"Ways of Worldmaking": A Study of Narrative Transmission in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*

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Summary

In this paper I argue that an understanding of modality – especially when deployed in so-called unreliable homodiegetic narration – essentially requires an understanding of the referential functions of language. These functions, often performed by implicatures and, in Goodman's terms, "exemplifications", create the "worlds" whose cognisability becomes a presupposition upon which our grasp of the relevant modality is predicated. James's novella, *The Aspern Papers*, offers a complex form of such a narrative transmission; one that would remain, I argue, only partially recoverable without the deployment of the text immanent postulates proffered by my theoretical exposition of the ironic modalities of unreliable homodiegetic narrative.

Opsomming

In hierdie referaat word argumenteer dat die begrip van modaliteit – veral wanneer dit in die sogenaamde onbetroubare homodiëgetiese vertelling ontplooi word – essensieel 'n begrip van die referensiële funksies van taal vereis. Hierdie funksies, wat dikwels deur implisering vervul word en wat volgens Goodman voorbeeldgevalle is, skep die "wêrelde" waarvan die kenbaarheid 'n veronderstelling word wat ons houvas op die relevante modaliteit bevestig. James se novelle, *The Aspern Papers*, bied 'n komplekse vorm van sodanige verhalende oordrag: een wat, volgens my redenasie, net gedeeltelik verhaalbaar sal bly sonder die ontplooiing van die teks se *inherente postulate* soos voorgestel deur die teoretiese eksposisie van die ironiese modaliteite van onbetroubare homodiëgetiese vertelling in hierdie referaat.

1 Introduction

Henry James, in a variety of forays into the novel form, was at pains to achieve complexity in his narrative transmissions, and to this end developed, among other types of mediators, inconscient narrators which, nevertheless, as actors in the presented world, created the illusion expectancy for the receiver of reliability. Tamar Yacobi (1987: 39) accuses James of disrupting an "ideal balance", as she sees it, between "excessive guidance" of the kind exhibited in, for example, eighteenth century novels (Fielding's *Tom Jones*, say), and "overoriginal guidance, which results in loss of control and interpretative darkness". This seems to me a failure not so much of James's control of his "signals", but rather of the reader's receptivity to their presence in the text. That we can judge as inaccurate the interpretation by his contemporaries of *Daisy Miller* would appear to indicate our approximation toward a "truer" interpretation of the novel; one which has its foundation in the greater attention paid to the signals (the translational indices) in the text that suggest circumspection on the part of receivers when attempting to evaluate the reliability – or otherwise – of a Jamesian character. As in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, the choice or a narrator who, ostensibly reliable in his judgements, is nevertheless perceived to be fraught with self-deception which

must render him – ultimately – unreliable, is a key factor in the ironic patterning of many of James's tales and longer narratives; and an (enhanced) objective critical approach (Abrams 1953) appears to me to illuminate the narrative strategies employed by writers who elect as mediators narrators with the observer status of Frederick Winterbourne, Dowell or the unnamed editor in search of Jeffrey Aspern's papers. They provide adequate guidance for the receiver only up to a point (and herein lies the trap for the reader not alert to this possibility); but where their judgements about themselves are concerned, we find them crucially wanting, so that we reinterpret their utterances at such junctures, recasting the presented world to incorporate elements of their inner (psychic) make-up which, precisely because of this limitation on personal insight, they are incapable of delivering as part of their presentational process. The immanent narrative situation (De Reuck 1986) must be invoked, and the translational indices which point to the existence of this second-order presentational process, isolated, so that the underlying mechanism can be determined in order to assist the receiver in the complex interpretative abstractions that form a part of the reception of these unique narrative situations. On a continuum of unreliability that might have, at one of its poles, an insane narrator, the narrator of *The Aspern Papers* is to be located at the furthest, for, as Yacobi notes, the limitations of this type of narrator are by no means clear: they lie hidden beneath a veneer of reliability that provides pitfalls for interpretation of the kind experienced by James's contemporary readership which "'found' the familiar pattern typical of the (older James) novel" in *Daisy Miller*, missing the fact that the centre of orientation of the presented world has been shifted from "Daisy's sensational story. . .into [Frederick Winterbourne's] 'discovery plot'" (Yacobi 1986: 39).

