

Article

The International Dimension of “The Death of the Lion”

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Abstract: This essay reconsiders some critically established ‘germs’ for Henry James’s “The Death of the Lion” (1894), traced back to the 1893 demise of Guy de Maupassant and to the latter’s only visit to England in the summer of 1886. On that occasion, Maupassant was ‘chaperoned’ by his American friend Blanche Roosevelt, a well-known literary journalist in the London and Paris circles. The unexplored connection with Roosevelt invites a new reading which gives prominence to the American woman character in the tale (Fanny Hurter) and unveils an international subtheme within it. In light of such a reading, as well as of authoritative studies which have analyzed “The Death of the Lion” against the rise of modern literary journalism, I will also re-examine the role of the first-person narrator, an unnamed ‘repented’ literary journalist, in thwarting the possible relation between Neil Paraday and his American admirer.

Keywords: Henry James; “The Death of the Lion”; Guy de Maupassant; Blanche Roosevelt; characterization; international theme; literary journalism

In his seminal book on Guy de Maupassant’s influence on the American short story, Richard Fusco (1994, p. 193) returned to Henry James’s 1888 description of the French writer as “a lion in the path” (James 1984b, p. 529) and argued that James found inspiration not only in Maupassant’s work and life, but also in his death (which occurred on 6 July 1893). Fusco drew attention to James’s use of the ‘lion’ metaphor¹ as well as of the allusive name ‘Guy,’² in a story published shortly after Maupassant’s demise, which, although bearing little resemblance to the writer’s life,³ tackled a significant issue for him—the relation between literary authorship and worldly fame. Since his attempted suicide in 1892—a tragic event that elicited considerable attention in the Anglo-American press—Maupassant had emerged as a modern literary celebrity whose private life could be unscrupulously dissected and sensationalized under the public spotlights.⁴

Maupassant visited in England for the first and only time in his life in August 1886 and the details of his visit are described in various biographical works.⁵ Of particular interest

¹ In his 1888 essay, James was using a proverbial phrase with a biblical source (after Proverbs xxvi. 13) applied to “a danger or obstacle, esp. an imaginary one” (OED ‘lion’ 2.b.) whose sense differed from: “A person of note or celebrity who is much sought after” (OED 4.b.).

² James would also employ this kind of allusion for his short story “Paste” (1899)—a rewriting of Maupassant’s “Les bijoux” (1883) and “La parure” (1884)—in which a worldly woman character is aptly called “Mrs. Guy.” See (Fusco 1994, p. 177).

³ The differences between the ‘lionized’ writer in the story and Maupassant, in terms of personal traits and biographical details, are evident. Neil Paraday is the same age as James at the time in which he composed the story.

⁴ In addition to providing explicit details about Maupassant’s suicide attempt, Anglo-American newspapers were often quick to draw conclusions on the artist and his worldly lifestyle, as the following extracts from syndicated publications show. In *The Pittsburgh Dispatch* (10 January 1892), for instance, an anonymous commentator wrote: “It is only within a little more than a year that the novelist, at the beginning of this period young, famous and rich, has been transformed from a gay bon vivant into a misanthrope, and finally into a homicidal lunatic.” (Anon 1892b, p. 8). On 16 January 1892, another commentator of the *Portland Daily Press* wrote: “Not long afterward he took rank in the same class with such men as Zola, Daudet and Bourget. Paris wanted to know him, and he wanted to know Paris. He was a fine looking fellow, with brown, wavy hair, magnificent eyes, splendid physique, the bearing of a soldier, and charms of manner and conversation that won the hearts of women. Welcomed alike by society and Bohemia, he ‘went the pace,’ now spending twenty-four hours on a new novel, and again devoting long and sleepless days to fashion or pleasure. The strain proved too great. A while ago he ceased to be a ‘thrill jolly fellow,’ as his friends called him. He grew morose, then lost his reason, and recently attempted suicide with revolver and razor. Now, at the age of forty-one, he is classed as a dangerous lunatic and can never more know sanity or freedom” (Dayton 1892, p. 3). See also (Collier 2011, p. 20).

⁵ See Johnston’s recent monumental biography (Johnston 2012, pp. 648–57). On James’s encounter with Maupassant, see (Edel 1978, pp. 172–78).

among the American literary personalities he encountered—which included Bret Harte and Henry James—is the figure of Blanche Roosevelt Tucker Macchetta d’Allegri (1853–1898), the daughter of a Virginia senator, who had started a career as an opera singer, eventually turning to literary journalism after her marriage to an Italian marquis. According to some sources, the woman had also been Maupassant’s mistress a few years earlier.⁶ A portrait of Roosevelt as well as of her close relation to Maupassant can be found in Chapter XX (“Memories of Guy de Maupassant”) of Frank Harris’s autobiography:

It was in the early eighties that Blanche Macchetta, or Roosevelt, as she was before her marriage, made me intimate with Maupassant in Paris. Blanche was an American who had come abroad to Milan to study singing; she was extraordinarily good-looking, a tall well-made blonde with masses of red-gold hair and classically perfect features. She had deserted music for matrimony, had married an Italian and lived in Italy for years, and yet spoke Italian with a strong American accent and could never learn the past participles of some of the irregular verbs. French she spoke in the same way, but more fluently and with a complete contempt, not only of syntax but also of the gender of substantives. Yet she was an excellent companion, full of life and gaiety, good-tempered and eager always to do anyone a good turn. She wrote a novel in English called *The Copper Queen*, and on the strength of it talked of herself as a *femme de lettres* and artist. She evidently knew Maupassant very well indeed and was much liked by him, for her praise of me made him friendly at once. (Harris 1931, p. 442)

Roosevelt joined Maupassant after the week he spent as a guest of Baron Rothschild at Waddesdon Manor (Buckinghamshire) and took him on a trip to Oxford (which proved particularly fatiguing for the French writer), and then, back in London, to Madame Tussauds, and to the Savoy for a performance of Gilbert & Sullivan’s “The Mikado,” staying with him until the middle of August, when he finally left for Paris.

