

AN ARCHETYPAL READING OF THE CAGE SYMBOL IN HENRY JAMES'S MAJOR PHASE

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ABSTRACT

During Henry James's later phase, the growing trends of Modernism impose an overwhelming isolation on the hero. The cage, earlier perceived by scholars as a powerful symbol of alienation within Jamesian fiction, is now made an object of revision under the light of Psychocriticism, to evince a full set of coherent symbolic forms. Labyrinths, masks, mirrors and lions thus become related within the archetypal framework of the Greek myths of Theseus and Perseus. Through the analysis of both trickster figures, the cage reveals itself as a symbol of the divided self in a narrative where truth and imagination become confused in dialectical analysis.

KEYWORDS: Henry James, cage, archetype, Greek myth, symbols, trickster, divided self.

RESUMEN

La influencia del Modernismo va paulatinamente enajenando al héroe de la etapa final de la producción de Henry James. Percibida por la crítica como factor alienante, la jaula será ahora considerada bajo la luz de la psicocrítica en función del conjunto simbólico que la retroalimenta: laberintos, máscaras, espejos y leones entroncan de esta manera con los mitologemas de Teseo y Perseo dentro del marco de la crítica arquetípica. A través del análisis de ambas figuras mitológicas, la jaula se revela como el símbolo de la personalidad disociada en el trasfondo de una narrativa donde imaginación y realidad se confunden en la exploración de la trama.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Henry James, jaula, arquetipo, mito griego, símbolos, embaucador, yo escindido.

1. INTRODUCTION

Henry James' passion for Greco-Roman tradition engineers a type of narrative poignant with images and symbols. The study of Jamesian images of the cage, from the viewpoint of such theorists as Charles Mauron and Carl Gustav Jung, under what is known as the psychocritic method, leads the path from James's major phase into the Greek myths of Perseus and Theseus, establishing thus a critical basis for archetypal studies. The analysis of cross-cultural primordial images becomes



here a departing point for a regressive journey into the hidden side of myth and its relations to the collective unconscious. Bringing to light such associations, while aiming at the discovery of traces relevant to the literary study of pre-Modernist Jamesian fiction, will be the mission of the following pages. The scope of this paper, however, must be limited to a mere consideration of the artist's final period, which F.O. Matthiessen notoriously named "the major phase." Only after 1895, enriched with the cultural fusion of the superimposing artistic movements in rapid fluctuation during the late Victorian era, does the author's field of vision expand in the analysis of detail, the "confidantes" receive a wider relevance as manipulators of the point of view, his characters become obsessed with the hidden truth, usually related to the idea of evil and, most importantly, symbols become the sole focus of narrative action, enabling us to study them from an accurate perspective.

This period in Henry James's production coincides with the twilight of the Victorian Empire, earlier commenced in the 1870s. By the turn of the century, the socio-political scenario portrayed a long list of disasters which led to the rise of the Conservative Party, directed first by the axis Disraeli-Salisbury and, incipiently, influenced by the growing shade of a young aristocrat, "Lord Randolph Churchill [who] realized that much could be gained by simply defending traditional causes: the Union with Ireland, the monarchy, the Empire, the Church of England, religious education and private property" (Pugh 109). In this complicated political context, we find a literary reaction to the decline of all things Victorian in the forms of the Symbolist Movement and the Aesthetic Movement which, together, became summarized in the term "decadence." Oscar Wilde, the Celtic Revival, and the French Symbolists in the 1880s contributed to the convergence of patterns characteristic of this *fin de siècle* in its transition towards Modernism.

In this context, James defies convention through "the complexity of characterization, the profundity of the themes, the power and mystery deriving from the peculiar, sinuous structure, and the evocativeness of the richly imagined settings" (MacNaughton 82), shaping a type of fiction that, towards the end of this period, is closer to the Modernists than to James's realist models. Modernism, directly concerned with the relationship between character and myth and the actualization of archetypal images through universal symbols, brings forth one of James's favorite subjects as presented in "A Round of Visits" (1910): the attempt to reevaluate the everyday hero within modern society. As Matthiessen notices, James early narrative departs from a metaphor that the artist manipulates into a full allegory but "as he went on to master all the skills of realism, he grew dissatisfied with allegory's obvious devices; and yet, particularly towards the end of his career, realistic details had become merely the covering for a content that was far from realistic" (71). James then learns to rely on symbols that "are all literary and pictorial" (Matthiessen 72), like the cage portraying the characteristic entrapment of the hero in his late period.

The first time, the reader encounters this symbol in James's major phase is in "In the Cage," concerned with a Post Office clerk who "was perfectly aware that her imaginative life was the life in which she spent most of her time" (James, *Short Stories* 454). The construction of this character is sublime: not only is her name



kept in anonymity to the end—as a symbol of her nullity—she also embodies the guiding conscience that unveils a plot being filtered through her alienation: “She did last things or pretended to do them; to be in the cage had suddenly become her safety, and she was literally afraid of the alternative self who might be waiting outside” (James, *Short* 516).

A second example of the symbolism of the cage in James’s late work appears in “The Birthplace.” The character in this short story is typically an anti-hero who not only perceives his universe under “the view as of a cage in which he should circulate and a groove in which he should slide” (James, *Short* 494-95), but he also fears the benefactor who helped him attain his present position as an image of the shadow within his own cage: “Grant-Jackson [was] there like a beast-tamer in a cage, all tights and spangles and circus attitudes, to give it a cut with the smart official whip and make it spring at him?” (James, *Short* 544).

