LEON EDEL

HISTORY OF AN IMAGINATION

by Arnold Mann

"When you're doing the biography of a writer, you're really writing the history of an imagination."

—Leon Edel

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INTRODUCTION

In May of 1981, Leon Edel was working out of his home office atop Wilhelmina Rise overlooking Waikīkī. He was three years retired from his post as Citizen's Professor at the University of Hawai'i, where his wife, poet, novelist and biographer Marjorie Sinclair Edel, had also worked and recently retired.

Edel's dossier, at that time, included his five-volume *Life of Henry James*, Volumes II and III of which had earned him a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award; *Henry James: The Dramatic Years*, *The Complete Plays of Henry James*, *The Prefaces of Henry James*, *Henry James and H. G. Wells* (with Gordon Ray), *Willa Cather: A Critical Biography* (with E.K. Brown); *The Psychological Novel: 1900-1950*; *Literary Biography*, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, and *The Complete Tales of Henry James* (12 volumes).

In the years following this 1981 interview, Edel would produce *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams: Experiments in Literary Psychology*; a two-volume version of his James biography, and finally, at the urging of his publisher, a single volume version which he would refer to as "an editing job," albeit a challenging one. Other editing jobs would include *The Letters of Henry James* (four volumes), *A Bibliography of Henry James*, *The Diary of Alice James*, *The Complete Notebooks*, and four volumes of Edmund Wilson's *Notebooks and Diaries*.

His only autobiographical work, *The Visitable Past: A Wartime Memoir*, would be published posthumously by the University of Hawai'i Press, three years after his death in September of 1997, at the age of 89.

Edel's passing, like that of James, was felt in both the Old and New Worlds.

Richard Garnett, writing in Britain's *Independent*, declared Edel "the foremost Jamesian scholar of his age," who "played an important part in rescuing the novelist from the indifference of British readers and the hostility of those American critics who believed that James had betrayed his birthright in turning his back on his native land and in taking the British Nationality."

Dan Fogel, writing in *The Henry James Review*: "No student of Henry James will agree with Leon Edel on every point. Some of us differ with him very sharply on fundamental issues in

interpretation of James's life and work. Yet all of us are so deeply in his debt that we are barely conscious most of the time of how much our fundamental knowledge of our subject, as pervasive for the student of James as the air we breathe, has been derived from Leon Edel's lifelong labors."

He has been likened to The Master himself, in the intensity of his work habits and his meticulousness. And yet, despite a remarkably precocious beginning, Edel would come to see himself as a "late starter" who spent "years floundering" in professional and psychological limbo.

It has been suggested that Leon Edel was not a true member of the American academic community, having done his doctoral work in Paris at the Sorbonne, and because he entered academia late in his career (Pierre A. Walker, "Leon Edel and the Policing of the Henry James Letters," *The Henry James Review*; 21.3 [2000]). Many of his early years, before and after his initial work on James at McGill University and the Sorbonne, were spent as a journalist, working for various news organizations in Canada, the U.S. and Europe, and as a psychological warfare officer in the field during World War II.

His manner was best described by Louis Auchincloss. He was "quite short," Auchincloss told *The New York Times* at the time of Edel's death, "and yet you noticed him" because of "the intensity of his gaze….He was quiet, witty and

usually kind, but he could be crushing when he encountered gross error or pretensions in his field. He was always willing to listen, but he did not suffer fools gladly. He thought life was too short for that."

A more amusing take on Edel comes from the equally perceptive Geoffrey Hellman, who described him in his 1971 *New Yorker* profile as "a twinkling-eyed, exuberantly mustached, merry-faced, pussycat-faced, soft-spoken, friendly, affable, outgoing, observant, patient, tenacious, enthusiastic, ceremonious, intellectually severe, conversationally easy going; highly motivated, literarily territorial, psychologically oriented writer turned English professor."

Territorial, yes. Many have taken issue with Edel's "policing" of the James archives—using his relationship with the James family, and later the public relations group representing the James estate, to commandeer James's letters and other archival materials for his own purposes. Michael Anesko devoted an entire chapter of his book, *Monoploizing the Master: Henry James and the Politics of Literary Scholarship*, to Edel ("The Legend of the Bastard"). Edel's "policing," it has been said, resulted in a "sanitized" interpretation of James, who may not have been as asexual as Edel portrayed him when he was writing his *Life* during the '50s and '60s, before the sexual revolution took place. Edel would later discuss

James's homoerotic writings in his 1985 one-volume version of the biography.

So who was Leon Edel and what drove him?

That is the substance of this interview in which the biographer and literary critic with a penchant for turning the Freudian/Ericksonian lens on his literary subjects to reveal the "personal myths" that drove them to write what they wrote, now turns the lens inward, on himself and his "method."

In the pages that follow, Leon Edel tells his own story, from his early years growing up the son of Russian immigrants on the Canadian frontier, and the family dynamic that shaped him and enabled him to stake out his territory as he found his way into Henry James scholarship. We see the young scholar drawn to the Montreal Group at McGill, alongside fellow Modernists A. M. Klein, F. R. Scott and A. J. M Smith, then to France, where his mentor base expanded to include E. K. Brown and Louis Rapkine, and his investigations into James's dramatic years got him invited into the European drawing rooms of Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, Edith Wharton and others.

And his two encounters with James Joyce.

All of this is colorfully described by the seasoned scholar looking back. He was barely into his 20's at the time.

But it was Edel's early studies in Freudian psychology, his week in Austria with Alfred Adler, and the psychotherapeutic inward turning

that cured him of his own decades-long writer's block, that would solidify his interest and lay out his course as a pioneer in literary psychology.

Or as a "frontiersman," as Edel wrote, describing his early interest in James Joyce, before being steered by his McGill professor towards Henry James, much to James's good fortune. It was that Freudian slip of the pen that provided the window into the biographer's own personal myth during the course of our interview.

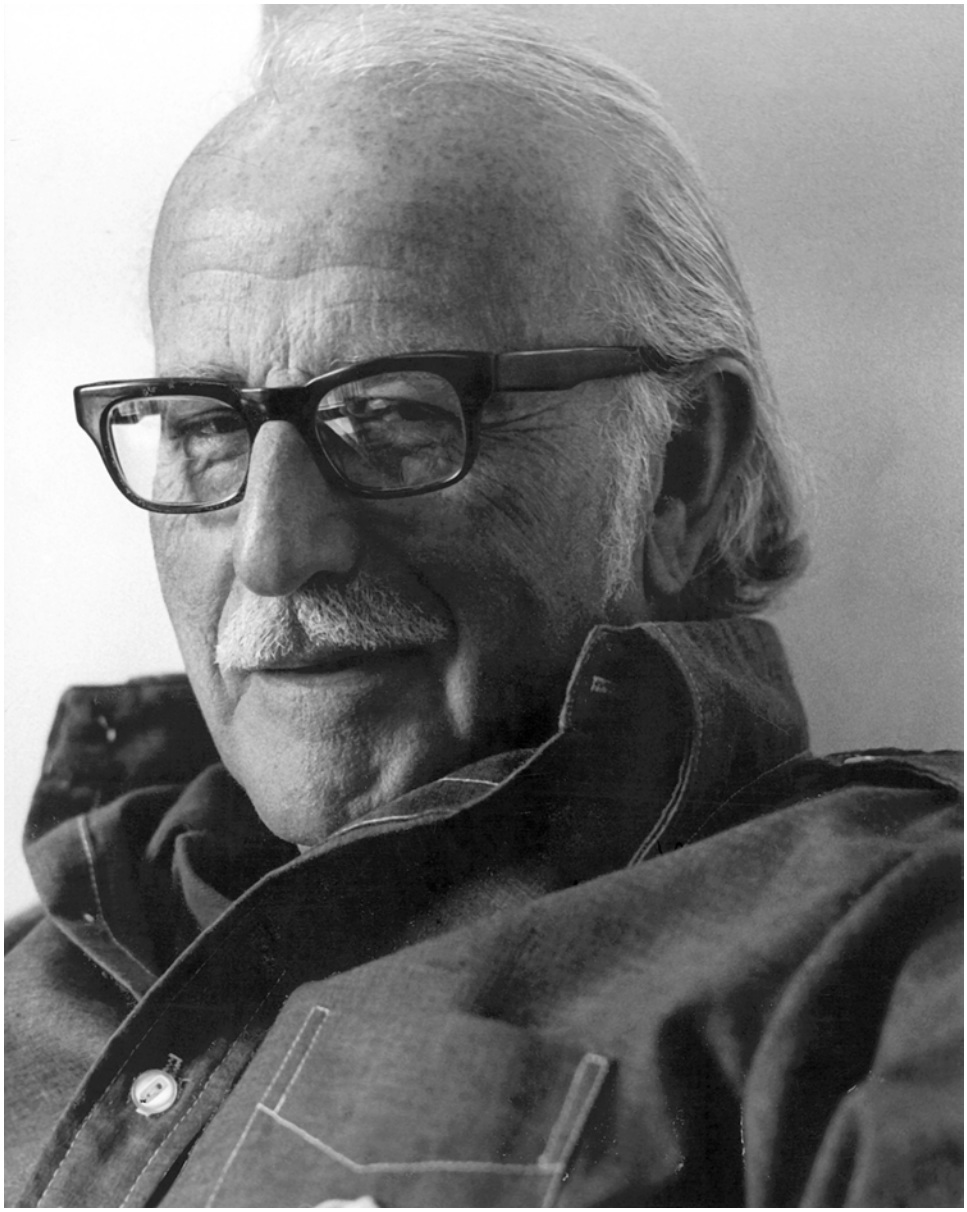
The interview took place over six days in May of 1981.

Hanging just inside the doorway of his home office as we sat down was a small oil painting by Bloomsbury artist Duncan Grant.

"Grant painted that when he was 90," Edel said in his characteristic soft, at times whispering tone. "I keep it there to remind myself that a man can be productive at 90."

He would miss that mark himself by a mere four days.

And so we began.



LEON EDEL

HONOLULU, MAY 1981

Can we take a visual trip around the room?

Over the years, what I have retained is my working library, the books that I need or think I will still need.

These four shelves here are my own productions. There are three more shelves upstairs. So there are seven shelves of Leon Edel around.

Above that are my Edmund Wilsons, most of them signed by him.

Above that are all the books about Henry James. There was a time, in the 30s, when there were five, maybe ten books on James, not including my two. I'm not up to date. There may be ten or twenty more. Some are signed by the authors. It's amazing how many of them were ephemeral. A lot of them are just PhD theses dressed up as books.

There's my biography section. A lot of them I've reviewed. They're biographies of people I'm interested in. I haven't read them all, but I refer to them quite often.

What are some of the more noteworthy ones, in your own mind?

There are a lot of what I call good workman-like biographies. My taste in biography is very special. I'm perfectly happy with a factual biography, the kind that Auchincloss described, where the writer has gathered the facts and just given them all to the reader. That's very useful to me. I, of course, look at those facts and start interpreting them right away.

Interpretive biographies are the ones I like best. For instance, there's one up there, *Edward VIII* by Donaldson [*Edward VIII*, by Frances Lonsdale Donaldson; Lippincott, 1975]. That's a good biography. I have over there some biographies by Lord David Cecil. They're very good. I admire Lytton Strachey. I know he took great liberties as a biographer, but I still admire what we can learn from him.

That E. M. Forster is very good, although I wish there had been more interpretation. P. N. Furbank wrote that. [*E. M. Forster: A Life*, by P. N. Furbank: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978].

Then there are a lot of the old-fashioned ones. That three-volume life of Byron is interesting for the rich material in it [*Byron: A Biography*, by Leslie Alexis Marchand; Alfred A. Knopf, 1957]. Byron's a fascinating figure. I have the Proust, which I think is very fine [*Marcel Proust, A Life*, by Jean-Yves Tadie, translated by Euan Cameron: Viking, First American Edition, 1970]. I have very strong reservations about Ellmann's

Joyce, because he has made Joyce into a kind of hero and is constantly overlooking the problems Joyce had. He regards Joyce's problems as eccentricities. They're much more than that. [*James Joyce*, by Richard Ellmann; Oxford University Press, 1959]

That takes care of that lot.

There's that very famous popular biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen. I once visited her house. It was a big house in Philadelphia. She had a separate room for every biography she'd ever written. I've got a separate section of shelves.

But you have your archive in the background.

Oh yes. There, for instance, is my Bloomsbury stuff.

In that first set of shelves.

That's right. The second set are a lot of reference books that I use. Over there I've got the residue of what was once a fine James Library. A lot of it I never brought to Hawai'i. It went to the University of Virginia.

And there's my Joyce collection, over in that corner, above the encyclopedia. The middle section is just miscellaneous fiction.

This James portrait…

That's the portrait of Henry James by his cousin, Ellen "Bay" Emmet. Bay was her

nickname. I have a complete account of that in *The Master*.

It was given to you by...
John James.

And underneath that portrait you found…
The other one, which is over there. I'm limited in my wall space for hanging pictures here.

And over there…
Miscellaneous fiction.

Then down below there I have my Canadiana. I have a separate literary life in Canada. I knew a whole literary generation that I grew up with. I have all their books, presentation copies from them, correspondence with them. I go to Canada two or three times a year. I lecture there. I've written enough essays on Canadian literature to fill a whole book.

These are all part of my Canadian writings. I have more in this drawer here.

This summer I'm going to write three essays on Canadians—two obituaries on old friends of mine who died recently and one preface to a biography of a Canadian poet.

So the Canadiana is quite important. It's a separate part of my library.

Over here is my complete set of books by people who crossed Henry James's path and wrote their memoirs, or letters—people who figured in his life. I collected those for a long

time and decided to keep them because they're very useful references. Sometimes just the indexes.

On those two shelves, through these miscellaneous volumes, I've got access to that part of the Victorian age that Henry James lived in.

Over here are books on the theory of biography. Some books on bibliography and book collecting.

Some of my French interests are over here.

It's a very esoteric library. There's very little philosophy in it. There's no economics in it, except Maynard Keynes.

It's a very humanistic library.

You can call it that if you want. It's *belles-lettres*. It's very *belles-lettres*.

You have three desks in here right now.

This is the desk I work at most of the time. You see that manuscript pile there? Those are the letters of Henry James. Out of those I will select *Volume IV*. I'm working on it now at odd moments. *Volume III* came out last fall.

You have other projects. There's essays in literary psychology.

That's my own work.

And your memoirs?

I'm going to start that as soon as these essays are finished. And in my office at the University, the *Edmund Wilson Volume III*.

So I have three books going now at the same time.

You're keeping busy.

Last year I brought out two books. One Wilson volume and one James volume. The year before that I brought out my *Bloomsbury* [*Bloomsbury: A House of Lions,* Lippincott, *1979*]. Next year I'm going to bring out my book on *Stuff of Sleep and Dreams* [*Stuff of Sleep and Dreams, Experiments in Literary Psychology,* Harper & Row, 1982]. By the time it comes out, the James *Letters* should be ready, or else the Wilson will be ready. I'm a kind of factory still.

How do you begin your day? Do you still go for an early morning swim?

No, my swim is always before lunch. First comes the work. An early breakfast, then I settle down for two or three precious hours. Those are the only hours that I can really do writing. Later on in the day I can do footnotes, I can work on James's letters, I can read books for review. But the really precious work starts between 7:30 and 8:30.

There was a time when I was in New York, at New York University, when I used to work nights until three or four in the morning. Then there was a period later on, when I was writing

The Master, for instance, which I wrote very quickly. I would lay out the material in the evening and spend the whole evening looking at the material. Then in the morning I would write without looking at anything. I was really distilling my work. That's a marvelous way to work.

Unfortunately, that ended when I reached the age of 69 or 70. I started looking at the work in the evening and discovered that I didn't remember it in the morning. Your memory starts getting shaky, you know. Now it's gotten so that I don't remember when I'm going from one room to the other—trifling things. When I sit here and work, though, I remember. For instance, I've just finished a long essay for a volume on Joyce. It was astonishing how much of that I remembered.

So memory's a queer thing. It gets spaced out a little when you reach 69 or 70. Any elderly person will tell you that. I had to reorganize my methods of writing. I didn't have to take as many notes as I do now.

You never had use of a tape recorder?

I never used a tape recorder. I belong to the pre-tape recorder era. A lot of my work was done in the pre-xerox era. In recent years, I went to England, to the British Museum, and I'd spend three days, four days, looking at stuff and just order xerox copies and go home. In the old days, I used to go to the British Museum and I'd sit there for four or five weeks, or six weeks, pay a

hotel bill in the neighborhood. Hotels in Bloomsbury weren't that expensive. And every day I'd go to the British Museum and do my work and take notes. You could get photostats in those days, but they were so bulky. You just photostatted the essential.

The new generation has it made technologically.

If you can synthesize the huge amount of material that's at your disposal.

That's the trouble. You come home loaded with tapes and then you have to sit down and listen to the tapes. So the old way of taking notes in the library, which would have to serve you, had some merit. You were doing the work then, and you didn't have to do it over.

Actually, an entire mental process has been replaced by a machine.

Yes.

But the tape recorder does free you up for asking questions. You don't have to write at the same time.

And you get the exact words. If in those days we could have used a tape recorder, I would love to have a tape of my conversation with Bernard Shaw.

Is Marjorie involved in any projects right now?

