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Musing on the Model, or An American Tradition of Female Life into Art: Henry James in Context

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Picasso's famous portrait of Gertrude Stein (Fig. 1) is as much a record of the artist's relation to his model as it is a representation of the model herself. We could say this of many portraits, no doubt, but the Picasso/Stein case is peculiarly rich in anecdote to this effect. According to *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* the painting was begun shortly after the two met late in 1905; it was the first time Picasso had "had anybody pose for him since he was sixteen years old" (he was then twenty-four), and the work went slowly — through some eighty or ninety almost daily sittings that winter. One day towards spring Picasso burst out irritably "I can't see you any longer when I look" and painted out the whole head, after which everyone went away for the summer. Returning to Paris in the fall, and before having seen Stein again, he painted in a new head all in one brief session and burst of inspiration.¹

The textbook-version of this breakthrough which I absorbed as a student is that between the painting out and the repainting in Picasso made his revelatory visit to the exhibition then showing at the Musée du Trocadéro of African masks. Eureka: Stein's face is reduced or "broken down" to a stylized mask, and thereafter we have *Les Femmes d'Alger* and Cubism. This version always includes the painter's Wildean response to his sitter's failure to recognize herself: "Never mind, Gertrude, soon you will come to look like this." In the *Autobiography*, by contrast, Stein and Picasso are equally delighted, each one having lost all

¹ *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, edited by Carl Van Vechten (New York: Random House, 1972) 42, 49, 53.

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recollection of the eighty-odd sittings and what they produced (having forgotten, if you like, Pablo's earlier efforts to match the portrait to the living Gertrude). But many years later when Gertrude cut her hair Pablo protested:

'Gertrude, what is it, what is it . . . Let me see . . . And my portrait,' said he sternly. Then his face softening, he added, 'mais quand même, tout y est, all the same, it is all there.'²

The assurance that life follows art remains in either case, and it seems to be one which we have absorbed or accepted without question. I at least have always tended to see in any photograph of Stein — the later the better, the shorter the hair the more so — a close resemblance to the portrait. So much so that I was struck to the point of betrayal by a recent article by John Richardson in which he juxtaposed that well-known image with a drawing from the intervening summer of 1906 of the head of a nonagenarian smuggler whom Picasso met in the remote Pyrenees (Fig. 2).³ The resemblance — I see it as a transfer or "transcription" of features of one head onto another — seems to explode not only the Trocadéro-breakthrough-version but also the picture's very relationship to its "model" (a word which now seems to belong between quotation marks): I see it differently, or rather differently as a portrait of Stein; the old smuggler intervenes in a way that no postulated African mask ever could.

Now I would like to turn to another example of artist and model, and to do an analogous experience on my part of re-vision. The case concerns Henry James and his orphaned cousin Minny Temple, who in 1870 died of tuberculosis at the poetically young age of twenty-four, when James himself was only twenty-six. She is the one historically real (though not

² *Stein*, p. 53

³ John Richardson, "Picasso's Apocalyptic Whorehouse," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 7, April 23, 1987, pp. 40-47. Interestingly enough, Richardson's argument that "Picasso's roots in Spanish art and literature, mysticism and religion, go far deeper than anyone thought" is anticipated in the section of the *Autobiography* cited above, for example: "In these early days when he created cubism the effect of the African art was purely upon his vision and his forms, his imagination remained purely Spanish. The Spanish quality of ritual and abstraction had been indeed stimulated by his painting the portrait of Gertrude Stein" (*Stein*, p. 60).

living) individual James was to claim as major inspiration and model — early in his career as the germ for Isabel Archer in the significantly titled *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and some twenty years after that work, for Milly Theale, the fatally ill young heroine of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). We can gauge Minny Temple's life-long importance to James by the fact that the last and longest chapter of his own autobiography of 1914, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, is devoted to her. The close detail of this final and presumably "non-fictional" portrait was possible for James because, unexpectedly and after the autobiography had been begun, he had been sent a packet of letters Minny had written almost a half-century earlier to a Boston friend. These letters enabled him, in his words

to do what I had always longed in some way to do without seeing quite how — rescue and preserve in some way from oblivion, commemorate and a little enshrine, the image of our admirable and exquisite, our noble and unique little Minnie.⁴

To do, in other words, what the partial portraits of his fiction could not: to represent (rescue and preserve, etc.) the uniquely Real. In a letter written to his brother William at the time of Minny's death, James had pronounced himself "perfectly satisfied to have her translated from this changing realm of fact to the steady realm of thought," suggesting that that steady realm might be his own consciousness, that she might henceforth be in his care.⁵ The autobiography completes this care, as the 1914 letter quoted above happily concludes: "dear Minnie's name is really now, in the most touching way, I think, silvered over and set apart."