Differently from these two examples, “Flickerbridge” (1902) anticipates later work in which James widens the horizon and equals house to prison, while still considering Paris as a showcase: “She had put him in the way of something absolutely special—an old house untouched, untouchable, indescribable, an old corner such as one didn’t believe existed, and the holy calm of which made the chatter of studios, the smell of paint, the slang of critics, the whole sense and sound of Paris, come back as so many signs of a huge monkey-cage” (James, *Short* 723).

Yet, it is in the novels produced during his later stage—that is, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*—where James best elaborates on this symbol. By constructing symbolic associations that revert to well-known archetypal images, James opens up channels that break the eternal isolation of his characters. For instance, in *The Wings of the Dove*, James evokes the longing centennial image of Britannia in Aunt Maud—to whom he associates the symbol of the lioness—and extends his metaphor through a whole set of interrelated allegorical setting:

She would have been meanwhile a wonderful lioness for a show, an extraordinary figure in a cage or anywhere; majestic. Magnificent, high-colored, all brilliant gloss, perpetual satin, twinkling bugles and flashing gems, with a luster of agate eyes, a sheen of raven hair, a polish of complexion that was like that of well-kept china and that—as if the skin were too tight—told especially at curves and corners. Her niece had a quiet name for her—she kept it quiet: thinking of her, with a free fancy, as somehow typically insular, she talked to herself of Britannia of the market place—Britannia unmistakable but with a pen on her ear—and felt she should not be happy till she might on some occasion add to the rest of the panoply a helmet, a shield, a trident and a ledger. (James, *Wings* 23)

Later in the same novel, however, James balances this symbol—the lioness represented in Aunt Maud—with its opposite: the dove that stands for Milly Theale. In doing this, he better suggests to the reader’s mind the archetypal relationship between the hag and the maiden: “Milly, alone, as happened, in the great garnished void of their sitting room, where, a little, really, like a caged Byzantine, she had been pacing through the queer long-drawn almost sinister delay of night, an effect she yet liked” (James, *Wings* 78). Here, as in *The Golden Bowl*, the character’s disa-



greement with the threatening outside world is subtly contrasted with his immured inner universe that is just as threatening: “[...] and in all the amplitude of a great residence, she [Maggie] had found, with so little seeking, the similitude of the locked cage” (James, *Golden* 756). In this last novel, the cage stands for the evil factor, here depicted as the rivalry between, Maggie, the locked wife, and, Charlotte, the menacing mistress: “The splendid shining supple creature [Charlotte] was out of the cage, was at large; and the question now almost grotesquely rose of whether she mightn’t by some art, just where she was and before she couldn’t go further, be hemmed in and secured” (James, *Golden* 655).¹

James’s symbolic use of the cage has certainly been noted by many a critic, like McNaughton, who, when analyzing *The Golden Bowl* further asserts on his finding of this symbol: “The cage was the deluded condition,² and Maggie, as having known delusion—rather!—understood the nature of cages” (115). The coming into action of the cage, however, had been earlier noticed by Daniel Schneider who analyses the cage as a result of “James’s resentment of the confining, narrowing, stultifying pressures of propriety and conformity [which] was to stimulate him to examine limitation and confinement in all areas of human experience” (117). Schneider wrote at length on the subject in an attempt to establish the relationship between the cage and the idea of paralysis. In our opinion, this connection exists, but not in the way this critic presents it, for he puts the symbol in relation with either spatial forms (such as the circus rings or spider webs) or what he calls “symbolic associates”³ such “as chains, collars, straps, girdles, walls, bridles, cases, boxes, molds” (137). Although all the elements mentioned by Schneider do certainly make

¹ Related to the glass cage is the glass case, showing as widespread a distribution throughout James as the cage does. The case, however, is unrelated to other symbols and it does not revert to the character’s feelings of alienation, but it appears as a visual image that carries dialectical meaning, for instance in *The Wings of the Dove*: “Mrs. Straingham was now on the ground of thrilled recognitions, small sharp echoes of a past which she kept in a well-thumbed case” (84); in *The Ambassadors*: “Here on the other hand, apart from the personal and the sexual range—which might be greater or less—a series of strong stamps had been applied, as it were, from without: stamps that his observation played with as, before a glass case on a table” (38); and further: “He would have answered for it at the end of a quarter of an hour that some of the glass cases contained swords and epaulettes of ancient colonels and generals; medals and orders once pinned over hearts that had long since ceased to beat” (171); and finally in *The Golden Bowl*: “our friend had often found himself wishing he were able to transport [an old church], as it stood for its simple sweetness, in a glass case, to one of his exhibitory halls” (154), and later: “The ugliest objects, in fact, as a general thing, were the bravest, the most tender mementoes, and, as such, figured in glass cases apart, worthy doubtless of the home, but not worthy of the temple—dedicated to the grimacing, not to the clear-faced gods” (572).

² This expression is unequivocally drawn from *The Golden Bowl*, where we can read: “The cage was the deluded condition and Maggie, as having known delusion—rather!—understood the nature of cages” (645-46).

³ I understand that these “symbolic associates” are visual images and not symbols *per se* because, although they do occur in Jamesian fiction with a certain frequency, neither are they assigned an individual symbolic value nor is their position in the text somehow emphasized as to focus on its significance.

their appearance in Jamesian fiction, the fact that the symbols listed by the scholar do not outline a coherent symbolic set represents a serious analytical difficulty. Most importantly, there is an absence of feasible context, further from Jamesian texts, within which the symbols can be analyzed; if this context is missing there is no basis for extrapolation.⁴

2. A COHERENT SYMBOLIC SET

The problem created by the lack of coherence between the different parts of the symbolic set⁵ is easily solved by the submission of this text to the psychocritic method developed by Charles Mauron. The results shown by the super-imposition of texts is an only apparently inconsistent associative net, revealing the connection between the cage and such other symbols as the labyrinth, the mask, the mirror and the lion. Their subsequent discussion under the light of Jungian studies will bring forth the underlying myth and with it, a new interpretation of the symbolism of the cage in late Jamesian texts.