She has a book that is being edited. It should be a very important book. It's an anthology of Polynesian poetry. She's written a very good preface for it. If there were interest, it could be like the *Oxford Books of English Verse*. This would be the *Oxford Book of Polynesian Verse*. It's being published by the University of Hawai'i Press. This is the oral literature. No one has ever made an anthology of that, as far as I know.

You're still doing lecture tours, aren't you?

I go when I can put together a group of lectures so that I don't have to do too much flying. It's very rare for me to fly to the mainland to give just one lecture. I did that in April because it was very special. It was a memorial lecture for Joseph Warren Beach, a great Jamesian who died many years ago. Every year they have a memorial lecture in Minneapolis at the University, and this year I was invited to give it. I felt that I wanted to do that. It was a five-day project. I flew out one day—it's a long flight—rested the next day, gave the lecture the following day, fraternized with the faculty for a day and then flew back.

But that's very rare.

Last February, when I went to New York to receive the National Arts Club's Gold Medal, I was able to combine that with a lecture in Vancouver, and from New York I was able to fill

an engagement I had promised in Ft. Worth, where I spent three days visiting classes.

You have a number of Gold Medals.

I've got two medals that I value very much. The one I value above all others was given to me by the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

That was for creative writing in biography.

That's right. Malcolm Crowley made the presentation.

And now the National Arts Club Gold Medal for Literature.

Which they give periodically. Quite a distinguished roster of predecessors. Like Isaac Singer, Robert Penn Warren, and so on.

I'm now planning a trip in the fall to Ohio. I'm invited to give a reading from the biography at Wesleyan.

You selected the passage yourself?

Oh, yes. The way in which poets read their works. It's a prose evening.

That's a significant event.

It's the first time I've been asked to give a reading, so I couldn't resist it. Then it coincided with an invitation to participate in the Bloomsbury symposium. All the big Bloomsbury people are going to be there. Quentin Bell is coming over from England for it, and various

others. [Michael] Holroyd will be there—the Lytton Strachey man. That will be at the Metropolitan Museum.

But I don't go to conferences very much anymore. They're tiring. You talk yourself out. It's a great drain on your energy. I think I will probably cut down on this aspect of my activity more and more. Except that I'll do other types of traveling, like the month I spent in Italy last fall.

THE EARLY YEARS

Let's go back to the beginning. You were raised on what you have referred to as the "Canadian frontier."

My father was a businessman most of his life. He had a rather limited education. He was an immigrant.

Simon Edel. He was from Russia.

He came over just after the turn of the century. I remember him telling me he remembered being in Chicago. He worked with a labor gang. He described the muddy streets. He described a Chicago that sounded almost like a village.

How old was he when he came over?

He'd just turned into his 20's, I think. Perhaps even younger. He left my future mother behind. He was already in love with her. The idea was, she'd come over and they'd get married as soon as he could find some kind of steady work. The way it was—I think it's true of the Chinese here—you relied upon people from your home town. There were some people from his home town in Pittsburgh. So he finally ended up in Pittsburgh. He had no skills of any kind. He got

himself a regular job in a pants cleaning and pressing establishment. I think he was earning eight dollars a week. That was considered a decent salary. It enabled him to rent two rooms and furnish them, and write to Mother, "Come over and let's get married."

Your mother, Fanny, was an educated woman.

Yes. She spoke two or three languages. She had a very modern father. He lived in the Ukraine, in this little town where my father and mother met. They were children together. He was manager of an old-fashioned flour mill and used to go on horseback all over Europe, back in the 19th Century, to buy crops. He'd go to Romania. With this travel, and so on, he insisted that she not be brought up in ignorance, the way most girls were in those days. She knew Polish, she knew Russian very well. She'd learned Hebrew. She could read the Bible.

She ended up being a 1905 vintage socialist. She believed in Darwin, not in religion, so she was in all kinds of religious arguments. And she'd always quote passages from the Bible. I heard her doing that to my grandmother, who was very religious.

Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

My mother wouldn't hear of it, because she didn't believe in it. She was anti-orthodox, anti-religious. That didn't mean that she wasn't

interested in nationalistic things. She read a great deal. She mastered English considerably. When I was growing up, she was reading George Eliot, she was reading Bernard Shaw. Those were the books I used to see around the house. In later years, she read only English.

We were brought up in a quite strict way.

So you started out in Pittsburgh.

Things went very badly for Dad in Pennsylvania.

Though he did well at first.

He was enterprising. He went off to a coal mining town near Pittsburgh called Tar Station. Coal was a great industry then. He established a retail store and was doing very well. In those days, the mine owner owned the stores. The workers got deeper and deeper into debt to the company, so there was always room for an independent. My father was doing very well as an independent. People would rather deal with him than get entangled with these company stores.

He was a bit of an easy touch, though. People ran up debts with him.

He was pretty easy on them. I remember Mother being very sharp with him about that sort of thing. He was too gentle for that rough and tumble world. He made a lot of mistakes and wound up losing a lot of money.

Mother used to speak of Tar Station with horror. There was so much violence. Father himself carried a pistol during that period. An old fashioned little handgun. No bullets, though. He may have had bullets, but they weren't around the house.

He was a man with no aggression in him. Fanny had a lot of aggression in her.

Then, between 1907, when I was born, and 1910, there was a very long mining strike, and a strong recession, and my father found himself badly stranded. That was when he got a letter from his older sister who had married and gone to live in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan was frontier. You could still get land. There were land grants.

Her husband had done very well. He had an enormous farm. He'd opened up a couple of stores in towns nearby. So my father was going to come and manage one of those stores for him.

Of course, Mother felt very strongly that Father shouldn't be an employee of his own sister's husband. She didn't see why Father, once he got out there, couldn't break away for himself. And Father did. They ended up in this very small one street town, knee deep in snow eight months of the year. The town was called Johnson. I can't even find it on the map today.

Fanny wasn't happy there.

She liked Pittsburgh. It was the early Canadian experience where he was not on his own feet. They really were out of touch. Think of it. No

television in those days, no radio. Nothing. You were in the snowbound prairie with maybe one train going through the town on any given day, if you were on the railroad. If you weren't on the railroad and had to take a train, you rode in a horse and sleigh to the nearest railroad town.

That was the make of it then.

By that time, I was three years old, my brother Abraham was a year and a half, and Mother suddenly said, "I'm going to take the kids and go back home to see my folks, and when you've got something really going, I'll come back."

That's where my first memories begin. I don't remember Pittsburgh much. I think I must have had memories in my dreams of Tar Station, the mining town.

What I do remember is Europe. I remember my grandparents.

* * *

My grandfather had quite a nice big house. Very comfortable to live in. He was a tall man with a long, white beard. By that time, he was retired. I remember singing Russian songs.

This was your mother's father, Mordecai.

Yes. My father was one of nine children. I never knew my father's father because he died many years before of cancer. He'd been a

bookish man. All my ancestors on the Edel side were scholarly. One had published grammars, and so on, way back in the late 18th Century.

So you were with your mother's family those ten months, in the Ukraine.

It's near the Ukraine. That town is now in Poland. I looked it up on the map. It's called Rovno. But it was Russian then. It was just outside the Ukraine. Ukrainian is a different language from Russian. Mother spoke Ukrainian. The farmers, the homesteaders were Ukrainians. Mother spoke their language.

My mother's father was a very independent man, if you compare him with all the other ghetto types—old country Jewish ghetto.

Did she speak of him often?

Oh yes. She worshipped him. He was a very shrewd man. I have a very dim memory of him from that year we spent in Europe.

And her mother?

She spoke very critically of her mother.

I have a very good picture in my mind of her mother. She was terribly orthodox, terribly devout, and spent her whole life doing good deeds while neglecting her own children. She only had two children. She'd had several, but only two had survived. She was always busy cooking meals, carrying them to some poor family in this other part of the town.

My mother felt very neglected. Her father was more attentive to her than her mother.

Your father's family were the scholars.

Yes. I was named Judah Leon Edel, after my grandfather. He had been named after his grandfather. It was always considered a particularly great virtue for a man who could write to make a manuscript of the five books of the Torah. Grandfather Judah Leon Edel performed this particular act. It's a marvelous thing he wrote, the sacred scroll on parchment. You're supposed to wash your hands after every line, I think.

My grandmother had it, and when she died, we were in the east, so it passed into the hands of my cousin, Dorothea. My father was rather miffed about it. Without consulting him, she went on a trip to Israel and gave it to the museum in Israel, where they have a big collection of these kinds of things.

So Judah Leon is there.

My great-great-grandfather wrote books under an assumed name. I don't know why. He was known as a great sage and writer. I don't think he was a rabbi.

There's a parallel here between your family and the James family, in how the names were passed from generation to generation.

The Jews have always done that. The thing that interested me is the choice of the name Edel. In

the 18th Century, the Jews in the European ghettos didn't have last names. They were always Isaac Ben Itzhak [Isaac, son of Itzhak]. Then there came a time when they started registering them for military service and so on. That's when you got a lot of ridiculous names. They would say, 'Your name's going to be Katzenelnbogen.' There are people named Katzenelnbogen today. Or they'd shorten it to Katz.

Now there's Edelstein, Edelman, Edelberg. We know the German word for Edel means noble. It also means gentle. My father was very gentle, and almost painfully honest. That was partly what was wrong, with his never succeeding in business. But it made him very popular.

That gentleness must have run in the family from these grandfathers of mine.

My grandfather, who I never knew, married a very rich and practical woman—my grandmother Dina. I don't know how my grandfather married this woman, my grandfather being very bookish. He had a tremendous library of ancient books. He died so young. He died at 40 of cancer of the throat.

My father grew up in that kind of a household where the children are pretty much neglected—the wealthy noblewoman who has enough servants. Grandfather was always off in his library.

Mother used to tell me these stories. Mother knew all about the Edels.

She said Grandfather was a very respected man in the town. My aunts gave themselves great airs on that account. My aunts were very simpleminded women. Three or four aunts came over with my grandmother. The ones that stayed home never got married.

One branch of the family went off to Israel. They've changed their name to the Hebrew word for noble—Adira, or Adara, I think.

My grandfather did earn money, but he would never take it. He was the wise man of Rovno. A couple would come for advice, family counseling, arbitration, and he would sit there and give them all his advice. And they'd say, 'We'll give you some money for this,' and he'd say no. Then they would go into the next room and Grandmother took it.

I knew Dina. My father brought her over from Russia after the war. She looked like Queen Victoria. She sat like Queen Victoria.

Your mother brought you and your brother back well before the war.

It was my mother's father who said, around 1912—I was four and a half, going on five—"There's an awful lot of talk about the war to come, Fanny. You better get back to America. I wouldn't stick around here."

He foresaw the war. So Mother took his advice.

By that time, Father had gone into his own business in Winnipeg. He had a corner store. We

arrived in Winnipeg, we got an apartment. We were all set up, and the family was reunited.

But that didn't work out either. So Father pushed away again, to another small town, but not as small as the one that Mother had fled from. He went to a town of about 3,000 with two railways—the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific.

* * *

Yorkton was a railroad junction.

The town had ten avenues, various cross streets, and a big high school. And two or three public schools. I was almost ready to go to school.

There Father briefly managed a business for someone else again, much to my mother's disapproval. But at the first opportunity he broke away and set up what really amounted to a trading post.

We lived in a comfortable house. The community around were Ukrainians. Doukhobors were a sect. And Tolstoyans, who Tolstoy had helped migrate to Canada. There were Mennonites, there were Poles. It was a polyglot community my mother could talk to.

I came out of Yorkton, out of that milieu—not a complete Canadian, certainly not an American, but a European. And really isolated.

You can't imagine how isolated we were, way up there in Canada. It's as if you're in the middle of nowhere. You take a train, ride 30 miles, 50 miles, and you come to three tinier Yorktons. You ride all the way to Winnipeg, which is a night's journey—six or eight hours—into a small city. Just a bigger Yorkton.

All these people with no communication with the outside world except the newspaper, which arrived on one or two trains that came through town. That was all they had. There they were, these people who had come from a teeming effervescent Europe. I went to school with Cockney children. I remember them to this day.

Their eyes were all turned towards Europe.

That is my answer as to why I chose Henry James. Europe was his focus—the American who was always concerned with Europe. I think that's terribly important, if you ask why I chose Henry James out of all the other writers when I finally came upon him. The great novelist writing about America in Europe. There is no other one.

I would attribute a great deal to this part of my life.

Our house in Yorkton had a big lot on one side and a garden on the other. My mother said, "That's your garden. You can plant anything you want in it. You're going to take care of it. You've got to do the weeding." Mother couldn't be bothered.

So I was given the job of running the vegetable garden. And I did. I took great pride in it. My

cucumbers got frozen one spring because you plant them and they come up in early May, and you get a frost in the middle of May in Saskatchewan.

When your cucumbers are frozen, you've had it.

How old were you?

I was eight, I guess.

All I needed was some sackcloth to cover the cucumbers until June 1. Every night I'd go out and cover the cucumbers. I produced a bumper crop and everybody praised them. We ate them fresh from the garden. I took pride in that. I always kept lettuce in production, and radishes. We had everything garden fresh. I planted onions and carrots, of course, and beets. Gardening was very important in my life.

Later Henry James would become your garden, and you would protect that territory.

I wouldn't disagree with that. With James I had, through a series of circumstances, got my garden plot. I had launched a rather big project. I was in the midst of it, and why should I let anyone in else get into it and do a hit and run article. I was protecting myself.

People would write in and want to publish certain James letters, and I got to the point where I could say to the James family, no I want those. I had other ways of handling it too.

I don't want to seem like a dog in the manger. I let Ilse Lind collaborate with me. [*Henry James, Parisian Sketches: Letters to The New York Tribune, 1875-1876*]. I started Dan Lawrence out. He and I did the bibliography of Henry James. Today he's very famous as the editor of Bernard Shaw's letters.

I wasn't just writing one book; I was writing a series of books. I think one of the reasons why each of my volumes had a lot of novelty—a lot of surprises for people—was because I protected myself.

There may be another metaphor at work here besides you protecting your garden. In writing about your early interest in Joyce, you refer to yourself as a frontiersman—as one of the first Joyce investigators. It's an interesting use of the word. Pioneer would seem the more appropriate term to describe one who is exploring new territory.

I may have used frontiersman to avoid the cliché pioneer.

Perhaps. At the same time, I can't help but think back to your early days on the Canadian frontier, as you have called it.

That's a good point. I can accept that.

In most cases, when you embarked on a new project, it was an unchartered territory.

That happens to have been the case. I was writing on Virginia Woolf in 1928. I was writing on Dorothy Richardson for my MA thesis at McGill. And Joyce and James. Academia at that stage was not even looking at these writers. In those days, the moderns were not being studied.

That's why your use of the word "frontiersman" interests me. It has the feel of what you would come to refer to in your investigations in literary psychology as the writer's "personal myth." I see you as a kind of literary frontiersman. And your use of the word to describe your early pioneering work in Joyce suggests that perhaps, somewhere in the back of your mind, this may be your personal myth at work, expressing itself. Here is a literary frontiersman who stakes out his territory—his homestead, if you will—and protects it as if it were sacred ground that should be taken very seriously, and treated with compassion.

I can accept that. And when we use the word compassion, that's my father. Father was a really compassionate man. I don't think I appreciated that as much as I should have.

It's difficult too, because compassion can be interpreted in terms of weakness. The compassionate man is sometimes the man who can't hold onto what he's got, who gets things

taken from him, as your father did in his early frontier days.

That was the way my mother interpreted it. I think that as a child I must have tended to accept Mother's view as against my father's. I think the child tends to side with the strong. There's no subtlety about it. If mother is strong, that's where you belong.

So here you are, the frontiersman protecting your settlement, the Henry James archive, but your gun has bullets.

Okay, I won't argue with your interpretation.

* * *

Your family actually prospered in Yorkton.

Father's store was very popular. They all came there because they loved to talk to my mother. Mother would take them to the back of the store. She was running a whole social circle. They'd want to know which doctor to see, what to do to avoid so many pregnancies. Mother was constantly giving advice.

Sort of like her scholar father-in-law.

At the same time, they discovered that Father didn't cheat on the butter. They'd bring in tubs of butter. He would weigh it right down to the last ounce and give them their groceries. My father

was the sort of man who could never say no if someone came in and asked for a five dollar contribution for something. Father gave him five dollars when one dollar would have been enough.

He had quite a flourishing business there, during my grade school years, then high school.

Our house was always filled with people. Mother belonged to all the different societies in the town, including the WCTU, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, though she wasn't a Christian. She also belonged to the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. She was a very outgoing person.

With no chosen religion.

She had no religion. Father was not devout, but he had more or less conformed to the little Jewish community there. They had a synagogue and father went on the High Holidays. Sometimes he took me along. They had a separate little schoolhouse, but I didn't have any of that.

So I was brought up. I knew that I was not a WASP, but it was WASP all around me. We lived opposite the Methodist Church. At the Anglican Church, down the way, there was an Englishman who used to pat me on the head and tell me that I should always know that I had a very remarkable father.

"You must always remember that," I remember him saying to me. "He looks you straight in the eye when you talk to him." Reverend Parrott was his name. Then he'd say,

"Anytime you want to use our skating rink, you should come." They had a skating rink attached to the church. I don't know whether he was trying to convert me or not, but I used the skating rink.