2 The Aspern Papers

The link exhibited between *The Aspern Papers* and other homodiegetic narratives (Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess", Ring Lardner's *Haircut* Malachi Whitaker's "X", for example) is, at first sight perhaps, not at all clear. Yet there emerges, as reception is completed, an awareness of this narrator's kinship with the Duke of Ferrara of the Browning monologue. The relationship between the two discourses has no generic basis (as may be seen to inhere in that between *Haircut* and "My Last Duchess" De Reuck 1986), but is rather a feature of the similar patterns of self-deception each narrator displays. Their link, therefore, is structural an not generic.

It seems pertinent to digress briefly, at this point, into a discussion of deception as a quality in narrative transformations other than those presently in focus. It becomes necessary to decide what kind of deception is being practised: is it, for example, a deliberate aspect of the homodiegetic narrative situation such as occurs in Charlotte Bront's *Villette* [1853] (1979)? Here the narrator, Lucy Snowe, tyrannically manipluates the disclosure of elements comprising the presented world, withholding information, so that the receiver's position of inferiority vis-a-vis the presented world is maintained. This relationship of dominance (on the part of the mediator) and submission

(on the part of the receiver) is clearly manifest in those acts of narrative transmission which permit the reader no re-orientation vis-a-vis the presented world; no recasting of the events so that the submissive relationship may be subvented. In *Villette* Lucy Snowe's unreliability remains the distinguishing feature of the presentational process: no immanent voice, for example, redirects the reception of Lucy's judgements. We learn only in Chapter 16, and long after the narrator has recognised the fact (in chapter 10), that the "frank tread" which she would have followed "through continual night, to the world's end" (1979: 125) that first night in Villette, was that of Dr John Graham who rescues her from the brink of death in chapter 15, "The Long Vacation". Lucy Snowe at no point in the presentational process permits the reader an encompassing perspective upon the presented world. The disclosures are climactically timed for maximum dramatic impact as in the revelation that occurs in chapter 16:

> For, reader, this tall young man – this darling son – this host of mine – this Graham Bretton, *was* Dr. John: he, and no other; and, what is more, I ascertained this identity scarcely with surprise. What is more, when I heard Graham's step on the stairs, I knew what manner of figure would enter, and for whose aspect to prepare my eyes. The discovery was not of to-day, its dawn had penetrated my perceptions long since. . . .I found him out soon. I first recognized him on that occasion, noted several chapters back, when my unguardedly-fixed attention had drawn on me the mortification of an implied rebuke.
>
> (Brontë 1979: 247–248)

In narratives of this kind it is true that the receiver "cannot count on an *alternative* representation" (Yacobi 1987: 23), for the tyrannical nature of the mediatory process here precludes the receiver's contradiction of the firsthand report of the homodiegetic narrator. However, when the receiver is able to distinguish unreliability of the kind inherent in Brontë's novel from the kind that is evinced in conjunction with the immanent narrative situation, it can be seen that not only is a complex narrative transmission discernible, but moreover, a conventional perception about the relationship between receiver and mediator (that is one that comprises submission on the part of the reader) can be seen to require re-assessment.

The Aspern Papers exhibits, initially, qualities of presentation not unlike those of *Villette*. Unreliability manifests itself as a feature of the mediatory process only gradually, and the receiver must be alert (in the James short story) to the existence of translational indices which are deceptively concealed. "Popperian tentativeness" which provides the core-structure of the methodology I employ as a narratologist, appears to be almost paradigmatically a feature of reception here, as conjecture supersedes conjecture as to the existence of the immanent narrative situation; and only in the closing sections of the narrative does it appear that an epistemic warrant confirming the presence of the immanent voice in the narrative as a whole, has been given.

The reader's illusion expectancy of reliability is created by means of the narrators's apparently conscient narration. He is to be trusted in his role as the juggler/articulator of the presentational process, we assume, because of

his depth of personal insight. His apparent consciousness of his motives in pursuing the old women in Venice in order to obtain the cherished papers that link Jeffrey Aspern to the last person alive who had known him, the "divine Juliana" (1978: 168) of "Aspern's most exquisite and most renowned lyrics" (p. 167), deflects attention away from any early recognition of the narrator's limitations, so that the resolution or anagnorisis that occurs in the reception of this discourse may be all the more impressive. Certainly, in his selection of a narrator as complex and intelligent – not to say immoral – as the (deliberately?) unnamed mediator of this discourse appears to be, James has set himself a fascinating challenge for his exploration of the self-deceiving mind.

