

**THE FANTASTIC ANATOMIST. A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY  
OF HENRY JAMES**

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(by Marita Nadal. University of Zaragoza)

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As many critics have pointed out, the absence of the physical is a recurrent characteristic in Henry James's fiction. Taking this feature as a point of departure, the author of this volume argues that in James the physical is not merely absent: it is *excluded*. Invoking the Freudian phenomenon of the return of the repressed, Bailie contends that James's fiction is haunted by the body it has repressed. Therefore, his aim is to disclose the secret resurgence of the body as a crucial determinant of James's work. As Bailie remarks, he is not the first to be intrigued by such bodily matters in James's writing: E. M. Forster, Edith Wharton and Edmund Wilson had referred to this question before. However, Bailie's main concern is not just Henry James as the anatomist of an excluded and repressed body, but as the fantasist of a maimed and questionable bodily figure. Hence the title of his volume.

In order to carry out the analysis, Bailie studies from a psychoanalytic perspective a variety of Jamesian texts ranging from fiction to notebooks, letters and other biographical sources, which includes significant psychological references to the James family: Henry James Senior, his wife Mary, William and Alice James are all involved in the scope of Bailie's study, which in my view is as it should be: no doubt, it will attract readers interested in James's life and work and also those concerned with the historical and cultural context in which they developed.

The volume is divided into five chapters followed by an Appendix. After the Introduction, chapter 2, appropriately entitled "Preliminary Investigation", focuses on a minor tale, "Theodolinde" (1878), which is used as a basis for later chapters. The conclusions drawn from this story are supported by the analysis of a James dream—he called it a nightmare—included in his *Autobiography* as the Louvre dream, and by passages from his *Notebooks*.

Apart from the connections established between the plot of the tale and James's family relationships—the story is taken to symbolize a case of sibling rivalry—the chapter offers an interesting allusion to James's adoption of "Fletcherism", which Bailie relates to the novelist's pathological relationship to words and his habit of dictation that gradually replaced writing. Just as Fletcherism focuses on the mouth—Horace Fletcher insisted on the need for repeated chewing before swallowing—James's fascination with words and dictation points to a fixation on orality and an upward displacement of the libido that is latent in "Theodolinde". Thus, this preliminary chapter, with its analysis of James's regressive personality, his emphasis on the higher, non-genital body, and the tendency to the oral-sadistic, encapsulates the main concepts of Bailie's study, which are elaborated further in chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 3—"Case History"—analyses two Jamesian tales: "A Most Extraordinary Case" (1868) and "The Jolly Corner" (1908). As in the previous chapter, Bailie combines the (auto)biographical, the fictional and their historical background. Particularly revealing are the parallels he draws between Silas Weir Mitchell's "The Case of George Dedlow" (1866)—included in the Appendix of this volume—and James's "Extraordinary Case". Whereas Mitchell's story focuses on the medical effects of factual mutilation in a Civil War soldier, James's protagonist, though bodily complete, experiences fantasies of mutilation and regression that Bailie traces to James's own fixation with his "obscure hurt" and "invalidism". If the chapter proves especially attractive because of Bailie's inclusion of history and medicine, his brief reference to Dickens and Balzac contributes to keeping his study within the realms of the literary. In this respect, the author contrasts James's realistic techniques with those of the former writers, "for James gives us a world peopled by characters who convincingly assume the vestments of reality and yet, in the end, do not so much exist as signify. It is a world peopled by "cases"" (48).

No doubt, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is the most fascinating case in James's fiction, and Bailie, in accordance with the title and objectives of his volume, approaches its study as an autopsy performed on the damaged body of Peter Quint, "the heart of the tale", and "the key to the fictional labyrinth" (59). As could be expected, this body, with a wound to the head, epitomizes the psychoanalytic displacements, inversions and condensations studied in previous chapters. In

contrast to the centrality conferred by Bailie on Peter Quint, Jessel is reduced to sheer absence, whereas the governess, a *complete* body only at the beginning of the story (cf. the passage in which for the first time she sees her whole body in a mirror) experiences a progressive masculinization in her frantic haunting of (and identification with) Quint's defective figure.

Again, parallels are drawn between the case of the fictional character and the writer's, pointing out the relationship between James's ("sacroiliac"?) injury and Quint's incomplete body, which, significantly, is only displayed from the waist upwards. As before, Bailie extends his analysis to other members of the James family, finding further evidence for his hypothesis in James's relatives: Henry James Senior suffered the amputation of a leg, a lack that in his autobiography is transferred to the *upper* man: the missing leg becomes an arm. Particularly revealing is the allusion to William James's criticism of James's intricate, obscure style: "say it out, for God's sake", he asks the writer in a letter. Significantly, it is James's difficulty in "say[ing] out" that—according to Bailie—shapes the plot of *The Turn of the Screw*. As he argues, "an anxiety focussed on the power or effect of speech is deeply rooted in James's story" (70).

Chapter 5, "The Jameses and Psychoanalysis", contains valuable information about the relationship of the James family with Freud and his theories. It alludes to the meeting of Freud with William James—and to their conceptual divergences—and also discusses interesting details about the "visitations of nervousness" that affected the members of the James household: here, Alice James occupies a central role. Bailie notes that though there is no evidence that Henry James had read Freud's work, he shows a psychoanalytic understanding of mental processes in his relationship with his sister Alice and her predisposition to neurosis. Even if he failed to apply to himself his insights about her, Bailie concludes, "We must be grateful that our fantastic anatomist was born before neurotic science could have made of *him* a simple body" (106).

Although clearly restricted in the number of fictional texts analysed, Bailie's study is of great value: his solid network of data and variety of critical skills result in a concentrated, rigorous psychoanalytic analysis that will help to illuminate obscure zones in the life and work of Henry James, a most extraordinary case.