The symbol of the labyrinth in James's short fiction significantly shows a continuity of meaning that is easily observed for over a decade. In all cases, as it happens in "The Abasement of the Northmores" (1900), it anticipates the prospective transformation of the heroine, as arising from a state of uneasiness: "But there were difficulties, the case was special; she lost herself in the labyrinth, and her competence was questioned; two or three friends to whose judgment she appealed, struck her as tepid, even as cold" (James, *Short* 602). In addition to it, the labyrinth also portrays a state of present suffering, such as we find in "The Great Good Place" (1900): "Yes, there were hours, and this was one of them: he jerked himself up for another turn in his labyrinth, but still not touching, not even again meeting his interlocutor's eye" (James, *Short* 561), and the search for a guide that resolves his confusion towards final bliss, as shown in "The Special Type" (1900): "She wants, if I may tell you so, for the great labyrinth, a real friend; and asking myself what I could do to make things ready for her, and who would be absolutely the best woman in London" (James, *Short* 662). Ten years later, however, Mark Monteith evinces that James's hero is still looking for a final satisfaction to his inconclusive feeling of overwhelming alienation within the pretense of successful life:

The signs of this met him at every turn as he threaded the labyrinth, passing from one extraordinary masquerade of expensive objects, one portentous "period" of decoration, one violent phase of publicity, to another: the heavy heat, the luxuri-

⁴ We encounter here a difficulty in method. The method used by this critic seems to be too innovative or too heterodox to suit any particular current of thought.

⁵ Since there must be a symbolic set, and the one presented by Schneider is not coherent, then we are faced with the problem of finding a more suitable one.

ance, the extravagance, the quantity, the color, gave the impression of some wondrous tropical forest, where vociferous, bright-eyed, and feathered creatures, of every variety of size and hue, were half so smothered between undergrowths of velvet and tapestry and ramifications of marble and bronze. (James, *Short* 1064-1065)

This idea of life as a farce arises from a mental state suspicious of reality. Hence the commonality of the images of the labyrinth in James's Italian scenarios,⁶ as it happens when Merton Densher walks the streets of Venice in *The Wings of the Dove*.⁷ In this novel, the symbol provides a bond between the characters conforming the amorous trio which moves the plot, namely, Kate Croy: "The woman in the world least formed by nature, as she was quite aware, for duplicities and labyrinths, she found herself dedicated to personal subtlety by a new set of circumstances, above all by a new personal relation," (73) and Milly Theale: "My dear child, we move in a labyrinth." "Of course we do. That's just the fun of it!" said Milly with a strange gaiety. Then she added: "Don't tell me that—in this for instance— there are no abysses. I want abysses" (130).

According to Fontana, the use of this symbol has been recorded since primitive stages all over the globe: "It appears in the symbolism of the ancient Egyptians and all the early Mediterranean civilizations. It was depicted by the Celtic peoples in pre-Christian times and also in Indian and Tibetan cultures before appearing as a motif in mediaeval Christianity" (62). It, nevertheless, seems to be more difficult to reach an agreement regarding its contemporary *status*. Cirlot, in his *Dictionary of Symbols*, points that "the terrestrial maze, as a structure or a pattern, is capable of reproducing the celestial, and because both allude to the same basic idea—the loss of the spirit in the process of creation (173). As opposed to it, he describes the maze in its primitive form—the spiral: "The spirals are double ones: follow the lines with your finger from outside to inside and when you reach the centre, there is the head of another spiral coiled in the reverse direction to take you out of the maze again. So the pattern typifies both death and rebirth [...]" (Graves, *White* 99). The implication of this double symbolism of death and rebirth causes Campbell to analyze it as related to the rite of passage:

The labyrinth, maze and spiral were associated in ancient Crete and Babylon with the internal organs of the human anatomy as well as with the underworld, the one being the microcosm of the other. [...]. Its principle seems to be the provision of a difficult but possible way to some important point. Two ideas are involved: the idea of defense and exclusion, and the idea of the penetration [...]. The maze symbolism seems to be associated to maidenhood [...]. In the celebrated story of Theseus, the

⁶ Other examples of the labyrinth can earlier be found in *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Aspern Papers*.

⁷ "At his hotel, alone, by night, or in the course of the few late strolls he was finding time to take through dusky labyrinthine alleys and empty *campi*, overhung with mouldering palaces, where he paused in disgust at his want of ease [...]" (336).



labyrinth, and the princess Ariadne, the Cretan labyrinth was difficult to enter and as difficult to leave, but Ariadne's thread supplied the clue. (Campbell, *Masks* 69)

Associated to the labyrinth in James narrative, there comes the mask, which appears in parallel contexts. Thus, in *The Wings of the Dove*, the mask appears among the same characters entrapped in the labyrinth, that is: 1) Milly: "Milly had constantly proceeded, and more than ever of late, on the theory of intimate confessions, private frank ironies that made up for their public grimaces and amid which, face to face, they wearily put off the mask." (305); 2) Kate: "Her [Kate's] rigour was more to him, nevertheless, than all her readiness; for her readiness was the woman herself, and this other thing, a mask, a stop-gap, and a "dodge"" (369); and 3) Merton Densher: "He [Densher] brushed shoulders with brown men whose hats askew, and the loose sleeves of whose pendent jackets, made them resemble melancholy maskers" (388).

