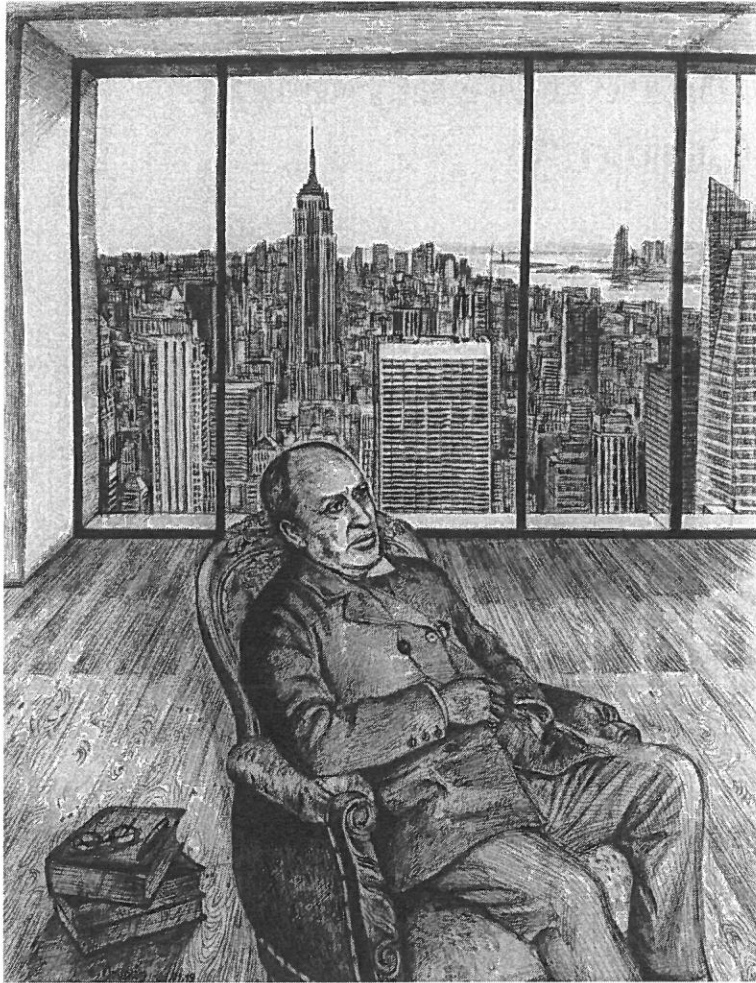


**Reading Henry James in  
the Twenty-First Century**  
Heritage and Transmission



*Edited by Dennis Tredy,  
Annick Duperray and Adrian Harding*



*James and His Window on the Coming Century*, Eric Doussin, 2019

# Reading Henry James in the Twenty-First Century:

## *Heritage and Transmission*

Edited by

Dennis Tredy, Annick Duperray  
and Adrian Harding

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction <i>Dennis Tredy</i>	xi
PART ONE: UNDER JAMES'S INFLUENCE	
Chapter One Burns the Fire: Muriel Spark's "Aspern Papers" <i>Eric Savoy</i>	3
Chapter Two Ghostly Transmissions: Or, Playing Doctor with Henry James <i>Sheila Teahan</i>	19
Chapter Three Henry James's <i>The Ambassadors</i> and W. Somerset Maugham's "The Fall of Edward Barnard": Influence or Intertextuality? <i>Souad Baghli Berbar</i>	29
Chapter Four "[I]t's a Splendid Style, but It's a Dangerous Style": Henry James and Elizabeth Bowen <i>Rachel Bryan</i>	39
Chapter Five "If the Master Does not Vanish": The Power of Henry James's Legacy in Leslie Marmon Silko <i>Carlo Martinez</i>	49
Chapter Six The Heritage of Haunting: The English Country House from Henry James to Sarah Waters <i>Vijay Prakash Singh</i>	59