But to have the Reverend Parrot suddenly stop me, put his hand on me very affectionately and make me a speech about my father was something that registered, to this day. I suddenly got a picture of the esteem my father commanded.

That's what I mean by my having a kind of WASP background, which makes a great difference between myself and someone like Alfred Kazin or Malamud, or even Saul Bellow, who lived in Montreal. They were much more intimately involved with Judaism, whereas I was always outside. Mother had brought me up that way. I could see her ambivalence. She was not for assimilation. She used to say very proudly, "a Jewess like myself."

In that town, she was the token Jewess in a very WASP outpost.

She was very much respected. They had a people's forum. They used to bring speakers from Winnipeg. Mother sat on that committee with the chairman who was a well-known Scot with a big library. She used to come home with piles of books from his library. Father went to Winnipeg. He'd go into the bookstore and find out what's good for boys—boys' books.

Father was a short man. Would you like to see a photo of him? This is full of old photos I haven't looked at in years.

Here's my childhood album. There's myself, Father and my brother. That'll give you an idea what Father looked like.

Let's see if I can show you a picture of my mother during that same period. That would be in Yorkton. That whole album. There's Mother and Father together. Mother's on the right. She's quite a handsome woman. She was really short. She was five foot, I would say.

I was beginning to develop my own pictures. I had a Brownie camera.

There I am with my high school class. A couple of them are still living. I never kept in much contact with my Yorkton high school classmates.

So these were the forces that shaped you, during your early years on the Canadian frontier—the gentle, honest father, who carried a gun with no bullets, and the strong mother.

She was the mind force in the family. She had tremendous drive and enthusiasm. Father contributed something quite different. Father was the artistic force, in my opinion.

How so?

Out of all I remember, there was his complete neatness.

My father was artistic in his package wrapping. They didn't have bags in those days. They had a great big roll of brown paper at the end of the counter. Somebody would come in to the general store and want a pound of sugar and a pound of this and a pound of that. I watched my father make that parcel and wrap it with a neatness and precision, and just the right amount of string to tie the package.

When we were going on a trip somewhere, he'd look and say, "This can't be like that," and he'd repack everything. If there was a package to be sent away, Father wrapped it with the same neatness and precision. It was almost like a work of art. Whenever I had to send books off to anybody, I'd bring them around. In his old age, Dad would still make me the most beautiful little packages.

That was something I was indebted to my father for. I do that whenever I write an essay. Everything is carefully packaged.

That and his gentleness served him well.

I never heard a bad word against him. Ever.

We were very much a family unit, despite Mother's sharpness. Father worshipped her all his life. He always remembered her birthday and anniversaries. He would always buy some kind of present, which she would reject by saying, "Why do you spend money on me like that?"

Father stayed in that Yorkton store, which was in the Jewish section. Then he partnered with a

rather slick man named Kaye and they opened a big store on the main drag. Kaye and Edel General Store. That prospered even more. This was up through my high school years. Those were the years that we were very comfortable. We had a very nice house. It was remodeled. Mother insisted on a sleeping porch upstairs because of the summers. We could sleep out in the open air. That house was Mother's planning. It was in a very nice neighborhood.

Mother gave lots of parties. We entertained a great deal. My brother and I both had bicycles. Towards the end, Father bought a secondhand car, which I was burning to drive. A Model T. There were very few cars in Yorkton. This was during the first World War.

What happened then?

Father and Kaye didn't get along too well, and Father decided he'd get out. So Kaye took over the store and paid off Father. Mother said Father didn't get enough. And Father went into the insurance business around 1921.

How did you start developing artistically?

I was overstimulated artistically, I think.

There was music around the house, there were books. There was talk of literature. Mother's friends would come on Sundays and talk about Tolstoy. I used to read Tolstoy and Chekhov. This was sort of the cultural elite from Europe that had drifted onto the prairies. And they found

each other. Sundays were a great day. They'd come together and sing Russian songs and drink toasts. Some were socialists. None were communists. They hated the communists. What was happening in Russia was wrong. It wasn't the utopian bed!

I began first to dabble with water colors. I didn't go on with it, though. I don't think I was visual enough. Later on, I painted oils to teach myself to be visual.

At the age of eight or nine, Mother decided I ought to take music. She got my brother a piano, and I took to the violin. By that time I was pretty crazy about music. We didn't own a gramophone, but there was a dealer in town, a Russian, and I'd go to the store and he'd play any record I wanted to hear. He would talk to me about days in Moscow.

In no time at all I was playing in concerts all over the place. I was in demand. Suddenly hearing audiences applauding me was a marvelous sensation. At 13 or 14 everybody thought I was going to be the great musician, the great violinist in this town. But there again, I'd mastered one part of the violin, about three positions. There are seven positions on the violin. You have to master each position. I mastered three positions and never went beyond that. I could play nice sentimental music. People loved it. They applauded.

I still get letters from high school kids or people, asking, 'Why didn't you become a

musician? You were so good.' It was that musical part of my life. Of course, I'm a very auditory person. My ears take in things. That's why I was able to learn languages. But visually I'm not so good. I taught myself.

So eventually I came to writing.

You had your challenges there too.

I didn't have the deep rootedness of language of someone who has had the English language in his ears from the moment he was born. Mother meticulously wouldn't speak English. She spoke Yiddish to us. And I've forgotten all my Yiddish.

Later, I said to her, "Why did you do that?" I wish I'd learned English earlier. I learned my English when I started going to school, or mixing with the English in Yorkton. I learned Russian when I was in Russia, but I've forgotten it completely. I remember maybe three words.

She said, "I didn't want you to have an accent. I wasn't going to teach my accent."

It meant I got English at a later stage.

And you chose writing.

Violin playing could have been easier.

I couldn't write poetry. I wasn't brought up in a world of fantasy where I could write fiction either. So I moved into journalism. From the time I was in high school, I was writing all the time. Later I worked for the Montreal newspapers in the summer, when I was 17, 18. That's how I put myself through college.

You worked first at the Yorkton Press.

As an office boy. And I learned a little about printing there. They paid me ten dollars a week. You know what I did with that 40 dollars I earned that summer? One week, the great violists Mischa Elman and Fritz Kreisler were playing in Winnipeg. So I went down and stayed with my grandmother. I went to two concerts to hear these two great violinists.

Those were the two first concerts I attended. There was a lot of good music in Winnipeg. I had myself a feast in music. The family very wisely arranged for my brother to go hear Rachmaninoff. My brother Abraham lived in a different world. I lived in my own world. Henry James said that his older brother was always around the corner, in the next room. I hardly ever saw my younger brother. I couldn't tell you today what my brother did or how he spent his days in Yorkton. We played together sometimes. I was the gardener. My brother was the one who sat on the side. Everybody said, 'The little philosopher.' And he became a philosopher. He won a scholarship to Oxford. He became a classic scholar first, then later a philosopher. He has quite a reputation, you know. His books are over here.

The family's next move was to Montreal, where you and your brother would both attend McGill University.

I think the great mistake Father made was not sending my brother and me off to college and staying in Yorkton where he continued to know the community.

Selling insurance.

He did very well at it, in Yorkton. Everybody liked him. Everybody knew him, everybody trusted him. He sold a lot of insurance. Working for a big firm like New York Life, he could have gone on being an insurance agent. He did so well for them that they brought him east. He cased Toronto and he cased Montreal. He decided Montreal was much more European than Toronto.

Toronto, in those days, was very Protestant. It had no foreign element in it. Montreal had a fascinating combination of WASPS in the western part of the town, Jews and foreigners in the middle, and French Canadians on their side. The French Canadians and the English Canadians hardly ever talked to each other. And the Jews were in the middle with a great deal of antisemitism on the part of the French Catholics. So the Jews, for purposes of the Quebec government, were considered Protestants. There were 100,000 of them in Montreal. But we didn't live in that ghetto. Mother found a nice quiet street right near the University, a nice apartment.

So your mother went along with the Montreal move.

If we were going to a city, Mother wanted it to be as big a city as possible. She wanted intellectual company. She wanted contacts of that kind. She belonged to The Daughters of the Empire, the WCTU, and a dozen other things. There was a Jewish Ladies Aid Society, the WASP charities, and so on. The only thing she didn't take part in were church things, which were religious. But she certainly was known in the town and called upon by all kinds of outfits and always participated. She liked Montreal.

And you and your brother entered McGill.

I was 16, my brother was 14. My brother should have been given two years rest. Even at 16, I could have had two years rest. But who thought about it then? It was time to go to college. So my brother entered college at 14. They looked at him rather surprisingly. He arrived still wearing knee pants. The dean said to him, "Get out of those."

That first year was tight.

When we got to Montreal from Yorkton, we didn't have much money. Father had returned the house to the people who had the mortgage. We just sold the contents. By the time we were settled in Montreal, he'd practically run out of all the money. The tuition was $100 for each of us. So he needed $200. That was a lot of money in

those days. Father borrowed the money and we went to McGill. The second year, I worked all summer on the local paper and earned my own $100.

And your father eventually found his way.

He was one of these people who always believed that somehow or other things would work out. Okay, so we're dead broke. Things will work out. He was an eternal optimist. That used to eat mother up. She wanted to know where the money was coming from, what they were going to do.

He couldn't sell insurance to strangers, so he became like Willy Loman. He became a salesman for a clothing house. He started traveling, in Ontario more than in Quebec. In Quebec you had to know French and Father didn't know French. He drove to all the little towns and over the years he got to know all the families, with the same kind of charisma that he had in Yorkton. Everybody looked forward to his coming. And there were periods when he did very well.

He felt that he had done very well, considering. He had made his way from being a day worker on the railroad and was able to establish himself and raise his children. He always used to say, "We want the best for you. We want you to have a better life than we've had." That was very common among all Jewish families.

And your mother respected that.

She certainly knew that she was going to get a rather mild-mannered man. And she liked him for those qualities. After Father's death—he died of a series of heart attacks, in 1956—Mother would never allow any critical word to be said about Father. I would say, "Father had a very impractical side," and she would say, "Your father was a very good man."

So in the end, Mother was saying about him exactly what the Anglican Clergyman would say. And it was Mother who led the traditional "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust" prayer, in Hebrew, at Dad's funeral service, when the man at the Long Island Jewish Cemetery skipped over it. "Why is he skipping this?" she said. She wasn't religious, but she was going to do the right thing by Dad. She felt the traditional Hebrew should be spoken over the grave. I was beside her. I remember that very vividly.

She was a very dutiful and devoted wife.

She respected Father. She was terribly critical of him, but she respected him.

* * *

You and your brother found your way at McGill.

There I was, 16 years old, entering McGill. Naturally, I drifted to the *McGill Daily*. By the second year, I'd fallen in with a writing group.

This was the Montreal Group that launched the Modernist movement in Canadian prose and poetry.

They were starting *The McGill Fortnightly Review* and they invited me to be the managing editor. I was the youngest. All of them have become famous. F. R. Scott was in it. A. J. M. Smith was in it. That was where I really learned all about literature.

Smith was a very fine poet. And Allan Latham was very good on German Literature and the trade unions. I fell into the right crowd. My brother majored in the Classics. He learned his Greek. Then he went to Oxford. He was on par with all the English boys. He had as much Greek as they did. And he made a *first* at Oxford [First Class Honours], which is very rare—not easy to make.

In this literary group, I was directed towards the Moderns. Smith first gave me T. S. Eliot to read. I remember sitting in Shakespeare, learning Shakespeare. Our old professor was a windbag. And Smith laid *Prufrock* in front of me. He'd gotten it from a professor who had come over from London who was teaching at McGill.

This was your introduction to what you refer to as the inward turning artist.

The inward turning. That was my own interest. I was a junior in 1926 when I got hold of a copy of *Ulysses*, which was a banned book. I read it. Stream of consciousness, I thought, this is marvelous stuff. My professor, who was in charge of the novel, sent me to an older man to discuss this, "because I'm not sure we can get away with a living writer." Joyce was only 40 years old then.

I was staking out ground. I was attracted to Joyce. I'd not yet heard the name Henry James.

But Joyce was stream of consciousness and that was out.

Then this other professor, George Latham, said, "I've been reading these writers. Have you read Virginia Woolf?"

I said, "I've read *Mrs. Dalloway*." I belonged to the University Book Club, where the new books were, and I'd seen *Mrs. Dalloway* on the shelf there.

He said, "I think all of these moderns are influenced by Henry James. That's my theory." Latham was an elderly man who'd been at Harvard. He was a marvelous, amiable and very nice professor. I liked him very much. The professor I was closest to was a man named Dr. [Howard] Files. He was also a Harvard man. He was at Harvard when Frederic March was there.

Those were the two Harvard Professors that I liked. They were Americans, but settled in Canada.

Latham was the one who said, "You can write your dissertation on Henry James, and then bring in a chapter on Joyce. That's allowed. And a chapter on Virginia Woolf, if you want, if you like her well enough."

That's all he said to me.

I went down to the library to the greatest event in my life. Having grown up in Yorkton, where there was no library, I could only read what was around. I'd read all of Dickens. I'd read *The Boy's Own Annual*, which was published by the Anglicans, teaching the young all the virtues. There were very good adventure stories, like *The Quest for the Holy Grail*. Everything was noble and pure.

I feasted on that kind of stuff. I also had Mark Twain.

I read the Bible in Yorkton. I reached a stage when I was trying to find out what sex was all about. I used to read the Bible with all the copulation…'and he went in unto her'…'and then he knew her.'

That was my reading as a boy. And I read every newspaper that came in. Sports pages. Everything. Nowadays I don't even look at the sports pages.

So when I got to McGill and we were allowed into the stacks, in the second year, it was like walking into a treasure cave. I remember walking

up and down those stacks, pulling this book down, pulling that book down. It wasn't like a modern library. There was just a great big work table at the end of each section. I piled these books there and sat. Nibbled at this one, nibbled at that one. Suddenly, I started reading Ibsen. There was a whole set of Ibsen there.

So the moment my professor said Henry James, I went into the stacks and there were 35 volumes of Henry James. Beautiful. Newly printed. This was the post *New York Edition* that MacMillan had published.

I started pulling them down, looking at them. *The Wings of the Dove* sounded lovely. Biblical. I was turned loose during the next three years. That was when I caught up on my reading, though you never really catch up when you lose those good reading years.

In my junior year, I suddenly discovered that the way to pass examinations was to just go to the library, pull down books and read. And I'd come up with more general knowledge. I made first class honors in my senior year, but I made thirds and seconds before. They averaged it out, so I came out with second class honors.

But that wasn't the point. The point was, that was the great liberation for me there. Books were exciting. Books were something I was really deprived of in childhood. I couldn't have enough. I read everything there was. And ever since then I've surrounded myself with books.

They've got a library in Yorkton now. It's in an old store on the main street, but at least they've got a town library now.

It was then, reading Henry James, that I came upon these two big volumes of his letters. I loved his letters. And I suddenly began to read about his plays. It was at some point during the next year that it was agreed that my dissertation would be called: *Henry James and Some Recent Psychological Fiction*, with a big section on James, then a chapter on Joyce, a chapter on Virginia Woolf, and a chapter on Catherine Mansfield.

That dissertation was a foreshadowing. I was going in a very straight line.

So I ended up getting my M.A. at McGill and writing *Henry James and Some Recent Psychological Fiction*.

That dissertation was your foray into literary psychology.

The only psychology I read for that was William James's chapter on the stream of consciousness. The name Freud didn't mean anything to me at that stage. I wanted to write more about the stream of consciousness in Joyce. There wasn't very much on Joyce. At that time there was one book—*James Joyce: His First Forty Years* [Herbert S. Gorman], telling the world about *Ulysses*. Because *Ulysses* was a banned book. And reading this quickie, which is

not a bad book—I think Joyce helped him write it—that's what excited me.

That was the starting point. Then I suddenly got to James. And once I finished that thesis on James, I did nothing more with him for a long time. I dropped him, until I decided to do my thesis at the Sorbonne. I found there too they were very happy to have a thesis on James, on the plays.

THE PARIS YEARS

It was Prohibition that got you to Paris.

That was a period in Canadian American relations when Prohibition brought thousands of Americans to Montreal to have a good drink every weekend. And it brought thousands of dollars into the treasury of the province of Quebec. Each province decided on its own liquor laws. Some provinces followed the United States example and went dry. Quebec never went dry. The government made tremendous money during Prohibition because it was perfectly legal to drink in Montreal. So they set up a dozen scholarships for study abroad, and I applied for one of those and got it. It was three years renewable. I was working for the *Montreal Star* [an English language newspaper] when I applied. I had an interest in studying French journalism. There were no hard and fast rules, you had to designate a place. So I designated Paris.

It was a hundred dollars a month, which was a lot of money in Paris in those days. $1,200 a year.

So I took a leave from the *Montreal Star*. It was agreed that I could write as I pleased [in Paris], but they wanted theater, music and for me to keep my eye on Canadians. And they paid me eight dollars a column. I would write about four columns a month. So I had an income of $132 a month instead of $100.

That extra money enabled me to travel all over Europe.

The franc was 4 cents. You could easily live on a dollar a day in Paris. I applied and was given residence in the House of Canadian Students in Paris. It was very cheap and comfortable. We got good breakfasts. It came to about eight dollars a month—two dollars a week.

I studied journalism. There were no schools of journalism in France. All I did was sit around and talk to the foreign correspondents. Canadians. I got to know them. I went to the Canadian legation—now an embassy—every week and got to know the "PR" there. He'd tell me which Canadians had been in Paris and what they were doing. So I could write a little gossip column. Nothing personal. Just what the Canadians were doing in Paris.

