PARATAXIS IN JAMES'
WASHINGTON SQUARE

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Abstract

Henry James' Washington Square is constructed around parallel contrasts - of character, of setting and of theme. Many of these contrasts are articulated in paratactic structures, separated by semicolons. There are 786 semicolons in the book - an average of 4.5 per page. The ratio of semicolons to full stops is 1:5. The paratactic structuring appears designed to reinforce the moral perspective of the work.

This paper consists of an examination of Henry James' use of parataxis in Washington Square. James' syntactic, rhetorical and stylistic structures have been the subject of numerous investigations, in particular by Seymour Chatman, in The Later Style of Henry James and Ian Watt, in "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors." These studies, however, have tended to concentrate on the later novels or on the development of James' later style. To my knowledge, no one has provided a quantitative appraisal of James' use of parataxis in his early novels.

This investigation reveals that James' use of the semicolon in Washington Square is inordinately high, exceeding the bounds of stylistic decorum. Although the fashion for the use of the semicolon may have declined somewhat in the past one hundred years, James, in this particular work, uses a higher percentage of semicolons than his contemporaries use or than he himself uses in his later novels. In this novel there are almost as many semicolons as periods. The book consists of long strings of parallel, contrasting utterances. In his later style, on the other hand, James relies more on complex sentences, in which the exact relationship between precise nuances of perception can be determined.

James' mode of structuring in Washington Square seems designed to enhance the theme or moral perspective of the book. The main subject of Washington Square, broadly speaking, is New York city itself. This topic is vast, broad and amorphous, a challenge not only to one's understanding in general, but also to one's ability to keep moral issues in focus. James applies to this subject the moral perspective of a New England Puritan. The strings of repeated paratactic structures provide opportunities for structuring the material as multiple polar contrasts, a mode of perception congenial to a sensibility perceiving the world as contrasting moral absolutes. The apparent complexity of the characters thus appears not to be genuine complexity but rather masks or disguises which are penetrated in the course of the novel. By the end of the novel, the moral standing of all the characters stands unambiguously revealed, hence affirming a faith that clear moral judgements remain possible, even in a world whose apparent complexity would seem to lead inexorably to moral relativism.

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Parataxis is defined by The Oxford Guide to Writing as the use of the semicolon or as the use of syntactic structures requiring the use of the semicolon. The Oxford Guide defines the function of the semicolon:

The semicolon has two functions: to separate independent clauses and, under certain conditions, to distinguish the items in a list or series.  

Particular attention is called to two types of compound sentences which may be separated by the semicolon:

Paratactic compound sentences punctuated with semicolons are especially common when the second clause repeats the first... Using and in such sentences could be subtly misleading, implying a change of thought where none in fact exists... Parataxis is also effective between clauses expressing a sharp contrast of idea... Clauses like those could be joined by a comma and but. Omitting the conjunction and using a semicolon, however, makes a stronger statement, forcing readers to see the contrast for themselves.

The MLA Handbook defines the use of the semicolon as follows:

Semicolons are used to separate items in a series when some of the items require internal commas. They are used between independent clauses that are not joined by a coordinating conjunction, and they may be used before the coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence if one of the independent clauses requires a number of internal commas.

The Harbrace Handbook states the following:

The semicolon can be used to mark the connection of closely related sentences... Use the semicolon between two main clauses not linked by a coordinating conjunction.

The Harbrace Handbook adds a stylistic note:

Caution: Do not overwork the semicolon. Often compound sentences are better revised according to the principles of subordination.

The following principles, then, pertain to the use of the semicolon:

1. The semicolon is used to divide syntactic units which are grammatically parallel and syntactically equivalent.
2. Use of the semicolon implies a relationship (such as contrast) between the elements which it joins.
3. There are certain constructions in which the semicolon is mandatory and others in which semicolon is optional.
4. The semicolon is a somewhat specialized mark of punctuation; hence, overuse of the semicolon runs the danger of appearing pretentious.