Goodman's categories for exemplification and/or expression may be subpoenaed in order to validate the critical commentary which follows. They largely derive from the visual arts, but have their almost synonymous counterparts in the terminology already in use in narratological exegesis. Thus, Goodman's analysis of "how...particular worlds are made from others" (1978: 7–17) utilises such concepts as the following, which I shall use heuristically to examine the kind and extent of the "worlds" being presented in the story:

1. Composition and decomposition.
2. Weighting.
3. Ordering.
4. Deletion and supplementation.
5. Deformation.

They may be translated broadly into narratological terminology as:

1.1 construction and deconstruction (the assembly of parts into their composite wholes; their division into classes or sub-sets of one another. Such activity on the part of the critic may, naturally, affect all or any of the "strata" of the literary work);

2.1 foreshadowing/prefiguring/emphasis, which would contribute to the structural patterning of a given narrative, whether in the presentational process or in the presented world;

3.1 plot, or the causal connection linking the sequence of events. This could also be extended to include the "plotting" of character, that is, its unfolding during the course of the discourse;

4.1 editing: implying the elimination or inclusion of variables for greater conciseness of expression at whatever level of literary work;

5.1 distortion, as in, say, fantasy, the grotesque or burlesque, where an impact upon the reader is achieved by means of some measure of excess in the presentation of the literary world.

Goodman (1978) does not offer this classification as in any way conclusive, but it can readily be appreciated that, as literature (at one level) is concerned precisely *with* the creation of worlds, such elements as are typologised above, might be a part of the process. It is hardly surprising then, to discover that his (incomplete) list has been a part of narrative criticism for some time. The

useful insight is his notion, "exemplification", which, by dint of the deployment of some or all of the above processes of worldmaking, explains theoretically the functioning of the immanent narrative situation. Using Goodman's model it is, thus, possible to explain how a world which is not apparently represented, nonetheless is reconstituted so that it competes for – and achieves – ontic precedence in the act of interpretation. The analysis of *The Aspern Papers* will include in its stratagem some of the "ways of worldmaking" suggested above, but only as they apply (obviously) to the making of the second-order world which has, as its generator, the immanent narrative voice.

The narrator of this tale is established from the outset as cultivated, erudite and aware: not in question either are his fundamentally immoral attitude toward the acquisition of the papers and his mercenary cast of mind. He is a literary editor of some standing and, together with a co-editor, John Cumnor, is bent upon extracting Aspern's private correspondence with her (the only area of Aspern's life not yet publicly documented) from the now aged Miss Bordereau despite her rejection of Cumnor's earlier suits:

> No notice whatever has been taken of his first letter, and the second had been answered very sharply, in six lines, by the niece. "Miss Bordereau requested her to say that she could not imagine what he meant by troubling them. They had none of Mr. Aspern's papers, and if they had should never think of showing them to anyone on any account whatever. She didn't know what he was talking about and begged he would let her alone".
>
> (1978: 159)

The point, however, lies not so much in the fact of his persistence, but in his consciousness of the degree to which he will go in order to manipulate events to his perceived advantage:

> . . .I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard, and I can put her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practices. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance.
>
> (1978: 159)

Quite apart from his somewhat cynical notions of diplomacy, the narrator/editor's discourse projects a clear image of a consciousness fully aware of the immorality of his actions: to get the documents he is prepared even "To make love to the niece" (1978: 161), he informs Mrs Prest. Part 1 concludes on this dramatically heightened note, but it has established more than merely a climactic moment in the exposition of the tale.

A significant index to the receiver's subsequent understanding of the limitations of this apparently reliable narrator, lies partially obscured in his comments on Aspern and women (including Juliana). They serve to validate later interpretative abstractions on the part of the receiver, in that they are instances of foreshadowing (implicit emphasis) or, in Goodman's terms, "weighting". Several markers in this discussion of Aspern prove, in the end, to have prefigured our ultimate reconstruction of the mediator as unreliable insofar as his knowledge about himself is concerned. Aspern's treatment of

Juliana, as recounted by the mediator, is glossed over as "...an impression about 1825 that he had 'treated her badly'" and the poet's relationship with other ladies is described as "'serv[ing]'...several other ladies in the same way" (1978: 156). The narrator's selection of this impression from Aspern's past, coloured as it is by the dismissive, contemptuous tone he employs, diminishes not only himself, but the Romantic hero for whom he is prepared to do "worse still" (p. 159). This is an early index suggesting his lack of personal insight, because the immanent voice directs the receiver towards the construction of an identity relationship between the editor and Aspern; but where the editor regards Aspern as nobly Romantic ("Orpheus and the Maenads!" 1979: 156) in his relationships with women; and himself as wanting when compared with Aspern ("...he was kinder, more considerate than, in his place...I should have been" p. 156), the receiver, in fact conflates them because of their equal lack of consideration for the sensibilities they encounter. The editor/narrator's limitations are thus signalled early; prefigured in this crucial exchange between him and Mrs Prest.