And when there was a new interesting play in Paris, I would go and write it up. Because the *Montreal Star* liked to show to the French population that it was paying attention to French culture.

Quebec today is still preponderantly French. You can't be a reporter in Montreal without knowing French. So I was using French for my work. I was not very good then. I improved it a great deal in Paris.

The music editor said I could write a music column anytime I wanted, and I used to go to the big concerts in Paris. Every great musician in the world in those days wanted to give a concert in Paris just to be able to say that he had been there. It

was tremendous in those days. You could go hear Stravinsky performing his new works. I wrote a lot about Stravinsky. Who was talking about Stravinsky back then, the way we talked about him later? I ran several articles on Stravinsky in Montreal. I kept an eye if a Canadian singer came to Paris to give a concert. There was one Canadian singer who was singing at the Paris Opera and I went to the opera and covered it.

In other words, I kept up my journey. And I didn't try too hard to study at that stage.

It wasn't until I went abroad that I happened to meet up with this fellow from Toronto who was a charming person and whom I took a great liking to. And we took to knocking around together. He was the man whose Willa Cather biography I later finished.

That would be E. K. Brown.

Brown and I became very good friends. Brown was a trained academic. He knew Italian, French, he'd read Dante in the original. He wasn't one of those musty scholars by any means. He was very much alive and alert and very well liked.

He would say to me, "What are you doing here in Paris?"

And I'd say, "Living. Enjoying myself."

"In the end," he said, "you're going to have to go back with something. You've got to have something to show."

So I said, "Well, maybe I ought to take a few courses at the Sorbonne."

And he said, "If you want, I'll tell you all about the professors at the Sorbonne who are interesting." He took me down and introduced me to them. He had been there the previous year.

He was terribly nice. We had these common interests. He was much more interested in Mathew Arnold, the Victorians and so on. He started reading James and Joyce as a result of my influence, and I started finding out much more about the Victorians than I had known before meeting Brown. Thanks to Brown, I started reading Dante. I hadn't read much Dante.

Remember, I came out of the prairies with a very spotty education, very little culture. I just began to get it at McGill. I continued to get it. I was lucky. I'd gotten some of my culture from Smith and Scott at McGill. I now got it from Brown on the one hand, and from a very remarkable scientist who lived at the Canadian House.

His name was Louis Rapkine. He had a remarkable story that I want to tell in my memoirs. He spoke French fluently. He had a Rockefeller fellowship when I met him. He had made some startling discoveries. He was one of the first to work on the cell. Later, during the war, he got involved in smuggling scientists out of Nazi Germany. He smuggled them into France. And then when France fell, he went to New York and smuggled them out of France to New York. He smuggled Frenchmen.

His career is an unwritten story.

But there's an annual Rapkine lecture in London. The Association for the Advancement of Science had a special session in his memory when he died. He died at the age of 44. Like Brown. These two friends both died of cancer. One of leukemia, one of lung cancer. They both died after the war.

At that time, Rapkine had gone to the Pasteur Institute. He was DeGaulle's chief negotiator for scientific affairs for a while. He was very busy helping the French reconstruct their scientific establishment. It was in shambles. And in the midst of that he developed lung cancer and died.

So I had two very powerful mentors in Paris.

In what way was Rapkine, the scientist, a mentor to you?

He was a mentor in a very strange way. It's very hard to describe. He had a touch of…something like Gandhi.

He had a touch of Gandhi in him?

Like Gandhi, there was something spiritual about him. He walked into a room and everybody practically bowed down to him. He had very piercing eyes. He was profoundly ethical. Profoundly concerned with what was right and what was wrong. He lived a very high level life, and science was for him a kind of special religion. This was a very religious man. But not in the usual sense. He was a spiritual man. It's

very hard for me to describe that. I intend to do it when I do my memoirs.

How did his thinking influence you?

It made me think about a lot of moral questions, and larger issues than mere aesthetic. He had the same interest in the arts that I did. We would go to concerts together. He was very musical. Then he'd disappear for weeks. His room and Brown's were next to each other, and when Brown went back to Canada I moved into Brown's room. I wouldn't see him for weeks, then suddenly I'd run into him.

He was involved in an experiment.

My point is, my two Paris mentors were older than me. Like Smith at McGill was older. I was always with boys who were older than myself.

But Rapkine, I'm not alone in talking about his spirituality. When he died, his widow sent me all the scientific meetings that were held in his memory, and nearly every speaker spoke of Rapine's *apostolat*. Like the English word apostolate, as if he had had a mission on earth. They used the richest words.

He was fearless. I saw him at the State Department. He asked me once to come to Washington to help get somebody out of France whom I'd known. So I came to Washington and signed the affidavits. When he walked into the room, the State Department people used to come up and salute him. He had that kind of charisma.

So I'm not alone in that. His doctrine was that of a great humanitarian. There were 150 or 200

families with money from Rockefeller. Wherever he went, he would make a speech, talk to the right people, and get money from them. As a result, during the war we had some of the greatest French scientists working right in New York. He brought them over. He got them smuggled out of France.

So there you were, two Canadians in France.

He spoke French fluently. His father was a tailor all his life. He had come from Russia to Montreal, but they stopped in Paris on the way and Louis went to school. So he had spoken French as a boy.

Louis went to Montreal High School, and to McGill. And in his second year at McGill, his father had saved up money to send him to medical school. Louis said, "Dad, give me this money. I want to go to Paris and do some experiments." He had no degree of any kind.

Did you know him in Montreal?

No. I'd heard his name, but I hadn't met him. I met him at the Maison Caron.

And then there was E. K. Brown, from Toronto, Catholic, highly respectable, from the University of Toronto with a job waiting for him in the English department. A man of great culture and a marvelous person.

What was Brown doing in Paris?

He was doing postgraduate work. But he knew he would go back to a job at the University of

Toronto. He would start as an assistant professor. He was in his early 20's. I was 21. He was three or four years older.

Brown was very much a man of the world. Very shrewd, very political. I'm not talking about world politics, but academic politics. Brown moved from Toronto to be Chairman at Cornell and then to an important chair at Chicago. That's where he died. He was on his way up when he died. He was 45 years old.

And you would wind up completing Brown's biography of Willa Cather.

I did it in one year. His widow called me one day and said that I was the only one that they could ask to finish it. I asked her to send me his notes. It was already three quarters done. He had done all the leg work. I'd read Willa Cather's works. I had to reread them, but they were easy to read. And I knew how Brown thought. I had known him very intimately. So I decided, yes, I can do this job. It's child's play compared to Henry James. Brown himself knew that it was. It was only 300 pages.

You got to do a friend a favor.

And I did it for selfish reasons. I figured it would be useful for my career. I didn't want to be typed as a one-track man on James. And it was a chance to be published by Alfred Knopf. Brown already had a contract.

I didn't want any money for the job. I finally took a very small part of the royalties. By

coincidence, *The Untried Years* came out in February and *Willa Cather* came out in March. Nothing could have been better. *The Untried Years* got reviews on *inside pages*, but *Willa Cather* got front page in *The New York Times*. [*Willa Cather: a Critical Biography*, by Brown, E.K. and Edel, Leon; Alfred A. Knopf, 1953]

At any rate, coming back to Paris and my two mentors, Brown wound up going back to America, but Rapkine was still around. He lived in an apartment. I used to go over on Sunday nights for dinner with him and his wife. She's still in Paris. She works in the Pasteur Institute. I see her every time I go over there.

I think also, I had a lack of self-assurance in those years—not an inferiority complex in the Adlerian sense, but in the sense of low self-esteem.

You didn't quite know who you were yet, or where you were headed.

Who I was. Brown was a great person to latch onto. A kind of father figure. So was Rapkine. My moral father figure was Rapkine. My achievement practical father figure was Brown. My mentor at McGill had been Smith. If Brown had lived, he would have written a biography of Edith Wharton. He became very interested in Edith Wharton.

You met Edith Wharton.

Before I left Paris. She actually regarded me as a sort of young friend. She'd call me up and invite me out to lunch.

You were just starting to investigate James, at the Sorbonne.

It was Brown who convinced me, "Look, don't just sit around the cafés, unless you're going to be a novelist or a poet." What clinched it, though, was the Wall Street crash of '29. By that time, I was well established at the Sorbonne. But I realized also at that moment, when most of the Americans started rushing home from Paris, I didn't have to. I had my hundred dollars a month for two more years.

I thought, Brown is right. In fact, the first time I met him he sat me down and cross-examined me like a professor, as if I'd come to his office. He wanted to know about my MA thesis. I told him about Henry James. I told him about the plays. He was the one who said, "Do you realize in Paris here, at the Sorbonne, they've got an American studies chair? Nowhere in America will you find that. American studies came in after the war. I'll introduce you to Professor Cestre. He looks like a New England clergyman. He's a graduate of Harvard. He speaks English fluently. He likes to speak English."

Charles Cestre was a Frenchman who went to Harvard. Then he came back and wrote on American subjects and got appointed Professor of

American Civilization and Literature at the Sorbonne.

I said to Brown, "Isn't it kind of queer to do an American subject at the Sorbonne?" and he said, "No, I'm doing Matthew Arnold for Cazamian." Louis Cazamian was the great Anglicist at the Sorbonne, along with Émile Legouis. He had written a monumental history of English literature in French. To this day it's known. I met Legouis, who was a great Chaucerian. Brown introduced me to Legouis, he introduced me to Cazamian, he introduced me to Cestre.

Cestre said, "You want to write a doctoral thesis on Henry James? That sounds wonderful. Henry James is a great subject."

And I said, "I want the plays."

He said, "What about the plays? I didn't know he wrote plays."

I told him about the subject.

He said, "That sounds like a valid subject. I will take you. I will be glad to direct your thesis."

It's a personal thing there. You go to visit these professors at their homes once a week for two hours.

I said, "Well, I don't even know what I'm going to find about the plays."

He said, "Well, you will report to me. We'll see. Meanwhile, I'll accept you."

So there I was, not terribly eager to sit down and write a thesis, but back into James in early 1929.

I went to some of Cestre's lectures. They were very elegant. He was lecturing on Edwin Arlington Robinson, one of his favorite poets. He gave a whole series of lectures. And when I started working on James, he worked right alongside me. He read and gave a series of lectures on James. Once every four or five months, he invited me to come and tell them what I was doing. No strings attached. It was fantastic. A hundred francs and you were registered at the Sorbonne.

I had to go through the formality of getting my MA recognized. In Paris, that's the equivalent of their degree.

After a while, it suddenly dawned on me that Brown had done me a great favor. Having a project was a good thing. I wasn't studying French journalism, but the Province of Quebec didn't worry about it at all. I'd say, well, I'm doing this and this, and they'd say fine and hand me my check. At the end of the year, we had to bring a letter from our professors just to show that we weren't drinking up the money in Paris. That's all. Every three months they handed me my check for three hundred dollars from the Province of Quebec which I would take down to the Royal Bank of Canada right there on the Boulevard.

I was in good shape. I could go to London. My brother was at Oxford. For 50 dollars I could spend a week there and come back to Paris. I could get a fine French dinner with wine for 50

cents. We're back in the 20's. It was fantastic. I had a nice little restaurant I used to go to regularly. My breakfast I had at the Maison Canadiens. My lunch was a sandwich in a bar. I didn't use taxis. I used public transportation. It was very comfortable.

There were always student seats in the theaters. The French were very good about that. In the movies, I would just show my Sorbonne card and go in for five francs. That's 20 cents for a movie.

* * *

It was during this period that you started meeting some very important literary figures. You ran into Bernard Shaw when you were fresh off the boat. Your brother was with you on that boat.

We came over from Montreal on the Canadian ship. We pulled into Liverpool and took the train to London. I was on my way to Paris, but went first to England and to Oxford and saw him established there. I was playing the role of the older brother. I had dinner with him in the Common Room and got a glimpse of the Oxford establishment. He was in New College.

The next day we went and found a lodging house in Bloomsbury. It was the first time I had ever heard of Bloomsbury. That day we were out walking. There was the National Portrait Gallery.

We came around the curve, there was a slight hill, and I looked and said, "My God, Abe, there's Bernard Shaw!"

Shaw was striding along. The beard, everything. The complete Shaw. We just looked at him, watched him.

And you knew you were in Europe.

I certainly knew we were abroad. Shaw didn't live very far from the center of Trafalgar Square. Most of his years he lived in a very fine flat right off Trafalgar Square. That's where I saw him. That was my first glimpse of him.

You would meet him again when you started working on James.

Yes. When I started working on James, I began to write letters. First I contacted the James family for permission to read the unpublished plays. They were at The Lord Chamberlain's office. They had been produced, but never published.

They had their files. I came in and asked if I could see them, and they said 'You must have a letter from the owner of the copyright.' So I wrote Harry [Henry] James at Harvard. I'd never met him. He was William's son. He was the executor for William and for [his uncle] Henry. I told him I wanted to read the plays.

He was very correct. He wrote me a very proper letter, saying, "Mr. Leon Edel is interested in doing some work on my uncle's plays. Permission is granted."

So I made a special trip to England to The Lord Chamberlain office. They brought me *Guy Domville*, which I read then for the first time. Nobody knew what was in it. It was first published in *The Complete Plays*. Then they brought me James's dramatization of *The American*, with James's own handwriting all over it. It was a one-act play.

These were the ones that were produced. At that stage, I didn't know where to look for the ones that were not produced. I didn't find them until much later.

The next thing I did was write to Percy Lubbock, who had edited the two volumes of James's letters. Lubbock had edited the 35-volume set and James's letters. And he was a friend of Edith Wharton's.

I just started writing letters to the proper people.

It was Lubbock who then said, "When you get to London, you can go and see James's secretary. She's very much alive and busy there." Theodora Bosanquet was in her prime then. She'd been a young woman when James died. James had been dead only 12 years.

James always thought of her as "Little Miss Bosanquet," but actually Miss Bosanquet was quite an educated woman. By the time I met her, she was Secretary of the International Federation of University Women. She travelled to India. She travelled everywhere. I wrote to her in London. I went to her office. I said that I had permission

from Harry James. She was very cagey and careful. Years later I found out why. The James family thought she was too meddlesome when James was dying. She had all the strings of James's world in her hands. Mrs. William James resented that particularly.

She was very cautious, very correct.

And there you were, this enthusiastic young man.

I said, "Surely you must have kept some record of some kind. I'd love to have some dates and so on."

She said, "Well, I've got some old notes. I'll see what I can dig up for you."

A few days later I realized I had made an impression because she said, "If you will come to my studio and have some tea with me, I'll have some notes for you."

That was when I realized that I really had a good subject. Because she had a list of dates for me. On this date, she said, James was working on such and such a play; on this date, he had conversations with Granville Barker; on this date, Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote to him about one of his plays, and on this date Mr. James answered Mr. Bernard Shaw.

I went home and I wrote to Mr. Bernard Shaw. I said, "I understand that you corresponded with Henry James on such and such a date about one of his plays. I'm doing a book on James as a

playwright, an unsuccessful playwright, a study in failure."

Did you really say that?

I think I said that. I wanted to make it clear that I wasn't in any way trying to treat James seriously as a playwright, because nobody treated him seriously.

My argument—this was the great illumination that I had one day in the stacks at McGill—I thought, my God, this man wrote plays for five years and then his novels took a turn. Everybody says his novels are different. But nobody connects the possibility of playwriting with that. I made that connection that first day. It was my great moment of illumination. And 20 years later, I found James making the connection, when I first read his notebooks.

So the plays changed the dramatic structure of his novels?

From then on, he talked of his novels as, "my third act"…"my second act…"

The plays were a workshop for him.

That's right.

Nobody had realized that. This was the great illumination I had at the age of 19 when I was writing my MA thesis at McGill. I had this illumination that the plays were important in relation to the novels.

You didn't have copies of the plays at McGill, did you?

No. But I'd read about his having written them, having been a failure and booed in the theater. I'd read that in the letters, what there was in the letters. So when I finally narrowed my subject down, I said to my professor of American literature, I want to write about five years in James's life—*Les Annes Dramatique*. *The Dramatic Years*. And that became the title of my thesis.

I returned to this original moment of illumination, coming on the fact, my God, he wrote plays for five years. I hadn't known it. And when I mentioned it to people in London, they didn't know it. Shaw knew it. Shaw remembered. The older generation. But most people, nobody paid attention to James writing plays. He was a flop.

Why was he a flop as a playwright?

He wasn't any good. He was a lousy playwright—as I later described it, *A Study in Failure*, which turned into success when he started using the technique he acquired in his novels.

The plays were a gestation period.

That's right. They lead up to *The Spoils of Poynton*, that series of novels that are all very dramatic, to *The Ambassadors*. Finally to a novel

that's totally dialogue. *The Awkward Age* is a dialogue novel.

This is what I was writing about.

Tell me about your meeting with Bernard Shaw. Bosanquet had told you that he had communicated with James about one of his plays.

I wrote to Shaw. Those were the days of the British Post Office. I wrote a mild note, very polite, very gentlemanly, just saying, I know how busy you are—he had three plays running in London at the time—but would you care to talk to me for a few minutes about this correspondence. I'd like to know what was in it.