If Minny had already been "translated" to the realm of James's thought, so in 1914 her epistolary remains were transcribed into his text. James quoted the letters extensively, after which he destroyed the originals. But as Alfred Habegger recently discovered (see note 4), copies

⁴ Henry James to Henrietta Pell-Clarke, 5 May 1914. Quoted in Alfred Habegger, "Henry James's Rewriting of Minny Temple's Letters," *American Literature*, Vol. 58, No. 2, May 1986, p. 161. Habegger describes the handwritten copies of Minny's letters found among the James papers at the Houghton Library of Harvard which are referred to below, and he reproduces the first four letters along with James's printed versions of them. I am indebted to his attractive and provocative article for the germ of this essay.

⁵ Leon Edel, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984) I, 226.

had previously and prudently, or perhaps just piously, been made by the female relatives who were charged with the task of sending them off to Henry. Of course we cannot compare a literary "portrait" with its real-life "model" as we might compare a painting with a photograph; but we can compare the relative's transcriptions of the original letters (call these a sort of photograph) with James's own translation — call this a portrait or, to repeat his words, Minny "silvered over."

He seems to have meant them rather literally. Habegger points out some very questionable inventions as well as omissions, and remarks of James's editing in general that there "was scarcely a sentence he did not emend."⁶ Indeed he cannot seem to leave anything alone, and reading the original texts alongside James's version is, for me, uncannily like reading the first edition of one of his novels alongside the revision he made for the New York edition — until I remember that in this case the text he is "revising" is not his own but another's. Now it's clear that Minny Temple was a wonderful if artless writer: from the letters that survive we get a very strong and definite image of an individual — of a style or personality or, if you like, soul. In James's rewriting we see that individual rendered unrecognizable. Or to restate and repeat: between image and text an old smuggler intervenes — here he is called The Master.

The analogy with Picasso may be extravagant, but it should serve to deflect questions of honesty or accuracy which might present themselves in the case of James, as they do for Habegger, and to raise quite different questions of *representation*. The portrait — any portrait — insists or causes us to insist on its representation of a particular original. In this respect it implies its own fairly rudimentary sense of context as extratextual circumstance, as referent: an original or model is, of course, only one particular if peculiar form of referent. Such a rudimentary or naive sense of context might seem inappropriate to The Master, the thrust of whose career is towards independence of or even escape from the referent. But we should recall that James began his career not as a Modernist but as a committed nineteenth-century Realist who can sound rather naive himself. His treatment of character in the 1879 biography of Hawthorne, for example, is revealing. James's highest praise is reserved for Zenobia of *The Blithedale Romance*, whose original he takes to be Margaret Fuller

⁶ Habegger, p. 162

(a source-figure of surprising prominence in James's own fictions), and who is in his judgment Hawthorne's

only very definite attempt at the representation of a character. The portrait is full of alteration and embellishment; but it has a greater reality, a greater abundance of detail, than any of his other figures, and the reality was a memory of the lady. . . .

Later James repeats that although it would be idle "to compare the image at all strictly with the model" nevertheless the model has fired Hawthorne's imagination to its one creation of "a woman in all the force of the term," superior ("more concrete") even to Hester Prynne.⁷ I believe that Stein was deliberate in her evocation of a kind of anachronism, a comparably youthful naiveté, when she specified that Picasso had had no one "pose for him," that is, for faithful or accurate *representation*, since the age of sixteen. All the greater, then, is the effect — it is one of anomalous similarity rather than contrast — in her playful anecdote of the mature artist's anxiety about the continuing fidelity of model to image. Indeed, naiveté and sophistication, which is the quality Stein objects to in the African masks, are major themes of this section of the *Autobiography*.

Our surprise and amusement at such "vestigial" traces of literalism-of-reference depend, as both James and Stein knew well, on a different and wider sense of literary context, of which the seminal statement for the Modernist period is surely "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot's definition of the ideal order of literature, however challenged by Harold Bloom, permeates today's criticism, which tends to assume his notion of the historical sense with which the poet must write:

not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.⁸

⁷ Henry James, *Literary Criticism* (New York: The Library of America, 1984) 379, 420, 421.