A pair of hypothetical examples may help clarify the third point above. In the following pair of clauses the semicolon can be considered mandatory:

Most Russian men are thin; most Russian women are fat. The two clauses in the above example are syntactically parallel and semantically equivalent. The contrast between them is explicit.

There is a different relationship between the following pair of clauses:
PARATAXIS IN JAMES’ WASHINGTON SQUARE

The boy entered the room, the girl who was sitting on the sofa jumped up and left the room.

In this example, the two clauses are not exactly parallel. They could be combined in various ways. Use of a coordinating conjunction would be possible but might distort the meaning slightly. The clauses could be separated by a full stop. In this case the clauses would be discrete, and the events they record could well be disconnected. Use of the semicolon forces the reader to see these events as related and thus adds a dimension of relational meaning which is not present when the clauses are read separately. Use of the semicolon thus constitutes a step toward subordination. However the relationship implied is not rendered as explicit as would be the case if full subordination were employed:

Because the boy entered the room, the girl who was sitting on the sofa jumped up and left the room.

In the above example, then, the optional use of the semicolon imposes on these clauses a parallel structure which is not inherently or necessarily present and thereby adds an implicit dimension of relational meaning.

As a concomitant to the definition of the semicolon, it may be added that the semicolon can be considered the opposite of the colon, which is used to introduce subordinate and exemplifying material. The colon is most frequently used to introduce a list of items. However, as is the case with the semicolon, the colon may, on occasion, be used optionally to impose subordination on material which is not inherently or necessarily subordinate, thus adding a distinctive level of relational meaning.

Washington Square contains 786 semicolons - an average of 4.5 semicolons per page or one semicolon every one hundred words. On some pages there are as many as 12 semicolons. This may well represent the most congested concatenation of semicolons in English or American literature.

Avoiding overuse of the semicolon could be considered a maxim of conventional stylistics in James’ time as well as in our own. The structures for which the semicolon is the appropriate mark of punctuation are so specialized that their excessive use might be considered a mark of affectation. It is unlikely that a master stylist like James would have been oblivious to such a commonplace. His defiance of conventional wisdom in this instance must be considered deliberate, even flagrant. Evidently, he felt that it was worth the risk - that the necessity for structuring his material as an iterated sequence of parallel entities obviated any allegation of ostentation.

The first sixty of the semicolons in Washington Square were examined in detail. The goal was to determine the degree to which the unit to the left of the semicolon (U₁) was parallel and equivalent to the unit on the right (U₂). In each case the number of words to either side of the semicolon was counted; the type of structure (simple, compound, complex, fragment) was identified, and the coordinating element (if any) was identified. The general conclusion of this statistical study is that the instances of semicolon usage in Washington Square fall into a number of discrete categories.
The first point concerns the ratio of semicolons to colons. There are only 25 colons in the entire book. The ratio of semicolons to colons is thus 31.4: 1. Since the semicolon is used for coordination while the colon is used for subordination, in this particular work, the proportionate usage of these marks of punctuation suggests that coordination was more important than subordination. But even these statistics do not tell the whole story. There are two types of constructions where the colon is required:

A. I bought some fruit: apples, oranges and bananas.
B. He said: "I will not go."

Of the 25 colons in Washington Square, 7 are of type B above. These cases are usually introduced by such a phrase as, "he inquired." This usage could be considered a convention for representing dialogue rather than a mode of structuring. There are no clear cut instances of a list as in type A above. There is one case where material following the colon is syntactically subordinate and another case where a colon introduces two alternatives, separated by a semicolon. The remaining 14 instances of the colon are of a general type shown in the five examples below:

1. Besides, he was a philosopher: He smoked a good many cigars over his disappointment, and in the fullness of time he got used to it. (WS 13)
2. You know high treason is a capital offense: Take care how you incur the penalty. (WS 97)
3. That dear little business: I think it's so brave of you. (WS 138)
4. You will kill her: she passed a dreadful night.
5. It isn't the moment to choose: We have waited too long already. (WS 146)