Chapter Seven	75
Calling the Master Out: Joyce Carol Oates's Rewriting of Henry James	
<i>Anna De Biasio</i>	
Chapter Eight	85
Tradition, Transmission and the Théâtre Français: Re-configuring Henry James's Dramatic Heritage	
<i>Dee MacCormack</i>	
Chapter Nine	95
Luca Ronconi: Temporality and Illusions in the Adult-Child	
<i>Matteo Gonfiantini</i>	
Chapter Ten	105
<i>The Aspern Papers: Again, and Yet Again?</i>	
<i>Rosella Mamoli Zorzi</i>	
Chapter Eleven	117
"The Turn of the Screw" on Screen: Playing James's Game of Re-Transmission	
<i>Dennis Tredy</i>	
PART TWO: EUROPEAN CONNECTIONS	
Chapter Twelve	133
Henry James's Figure through Nikolai Leskov's Carpet	
<i>Jean Perrot</i>	
Chapter Thirteen	145
A Possible Spatial Heritage: James and Balzac	
<i>Natasha Vicente da Silveira Costa</i>	
and <i>Guacira Marcondes Machado Leite</i>	
Chapter Fourteen	155
The Anti-Modern James, Balzac and Barthes	
<i>Erik S. Roraback</i>	
Chapter Fifteen	167
The Transmission of Memory in James and Proust: Composing Private Texts in <i>The Wings of the Dove</i> and <i>La Prisonnière</i>	
<i>Phyllis van Slyck</i>	

Chapter Sixteen	177
From Hyacinth Robinson to Nick Dormer: Variations on the Myth of Endymion, a Case of Suspended Transmission	
<i>Isabelle de Vendevre</i>	
Chapter Seventeen	189
Watteau's Fan: Henry James and the Lightness of Style	
<i>Tamara L. Follini</i>	
PART THREE: REHABILITATING JAMES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	
Chapter Eighteen	219
The Wail of the Voice and the Vicissitudes of Transmission: "The Middle Years," "Nona Vincent" and <i>The Wings of the Dove</i>	
<i>John Holland</i>	
Chapter Nineteen	229
Speech, Self and History in <i>The Question of Our Speech</i>	
<i>Victor G. Rivas Lopez</i>	
Chapter Twenty	241
Henry James and Cognitive Science	
<i>Kyung Ah Kim</i>	
Chapter Twenty-One	251
Shifting Selves and Ghostly Others: James and the Rhetoric of Collective Memory	
<i>Ivana Čikeš</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Two	261
Claims of Art and of Social Duties: Hyacinth's Choice in <i>The Princess Casamassima</i>	
<i>Keiko Beppu</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Three	269
"Plumes from the Imperial Eagle": Henry James, Moral Irony, and the Hypertext of Empire	
<i>Selma Mokrani</i>	
Chapter Twenty-Four	281
James's Legacy: The Marriage Plot and Its Discontents	
<i>Joewon Yoon</i>	

Chapter Twenty-Five Queer Transmitting / Queer Supplanting: Letters, Art and Desire in James's Late Phase <i>Kathleen Lawrence</i>	295
Chapter Twenty-Six Ghostly Economies in "Maud-Evelyn" <i>Thomas Constantinesco</i>	307
Chapter Twenty-Seven Sketching in an Age of Anxiety: Henry James's Morganatic Baroness in <i>The Europeans</i> <i>Korey Garibaldi</i>	317
Chapter Twenty-Eight The Wished-for Children of Henry James <i>Paula Marantz Cohen</i>	329
Chapter Twenty-Nine Liking Henry James <i>Michael Nowlin</i>	335
Bibliography of Primary Sources	
Works by Henry James	347
Stage and Film Adaptations of James's Works	352
Works by Other Authors	354
Bibliography of Secondary Sources	359
Volume Editors	379
Contributors	381
Index	389

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ANTI-MODERN JAMES,  
BALZAC AND BARTHES

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This text focuses on Henry James's, Honoré de Balzac's, and Roland Barthes's star-like conceptual personae, and offers general interpretive takes on critical and fictional works that communicate the idea of a general, shared sensibility at one with the notion of having an "anti-modern" and thus, as the present argument will show, a true modern take on things. This study will throw an interpretive light on our trio of writers, and on their authoritative achievements in compositional work. This will be seen partly in the sense that Antoine Compagnon has given to the term *anti-modern* in his seminal study, *Les Antimodernes de Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes* (2005). For Compagnon this means being anti-capitalist as well; or, as Christian Ruby writes in a French language review of the book:

One cannot content oneself with exalting the moderns, which was done for a long time, without recalling that anti-moderns also took up the pen. It must also be understood that the anti-moderns are above all writers caught up in the modern current while repugnant to this current. Thus, Gustave Flaubert writes following the disappearance of Théophile Gautier, in 1872: "*He died from disgust of modern life.*" But what is the content of this gesture? (my translation)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "[O]n ne peut se contenter d'exalter les modernes, ce qui se fit longtemps, sans rappeler que des antimodernes ont aussi pris la plume. Encore faut-il comprendre que les antimodernes sont avant tout des écrivains pris dans le courant moderne et répugnant à ce courant. Ainsi, Gustave Flaubert écrit-il lors de la disparition de Théophile Gautier, en 1872 : « *Il est mort du dégoût de la vie moderne.* » Mais quel est le contenu de ce geste ?" (Ruby).