I mailed it on the way to the British Museum where I spent day after day reading. I was reading in and around James. Everything. The British Museum was marvelous. It had all kinds of things. It even had some unpublished letters there. My first glimpse of unpublished letters was at the British Museum in the manuscript division.

I got home that evening and a postcard had come from Shaw's secretary. Think of that prompt delivery.

"Mr. Shaw will see you tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock."

At ten o'clock precisely, I rang the bell at his flat right off Trafalgar Square. It was answered by a maid who ushered me into this great big study. There he was, just the way I'd seen him, wearing a corduroy jacket. He was a shorter man

than I'd thought. He was just a little taller than I was myself.

He took a puzzled look at me and his secretary, as if to say, "Who is this young man?" And his secretary said, "Henry James."

"Oh," he said. "What kind of book are you writing on Henry James?"

I said, "Well, I just wanted to find out about his plays."

"Well," he said, "his plays were very interesting."

I said, "I knew that you had reviewed one of his plays." Shaw reviewed *Guy Domville* and printed it in his volume of collected criticisms. I referred to that. I'd already read the plays by that time. I wanted to know more about that, I said. "And I want to know what play you corresponded about."

Imagine how timid I was, finding myself in the presence of *the great man*. And Shaw was *the great man*. He was famous. 70 years old then. He lived to be 93.

"I meant to find out whether you can find the letters," I said. "I don't know whether James kept your letters, but maybe you kept his."

He turned again to his secretary, whose name was Blanche Patch. She wrote a book about him [*Thirty Years With G.B.S.*, Dodd, Mead & Company, 1951]. Everybody knew Blanche Patch. Shaw's letters were signed "Blanche Patch, Secretary to Shaw." Later on, when he discovered that his autograph was fetching so

much money, he was very sparing of it. He would dictate letters and Blanche Patch would sign them.

So Shaw said, "I remember that very clearly. James had written a play about a young man who was killed by a ghost. I couldn't stomach that. So I wrote a letter to James"—it was typical Shaw—"and I said, Look, what do you mean by writing a play about a ghost killing a man? I want you to write a play about a man killing a ghost. It's the men who kill ghosts who make life worthwhile. As a socialist…." and he went on.

Meanwhile, his secretary looked and said she couldn't find the letters.

He described all this and I said, "Do you remember what James replied?"

"Oh," he said, "James replied that he had done this in an artistic way. He had a certain theory of art. But he accepted my criticisms in very good grace. Of course, Mrs. Granville Barker [Barker's first wife, actress Lillah McCarthy] greatly admired James. The Barkers were great admirers."

Then he gave me a reminiscence of a day they went down to Lamb House to meet him.

I didn't pull a notebook out on him. I already knew enough about journalism. In a way, I'd been training myself, and I was mentally recording all this.

He talked to me for a half an hour. He would have kept me an hour, I think. He was one of these talkable types. He was wound up. Shaw

was like that. Towards the end, I remember he led me to the door, he saw me out, wished me luck, and then he said, "What you have to understand"—later I found he made this speech many times—"the trouble with Henry James was, he was one of those 19th Century fatalists and pessimists. As a socialist, I believe the world can be improved. James had that fatal pessimism which began with George Elliot and the Darwinians. He said that man could not be changed. I believe man can be changed."

He made me that speech at the door.

That was my first great interview. And I realized then that I had a good subject. My subject was getting larger and larger.

The next thing to do was write to Granville Barker.

I wrote to him at his English address. I had looked him up in *Who's Who*. I was still in London when I got a card from him saying, "I reside in Paris. Come see me when you get back."

When I got back to Paris, I called him up. He had a beautiful house, and he sat me down and pulled out one of James's plays he had been working on, trying to produce it. He explained to me he was really disgusted. He believed in James as a dramatist. He said, "He's the kind of man we need in the theater. It was the kind of quality writing that was very literary but it could be handled."

Barker directed a number of Shaw's plays.

Granville Barker was the famous man who had made Shaw. He took Shaw's plays, which were talky and so on, and put on season after season of them. And he knew how to handle Shaw. Shaw was very close to Granville Barker, until Granville married and had an unhappy marriage and they were estranged. But that whole Shaw Granville Barker period, from 1900 to 1910, was what made Shaw.

That was a great period.

Granville Barker staged Ibsen and he staged many plays he had written himself. He was a real man of the theater. A marvelous man. A very handsome, charming person. I had a marvelous session with him in Paris.

I said, "I'm writing this book. Maybe later I will try to get them to publish these plays—the ones that were produced."

"Don't do that," he said. "Do it up brown! Publish all the plays!"

He was the one who said, "We ought to have them all, even the ones that never got near the theaters."

Then I said to him, "Look, do you mind if I send you my chapter on yourself?" and he said no. So a year later I sent him the chapter, and he wrote me back a very lovely note. I've still got it somewhere, at the bottom of the manuscript, saying, as I remember, "You're laying it on too thick about me. What you have to understand is that in the theater we had solved difficult

playwrights like Chekhov. With the right actors and the right direction, James could have been a good man in the theater."

I've quoted him.

By the end of the second year, I'd worked on this dissertation quite hard. Now I had to start thinking about putting it into French. I'd written it in English. I could speak French fluently, but writing it always threw me. Especially trying to translate James in quotations into French. Finally, my professor gave me a French professor to help me. It was an accepted procedure, so I had no problem there.

I paid this professor. I gave him French text and he would look over my English text to see how I'd done it. He did a great deal of retouching, especially the Jamesian quotes.

You had a good deal of help in that translation.

I had quite a bit of help with the French. But that doesn't mean that I didn't learn in the process. Today I can sit down and write a letter in French, no problem. I correspond in French.

I spoke French fluently. I had to defend the thesis in French before a five-man jury. It was a big deal. By then I had decided to not take the ordinary doctorate but the "State" doctorate, which involves two theses—that is, a minor and a major thesis. And Cazamian had accepted me as director of my minor thesis, which was the prefaces of Henry James.

So I worked hard and also had a lot of fun. When I came back from Paris, I had a mass of clippings.

Here. [Taking out clippings.]

Those are reviews.

I didn't put dates on them. But this is how I remind myself of what I was doing, what I was seeing. Not very good writing, but publishable. I just pasted them up long, long ago. They're practically falling apart now. but this will give you an idea how far back I go as a published writer. I must xerox those. If I xerox them, I'll be able to retain them a little longer.

So here you were this exuberant young man meeting these people of almost mythic dimensions.

They had mythic dimensions then. Shaw was great.

And now Edith Wharton.

Edith Wharton was a complicated story.

How so?

I asked around Paris. Everyone said, she lives in the south, she's a difficult woman, you won't get to see her. I wrote to her and got no answer.

I then wrote another letter. In a sense, I blackmailed Edith Wharton into seeing me. That's a crude way of putting it. A very important figure in Edith Wharton's life was a man named

Walter Berry. I showed an interest in Walter Berry. Then I got a letter from her—a very fast one.

She wanted to know what you were up to.

In the biography of Edith Wharton, she said, "There seems to be a journalist named Edel who's trying to work up some scandal story about me."

But when I went to see her, she received me in great style. She was standing outside wearing the rose that is the Legion of Honor when the chauffeur drove me up. She didn't know she was going to receive a boy age 24. But she had dressed up for the occasion. She was 70, rather short but elegant.

She said, "I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Edel. I got your letter about working on Henry James. We must talk about this. Let's go for a walk in the garden. First tell me, why do you want to write about Walter Berry?"

I said, "Well, he was a friend of Proust's. I first heard of him when Henry James's letters to him were published. I thought, here's someone who crossed the path of three great novelists—Proust, James and yourself."

I was being very flattering.

She smiled and said, "Oh, but he was an international lawyer and judge. Lovely man. I thought of writing about him after he died, but I realized he was one of those people one doesn't write about because he hasn't published anything.

During the war, he was president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris. When you've written his obituary, you've written everything there is to be said about him."

It was all very personal. And I said, "Well, I accept what you say."

She said, "Well, where would you publish it?"

I told her I had no idea where I would publish it.

"Well," she said, "I don't see that you can do very much with Walter Berry," and I said, "If that's the case, let's talk about Henry James."

We started talking about Henry James. She took me into the house, gave me tea. She had set it all up that I was to take a 5 o'clock train. But by the time the chauffeur came to get me, she said, "You know, there's a train a half an hour from now. Let's not interrupt our conversation."

I knew then if she had any worries about the sensitive area of Walter Berry, she was ready to talk to me about Henry James. So that was our first interview.

A year later she wrote her memoirs and she sent me a copy when I was back in America. When I came back to France, in '36, I called her up and she invited me right out to lunch. And then a few days later she called me up again and invited me to lunch.

So we had that one meeting when I was a student. Then I came over as an adult. I was 29 years old then. It was as if we knew each other a long time. We were old friends.

When I applied for a Guggenheim, to get at the plays, I wrote and asked her, "Would you feel free—and be very frank with me—to write a letter of recommendation?"

She wrote back saying, "I've written an enthusiastic letter of recommendation."

And at the dinner of the Gold Medal, the president of the Guggenheim Foundation, Gordon Ray, said, "Statute of limitations is over. I will read the letter that Edith Wharton wrote about Leon Edel." For the first time I heard what she wrote. It was a wonderful letter. I'm sure she got me my Guggenheim.

When a friend who knew James came to visit her, she would call me up and say, "Oh, Gaillard Lapsley is here today. He just came over from England. I think it would be nice if you could come to lunch. We'll spark each other for you on Henry James."

That's the way she said it. "We'll spark each other for you on Henry James!"

I came to lunch grand style, this little chateau that she lived in with hot/cold running services. Delightful. Of course, by that time I was already living in the midst of the Depression and very much in journalism.

There are many memories of those lunches I had with her, two or three the last year of her life. She died in '37.

What about Joyce now? Your first meeting with him was the following year.

I never met Joyce.

Your first encounter…

Was at the opera. I watched him at the opera. I saw him once or twice again across from Sylvia Beach's, when he sat next to me. Today I wouldn't think twice of opening a conversation with him, but I was a scared little boy. Shaw made me feel at home. I stood in awe of him too. But with Joyce, I was just scared of him.

Your encounter with Joyce was through Sylvia Beach.

Remember how enchanted I was by Joyce in Montreal? When I arrived in Paris, one of the first places I went to was 2 rue de l'Odéon, where Sylvia Beach had published Joyce. She had established this bookshop, Shakespeare and Company, which she had modeled after her French friend Adrienne Monnier's bookshop, La Maison des Amis des Livres, across the way.

Sylvia was not a publisher, but she met Joyce, she got interested in *Ulysses* and realized this was a great thing. She found a French printer and she printed *Ulysses* and started selling it for 100 or 200 francs.

She had a lending library too, and she had the latest books from London.

When I arrived in Paris, I bought a copy right away. A ninth edition. I've still got it. It's right over there.

I came into the shop and started talking to her. She was a nice lady. Elegant. She was brought up in Princeton, the daughter of a clergyman. Here I was, a young man eager to know about Joyce. She always answered. She was building up the legend.

We got to talking about Henry James. I remember she said, "Oh, we've got a picture of him." She had a picture of James there. Then I talked about Joyce with her.

I got to know her. We became very good friends. She would say to me, "Oh, last night I met a gentleman who knew Henry James. Morton Fullerton."

I knew who he was. "The man who writes for the *Figaro*," I said. "He writes those elegant French articles on American politics."

"That's right," she said. "That's the man. He's very easy to talk to. If you just call him up at the *Figaro*, he'll be glad to talk to you."

In the end, many years later, he turned out to be Edith Wharton's lover. I saw Fullerton three times.

So one day I came and Sylvia said, "Mr. Joyce is calling all hands on deck to go to the opera. His fellow Irishman is singing and he's convinced that the opera people are not employing him enough. They're only letting him sing twice a month."

Of course, Joyce was very paranoid about this. They weren't giving him as many appearances as the French and other Europeans. That particular opera was *William Tell*. They had revived it. This man had sung this role. He was on his way out. His voice wasn't what it had been. But Joyce wanted to give him a big hand. And he wanted all his friends on deck.

"Mr. Joyce will be there," said Sylvia.

I said, "Great, I'll go."

I went right down to the opera. I used to buy a ticket way up in the gods. I bought myself one two or three balconies lower so I could get a better view of the whole orchestra. I knew Joyce would probably sit there. I was sure it would be a big audience, but I must see him.

I saw him walk in. They had a slot machine in every aisle at the Opera in Paris. I put a franc in and you get opera glasses right there.

What did he look like?

Joyce looked very much like the pictures that I'd seen of him. But he looked like a blind man. His son was right behind him. He had the cane. He was very elegantly dressed. And he was wearing that Latin Quarter hat. He didn't take it off when he walked in. He was thin and dressed very meticulously. I think he was wearing tails that night with his black tie. I'm not sure. But he was very much dressed up.

As it happened, I was sitting on the side, in the horseshoe of the balcony. There was a great big

chandelier there. Way down was Joyce. I could see him very clearly with my naked eye.

The opera began. The moment this guy came out, Joyce shouted "BRAVO!" and stood up. And all of Joyce's acolytes stood up. There were several hundred of us. I didn't stand. I was upstairs, so I just sat. I had a front row seat that I paid a dollar for. It was a lot of money.

Did you get closer to him at any point?

In between the acts, I figured he'd go out for a smoke. So I went down the great grand staircase. And there he was, standing with a group of friends. Sylvia was there, of course. But I didn't go up. I didn't want to intrude on her privacy. I saw Sylvia and Joyce's son. This young boy was also very much dressed. He was in training to be an opera singer.

I just stood and watched him. I watched the postures he took, the way he slouched. Kind of tired looking. He wore that Latin Quarter black felt hat, which he took off when he sat down. It was very much the kind of hat they wore at the Latin Quarter at the turn of the century.

Probably five times I went and watched him smoke a cigarette between acts. The way the kids today go and watch a rock singer.

You didn't go up to him, though.

Remember, I was raised in Canada. We were taught, you've got to be introduced. You don't just barge in on people. Who the hell was I, after

all? What could I claim? I was not even a writer. I didn't even belong in that circle. I was just a student. An admirer of Joyce.

Nowadays you go over and ask for an autograph. I wouldn't do that. I never did that. My generation didn't do that. I wanted to observe him and I did observe him. And that was that.

The next time I saw him my dream was realized in a way because I really got close to him. I couldn't have gotten any closer.

This was at Madame Monnier's.

Adrienne Monnier's French bookshop was holding a special reading. I went to Adrienne's mainly for that event, to write an article. They used to hold all kinds of events there. T. S. Eliot came over and read at Sylvia's once.

You met him too, didn't you?

I met him much later at a party. And then in Boston too. By that time I already had two or three volumes of the *James* out. I was a man of letters. It was easier to meet him than to meet Joyce.

Joyce was a queer person. There was something about him that set you off. Those big thick glasses. He'd had umpteen operations on his eyes, for glaucoma and cataracts. I've never seen anyone with glasses as thick as Joyce's. It gave him a kind of owlish look.

I went into Adrienne's for this evening where they were going to read part of *Finnegans Wake*.

It wasn't called *Finnegans* yet—it was called "Work in Progress." A board of ten writers sat down with Joyce presiding to translate these few pages from *Anna Livia Plurabelle*.

It started at 8 o'clock. I came in at ten minutes to eight. Again, very mousy like, really. I went off into the farthest corner of the room and to my delight found a little chair with arms. And I sat down. There was another one right there beside me. I just sat and watched people arriving. I didn't realize who they were, though some of the faces looked familiar. The French were turning out in honor of Joyce.

Just when Adrienne was calling the meeting to order and everybody went to their seats, a tall pair of legs passed me. I looked up like that, you see, and I said, my God, there's Joyce right beside me, in the other chair. I wondered whether he was trying to be mousy. He had waited to see, not to mix with the crowd. He came in at the end and sat down. That was an exciting thing. I looked at him out of the corner of my eye—I didn't want to stare. And I got a very clear picture of him.

That was close up. And that's my new name for that chapter in my book—"Close-Up" [*Stuff of Sleep and Dreams, Experiments in Literary Psychology*].

For an hour and a half we sat there for the talk, the reading, and finally the playing of the recording—Joyce reading the thing himself in English. It was really quite a thrill.

***Finnegans Wake* had not been published.**

It was coming out in installments, in *transition* [the experimental French literary journal].

Anna Livia Plurabelle was the most famous section of it. Joyce had made a marvelous reading of it. It's been one of the most wonderful spoken word records that exists. He was an actor, you know. It was a great, great thing.

I knew that record so well. I can imitate it…"Well, you know or don't you kennet or haven't I told you every telling has a tailing and that's the he and the she of it. Look, look, [the dusk is growing.] My branches lofty are taking root. My cold cher's gone ashley. Fielhur? Filou! What age is that?"

That's the way the record sounded. A little slower. Joyce read it slowly. With the proper Irish accent. Fielhur is "What time is it?" Then he says that in German: Filou. It's not exactly, What time is it? Uhr is the German word for *hour*.

Then he switches from hour to, "What age is that?"

That was the evening that I wrote up. By that time, Brown had gone back to Canada and was one of the editors of the *Canadian Forum*. He kept wanting manuscripts from me. That was when I began to write for the *Canadian Forum*, which is like *The Nation* or *The New Republic*. It still exists. And they published my early stuff.