Henry James met Maupassant at Waddesdon Manor and in London too. In a letter to Paul Bourget dated 23 December 1898 on the recent death of Baron Rothschild, James remembered having spent “two or three days” at Waddesdon with “poor Maupassant” (James 1980, p. 90).⁷ On 11 August, Maupassant dined in London as a guest of Roosevelt’s along with Count Primoli, Bret Harte, Henry James and others.⁸ On that occasion, Maupassant offered Roosevelt the manuscript of his new novella *Le Père Amable* (Johnston 2012, p. 650). Some days later, in a letter to Francis Boott, dated 15 August 1886, James wrote “I have but just escaped from the jaws of Blanche Roosevelt, who used to sing in opera—didn’t she?—and who is now here married to a Milanese, trying to be literary and assaulting me (with compliments) on my production.” (James 1980, p. 130).

Roosevelt had indeed been very ‘literary’ in those years, and the writings she had published after her retirement from singing flaunted her acquaintance with literary celebrities in both the United States and Continental Europe. She was reported to have stated: “It has been my destiny to meet great people. There is scarcely a literary man or woman whose name is great whom I have not known more than superficially.”⁹ Two of her books, one on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Roosevelt 1882), America’s most celebrated poet of the century, and another on Gustave Doré (Roosevelt 1885), the renowned French artist and illustrator, came out more or less concomitantly with the death of these two important figures. Whereas the former became the core of a quarrel with the author’s heirs, the second “gave her at once an established standing in the critical circles of London and Paris” (Anon 1888, p. 20) that was widely reflected in the contemporary press.

⁶ See (Gale 1989), p. 559. Johnston hints at such an affair in many passages of her biography. Mainwaring also implies that Roosevelt was mistress to another important member of James’s circle, Morton Fullerton (Mainwaring 2001, pp. 97–98).

⁷ Johnston reports having found James’s signature in the guest register at Waddesdon (Johnston 2012, p. 650).

⁸ See (Roosevelt 1895), p. 1.

⁹ Roosevelt quoted (Anon 1893), p. 5.

Roosevelt was recognized as a mediator between the French and Anglo-American cultural worlds on both sides of the Atlantic. Praising both her worldly and literary skills, a columnist of *Le Figaro* wrote: “The great Parisian salons have adopted the pretty woman and the brilliant conversationalist: people look for her at Princess Mathilde’s, Princess Jouriewsky’s, Baroness de Poilly’s, Countess de Brigode’s, Countess Léon Moriszech’s, etc. As for the authoress, she has created solid friendships in the world of letters: Ludovic Halévy, Albert Wolff, Guy de Maupassant and many others are familiar to her.” (Paris 1887, pp. 1–2, my translation). The British and American newspapers echoed a similar appreciation: “Roosevelt occupies a unique position in the artistic world of Paris. Her failure as a singer she frankly avowed and with smiling courage she took up her pen. Her beauty of face remarkable in its regular sculptured delicacy united to a lively imagination and unusual fluency of speech in Italian and French as well as in English has made her a welcome guest in many circles.” (Anon 1892a, n.p.).¹⁰ Roosevelt also devoted herself to writing fiction, publishing novels such as *Marked “in Haste”: A Story of Today* (1883), *Stage-Struck* (1884), *The Copper Queen: A Romance of To-day and Yesterday* (1886, later dramatized by her friend Victorien Sardou), *Hazel Fane* (1891), and the posthumous *A Riviera Romance. “Rien ne va plus”* (1899), which also received attention by the press.¹¹

In 1889, she contributed an article to *The Woman’s World*, a magazine edited by Oscar Wilde, in which she provided a portrait of Maupassant as well as a reminiscence of his summer stay in England three years earlier. This article came out in the same year as James’s second essay on Maupassant, published in *Harper’s Weekly* in October 1889, that was meant to introduce the work of the French writer to an American readership. Roosevelt’s article was very much in the key of the works that had made her famous. Not only did it dutifully provide information on the author’s background and style, but it also indulged in details that gave readers a sense of her acquaintance with the French writer. Her article also went in the direction of reinforcing the public image of Maupassant as the epitome of the literary celebrity: “Guy de Maupassant soon became the theme in public and private circles, in high life and low, in artistic and Bohemian gatherings; his talent was discussed and his personality questioned. Who he was, whether noble or plebeian; what he looked like, and where he came from; if young or old, rich or poor; and was ‘De Maupassant’ a real name or an incognito” (Roosevelt 1889, p. 13).¹² The article also featured an extended and detailed description of Maupassant’s home and studio:

M. de Maupassant lives in Paris with his cousin, de Poitevin, a fine landscape-painter, at No. 10, Rue Montchanin, Quartier Malesherbes. His house is charming, luxurious, and artistic. While the exterior is very simple, the interior is a wilderness of Genoese tapestries, Louis XV. furniture, sculptured cabinets, and rare porcelain. In the drawing-room are an admirable head of Flaubert, some charming Normandy studies by M. de Poitevin, well lined book shelves, and an immense bear-skin, which stretches its white length over the entire parquet. Beyond are the poet’s bed-chamber, a splendid but somberly furnished apartment, and, further on, a sort of writing-room and conservatory in one—a perfect museum of rare and interesting objects; amongst others, the author’s MSS, piles of autograph letters from some of the greatest living and dead celebrities, and a magnificent statue of Buddha, representing the high priest of this religion with so benign an aspect that, were the original at all like the effigy, none could resist being a follower of this teacher of faith.” (Roosevelt 1889, p. 15)

¹⁰ While reviewing her recently published *Victorien Sardou: A Personal Study*, an anonymous reviewer of London’s *Saturday Review* also underlined Roosevelt’s impressive knowledge of the Paris world (Anon 1892c, p. 205).