In another passage from Ruby:

Besides, it is less of a historian's work than it is work addressed above all to our times. While in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, literature treated modernity as something epic, all the while extolling the dogma of progress, the rationalism of the Enlightenment, positivism and historical optimism, Antoine Compagnon observes that our epoch has rehabilitated so-called anti-modern authors: Chateaubriand triumphs over Lamartine, Charles Baudelaire over Victor Hugo, Gustave Flaubert over Émile Zola, Marcel Proust over Anatole France, or Paul Valéry, André Gide, Paul Claudel, Colette over the early avant-gardes of the 20th century [...]. According to Antoine Compagnon, a modernism "worthy of the name"—that is to say, true—"has always been anti-modern—that is to say, ambivalent and self-conscious, all the more so since he felt Modernity was a moment of violent separation." This established thesis consists finally of defining the anti-modern as modern, as caught up in the movement of history but incapable of mourning the past. (my translation)<sup>2</sup>

These are all critical notions worth pausing to consider, and so they should be kept in the wings of our discussion as we proceed.

In this light, to be anti-modern is to be a true modern, because it denotes that one is most faithful to what is most valuable in our ongoing cultural modernity. This modernity first erupted in the seventeenth century. It is in this argumentative line that this study discusses James, Balzac, a crucial antecedent writer for James, as well as the later key figure for critical culture and a noted critic of Balzac himself in *S/Z*, Barthes. All three of our chosen writers may be seen as exemplary and fascinatingly true modern anti-moderns. This case will be argued not only in ways inspired by Compagnon's teachings, but also on our own terms. Here the article will also consider important questions of experience and entertainment culture,

<sup>2</sup> "Il fait d'ailleurs moins œuvre d'historien qu'il ne s'adresse surtout à notre époque. Alors qu'au XIXe et XXe siècle, la littérature faisait l'épopée de la modernité, en exaltant le dogme du progrès, le rationalisme des Lumières, le positivisme, l'optimiste historique, Antoine Compagnon observe que notre époque réhabilite les auteurs dits antimodernes : Chateaubriand triomphe de Lamartine, Charles Baudelaire de Victor Hugo, Gustave Flaubert d'Émile Zola, Marcel Proust d'Anatole France, ou Paul Valéry, André Gide, Paul Claudel, Colette des avant-gardes historiques du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle [...] D'après Antoine Compagnon, le modernisme « *digne de ce nom* », c'est-à-dire véritable, « *a toujours été antimoderne c'est-à-dire ambivalent, conscient de soi, d'autant qu'il a vécu la modernité comme un arrachement.* » Cette thèse établie consiste finalement à définir l'antimoderne comme moderne, pris dans le mouvement de l'histoire mais incapable de faire son deuil du passé" (Ruby).

as well as the production of a more general cultural sensibility that would value freedom, autonomy, creativity, radical interdisciplinarity, and generosity. This would be in opposition to being shoe-horned, to having one's individual creativity stifled and obstructed by the machinery of a normalizing modernity and its hyper-disciplinization, and last but not least to the destructive power of an authoritarian mindset that sees institutional forms as the ultimate goal. The lattermost may in many a context destroy singular examples of innovative and radically new creative work.

Relevant texts by James that could be more fully explored in a more comprehensive account than the space of a mere chapter include *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Ambassadors* (1903), *The American Scene* (1907), and his essays on Balzac. Implicitly broached here will be the whole problem of reading James in the twenty-first century in a larger context that includes our recognition of Balzac and Barthes as, respectively, fictional inspirer and rich theoretical resource. If we had space, Balzac's text *Traité de la vie élégante / Treatise on Elegant Living* (1830 / trans. 2010) would also be investigated, among others. Barthes works to be discussed would include *Le Bruissement de la langue / The Rustle of Language* (1984 / trans. 1986). As it stands, most of our observations will of necessity be of a general but essential kind, albeit with slightly more emphasis on James's compositional work as compared with that of Balzac or Barthes.