The mask in full versatility appears also as fan in "The Real Right Thing" (1899) where the inaccessibility of woman's feelings was evinced once "she offered him a huger, bleaker stare over the mask of her fan" (James, *Short* 556), or as the abstract mask of social manners in "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903), where John Marcher "wore a mask painted with the social simper" (James, *Short* 752). Yet, it is perhaps in "The Jolly Corner" (1098), where the mask appears at its best when associated to the feeling of encasement: "Great builded voids, great crowded stillnesses put on, often, in the heart of cities, for the small hours, a sort of sinister mask, and it was of this large collective negation that Brydon presently became conscious—all the more that the break of day was, almost incredibly, now at hand, proving to him what a night he had made of it."⁸ (James, *Short* 969, 970).

Most interestingly, *The Golden Bowl* anticipates under this mask, a recreation of Greek myth in the encounter of two adulterous lovers (Charlotte and Prince Amerigo) under the supernatural mask of night (in a clear representation of the Underworld of the Moon goddess Hecate⁹) and the later rescue of the same hero earlier shown in his labyrinth: "This characterization came from her as they walked away—walked together, in the waning afternoon, back to the breezy sea and the bustling front, back to the rumble and the flutter and the shinning shops that sharpened the grin of solicitation on the mask of night" (219).

Masks are a primary form of art that is present in aboriginal cultures of Oceania, India, China, Ancient Greece and Egypt, Native-American cultures and

⁸ Other instances of the mask in Henry James's short fiction can be found in "Julia Bride" (1908) when she realizes that a sacrifice is required in exchange for the favor she is asking for: "So the gap showed just there, in his admirable mask and his admirable eagerness; the yawning little chasm showed where the gentleman fell short" (James, *Short* 942) and in "The Bench of Desolation" (1909): "He had accepted the social relation—which meant he had taken even that on trial— without knowing what is so dazzlingly masked [...]" (James, *Short* 1049). The interesting appeal to Medusa in this piece will be the object of further insight in later pages.

⁹ Other names for the Greek Moon goddess: Circe, Hera and Persephone.



Paleolithic paintings, just to name a few. Its significance is related to the actualization of myth through ritualistic practices. Thus, Maria Leach lists a number of purposes for its use that range from therapy and exorcism to drama (685), while once more, she points to its mystical relevance when quoting that

Moreover, the mask in a primitive festival is revered and experienced as a veritable apparition of the mythical being that it represents—even though everyone knows that a man made the mask and that a man is wearing it. The one wearing it furthermore, is identified with the god during the time of the ritual of which the mask is a part. He does not merely represent the god; he *is* the god [...]. (qtd. Campbell, *Masks* 21)

More in accordance with our line of analysis, however, Cirlot focuses on the idea of metamorphosis: “All transformations are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shameful [...]. Therefore metamorphoses must be hidden from view—and hence the need for the mask. [...]. The mask is equivalent to the chrysalis.” (205). One of these transformations is essential to the rite of passage, in other words, the sun-hero becomes endowed with the powers of the divine being, hence the use of the mask as a “an image bearing another symbolic meaning which derives directly from it. The mask, simply as a face, comes to express the solar and energetic aspects of the life-process” (205).

The third symbol coherent with cage symbolism is the mirror. Very rarely, nonetheless, does Henry James use this very term; he prefers explicit glass or polished surfaces, both used with the purpose of reflection. Its incidence in some parts of Jamesian later work, for example in *The Ambassadors*, is overwhelming. This fact is, *per se*, enormously revealing of its underlying significance. In *The Ambassadors*, the appearance of the mirror is significantly associated to the protagonist, Lambert Strether. Strategically located mirrors enable this character to “[...] observe the scene from behind the clear glass plate of that retreat” (217-18), and, most significantly, they allow him to take a hidden glimpse of danger without running the risk:

Both the windows of the room stood open to the balcony, but it was only now that, in the glass of the leaf of one of them, folded back, he [Strether] caught a reflection quickly recognized as the color of a lady’s dress. Somebody had been then, all the while on the balcony, and the person, whoever it might be, was so placed between the windows, as to be hidden from him; while on the other hand, the many sounds of the street had covered his own entrance and movements (302).

In *The Ambassadors*, as in “The Papers” (1903), James introduces a mirror to reveal one side of the truth that remains hidden to the naked eye and becomes accessible only under trance: “She saw herself in this possibility as in some grotesque reflector, a full-length looking-glass of the inferior quality that deforms and discolours” (James, *Short* 838). Thus, the looking-glass becomes a narrative device to manipulate what it is perhaps James’s better achieved feature in his late work: the dialectic exploration of the evil influence of some obscure hidden truth that moves the plot.



This truly original narrative device enables such an anti-hero as Herbert Dodd in “The Bench of Desolation” (1909) to have a glimpse at the loving face of a Medusa-like Kate Cookham, “her large, clean, plain brown face—so much too big for her head, he now more than ever felt it to be, just as her head was so much too big for her body and just as her hats had an irritating way of appearing to decline choice and conformity in respect to any of her dimensions [...]” (James, *Short* 1013-1014) in the revealing “rich inner air of the plush-draped and much-mirrored hotel, where the firelight and the approach of evening confirmed together the privacy[...]” (James, *Short* 1039).

