

Tea and Henry James's 'Scenic Method' in *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoils of Poynton*

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– Leo B. Levy, *Versions of Melodrama* 96

What I understand by manners ... is a culture's hum and buzz of implication...They are hinted at by small actions ... by the arts of dress or decoration...by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm ...by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning...

– Lionel Trilling, *Manners, Morals, and The Novel* 212

Scenes involving the giving and taking of tea are surprisingly frequent in English literature, perhaps reflecting a British national habit exported to the rest of the English-speaking world. As a major figure in English literature concerned with the manners and morals of his time, tea finds a place in the novels of Henry James. In *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoils of Poynton*, novels of James's middle period, tea scenes are conspicuously and significantly featured. This essay will analyze the intrinsic interrelation between tea scenes - an occasion of English social manners - and James's evolving themes and the application of what he called the "scenic method".

By means of this "scenic method", the narrative unfolds in a series of scenes or dramatic encounters between the main characters, a method that owed much

to his experiments with drama. In 1910, James wrote in his *Notebook*: “Oh, blest Other House, which gives me thus at every step a precedent, a support, a divine little light to walk by”(348). The “divine light”, according to Peter Brooks, “was that of a fully developed scenic and dramatic technique translated into novelistic form. The original transcription of *The Other House* from play to novel was the most telling demonstration for the author of how the lessons of his grim theatrical years could be put to use in fiction”(162). He refers to Leon Edel and Leo B. Levy, who have described the direct effect of the theatrical experience on James’s novelistic technique from *The Spoils of Poynton* onward, and cites Levy that “the scenic intensities ... are the primary literary experience of the reader of James”(qtd. in Brooks, 162). Particularly in two books, *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoils of Poynton*, tea scenes are not only a recognizable theatrical device, but also provide an ideal setting to engage the characters with one another.

In *Reading Novels*, George Hughes observes, “the setting is of key importance, since it will shape the dialogue. The way we speak depends on where we are” (100). To see how tea scenes – the setting – shape the dialogue (the two texts are heavily dependent on dialogue), I will begin with a brief social history of tea in Britain, explaining the tradition and the cumulated cultural meanings of tea and tea-drinking. As mentioned above, tea scenes are scattered across English literature, and in making some reference to these earlier scenes in literary texts, I hope to throw light on how cultural and metaphorical meanings are imbued in tea-drinking over the centuries, and how Henry James, as a recipient of this cultural heritage, used these meanings to underpin the art of his novels.

Tea, its social history and literary tradition

'Taking tea' is a form of civilized behavior in social history. Initiated in ancient China, tea-drinking gradually and steadily grew into a culture with wide and profound connections to art, literature, philosophy and religion.

Tea-drinking is versatile: performed by the civilized and cultivated, it is an art which produces a genuinely aesthetic and transcendental moment away from everyday life. In daily life, it creates a polite and intimate atmosphere within the domestic sphere and extends hospitality to visitors. As a social drink, tea-drinking is inevitably involved with etiquette – a coded behavior that functions conspicuously in hierarchical societies.

Tea-drinking, having been established in the East, especially in China and Japan, both as an aspect of high culture and as a long-standing tradition, spread into Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Because of the respectability and popularity it had achieved in Eastern societies and the highly developed art of its utensils and the interior design associated with it, tea was quickly adapted by the European courts and aristocracies in early seventeenth century, and soon made its debut in English literature, namely in Restoration comedies, in depictions of the life of the upper classes. William Congreve's *The Double Dealer* (1694), for example, includes a line revealing the changing social patterns between the sexes that involved tea. The ladies, one character explains, were "at the end of the gallery, retired to their tea and scandal according to their ancient custom after dinner". In Colley Cibber's *Lady's Last Stake* (1708), tea is eulogized extravagantly:

Tea! Thou soft, thou sober, sage and venerable liquid; thou innocent
Pretence for bring the Wicked of both Sexes together in a Morning; thou
female Tongue-running, Smile-smoothing, Heart-opening,

Wink-tipping cordial, to whose glorious Insipidity I owe the happiest moment of my life, let me fall prostrate(193).

William Wycherley's comedy of 1675, *The Country Wife*, exploits the fashionability of tea and tea-utensils, to stage an outrageously smutty scene, in which 'china' is used as a synonym for sexual intercourse. Half a century later, Henry Fielding, in his comedy of manners, *Love in Several Masque* (1728), sums up the use of tea in Restoration comedies: "Love and scandal are the best sweeteners of tea"(Fielding, 76).

As the novel replaces the drama as the central literary genre, tea-scenes also begin to play their part here. Novelists like Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* (1810), Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* (1851), and Mary Braddon in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1863), bring their characters together over tea. Tea is a feminine drink that highlights female domesticity and grace, but it also involves class, something that reveals the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Tea-drinking, limited to the highest social class by its expense in the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, spread to the less wealthy, but emerging merchant class, as an expensive and fashionable drink. As a foreign aristocrat observed on his visit to England in 1784, tea drinking provided "the rich with an opportunity to display their magnificence in the matter of tea-pots, cups and so on"(Berg, 161). This trend can also be seen in the visual arts. In the works of William Hogarth, both in the genre of family portrait (for example, *The Strode Family*, 1738) and narrative painting (*Marriage a-la-Mode*, 1742-43), tea is placed beside each elegant, central female. In her book *The English Family Portrait*, Clair Hughes comments "[t]he Strodes, it seems, wished to be recorded with their tea-cups and fine silver – demonstrations of their wealth, awareness of fashion and their good taste"(Hughes, C. 25), and she continues in

parenthesis, half mockingly "(rather as an English family might now have a video of themselves with their new Nissan car)".

Along with the rise of consumerism and improvement of women's place in home and society, tea began to play the role of a social drink in the traditional setting for formal, social intercourse – the drawing room, a place dominated by women.