According to Compagnon, "the term *modernity*, meaning the character of being modern, first appeared in 1823 in Balzac" (*Five Paradoxes* 5). Compagnon adds, "[A]nd though the term *modernism* [...] was first used by Huysmans in the *Salon de 1879*, the adjective *modern* is much older [...]. [A]ccording to Hans Robert Jauss [...] *modernus* appeared in low Latin toward the end of the fifth century, derived from *modo* (just now, recently now)" (*Five Paradoxes* 5). In another tack to which we have already referred, the explosive energies of modernity began to assert their force around 1600, and it carries over to our current era of time. From a different vista, Cornelius Castoriadis instructs us:

After the Greek experience, the project of autonomy emerged once again with the birth of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe, starting in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is the onset of the 'modern' period in the broadest sense of the term. From then on, cultural creation is seen to expand and accelerate, so richly and with such changes of tempo that it is incompressible and almost beyond scrutiny. (Castoriadis 78)

In this way, James, Balzac, and Barthes, it may be argued, have contributed, with the aid of their dedicated readers, to anti-authoritarian and anti-modern

politics of freedom and autonomy. Both reading and writing their truly monumental tomes are a truly anti-modern journey. For their prose texts invite new creative approaches and attitudes to the perusing and encountering of texts. Content-wise, Lambert Strether's quest for and discovery of freedom, in intersubjective ways with other characters that populate *The Ambassadors*, stands out. Furthermore, the problem of dealing with one's life also informs the content of the so-called non-fictional travel volume, *The American Scene*.

Julia Kristeva notes that the Barthes's anti-modern position involves

...fluid, light, ironic engagement that sandblasts stupidity, kills no one, but invites one to think with one's body, sensually and happily. Though tinged with a subtle tenderness, this intimacy established with his reader, as well as with the object of his criticism, has nothing ambiguous about it." (Kristeva 84)

This anti-modern, baroque emphasis on the corporeal is clearly found in Barthes's writing; the same emphasis on fleshly substance may also be seen in the committed materialists of Balzac and James. What was the singular phenomenon that made the anti-modern and highly individual and unorthodox Barthes the theorist of the modern? Kristeva writes that "he was the first to react to the robotic banalization of a now virtual society" (Kristeva 116). Perhaps it took a true anti-modern to have Barthes's clairvoyance. Here once again, is it not the Jamesian character of Strether who would have much to teach us about another praxis of life beyond that "of a now virtual society?"

In spite of or rather because of James's, Balzac's, and Barthes's anti-modern propensities, we are also living today in a very Jamesian, Balzacian, and a Barthesian age. What does that mean? The historical dialectics of the modern/modernity give us food for thought on this striking phenomenon concerning what it means to be a contemporary. For it may be a paradoxical truth that our real contemporaries are rather those who still live on in their work today, more than our living contemporaries.

The foundational significance and authorial energies of James, Balzac and Barthes are undoubtedly remarkable. For on some level Balzac is rightly considered one of the originary figures of the novel who bequeathed fertile conditions for the work of his successors, including Henry James and Barthes. One may of course go further back to Miguel de Cervantes or to the eighteenth-century French novel for other key foundational texts in the tradition of fine fiction, but the teeming texts written under Balzac's pen remain something *sui generis* in the genre. James, in a certain way, simply forged the novel as we know it with his singular and even monastic devotion

to the craft; the essays written for the New York Edition of his work remain unrivalled in the degree of self-reflexiveness they brought to bear on fiction writing to this day. This is undoubtedly a notable achievement. Barthes, for his part, is one of the most important theoretical and genuinely creative writers to emerge from Europe in the past fifty years. He is a pioneer of what he termed "arrière-avant-garde" scholarship (see reference below), and as such equally deserves the most careful scrutiny.

As Compagnon writes: "The anti-moderns—not the traditionalists therefore, but the authentic anti-moderns—would be nothing less than the moderns, the true moderns, not the dupes of the modern, but those who have smartened up" (*Les Antimodernes* 8, my translation).<sup>3</sup> This is the case, and each actually does have something to teach us about the general business of life. For the anti-moderns truly try to think about the nature and aims of the modern, and so by extension about modernity, and about how to understand the intelligible and intelligibility in our world of big finance. The anti-modern here for Compagnon also "designates doubt, ambivalence, nostalgia, more than a pure and simple form of rejection" (*Les Antimodernes* 9; my translation).<sup>4</sup> This is an important distinction to make, since surely all three of our authors take on these dialectical and double-edged temperaments that are able to see the complex whole (Hegel) in order to bring out its good and bad sides. Crucially, "They have a particular relation with death, melancholy, and dandyism" (9, my translation).<sup>5</sup> On some levels all of these attributes may ascribe to our trio of writers, even if it would be a forceful argument to proclaim an especially pronounced dandyism to any one of them in particular. Balzac himself, though, authored a text noted above, *Traité de la vie élégante / Treatise on Elegant Living* (1830 / trans. 2010), which constitutes a real contribution to the genre.