In each of the above examples there is a pair of statements which are thematically related and nearly parallel in structure. Certainly the material following the colon is not syntactically subordinate. \(U_1\), may, however, be considered semantically subordinate in the sense that \(U_2\) explains, exemplifies or amplifies the material in \(U_1\). In all these cases a semicolon (or for that matter a full stop) would do just as well. In fact, many of the instances in which James uses the semicolon are indistinguishable from the above patterns. In the light of James' own usage, the choice between the colon and the semicolon appears optional. Through the choice of the colon, James has chosen, evidently on semantic grounds, to subordinate a unit which could be considered equivalent. The difference in meaning between the use of the colon and the semicolon in such instances is, while tangible, extremely subtle and rarified.

Let us now consider what can be discovered by a comparison between the instances of usage of the unit on the left of the semicolon (\(U_1\)) and the unit on the right (\(U_2\)). The first test was to count the words on each side of the semicolon. One would expect the number of words on each side of the semicolon to be equal, or approximately so. This would correspond to the standard pattern of semicolon usage as in: He is fat; she is thin. If one prepared a graph in which the X-axis consisted of the percentage of instances and the Y-axis consisted of the ratio of the absolute values of \(U_1\) and \(U_2\), one would expect the chart to appear as follows:
This chart may be explained as follows: It was discovered that the number of words in $U_1$ equals the number of words in $U_2$ in only 10% of the cases examined. In such instances, the average number of words in each unit is nine, a markedly small number for James, whose sentences frequently run to over 100 words in length. In the cases in which $U_1 = U_2$, 67% of the time, both are simple sentences. In another 10% of the cases examined, $U_1$ and $U_2$ are nearly equal, by a ratio of 1.1:1. For the ratio of 1.2:1, however, the number of instances drops drastically. In 78% of the cases studied, the difference in number of words between $U_1$ and $U_2$ was 1.3:1 or higher. In such cases the two units would be immediately and intuitively perceived by the reader as unequal. While James was aware of the type of semicolon usage exemplified in the first graph above, its occurrence was relatively infrequent. In the overwhelming majority of cases, $U_1$ and $U_2$ are noticeably unequal in length.

The cases in which $U_1$ and $U_2$ are unequal provide further confirmation of this pattern. It was found that $U_2$ is greater than $U_1$ in only 17% of the cases. James clearly showed a preference for the pattern in which $U_2$ is greater than $U_1$. The following chart shows the average number of words in each, for each of the three instances mentioned above:

$U_1 < U_2$ (73%)

12.2 22.7
RICHARD LORING TAYLOR

\[ U_1 \quad > \quad U_2 \quad (17\%) \]
\[ 15.8 \quad 7.5 \]
\[ U_1 \quad = \quad U_2 \quad (10\%) \]
\[ 9 \quad 9 \]

It will be observed that, when \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) differ, one side will, on the average, contain twice as many words as the other. The reader is obviously not expected to sense such patterns as parallel or equivalent. The discrepancy in weighting is thus sufficiently great that the reader is expected to notice the difference. In some cases, the shorter unit may consist of a single word, as in the following example:

"Yes; but he will stand there entreating her to choose, and Lavinia will pull on that side."? (WS 67)

In the above example, it takes a certain stretch of the imagination to regard \( U_1 \) as equal and parallel to \( U_2 \). In fact, the material in \( U_2 \) consists of an example, explanation, illustration or, in more general terms, an expansion of the material in \( U_2 \). In such instances one would not be surprised to see a colon used. Indeed, the semantic relationship between \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) appears indistinguishable from the examples previously cited, in which James uses the colon.