Robert Graves states in *The White Goddess* that: “[...] the mirror did also form part of the sacred furniture of the Mysteries, and probably stood for “know thyself”” (439). Although this symbol is particularly significant in Oriental tradition, Christian tradition has also donated us two mirrors associated to St. Athanasius and St. Gregory of Nyssa (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 659-660). The significance of this symbol is directly related to the inner soul, in other words, to the self: “The mirror’s task is not simply to reflect an image. When the soul becomes a perfect mirror, it becomes part of that image and, through becoming part, undergoes transformation. There, therefore exist a relationship between the object contemplated and the mirror which contemplates it.” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 660). Witches in Thessalia had a magic mirror that they would turn towards the moon, and mythology presents the shield used by Perseus to kill Medusa, a mythological figure that synthesizes the dark aspect of the goddess, and the snake as symbol of rebirth. Both icons are rooted in Neolithic times, when the life cycle and consequently, the woman figure, were essential to the survival of mankind, hence Campbell’s reckoning: “In the basal Neolithic: c. 5500-4500 B.C. Among the symbols associated with the great goddess in the archaic parts of the Mediterranean we find the mirror, the kingly throne of wisdom, the gate, the morning and evening star, and a column flanked by lions rampart” (Campbell, *Masks* 140).

Lions, similarly, emerge in Jamesian fiction in connection to the cage. In *The Ambassadors*, for instance, the lion appears contemporaneously with the character’s feeling of fear and dismay: “Strether had woven this web of cheerfulness while they waited in the court for Chad; he had sat smoking cigarettes to keep himself quiet, while before him, caged and leonine, his fellow traveler paced and turned” (245). Later, James exports the same association to different contexts: “They [Sarah Pocock and his mother] don’t lash about and shake the cage,” said Jim who seemed pleased with his analogy; “and it’s at feeding-time that they’re quietest. But they always get there” (261).

It had earlier been pointed, when discussing *The Wings of the Dove*, that Aunt Maud, described as a “wonderful lioness” is identified with Britannia.¹⁰ Lions

¹⁰ James seems to have discovered the metaphor in an earlier quotation: “It was perfectly present to Kate that she might be devoured, and she compared herself to a trembling kid, kept apart a day or two till her turn should come, but sure sooner or later to be introduced into the cage of the

are not only part of the British coat of arms since mediaeval times, their importance in Early Christian Europe has to do with the popular belief that they were born dead and they came to life only after three days (Fleming, Husain, Littleton, Malcor 121). Lions, as prevailing symbols of rebirth, became consequently associated to the figure of Christ who through the ideals of sacrifice defeated death and came back to life in a typically solar cycle, like the one that Herbert Dodd completes in "The Bench of Desolation": "Herbert Dodd, for that matter, might have been himself attempting to make by the sun's sharp aid some approach to his immediate horoscope" (James, *Short* 1051). A further emphasis on the aspect of rebirth, as obtained through the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, justifies James's marriage of the two fundamentally opposed ideas of Eros and Thanatos: "I say, there's no imagination so lively, once it's started, as that of really agitated lambs. Lions are nothing to them, for lions are sophisticated, are *blasés*, are brought up, from the first, to prowling and mauling" (James, *Golden* 543).

Henry James's lion is, nevertheless different from the Devil-Lion portrayed in the Psalms in that its force is not, despite appearances, essentially destructive. On the opposite, this beast of the jungle, is for James a necessary inductor of catharsis, whose transformative force is powerful enough as to propitiate the longing for passage:

Something or other lay in wait for him, amid the twists and the turns of the months and the years, like a crouching beast in the jungle. It signified little whether the crouching beasts were destined to slay him or be slain. The definite point was the inevitable spring of the creature; and the definite lesson from that was that a man of feeling didn't cause himself to be accompanied by a lady in a tiger-hunt. Such was the image under which he had ended by figuring his life. (James, *Short* 750)

Anthropologically, whereas the lioness embodies the image of maternity and was consequently associated to the mother goddesses of a number of cultures (Leach 626), "the lion corresponds principally to gold or the "subterranean sun," and to the sun itself, and hence it is found as a symbol of sun-gods such as Mithras" (Cirlot 189). This opposition disappears when we consider that the original moon goddess was later supplanted by a male god who became the instigator of paternalistic religions of Eastern import. The earth goddess, in her triple form, acted on birth, love and death, while the sun, is a masculine symbol of penetration. Cirlot

lioness. The cage was Aunt Maud's own room, her office, her counting-house, her battlefield, her special scene, in fine, of action, situated on the ground-floor, opening from the main hall and figuring rather to our young woman on exit and entrance as a guard-house or a toll-gate" (James, *Wings* 22). He later proceeds to make it extensive to other observers upon the same character: "She was in fine quite the largest possible quantity to deal with; and he [Densher] was in the cage of the lioness without his whip —the whip, in a word, of a supply of proper retorts" (James, *Wings* 55). Later, in *The Ambassadors* the reader will meet Lambert Strether in similar circumstances in the scene of the confrontation between him, Waymarsh and the POCOcks (245, 261).



understands this double symbol in the following terms: “the lion pertains to the Element of earth and the winged lion to the Element of fire. Both are symbolic of continual struggle, solar light, morning, regal divinity and victory” (189), the earth lion representing the mother, while fire is related to the sun, and therefore, male. Later, the synthesis of both aspects, male and female, was projected into Christ, the son: a solar-hero of divine ascendancy, who in all cultures represents the victory of life over shadows in a rite of passage emulating the cycle of death and rebirth: Hercules, Theseus, Perseus¹¹... are all victorious in this difficult journey into the depths of the unknown.