⁸ *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975) 38. Bloom's challenge is implicit throughout *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); it is condensed and reviewed in the more recent *The Breaking of the Vessels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) 18-21. It has been, inevitably, generative of its own challenge or attack; from a recent review of a collection of interviews with

For Eliot immediate circumstance and the Tradition so conceived are not only different but incompatible: as I read the essay, his wish in it is, as well as to exhort the artist to that famous "escape from personality," to exhort the critic to escape from the artist's biography — his circumstances as context of his work. But could we not bring these two senses of context closer together? I find a possible bridge between them in the modification of Eliot's sense of order proposed by Frederic Jameson in *Marxism and Form*. Jameson suggested

the smaller idea of limited sequences which are modified by the addition of a new term, itself perceived against the continuum of which it is a part. Such limited sequences furnished the context or framework for literary understanding at least as long ago as the Greek tragedians.⁹

The limited sequence in which I propose to place James is both generic and national, and is further unified by a basic paradigm repeated in each case: a living or once-living woman is the model (or muse and model) for the artist; she is at once inside and outside the work, or inside and outside the artist's own "realm of thought," where James placed Minny. From Poe to Hawthorne to James to Fitzgerald to Nabokov this specific biographical circumstance is internalized as subject of the work. Poe had his cousin and child-bride Virginia; Hawthorne his fair bride Sophia (and according to a recent work his dark older sister as well, with whom he was incestuously involved¹⁰); James, the only celibate, his cousin; Fitzgerald, overwhelmingly, his Zelda; and Nabokov his Vera. Nabokov's marginal or provisional position in the American tradition is useful, I think

contemporary critics: "Hillis Miller makes the convincing point that Bloom's noisily proclaimed debt to [Northrop] Frye . . . conceals his real obsession with Eliot. . . . Bloom's whole critical project, which emphasizes the struggle for imaginative breathing space between a poet and his precursor, is a response — a response, incidentally, very much in keeping with his own notion of how writers' identities are formed — to Eliot and to Eliot's vision of a timeless order of masterpieces, ever-ready to accommodate new works of genius, which are written in the belief that 'there is no competition'." Eliot's notion of literary context may, in other words, prove the more durable. John Lanchester, "Absent Authors," *The London Review of Books*, Vol. IX, No. 18, 15th October 1987, p. 10.

⁹ Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971) 314-315.

¹⁰ Philip Young, *Hawthorne's Secret* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984).

since it gives him a fine Eliotic sense of his adopted country's literature — which must perforce be not only "in his bones" but in his conscious mind as well. *Lolita* can be read both as a profound homage to its precursor Poe, and more extensively as an ironic, indeed satiric (but I suppose he would add affectionate) reflection on American culture and tradition, made from the perspective of a European exile intent on assimilating and outwardly conforming to it while secretly performing his own drastic revision. (Note how prominent exile is, in fact, in all five writers.) It is the self-consciousness and revisionary extremity of Nabokov's perspective which helps us to re-place James in the perspective a limited sequence should provide. For James's very relation to "extremity" — Poe's particular brand no less than Nabokov's — seems to me largely unrecognized or misread, and it is around his pivotal position in the sequence that I should like to turn. To do so I must begin in some detail with Poe.

Poe's most systematic and in my opinion impressive rationale for the subject of his art is "The Philosophy of Composition" of 1846, in which he declares "Beauty . . . the sole legitimate province of the poem" and concludes that "the death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world."¹¹ A corollary of this pronouncement is, of course, that the dying of the woman is prerequisite to the art of which she is the poetical subject. Poe's barest rendering of this idea is his brief tale "The Oval Portrait" (1845), in which "a maiden of rarest beauty" who has, in "an evil hour" wedded a painter with "already a bride in his art," sits as model to him "for many weeks"; at the portrait's completion the painter, "very pallid and aghast," cries — of the painting — "This is indeed Life itself!" and turns to see that his model/wife is dead. The art itself is vampirish: the tints on the canvas were drawn "from the cheeks of her who sat" and so forth.¹²

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *Complete Works* (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1902) I, 287; hereafter *Works*.