The drawing room connects the otherwise strictly separated spheres of men and women; it is the place where married women exert their social power, such as managing the marriage of young girls, and it is one of the main settings for young girls to meet and "catch" their future husbands.

In the 1830s and 1840s a new social ceremony of tea-taking was set up by the upper class – the afternoon tea. Afternoon tea is a social entertainment designed for the leisured class to take tea and light refreshments in the drawing room, accompanied by beautiful porcelain and fine silver. Tea was by that time affordable by nearly all social class, therefore in order to retain its cultured, "polite" aspects, tea-time became the focus of various effects to distance it from plebeian vulgarity. The placing of tea in mid-afternoon assured the elitism and respectability of the ceremony, as only the leisured, non-working male would be free to partake of it. Young women make tea, a display of feminine grace and attentiveness, and men help to hand around the tea; this social ceremony is both a chance to show feminine refinement and an approved, formal place for open courtship.

Tea became more affordable in the late eighteenth century, and tea-drinking by the mid-nineteenth century had penetrated all classes in Britain and became the national habit. Nevertheless, tea never erased class difference; instead it nursed snobbishness. The type and quality of tea indicate the financial capacities of the family; tea etiquette reveals the education and background of its partakers.

These aspects of tea-drinking that penetrate social and private life make tea scenes an effective device for portraying the characters and showing their status and relation to each other against a particular social background.

The last decades of the nineteenth century were prosperous years for the British theater. One of the most successful playwrights of this period, Oscar Wilde employs tea-scenes frequently as a dramatic device. *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) starts with a tea scene of love and scandal: Lord Darlington reveals to Lady Windermere her husband's "affair" with Mrs Erlynne and declares his own love for Lady Windermere. In *The Importance of Being Ernest* (1895), the characters continuously revolve around their tea tables. Wilde's subversive humor turns the polite tea-table into a place for covert mockery and social satire.

In his *Introduction* (2001) to William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), Trevor R. Griffiths observes: "In the English theatre the Restoration comedies inaugurated a virtually unbroken Comedy of Manners tradition through Sheridan and Goldsmith to Boucicault, Wilde, Coward, and Ayckbourn"(xi). We can reasonably assume that Wilde, in inheriting and contributing to this tradition, acknowledges and develops the traditional dramatic use of tea in the Restoration comedies onwards.

By Wilde's and James's time, tea was established as a ritual full of cultured and literary traditions, and Jane Pettigrew's quotation from George Gissing sums up the current social role of tea: "[n]owhere is the English genius of domesticity more notably evident than in the festival of afternoon tea. The mere chink of cups and saucers tunes the mind to happy repose"(104-5).

"A Tea of Her Own" in *The Awkward Age*

As Gissing's contemporary, James would not have missed the significance tea had in British life. His early master piece, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), opens

with an afternoon tea scene in "*an old English country- garden*".

Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not – some people of course never do, – the situation is in itself delightful (3)

Isabel Archer, the spirited young America girl, steps into the traditional British ceremony after her transatlantic journey. The dramatic tea scene is a perfect setting for the American heroine's debut into a new culture.

An underlying function of this depiction of afternoon tea in a garden lies in what it suggests about the participants in the ceremony. They are three leisured, upper class gentlemen quietly taking their afternoon tea. The absence of the other sex is odd, but prepares us for the entrance of the heroine; meanwhile the three gentlemen "quietly" taking their tea stand as an image, a picture in miniature of the leisured conventional Anglo-American upper class, against which we are to see the spirited, independent, open-minded young American girl, Isabel Archer. Though Mr Touchett, is originally from America, his large, brilliantly painted teacup and his enjoyment of tea seem to suggest his comfortable acceptance of British culture. This beautifully set, 'innocent' afternoon-tea, prepares a new perspective for the "free" girl, but the beautiful appearance of the civilized ceremony does not prepare the girl for the depth of the culture, in which the "innocent" afternoon tea was forged and rooted. The afternoon tea scene quietly and carefully shows things that suggest the participants' circumstances and character, and throws into dramatic relief the unexpected entrance of Isabel. Upon her appearance everything livens up, the dog begins barking, Ralph walks faster, Lord Warburton's interest find a focus,

even the seated elderly Mr Touchett, stands up.

In his middle period, after his experiment with the theater and his encounters with French literary circles, James explored new materials for fiction utilizing the cumulative knowledge of English manners that twenty years' residence in England had afforded. Certain passages in his notebooks indicate his persistent interest in the evolution of contemporary British society. For example, he writes on February 27, 1895, of "the two most striking social notes" discerned by a French social critic, "Brada" in her *Notes sur Londres*: "the masculinization of the women" and "the demoralization of the aristocracy – the cessation, on their part, to take themselves seriously; their traffic in vulgar things, vulgar gains, vulgar pleasures – their general vulgarization"(192). This could virtually be a statement of James's own thematic interests in *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoil of Poynton*. Robert B. Pippin observes as well: "It is everywhere clear that James believes that many aspects of traditional and, in essence, largely pre-modern European customs, manners, and mores were, by the late nineteenth century, finally in some sort of end-game situation, and they deserved to be. Upper-class and upper middle class European life – arranged marriage, rigidly defined, predictable social classes, accepted notions of honor and social esteem, conventional constraints on conduct and speech, some intuitive sense of, feel for, the higher and the lower – had all largely become more social theater than social reality, as James depicts it (34).

In a series of works, like *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Turn of The Screw* (1898), *What Maisie Knows* (1897), and *The Awkward Age* (1899), James is tackling the themes of youth and its corruption by the adult world. Tea-drinking, as an available ritual involving gender and generational relations, with rich cultural and metaphorical meanings in literature, colludes with James's "scenic" method and evolving themes.