3. UNDER THE SHADOW OF MYTH

The contextualization of symbols belonging to the constellation of the cage shows that they either originate in the myth of Theseus and the labyrinth of the Minotaur, or they derive from the myth of Perseus and Andromeda. Two types of evidence justify this assertion. On the one hand, there exists explicit textual proof that Henry James had both myths on his mind while he was writing his novels. In *The Wings of the Dove*, for example, there is a reference to the Gorgon: “It will be my life—paid for as that. It will become my great gilded shield; so that those who wish to find me must come and hunt me up” (315). An allusion to the myth of Theseus (and Hercules) is later to be found in *The Golden Bowl*: “There came to her [Maggie], confusedly, some echo of an ancient fable—some vision of Io goaded by the gadfly or of Ariadne roaming the lone sea-strand”¹² (727).

A further clue is the temporal setting in which the climax of the action occurs in all three novels. In *The Wings of the Dove*, the turning point, takes place with Milly’s epiphany of her deceit by two wicked lovers, which causes the outpour leading to her death. This scene is set in Venice, where Milly had emigrated with the purpose of improving her seriously deteriorated health:

Then, it’s as I [Milly] like. But you must really, though we’re having such a decent month, get straight away.” In pursuance of which, when she had replied with promptitude that her departure—for the Tyrol and then for Venice—was quite fixed for the fourteenth, he [Sir Luke] took her up with alacrity. “For Venice? That’s perfect, for we shall meet there. I’ve a dream of it for October, when I’m hoping for three weeks off. [...]” (296-97)

¹¹ One sun-hero in Celtic legend carries the name “Llew Llaw Gyffes,” the lion with the steady hand, which is “connected with *leo* (lion), an appellation of Lugh’s [Lamfhada]” (Graves, *White* 329). Lugh was the sun god in the Irish Leabhar Ghabhala.

¹² Io is an aspect of the moon goddess who helps Odysseus by throwing him her scarf for him to safely reach the coast whereas Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus after gaining her help in the labyrinth innuendo: “Ariadne wept with rage in waking, to find herself deserted; but Dionisus soon walked up, introduced himself, and offered her a large cup of wine” (Graves, *Greek* 82).



In *The Ambassadors*, similarly, Strether's realization as to the true nature of the "virtuous attachment" between Marie de Vionnet and Chad Newsome, collapses in chapter 30. Hoping to take a break from "the hugely distributed Paris of summer, alternately dazzling and dusky [...] and with shade and air in the flutter of awnings as wide as avenues" (377), Strether finds himself face to face with the two lovers who aimed to pursue their clandestine relationship in the Cheval Blanc. Finally, in *The Golden Bowl* the act of treason involving the partners of the Ververs is depicted to a relatively early moment in the narrative and consequently, the reader becomes involved, not with the act itself, but with its consequences. The relationship is eventually discovered by Maggie who, accordingly, induces the climax by breaking the golden bowl —witness of the mischievous act— into three pieces. This moment takes place within a time frame recorded between: "the middle of July for the "good long visit" at Fawns on which Maggie had obtained from her father that he should genially insist" (536) and "the September hush [which] was in full possession" (773).

In summary, all three novels trace their climatic moments of revelation as to the inner motifs of the action being analyzed by a central conscience, by the end of the summer. This moment is known in astrology as the autumnal equinox which

is a natural consequence of inclination of our axis to the plane of the ecliptic. The ecliptic defining the path of the sun in the sky crosses the celestial equator twice each year. It does so on or very close to March 21 and again on September 23, and at these times the periods of daylight and darkness are each 12 hours long as seen from any point on the Earth. These points and dates are known as the equinoxes —the vernal, or spring, and the autumnal, respectively. (Upgren 182)

Each one of the seasons has its own set of stars or constellations visible from the earth during that particular time of the year. Curiously enough, the five constellations visible from the Western hemisphere from the commencement of autumn are Perseus, Andromeda, Cepheus, Cassiopeia and Pegasus, all of which are obviously linked to the myth of Perseus.

Basically, the myth of Perseus departs from the well-known motif¹³ of the oracle that a given character's grandson will kill him, which causes that character to lock down his daughter first and once her pregnancy is discovered, to emancipate her. Thus, Perseus finds himself destitute with his mother Danaë and, willing to free her from Polydectes, an unwanted lover, he offers the villain the Gorgon's head in exchange for her mother's freedom. In order to accomplish his task, Perseus will fulfill a three-fold journey: first, he will search for the Graeae, then for the nymphs,

¹³ This motif is present in a number of Indo-European myths and legends such as the tragedy of Oedipus. In Celtic myth, we find a similar episode between one-eyed Balor and his daughter Ethlin, who will later conceive Lugh lamfhada, the Celtic Sun-god. In all cases, after having been forgiven, the descendant kills the initial character by accident, fulfilling thus the prophecy.



and later for the Gorgons. All three sets of sisters count three in number and each represents a different phase of the moon goddess which, symbolizing death, is the final destiny to be defeated by Perseus: “the New Moon is the white goddess of birth and growth; the Full Moon, the red goddess of love and battle; the Old Moon, the black goddess of death and divination” (Graves, *Greek* 61). Incidentally, Perseus ends up with four gifts:¹⁴ Hades’ helmet of invisibility, a pair of winged sandals, a magic bag and Hermes *harpe* to which Athena adds her shield to be used as a mirror (Vernant 179). This narrative summarizes most of the symbols earlier found in James’s fiction now newly associated to the idea of the otherworld, since “they [the winged Gorgons] are the Triple Goddess again who, by wearing these ritual masks, is protecting him from profane eyes. She is also known on the earth holding out her mirror with a Gorgon’s face reflected in it, to protect him in his poetic flight” (Graves, *White* 246).