In cases where \( U_2 \) is less than \( U_1 \), \( U_2 \) can often be considered a compression of \( U_1 \). The following example illustrates this pattern:

it was observed that even medical families cannot escape the more insidious forms of disease, and that, after all, Doctor Sloper had lost other patients besides the two I have mentioned; which constituted an honorable precedent. (WS 8)

In this distinctive example, \( U_2 \) and \( U_2 \) are clearly not parallel in weight or equivalent in syntax. \( U_2 \) is a subordinate clause, or, in this context, a sentence fragment. The construction is rescued from incorrectness only because the pronoun which refers to the entire preceding construction rather than to any specific, antecedent. In this instance, the syntactic subordination of \( U_2 \) would appear to call for the colon. By using the semicolon, James raises the weight of this five-word subordinate clause to a level equivalent to the preceding 30-word complex sentence. The weighting in this case is conceptual rather than syntactic. James' use of the semicolon in such instances is dynamic -- to add an additional level of relational meaning or possibly to correct a potentially incorrect sentence pattern.

It will be further observed that, in 44% of the cases examined, the semicolon is immediately followed by a coordinating conjunction (and or but). In another seven cases there is some other connective such as so, whereas, for, or that is. Most of these cases are actually compound sentences, in which the semicolon serves as a strong or emphatic comma.

It may also be observed that, in 5% of the instances in which the semicolon is used, it is employed in a string of items, such as the following:

I came; I saw; I conquered.

Subtle change in meaning can be introduced into the above example by substituting the colon for the semicolon:

72
I came: I saw; I conquered.
I came; I saw; I conquered.

In the light of the nuances of meaning which can be introduced by varying the colon and the semicolon in such strings, let us consider the following examples:

She was romantic; she was sentimental; she had a passion for little secrets and mysteries -- a very innocent passion, for her secrets had hitherto always been as unpractical as added eggs. (WS 11).

In this example, \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) are parallel in meaning and equal in syntax. \( U_3 \) on the other hand, in addition to being far longer, is not parallel to the previous two. In \( U_1 \), the attribute is presented as a noun whereas in \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) it appears as an adjective. If one reads \( U_1 \) as exemplifying \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \), a colon would be more appropriate. Furthermore, in terms of weighting, there is a question whether \( U_1 \) is to be considered equivalent to \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) taken separately or together.

The above pattern may be contrasted with the following:

Catherine’s handwriting was beautiful, and she was even a little proud of it: She was extremely fond of copying, and possessed volumes of extracts which testified to this accomplishment; volumes which she had exhibited one day to her lover, when the bliss of feeling that she was important in his eyes was extremely keen. (WS 78)

In this case, \( U_1 \) is a noun phrase containing an embedded adverb clause. It is therefore syntactically subordinate to \( U_2 \). Furthermore, from a semantic viewpoint, \( U_1 \) provides an example of the "volumes" mentioned in \( U_1 \). In this case the colon does not introduce a list of equal and parallel examples, either from a syntactic or semantic viewpoint. Although the sequence of colon and semicolon in this instance is deliberate -- one might almost say ostentatious -- there is little reason why the colon and the semicolon might not be reversed. In fact, reversing the colon and semicolon would seem to be the more likely choice.

There are three possible types of strings: 15

\[
U_1; \ U_2; \ U_3.
\]

Although James’ use of these marks of punctuation appears to have been deliberate, there seems to be little syntactic or even semantic justification for the choice of one pattern over another. This seems to characterize his use of colons and semicolons in general. In over 50% of the instances in which he uses the colon, there are two parallel sentences approximately equivalent in meaning. In well over 50% of the cases in which he uses the semicolon, \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) are perceptibly unequal in syntactic weight. It seems as if the distinction between the colon and the semicolon, traditionally defined as opposites, is becoming blurred.

It is unlikely, however, that James was insensitive to the differences between colon and semicolon. Instead, he relied on these marks of punctuation to preserve their meaning in every instance in which he used them. In general, he does not use a semicolon because \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) are parallel. Instead, we are to read \( U_1 \) and \( U_2 \) as parallel because he uses a semicolon. The same is true of his use of the colon. He
uses these marks of punctuation to contribute actively to the meaning by imposing certain kinds of relationships on the reader's attention.