Seymour Chatman appositely says that “scene is the incorporation of the dramatic principle into narrative” (72). Indeed James’s scenic method seems to be a good example of this. In the late nineteenth century emphasis on scenes became an important way of cutting out narrative commentary. Henry James, in his 1908 preface to *The Awkward Age* (1899), declares he wanted to stop “going behind” the scene to the “storyteller’s great property–shop of aids to illusion”, to avoid “explanations and amplifications”. He decides to use the form of “the successive Acts of a Play” and aimed at “really constructive dialogue, dialogue organic and dramatic, speaking for itself, representing and embodying substance and form” (xvii,xiii,xvii).

Jean Frantz Blackall, in her *The Experimental Period*, observes: “The dialogue of James’s plays has sometimes been associated with that of Restoration comedy in its cadence, ‘style and bite’, and these qualities come over into the fictional dialogue. Sentence rhythms are variable, language is colloquial, and characters indulge in stichomythic exchanges and tease each other with ambiguous pronouns. Conversation becomes a drawing–room sport, with its apotheosis in Mrs Brookenham’s salon in *The Awkward Age*” (150–1).

Given James’s familiarity with the Restoration Comedy, we can pursue the analogy between the employment of tea scenes in Restoration Comedy and Jamesian ones. Complaining in *Hawthorn* (1879) of the simplicity and thinness of American culture that failed to give the American novel the dense social texture of the English novel, James, after twenty’s residence in Britain, finds in tea scenes the thickness of social manners to make concrete what Lionel Trilling describes as the “hum and buzz of implication”.

Trilling, observes in his essay *Manners, Morals, and The Novel* (1951): “In America in the nineteenth century, Henry James was alone in knowing that to scale the moral and aesthetic heights in the novel one had to use the ladder of

social observation" (212). In the same essay Trilling describes the task of the novel as: "a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul" (212). And he tries to generalize the "nearly indefinable subject" of manners:

What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication...It is that part of a culture which is made up of half uttered or unuttered or unutterable expression of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning...

Two decades and half later, Peter Brooks, discussed in more details the observation and exploitation of social manners in Henry James's major works. In his chapter *Henry James and the Melodrama of Consciousness* in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Brooks, in discussing the discrepancy between motive and action in James's novels, observes: "This means in practice a pressure on the surface – the surface of social forms, manners; and the surface of literary forms, style – in order to make surface release the vision of the behind..." (171).

Brooks goes on to define James's "expressionism" as a "desire to exceed the inherent qualities of the medium", this medium being "social manners, the order of human interchange within an established social code, complete with its register of coherent, because conventional, signs." Quoting F.R. Leavis, Brooks explains the "medium" must "satisf[y] his implicit demand: the actual fine art of civilized social intercourse that would have justified the flattering intensity of expectation he brought to it in the form of his curiously transposed and

subtilized ethical sensibility"(171). Brooks concludes, the fictional answer to this demand was the invention of a medium of social intercourse and manners that would allow the observer to read into and extrapolate significances.

What I propose to argue here is that in *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoils of Poynton*, tea manners are James's 'invention': indicators or tokens such as 'a tea of her own' in *The Awkward Age* and the nibbled tea biscuit confronting Mrs. Brigstock on the floor in *The Spoils of Poynton*, "the words that are used with ... a special meaning" achieve, in Brooks' words, "a charge of hallucinated meaning"(171-2).

Much of *The Awkward Age* and *The Spoils of Poynton* is set at the tea table in drawing rooms. Tea scenes constitute the dramatic structure of the narratives; tea not only shapes their talk, but also plays a strong, subversive role when sexual meaning is deliberately or mistakenly read into it. James' placing of his characters endlessly at afternoon tea, is not a superficial convenience, though he is fondly accused by Virginia Woolf of giving his characters too much tea.

Both books tell of young girls unsuccessful in the marriage market: their difficult situation with the men they love, and their relations with manipulative adult women. Basically the two British girls are of very different types and of different social circumstances, but their failure to marry is caused by and occurs during tea-table talk.

In *The Awkward Age*, Mrs Brookenham, manages a small circle of friends, Vanderbank, Mitchy, the Duchess, Lord Petherton and others; they meet regularly for "witty conversation" until Mrs Brookenham's daughter, Nanda, reaches "the awkward age" when she has to sit in the same drawing room. The tea table is the first place where we know of the Duchess' disapproval of Nanda's education – namely her exposure to inappropriate adult talk – while the two women gossip and plan the marriage of the two young girls, Nanda and

Aggie, over the tea-table. The narrative then unfolds in a series of tea scenes between mother and daughter with the three men involved in their lives. In particular, Nanda's two tea scenes, which mark her debut and the denouement of the story, provide a contrast against which the whole development of the plot takes place.

Nanda's first scene is at afternoon tea at Van's house. She walks alone to Van's house, an act that astonishes the two male guests: a well-born girl of eighteen walking to an afternoon tea appointment with no chaperone is extraordinary. And to meet an old gentleman to whom she is not yet formally introduced, makes the meeting somehow uncomfortable.

The girl "took on her own part no account of any awkwardness" and seeing the servant bring in tea things, Nanda offers to make tea. Nanda chatters while conducting her first social performance of tea-making. It is from her monologue that Longdon, Van, and the reader understand that Mrs Brookenham has sent Nanda to Longdon to secure the family's financial future. But Nanda so openly repeats her mother's directions to make Longdon like her that she unknowingly clears herself of any complicity in her mother's scheme. In addition, the narrator comments throughout this meeting on "her crude young clearness" and a "directness that made her honesty almost violent". Mitchy even questions Nanda's ability to "understand" what Mrs Brookenham expects from her daughter's relationship with Longdon, describing the girl's literalness as a "tragic" lack of "a sense of humor".

Yet it is in her guileless talk and unaffected behavior that Mr Longdon sees the graces that save her from her corrupting and artificial circumstances: she was extraordinarily simple. "Mr Longdon looked at her now with an evident surrender to his extreme interest, and it might well have perplexed him to see her at once so downright and yet of so fresh and sweet a tenderness of

youth"(91). Thereafter it is his passionate interest in the girl that propels the development of the narrative.