Perhaps the most obvious deflective move made in this transmission (that is, away from the recognition of the narrator as an unreliable mediator) arises in those elements of his discourse that signal, unequivocally, his insight into his motives in attempting to take up occupancy in the crumbling Venetian villa that the Misses Bordereau live in: the editor/mediator's acquisitiveness. In his exchange with Mrs Prest (1978: 153–161) there occurs an accretion of pointers to his mercenary and manipulative nature, all of which serve to weight our reception of him in a manner apparently explicitly contrived:

> The other idea that had come into my head was connected with a high blank wall which appeared to confine an expanse of ground on one side of the house...a few thin trees, with the poles of certain rickety trellises...visible over the top....It suddenly occurred to me that if it did belong to the house I had my pretext. (1978: 158–159)

His imagery now – as at other times in his assault on the privacy of Juliana Bordereau – is infused with a probably conscious martial quality ("...I was afraid to meet failure, for it would leave me, as I remarked to my companion, without another arrow for my bow" 1978: 159) and his strategy for gaining access to the Bordereau villa is crudely articulated:

> The old woman won't have the documents spoken of; they are personal, delicate, intimate, and she hasn't modern notions, God bless her! If I should sound that note (offer to buy them, directly) first I should certainly spoil the game. I can arrive at the papers only by putting her off her guard only by ingratiating diplomatic practices. Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I am sorry for it, but for Jeffrey Aspern's sake I would do worse still. (1978: 159)

The mediator, in a sense, wants it both ways. His apparently disarming forthrightness, coupled to the fact that this activity is being pursued in the noble interest of completing – for posterity – the documentation of the life of a recognised literary figure ("the multitude, today, flocked to his temple, but

of that temple [John Cumnor] and I regarded ourselves as the ministers" 1978: 155) barely conceals the attempt to diminish the more immoral dimension of his enterprise by justifying it as knowledge necessary to the fuller comprehension of Aspern the poet. Nevertheless, the narrator's personal insight seems clear in the first part, his "plan of campaign" (p. 154) culminating in a decision to "make love to the niece" (p.161), made in the apparent consciousness of its fullest implications.

Goodman's notion of "ordering" which I regard as more or less synonymous with the arrangement in sequence of the elements of the plot of a narrative, can be seen to be the construct at work as the first part of *The Aspern Papers* draws to its climactic close. In the ensuing sections (II-IX) the narrator's attempt to win Miss Tita to his side, thereby ensuring her complicity in gaining from Juliana the correspondence he desires so obsessively, will provide the narrative with much of its ballast. More important, still, her character – and those aspects of it which his discourse will fail to account for, but which the receiver will gradually come to discern as fundamental to her nature – will function as a translational index, revealing, in its relation to that of the urbane narrator, several facets of the discourse of the immanent narrator. In this, the "little one, as Mrs Prest called the niece" (1978: 154) plays a role (narratologically speaking) not unlike that of the duchess in Browning's "My Last Duchess": her emergence referring, in an essentially non-denotational manner, to the homodiegetic narrator's submerged limitations.

The matter of reception is complicated for the reader in his/her attempts to concretise Miss Tita (or for that matter, Miss Juliana) by the fact that the homodiegetic narrator's observations about them appear to be both subtle and comprehensive. His first description of the niece presents her in her superficial aspect, though naturally – but not at all disturbingly, for the present – coloured by subjective impressionism on his part:

> She was a long, lean, pale person, habited apparently in a dull-coloured dressing gown, and she spoke with a kind of mild literalness. . ..Her face was not young, but it was simple; it was not fresh, but it was mild. She had large eyes which were not bright, and a great deal of hair which was not "dressed", and long fine hands which were – possibly – not clean.
>
> (1978: 163)

Her response to his affected enthusiasm for their garden ("I *must* have a garden – upon my honour I must") is recounted by the editor/narrator with consummate discernment:

> She clasped [her hands] almost convulsively as, with a confused, alarmed look, she broke out, "Oh, don't take it away from us; we like it ourselves!"
> "You have the use of it then?"
> "Oh, yes. If it wasn't for that!" And she gave a shy, melancholy smile.
>
> (1978: 163)

The narrator's powers of observation are manifestly acute, ranging as they do from the surfaces of the characters with whom he interacts to their inner

beings: this is especially true of his exchanges with, and analysis of, Miss Tita Bordereau. Despite the overt nature (in the eyes of the receivers of this discourse) of his hypocritical relationship with her (perhaps indeed because of it), the narrator's reliability remains largely unchallenged, thereby achieving James's apparent aim of a more complex reversal in the reception of this focaliser at the closure of the narrative. Until this juncture is reached, the expositionary nature of parts I and II contributes to an impression of the narrator as capable of accuracy in his judgements of others as well as himself. He speaks, incisively, about "constrictions like this in Tita Bordereau which, as [he] observed later, contributed to make her and odd and affecting person"; and of the impression (he conveys it as a conclusion) that "In Tita at any rate a grateful susceptibility to human contact had not died out" (1978: 165–166).

If Tita's emergent character is to function as a translational index, indicating the epistemically primary discourse of the immanent narrator, Juliana's exchanges with the narrator (though of a different kind) likewise provide access to another order. Suggesting ways that the receiver might take in order to reach the complex level of interpretative abstractions, implicatures are locatable at the levels of the portrayed objectivities and of the projected states of affairs (Ingarden 1973). Miss Juliana's appearance is described by the narrator when he first encounters her, in a manner redolent of subjective impressionism (and may be significantly contrasted with his earlier, more dispassionate description of the niece). Clearly, more is revealed about the focaliser/narrator himself than about Juliana:

> I was really face to face with the Juliana of some of Aspern's most exquisite and most renowned lyrics. I grew used to her afterward, though never completely; but as she sat there before me my heart beat as fast as if the miracle of resurrection had taken place for my benefit. Her presence seemed somehow to contain his, and I felt nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than I ever had been before or have been since.
>
> (1978: 167)

Only when once he has established his responses to the ideal Juliana of the poems, does the narrator recognise in the actual figure before him "the terrible relic" who appears "too strange, too literally resurgent" (p. 167). In his presentation of Miss Bordereau his judgements, for the first time, appear hesitant, stopping short of the fuller, more incisive analysis he was capable of in his treatment of her niece. This instance of weighting in the presentational process of prefiguring a subsequent, more fully realised limitation on the judgements of the narrator, is carefully controlled so that the reader/receiver's sense of an index (one which refers to the second-order presented world, or at least suggests the process whereby such a world will be seen to come into existence) is modified by the apparent penetration of the almost epigraphic phrasing of such judgements as: "The divine Juliana is a grinning skull" (1978: 168). Retrospectively, with the reading process completed, this phrase carries a degree of metaphoric weight that unpacks for the reader/receiver at the meta-level of this narrative, signifying meanings caught up in

the complex matrix of life and death imagery; of the ideal and the actual, or the Romantic and the objective. Though the narrator describes her as a grinning death's head, he in fact (for all his penetrative qualities) fails to grasp that his pursuit of an ideal object (the Juliana of the lyric poems) is doomed from the outset, in that the ideal, by its very nature, must remain essentially unattainable. Corrupt and mercenary as he is, his quest (certainly, within the parameters laid down for the stereoscopically rendered presented world) must be futile.

The narrator's earlier air of complacency gives way, in the discussion they have about the rental of the rooms, to a feeling of disquiet. Coupled to his perhaps guilty sense that the "old woman. . .had a fuller vision of [him] than [he] had of her" (1978: 169–170) is a reluctance to recognise in Miss Bordereau, a mind as mercenary as his own. He remains, in a way, a victim of his Romantic illusions about her, so that it would appear "odious. . .to me to stand chaffering with Aspern's Juliana. It was queer enough to have a question of money with her at all" (p. 171). This apparently conscient quality of the narrator stops short, however, of a recognition of the force of the discrepancy or disjunction between his perceived interest and his real ones: the "divine Juliana" whose "presence seemed somehow to contain his [Aspern's]", making the narrator feel "nearer to him at that first moment of seeing her than [he] ever had been before or ever [has] been since" (p. 167) being merely a chimera, the pursuit of which allows the narrator an identity relationship with Jeffrey Aspern. Reinforced in this component of the narrative is a burgeoning awareness on the part of the reader that this mediator, for all his urbanity and ostensible penetration into the motives and/or psychic make-up of his "interlocutresses" or, for that matter, himself, decidedly lacks self-knowledge. To the degree that such knowledge is wanting on his part, it is supplied by the indices which signal the epistemically primary "world; that which endows the reader/receiver with a position of supremacy vis-a-vis the characters and events of the (immanent) second-order narrative transmission.