The abundance of semicolons in *Washington Square* appears related to larger themes of this work. *Washington Square* is structured around parallel contrasts, from the syntactic to the conceptual. In James' work in general, and in *Washington Square* in particular, the reader is invited to make a choice between contrasting systems of value. Such a choice must be based on comparison—a task which may be rendered easier if the alternatives are represented as polar opposites.

James offers the reader many dichotomies—between characters, between one place and another, between one religious tradition and another. These various dichotomies may finally be manifestations of the ultimate dichotomy, that between Heaven and Hell, or in historical-political terms, between the Puritan and Catholic religious traditions. James' commitment to his New England heritage is manifested in his faith that a moral judgement—no matter how subtle the necessary discriminations—is not only possible; it is necessary. For James, the quest for meaning is realized in such judgements. Only in his capacity to make moral judgements does one find the world meaningful—even comprehensible.

The Catholic believed in free will and tended to emphasize the covenant of works. There was a causal relationship between one's actions or intentions and one's subsequent fate in the afterlife. During the ritual of confession the individual would articulate his moral status in exhaustive detail. The moral standing of the individual could be minutely differentiated into many discrete steps, a complexity mirrored, not only by the complex hierarchy of the church itself but by the image of the afterlife, with its many levels of heaven, hell and purgatory.

The Puritan tended to emphasize the covenant of faith, to the virtual exclusion of the covenant of works. One's fate and character have been pre-destined by God. The Puritan acknowledged no complex hierarchy, whether on earth or in the afterlife. The gap between heaven and hell was infinite and unbridgeable. There was little need for a ritual confession since one's actions had been pre-destined and since God sees everything. The main question a Puritan ultimately faced is whether he had been endowed with grace—created as the kind of person whom God has pre-destined to go to Heaven. While one's actions or intentions may not cause one go the Heaven or Hell, they may serve to symbolize the kind of person one is.

Jonathan Edwards modified the New England Puritan tradition by proposing that moral evaluations can be couched in aesthetic terminology. For Edwards, a good action is something beautiful; a bad action is ugly, even disgusting. The character of such judgements remains, however, the same, both in its implacable absoluteness and in the convention of regarding action as symbolic.¹⁰

In many of James' novels, the contrast between Puritanism and Catholicism is symbolized by a contrast between two cities: Boston or Woollet, representing New England Puritanism; Paris or Rome, representing Catholicism. The New England cities are amply stocked with naive businessmen or wealthy and innocent young ladies; the Continental cities abound with handsome and sophisticated young men eager to prey upon these hosts as they complete the final leg of their mandatory grand tour.

Although Paris and Rome are the Ultimate symbolic manifestations of the Ca-
tholic tradition, other places may also serve as polar opposites to the New England sensibility. England, with its Anglo-Catholic tradition, is one such place; New York City is another.

Americans in general and New Englanders in particular have long sensed that New York City is not really part of America. The Hudson River traditionally marked the boundary of New England. Puritans came with their families to New England to establish the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God on earth. Their experiment established a structure within which subsequent immigrants had to find their place. The Dutch, on the other hand, established New York City as a trading outpost. Since that time, many foreigners, having immigrated to America, somehow do not make it beyond the borders of New York City. New York City can be described as Catholic—not merely because many Catholics (Dutch, Italian, Polish, Hispanic) happen to live there—but Catholic in its universality in its multiplicity of surfaces, in the broad spectrum of its sensibility, in its minute differentiations with a continuum of critical judgement.

New Yorkers certainly display no reluctance to make judgements, but their judgements tend to be relative rather than absolute. New York City is like a mapping of Dante's Inferno. Its hierarchy of streets and avenues resembles the sublevels of the circles described by Dante. In both cases there is a broad spectrum divided into multitudes of discrete steps. The New Yorker's equivalent of moral judgement is discrimination of status. Of the ten million denizens of that metropolis, each has a status, of which he and his fellow New Yorkers are fully aware. Such status is determined by many factors—wealth, education, dress, speech, and, above all, by one's address. The many discrete levels of status which a New Yorker is able to distinguish constitute one of the miracles of the human mind.