We also read from Compagnon on how "we tend to see the anti-moderns as more modern than the moderns and the historical avant-garde: in some sort of way they are ultramodern, and they maintain an air that is more contemporary and near to us because they were more disabused" (9, my translation).<sup>6</sup> This is also true for the critical cases of Balzac, James, and

<sup>3</sup> "Les antimodernes—non les traditionalistes donc, mais les antimodernes authentiques—ne seraient autres que les modernes, les vrais modernes, non dupes du moderne, déniaisés" (*Les Antimodernes* 8).

<sup>4</sup> "Il désignait le doute, l'ambivalence, la nostalgie, plus qu'un rejet pur et simple" (*Les Antimodernes* 9).

<sup>5</sup> "Ils entretiennent une relation particulière avec la mort, la mélancolie et le dandysme [...]" (*Les Antimodernes* 9).

<sup>6</sup> "...nous tendons à voir les antimodernes comme plus modernes que les modernes et que les avant-gardes historiques: en quelques sorte ultramodernes, ils ont



Barthes—for each would be an ideal example of these respective pictures of successfully accomplishing a certain uniquely personal style and vision that would make of each one an agent of creative autonomy, cultural “autopoiesis” or self-renewal, and cultural renaissance, in line with German sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s ‘systems theory’. All three of the aforementioned figures also service a culture of replenishment and renaissance precisely via the mediating agency of their profound and paradoxically radically up-to-date (because old-fashioned) anti-modern status.

For Compagnon, Barthes constitutes “a classic anti-modern” (13, “un antimoderne classique”). And as alluded to above, Barthes provocatively once “declared in 1971 that his wish would be to be situated to the back of the avant-garde” (13, my translation).<sup>7</sup> This is a position that surely also describes James and Balzac, when one considers their sensibility, temperament and overall ideological vision of their artistic worlds. Each was able to construct an unprecedented textual project that was uniquely their own and that was both forward- and backward-looking, and each side-stepped certain conventions that would otherwise have, if they had been overly credulous moderns, tied them down to a particular school or movement of their time. It is perhaps this desire for a certain unorthodox—if not ecumenical, protean and chameleonic—temperament which most defines all three: Balzac, James, and Barthes. Their dialectical stance on so many aspects of the modern fuel their vision of the world.

As Compagnon demonstrates, “The anti-moderns are the liberated moderns” (14, my translation).<sup>8</sup> He then goes on in *Les Antimodernes* to assess the following qualities and attitudes of the anti-modern sensibility, which include the following six ideas, dedicating a chapter to each:

- 1) a counter-revolutionary stance
- 2) an anti-Enlightenment stance
- 3) pessimism
- 4) *péché original*, i.e. the weakness of original sin
- 5) the sublime
- 6) a style displaying forms of vituperation and imprecation

Compagnon expresses a preference for the term ‘anti-moderns’, not ‘counter-moderns’, because for him the latter term is not a felicitous one.

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maintenant l’air plus contemporains et proches de nous parce qu’ils étaient plus désabusés” (*Les Antimodernes* 9).

<sup>7</sup> “Barthes déclarait en 1971 que son vœu était de se situer ‘à l’arrière-garde de l’avant-garde’” (*Les Antimodernes* 13).

<sup>8</sup> “Les antimodernes, ce sont des modernes en liberté” (*Les Antimodernes* 14).

And with respect to the six fingerprints, surely we may ascribe any number of these attributes to our literary-critical trivium if we were to take a leaf out each of their books and examine them. However, we cannot ascribe all of them to any one of our figures. Nevertheless, in the case of James for example, if one considers *The Princess Casamassima*, which so adventurously broaches enormous questions about social engineering and class politics in spite of its ideological complicities with the powers that be, a certain “counter-revolution,” an anti-modern sensibility of undoubted “pessimism,” is clearly at work.

Importantly, for our theorist Compagnon, “[T]he anti-moderns are not just any adversaries of the modern, but they are the thinkers of the modern, its true theoreticians” (24, my translation).<sup>9</sup> This is true, and crucial. The massacres of past centuries are recounted in James’s *The Princess Casamassima* to a rather anti-modern effect in its defense of certain status quo power structures that rather tenuously construct a society that is always in danger of passing over to its dialectical other, to a totalitarian and authoritarian culture. And yet James’s understanding of power in this book is not absolute or un-interrogative. Likewise, Balzac and Barthes may also be said to be, in book after book, genuine thinkers and theorists of power in the modern world.