Nanda offers tea to Mitchy as well; "Mr Mitchy, sugar? Isn't that the way to say it? Three lumps? You're like me, only that I more often take five"(AA 89). Mitchy dashes forward for his tea. His sociable gesture underlines his feeling towards Nanda. The son of a tailor, raised into the status of gentility by his wealth, and therefore preyed upon in the marriage market, Mitchy is self-conscious and cynical. He has a genuine fondness in Nanda who is obviously indifferent to his money and – alas – to his love for her.

Van's tea habits are not mentioned; he seems not to take his tea seriously. However, this attitude later turns into a conscious gesture. At the country house, Van meets Nanda in the park and he avoids giving Nanda his cigarette case (a gesture of his refusal to compromise); though using afternoon tea as an excuse to end the unwanted tete-a-tete, when they reach the house, he declines the tea Mr Longdon offers him and leaves. This tea gesture foreshadows his final refusal of Longdon's offer of a dowry on condition that he marries Nanda.

Tea offering and tea taking, are a social ritual that define human relations, and are also a way to express and modify the relations. In the first tea scene, Van treats Nanda as a child; Mr Longdon sees in her his lost, female ideal, if in a different costume and state of mind; Mitchy, interested in Nanda's conversation, takes her tea seriously, sees the real Nanda, and loves her for what she is. A fourth, absent person, Mrs Brookenham can be felt behind Nanda, as well as a sense of Mr Longdon's dislike of Mrs Brookenham. The first tea scene that brings Nanda and the three men together and forms their relation in the tea-taking discourse, anticipates the distant final tea scene in which Nanda meets them, each in his turn, in her own room.

Mr Longdon is repelled by the poisonous circle of Mrs Brookenham's

friends, and he decides the best way to take Nanda out of it is to marry her off, preferably to Van, whom the girl loves. But the situation is complicated by the fact that Mrs Brookenham is or has been, Van's mistress. The Duchess sums up Mrs Brookenham's predicament: "she must sacrifice her daughter or...her intellectual habits"(AA 255). Mrs Brookenham decides on sacrifice her daughter: first, she tells Mitchy that Longdon has offered Van money to marry Nanda, thus humiliates Van into rejecting Longdon's offer. Second, she gives Longdon a further impetus by her crude behaviour at Tishy Grendon's party. Mrs Brookenham, presses Nanda for a public declaration of whether or not she has read the "French novel". In Van's final talk with Mrs Brookenham, he coldly indicates that he cannot help but "understand now" that her crude demand to have Nanda back from Longdon at Tishy Grendon's party was, in fact, a deliberate action so coarsely performed that Longdon would be forced to take Nanda away forever.

Tea, tea delicacies and smart tea gossip, have been part of the charm Mrs Brookenham has exerted over her small circle, and indeed it is dealings with tea that highlight the aftermath of the "smash" which Mrs Brookenham stages at the Grendon's.

Mitchy enters Mrs Brookenham's drawing-room after a considerable interval, and, despite his hostess's surprised delight at his appearance, "declined to partake of her tea or to allow her to make him what she called "snug for a good talk" in his customary corner of her sofa"(309). To decline tea is Mitchy's social rhetoric of refusal.

It is also at tea that Mrs Brookenham meets Van, who comes in alone, four months after the "smash". Mrs Brookenham makes the most of this opportunity – using tea gossip to sabotage Vanderbank's wavering intention to propose to Nanda. Mrs Brookenham deliberately asks the servant who brought in tea, "Is

Mr Cashmore still with Miss Brookenham?"(AA 293). This immediately draws the suspicious Vanderbank to her tea table. Exactly to what she wants, Vanderbank asked, "Does he run in and out that way without even speaking to you?"(AA 293). Cynically, Mrs Brookenham answered,

'One would like to draw the curtains, wouldn't one? And gossip in the glow of the hearth.'

'Oh, "gossip"!' Vanderbank wearily said as he come to her pretty table. In the act of serving him she checked herself. 'You wouldn't rather have it with her?'

He balanced a moment. 'Does she have a tea of her own?'

'Do you mean to say you don't know?' – Mrs Brook[enham] asked it with surprise. 'Such ignorance of what I do for her does tell, I think, the tale of how you've lately treated us.'

...

'Well , the time without you,' Mrs Brook[enham] returned, 'has been so bad that I'm afraid I've lost the impression of anything before.' Then she offered the tea to his choice. 'Will you have it upstairs?'

He received the cup. 'Yes, and here too.' After which he said nothing again till, first pouring in milk to cool it, he had drunk his tea down.

(AA 293–294)

"Tea" contains the whole significance of the conversation exactly as Wycherley's tea-cups 'contain' all Horner's sexual adventures with women. Mrs Brookenham is damning her daughter for having too much freedom with men, and exploring Van's feeling toward herself and her daughter. Van's intention of drinking tea with both mother and daughter, certainly includes the possibility of

a proposal to the younger one. The mother's question already prepares the trap: "a tea of her own" is a freedom that modest and marriageable girls did not and dare not assume at the time. Vanderbank is alarmed. His pouring milk to cool his tea is a conscious action to balance himself – to "cool" his ardour for marriage.

The gossip continues, and turns to Mitchy and his disastrous marriage. Quite unexpectedly, Mrs Brookenham changes her subject.

'And if he's unhappy,' she went on, 'he'll know whom to pitch into.'

'Ah,' said Vanderbank, 'even if he is he won't be the man to what you might call "vent" it on her. He'll seek compensation elsewhere and won't mind any ridicule –'

'Whom are you speaking of as "her"?' Mrs Brookenham asked as on feeling that something in her face had make him stop. 'I wasn't referring,' she explained, 'to his wife.'

'Oh!' said Vanderbank.

'Aggie doesn't matter,' she went on.

'Oh!' he repeated. 'You meant the Duchess?' he then threw off.

'Don't be silly!' she rejoined. 'He may not become unhappy – God grant not!' she developed. 'But if he does he'll take it out of Nanda.'