The thing on Joyce wouldn't be for the *Montreal Star*. I wrote that for the *Canadian Forum*. I had already compared texts. It's not a

very well written piece. I didn't describe Joyce. Again, I thought, Oh, I could have written, I should have written…

I took different texts and tried to figure out what was Joyce doing.

Everybody was bewildered. What was Joyce doing in this work? By having different versions of *Anna Livia*, I was able to show the method of the madness. An example I used then and I still use is that I found in an early version he said, "Wait til the rising of the moon love." And then in the next version, I found "Wait til the honeying of the loon love." By using the word loon, he gets alliteration. He gets honeymoon into it. He gets three more meanings into it, you see.

So you saw earlier versions?

I saw the earlier versions.

Where'd you get all these versions?

Adrienne had published an early version and I got it from her. Then there was another version that had been published in *transition*. I dug that up. And then there was the version that was published as a separate little booklet in London. I still have it up there.

So I had different versions to look at. And each time you could see that he was developing this kind of double talk, or double think, making it more and more complicated each time. When you say the first time, "Wait til the rising of the moon love," no problem. "Wait til the honeying of the

loon love" is already becoming a very complicated statement.

That line is in the final version.

You published this in your article.

And I brought it in to Sylvia Beach and said, "Look, I was so glad to go to Adrienne's evening and I did this piece. Maybe you want to show it to Adrienne."

And she said, "Oh, I'll show it to Mr. Joyce."

The next time I came to see her, she said, "Mr. Joyce was very pleased with your article. He's so glad when people pay attention to *Finnegans Wake*." Then she said, "Here's some recent pictures of Joyce. I'll get Mr. Joyce to autograph one for you." She had these Bernie Sabbath's, this famous photographer.

That's a Bernie Sabbath that I have signed by Joyce. That was 1930, I think.

* * *

In the midst of all this, Leon Edel the literary sleuth was born.

I stepped away from my journalism, which was an elementary kind of sleuthing.

I'd chased ambulances, been in the lower courts in Montreal and covered the shipping, the waterfront. Cub reporters do that in Montreal. This was now the literary world. I was much

more in my own element. I met English students. I got to know my brother's friends at Oxford.

You were pursuing more than a story. Your literary sleuthing was taking you into the James archives, and into parlors of the people who knew him.

Playwriting was a mystery. Why did James want to write plays? We didn't have the letters then. The plays weren't known. It was all very mysterious. I just went at it step by step. I hadn't acquired any systemic method. Nobody ever taught me anything. I had to learn it myself. One thing had to lead to another. So Lubbock put me onto Bosanquet, who gave me the leads that put me on to Shaw, who talked about Granville Barker.

A man at the British Museum who later became a good friend, said, "Did you see such and such an actor in *Guy Domville* in Piccadilly?" So I wrote to this actor, who invited me to lunch at the Garrick Club, the actor's club. "I don't remember much about *Guy Domville*," he said. "All I did was play a bit part."

So here you are interviewing all these people. Did you take notes?

With most of them I would not pull out a notebook, because I knew that the English were very discreet. Sometimes I would say, "Would you excuse me, I'd like to write down this date,"

and then I'd make a few notes. Sometimes I'd surreptitiously do that.

I would never pull out a notebook on Edith Wharton. In her own home?

So I got to carry it all in my memory. I'd make notes afterwards.

And one thing led to another. I would read things at the British Museum and that led to other things.

And in the end…

I finished my dissertation, I defended it, I got the degree.

It was a five-hour defense.

That's typical of a Sorbonne defense.

It begins at one o'clock and goes on all afternoon. It's a public event. It's announced in the Paris newspapers because the degree is given by the French government. Education is federal in France.

Then you came home to the Depression.

When I came back, in 1932, it was midwinter and the lowest point in the Depression. I went back to Montreal. I had nowhere else to go. There was an extra room at my mother's and I stayed there. They were leading a very low-keyed life. My father had enough business to take care of the two of them. They no longer had to have a big apartment. It was quite a comedown to return to

Montreal, a provincial city, in the dead of winter, after four years of freedom in Paris.

I wrote immediately to practically every English department in Canada, and all the major ones in the United States. I had a folder that high that were laying people off. And I soon realized that though I had this fancy degree, it meant nothing in the United States.

Why was that?

The way the hiring is done in the United States, you do your PhD with some professor at a good university, like Harry Levin at Harvard. Then you've got an immediate American reference. Not only that, you hear about places that are looking. Back then, nobody was looking and I had no American references. All I had was some very nice letters from my French professors and a maverick degree. It was an oddball thing to have done. And my dissertation was in French. It was not available in English. I paid for the printing myself. No publisher printed a thesis in Paris. I think I got my 300 copies for between five and eight hundred dollars. I borrowed the money for that.

So I went to the *Montreal Star* and they said, you left us 3 1/2 years ago. You've come back at a time when we just can't take you back. Nobody's resigning their jobs.

So I took whatever I could get. Somebody at McGill said there was a young man who needed some coaching in French. A young rich man who

had failed his French. Would you be willing to coach him? I said sure. It was maybe nine dollars a week. I just tutored.

Suddenly I saw an ad. A college in Montreal was looking for someone to give two lectures a week in English. So I wrote and immediately got a letter back and discovered it was the YMCA, which was running a small college. Evening classes for young people. They would pay me two or three dollars an hour for every lecture. It was called the Sir George Williams College. Today it's a big university in Montreal [Concordia University], but it grew up from the YMCA then developed to George Williams University. I was just an adjunct.

Just to give you an idea of what that Depression was like, with my education and everything else, what I got was six dollars a week from my tutoring and another six or eight dollars a week from the Sir George Williams College where I was at least getting some experience in teaching.

You were basically teaching at the Y.

They didn't say so in the ad. It was kind of a deadpan ad I'd responded to. But they gave me the job right away. They were delighted. I was much above the level with a doctorate, above the level of most of their teachers.

But another thing happened at that moment. While I was doing this kind of freelancing, there was a noon paper in Montreal called the *Herald*.

It was one of the oldest papers in Montreal. It had been bought by the *Star*. The *Herald* was this sort of easy run paper. It had a good noon circulation. The later editions didn't sell very well. They had a small staff.

So I walked into the *Herald* and ran into a former senior man of the *Star*, who was managing editor. He looked at me and said, "Are you looking for a job?" and I said, "Yes, I am."

Later I learned he was a veteran drunk. The *Star* had bounced him and he had gone over to the *Herald* and was managing editor. But he remembered me from before and they had enough fluidity. They were hiring cheap labor.

"I'll give you twenty-five a week," he said. Perfect. That was fine.

So you were hired as a reporter.

It was general work. Anything I wanted. I was attached to the city desk.

I got twenty-five a week for two weeks and then there was a twenty percent cut in salaries. That was the Depression. So I ended up with twenty a week. I could still go into the Y and give my lectures in the late afternoon and evening. But in order to publish at noon, we had to be there at 6 am.

Very quickly I took over because there wasn't any regular music critic, and there wasn't any regular movie critic. There were always passes to the new movies. Whoever was free that night went to a movie and wrote a review of it.

Gradually I took over those jobs because I was known for my letters from abroad. So I could call myself the music editor of the *Herald*. I could call myself the movie editor. The theater I shared with somebody else, because there was someone who had always done the theater. I didn't muscle in on him.

Then I started writing a Saturday column on the arts. And people were reading me. Again, my name was known in Montreal. But it was a pretty dull time. I was pretty depressed. I wanted to be back in Paris.

And James?

After I came back, I sent Harry James my thesis. Years later I would read his letter to Percy Lubbock, saying that he had met me in Paris. I caught him in Paris when he was there, and he gave me permission to use certain things—quotations from the plays and so on. He looked like Lambert Stretcher [protagonist, *The Ambassadors*), with his big mustache. He received me at the Hotel Continental and gave me dinner. He was very polite to me. In his letter to Lubbock—his widow gave me all the correspondence—he said, "I've just read Edel's thesis. I hadn't expected anything as good as that."

That was when he was consulting Lubbock. Should he let me edit the plays or not?

I decided to strike when the iron was hot, before somebody else came along. I'd had my finger in that pie. And I asked permission.

But even there, if I really think myself back, I was very passive about all this. If I'm not mistaken, I did this because of E. K. Brown, who came to Montreal from Toronto and looked me up. It was then an eight-hour journey to Montreal by overnight train. He and I went out and had a meal. It was a great reunion. And he said, "What are you doing?" I'd sent him a copy of my thesis and he had liked it. I think he reviewed it in the *Canadian Forum*. I think he was surprised by it too.

It was then he said, "You're in an ideal position now to edit the plays."

And I thought to myself, Edward's right. So I wrote the letter to Harry James.

The element of the accidental occurred quite frequently in my life then because I was a drifter. I really was a drifter. I came to Paris and started drifting and Brown pulled me out of that. I came back and drifted again for four years in Montreal. I could have borrowed money. Dad probably would have staked me. I could have gone off to New York. My brother was already in New York. My brother kept an eye on me. He kept giving me signals that there were vacancies in various colleges.

Your brother was taking the more chartered course.

My brother had moved from Oxford with a very fine degree. He took that straight to Columbia. He didn't have a PhD from Oxford. He had taken a BA all over again from Oxford, in classics of philosophy—they call the ancient greats scholars. And he had made a *first* in it. That Columbia knew, and they accepted my brother and he did his PhD in philosophy on Aristotle at Columbia.

The year he got his degree at Columbia, one of the professors at Barnard was leaving for sabbatical. My brother moved right into that as a visiting assistant professor, or instructor. He took over the courses of this professor. During that year, he'd already gotten to know other philosophers.

He was the opposite of me. Very practical.

He got to know people at City College of New York. And, above all, he got to know the great Morris Raphael Cohen, Professor of Philosophy at City College. Cohen had been a pupil of William James and was one of the most respected philosophers in the whole United States then. Sidney Hook was a pupil of his. He had disciples.

Morris Cohen took a great interest in my brother. He made room for him in the Philosophy Department at City College. For a year, my brother had been sitting pretty at Columbia. Then he moved into City University with a small job. He became a kind of understudy of Cohen and

got into legal philosophy. Cohen had been one of the great developers of the philosophy of law.

I was still in Montreal when all of this was happening. I was a fixture at the *Herald* at 20 dollars a week.

Those two years in Montreal were a game. I had two years of drifting, from 1932 to 1934. Then, in '34, E. K. Brown invited me to Toronto to give a lecture on Henry James. I gave the lecture and he introduced me to his Toronto faculty. Brown was doing his best to get me known.

It was there, during my visit to Toronto, that Brown suggested that I plan as my next job to edit the plays. And it was in 1934 that I got my lucky break. It was a lucky break and it was not a lucky break. It was one of the greatest mistakes of my life, but it led to…

You mean the French news service, Havas?

That's it. That was the lucky break. Because there was my brother in New York, enjoying New York, and I was in Montreal backwater. And suddenly one of the boys at the *Herald*, who was quite an adventurer, heard Havas was establishing a bureau in New York and they were looking for French language people to handle the incoming cables. I didn't know what kind of work was involved, but 50 dollars a week was what they were offering. Instead of scrambling around to make 35 dollars a week, tutoring,

miscellaneous work, I could come to New York with a salary and try to make my way there.

So I accepted the job. Meanwhile, during my last six months at the *Herald*, the drunk had gone on one drunk too many and I became the managing editor of the *Herald*. So for the last six months or so, I suddenly catapulted into one of the top jobs. The only person over the managing editor was the editor in chief, who wrote a daily editorial. And because they discovered I had a doctorate, I became known as "Doc" in journalism for the next twenty years.

So I went down to New York.

I found myself a nice room in a brownstone. I was on my own in the big city, going to plays. The work, however, was drudgery. We would come in very early in the morning, the French cables would arrive and we'd have to struggle to turn it into a good story. They gathered together an assortment of us who knew enough French to do that. We had to keep going, sitting at the typewriter, banging for five or six hours a day.

I got into a rut there.

Did you get anything out of it?

I learned news agency procedures. They're now obsolete.

How about your writing?

I didn't do much writing then. I edited copy, I wrote and edited copy.

I was in New York for about a year and a half. I married my first wife. I met her at my brother's house. She was working for Columbia. She was a secretary to Franz Boas, the famous anthropologist. She'd been in mathematics.

We drifted into marriage. By the age of 27 or 28, I was married. We set up an apartment. She had a job, I had a job. My job was not so good because I had to get up sometimes in the middle of the night because of the difference in time with Europe. I would be riding at 5 am or sometimes 4:30 am in the subway. In those days, it was safe to ride in the subway. We lived in an apartment near Columbia. A very cheap apartment. Rents were cheap then.

I had two years of rather ineffectual living in New York. With my brother's help I got to know some people in the Universities. But the situation was still tight, and the Depression was still on. I was working for a foreign outfit. There was no security of any kind. I didn't even think about it in those days.

Suddenly, in 1936, the manager of the office died. He had one of those pneumonias. In those days, there weren't any antibiotics. You just got it and died. He was a young man. It was a terrible thing. He was a charming person. The Paris office immediately sent over a person to take care of things. His decision, after looking at the work, was to send me to Paris because I had pretty fluent French, telling them what needs to be sent over here.

So suddenly I found myself on my way back to Paris, four years after leaving. I didn't realize I was going to be the highest paid man in the Paris office, because I was being paid on American standards. Fifty dollars a week.

So you didn't get an increase in salary.

No. I got perks. They paid my way over, of course. And fifty dollars a week in Paris in those days, again, was still pretty good. We took the ship. My wife came with me. And we got a nice apartment there.

But on the way to Paris, or six months before, I think again how passive I was. A friend of my wife's who was in the book trade used to come around. They were old friends. He came around and we talked books. He saw my dissertations and he said, "You've got a project to edit James's plays. What are you sitting on it for? Why don't you apply for a Guggenheim? As a matter of fact, I'll get you the application forms."

This was in the fall of '35, before going to Paris. That was when I applied for a Guggenheim and gave Edith Wharton as my reference, and Harry James. I asked his permission to put his name down and he said yes. And Percy Lubbock was the recognized Jamesian who had edited James's letters.

So in the fall of '35 I applied for a Guggenheim, and at the end of March I sailed for Paris. And while I was at sea, my brother sent me a cable saying, "You've got the Guggenheim."

* * *

I could have immediately resigned the Havas job, but I felt that would be a dirty trick. So I wrote the Guggenheim and asked whether they would let me delay for six or eight months, and they said they had no objection. They were very liberal about that.

In those days the Guggenheim [Fellowship] was $2500. For the year. My Guggenheim provided for me to go to London and continue the work that I'd been doing before and then to go to Harvard [The Henry James archive was at Harvard] in the fall.

So I went and did the job in Paris. This was the period, when I was working for Havas in Paris, that Edith Wharton would call and invite me to lunch. That was the period when I was in the world, no longer a student. And Edith Wharton treated me as a young acquaintance and was very generous and kind.

In the spring of 1937, I left Havas and went off to London on a year's leave of absence. I didn't want to burn my bridges. And I had a great time. I got a lot of work done and I saw a lot more people than I had known were still around. Theodora Bosanquet by this time had become literary editor of a magazine called *Time and Tide*, which was a great feminist weekly subsidized by Lady Rhondda, a millionairess. So

Theodora was in Bloomsbury. She invited me to parties there. It was very nice.

But again, I didn't take advantage. I could have tried to write articles for Theodora. She would have published them. I didn't. I just went back to the British Museum and went on with my researches. I completed a vast amount of research. I got my eyes into James's letters.

That summer my wife and I sailed back to America and spent the summer in New Hampshire. My brother had a big house for the summer and we stayed with him. In the fall, my wife took a job in New York. We got a little flat in New York. I went to Harvard for the first time.

This was the fall of '37. I still had the Guggenheim. I was given permission, formally, to see all of James's papers, which had not yet been presented to Harvard. They still were on deposit in the basement of the Widener Library, because Harry was an overseer at Harvard. He was on the governing board. He worked for the Carnegie Foundation. He was the head of TIAA [Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association]. It's a great pension outfit. He set it up. It was part of a Carnegie Foundation job. And he became first president of the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association. That's what pays me money. My pension here in Hawai'i is only 6 years, but I've got 25 years pension from NYU, which is TIAA.

I visited him. He said to me, "Well, you certainly were ahead of a lot of people in working

on my uncle. But now other people are catching up with you. I'll give you permission gladly. You may see anything you want relating to the plays."

In other words, nothing else. He was very careful—"You're doing a job on the plays, that's your job." Of course, in order to see what related to the plays, I had to look at the other stuff.

When I came into that basement at Harvard, that was one of the fantastic days of my life. I walked in and there was this whole basement room, a big basement room, nicely furnished. The Widener Library wasn't just a cellar. And laid around on enormous tables were these boxes. William to Henry, Henry to William. Boxes and boxes. Henry to his mother, William to his mother.

The whole James family archive was there. In that room.

There was a trunk in the corner. A big wooden box. I lifted it up, opened it. And what did I see but the handwriting of Theodora. She had a very special handwriting, Theodora Bosanquet, who had been James's secretary. She had packed this trunk. I realized when I looked at it that nobody had touched the stuff since she had packed it in 1916, when James died. Harry was a busy man. He was busy with his father, William James. He had to do his father's letters. But his uncle Henry, he just let the stuff lie.

What was in that box? About ten versions of other versions of some of the plays. And some of the plays I'd never seen were in that box.