Several of Goodmans's ways of worldmaking combine in the interlocking of the mercenary and Romantic motifs in this narrative. In that they comprise, structurally, the relationship of parts to a whole, they can be seen to provide evidence for his composition and decomposition. As motifs, the elements that they comprise are, indeed, weighted, providing the narrator with moments of emphasis and foreshadowing that they will play a significant part in the structure of the entire narrative transmission. Their orderings, too, as component parts of the story's plot can be seen to contribute to the making not only of the homodiegetic narrator's world, but also that of the immanent narrator. Disjunctions in the reception of these motifs that suggest one reading by the homodiegetic narrator, and another by the immanent narrator, and by extension, entail, therefore, the existence of two discrete narrative situations, occur frequently once the ostensible narrator as a touchstone for the judgements in his discourse is perceived to be fallible. His apparent self-knowledge is particularly vulnerable to a radical recasting by the immanent narrator in the resolution of the Romantic motif with translational

indices scattered through the various strata of the narrative transmission but deriving chiefly from their coalescing around the interaction between the characters.

The editor/mediator having gained, by such devious means as he deemed it necessary to deploy, access to the garden and the rooms which might make it possible for him to wrest by deception the papers that provide his quest with its grail; and having moreover, attempted to ingratiate himself with the niece in his efforts to achieve his goals, there is a return to a contemplation of the *raison d'etre* for his presence. In one respect he remains consistent and to a degree, at least, "honourable": he fulfils his promise to "smother the house in flowers" (1978: 182) (the martial imagery emerging once more – significantly – in this section of the discourse in such phrases as: "batter the old women with lilies" and "bombard their citadel with roses" p. 182). It is especially illuminating in that at this point in the narrative, having placed it in the Romantic motif, the indices of earlier episodes find a resolution that had earlier been prefigured. What keeps him patient in his long drawn-out seige of the Bordereau "citadel" is Aspern's "spirit":

> . . .the revived immortal face – in which all his genius shone – of the great poet who was my prompter. I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to tell me that he regarded the affair as his own no less than mine and that we should see it fraternally, cheerfully to a conclusion.
>
> (1978: 180–181)

Certainly, the point of the presentation in this extract is to establish the "fraternity" of the narrator and Aspern. He regards

> his eccentric private errand [as] a part of the general romance and the general glory – I felt even a mystic companionship, a moral fraternity with all those who in the past had been in the service of art. They had worked for beauty, for a devotion; and what else was I doing?
>
> (1978: 181)

Their identity-relationship is subjectively experienced by the editor/narrator, but that it is a moral one must be seriously questioned by the reader/receiver. By his own admission, the narrator has practised deception on the two old ladies, and moreover, has cynically embarked upon a path that will win him the trust and confidence of the vulnerable niece (he describes her, himself, as "of a yielding nature and capable of doing almost anything to please a person who was kind to her" (1978: 208). In his treatment of Miss Tita there is an obvious parallel with the way Aspern had served Juliana: the discrepancy lies in the narrator's judgement of himself as – like Aspern and the Romantic poets with whom he is aligned – "work[ing] for beauty, for a devotion". The "moral fraternity" to which he aspires is rendered suspect by the disjunctions in his observations upon his own actions which he would elevate to the level of the sublime, and the immanent narrator's projection of his judgements as reprehensibly self-serving. In moral terms, the immanent narrator makes it clear, the mediator cannot claim that the end justifies the means. A corollary

to this judgement which emanates from the second-order discourse, is that the question of Romanticism with its egocentric focus upon the individual, is highlighted. The discourse of the homodiegetic mediator is, thus, reconstituted as emanating from a second-order narrative situation, but one which – as we have seen – has epistemic precedence permitting, as it does, an encompassing vantage point for the reader/receiver.