The work authored by each of our select writers consists of so many truncheon blows to a heteronomous modern society, for surely there are ways in which the basic coordinates of their cultural worlds pop out in our current constellation of the force of big finance and of the digitalization and mediatization of actuality. Our authors promote a culture of autonomy, freedom, generosity, and liberality as key signs of learned and achievable hope for our shared future. Castoriadis nicely defines the term ‘autonomy’:

But what does autonomy mean? *Autos*, ‘oneself’; *nomos*, ‘the law.’ An autonomous person is someone who gives herself her own laws (not someone who does whatever she feels like, but who gives herself laws). Now this is immensely difficult. For an individual, to give oneself one’s own law (in those areas where it is feasible) demands the ability to dare stand up to the entire range of conventions, beliefs, and fashions, as well as to scholars who continue to support absurd conceptions, the mass media, a public that keeps silent, and so forth. (Castoriadis 94)

Again, works authored by Balzac, James, and Barthes may help us to develop a culture of autonomy precisely because of their anti-modern

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<sup>9</sup> “...les antimodernes ne sont pas n’importe quels adversaires du moderne, mais bien les penseurs du moderne, ses théoriciens” (*Les Antimodernes* 24).

propensities and the autonomous 'laws' each established for himself. Though each may be somehow considered devoted materialists, their works show variants of materialism that go against the more vulgar materialism of a heteronomous society subject to external controls and 'laws'.

In another aperçu, Compagnon writes, "Baudelaire's ambivalence towards the Revolution bears witness, as in de Maistre and Chateaubriand, to a counter-revolutionary fascination and an anti-modern resignation, rather than to the simple rejection of anti-revolutionaryism claiming that abstraction can be made of the Revolution" (30, my translation).<sup>10</sup> There is, to be sure, a certain resigned if not a hangdog air in, for example, many of James's characters and protagonists. Also, as Compagnon writes for Baudelaire, the French Revolution displays "the *natural* pleasure of demolition, the *natural* taste of destruction, the *natural* love of crime: this is what the Revolution illustrates, in the eyes of Baudelaire" (30, my translation).<sup>11</sup> Balzac and James, and perhaps even Barthes, would agree in unison.

When Compagnon adverts to the idea that "the anti-modern carries the cross of democracy" (37, my translation).<sup>12</sup> It allows us to think that seeing sovereignty as free agency that would resist the fatal reifications of standardization and normalization also needs a healthy dose of contestation if we are to have a happy blend of community and singularity. This also maps onto what Castoriadis writes about 'autonomy', above. The question is whether this is even possible nowadays. As Peter Sloterdijk has put it in more hopeful terms: "When a reflective individual appears on the scene, breaking away from the dominion of collective customs and making itself subject to a higher law—be it Nature, a faith illuminated by a holy text, or the individual law of the search for happiness—research into the meaning of freedom is set in motion" (Sloterdijk 15). This is perhaps what an act of literature may mobilize or embody in certain contexts, including that of the powerful signatures of our three target authors. James's own life and compositional praxis serve as good examples of this sort of self-

<sup>10</sup> "L'ambivalence que Baudelaire manifeste à l'égard de la Révolution témoigne, comme chez de Maistre et Chateaubriand, de la fascination contre-révolutionnaire et de la résignation antimoderne, plutôt que du simple rejet antirévolutionnaire prétendant qu'abstraction puisse être faite de la Révolution [...]" (*Les Antimodernes* 30).

<sup>11</sup> "Plaisir *naturel* de la démolition, goût *naturel* de la destruction, amour *naturel* du crime: voilà ce qu'illustre la Révolution aux yeux de Baudelaire" (*Les Antimodernes* 30).

<sup>12</sup> "...l'antimoderne porte la croix de la démocratie" (*Les Antimodernes* 37).

reflexivization that made new things possible through his writing while adhering to what he saw as higher standards and a higher 'law'.