And what else?

And a lot of little scribblers that I opened up. I thought, my God, these are notebooks. Those notebooks I was reading yesterday that were published by other people, not by me. I read them ten years before they were published. Not only that, I sat down and copied out of them. I copied a lot of notes on the theater and a lot of things that seemed to me interesting. Whenever I came on anything that fascinated me, I quietly took a copy of it. There weren't too many things, but I took copies just for myself.

That was where I remember seeing a box of stuff marked "to be destroyed." I couldn't copy it, because of the secretary in charge of all this. But when I came on James's last dictation, I copied that. It was stream of consciousness. That's why I copied that. He was delirious. Theodora had told me about this. And there it was. It was her typewriter, her sheets. It was all on James's typewriter. I knew it so well.

During that winter, when I was at Harvard, I would come and go. Weekends I'd go back to New York.

You were still on the Guggenheim.

Yes. This was the Harvard part of my Guggenheim.

At various times, notes would arrive from Harry James, and the secretary who had been an assistant to Ralph Barton Perry, the Professor of Philosophy who had written two big volumes on

William James. Ralph Barton Perry would come in. He had already published these two volumes. Harry James had sent them to me when I was in Paris, as a gift.

There they are, right over there. I'll show them to you.

I can see them.

You see those two with a chipped red corner. They're full of James's family correspondence. All focused on William James. Harry himself had done the letters of William James.

So these are the two volumes.

Ralph Barton Perry had taken William James's place when William retired. He was Chairman of Philosophy. He was very nice to me. I could consult him. There was some order in the family papers because he had used them. There was no order in Henry's personal papers. When I mentioned the notebooks to Harry, a kind of frightened look came on his face. I mentioned them very indirectly, and I realized he didn't even know they were there.

I didn't want to make him look foolish, so when I saw that, I just dropped it.

So you came out of the Harvard Widener Library with…

When I left, I had read all the plays, I'd made copies of the ones that I needed to make.

And you saw them at various stages in development.

Various stages. I saw all the plays about which there had been references in letters but I'd never known of their existence. These were plays, you see, that had not been produced. James had published four plays, in the'90s. All we knew that existed were those four plays that were never acted. Then *Guy Domville*, which had been acted, and *The American*, which had been acted. That's six plays. One acted later on—the one acted which Shaw made a fuss about.

So I found another five plays, I think. Altogether there were a dozen.

In that trunk?

James's texts were in that trunk. Different texts. Rewrites. The one that didn't work out for Granville Barker, and so on.

I had really finished my job by the end of the winter of '37 when my Guggenheim money had run out. I'd made friends with various Harvard people who are still my friends. But there was certainly no job for me at Harvard. They have their own way of hiring and I had nothing to my credit in the way of publication, except my thesis. I didn't apply for a job at Harvard. I didn't even try. I knew my luck would have to be at some other kind of college.

I went back to New York and I needed money. I wasn't going to let my wife support me. She had a fairly decent job, but she couldn't take care

of everything. So I went back to Havas. They were still going strong.

Having been out, I had to go back to a minor job. The same old drivel. From ’37 to ’38, that was about the worst year. I was real low. I was coming in at 4 am.

And the plays…

The plays hadn’t been published. I still had no concept of how I was going to handle all of this. I just had all the material, and a hell of a lot of knowledge suddenly on Henry James that I never expected to have. I kept wishing, by God, I wish I could be editing the notebooks. I’d much rather edit the notebooks than the plays. The plays are, after all, a study of failure, but the notebooks are fascinating.

This was 1937, 1938, and the news from Europe was getting pretty hot.

There came a moment where I said to myself, look, you’re back at Havas, they’re not giving you any pension, they’re not giving you anything. Okay, maybe seventy-five, a hundred a week by that time. That’s how much it had gone up. The only thing I had was Social Security. My Social Security goes all the way back to the middle ‘30s, when it was first established. I was paying Social Security from then on.

I’d at least have that for my future.

I’d asked around the *New York Times*, but no. I didn’t want to work for the evening papers. Then again, I really didn’t want journalism at all.

Therefore I didn't try hard. I didn't push. I was not good at job hunting. I wasn't good at all. I was falling into things.

So again I took the safest route. I wrote to the president of the Canadian Press Association [J. F. B. Livesay], which is like Associated Press. He was a James enthusiast. He'd once written me a letter and I'd gotten to know him. I met him in Toronto. I knew his daughter [Dorothy Livesay] too, who is now a very famous Canadian poet. I'd met her in Paris when she was a student [Sorbonne].

I wrote to him and said, "Look, I'm at loose ends. I wonder whether there's any place for me in your organization, particularly if I could work in your New York bureau."

It was in the same building as Havas.

All the agencies were on one floor in the AP Building. And the Canadian Press had a very good office, very well organized. I thought, at least I would be in an outfit that would have some kind of future for me. And of course I had the knowledge of Canada.

So I went to the Canadian press in New York in the spring of 1939, and in the fall the war began.

You eventually wound up on the war desk.

I remember coming in early Sunday morning and the tickers were going like mad. They were talking about Pearl Harbor, and I sat down and

started reading. I handled the Pearl Harbor story for Canada that day on the wires. It was a little dreamy that I would someday come out to Hawai‘i, but suddenly I was reading about Hawai‘i for the first time. I’d never been introduced to Hawai‘i except hearing Hawai‘ian music on gramophone records.

I became head of the war desk. There were two of us. I did one shift. We handled only war news. War cables. The Canadian Press had special correspondents abroad. This was very professional and very good. It was the best journalism that I was ever involved with, although it was news agency journalism. Cut and dried styles. We knew exactly what each paper wanted.

They knew about my past. I became a ‘second-nighter.’ The out of town papers go to the theater the second night. I used to see all the Broadway shows. I would write them up. I still had my finger in that pot.

The happiest time I had as a journalist was with the Canadian Press. I was back in my own element.

Meanwhile, Ralph Ingersoll had set up *PM* in New York. *PM* was a 10 cent newspaper. He had been one of Luce’s lieutenants and he decided he wanted to have a daily *Time* magazine, printed on good paper. A 10 cent daily. All the news digested. Pretty courageous, because nobody paid more than 5 cents for a paper in those days.

And no advertising.

He conscripted for that some of the best journalists in the United States. Max Lerner was writing for him. He had various other big shots. But he also needed rank and file. Curiously enough, a chap I worked with on the *Montreal Herald* got a job there. He was the one who told him about me, and they made me an offer way above the 75 I was getting at the Canadian Press. They offered me a hundred a week if I would come to *PM*. So I resigned from the Canadian Press and went to *PM*.

For the next year, I was with them. That was when the draft caught up with me. I had no children, my wife was employed, I was employed. There was no reason for my not being drafted. So there I was in the Army, in the spring of 1943.

I didn't try to get out of it. I remember the people at the top of *PM* said, "Why didn't you tell us you were coming up? We could have taken steps to say you were necessary to the war desk."

But there I was. I was in. No argument about it. I was passive.

Did they offer you Officers Candidate School or anything?

No. I didn't ask for that. I'll tell you what I did turn down, and there was my mistake. I'd been offered jobs in the Office of War Information. Because of my French, they wanted to send me to Algiers. I should have gone. It would have been very exciting. But there I was, stuck again.

I think that whole period, starting with my coming back from Paris, the Depression in Montreal, there had been a real regression. Those were the years where I really was my most passive.

You were in a rut.
A real rut.

And the war was an escape.
And my marriage was in a rut too. She was intelligent, amiable. I think we were just both lonely.

So off I went. And I suppose deep down I was glad to do it, although it was rough.

THE IN-BETWEEN YEARS

It can be a relief to give your life into somebody else's care for a while. You're going to be provided for. You're not going to have to worry about where the next dollar is going to come from. It's time off.

I just sloughed all responsibilities. And there I was 37. Through all those wasted years I just drifted. I was still a drifter. My brother was moving on in his career very well. He got married. During the war, his first child was born, and his second child.

So I went into the Army. It was the war years and I didn't even make a move. They asked me did I want to go into the Navy or the Army, and I said Army. Maybe I should have said Navy. I didn't even think about it. It was a thoughtless answer. Later on, I thought, so why didn't I say Navy? That would have been an original experience. It might have been totally different.

But the Army it was.

I went into Army basic training in the middle of July, down in Ft. Eustis, doing things with 20-year-olds. It was rough. It was real rough. I got through 12 weeks of basic. At the end of 12

weeks, I was suddenly summoned before the Commanding Officer. He said, "We don't like to lose men, but I think in your case we're going to send you out. We got a request. Your records in Washington show that you speak French, that you've been a newspaperman, that you have certain skills. And we got orders to shift you to another camp."

I said goodbye to all the boys I'd gone through basic with. You acquire a barracks kind of intimacy. They all envied me. I was going somewhere mysterious. I didn't know where I was going.

I made this mysterious journey to Baltimore, then Hagerstown. I found out I was going to Camp Ritchie. Camp Ritchie was a hush-hush G2 Camp. Intelligence, but not only intelligence. Because by that time the war had taken on what they call psychological warfare. Here I went to school again. The first six weeks there, they were in a state of chaos because Italy had gone out of the war…been knocked out of the war. It was 1943. There had been some big reverse.

That would have been Mussolini's arrest, which provoked a civil war.

The Italian language people were concerned. This camp was filled with Italian language people, German language people, French speaking people. The French were riding high. No one knew what was being prepared.

The first four weeks we were all on KP, until our time came to go to class. When we went to class, we were the elite. Others waited on us. All we did was go to class all day. All kinds of military intelligence training. It was one of the most fascinating parts of my war experience.

We did creeping and crawling. We were sent out at night with a compass. We were dropped off in the middle of nowhere and had to find our way back. All kinds of practical exercises. It was a brilliant camp. There are times when the army functions very well. It was full of Germans. The woods were full of them, and they wore German uniforms. Our job was not to be captured by them. If we were captured, they behaved like Nazis.

It was real. They made it very real. They'd take us out, sit us down in the dark, and they'd fire all the German weapons, so we'd hear the sounds. Very intelligent. They'd sit us down for a while and tell us to look in that direction and say what we saw. Suddenly one of us would say we saw a light. It was just a flicker of light. Then the officer in charge said, "Okay fellows, now you've seen how visible a single match is. Somebody lit a cigarette on that hilltop. When you're creeping and crawling over there in Europe, don't light cigarettes."

He taught us everything.

When we finished that, I figured we were going to be sent off somewhere and assigned to duty. Not at all. Suddenly I found new marching

orders. They'd caught up with my newspaper work. My French skills before, now my newspaper work. They were organizing a series of special companies. This was to be called psychological warfare. It was really propaganda.

There I was back again a journalist, but a military journalist. We were being trained for combat, to take over radio stations, take over printing presses. We were to carry equipment in the field so we could run off a leaflet. Our group consisted of Germans, Italians; all the languages were represented. If we needed a German pamphlet, the Germans were there to write; if we needed a French pamphlet, I was there with various French guys to write it. And we could make broadcasts in whatever language was necessary.

That was again a fascinating training. There I met Albert Guerard, who was at Stanford. He was at Harvard before that. We were both trained in those units. They were called *mobile broadcasting companies*, which was an innocuous name. I was in the 3rd Mobile Broadcasting Company. By the time I was through, I was given a tech sergeant's rank, which was the highest rank they gave. There were two or three tech sergeants. Then they handed out a lot of sergeants and corporals.

We were shipped off. We didn't know where, but pretty soon we figured out we were on our way to Europe. We landed in England. I saw London. It was after the Big Blitzes. Mainly we

were again at a camp being prepared. Then we were told we were going to go to France pretty soon.

While we were there, D-Day came. I remember waking up in the morning and seeing row upon row of planes flying by, all day long.

That was the great D-Day bombing.

The Normandy invasion.

We immediately left London, where we had been taking some special indoctrination courses, and were moved down to the Channel where we prepared all our equipment for a landing on the beach. We had to put beeswax on the engines. We had our own jeep assigned to us. We had to make sure that everything was beeswaxed.

You were waterproofing the engines.

We spent a whole day on it practically. We were taken aboard a ship and we crossed over. I looked around and a bunch of journalists were onboard. The press camp was to be close to psychological warfare.

Was there a lot of shooting going on as you crossed over?

No. Nothing. No planes. Normandy was over. It was 12 days after.

You were coming to a secure area.

Relatively secure. The beach had been cleared. We were Patton's army. We came in with a lot of

newspapermen, some of whom I'd known from the press camp.

You were playing chess in the field.

That was later. That was the Morris Bishop episode. Morris Bishop years later used to say, "Funny, I was with Edel and he was always carrying a gun." I had a Tommy gun.

He wondered whether or not there were bullets in your Tommy gun.

There were plenty of bullets in that Tommy gun. I just had to pull the trigger. The magazine had 20 shots in it. Big bullets. I used it once. But it was just blind shooting. In Paris, after the Liberation. I was shooting at invisible targets. We were being shot at from the rooftops.

By whom?

Germans in civilian uniforms who had remained behind. Snipers. They were sniping for several weeks. I went through two experiences where I came close to active combat. Not the kind where you're fighting other men, but the unseen enemy. The other one was the mysterious situation where you wander around dark streets never knowing what you'll come to around the corner. One night in Strasbourg, I turned a corner and was confronted by four guys who had Tommy guns too. I had mine on my shoulder and they had theirs pointed right at me.

They said, “We want the password.” And they said it in French.

I answered them in French. I said, “I can’t give you the password. How do I know that you aren’t Nazis trying to find out the password? You’re supposed to give me one word and I give you one other word back.”

They turned out to be DeGaulist troops. FFI [French Forces of the Interior].

It was like giving them a professorial lecture. They said, “Come on, give us the password.” I said, “Look, the password has a first word. You give me the first word and I’ll give you the second.” So they gave me the first word, which was usually Eisenhower or something simple for the French. And I said “Casablanca.”

They were satisfied. I said, “The next time you do it that way. Don’t ask for me to give you the password.”

I walked around the corner. It was then that I got the shock. I thought to myself, my God, these guys could have mowed me down! For one time, my feet actually began to quake. It’s the kind of experience I went through. Being shelled by the Germans was the other nightmare.

And you lived to tell about it.

I was decorated for my work in Strasbourg. I was made a lieutenant in the field. A cable came signed “Eisenhower.” That’s the way it was done. And I came back to Paris and suddenly found that I could go into an officer’s mess and live in a

hotel instead of living in a barracks and sleeping on straw.

Hitler died that spring. It was VE Day. They were going on into Germany and I went into Germany with them. In Germany, I lived in a hotel. I might as have well have been a sergeant because the brass was very big in Germany. I was constantly fighting the U.S. Army, and they gave me the right job. The American Army did right by me. There were guys who spoke French and were sent to learn Japanese. Guerard spoke French. His father was French. He came to us from a camp where they'd been trying to teach him Japanese. He was supposed to go in the other direction.

I moved straight. I can't complain. And I moved up.

While you were in Germany.

I was made a First Louie in Germany.

I went up to Berlin for special conferences on Anti-Nazification. I was in on a lot of that. General Clay was in charge of Berlin then. I visited the Chancellor. When Hitler died, Berlin was a shambles. I saw Berlin as a shambles. I travelled to Munich. I established bureaus. I did a Canadian press training. I did exactly the AP Canadian Press model, with bureaus in different centers. We had our own OWI [Office of War Information] people—older people, all journalists—running these bureaus, then gradually becoming counterintelligence. We

cleared Germans. We could move Germans into these jobs.

And there was the end of the war.

When you were in Paris, you also stopped in on Sylvia Beach.

That was the day of the Liberation. The day Paris was liberated.

You stopped in on Sylvia Beach again.

I saw her there. I walked with her. I took a long walk through Paris with her. Because you didn't have any transportation. She was needing her bicycle. Hemingway had seen her that morning or the day before, she told me. I was the second person to look her up.

Then back to New York and to PM.

I came home in a depression. Just like the post Paris years. Suddenly I was back to responsibilities. I was out of the Army matrix. I didn't know what to do with myself. The marriage was washed up. I continued to muddle along. By now I was 40 years old.

So at the age of 40, I was in a deep depression and back at PM, which had deteriorated. It was losing money and being subsidized. It started out so wonderfully and then it went to pieces.

You needed to finish the plays.

Looking back at it now, I realized the extent to which I had completed nothing in my life. I set

out to have a college degree and teach at a university. I hadn't made it. I'd set out to do the Guggenheim project, but I hadn't finished it. This was 1947. I'd had my Guggenheim in '37. The whole war had intervened. I had done a lot of writing, but I found my desk filled with unfinished stuff. Various ideas of one kind and another. I could write on assignment, but I couldn't write for myself.

My whole life was unfinished. And my personal life was unfinished too.

Did you have a fear of completing things, or was it just…

Failures in confidence. Call it that. I suppose this kind of drifting life that I led meant that I didn't have any real confidence in myself. Or real belief in myself. Somewhere out of all this, this is the way I'd worked out.

PM had to fold and I had to find myself unemployed to suddenly say to myself, what do I do next? And I said to myself, you're going to sit down and finish the plays. You're going to finish your Guggenheim project.

What happened, in very quick order, I just sat down and got the plays done. I discovered after those ten years that it was all in my head. I didn't even have to look at the material—or a lot of it. The only way to do it was not to rummage around in the material where you get lost, but just to get at the center of everything. I knew the story of each play. I'd rethought it. I'd had all the

gestation I needed. I sat down and found that within six months I'd finished the plays.