¹² *Works*, IV, 320-325. Hawthorne seems to begin with this image in his own version of the allegory, "The Birthmark" (1846). In this tale, an analogously austere, already-married husband uses his arts to draw from the cheek of his bride an imperfection of nature, thereby killing her. Nominally a scientist (and for our purposes usefully compared to Fitzgerald's Dick Diver), he nevertheless sees himself as Pygmalion and is clearly the sculptor or portraitist of his model/wife, using her own flesh rather than marble or canvas to achieve his ideal image.

"The Oval Portrait" is not itself a portrait of a particular woman, but rather a fable or near-allegory of the portrait, of the artist as portraitist and his relation to the model. Manifestly, Poe's fable exposes the lie at the heart of the artist's exaltation of his subject: in so far as she is model, she is not wife; in so far as she is the subject of art, she is not beloved of the artist, she is cannibalized. But there may be an element missing or suppressed in the work, a latent content.

Poe tends, if I may put it this way, to triangulate the figures of his paradigmatic story. Generally the male protagonist is an already internally-divided character whose bipartite nature (to use a Poe term) is externalized in the presence of another: double or opposite, and usually narrator — like the narrator of "The Fall of the House of Usher," who is "ushered into the presence" of its protagonist at the start of the tale; or like the anonymous narrator of the exploits of Dupin, the detective who is both poet and mathematician, creative and resolute; or like the eponymous William Wilson, the often intoxicated criminal-narrator who is haunted by his always sober conscience, William Wilson. The woman/subject — for example, the Lady Madeline of Usher — represents the third element. Along with this triangular configuration we find recurring in Poe's fictions three stages in the treatment of the subject which may be labeled as follows: 1. The *translation* of the woman (the Lady Madeline "succumbs" and is placed by Roderick in the tomb); 2. translation transmuted to *transgression* (at the moment of inhumation, which amounts to murder, Roderick confesses his unnaturally sympathetic twinship with his sister or, by displacement, their incest); 3. the *return* of the dead (Madelaine rises up from the tomb to rejoin her brother in a mortal embrace). Afterwards the narrator escapes the falling house to tell the tale and complete the frame.¹³

To return to the latent content of "The Oval Portrait": here the pattern of translation, transgression and return is truncated, *as is the frame* of the tale. It begins with its anonymous narrator, aided by his valet, taking

Pursuing a sequence of tales of artists and models, we might proceed to James's "The Real Thing" (1892) in which he portrays an artist blocked by the excessive reality of his models and, to my mind, anticipates the Modernist Picasso frustrated (perhaps) by the excessive reality of his own model.

¹³ See Daniel Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 293-325 especially, for a reading of "Usher" by which the present discussion is certainly influenced.

shelter in a remote chamber of a deserted house after having suffered a "desperate" wound, unspecified and unaccounted for. In this chamber, in the course of the night, he sees the portrait and reads the text giving its history. The tale ends with the close of that text — the death of the model/wife — and the frame is not resumed. We may, I suggest, complete it ourselves by imagining the subject as having escaped from *her* frame (this is the uncanny or nightmare impression of the narrator on first catching sight of the picture), as having "returned" to account for that desperate wound which is anterior to the tale itself. In other words, we may shift the referent of the text-within-the-text from portrait to frame: from being an account of the subject to *accounting for* the condition of narrative. Poe's tale enacts the internalization of circumstance as subject or, as what I've just described may suggest, the externalization of subject as circumstance: the process is circular, a dialectic of art and life (or of artist and living subject) that is, in its alterations of translation and return generating translation and so on, potentially endless.

We can see this dialectic at work in the relation between the two parts of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* — the romance proper, and the autobiographical frame "The Custom House," which was composed by the author mid-way through the writing of the romance.¹⁴ In each part we have a central, triangular configuration of two men, one subject/woman: Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Hester in the romance, and in the introductory, the long-dead Hester represented by the rag of scarlet letter, her first "author," the Surveyor Pue, represented in the parchment scrolls found with it and recognized as "ancestor in an official capacity" by the third figure, his descendent Hawthorne, who is represented, of course, by the text before the reader's eyes. In "The Custom House" the author Hawthorne accepts (he takes it from his hands) and "translates" the text of Pue; he begins to accept as well the letter (he holds it to his breast), but on feeling the scorching sensation which may symptomize the letter as badge of transgression, he hastily lets it fall. In the romance we have a symmetrical opposition which runs throughout: the transgressor Dimmesdale — the man of letters and of eloquence — has "accepted" the badge, although only secretly until the end, when it is revealed to be scorched or branded into his breast.