In an interesting account from Bruno Chaouat, "As Fragonard's pastoral swings, Rousseau's fusionsal fête, and Diderot's epicurean materialism demonstrate, France has enjoyed a long tradition of challenging the unbearable gravity of being" (Chaouat 127). Chaouat continues:

Yet a powerful countercurrent has always accompanied those hedonistic forces. This shadow—metaphysical moroseness—may bear some relation to the spirit of the counter-revolution. More broadly, a culture of moroseness can be ascribed to a less easily dateable intellectual and literary phenomenon charted by Antoine Compagnon in *Les Antimodernes*. Although the authors Compagnon studies often come after the Revolution and react to its ideology of progress, the antimodern ethos precedes the buoyant beginnings of the Enlightenment and, a fortiori, the post-revolutionary hangover. (Chaouat 127)

To continue:

As Compagnon has shown, antimodern rhetoric finds a source of inspiration in Pascal, founder of existentialism and messenger of the tragic condition of dereliction. Pascal's gloomy aphorism, "A king without diversion is a man full of misery," does not suggest that one is happy when entertained. Rather, entertainment—and, closer to us readers of the Frankfurt School and of Guy Debord, the culture and industry of entertainment—diverts even the most fortunate humans from their ontological wretchedness. Entertainment is, as the French would have it, a *cache-misère* [presentable outer garment]. (Chaouat 127)

So what does this have to do with James, Balzac and Barthes?

For one thing, readers of Henry James are invited to an affective literary banquet of sadnesses and yet also of exuberances and joys, comprising three of the many key affects of that aesthetic world. The James text time and again contains one unhappy ending after another, right up to and including his *summa*, *The Golden Bowl* (1904). The aesthetic *jouissance* and elation of the artists and writers that James stages in his novels and short stories also offer a view that militates against a sad affect that seems to characterize the Jamesian page. James's autobiography also betrays quite an explosive mixture of joy and elation in recounting his life narrative. So things are complicated here. And on some perhaps disavowed level too, James's work essentially is a *form of being* for its engagers, who very much wish to replace the world of entertainment, and so in this way it is an anti-modern act of literature *par excellence*. Also is there not a sense in which the very act of reading is itself a kind of deadly weapon—and modern weaponry at

that—with which to contest the modern spectacle of disintegration, to echo McKenzie Wark's *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the Twentieth-Century* (2013)? And likewise, is not the real intention of Balzac's monumental *La Comédie humaine* precisely, as Maurice Blanchot taught us, "not to imitate but rather to replace reality"? So as Blanchot also argues, Balzac is not a classical realist writer at all:

Balzac has nothing in common with the realist novelists of whom, for a long time, by a ridiculous misunderstanding, we thought he was an example [...]. Balzac's work [...] is neither the copy nor the caricature of reality. It tries to exist on its own. Its ambition is to attract the reader, to keep him while making the real universe unlivable and blocking any exit from him so that he can no longer imagine any other way of living than that of *La Comédie humaine*. (Blanchot 178)

These remarks are worth pondering on for their high-powered imaginative quality. Is it indeed not true—in spite of all appearances to the contrary—that what Blanchot has to say here is not only valid for Balzac, but also for James and Barthes? For their real purpose is something other than being merely realistic, as rather each attempts to construct a world that would replace a fallen one for each of their readers. The otherworldly quality of James's prose certainly serves as a useful example here of how that may open up a space for an alternative, imaginary reality for his readers, even as the practical world oddly seems to be mobilized at the same time.

For is it not the case that the cultural output and even on some disavowed level the *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* alike of our target authors profoundly work against and dismantle the inadequacies of a culture of growth finance, of the circulation of goods, and of people whose motive is purely one of profit? Are not the stylistic and productivist excesses of a Balzac, a James, or a Barthes rather a certain way of taking creative sovereignty and self-singularization to the limit? Is it not the case that Balzac, James, and Barthes, in their truest essence, embody so much of what is great about the true legacy of modernity, including autonomy, creativity, concentration, and freedom? And for one example does not the Barthesian pen map out those sometimes disavowed coordinates for us to truly apprehend our modern era? For example, as Jonathan Culler quite judiciously puts it with regard to Barthes's writing on the fashion system, "For where there is meaning, there is system. It is Barthes who taught us that" (Culler 77).

As for what influenced Barthes's famous essay "La Mort de l'auteur" (1967) / "The Death of the Author," clearly it is in part Nietzsche whom he continuously read, and even Nietzsche's famous remark that "God is dead,"

which for us means connective relations and/or meaning are dead, and so in need of autopoietic renewal; this is something for a more refined and developed anti-modern sensibility. Balzac and James also inform this logic through the avowed and disavowed relation of their work to various forms of capital, including an untrammelled and unstoppable capitalism. The enormous pleasurable of Barthes's and also of James's and Balzac's writings militate against this broken God mindset by creating profound relations with their readers, which engenders a certain form of togetherness and communal spirit.