Van appeared to challenge this, "'Take it out" of her?'

'Well, want to know, as some American asked me the other day of somebody, what she's "going to do" about it.'

Vanderbank, who had remained on his feet, stood still at this for a longer time than at anything yet. 'But what can she "do" –'

'That's again just what I'm curious to see.' Mrs Brookenham then spoke with a glance at the clock. 'But if you don't go up to her –'

'My notion of seeing her alone may be defeated by her coming down on learning that I'm here?' (AA 298)

This is one of the Restoration comedy "style and bite" dialogues observed by Blackall, in which characters indulge in "stichomythic exchanges and tease each other with ambiguous pronouns" – "she", and the Restoration Comedy employ of tea scene with gossip and sexual denotations. The mother drops the bomb here; Van doesn't perceive the danger until the very last moment. Without the smallest sound or puff of smoke, the explosion detonates in Van's consciousness. It blows up all possibilities for Nanda finally: a potentially adulterous wife is impossible for Van. He leaves the mother's tea table and steps out of the house. The climactic scenes are realized without rending the fabric of "manners" while yet opening up depths of violence, hostility, and conflict.

This unpredictable gossip of tea is finally "sweet" enough to complete the "smash". Mrs Brookenham's tea gossip easily overrides the promised generosity of a good dowry for Van. Despite his apparent "modernity", his stance as an intellectual, Van's maintenance of the nineteenth century double standards for men and women can here be most clearly seen. His French novel, as well as his free-spirited talk at her mother's drawing room has been part of Nanda's education, of which he now disapproves. His ambiguous relations with Nanda's mother nevertheless never seems to trouble him.

Tea is the "prop" Mrs Brookenham uses to lead Van to the fact that Nanda is receiving her own male guests in her own room; tea is Mrs Brookenham's device to probe Van's attitudes; her repeated question as to whose tea Van is to drink, is the coded question of whose love he is to accept. Vanderbank reads the language well and answers in the same coded language. He will drink with both, by which invites Mrs Brookenham to make her last stand, her devastating

bid to keep Van for herself.

Nanda's last tea scene with the three men, is totally different from her mother's in its lack of self-interest, though tea still carries the symbolic meaning in the feelings and relations between the characters.

Van comes in first, after Nanda has written to him, asking him. "Vanderbank ha[s] not been in the room ten seconds before he showed that he had arrived to be kind", and keeps on talking facetiously. "Nanda [sits] in her place, where her stillness, fixed and colourless, contrasted with his rather flushed freedom, and appeared only to wait, half in surprise, half in surrender, for the flow of his suggestiveness to run its course". (AA 331).

It is the offering of tea that then changes their position. She reverses her usual posture from that of eager listener hoping for a long-awaited proposal to that of a supplicant toward whom he can appear generous in granting her a simple favor – to remain kind to her mother.

Nanda offers tea, which immediately gives Vanderbank an excuse to attempt a prompt departure: "I've a job, perversely – that was my reason – on the other side of the world; which, by the way, I'm afraid won't permit me to wait for tea. My tea doesn't matter..." (AA 335)

Nanda sees, in the moment, the "inward terror that explained his superficial nervousness, the incoherence of a loquacity designed, it would seem, to check in each direction her advance" (AA 336). Tea, in an unexpected way, prepares a small stage for the revelation of the naked soul of the sophisticated Vanderbank.

Where indeed could he have supposed she wanted to come out, and what that she could ever do for him would really be so beautiful as this present chance to smooth his confusion and add as much as possible from his having dealt with a difficult hour in a gallant and delicate way?

To force upon him an awkwardness was like forcing a disfigurement or a hurt, so that at the end of a minute, during which the expression of her face became a kind of uplifted view of her opportunity, she arrived at the appearance of having changed places with him and their being together precisely in order that he – not she – should be let down easily. (AA 501-2)

Vanderbank has made his decision before he comes in, and tries to deal with Nanda in the same way he did when they met in the country garden, only with more self-conscious difficulty. Nanda's tea is the last straw to the poor camel; Van's "designed" appearance collapses. He lapses into empty, nervous gabbling and beats a retreat forever.

Nanda's tea scene with Vanderband sets a sharp generational contrast with that of her mother's with the young man, which points to the difference in their integrity and ethical sensibility. Pippin appositely notes that 'the question' in *The Awkward Age* is on "a transition time between an age of secrets, avoidance, repression, and rigid social control toward a time of dangerous knowledge and a freedom as likely to produce selfishness and fatuity as self-reliance and integrity" (AA 38). The tea scenes here, nevertheless reveal the selfishness and fatuity of the elder generation – Mrs Brookenham, and the Duchess – while Nanda in her final tea scenes with the three men claims her self-reliance and integrity.

Mrs Brookenham's tea talk is designed to condemn Nanda by the fact she has "a tea of her own", therefore to sabotage the young man's desire to marry Nanda; while the young girl solicits his kindness to her mother at her tea, which is also a plot to let the man down easily. Nanda, the "modern" girl, has heard the adult conversations, understands the depth this new world can sink to, yet

her knowledge saves her from their depths. Betrayed by her “modern” mother and denied union with Vanderbank, the modern girl nevertheless finds enough strength to keep her integrity. Discussing the theme of betrayal in James’s fictions, Brooks comments:

James’s usage, for all its subtlety, shows a certain fidelity to this tradition (of le traître). Evil is treacherous in that its darkest intent is dissimulated under layers of good manners ... and evil is treachery in that it means denying to someone the means to free realization of his (or so much more often in James, her) full potential as a moral beings. What opposes such treachery is not simply innocence, but more forcefully loyalty, what might best be characterized in James’s own term as “kindness”: the refusal to do hurt, the refusal to betray... (169)

Brooks’s comment is particularly valuable in helping understand James’s attitude toward innocence and knowledge. Knowledge is not corrupting; exposed to adult corruption, Nanda is able to encompass knowledge of evil with her virtue. Her final tea scene with Vanderbank shows that she asserts her autonomy and integrity, and resists the manipulative demands of evil.