As the title indicates, *Washington Square* is ultimately about New York City itself. The title is a specific address in New York City. As such, it has a particular meaning and status in the eyes of the inhabitants of that city. The novel is, in a sense, about the meaning of that status. Henry James himself had the security of having grown up at that address. He was familiar with its thoroughfares, its back alleys and its ways. But this experience did not give him the satisfaction it would have given a true New Yorker. Indeed, the Puritan in him felt that there was something hollow at the core of such satisfaction. He was never of New York City; he never embraced its values; his New England heritage led him to regard New York City as somehow foreign or alien. He remained a New Englander living in New York. *Washington Square* represents a major attempt on his part to come to grips with his New York experience.

An innocent New Englander coming to New York City finds himself bewildered by the virtually incomprehensible variety he perceives. Although he may sense that what is incomprehensible is probably evil, his powers of moral discrimination may be set in abeyance by the sheer multiplicity of phenomena by which he is overwhelmed. He cannot understand what he sees, and, further more, New York City may turn out to be frustratingly oblivious to the judgements he would like to render.

The major conflict in *Washington Square* is between the narrator as perceive and the city as subject. At first, James tries to give the city its due. The multifarious
surface of the city, the milieu, caught in its trajectory at one moment in time, is arrayed in meticulous detail. One senses at first the impassive objectivity of the archeologist, reconstructing the fragments of a vanished time without imposing any values of his own. It is a testimony to James' objectivity that his New York of the 1840's closely resembles the New York we know today. At first the narrator even attempts to enter into the spirit of the New York system of value.

As the novel opens, we are shown the characters as they would be appraised by a New Yorker, a mode of evaluation with which the narrator seems at first to concur. Dr. Sloper occupies the very pinnacle of the status hierarchy. In the absence of an American nobility, successful members of the medical profession are among the most respected people in New York City. Dr. Sloper's other attributes -- his good looks, his wealth, his attractive wife, his manner, his bearing, his breeding, his wit, his scientific background -- merely strengthen his position at the top of the social hierarchy. His apparent concern for his daughter at first appears genuine, and his appraisal of his daughter's erstwhile suitor appears measured, objective and accurate. He is represented as everyone's ideal father figure -- wise, humane, understanding but authoritative. All these attributes can be summed up in a single declaration -- he lives at Washington Square. This is the meaning of the title.

In at first seeing Catherine through her father's eyes, we are also seeing her through New York eyes. Catherine is unbeautiful, dull, placid, stolid, socially inept, immune to good taste, limited in her understanding of nuances of speech and behavior and, in general, ill equipped to cope with the world. To be unbeautiful may weaken one's position in New York society but does not damage that position irreversibly; but to be dull -- for a New Yorker, there simply can be no greater sin.

The reader's attitude toward the two main characters seems to be determined before he has finished reading the first chapter. As he proceeds, however, the reader begins to question his initial appraisal of these two characters. As he reads further the reader realizes that the narrator's initial assumption of the New Yorker's persona is ironic. In the structuring and presentation of the subject matter of New York City, the author's outlook is ultimately and distinctively puritan.

Different characters, and, in particular, different members of the same family, tend to be delineated as opposites according to one parameter or another. The lax and spendthrift ways of Morris Townsend are brought into focus through the contrast with his sister -- a tidy, bustling, thrifty, honest little home-body, who exemplifies the domestic virtue of making do with whatever Fate has consigned to her. Her modest home is neat as a pin, and her modest budget is perfectly in order, even with Morris putting a strain on her resources. We are amazed that she is able to scrape together enough to take care of her ne'er-do-well brother.

Similarly, Dr. Sloper's two sisters are defined as opposites. Mrs. Penniman is pretentious, romantic, florid, impractical, generally addle-brained and addicted to minding everyone's business but her own. Her sister, Mrs. Almond, embodies the opposite of virtually every one of Mrs. Penniman's characteristics. Mrs. Almond is modest, practical, sensible and passionately devoted to minding her own business.