¹¹ Apparently her three-volume novel *A Fatal Legacy* was held in high esteem by authors like her friend Wilkie Collins (Star 1890, p. 2).

¹² Roosevelt made an extensive use of the “lion” metaphor in her book on Doré. See, for instance, the following passage: “In London, the world’s metropolis, [. . .] he was sought out, presented here and there, taken to balls, theatres, and “at homes;” put up at clubs, dined, wine, and fêted; [. . .] Rich, gifted and engaging, preceded by his brilliant reputation, he was lionized and talked about; in short, to sum it all up, he was “the fashion,” and fairly in the swing of that dizzy social vortex—a London season.” (Roosevelt 1885, pp. 299–300); see also (Roosevelt 1885, pp. 286, 300–1).

Accompanied by a large illustration by Gustave Fraipont which dominated the first page of the article, this description provided further evidence that Roosevelt had been a member of Maupassant's circle as well as a welcome guest to his domestic retreats—as also shown by the recollection of her exclusive visit to Maupassant's favorite country house, 'La Guillette' in Étretat, for which a second illustration was provided (1889, p. 16).

Roosevelt's personal closeness with the subject of her writing was also displayed in her book on Longfellow, which opened with the facsimile of a handwritten 1882 letter from the poet meant to provide undisputable evidence of their relation. In the Introduction, she wrote: "Honored with the poet's friendship, I could not but appreciate the benefit of passing much time in his society, and seeing him in the home circle, where the genuineness of his nature could best be understood." (Roosevelt 1882, p. 11) Roosevelt claimed that Longfellow was "pleased" with her idea of writing a book about him, provided suggestions and corrections, and even "remarked on the chapter containing his personal description: 'Why, that is my portrait; flattered certainly, but it is me, and I will never have another taken better than that.'" However, she added, "his sudden death prevented him to revise it completely." (Roosevelt 1882, p. 13). In the first chapter, Roosevelt described herself as allowed to "look around and examine the apartment at [her] fullest leisure," and confessed: "I lost no time in concluding that I was in the famous study of the poet, and what a study! The room, about thirty feet square, seemed of more ample dimensions. There was a harmonious blending of furniture, walls, books, pictures and statuary" (1882, p. 22) and she went on providing an incredibly detailed catalogue of the objects in the room.¹³

Roosevelt's literary biographies certainly aimed at soaring above the triviality of home-life sketches. In his study of the late nineteenth-century rise of the modern home interview, Richard Salmon defined the latter as a sort of "hermeneutic practice: a medium through which both the journalist and the reader might hope to discover the authentic 'nature' of famous individuals" (Salmon 1997, p. 162). Such an authentic nature was constructed as something at the same time enhanced and violated through the "compulsory visibility" (Salmon 1997, p. 162) imposed by the interview itself. Pointing out how, in that period, "volumes documenting 'homes and haunts' and 'literary shrines' of canonical authors began to proliferate at both sides of the Atlantic" (Salmon 1997, p. 166), Salmon also noticed that "the topography of the home was often explicitly read as a domain of revelatory signs. Expressing the very essence of the subject's personality, the home was both a sanctified space (a 'literary shrine') and a world composed for familiar domestic icons. [. . .] the effect of this cultural code was not so much to dispel the aura of fame as to produce and reinforce it" (Salmon 1997, p. 166). In analyzing the rhetorics of contemporary articles which inspected authors' domestic space, Salmon found evidence of the belief in "the revelatory capacity of objects [in allowing] insights, not merely into the worldly success of celebrity, but, more importantly, into the (supposed) inner nature of the creative mind." (Salmon 1997, p. 167).

In the Preface to her monumental memoir on Gustave Doré, Roosevelt felt as if her mere being in the home of the departed would somehow enable her to summon the spirit of the artist. She wrote: "I VISITED the home of Gustave Doré after his demise; and on looking round the rooms which spoke so plainly of their late lamented occupant, the idea came to me to make a sketch which I should call 'An Artist's Home after his Death,' [. . .] In compiling it I have tried to identify myself with the one predominating element of Doré's nature—his imagination; and after depicting life in the real, have ventured into the domain of the unreal, writing in the spirit of those who lead imaginary existences." (Roosevelt 1885, p. vi). In the chapter "My First Visit to Gustave Doré, in 1873", she showed what "writing in the spirit" of the great author consisted of, sharing with her readers an extraordinary experience. Thanks to a common friend, not only was she granted exclusive access to the author's studio (which looked to her "like the interior of a grand old cathedral [. . .] certainly a sanctuary" (Roosevelt 1885, p. 303)), but she also had the chance to

¹³ See (Roosevelt 1882), pp. 25–26.

peep—unnoticed—at the illustrator at work. This encounter with the artist, caught in the atmosphere of his everyday activity, also gave way to a visionary experience, during which Roosevelt had a sort of ecstatic revelation of the artist's genius:¹⁴

Every gesture, every word, every movement betrayed the man's inner nature as plainly as a clear mirror reflects surrounding objects. [. . .] While looking and listening, I soon discovered that he possessed the power of personal magnetism in an extra-ordinary degree. [. . .] I looked at Doré closely, but his face perplexed me. It was not so easy to read as I had at first thought; while I pondered I inadvertently cast my eyes in the direction of the scaffolding, and started, for the momentary vision came to me of a man on a ladder surrounded by paint-pots and brushes. It was so real that I thought I saw the artist himself; and yet Doré was no shadow but a bona-fide substance at my elbow, still chatting with his friend. He was a man one would always turn twice to look at; but he never appeared so well as when on his ladder, for there he was certainly a personage. [. . .] Thus I looked at the man at my elbow and saw with him alternately the artist hovering in air, a god of the canvas midst paint-pots and brushes. [. . .] When an expression puzzled me on the face of the phantom, I sought to read it aright in that of the man. When I had minutely dissected the features of the shadow, I fitted them together again and recomposed them, aided by the completeness of the living man's face. At last, when I had almost finished my scrutiny and had taken a last look, wondering what the lips would utter were the phantom mouth to speak, I heard a very clear voice close at hand, asking me, "Mademoiselle, are you dreaming?" (Roosevelt 1885, pp. 395–99)

This passage testifies to Roosevelt's ability to combine, as an author and journalist, instinctive insight and acute observation, emerging both as an enraptured female subject seduced by Doré's personal charm as well as a professional connoisseur of his talent.