Mitchy comes in after Van. Their talk begins with Nanda’s meeting with Van, and the coming of Mr Longdon, which kindles Mitchy’s interests immediately. They don’t neglect their tea: Nanda makes tea for Mitchy, and Mitchy takes it, and asks for more. The harmonious offering and taking of tea, is the manifestation of their mutual fondness: “The fact of her attending – and with a happy show of particular care – to his immediate material want added somehow, as she replied, to her effect of sincerity” (AA 346).

Mitchy, the unrequited lover, like Ralph in *The Portrait of A Lady*, is

genuinely interested in her. In this last meeting, after their relations and their situations in life have so changed, Mitchy is right to say: "'[w]e've worked through the long tunnel of artificial reserves and superstitious mysteries'", and "'I have found in you a friend with whom, so utterly and unreservedly, I can always go to the bottom of things'" (AA 349). Mitchy's refusal of the mother's tea, but not the "scandalous" daughter's, is his judgement of them, consequently, his decision on his future relation with them.

After Mitchy leaves, Nanda falls again into a reverie, in which she fails to notice the servant removing tea. So when the punctual Mr Longdon arrives, Nanda regretfully announces: "I've not tea, after all, to reward you!" (AA 357) – an unintended prediction of their relationship. In love with Van, Nanda tries to put in a good word to Mr Longdon for Van, whose friendship has been severely damaged by Van's neglect of the old man. Nanda's pride stops her from abusing the man who has rejected her, and from feeling or expressing self-pity.

Mr Longdon, knowingly, and sympathetically helps Nanda face her own feelings, which deepens their mutual understanding. By seeing Van's helpless limitations and conservativeness, the two see the distance they've covered in the difficult year of Nanda's awkward age. Yet, Nanda's offhand words of "I've not tea, after all, to reward you!" seems to point out the underlying inappropriateness of their relation. For Nanda – still a young girl – to retreat to the country with an old man, who is attracted to her by her physical likeness to her grand mother, his feminine ideal, is not a free choice. If tea is the encoded word for love, Nanda sees clearly what she is to sacrifice for her relation with Longdon – her youthful passion.

The episodes of the denouement are threaded together by tea, and throughout the book, in Nanda's relation with the three men, Van, Mitchy and Mr Longdon, tea contains metaphorical meanings: Van never drinks Nanda's

tea, neither in their first meeting with Mr Longdon, when Nanda makes tea for all of them, nor does he accept tea at their accidental meeting in the country house, nor in their last meeting at the novel's conclusion. He consciously avoids her tea, to keep himself from being compromised: disabled by his disapproval of her education and her knowledge of sexual corruption at what he considers an improper stage in her life, he rejects her love.

Mitchy, is always ready to drink tea with Nanda – a gesture of his attitude to her; along with Mr Longdon, Mitchy is free from stereotyped attitudes to see and accept Nanda for what she is, and he reaches a deeper understanding of her after his own disillusioning marriage to Aggie, the conventional, innocent (=ignorant) girl, whose final and quick corruption after marriage presents a sharp contrast to Nanda.

Nanda's relation with Mr Longdon is special, as in their first meeting at the tea table; Mr Longdon's tea with Nanda is interrupted by tears occasioned by Nanda's likeness to his youthful love, her grandmother. This sentimental link on the older man's side, leads him a long way to his final understanding and acceptance of the young girl as she is, sharing a physical likeness with her ancestor, but nothing else. Nanda "ha[s] no tea" to reward him in the last meeting – the unintended words, predict the fact that their relationship cannot be one of marital happiness.

The "Tale –Telling" Tea in Henry James's *The Spoils of Poynton*

The Spoils of Poynton is the first short novel after the debacle of James' s play, *Guy Domville*, and it is his first experiment with the "scenic method". The novel concerns a struggle over some beautiful, precious objects in the house, Poynton. In the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* (1908), James explains his "curious enough value" of his theme:

The sharp light it might project on that most modern of our current passions, the fierce appetite for the upholster's and joiner's and brazier's work, the chairs and tables, the cabinets and presses, the material odds and ends, of the more labouring ages. A lively mark of our manners indeed the diffusion of this curiosity and this avidity, and full of suggestion, clearly, as to their possible influence on other passions and other relations. (26)

The people involved in the struggle are the deceased owner's widow, now chatelaine of Poynton, Mrs Gereth, her son, Owen, Owen's fiancée, Mona Brigstock, and a friend of Mrs Gereth, Fleda Vetch, who is the center of the tale. The son's marriage requires the mother's departure from the house, leaving the spoils to the new couple; the mother refuses to leave her precious things to the Philistine Mona, the future chatelaine of Poynton, and challenges Fleda, who shares her aesthetic taste, to win over Owen and consequently its contents. The possession of these objects forms the crisis of the relations between the characters.

The structure of the novel is purely theatrical. Through dialogue, in a series of tea scenes, readers witnessed what happens to the "spoils" and how the relations of the characters change and complicate. Tea becomes a "prop" that reveals the undercurrents of struggle between the characters. Particularly in the farcical final tea scene, through Mrs Brigstock's lurid and comical reading of the piece of tea biscuit, it "achieve[s] a charge of hallucinated meaning" (SP 172), and propels a series of acts with unforeseeable consequence.