Dr. Sloper and his daughter are also represented as opposites. There seems to be little thread of genetic or cultural continuity between them, and it is difficult to locate them on the same scale. The gulf separating them is broad and virtually unbridgeable -- as broad as the gulf between Heaven and Hell.
PARATAXIS IN JAMES’ WASHINGTON SQUARE

The significance of the conceptual opposition between Dr. Sloper and his daughter becomes clear as the book proceeds. The characters in this book do not change. What happens is that they stand revealed. Dr. Sloper’s moral stature in the eyes of the reader crumbles steadily as the reader comes to understand, along with Catherine, that the Doctor has never loved his daughter. When, at the end of his life, he disinherits her for refusing to promise that she will not marry Morris after his death, Dr. Sloper is revealed to be morally unlovely, to use diction from Jonathan Edwards’ modification of Puritan modes of evaluation. Once the reader’s judgement of Dr. Sloper is clear, previous issues and incidents which one might have considered morally ambiguous also become clear. The “wrong-rightness” which Donald Hall finds in Dr. Sloper may not be as ambiguous as it appears. What may be right according to one scheme of value may be wrong according to another.

It becomes evident that, in preventing the marriage between Catherine and Morris Townsend, Dr. Sloper had never really been acting in his daughter’s interest or out of disinterested concern for her welfare. The reasons for Dr. Sloper’s attitude toward his daughter may help explain this attitude, but they in no way justify his behavior. His daughter was evidently awarded to him by a whimsical or vindictive God as compensation for the wife whom he had admired and the son for whom he had cherished great hopes. Perhaps she was even sent as a test. The flaws for which Dr. Sloper condemns his daughter -- however real they may be -- are certainly no fault of the girl’s. She grew up in an atmosphere characterized, not by love, but by unceasing scorn and resentment, which was barely disguised by a veneer of sardonic irony.

Dr. Sloper turns out to be guilty of the primordial sin -- pride. As the reader comes to recognize Dr. Sloper’s sin, the very attributes which were formerly appealing become disgusting. As a doctor, he had sought professional “experience.” As a man, like Adam, he found it. In particular, as a “ladies’ doctor” there is something obscene about the man -- a presumptuous inquisitive poking into secrets around which nature has drawn a discreet veil, his attitude disguised by a facade of authoritative manner. His demeanor and his success appear hollow. But as our disenchantment with Dr. Sloper himself grows, so also grows our disenchantment with the New York system of value which had raised Dr. Sloper to its highest pinnacle.

Catherine likewise stands revealed. She is devoid of pride or ambition. She would be perfectly happy to remain wherever God might put her -- on earth or even in a modest corner of Hell. As a lover she is passive as a turtle. She feels but rarely acts. She accepts as her role and her destiny that it is up to others to act. Her trajectory to Heaven is merely the unfolding of her nature, and the price she pays to get into Heaven consists of the unflinching manner in which she endures the consequences of her capacity to love.

Her feelings for both her father and Morris Townsend had been selfless and sincere. Both men had tried simultaneously to exploit and belittle those feelings. In the quiet firmness with which she deals with them, Catherine eventually rises to an exquisite moral grandeur. Catherine’s capacity to love -- a quality which Dr. Sloper finds neither useful nor endearing -- is revealed to be the manifest sign of what the Puritans call ‘grace’ -- a quality independent of any other, such as beauty, wit or taste. The reader’s appreciation of Catherine arises out of substituting one system
of value for another. On a New York scale of status, Catherine is beneath contempt; from a Puritan viewpoint, she is of the elect.

In *Washington Square* the multiplicity of surface detail and the gradation of status levels characteristic of New York is compressed into a New England scheme of polar opposites. The author's means of achieving this compression is by structuring his material as an iterated string of contrasting elements. At times the material fits reasonably well into such a structure. At other times the material must be forced a bit into the structure.