The reliability question does not, of course, end there: indeed the Romantic motif raises another problem. The mediator's attempt at a fusion of the identities of himself and Aspern in their pursuit of beauty is undermined at that point in the narrative where he presents an account of Aspern which places him in the tradition of the American Adam; of a time and place

> when our native land was nude and crude and provincial, when the famous "atmosphere" it is supposed to lack was not even missed, when literature was lonely there and art and form almost impossible, he had found means to live and write like one of the first; to be free and general and not at all afraid; to feel, understand, and express everything.
>
> (1978: 186)

The gulf that separates Aspern and his biographer is unequivocally there. In the matter of their treatment of women, they exhibit similarities, but in the profounder realm of morality and art and the relationship of the one to the other, the narrator seems confused and is manifestly wrong in his judgement that their "fraternal" link is a shared moral enterprise. The means that he employs to gain the Aspern papers from Juliana can in no way, as I indicated above, find moral justification. The narrator of this discourse, for all his apparent sophisticated urbanity and penetrating insight, is severely limited, and it is this full realisation on the part of the reader/receiver of the extent and depth of his self-deception (which James's narrative patterning has kept partially concealed from the tale's inception) that is to be found in the resolution of the discourse(s) that emanate contrapuntally from the editor and the immanent narrator. The extent and nature of his self-deception becomes especially clear in the conclusion of the mercenary motif which has, at its emotional (and indexical) centre, the emergent character of Miss Tita.

Having established himself in the villa of the Misses Bordereau, three months elapse without any contact with them; time spent by the narrator, consciously, voyeuristically, watching for the two old ladies who appear, just as consciously, to be avoiding him: "In these windows no sign of life ever appeared; it was as if, for fear of my catching a glimpse of them, the two ladies passed their days in the dark" (1978: 182). Determined that they must therefore have something "to conceal", and supremely inconscient of the index this provides to his own behaviour (which he does not judge harshly, but merely rationalises as an editor's need to discover "esoteric knowledge" p. 181), the narrator presents his experience of the peculiar absence of the women, using images that play with the artful linking of structural features (the windows) and "seeing" in a manner that foregrounds, again, the mediator's ability to discern and access acutely:

> Their motionless shutters became as expressive as eyes consciously closed, and I took comfort in thinking that at all events though invisible themselves they saw me between the lashes.
>
> (1978: 182)

He comes across Miss Tita in his bower one summer night in July and sets in motion the full force of his charm in order to win her to his side. The subsequent encounters between them mark a gradual, but inevitable realignment on her part with his interests, although she experiences a great deal of distress (noted by the mediator but ignored as he serves his own interests). A curiously disingenuous comment from him provides a pointer to his capacity for self-deception, though, and comes after he has requested her "to have faith":

> I could not say more, though I should have liked to, as I saw that I only mystified her; for I had no wish to have it on my conscience that I might pass for having made love to her. Nothing less should I have seemed to do had I continued to beg a lady to "believe in me" in an Italian garden on a midsummer night. There was some merit in my scruples, for Miss Tita lingered and lingered.
>
> (1978: 194)

To some extent the narrator's crudely manipulative intention to "make love to the niece" (1978: 161) is modified by his apparent sensitivity to her feelings, but his grand plan to acquire the documents with Tita's assistance is better served by this discretion: he can, in fact deceive himself (which he does) into believing that his conscience is clear, by just such a hesitation, carefully planned and executed in the broader interest of his campaign. His manipulative approach to this woman (whose "simple solemnity" p. 194, and "shy impatience [like that] of a child" p. 204, reinforce reception of her character as vulnerable in the extreme) is consciously contrived: however, the excessive cruelty of his behaviour toward her is not a given in the first-order discourse but is, rather, what Goodman would call an exemplification, arising out of those indices which suggest a recasting of the homodiegetic narrator's judgements in a mould shaped by the immanent narrative situation.

What the narrator regards as "this last indiscretion. I think it was the worst thing I did" (1978: 231), that is his attempt to burgle Miss Bordereau's secretary on the night she is taken deathly ill, reveals his appalling insensitivity. In the moral universe projected by the dual narrative process of this story, his manipulation and rejection, finally, of Tita Bordereau is the "worst thing" he does. His peculiarly impressionistic subjectivism is capable – briefly – of transfiguring her, but by this juncture in the narrative, his perceptions are being wholly reconstituted by the translational indices, so that the epiphany-like experience he goes through after her proposal of marriage (her own stratagem to permit her a morally acceptable way of giving him the Aspern papers – "Anything that is mine – would be yours, and you could do what you like. I couldn't prevent you – and you would have no responsibility" p. 244) is reworked by the reader/receiver as just one further rationalisation on his part of his *modus operandi* in acquiring the papers:

> . . .as I came into the room I saw that she had drawn this inference [that he declined her proposal of marriage] but I also saw something which had not been in my forecast. Poor Miss Tita's sense of her failure had produced an extraordinary alteration in her, but I had been too full of my literary concupiscence to think of that. Now I perceived it; I can scarcely tell how it startled me. She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution, made her angelic. It beautified her; she was younger; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This optical trick gave her a sort of phantasmagoric brightness, and while I was still the victim of it I heard a whisper somewhere in the depths of my conscience: "Why not, after all – why not?" It seemed to me I was ready to pay the price.
>
> (1978: 250)

His powers of self-deception reach hallucinatory levels with the prize so nearly within his grasp. However, the reader/receiver is by this stage fully aware (as a result of the accretion of indices that corroborate a reading of this narrator as the victim of his subjectivity biased or distorted impressions) that the attempt to objectify his experience in no way alters its nature. The second-order discourse reconstitutes his actions as those of a cruel man, his almost beatific experience in his last encounter with her as, rather, a subjective extension of his obsessive greed to acquire the Aspern papers. The editor/mediator exits from his discourse in the ostensibly mercenary mode he (consciously) established in part 1, but his attempt to assuage his conscience by means of a financial transaction – which works for him – leaves the reader further attuned to his loss of epistemic status in this narrative; for he is unaware that his consciousness carries the strictures and limitations of unreliability, extending from the presentational process, where, in the final analysis, he performs only a limited act of narrative transmission, to the presented world, where his perceptions and observations, so apparently astute in the opening pages of the story, are gradually eroded in the process that reveals the authoritative emergence of the second-order discourse, that is, the immanent narrative situation.

The final utterance of the editor/mediator reveals his shallow insensitivity in that, having destroyed the hopes of Miss Tita Bordereau, indeed, her existence as a woman, his own concerns remain the limited and obsessive ones of our earliest encounter with him (now revealed in all their tawdriness):

> I wrote to her that I had sold the picture, but I admitted to Mrs Prest, at the time (I met her in London, in the autumn), that it hangs above my writing table. When I look at it my chagrin at the loss of the letters becomes almost intolerable.
>
> (1978: 251)

The depth of insight of which he seemed manifestly capable in part 1 of this novella is clearly absent in these final paragraphs. The editor/narrator's judgements are superseded by those of the immanent narrator, with the emergence as a structural feature of the former's ignorance of his motive functioning as a complex index to the existence of the second-order, epistemically primary, "world". Henry James, in his endeavour to render fictional "reality", has written a narrative which, pre-eminently, achieves the implicit goal of the immanent mode: the subtle evocation, by means of the

inversion of the conventional relationship between the mediator and the hypostatised reader, of not one presented world, but two: a technique which underlies one of the most fascinating means of rendering irony in narrative.

3 Conclusion

Something of the potential of this technique – as I have explicated it in this article – for achieving a fuller representation of the structures of irony, may be discerned in the analysis which I have undertaken here. Post-structuralist relativity as an informing theoretical model (Birch 1989) would deny the validity of an essentialist undertaking such as mine here, but would founder, I believe, on the rocks of epistemology. Postmodernist relativities, especially the semantically based relativities of Derrida, for example, disconnect from the essential referential functions of language – the subtlety of which as I've argued before (De Reuck 1990a) achieves its apotheosis in unreliable homodiegetic narration – and it is this disconnection, with its privileging of semantic theorising that leads to the anti-realism so ultimately unsatisfactory for critical enquiry where fallibilistic assumptions, when eroded to a universal scepticism, lead to closure not only of knowledge but more damagingly of the enquiring mind itself. The developing area of pre-linguistic semantics (Martin 1987) has begun to provide the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for an exploration of contemporary linguistic discourse.

The number of readings possible as closure is deferred in the interpretative undertaking must have as their warrant the markers of the text (in all their semiotic complexity), and something like a "semantic horizon" can be invoked as the frame within which interpretation will inevitably occur. My suggestion, here, is that a reading that fails to cognise the epistemic precedence of a "world" ensuing from an immanent mediatory process cannot account for irony in a given narrative, and hence must be judged an impoverished reading. Where interpretation is involved, judgements must be made, and it seems clear that while closure may be deferred, the process is not infinite. Our shared semantic horizons ensure a degree of coherence if not, ultimately, of closure.

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