¹⁴ See Nina Baym, "The Romantic Malgré Lui: Hawthorne in 'The Custom-House,'" in the Norton Critical Edition of *The Scarlet Letter*, pp. 279-86 for a discussion of Hawthorne's order of composition.

Whether or not incest is covertly present in the scarlet letter, "translated" from "I" to "A," the theme is overt and indeed at the symbolic center of Hawthorne's final completed romance, *The Marble Faun* (1860), which is haunted as well by the crime of murder. *The Marble Faun* is important to our sequence for two principal features: what I call the "squaring of the triangle" which becomes Hawthorne's favored pattern after *The Scarlet Letter* and which is habitual to James from *Roderick Hudson* (1878) onwards; and the self-conscious or even self-reflexive prominence of the relation of artist or artifact to model, which is inherent in the title itself.

The Marble Faun opens with "four individuals" (these are its first two words) contemplating a marble statue attributed to Praxiteles which, three of the party agree, looks like the "original" of the fourth, an Italian Count who is also, we might say, an Italian primitive named (after the Renaissance sculptor?) Donatello. Each of these three also works with models — the man Kenyon as sculptor, the Dark Lady Miriam as painter (her subjects are from Classical mythology and the Bible, and depict "women acting the part of revengeful mischief towards man"; but her "model" so identified is the mysterious monk who pursues her from her past — perhaps an incestuous lover or an emissary thereof), and finally the fair maiden Hilda, a self-abnegating and worshipful copyist of the of course male Old Masters. As Miriam stands and gazes at Hilda's "magical" copy of Guido's Beatrice Cenci — the predominant symbol for the nineteenth century of the tragedy of incest/murder — she takes on the look and aura of the original. As in the case of the faun for Donatello, here the work of art becomes model for or interpretative sign of her living reality. Thus the appalling and apparently world-famous crime in Miriam's past is never recounted; rather, Hawthorne allows the Cenci history to stand in for or mirror her own, as the portrait does her face. And it does more.

During Miriam's conversation with Hilda about the meaning of the Cenci painting she cries out her passionate desire to enter and *know* its subject's consciousness. At first we take this to be Miriam's search for an understanding of her own guilt or innocence, and in so far as the painting represents her own face, this is so. But almost immediately she shifts her attention, like the artist she is or would be, from the referent (Beatrice's story) to the work itself, speculating on Guido's jealousy of Hilda's superior copy and surmising that "if a woman had painted the original

picture, there might have been something in it which we miss now"; she considers making a copy herself to "give it what it lacks."¹⁵ What the picture lacks is, of course, her *own* version of the self for whom the portrait is mirror. Miriam is condemned to be model *rather than* artist, it seems, and in this light the "vengeful mischief" of her pictures takes on a new meaning: it suggests the vengeance of the woman-as-subject, the model herself escaped from her frame.

At Miriam's instigation, the mysterious monk/model is murdered by Donatello (also her model; it is a murder of one model by another); thereafter the witness Hilda disappears; Kenyon changes from pallid non-entity to a kind of new-form New England minister who consecrates Miriam and Donatello to a sexless marriage — as if between brother and sister; I think there is an essential displacement here — whose binding knot is shared sin; Hilda reappears (Hawthorne, an exceedingly weary romancer, refuses to say where she's been or how she got there), and with her anticipated marriage to and fruitful domestication with Kenyon, the triangle is once again — but not very satisfyingly — squared.

Although *Roderick Hudson* may rightly be considered James's youthful rewriting of *The Marble Faun* (even as it's hero's given name acknowledges his descent from Poe), there are more fundamental parallels with Hawthorne to be found in the mature works of the major phase, particularly in the last of that group *The Golden Bowl* (1904). In this novel we have also at center four individuals, one of whom is an Italian Prince, though the reverse of a primitive. Amerigo (who acknowledges in his own right, very early in the text, the importance of "Allan Poe"¹⁶) stands as acquisition from the Old World to Mr. Verver and Maggie, the collectors, as Donatello stands to Kenyon and the others,

¹⁵ *The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, edited by Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Modern Library, 1937) 628-29. Young discusses at some length Hawthorne's "obsession" with this portrait (according to present judgment, probably neither by Guido nor of Beatrice Cenci), which he visited repeatedly while in Rome; see *Hawthorne's Secret*, pp. 42-43, 55-56, *et passim*.