Fleda is the intermediary between mother and son in their dispute. Her difficulties are shown in the first important tea scene in the novel with Mrs

Gereth. The mother has taken the “spoils” to her new home; the son comes to deliver an ultimatum for the return of the things, without which Mona won’t marry him. Fleda receives Owen, and promises to help him:

When at last she rejoined Mrs Gereth she found her erect before the drawing-room fire. Their tea had been set out in the same quarter, and the mistress of the house, for whom the preparation of it was generally a high and undelegated function, preserved a posture to which the hissing urn make no appeal. This omission was such a further sigh of something to come that to disguise her apprehension Fleda straightway and without apology took the duty in hand; only however to be promptly reminded that she was performing it confused and not counting the journeys of the little silver shovel she emptied into the pot. “Not five, my dear – the usual three,” said her hostess with the same irony; watching her then in silence while she clumsily corrected her mistake. The tea took some minutes to draw, and Mrs Gereth availed herself of them suddenly to exclaim: ‘ You haven’t yet told me, you know, how it is you propose to “make” me!’ (SP 115)

The tea-making is “the muse of dialogue”: by their changed roles at the tea table the two women communicate their difficulty and disparity. Mrs Gereth’s silent and dignified protest, in her refusal to make the tea affects the young girl. The girl is still more frustrated by her awakening consciousness of her feeling for Owen, and her frustration surfaces in her tea-making behaviour and betrays her secret to Mrs Gereth. “The tea took some minutes to draw”, is the metaphor that their problem draws into their talk over the pot of tea.

'Yes, I did tell you a while ago that for you I'd do it. But you haven't told me yet what you'll do in return.'

Fleda cast about. 'Anything in the wide world you may require.'

'Oh, "anything" is nothing at all! That's too easily said.' Mrs Gereth, reclining more completely, closed her eyes with an air of disgust, an air indeed of yielding to drowsiness.

Fleda looked at her quiet face, which the appearance of oblivious sleep always made particularly handsome... 'Well then, try me with something. What is it you demand?'

At this, opening her eyes, Mrs Gereth sprang straight up. 'Get him away from her!' (SP 115-6)

Observing the girl's acute nervousness in tea-making and listening to her reasoning, Mrs Gereth is able to draw the secret of the girl, that she is in love with her son. A plan quickly forms in her mind, and she throws her offhand demand at the girl – to get her son away from the Philistine Mona.

Mrs Gereth's discovery of Fleda's secret and her consequent demand on the girl, pushes Fleda into complicity with Mrs Gereth and places her in a more awkward position. Out of moral self-respect, Fleda refuses. To be loyal to her promise to Owen and to make Mrs Gereth return the spoils to Poynton, Fleda leaves Mrs Gereth and Ricks, and stays with her father in West Kensington.

The next important tea scene is at Fleda's father's house, in which Fleda can hardly overcome her own distaste for the place. Fleda meets Owen in the street when he comes to visit her. To avoid being seen alone with Owen in public, Fleda has to invite Owen to her father's house, and to do something, the disconcerted girl can think of nothing to do other than order tea. This unintended tea-for-two turns into a farcical scene upon the unexpected visit of

Mona Brigstock's mother.

The tea begins with awkwardness on the hostess's part. The weak-minded young man, swayed between his manipulative and greedy fiancée and his uncompromising mother, finds communication with Fleda a relief. Fleda, challenged by Mrs Gereth's daring demand and embarrassed by her own feeling for the young man, finds the situation difficult. Having refused complicity with Mrs Gereth's strategy of forcing Owen to break with Mona by withholding the spoils, the girl will not exploit this meeting for her own interests.

She buried herself with the tea and, to extend the occupation, cleared the table still more, spreading out the coarse cups and saucers and the vulgar little plates. She was aware she produced more confusion than symmetry, but she was also aware she was violently nervous. Owen tried to help her with something; this made indeed for disorder... (SP 139)

What adds to her embarrassment are the poor tea utensils in which Fleda has to offer her tea. Although Fleda is without the kind of vanity that wishes to demonstrate wealth through precious objects, she certainly cares about the lack of aesthetic taste, which her father's tea things betray. Used to elegant things, Owen is able to discern Fleda's changed situation in life.

Fleda, with her hideous crockery and her father's collections, could conceive that these objects, to her visitor's perception even strongly than to her own, measured the length of the swing from Poynton and Ricks; she couldn't forget either that her high standards must figure vividly enough to Owen's simplicity to make him reflect that West Kensington was a tremendous fall. If she had fallen it was because she had acted for

him. She was all the more content he should thus see she had acted, as the cost of it, in his eyes, was none of her own showing. (SP 139–140)

Tea has always had a class denotation. It is a concrete object in which the economic and class status of a family can be judged. Elizabeth Gaskell, in *Cranford* (1851), uses tea to depict the snobbishness of her (shabby) genteel ladies; one of them, Miss Matty, after losing her tiny fortune, saves herself from a descent in class–status by opening a small tea shop. If she had opened a dress–shop, or a grocer's shop, or indeed any other kind of shop, she would have fallen from the genteel middle–class into the shop–keeping, working–class. But tea is different; it is polite and respectable, and to know about it and handle it is a cultured activity.

Owen confesses over tea his disillusion with Mona, who refuses to marry him without the 'spoils', but nevertheless will not break off. So far, the girl is able to retain her usual sociability.

Her profuse preparations had all this time had no sequel, and with a laugh that she felt to be awkward she hastily prepared his draught. 'It's sure to be horrid,' she said; 'we don't have at all good things.' She offered him also bread and butter, of which he partook, holding his cup and saucer in his other hand and moving slowly about the room. She poured herself a cup, but not to take it; after which, without wanting it, she began to eat a small stale biscuit...(SP 143)

Yet her little act of composing herself brings a new crisis. With the inopportune arrival of Mona's mother, a new scene begins – chapter 15 – and with it our attention, like Mrs Brigstock's, is drawn to a trivial object that is given

disproportionate dimensions. Mrs Brigstock's eyes attach themselves to the barely nibbled biscuit that "in some precipitate movement" has been brushed to the floor. It was, we are told, "doubtless a sign of the agitation that possessed [Fleda]". For Mrs Brigstock there was apparently more to it than met the eye. Owen at any rate picked it up, and Fleda felt as if he were removing the traces of some scene "that the newspapers would have characterized as lively". Mrs Brigstock clearly took in also "the sprawling tea-things and the marks as of a high tide in the full faces of her young friends"(SP 148). The biscuit and then the "sprawling" tea-things are, in the manner of stage properties: they are hyperbolic conventional signs, magnified in order to release to scrutiny "more than meets the eye".