This theory is advanced to account not only for the inordinately high number of semicolons in *Washington Square* but for the active role which many of these semicolons appear to play. The semicolons tend to fix a certain tension between coordination and subordination as unequal elements are pulled by the semicolon into a matrix of polar opposition. The effect of the semicolons is intended to be cumulative. As the reader is trained to assimilate increasingly disparate material within a framework of polar opposition, the groundwork is laid for superseding the multiple gradations of status hierarchy characteristic of the New York value system with the rudimental New England choices: good; evil.
Footnotes

1 This paper was read at a literature conference held on October 22-25, at Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

2 Henry James, Washington Square, edited and with an introduction by Donald Hall (New York: Signet, 1964 & 1980), p. 184. This edition, hereafter identified as WS, is the source of all quotations from the text in this paper.


Vol. I The Untried Years 1843-1870 (1953);
Vol. II The Conquest of London 1870-1881 (1962);
Vol. III The Middle Years 1882-1895 (1969);
Vol. IV The Treacherous Years 1895-1901 (1969);

The standard bibliography of primary works is:


For bibliography and reprints of criticism prior to 1916, see:


For secondary materials between 1917 and 1974, the following two-volume annotated bibliography incorporates previous bibliographical listings:

period 121 books, 205 dissertations and 1733 articles. For the 57 year period included within this two volume bibliography, 3616 secondary items on James have been identified.

Secondary materials on Washington Square were compiled in the apparatus of a critical edition of this work:

Henry James, Washington Square, ed. Gerald Willen (New York: Crowel, 1971). This edition contains ten previously published and four new essays, as follows:

Gerald Willen, Preface and Notes on the text.
F.O. Mathiessen, "From the Introduction to The American Novels and Stories of Henry James" (rep. 1947).
Joseph Warren Beach, "From The Method of Henry James" (rep. 1918).
Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, "From The Early Development of Henry James" (rep. 1930).
Henry Seidel Canby, "From Turn West, Turn East" (rep. 1951).
F. W. Dupee, "From Henry James" (rep. 1951).
Edwin T. Bowden, "From The Themes of Henry James" (rep. 1956).
Leo Gurko, "The Dehumanizing Mind in Washington Square."
Mina Pendo, "Reason Under the Ailanthus."

David J. Gordon, "Washington Square: A Psychological Perspective."

On Washington Square, see also:


Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors: an Explication", Essays in Criticism, 10, pp. 250-274. This essay has been frequently reprinted.

The admonition in The Harbrace Handbook (op. cit., p. 127) not to overuse the semicolon can be considered a maxim of conservative or conventional stylistics, a position or tradition with which a master stylist like James must have been familiar.

Mina Pendo, in "Reason Under the Ailanthus," op. cit., states: In Wahington Square "James gave us a novel about place, as his title suggests, but not about people living in that place." This statement would appear to require some qualification.

The moral approach to James accounts for perhaps as much as forty percent of the material written on his work. A great deal of this writing seeks to determine his exact place in the continuum of the New England or Puritan tradition and the exact balance between moral and aesthetic criteria operative in his work. This approach certainly begins with James' own appraisal of this subject, particularly in his assessment of his relationship to his immediate predecessor, Hawthorne. From James, this tradition goes through figures like Van Wyck Brooks up to critics like Zarzar.


10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., pp. 618-619.


14 Ibid p. 127.

15 An example of this final pattern may be found in *The Ambassadors* (Methuen, 1903; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 6: "For a moment they stood confronted; then the moment placed her: he had noticed her the day before, noticed her at his previous inn, where -- again in the hall -- she had been briefly engaged with some people of his own ship's company".

16 This idea is developed in Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue in The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Regarding the acceptability of Edwards' notions to James, I am indebted to Professor Lawrence Willson of the University of California at Santa Barbara.

17 For this particular formulation of the New England deterministic perspective I am indebted to Charles Olson.

18 The dilemma of having to rely on symbols which may not prove to be trustworthy or consistent in meaning is identified by Yvor Winters (op. cit.) as a source of what he calls "American obscurantism."