¹⁶ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, edited by Gore Vidal and Patricia Crick (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985) 56. The designation is peculiar — American usage gives all three names, the European, favored by James in his criticism, omits the middle — and apparently intended to underscore the Prince's distinct (perhaps somewhat ignorant?) foreignness; Poe is further identified as "his prospective wife's countryman."

model or living artifact to artists and copyists. Hawthorne's resolution is James's beginning, that is two marriages which bind together even as they divide the four. But far more than Hawthorne, James seems intent on achieving a sort of super-valence of the square, of which the binding force is incest. The "marriage" of Maggie and her father Adam Verver (this is what it's called and what they enjoy, for practical purposes, in the eyes of the world), has been disturbed by Maggie's union with the Prince. For the sake of equilibrium, Adam marries Maggie's friend Charlotte (he re-acquires through marriage a daughter), who thereby becomes the mother-in-law of the Prince, her once and future lover. Less a shadowy and unspecified crime-of-the-past than in Hawthorne, incest here is the crime created by the personal/aesthetic arrangements of the present. Although this plot structure has been viewed as melodramatic, it comes closer to being parodic of its own nineteenth-century backgrounds.

James's resolution (again like Hawthorne's in that it removes one couple to the New World as the other remains in the Old) severs two illicit pairs: the real lovers who are only parodically incestuous, and the father and daughter who, though not lovers, are "really" so. What I hope is evident by this point in our sequence is that "the incestuous" itself may displace or "stand in for" the relationship of artist to model. Whereas James placed the latter at the center of *Roderick Hudson*, whose sculptor-hero finds, pursues, and is destroyed by his muse/model Christina Light, he submerges it in *The Golden Bowl*, where the daughter, quasi-artistic creation of her father, becomes the model for her own self-artifice. Superficially a descendent of the fair maiden Hilda, Maggie assumes rather the aspiration of Miriam, that is to be her own "original," and she succeeds where Hawthorne's dark lady was not able or permitted; the role of "vengeance" is ambiguous but ever-present. Hilda's symbolic character of the dove belongs rather to Milly Theale, the crucial heroine/model to whom we will, in pursuing our sequence, turn back at the end.

A no less symbolic nightingale is implicit in *Tender is the Night*, the title of Fitzgerald's last completed novel (1934), and of his career the one in which the internalization of biographical circumstance as subject is so extensive and complicating as to have defeated any purpose he may have had of mastery over either. In this work Fitzgerald continued his career-long meditation on his marriage to Zelda, his muse/model/Medusa and sometimes literary rival, duplicating the circumstances of her

hospitalization for insanity and, most important, transcribing the texts of these circumstances — hospital records, Zelda's diaries and letters, and so forth — into his own text. The character of the hero (invariably the author's surrogate) is "split" between eventually-conflicting roles of loving husband and healing psychiatrist, but it is clear that the psychiatrist is simply the artist displaced: Pygmalion-like, he has created his beloved, but as man of science he serves both to licence the transcription or expropriation of the subject and to justify the withdrawal of the husband. Incest seems to emerge in this work as theme and binding force as if of its own accord. It is felt both as crime in the past (the attribution of Nicole's schizophrenia to the trauma of rape by her father is wholly invented and in fact weakens the authenticity of the case history) and, in the present, as subject of art. The secondary heroine, hopelessly in-love-at-first-sight with the husband/hero, is a young Hollywood actress who has recently starred, brilliantly, in an otherwise inferior movie entitled "Daddy's Girl."¹⁷

Without drawing too close a parallel between this invented work and the portrait by Guido, I would suggest that the character of Rosemary Hoyt, the actress, does serve as a sort of surrogate or stand-in in the history of Nicole, as Beatrice's story stands in for Miriam's: but in this case we have the substitution of comedy for tragedy. Rosemary's case represents a successful or guilt-free translation of life to art, one which has the freedom or licence of reversibility: the celluloid image can be "living" without being vampirish, without drawing its tints from the cheek of the living actress, who in one scene sits in a darkened room enjoying it along with the rest of the audience. Rosemary is the actress, in other words, *of* Nicole, who is wife and model. And she tries to draw the hero, Dick Diver, into the celluloid image (she offers him a screen test), even as she offers to substitute for or replace Nicole as his wife — both of these foredoomed faux pas. Nicole repeatedly "returns" from insanity rather like Ligeia from the dead, and her own final emergence into health and a new husband sends the artist-figure Diver into exile (that is, a return to

¹⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934); the description of the film "Daddy's Girl" and Rosemary's screening of it appears pp. 68-70. As with all the portraits considered here, this cinematic one expands symbolically beyond its model: "there she was — embodying all the immaturity of the race"; the mirror-function is suggested in the parallel description of Nicole, embodying "the essence of a continent" (p. 136).