Brooks praises James' scene as "an exemplary instance of James's capacity to invest his confrontations with revelatory excitement without apparently violating decorum and the surface of manners, through imprinting on the objects and gestures rendered the stamp of hyperbolic and theatrical meaning" (162-3). James's medium of social manners functions: the sociable tea scene is subverted, in a second, into the most vulgar suspect. The beautiful surface of social manners gives way to "the vision of the behind" – the pharisaism of Mrs Brigstock. Exactly like Nanda's "tea of her own", a girl's tea alone with men, is morally suspect. James, in his oblique and indirect way, shows how the taboo subject of sex had become so unmentionable, so subject to lurid speculation, that it distorted and perverted human relation. The taboo is supposed to protect young men and women, but repeatedly it is used against young people by their corrupted elders.

The comical reading of the "fallen" piece of tea biscuit doesn't make Owen less marriageable. Though she has reacted with absurd moral outrage, Mrs Brigstock doesn't bid her daughter break her engagement. Speculating that the

piece of tea biscuit will break the engagement, Mrs Gereth packs the "spoils" back to Poynton to wait for their new mistress, Fleda. However, Mrs Gereth and Fleda, read of Owen and Mona's marriage in newspaper some weeks later.

Owen, in spite of his disillusion with Mona and his apparent love for Fleda, mysteriously marries Mona, which leaves his integrity in some doubt. Mona, knowing of the spoils return, seems to find no difficulty in overlooking her fiancé's scandalous tea party with her rival. The possession of the things supersedes outraged morality. The dramatic denouement of the burning of Poynton with its spoils, seems to be James's mocking comment on the characters' greed for material objects.

* * * * *

James, an acute observer of manners and their relation to the moral life of his characters, would not have overlooked the conspicuous place tea has in British life as well as its long tradition and appearances in British drama and novels. In his early masterpiece, *The Portrait of A Lady*, afternoon tea is introduced to emphasize the Englishness of the heroine's new cultural environment; in his middle period, James used tea scenes more metaphorically to underpin his thematic concerns with gender and generational relationships. Tea-scenes also provide traditional and ideal foci for the increasing importance of dialogue in James's "scenic" method. Tea scenes make for an ideal setting and structure for "the successive Acts of a Play", and the intricate, metaphorical meanings of tea inherited from English drama and the novel enable James to deal with his evolving themes in a subtle and oblique way.

In these two novels, James expressed his concern and distaste for the horrors of the marriage market that torment and pervert young women. In "The Art of

Fiction”, James points out the strange gap that exists between “that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know” (Miller, 43). A tea scene can be the medium that reveals the gap. When pressure is placed on this polite social discourse, it gives way to reveal the abyss beneath: sex is so taboo a topic in relation to the unmarried girl, that it creates absurd and often ungrounded speculation around her. Nanda’s “tea of her own” and Fleda’s “piece of tea biscuit”, damn them and destroy their possible marriages. James, in these two novels, exposes the cruelty in the way the taint of sexual knowledge or experience is used against the innocent under the cover of the beautiful and polite tea table; the giving and taking of tea, becomes a two-edged sword, a battle-ground and in becoming so, James expresses his indignation at the hypocrisy and immaturity of British pharisaism, and the sexual corruption and material greed that underlies it.

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お茶とHenry Jamesの場面法(Scenic Method)

戦 海燕

本稿は、「お茶」にまつわる風俗の文化史についての考察及び個々の文学作品におけるお茶の場面の分析の二部からなる。

歴史的考察は、文学作品におけるお茶の場面の具体的な分析に際して必要不可欠である。ここでは、「お茶」という風習が、イギリス社会において伝統に基づいた儀式としての社会的正統性を確立するに至るプロセスを、最初期まで遡って調査し、文化的、社交的、社会的な意味性がどのようにお茶の習慣に附与され染み込んでいったのかを検証する。同時に王政復古期の喜劇（Restoration Comedy）やHogarthの絵画作品、19世紀女性作家の作品に現れるお茶の場面等の考察を通じ、文学的な隠喩の分析を試みる。

英国社会においては、お茶を飲む習慣は多重な意味性を与えられている。優雅さ、耽美性、またこれらの上部構造としてのジェンダー、階級意識、スノビズムなどである。また、お茶会は正式な社交の場であるばかりでなく、性的関係の煙幕あるいは隠れ蓑として機能する場合もある。

本稿で取り上げたヘンリー・ジェームスの2作品は彼の創作活動中期に属するものである。この時期、ジェームスは劇作家としての成功を断念して小説に回帰しており、戯曲創作の試みから学んだ技法を小説創作に応用することになる。その結果生まれたのが場面法（Scenic Method）と呼ばれる手法である。この技法において、小説は主に対話と情景とで構成される。

作品Hawthorneにおいて、ジェームスは米国文学がその文化習俗の未熟さ故に英国文学のような重層的な社会性の表現に欠けると指摘した。今回取り上げた2作品の中で、ジェームスは「お茶」という典型的な英国式習俗を舞台として利用

し、主人公たちに舞台上の俳優のような脚光があたる効果を作り出している。また会話においても「お茶」に関する事柄から発展させ、そのやり取りの中に登場人物たちの相関関係を見事に明示する。社交の場としての午後のお茶は華麗な場面の下に恋愛や婚姻、金銭に関する争いを潜ませ、また当時タブーであったセックスの代用語として登場人物間の性的関係あるいは女性の性的知識への疑惑等を場面に投影している。

本稿ではこのようなイギリス社会の偽善と形式主義（Pharisaism）を文学においてお茶の場面から批判したジェームスの視点を明らかにしたい。