In a review of Roosevelt's book on the illustrator published in *Le Galois*, in which the author was praised for successfully having imported the American interviewing style, a French commentator observed:

Roosevelt writes like a man, but with the second sight of those gifted women who penetrate all the depths of art [. . .] Blanche Roosevelt receives at her home all the protagonists of the Parisian literary world. [. . .] The American, as an excellent journalist that she is, does not let any of their gestures escape without taking note of them immediately. It is natural that, before such a beautiful person, between one glass of Sillery and another, one should let oneself go and say all that one thinks—and something more: the American newspapers will be well informed of the little details of our great men. There is so much seduction, at the bottom of her gaze, and of mischief in her pen! (Loustalot 1887, p. 1).

Roosevelt's interviewing style, at least in the public discourse, reinforced the idea that the prominence gained by women in literary journalism at the end of the nineteenth century could be explained by the fact that they were better equipped than their male counterpart for bypassing the reluctance of famous men in revealing details of their private life. As Matthew Rubery has recently pointed out, in those years, "interviewing itself was considered by many in the industry to be a distinctly feminine branch of journalism for giving disproportionate attention to private life. The 'lady interviewer' was even thought to possess innate advantages over her male colleagues when it came to the work of conversation." (Rubery 2009, p. 133).

The new trends in literary journalism—which, by fictionalizing exclusive encounters with artists, also risked flattening genuine appreciation of their work into a journalistic validation of their talent—are very much at the center of "The Death of the Lion." In James's tale, an unscrupulous journalist named Mr. Morrow attempts to fathom the secrets of Neil

¹⁴ Salmon calls this sort of experience as a "revelatory moment" (Salmon 2008, p. 114).

Paraday, a recently discovered literary talent, by intruding into his studio and surveying the objects within, perhaps even having the writer pose therein, as if immersed in the process of writing:

'I was shown into the drawing-room, but there must be more to see—his study, his literary sanctum, the little things he has about, or other domestic objects and features. He wouldn't be lying down on his study-table? There's a great interest always felt in the scene of an author's labours. Sometimes we're favoured with very delightful peeps. Dora Forbes showed me all his table-drawers, and almost jammed my hand into one into which I made a dash! I don't ask that of you, but if we could talk things over right there where he sits I feel as if I should get the keynote.' (James 1996, pp. 367–68)

To confront Mr. Morrow, we find another journalist, the unnamed first-person narrator introduced at the beginning of the story who, after having had what he calls "a change of heart" (ibid., p. 360), appoints himself as the ultimate guardian of Paraday's space and privacy ("I entertained an insurmountable, an almost superstitious objection to his crossing the threshold of my friend's little lonely shabby consecrated workshop" (ibid., p. 368)) and eventually establishes a sort of protocol of respectful and disinterested appreciation of his authorship that is promptly adopted by an obliging admirer of Paraday's work, a young lady from America named Miss Fanny Hurter.

In what follows, I analyze James's parody of the disinterested appreciation advocated by the narrator, showing how such an appreciation only apparently distances itself from the worldly practices it rebukes, and ironically ends up precluding the author from receiving any authentic and humane demonstration of esteem. The possible connection with Blanche Roosevelt in "The Death of the Lion" illuminates a hidden transatlantic agenda in the tale. No one so far, at least to my knowledge, has speculated on the implications of the nationality of Miss Hurter—this tale belonging, according to the critical tradition, to a period of James's declining interest in the international theme. While traces of Roosevelt can obviously be found in several characters in the story, such as Guy Walsingham (the pretentious woman writer), Mrs. Weeks Wimbush (the worldly distinction-seeking host), or even in the previously mentioned Mr. Morrow (in his obsession for inspecting the author's studio) and in the narrator himself (in his apparently disinterested and friendly attachment to the celebrity), Roosevelt might also, and more significantly, be alluded to, *by contrast*, in Paraday's American admirer.¹⁵ If this is the case, "The Death of the Lion" would classify *obliquely* as an international tale which plays with the contemporary anxieties about the increasing visibility and importance of women in a transatlantic literary world.

James was very interested in the rising prominence of women in the literary landscape of his time. In his 1892 short review of Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel *Robert Elsmere*, for instance, he referred to the novelist as "the most striking example of the unprecedented kind of attention which the feminine mind is now at liberty to excite [. . .] No example could be more interesting of the way in which women, after prevailing for so many ages in our private history, have begun to be unchallenged contributors to our public" (James 1984c, p. 1371). Similarly, later on, in one of his 'American letters' ("The Question of the Opportunities," 1898) James drew attention to "the almost predominant hand [. . .] exercised [by] women," noticing that

"both as readers and writers on the other side of the Atlantic women have, in fine, 'arrived' in numbers not equalled even in England, and they have succeeded in giving the pitch and marking the limits more completely than elsewhere. The public taste, as our fathers used to say, has become so largely their taste, their

