains a question.

Heyns leaves this question, as with so many others posed by *The Typewriter’s Tale*, open-ended. James, Wharton and Fullerton are depicted as moving along the timeframe of the novel in a flurry of social engagements and visits, the nature of which initially seems—from Frieda’s perspective—fairly inane. The three’s meeting at the Charing Cross Hotel—an opportunity for a tryst between Wharton and Fullerton—is innocently obfuscated as a farewell dinner for Fullerton on his way to America. When Frieda questions James’s character about this event, he gives a longwinded reply about the nature of such hotels. This can be read to be either the genuinely innocent Henry James responding to what he considers to be Frieda’s question or the duplicitously discreet Henry James, leading the subject away from what may prove to be a dangerous indiscretion.

It is James's young protégé, Hugh Walpole, who alerts Frieda to the other possibilities of this meeting. Heyns's choice to have Hugh enter the possibility with Frieda that James may be shielding the illicit affair of Fullerton and Wharton places emphasis on the other side of James's identity: his intense friendships with young men. These friendships are only portrayed and observed from an outsider's perspective by Frieda and therefore their real nature and extent remain obscure. Yet Heyns's opting to let Walpole alert Frieda to the covert implications of the friendship between Fullerton and Wharton is significant since Hugh Walpole gives us a startling insight into James's character: despite what Walpole called James's "'puritanism' ... he was curious about everything, he *knew* everything, but his Puritan *taste* would shiver with apprehension. There was no crudity of which he was unaware, but he did not wish that crudity to be named" (quoted in Edel 1972, 407; italics in original). Thus, maintaining the correct outward form was crucial, while James was acutely aware of what the form might conceal.

This revelation about James's personality is depicted by Heyns when the inexperienced character of Walpole confronts Frieda with the fact that "people are assuming that Mr James is condoning, for reasons of his own, the relationship between Mrs Wharton and Morton Fullerton"; he tells Frieda that he has informed James and that it was "rather painful" since James "took gentle but very articulate umbrage at my confronting him with aspersions on the conduct of his two most intimate friends" (Heyns 2005, 203). What Heyns is depicting here is James's public persona protecting reputations—in effect observing discretion and the correct forms. Yet, simultaneously, it can be read as James at his most discreetly deceptive. Heyns portrays Walpole as correctly interpreting the relationship between Fullerton and Wharton, but mistakenly confronting James with it. Frieda's response penetrates the heart of the question, as she rejects Hugh's concern, asking: "Can you really think ... that a man of Mr James's penetration and knowledge of human beings ... could live so close to such a secret and not guess it?" (2005, 205). A question to which both the reader and biographer of James must answer: James must most certainly have known about Wharton and Fullerton's affair.

In the final act of fictionalisation, Frieda manages to steal Fullerton's letters to James. However, in keeping with his project of interacting with James's own texts thematically, the real cause of the climactic moment of the novel—the burning of the letters—is open-ended, multifaceted and revealing of Heyns's interpretation of the historical Henry James's life and identity. I would argue that the scene depicting the burning of the letters is singled out by Heyns to become synecdochically representative of the thematic concerns of the entire novel, where this action is the start of James's preparation of his public image for posterity. On Frieda's enquiry as to his reason for burning the letters James replies: "to figure them as pawing over one's letters and ignoring one's art" is to "cheapen the concept of posterity" (Heyns 2005, 222); in other words, the art should remain foregrounded and the life function as mere background. In the case of James, between his own suppressions, his family's manipulation of his posthumous public image and academic interpretations of his life sprouting from his art, ultimately, he may be said to have succeeded in his wish for his art to be his mouthpiece to posterity. James

explains to Frieda that he would not have regarded “these poor letters in just this light if I had not somehow, very recently, lost a bundle of letters that I had regarded as precious above all else, in coming from a person who has mattered above all else to me ... It has reminded me of the price life exacts, in terms of anxiety, perplexity, vexed relations, mistakes, vulnerability to loss” (Heyns 2005, 224). Thus, according to Heyns’s interpretation, the only safe way for James to gain access to life was through his art.

Furthermore, Heyns’s interwoven fictionalisation facilitates the thematically important open ending to the novel—similar to a final interpretation of James’s life and character that has to remain open-ended. James alludes to his shock that “Lamb House [his] stronghold against betrayal” had been breached by “those who did not scruple to use [him] as an element in their own designs” (Heyns 2005, 224). Yet, just like the open-endedness of the conclusion to *The Wings of the Dove*, where Kate Croy’s parting words to Merton Densher—“We shall never be again as we were” (James 2000, 545)—do not clarify whether she is ending their relationship because he is in love with Milly Theale’s memory or because she chose the money, so Heyns does not clarify whom this reproach is aimed at: is it aimed at Fullerton? At Fullerton and Wharton? Or at both and Frieda, since Frieda realises that Henry James had all along been aware of the deception practised by herself and Fullerton. In addition, this reproach of James’s can be interpreted to be aimed at posterity, even at Heyns himself, who will not “scruple to use [him] as an element in their own designs.”

In conclusion I would argue that Heyns, in writing *The Typewriter’s Tale*, is creating a new and dynamic form of historical preservation and tribute, since it offers a humanised interpretation of who Henry James was, in contrast to the hagiography established by himself and his family. In his choice to satirise the historical events portrayed, through fictionalisation, he lifts the mask that the posthumous image of “the Master” wears and reveals an idiosyncratic, warm-hearted, sensitive, loyal and humorous core that has been hidden from view by Henry James himself. In fictionalising Henry James, Heyns also offers an audience far removed from his context access to that context and creates a more sensitive understanding not only of James, but of what would have been important for James—his art.

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