America) and terminal, or at least interminable, decline and degeneration. What is characteristically ambiguous in our sequence about the sacrificial demands of art on artist and subject — does Madeline fall victim to Roderick, or *vice versa*? — is by Fitzgerald made characteristically plain: Dick Diver ends as burnt offering.¹⁸

Suffering no doubts about his own status as sacrificial victim, Nabokov's hero introduces his story with a kind of public exuberance: "Ladies and Gentlemen . . . Look at this tangle of thorns."¹⁹ In its comic perversity, Nabokov's *Lolita* celebrates as it parodies all the themes and configurations which we have considered. Our narrator is, as his name Humbert Humbert reflects, internally divided; and he finds his alter ego in Quilty, with whom he alternates patterns of evasion and pursuit and whom he murders at the close (the situation recalls Poe's William Wilson, but Quilty dying in his dressing gown as he crashes to the floor in an embrace with Humbert is really, I think, a horribly funny evocation of Madeline Usher). *Lolita* is herself a "return," the reincarnation of the hero's first child-love, the long-dead Annabel Leigh, and in marrying her mother (whom he tries but fails to murder) Humbert makes himself the father of his "child-bride"; furthermore, he imagines a future "marriage" to the off-spring of his union with Lolita, and health allowing, a continuing series of daughter to grand-daughter brides to feed his obsession and his lust. Parody indeed.

Lolita begins with a witty "translation" of art (Poe's poem "Annabel Lee") to the spurious "life" of its own art (Poe is evoked in reply to the apparently life-like but of course extremely literary not to say Bloomian question — "Did she have a precursor?").²⁰ In his own narrative history, Humbert is a translator of female life into art in more ways than one (he

¹⁸ The sacrificial gesture is more prominent in the plans for Fitzgerald's unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon* (1941), whose hero was to die in a plane crash. This artist-figure, not surprisingly in our context, is an artistically accomplished and commercially successful movie-maker. In the novel his dead actress-wife "returns" in the person of a strangely pliant or receptive surrogate, and despite the "tragic" undertones the whole work has to me the air of half-conscious wish fulfillment.

¹⁹ *The Annotated Lolita*, edited by Alfred Appel, Jr. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) 11.

²⁰ According to Appel (p. 331), Poe is referred to more than twenty times in *Lolita* "far more than any other writer (followed by Merimée, Shakespeare, and Joyce, in that order)."

is also, literally, a translator). His wife Charlotte's discovery of his "translation" of her into the text of his secret journal is what causes her death; he does succeed after all, we might say, in bringing it about. And although the prison diary which is to be published after Lolita's death, that is the novel we have, promises her and itself represents the immortality of art, it also records a different sort of murder.

For Lolita has been, as Humbert confesses in one moment of triumph, "safely solipsized." This phrase, which might stand as its own sort of parody of James's "translated to the . . . realm of thought," refers in context (Book I, chapter 13) to what is prerequisite to Humbert's own "safe" and presumably guilt-free male *jouissance*. I would like to spell out the implicit analogy: if Humbert's climax is a kind of homeopathic stay against his own death, analogous to his art, then its subject, the solipsized Lolita, is his, not her, immortality; as his love-making must always be rape, so his art may inevitably be vampirish. Although allegory is as hideous to Nabokov as it was to Poe and James (the latter two condemned the form and complained of its presence in Hawthorne), his fiction has, like theirs, its own quasi-allegorical dimension.

If we imagine an American tradition which sentimentalizes and glorifies the fair maiden or American Girl as supreme subject of art, even as it sentimentalizes and idealizes her death — perhaps prerequisite of this same art — we come close, I think, to the target of what I've called Nabokov's drastic revision: parody carried to the point of *reductio ad absurdum*, a comic nightmare. But each of the writers we've considered is engaged in his own revision of a tradition which is already there, even as each one seems to be the originator of it.