¹⁵ The story features other minor American women characters. In addition to the barely mentioned "young lady in a western city" (ibid., p. 374), a friend of Miss Hurter's, we also find Hurter's sister, Mrs. Milsom, who lives in Paris and apparently enjoys celebrity spotting ("that lady devoured the great man [Paraday, at the opera] through a powerful glass" (ibid., p. 379). James could possibly have been inspired by Roosevelt also for other of his works. The name 'Blanche' features as the name of the actress character in James's story "The Private Life" (1893), see Gale (1989), p. 559.

tone, their experiment, that nothing is at last more apparent than that the public cares little for anything that they cannot do." (James 1984d, p. 656)

In "The Death of the Lion", he engages this phenomenon, striving to redeem the reputation of his women compatriots against the example of the celebrity-hunting, 'seductive' Roosevelt (whose erotic involvement with Maupassant was certainly well-known to James), and envisioning a more appreciative kind of female reader for authors like Maupassant who had been victims of their own worldliness in a latter-day, women-run system of patronage.¹⁶

Introduced at the end of Part VI, Fanny Hurter is momentarily mistaken by the narrator as someone who is besieging Paraday's London abode, just like Mrs. Wimbush.¹⁷ But whereas the latter clearly emerges as an antagonist, Hurter—in spite of the threat in her name—soon reveals herself to be harmless. Promptly responding to the narrator's concern with the proper ways of approaching literary genius, she says to him: "I did use to say out West that they might write a little less for autographs (to all the great poets, you know) and study thoughts and style a little more." (ibid., p. 377) Even the threatening "massive album, showily bound and full of autographs of price," noticed by the narrator, does not belong to Hurter but to a friend of hers, and she has used it merely as a pretext to encounter Paraday whose work means so much to her. The woman is longing for that very singular experience of "look[ing] straight into [the artist's] face" (ibid., p. 375) with an earnestness that seems to have nothing to do with the intention of retrieving tangible marks of genius to be detailed in a literary magazine.¹⁸

Significantly, from their very first encounter, the narrator has the impression that this woman is, like Paraday, in need of some kind of help and supervision ("She would be another person to look after, so that one's honour would be concerned in guiding her straight." (ibid., p. 374)). As critics have noticed, the narrator's self-appointment as the defender of Neil Paraday and Miss Hurter is far from being disinterested since this character gives away clues that he may profit from them both. The first to openly voice some skepticism about the narrator's commitment to the author is Mrs. Wimbush (who is said to be spreading "pleasing fictions on the subject of [his] devotion" (ibid., p. 372)), but her opinion is disregarded by the narrator since she is competing with him to manage Paraday. But also Miss Hurter, at least initially, questions the narrator's position, when she asks him about the very snobbish practice of burning unread letters coming from unknown admirers ("Do *you* burn without reading, too?" (ibid., p. 373)) or when—after being told by the narrator that he had come to Paraday with unscrupulous intentions only to find himself eventually "converted on the spot to holiness"—she retorts: "'Yes, but you do see him!' and the narrator says to himself: 'I had to admit that this was the case; and I was not so prepared with an effective attenuation as I could have wished.'" (ibid., p. 377).

The possible advantages of the narrator's friendship with Paraday are disclosed in his account of the private séance in which the author reads the draft of his forthcoming book to him:

Loose liberal confident, it might have passed for a great gossiping eloquent letter—the overflow into talk of an artist's amorous plan. The theme I thought singularly rich, quite the strongest he had yet treated; and this familiar statement of it, full too of fine maturities, was really, in summarised splendour, a mine of gold, a precious independent work. I remember rather profanely wondering

¹⁶ Cooper argues that "in 'The Death of the Lion', the world of celebrity-commodification is run by middle-aged women, who, not being empowered to act in the political sphere, gain pseudo-political power by feminizing male artists and circulating them among themselves as, presumably, they themselves were circulated as young women among empowered men." (Cooper 1990, p. 77)

¹⁷ The appearance of the two women coincides with the narrator's confession of his having "passed a bargain" with Paraday: "Let whoever would represent the interest in his presence (I must have had a mystical prevision of Mrs. Weeks Wimbush) I should represent the interest in his work—or otherwise expressed in his absence." (ibid., p. 372)

¹⁸ Some critics have read Hurter otherwise. King argues that "Fanny sacrifices her unmediated relationship to literary authority—her desire to look 'straight' into the author's face—to become the narrator's story and wife." (King 1995, p. 25). King underlines how the story materializes male anxiety towards the feminine intrusion in the literary field. Hurter would thus be close to figures such as Mrs. Wimbush or Guy Walsingham.

whether the ultimate production could possibly keep at the pitch. His reading of the fond epistle, at any rate, made me feel as if I were, for the advantage of posterity, in close correspondence with him—were the distinguished person to whom it had been affectionately addressed. It was a high distinction simply to be told such things. The idea he now communicated had all the freshness, the flushed fairness, of the conception untouched and untried: it was Venus rising from the sea and before the airs had blown upon her. I had never been so throbbingly present at such an unveiling. But when he had tossed the last bright word after the others, as I had seen cashiers in banks, weighing mounds of coin, drop a final sovereign into the tray, I knew a sudden prudent alarm. (ibid., pp. 360–61)¹⁹

In associating the private performance of authorship with visionary voyeurism, this account seems to play with the rhetorical conventions that had become staple features of biographical writing such as that produced by women interviewers like Roosevelt. At the same time, however, it also features metaphors (“mine of gold,” “mounds of coin”) that subtly allude to the rewards one may derive from one’s association with an author’s genius (“as if I were, for the advantage of posterity, in close correspondence with him—[. . .] It was high distinction simply to be told such things”). Evidence of the narrator’s possible financial interest can also be found in his first encounter with Miss Hurter, during which his imagination seems very quick at gathering clues that Hurter might be a wealthy heiress (“I could imagine that she had lost parents—natural protectors—could conceive even that she had inherited money” (ibid., p. 374)) inviting readers to speculate on his attention for this sort of details.