If we rely solely on the myth of Perseus, however, two relevant symbols—lion and labyrinth—are left out of the picture. It would be fruitful to remember that Perseus doesn’t confront the dangers of the Cretan labyrinth of Cnossos. Theseus is the hero who “goes naked, except for his lion-skin, to the centre of the maze, there kills the bull-headed monster of the double-axe—the labris from which the word “labyrinth” is derived—and returns safely” (Graves, *White* 102-103). Once Theseus, the offspring of a secret marriage between King Aegeus and Princess Aethra, comes of age, he starts a journey to seek for his father, arising thus the jealousy of his cousins who believed to be the only candidates to the Athenian throne. After an episode in which he kills Aegeus’s nephews, Theseus arises the fury of the Athenians who nominate him to take part in the yearly tribute of seven youths and seven maidens set loose in the labyrinth of the Minotaur. On his way to the island, however, “Theseus prayed to the Goddess Aphrodite. She listened to him and told her son Eros to make Ariadne, Minos’s daughter, fall in love with Theseus” (Graves, *Greek* 80). Ariadne would provide the hero with a ball of thread given her by Daedalus—the labyrinth architect—and useful information as to when should the hero kill the beast. This myth combines an interesting symbolism of the sun and the moon, together with a pattern of death and rebirth which partly pours into James’s fiction. Thus, the hero is invested with solar attributes, such as the lion skin, whereas his counterpart, Ariadne, is “[...] “Most Holy,” [her] alias [being] Alpheta—alpha and eta being the first and last letters of her name. She was the daughter, or younger self, of the ancient Cretan Moon Goddess, Parsiphaë” (Graves, *White* 93).

Once the context has been established, it is imperative to determine the points of contact between those two myths so as to ascertain James drawing from classical data during his creative process. Three features have been identified to con-

¹⁴ Three is the number of god, whereas four represents the four pillars of the universe and, by extension, the four directions, the four elements, the four winds, etc. It is the number of the material world.



nect the myth of Perseus to that of Theseus, the first two of them having been commented upon by Graves himself, who points to the winged sandals¹⁵ and to the crane symbolism extant in both narratives (Graves, *White* 248). A third feature derives from the fact that both, Theseus and Perseus, are easily assimilated to the trickster figure. In his article about the nature of deceit, David Applebaum gives straight consideration to Theseus who uses Ariadne's qualities to later defraud her: "Theseus, founder of Athens, courted Ariadne in order to gain her secret of the labyrinth and its prisoner, her half brother, the Minotaur. He promised marriage after their escape. Nonetheless, having murdered the Minotaur, he betrayed his ally and his word, fleeing Crete without her" (Applebaum 38). Notwithstanding this, Theseus's true trickster nature is easily investigated through his presence in a bull ceremony that in itself connects him to the androgynous nature of Hermes, a trickster figure largely studied by Dr. Jung under his updated name of Mercury. On the other hand, Hermes is similarly the heavenly sponsor of Perseus, the one who lends him his sharp sickle, shaped in the form of a crescent moon in honor to the moon goddess¹⁶ of whom the bull carrying the moon between his horns is a well-known symbol.

4. IMAGINATION OR DELUSION

The trickster is an archetype directly imported from the Paleolithic. This god of the in-between, associated to patriarchy and to polytheism and driven mostly by primary forces,¹⁷ stands as a transition figure that connects heaven and earth and challenges both: "[...] he is the archetype that attacks all archetypes. He is the character in myth who threatens to take the myth apart" (Hyde 14). Trickster, the opportunity seeker is also a "creator differentiating opposites" (Hyde 175) whose "final message is that order and chaos are not contradictory powers that one must constantly struggle with, but complementary aspects of the same reality. In the end, confusion and clarity, comedy and tragedy, truth and illusion are just two sides of the same coin, constantly spinning." (Eaton 14). Both trickster's insight duality and his capacity to deceive must be necessarily understood within the mythical context: "[...] one can see that most modern thieves and wanderers lack an important element of the trickster's world, his sacred context. If the ritual setting is missing, trickster is missing" (Hyde 13). In addition to all the previous features, perhaps the most relevant characteristic of the trickster is his escapism that, from mundane logic defines him as a psychopath. In Hyde's opinion:

¹⁵ There seems to be a pattern in Indo-European myth which attaches an unusual relevance to the feet, as shown in the myths of Talus, Baldr, Bran, Cheiron, Mopsus, Achilles, Llew Llaw Gyffes and Cinderella (Graves, *White* 345-347).

¹⁶ We have already pointed to the lunar symbolism of the Naiads, the Graeae, the Nymphs and the Gorgons.

¹⁷ Mostly hunger and lust (Hyde 8-37).