At the very end of *Notes of a Son and Brother* James wonders, as he did at the time of her death, if his cousin's "exquisite faculty of challenge" might not have been, after all, thwarted by a too-confining life, had her life continued. "None the less," he writes,

she did in fact cling to consciousness; death, at the last, was dreadful to her; she would have given anything to live — and the image of this, which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it. . . in the beauty and dignity of art.²¹

²¹ *Henry James: Autobiography*, edited by F.W. Dupee (New York: Criterion, 1956) 544.

The reference is to *The Wings of the Dove*, and the remembered novel is figured as a ghostly image "wrapped," rather as "dear Minny's name" has in the present text been "silvered over." It is striking to compare the novel so remembered with the novel anticipated. In a notebook entry made some seven or eight years before its completion James had also imagined his character's, or perhaps her model's clinging to life, but in markedly stronger terms. This is from an entry of November 1894:

She learns that she has but a short time to live, and she rebels, she is terrified, she cries out her anguish, her tragic young despair. She is in love with life, her dreams of it have been immense, and she clings to it with passion, with supplication. 'I don't want to die — I won't, I won't, oh, let me live; oh, save me!' She is like a creature dragged shrieking to the guillotine — to the shambles.²²

We cannot say, really, if this sketch refers in any direct way to James's image of Minny's final state; but on the textual evidence, it does seem closer to Minny than her eventual fictional portrait, Milly Theale. The fiction this Notebook entry evokes is less *The Wings of the Dove* than a never-realized Jamesian version of "Ligeia." Note the rhetorical resemblance to Poe's evocation of the heroine of whom

words were impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness with which she wrestled with the Shadow [of death. . . so that to] the intensity of her wild desire for life — for life, but for life — solace and reason were alike the uttermost of folly.²³

Yet in the novel Milly's "beauty and dignity of art" entail a resignation and surrender to death which amount to suicide. According to the logic of the plot, Milly responds to the revelation that her suitor Densher (a writer) would have feigned love for the sake of her gold by turning her face to the wall to die. According to a deeper logic in the work, I believe, she surrenders not to injury, or even to disease, but to the imperative of art itself. We see this in a quite extraordinary, quite Hawthornean moment when, dining amidst the Great World at the country estate of Lord Mark, Milly is brought before a "mysterious portrait" and, through her tears, recognizes her double:

²² *The Notebooks of Henry James*, edited by F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) 169.

²³ *Works*, III, 200.

a young woman, all magnificently drawn, down to the hands, and magnificently dressed; a face almost livid in hue yet handsome in sadness and crowned with a mass of hair rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with her slightly Michaelangelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage — only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognised her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. 'I shall never be better than this.'

And the moment of recognition itself is "as good a moment as she should have with any one, or have in any connection whatever."²⁴ The work of art, as model for the living subject, exists in the narrative to prefigure the work of art for whom that subject is fated to be model — a fate to which Milly here willingly *consents*.

If Milly Theale is the heroine in James closest to a once-living model, she is also the one who comes closest to James himself: like her creator, she renounces life for the sake of his art. That this was James's own sense of his sacrifice to his muse is clear on every page of the various autobiographies. What he seems to achieve in his fiction is a participation in his heroine's renunciation which is free of that usurpation of her role which we find so conspicuously in, say, Fitzgerald after him.

This is hardly to say that James "resolves" the problem of the translation of female life to art. Milly returns from the dead in her bequest to Densher — a sum of money he does not accept, and more important a document he does not open or read (the seal is broken by another): she will haunt him for life, a benevolent ghost but a constant one.

For James, Minny Temple returns from the dead in her unexpected letters; the return is most welcome — James is moved and very moving in his evocation of what I can only call a joyful pain. But when, in the final paragraph of his autobiography, he writes of having laid to rest her ghost in *The Wings of the Dove*, he refers as well to a present and somewhat different necessity. The work of art is now complete, and it stands to the once-living model as the Praxiteles to Donatello, as the Bronzino to Milly Theale: it cannot be surpassed, and "revision" such as James performs on the letters is — whatever else it reflects of his habits and compulsions — the adjustment of life to the order of an art which has assumed priority. If

²⁴ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (New York: Modern Library, 1930) 242.

only one could — as James thought or, more likely, uneasily hoped that he had — destroy the originals. Picasso had his confidence — *quand-même, tout y est*, it is all there: but Picasso only had to paint an American, he didn't have to be one.