In the tale, parody mostly builds on the exaggerated restraint that the narrator subtly manages to impose on Fanny. He begins a series of reading sessions with her, which, while replacing her personal encounter with the author, also allow the narrator to implicitly claim an association with Paraday’s creative world. Hurter agrees to this second-grade proximity with the author, taking for granted that this is what Paraday really wants and being happy to know that the man she so much reveres is not alone thanks to the presence of a close friend (“Well, I wouldn’t want him to be lonely!” (ibid., p. 377)). Since Hurter is no “arch and ferocious lion-huntress” (James 1981, p. 148), but perhaps the only true appreciator of Paraday’s work in the story, her “touching feats of submission” (ibid., p. 378) to the narrator’s protocol are entirely out of place and even border on the ridiculous as in that stunning scene in which, tempted by the narrator, she stubbornly refuses to look in Paraday’s direction from her box at the opera.

The exaggerated, almost Manichean, opposition the narrator maintains between the public and the private appreciation of authorship certainly allows no grey area between the worldly and the artistic (literary) realms. And Hurter herself, once she has submitted to the narrator’s position, is required to become part of this polarization. From the point of view of the characterization in the story, the distance that the narrator creates between Hurter and what takes place at Prestidge—where Paraday is to be displayed by Mrs. Wimbush to high society members including a foreign Princess—has interesting implications. This is the episode of the story that closely recalls Maupassant’s visit with James to Baron Rothschild at Waddesdon Manor in the summer of 1886.²⁰ The foreign princess, the “illustrious stranger” for whom Paraday has “operated as a bait” in Mrs. Wimbush’s plan, has been identified by Adeline Tintner as inspired by Princess Mathilde Bonaparte (1820–1904), renowned

¹⁹ The remarkable homoerotic overtones of passages like the aforementioned have subtly been explored by critics. See (Person 1993), pp. 196–200. According to Salmon, the narrator “steer[s] Fanny Hurter away from personal contact with Paraday only to assume an eroticized relationship to the ‘master’ himself” (Salmon 2008, p. 111).

²⁰ Internal evidence in the text leads to the speculation that this episode was inspired by that visit. Both are set in August in a great country manor, the three days that the narrator spends there match the duration of James’s visit to Baron Rothschild’s home in Maupassant’s company. In particular, Paraday’s reference to the precious Sèvres (“[. . .] At any rate, I’d as soon overturn that piece of priceless Sèvres as tell her I must go before my date.” (ibid., p. 384)) seems to point at the important collection of those ceramics featured at Waddesdon manor. The excursion at Bigwood, during a “wet and cold” day (ibid., p. 384) also recalls Maupassant’s visit to Oxford, as described by Roosevelt in her sketch (Roosevelt 1889, p. 16).

patron of the arts and salon hostess of the French Second empire, who had been among the attendees of Maupassant's debut in the atelier of painter Georges Becker in 1877.²¹ If James's character is a caricature of that very personage, it might have been inspired by other caricatures as well: Princess Mathilde in fact had also been satirized by Alphonse Daudet in his novel *L'Immortel* (1888), a work highly esteemed by James.²²

In the narrator's words, the Princess stands out as

'a massive lady with the organisation of an athlete and the confusion of tongues of a *valet de place*. She contrives to commit herself extraordinarily little in a great many languages, and is entertained and conversed with in detachments and relays, like an institution which goes on from generation to generation or a big building contracted for under a forfeit. She can't have a personal taste any more than, when her husband succeeds, she can have a personal crown, and her opinion on any matter is rusty and heavy and plain—made, in the night of ages, to last and be transmitted. I feel as if I ought to 'tip' some custode for my glimpse of it. She has been told everything in the world and has never perceived anything, and the echoes of her education respond awfully to the rash footfall—I mean the casual remark—in the cold Valhalla of her memory.' (ibid., p. 383)

In spite of her title, the Princess seems to lack any sense of personal distinction, exhibiting no taste or preference for "the different manifestations of genius," or any ability to discern quality in what she admires. For her, Paraday only seems to represent the latest and ultimate source of entertainment ("he was to read them something absolutely fresh, and it was on that particular prospect the Princess had set her heart" (ibid., p. 381)). Her appreciation resting on clichés and consolidated formulas—she stands out as some sort of 'walking museum', where imagination has sedimented into a stale tradition.

The narrator's extended comment on the Princess, which he addresses to Hurter, seems to be aimed at comparing the noblewoman unfavorably with Paraday's American self-restrained admirer. As noted by critics, this part of the story (comprising Chapter IX and the beginning of Chapter X) offers an interesting change in the narrative technique, as we are presented with the narrator's "candid commemorate[ion]" (ibid. p. 382) of the events addressed to Fanny. As Salmon points out (2008, pp. 113–14), the violation of privacy implied by the narrator's shift from the first-person narration to the epistolary form quite contradicts the narrator's commitment to establish the boundaries of publicity, as he is disclosing a private document to a public audience identified with the readers of the tale.