The self-singularization involved in these three bodies of compositional work should be understood as forms of transindividuation and intersubjectivization; or as Bernard Stiegler also writes, "Individuation in general must be thought as relation and process and not as stasis and identity" (Stiegler 52). Following on from this, there is a sense in Barthes that as a genuine modern "he could be relied on to provide elegant, unorthodox formulations, enlivened by a theoretical perspective, with insightful discriminations and a concern for spiritual values" (Culler 115). Balzac and James both were theoreticians with a profound sense of affinity for the 'spiritual values' held by many of their fictional characters (Eugénie Grandet, Strether, and so on), values that inform their anti-modern (and so their truly modern) sensibility.

Chaouat also interestingly remarks that

France has its share of morose literati. This moroseness is found in the counter-revolutionary *Stimmung* traversing the nineteenth century, and expressed in critiques of the plague of modernity and democratization by Joseph de Maistre, Baudelaire, Flaubert, [inter alia, down to] Roland Barthes. As Compagnon argues, the more antimodern they are, the more modern they reveal themselves to be: "Without the antimodern, the modern would soon be lost, since the antimoderns are the moderns' freedom, or moderns plus freedom." (*Les Antimodernes* 447; Chaouat 128)

This precisely constitutes what made the cultural projects of our three notable authors possible. For if we did not have our dialecticians, problematizers, and theorists, then surely life would have ceased to be life at all, and would have merely passed over into its representation. For the modern is not entirely smooth sailing, and we do well to be sensitively attuned to this crucial fact. Further depth can be added to these reflections by amplifying the project and further exploring the idea that the anti-modern is the true up-to-date (and ultra-) hyper-modern subject and an essential undertaking. For we are in deep waters here and remain in dire need of anti-moderns with an extraordinary drive to write and guide us: Henry James,

Barthes and Balzac. And the problem is even broader than we might think, which is why we need instructors and benevolent authors in order to build upon their helpful insights, particularly those that shine with polemical and subtle anti-modern brilliance. Would not Balzac, James, and Barthes agree?

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE TRANSMISSION OF MEMORY IN JAMES AND PROUST: COMPOSING PRIVATE TEXTS IN *THE WINGS OF THE DOVE* AND *LA PRISONNIÈRE*

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Henry James and Marcel Proust, two giants of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel, explore strikingly similar territory: the emotionally powerful relationship between memory and imagination. Their characters explore the creative possibilities of memory, its capacity to produce the "illusion of immanence" (Sartre 50), and its ability to generate an intimacy with a subject that may not have been possible in "real" life.<sup>1</sup> Both writers stage scenes in which characters compose imaginative "memory-images" (Ricoeur 53) in order to satisfy a desire. This activity offers an intriguing perspective on the themes of transmission and heritage. Proust and James are fascinated not only by the location of memories, their enigmatic encryption in inaccessible places, but also by the secret emptiness at the center of a memory that exposes the ultimate failure of transmission. Proust and James thus chart a tension, a fraught internal ambiguity, between memory and its emotional remainder. Although it is generally agreed that

<sup>1</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 53. I have taken the liberty of applying Sartre's ideas about mental "images" to the construction of memories in James and Proust. It should be noted that Sartre makes a distinction between an "image" ("a given absent") and a "memory" ("a given past") (181); however, the creative aspect of memory in these writers' texts, the way "irreal objects" are reconstituted (Sartre 142), makes the philosopher's discussion of the "image" appropriate to our discussion of memory or what Ricoeur calls a "memory-image."

To commemorate the recent centennial of Henry James's death and to help readers understand the depth and scope of the author's influence both today and during the previous century, thirty leading Jamesian scholars from twelve different countries and five continents were asked to explore ways in which the notions of 'heritage' and 'transmission' currently come into play when reading James. The resulting chapters of this volume are divided into three main sections, each focusing on different ways in which James's legacy is being re-evaluated today—from his influence on key authors, playwrights and film-makers over the past century (Part One), to new discoveries regarding European authors and artists who influenced James (Part Two), to recent approaches more radically re-evaluating James for the twenty-first century, including contemporary poetics, political and sociological dimensions, cognitive science, and queer studies (Part Three). This collection will be of great interest to scholars and general readers of James, and is a useful guide to tracing the writer's ever-elusive figure in the carpet' and understanding the power of his continued impact today.

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