Certainly there are parallels. Psychopaths lie, cheat and steal. They are given to obscenity and, as one psychologist puts it, exhibit “a confusion of amatory and excretory functions.” [...]. While they are often smart, they have a sort of “rudderless intelligence,” responding to situations as they arise but unable to formulate any coherent, sustainable long-term plan. They are masters of the empty gesture, and have a glib facility with language, stripping words of the glue that normally connects them to feeling and morality. Finally, they lack both remorse and shame for the harm and hurt that trail behind them. One way or another, almost everything that can be said about psychopaths can also be said about tricksters. (Hyde 158)

Psychosis is a personality disorder that the patient experiences as a “rent in his relation with his world and [...] a disruption of his relation with himself” (Laing 15). The root of the problem is, for Jung, a breach in the transference of contents from the unconscious into the conscious state: “many psychoses illustrate the identification of the ego with the Self as the center of the universe or the supreme principle” (Edinger 13). As opposed to Freud, for Jung, the relationship between neurosis and psychosis doesn’t appear as a result of repression, but lies in the unconscious content which the neurotic learns to manage somehow whereas the psychotic becomes “overwhelmed by archetypal contents, such as hallucinations or delusions” (Mattoon 156). When this happens, the added factors of dissatisfaction, frustration and deprivation naturally propitiate an outbreak of neurosis, which is usually evinced by a number of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, phobia or obsession. All of these fit into a world of fantasy made aside from everyday reality, which satisfies more thoroughly the neurotic’s aspirations (Freud 206).

In such a context, myth provides James with the necessary framework to articulate the symbols related to the central image of the cage. All symbols associated to James’s cage evince that it stands for the divided self while the mythical context points to the trickster archetype: a psychological indicator that reality is deceiving and the individual must be on his guard. The novelty in James’s fiction, however, is that the character “colonizes” the cage for the first time and, because he so does, he may name it home:

Even the conviction that Charlotte was awaiting some chance really to test her trouble upon her lover’s wife left Maggie’s sense meanwhile open as to the sight of gilt wires and bruised wings, the spacious but suspended cage, the home of eternal unrest, of pacings, beatings, shakings, all so vain, into which the baffled consciousness helplessly resolved itself. The cage was the deluded condition and Maggie, as having known delusion —rather!— understood the nature of cages. She walked round Charlotte’s —cautiously and in a very wide circle; and when, inevitably, they had to communicate she felt herself, comparatively, outside, on the breast of nature, and saw her companion’s face as that of a prisoner looking through bars. So it was that through bars, bars richly guilt, but firmly, though discreetly planted. (James, *Golden* 645-46)

It is precisely of the sick soul what his brother, the great psychologist William James, was talking about in *The Principles of Psychology* when he stated that: “the worst alterations of the self come from present perversions of sensibility and im-



pulse which leave the past undisturbed, but induce the patient to think that the present me is an altogether new personage” (375). In yet another volume, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James goes further into this idea of the divided self and names two conditions in the neurotic mind, the first one being a “requisite receptivity” that increases environmental perception and, secondarily, a fear of evil as “a wrongness or vice in his essential nature, which no alteration of the environment, or any superficial rearrangement of the inner self, can cure” (151). Perhaps it should suffice to say that the Devil is another form of trickster.

Henry James’s literature is prolific in characters who suffer from irrational terrors. From George Winthermore, who fancies to be honored with Ashton Doyné’s “post-mortem” visit in “The Real Right Thing” (1899) to Spencer Brydon in “The Jolly Corner” (1908) who faces his double self, the history of mental delusion in James’s pages is wide and detailed. Perhaps the most explicit example towards the existence of neurosis is to be found in “The Great Good Place” (1900), an autobiographical piece telling the story of a nervous breakdown experienced by a writer in whom “the inner life woke up again, and it was the inner life, for people of his generation, victims of the modern madness, mere maniacal extension and motion, that was returning health” (James, *Short* 574). It is a well-known fact, that Henry James Sr. —the writer’s father— suffered a nervous crisis “beginning in May 1844 with a terrible vision, a feeling that a demon of some kind had appeared to him” (Moore 10). Yet, his son, William, haunted himself by suicidal tendencies, must have had in mind his own experience when writing about evil as associated to mental distortion in religious experience.

As a witness of his father’s ailment since his early childhood and as a devout reader of his brother’s writings in psychology, Henry James became an expert in the recognition and reproduction of mental disorder.¹⁸ What becomes most distressing, considering the cage is that the character is conscious —as the author who plays with him is conscious— that there is a distortion of reality and that self-realization engenders fear. In this context, the cage symbolizes a prison for this divided self as well as the natural protection against a menacing outer world which lies entirely in authorial hands. As the Post Office clerk expresses it in “In the Cage,” her position is “that of a young person spending, in framed and wired confinement, the life of a guinea-pig or a magpie” (James, *Short* 451); but this is a privileged guinea pig who perceives reality as from within Plato’s cave: “it floated to her through the bars of the cage that this at last was the high reality, the bristling truth that she had hitherto only patched up and eked out” (James, *Short* 457). The character, thus, sets herself between two antagonistic universes: “two parallel lines of her contacts in the cage and her contacts out of it.” (James, *Short* 476).

Within this cage, the emerging individuality may challenge —like the telegrapher does— the upheavals of his destiny, designed by a whimsical literary god.

¹⁸ Henry James was subject to severe nervous depression during his final years.

Outside the cage, the character is subject to confusion and distortion. Thus exposed, the characteristics of religious neurotics become an active quality, and hyperactive sensitivity in the guessing of appearances helps this type of character discover the evil that threatens him from the outside, be it adultery like in *The Golden Bowl*, a non-virtuous attachment that challenges tradition, like in *The Ambassadors*, or a pair of money-driven lovers like in *The Wings of the Dove*. The beauty of the caged creature doesn't lie in imprisonment "per se," but in its magnificent defense against the deceitful games of a writing trickster, whose message is that reality is deceiving and only the Cartesian conscience prevails. In essence, healthy or distempered, the human mind expands its cognitional deliverances in an effort to reach the surrounding reality and break its Modernist isolation.

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