But the tone of this intimate mock-reportage, meant to provide consolation to the narrator in the face of the vulgar worldliness displayed at Prestidge, also goes very much in the direction of reinforcing an adherence to his aesthetic protocol in his addressee by flattering her with an implicit comparison with the European princess ("I can't tell you how much more and more your attitude to him, in the midst of all this, shines out by contrast. I never willingly talk to these people about him, but see what a comfort I find it to scribble to you! I appreciate it—it keeps me warm; there are no fires in the house" (ibid., p. 385))

Although magnified by the narrator, who perceives them through the lens of exoticism ("a story strange to me, and as beguiling, as some tale in the Arabian nights" (ibid., p. 374)), Miss Hurter's attributes are indeed those of James's quintessential heroines ("her freedom, her errand, her innocence" ibid., p. 374) and her sincere and enthusiastic appreciation of Paraday seems to be symbolically contiguous with the new world she represents. In this respect, Hurter can be thought of as a "provincial of genius," much akin to the character of Miss Marian Fancourt in that other classic Jamesian tale of literary life, "The Lesson of the Master." In that tale, Miss Fancourt, who had spent most of her life in Asia, is said to have

²¹ See (Tintner 1991, pp. 22–27). See (Johnston 2012, p. 266). In her article on Maupassant, Roosevelt stressed the fact that the writer "dined with the Princess Mathilde at her very select parties, he was constantly seen at the Baroness de Poilly's most distinguished 'at-homes,' and noted patrons of art in patrician and literary circles vied with each other in rendering homage to his name and ability." (Roosevelt 1889, p. 13).

²² See Henry James. Letter to Alphonse Daudet (12 February 1895) (James 1984a, pp. 519–20).

‘her own feelings, her own standards; she doesn’t keep remembering that she must be proud. And then she hasn’t been here long enough to be spoiled; she has picked up a fashion or two, but only the amusing ones. She’s a provincial—a provincial of genius,’ St. George went on; ‘her very blunders are charming, her mistakes are interesting. She has come back from Asia with all sorts of excited curiosities and unappeased appetites. She’s first-rate herself and she expends herself on the second-rate. She’s life herself and she takes a rare interest in imitations. She mixes all things up, but there are none in regard to which she hasn’t perceptions. She sees things in a perspective—as if from the top of the Himalayas—and she enlarges everything she touches.’ (James 1999b, p. 570)

The performance at Prestidge has “a peculiarly exhausting effect” on Paraday, but the writer is “mortally afraid” (ibid., p. 384) of disappointing the Princess and, in particular, Mrs. Wimbush. Paraday’s fears, as reflected in the narrator’s account, well convey the importance of salon culture at that time, in which exclusive parties and gatherings could really have an impact on writers’ careers but were often peopled with figures devoid of those “excited curiosities and unappeased appetites”—quoting again from “The Lesson of the Master”—which lay at the heart of a truly motivated appreciation, and which were perhaps the characteristics of persons who most often were outsiders to those well-established circuits.²³

Paraday’s ultimate performance, which ironically culminates in his death, sees two other writers, Guy Walsingham and Dora Forbes, taking advantage of the situation and replacing him on the very occasion on which he was to be celebrated and during which he is instead lying in bed in agony. Interchangeability seems to be the rule that presides over this kind of event—anyone or anything goes, as long as the entertaining wheel keeps spinning—and the mismatch between the sex of these writers and their *noms de plume*, in addition to hinting, maybe, at the quality of Roosevelt’s writing (which some critic saw as suspended between the masculine and the feminine), plays with the titillation aroused by the gap between public/private life to the detriment of a recognition of actual literary merit.²⁴ Although the narrator attributes Paraday’s death to exhaustion, his desire to see him as entirely uninterested in participating in worldly events contradicts the author’s own choices. As Armstrong observes, the narrator “seems to speak for the author and to ask that the artist be recognized on his or her own terms. But the presumptuousness of his assertion of privileged knowledge about how to approach Paraday’s works exceeds the author’s own claims. Paraday is willing to let interest in his life or in his opinions about politics and art provide access to his works.” (Armstrong 1996, p. 104). As is often remarked, the metaphors employed to represent the London artistic scene are all drawn from the circus world and compare the domestication of wild animals to the base instincts that that kind of spectacle is called to gratify. But Paraday, “the king of the beasts of the year” (ibid., p. 370), is also said to be “bestly intelligent” (ibid., p. 384) and provided with an imagination that exceeds the narrator’s, especially in his ability to do justice to that worldly scene in ways that are only faintly grasped by the latter (“he surrendered himself much more liberally than I surrendered him. He filled his lungs, for the most part, with the comedy of his queer fate; the tragedy was in the spectacle through which I chose to look” (ibid, p. 381)).²⁵

²³ The end of the nineteenth century saw a return of interest in patronage as a remedy to the commodification of literary production. Already in 1867, in a letter to George Sand, Flaubert “advocated the return of patronage on the grounds that the commercial distribution of their work would turn writers into petty grocers” (Van den Braber 2017, p. 46). On James and patronage (with specific reference to Elizabeth Lewis’s London salon), see (Van den Braber 2017, pp. 50–53).

²⁴ This kind of proto-postmodern travesty, which transforms authorship into an empty simulacrum, is also a theme reminiscent of Maupassant, and of his masterpiece *Bel ami* (1885) in particular, in which the talented Madeleine Forestier acts as a ghost writer for ambitious male journalists including the protagonist, Georges Duroy.

²⁵ Paraday’s strange mixture of mature wisdom and childish fear in the story seem to match the demeanor displayed by Maupassant during his English sojourn. As the writer himself admitted in a letter: “I supposed that before my arrival a terrible reputation would precede me, and that I would find myself in the presence of parade-grounds at war for fear of an immediate and imperious attack by this debauched Frenchman. I gave the impression of a little boy who wants to remain very wise and who must seem very shy.” (Johnston 2012, p. 649. My translation).

In his interpretation, Armstrong concludes that this tale shows the inherent inconsistency of any notion of private aesthetic appreciation and conflates such appreciation with other “modes of seeing” struggling to establish their privilege. He argues:

The private sphere is not a pure domain of disinterested, free appreciation but a disciplinary construction produced by acts of exclusion and regulation. [. . .] the narrator and his model pupil build their communion by joining in a shared way of seeing, regulating together proper behavior toward it. Their ascendancy is based not on the incorporation of values intrinsic to the works they read but on their opposition to other ways of knowing the author. Their private aesthetic realm is a political province constructed in opposition to different modes of seeing which it negates in order to define its own privilege. (Armstrong 1996, p. 104)

This view of appreciation as a form of competition, however, mostly reflects the narrator’s stance. The latter’s construction of a “private aesthetic realm” which defines itself by opposition to the public display and consumption of authorship (as devised by Mrs. Wimbush) denotes a polarization that dishonestly incorporates and silences another kind of private appreciation (embodied by Miss Hurter) which remains largely unexplored in the story, very much like Paraday’s thwarted personal encounter with “a person knowing and loving the thing itself, the work” (James 1981, p. 148).

Interestingly, if the public cult of authorship leads to an actual and symbolic disappearance of both the author and his work, the private cult, which would entail the personal absence of the author, is similarly destined to be based, after Paraday’s death, on a *missing text*, in spite of the narrator’s insistence on ‘textuality’ as the foundation of his present and future commitment to the author’s memory with his trusted companion. The ‘regeneration’ of the narrator actually starts and comes full circle with the disappearance of two different manuscripts. Rejected by Mr. Pinhorn at the very beginning of the story, the narrator’s early sketch of Paraday is published in a minor journal and rapidly forgotten, whereas the manuscript containing Paraday’s last masterpiece is lost during the party at Prestidge. There seems to be a sort of moral retribution in the fact that, after the narrator snobbishly wants to “get rid” (ibid., p. 378) as soon as possible of the massive album of autographs belonging to Miss Hurter’s friend, he is unable to recover Paraday’s lost manuscript, inconsiderately placed in the hands of the narrator’s antagonist. It is almost as if his cult of authorship, that makes him look down on and disrespect any form of unspecialized, untrained appreciation (just as he only understands Paraday’s submissiveness towards authority as a masochistic by-product of his imagination²⁶), has been revealed to be snobbish and rigid by this ironic turn of events.

The narrator’s zealous intent of preserving Paraday’s legacy by recovering and editing his precious manuscript (“in some charming form, with notes, with the tenderest editorial care” (ibid., p. 391)), moreover, is compromised by the narrator’s affiliation to the very world in which Paraday’s authorship is both promoted and denied. According to DaRosa, by featuring as subject “the figure of a journalist who becomes the disciple of a literary master, [the story] draws on a questionable source of validation, since the contemporary newspaper had become both the proving ground for the notion of an authority and the location of its demise.” (DaRosa 1997, pp. 836–37) Far from being reborn as a disinterested reader as he had claimed at the beginning of the story, by pledging to edit the author’s last book, the narrator recovers agency for himself as a *literary journalist*, and the right of spreading the ultimate word on the author as well as on the ‘correct’ interpretation of his work.

In addition, since he embarks on this mission with a devoted (and domesticated) female companion at his side, he also recovers that masculine self-confidence that had been endangered by figures like Mrs. Wimbush, the Princess or, earlier, Miss Hurter herself. In this respect—by implicitly holding that his appreciation of Paraday is superior

²⁶ The narrator says: “It’s indeed inveterately against himself that he makes his imagination act” (ibid., p. 384).

to the aforementioned women's—he is very similar to the unreliable unnamed first-person narrator of “The Aspern Papers,” where the latter appoints himself as a better custodian of the dead poet's legacy than the two Bordereaus, also on the ground that—at least in his own opinion—the famous author “was no doubt not a women's poet” (James 1999a, pp. 229, 231). It is remarkable how, in both these stories, gender and international biases seem to intersect. The unnamed narrator of “The Aspern Papers” underplays Aspern's European experience as a parenthesis in the American poet's life (“it had happened to me to regret that he had known Europe at all [. . .] His own country after all had had most of his life, and his muse, as they said at that time, was essentially American” James 1999a, pp. 258–59), dissociating him from the ‘degraded, ‘almost unrecognizable, Americanness now featured by the two women. Very much in the same way, the remarkably exoticized perception of Miss Hurter by the unnamed narrator in “The Death of the Lion” allows him to distance the woman not just from other lionizers, but from Paraday himself, and to implicitly claim for himself a better understanding of a ‘national,’ British glory like the latter (which in the story is best exemplified, as well as problematized, by the recognition the author receives in the prestigious magazine aptly titled *The Empire*).

All these elements converge to destabilize the sentimental happy ending of “The Death of the Lion”. Apparently founded on a disinterested appreciation of Paraday's work and on a shared commitment to preserve his legacy, the “firm tie” (ibid., p. 392) that binds the narrator and Miss Hurter reveals a latent note of frustration with distinct implications from a parodic point of view: instead of re-establishing a viable *erotics of appreciation* between the author, his work, and his reader, it sets off an imitative triangulation which entails a conceited specialist, a missing text, and a deterred as well as misled admirer.

To conclude, the unnamed first-person narrator in this tale—an intriguing combination between the young man, friend of the “hero”-writer, and the “rising star” of journalism of his early notebook entry (James 1981, p. 149)—is the unreliable point of view through which James seems to elaborate the tensions between the integrity of a literary calling and the compromises of a worldly profession, which were reflected in the life and work of a master he very much admired, Maupassant, as well as in his own. Such tensions were also reflected in the rise of the generation of women journalists, such as Blanche Roosevelt, who pioneered and spread new and controversial approaches to artistic and literary genius, sometimes achieving, parasitically, the status of popular celebrities themselves. In addition to exploring possible autobiographical ‘germs’ behind the characterization of the tale, this essay argues for the centrality of the figure of the American admirer—whose traits seem to redeem those of the celebrity-hunting Roosevelt—and, in particular, of her thwarted encounter with the lionized writer: a chance lost in the game of “selfish interests” (James 1981, p. 148) which presides over the production and consumption of literary celebrities and their works.

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