Also, I had a contract for the plays from a publisher. I had a contract from Lippincott. There had been a James revival. The James papers that I had seen ten years before had been given to Harvard and Harvard professors were at work on them. Matthiessen [F. O. Matthiessen, author of *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*] had immediately pounced on the notebooks and was working on them, and consulting with me, asking me for my help.

It was at this point that Harry James said to me, "Other people are catching up with you," and I said to myself, dammit, I've got to get the plays done. And so I got the plays done. They were published. Good reviews. They got front page in the *New York Times*, front page in the *Tribune*.

Suddenly everything opened up. When Lippincott finished the plays, they turned around and said, now we want you to write the life of Henry James. And Harper's said, we want you to write the life of Henry James. I had two publishers bidding. William Morris took me on and arranged the contract with Lippincott. I'm glad. Because at Lippincott they were ready to wait. They weren't in a hurry. And it was their idea to put it out as a series of volumes.

So I began my literary life. I began my teaching life. It was time to start finishing. I

ceased being an unfinished person. It's been going on for more than 30 years now.

Now we can go on. Do you want my method?

Yes, particularly with respect to literary psychology.

THE WRITING YEARS

I think you will find that there is much less psychology in my preface to *Guy Domville* in*The Complete Plays*, which I did in '49. Because although I'd had the interest and I'd been reading, I really began to understand dreams when I started getting my own dreams interpreted, when I began to understand fantasy and the nature of fantasy.

So I take my beginnings in what I call literary psychology. I don't know that anybody else has used that term. They always speak of literature and psychoanalysis, or literature and psychiatry. But I call it literary psychology.

Yours sounds like a more humanistic approach.

That's right. Also, it gets away from the therapeutic.

It started in 1950, when my British publisher, Rupert Hart-Davis, now "Sir" Rupert, heard me talk. He met me when I was already deeply into this. He had an interesting psychological problem with a book. He gave me a copy. He inscribed it, "In hope of a diagnosis." This was a novel written by Hugh Walpole, who was a very

popular novelist in his time. He still has a wide readership in England.

Hugh wrote this novel, *The Killer and the Slain*, during the war and died right after, in 1941. Rupert, who was working on the biography of Hugh then, had the manuscript of this novel.

The manuscript was dedicated to Henry James, but not by name: "This macabre is dedicated in loving memory and humble admiration to the great author of *The Turning of the Screw*." The American edition edited this. They took out the word "macabre" and the dedication read, "Dedicated in loving memory and humble admiration to the author of *The Turn of the Screw*," not "*The Turning of the Screw*." Walpole got it wrong. There was a slip of the pen. But in the British edition, the dedication was the way Walpole had worded it in the manuscript.

Rupert said, "It might be interesting if you could figure out why this novel was dedicated to James, who has been dead for 25 years. Of course we all know they were friends. James took an interest in the young Hugh Walpole."

And, Rupert, said, "I'll give you copies of James's letters to Walpole." He was executor of the estate. That's how he came to write the biography. Since he had to go through all of the material, he decided he might as well write the biography.

I said, "No, I will not read the letters. I will read the novel and see what I can come up with."

So I read the novel. And I came up with a lot of psychological ideas as to why shortly before his death Walpole should have written this kind of novel, what was involved. Then I read the letters and I found more material. Then I sent the whole thing to Rupert, who then sent me back a series of diary entries which would further confirm my diagnosis.

I was very encouraged, and I sent off this thing to a quasi psychoanalytic journal called *American Imago*, and they accepted it.

I date that as my first piece of psychological writing.

What was your article titled?

"Hugh Walpole and Henry James: The Fantasy of the 'Killer and the Slain.'" I've still got offprints. I hope I can find one for you here.

What came out of it was how a dedication, then the reading of the book, can lead you into a whole relationship. A dedication, after all, presupposes a relationship.

How so here?

In a word, *The Killer and the Slain* is a redoing; it contains a lot of the elements from *The Turn of the Screw*. I don't think Walpole really knew it, but he felt the affinity between the two.

The story is about a man who kills another man and then becomes the man he killed. The man who performs the murder, John Ozias

Talbot, is a weak, effeminate, latent homosexual, but not really a practicing gay. He'd be afraid to do anything. The other man, James Oliphant Turnstall, is very macho. So Talbot goes from incipient gay to macho. Then, having become that, he has to kill that part of himself.

And the novel ends with Talbot's suicide.
It's a Jekyll-Hyde kind of thing.

Right down to the two characters sharing the same initials.
It's kind of old hat now, but it's still a very well-written, swift-moving story.

So how does this relate dramatically to James's *Turn of the Screw*, in which two children are placed in the care of a governess who becomes convinced that little Miles is possessed by the evil spirit of a deceased former servant, Peter Quint?
I'll read you this from my manuscript: "The governess at the end of the story confronts the ghost of Quint in a attempt to drive off the evil, and in the process, little Miles dies. The last words are, 'and his little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.' The final scene of *The Killer and the Slain* draws on the final scene of *The Turn of the Screw*. John Talbot is the adult form of little Miles. Tunstall is Peter Quint, and Leila [Tunstall's wife] is the Governess."

So what was the psychological connection you made between the two stories and the personal relationship between Walpole and James?

Walpole introduces a lot of corruption between the killer and the slain before the killer kills. Let's see [reading]: "Talbot's little son is like his father—a Little Miles. And Tunstall/Talbot, possessed by evil in *The Killer and the Slain*, commits an act Talbot alone would never have committed, or even thought of. He makes lewd drawings for the little boy and deeply disturbs the child. At that point, the Walpolean Peter Quint demonstrates his corrupting force.

"Hugh Walpole, the son of an Anglican Bishop, can well appreciate James's governess, reared in a vicarage, her need to drive out the Devil from Little Miles. This provides us with a partial answer to Rupert Hart-Davis' enquiry. Hugh dedicated his macabre in humble admiration to James because he was in a sense writing his own version of the Master's story. If we wish to pursue the dedication on psychological grounds, then we have 'The Turning,' then we get the slip of the tongue, and so on."

In dedicating his story to the author of "The Turning of the Screw," Walpole has extended it…

To a continuum.

The way I interpreted the fact that Walpole made a slip of the pen and said "turning" instead of "turn" is this: when you have a turn of the screw, that hurts. But with a turning of the screw, it's going on all the time. And the screw had to be turning for Walpole.

So the metaphor extends to Walpole himself.

What I'm involved in is not putting the characters on the couch, or the author on the couch. I'm involved in finding out what imagination has achieved. I'm looking for triumphs of the imagination, where the author takes part of the data of their own life, as Walpole does.

Alright, it's only a thriller novel, but *The Killer and the Slain* is an imaginative work written right out of Walpole's own unconscious. In his own mind, there is his relationship with Henry James, there's the power of Henry James in *The Turning of the Screw*. But aside from the dedication, in the story itself is a total recreation of the macabre in which there's this tough painter—Tunstall is a painter—and this rather precious antique dealer, Talbot, who's married and has a little boy. Tunstall is constantly saying, there's a tie between us. We're on the same wavelength, you and I. And Talbot hates his guts, until he gets to the point where he decides to kill him.

So James Tunstall is a painter and Talbot…

Is an antique dealer. And a writer. Hugh Walpole bought antiques. He had a tremendous collection of antiques.

And he had a longstanding relationship with James, who had taken the young author under his wing, so to speak. It was almost like a father-son relationship, with something more on Walpole's side. According to Somerset Maugham, on one occasion Walpole made a sexual overture to James and James refused him.

Yes. What was clear to me was that Walpole was known to be a homosexual. James was the macho. He had to kill the father in order to become the father. So it was a mixture of Oedipal and macho, with Walpole killing off James in order to become James. And dedicating it to his memory 25 years after James died, in humble admiration, Walpole then drops dead of a heart attack a few months later. It was his last novel.

It was strange in many ways that Walpole should think of James as macho when many people thought James was rather effeminate. But James had power. James was a powerful man.

There, look at that picture of him. That's the James that Walpole knew.

With this initial paper, there was the beginning of my method.

To do what the New Critics ask of me, although I rebelled at the New Criticism. I said,

yes, text first. The text is the pure fantasy. Then you go wherever the text leads you. And in the text you look for slips, as Freud taught us. Slips of the pen.

Like frontiersman instead of pioneer.

Frontiersman—you got me up on a word.

What I was doing then, when I later looked back on it, from the beginning I was getting away from the therapy. I didn't use the word Oedipal then. I didn't use the word sibling rivalry in the whole five volumes of James, but I was talking about sibling rivalry. Now it's become very common. In the revised version, 25 years later, I think I used it once or twice.

But the people who were writing literary psychology or literature and psychoanalysis then were all looking for the Oedipus complex, all these therapeutic things. The adjective Oedipal was used all the time. I was invited at that time to a meeting to start the Literature and Psychoanalysis Group in the Modern Language Association. At the very first meeting I convinced them and they changed it to the Literature and Psychology Group. Imagine if they had called themselves Literature and Psychoanalysis.

It would have become an even more defined science.

That's right. So there's where the method began.

And yet, your interest in literary psychology goes back long before you wrote about Walpole's *The Killer and the Slain*, in 1951.

That's two years before the publication of my first volume of James.

The very beginning goes back to the Montreal Group, to your original fascination with the modern psychological novelists—to Joyce's stream of consciousness, to Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson.

Because they were subjective. They were all stream of consciousness in one form or another. James was one of the great psychological novelists. He was always concerned with the way people look at things and the theories people develop about reality around them.

The world they saw was very much a product of their inner makeup.

That's right. And the way in which they explained the world to themselves.

James played with that not only in *The Turn of the Screw,* but in *The Aspern Papers*, a great novela, which has a narrator like the governess, only this time the narrator tells the truth. The governess, you see, is paranoid. She's destroying everything. Everything is reflective of her own feelings. She's projecting all the way through.

After the war, in the method, I began to talk about projection. I began to understand projection. You've got to understand these things

that are commonplace now. Earlier, it was on a much more conscious level. After the war, I began to look for the signals and signs of the unconscious.

You became more symbol oriented.

Symbol oriented, myth oriented. I also began to read Jung. And I began at this stage to read people from the William Alanson White Institute. That's Harry Stack Sullivan. They go in for interpersonal relations. They're very critical of Freud. But they use Freud. I'm now an honorary member of the William Alanson White Institute.

What did you think about Jung?

I understood that Jung reacted against Freud's anti-religious position, quite justifiably, I think. But Jung took everything of Freud's and renamed it. That's my theory.

He created a new system.

He just simplified it.

I never thought of it in those terms.

Think of it. Jung is translating Freud, and adapting Freud.

So in place of Freud's id, ego and super-ego, Jung saw the ego, the personal unconscious, and collective unconscious?

That's right. Now, the collective is purely a hypothesis. That's the part I don't agree with in

Jung at all—the collective. But even though I say I don't agree with it, I still have a feeling that somewhere something is communicated. Something was communicated by Fanny and Simon to me out of their grandparents, and their great grandparents. There's some continuum. Something. But it's very mysterious in that you can only conjecture about it. And it is not hereditary, I think.

I'm not interested in debunking Jung, or Freud versus Jung, or any of that. Anything they can tell me about the imagination I will use.

Certainly, I liked the Jungian analysis in that Canadian trilogy [Robertson Davies' *The Deptford Trilogy*] very much. But in each case I kept going through and seeing that that analysis as written down by this man is very close to a Freudian analysis, except for putting it into another terminology.

You might say that Jung managed to extend Freud's metaphor.

He extended it to the extent that Jung came from such a different environment. Freud was the Jewish boy, the city boy, the Viennese, the cosmopolitan. Jung was more aristocratic, gentry, closer to the land, country.

And the son of a Lutheran Pastor.

I see Jung as an infiltration or conversion of Freud. But Freud's essential discoveries are not invalidated by Jung. They are, in a way, enlarged.

And this to me is true for all the people who have criticized Freud. All they do is take Freud and restate him. But the discovery of the unconscious, that was Freud. He discovered it. What he didn't do, what he left unfinished, and other people have finished, is ego psychology. And that has been popularized by [Erik] Erikson.

Erikson didn't invent these crises. He got them from ego psychology, which was developed—if you want to be historical—by Hartmann. [Heinz] Hartmann, [Ernst] Kris, [Rudolph] Loewenstein, these were the people that took this part of Freud that had been neglected, that Freud hadn't gotten to really. That is, Freud had focused so much on infantile things—the child, how it all began. There was room for study of what happens in middle age. It was Erikson adapting ego psychology that got to the crisis of the 20s, the crisis at middle age, the crisis of aging. Erikson had a whole series. And a lot of people use Erikson.

I think the terminology that's used now is good. Freud is classical. And then there's the modern, or the new that has come since Freud. Freud is the classic. Jung then, I would say, belongs with Adler and the others—the voice diverged. And all of them made a contribution.

I didn't sit down and read these books. I went to lectures. A lot of them. I did look things up in books. And I'd read some Freud in Paris in French in the early days. But an awful lot of what

I got, aside from my own analysis, I got from constantly being in those circles.

You mentioned Alfred Adler. You spent a week with Adler during your Sorbonne years. Can we talk about that?

Yes.

Because it seems like a very important point in your life, your work.

It was an initiating point.

It occurred in about 1929, 1930.

A half a century ago. In 1930. It all occurred in the strange ways in which these things happen.

It was before I saw Bernard Shaw. I went over to England from Paris because a lot of the Henry James stuff that I was working on was not in the French libraries. The place to look at it was in the British Museum. And I went up to Oxford and visited my brother, who said, "I've got a place for you to live in London. A brother of a friend of mine here is living with two other chaps. They've got an extra bed and they already said they'd be glad to have you."

I arrived in London. It was an apartment on the ground floor, right opposite Regents Park. There were these two brothers and this chap who was studying architecture. He was a real young blade around town. He opened the door and said, "Oh, you're young Edel's brother. Look, I have to go.

Can you lend me a pair of socks? This is where you're going to sleep."

That was the beginning.

Later that evening, I met these two brothers. One was a medical student, the other a Hebraic and Arabic scholar. Their father had been an instructor at Oxford in Semitic languages. He had just disappeared. There were lots of stories about him. These two boys had left their mother and were living on their own. But they were making their way. One was just starting medicine. The other was at the British Museum all the time. He took me to the British Museum and introduced me to everything.

I had a marvelous time living with these brothers [Israel and Nakdimon Doniach]. They knew London like the back of their hand. This was my great introduction to London. We used to walk through Regents Park. We had a marvelous time. I am still in touch with them. The medical student became an eminent pathologist—*the* Professor of Pathology [at London Hospital].

At any rate, at some point I told the two Doniach boys that I was planning that summer to go to Vienna, and they said, "Oh, our sister's in Vienna."

I said, "What's she doing there?"

"She's studying piano with [Artur] Schnabel. She gives concerts. Look her up."

She started out to be a concert artist. She later became a musicologist.

So my brother sends me to live with these boys, they say look up my sister [Shulamit Doniach], and I go to Vienna. It might have happened a dozen other ways, but that's the way it worked.

I go to Vienna. While I'm there, I wonder, that's an older sister. She was almost 30. But anyhow, I called her up. I told her I'd lived with her brothers and I said, "If you have time, let's go have a drink or a cup of coffee or something."

She said fine. She had time. It was summer.

She turned out to be rather pleasant. I suppose she didn't know what to do with a young chap like myself. We talked about music. She showed me some of the sights. She said, "I don't know if you're interested, I'm going to Adler's summer seminar. He gives it for the English speaking, mostly doctors. There are doctors here from the United States, there are English doctors. There are about 20 people there."

I said, "Does he accept visitors? Can I go?"

She said, "Others have brought in visitors." And she brought me along.

That was that afternoon. It was at 4 o'clock. We'd had lunch. So she took me to his place and I saw this very big apartment and got a glimpse of some home life in Vienna. It was very interesting. I remember the big room, and I remember little Adler himself with his little wispy mustache, almost like Hitler's. He was a short fat little man. But oh, was he a bundle of energy!

He sat me down. I was wearing this very fancy beard, very well trimmed.

I remember listening to individual psychology and so on. Nothing was said about the inferiority complex. They were discussing cases. Some of it was pretty technical. I just enjoyed the vitality of this man. And when we were through, he turned to Shula Doniach, the pianist, and said, "Bring him around the Siller tonight." This is where two or three nights a week he just sits there. He's got his regular table and anybody who wants to can come from the seminar and be sociable and drink with him.

"See," she said, "he doesn't mind at all your having come."

She took me then to the Cafe Siller. I really liked it there. It was one of these old-fashioned Viennese cafes right down by the Danube. It was a mild night near the end of August and we sat around.

And he observed the conventions.

I was the guest who had come to his seminar. I was a student of literature at the Sorbonne. Therefore, I had to sit on his right. He made a place for me right next to him, and then he began a conversation with me. It was that evening that I had probably the most conversation with him. Because we talked for a good long time.

He asked me, "What are you doing?"

So I told him I was working on the plays of Henry James.

"The brother of William James," he said.

"It's a biographical study," I said, and he said, "Oh, well you know, brotherly relationships are part of my interest. Which one was the oldest?" and I said William was the oldest. He knew William's work, of course. So he expressed a particular interest in that.

We went on. He said, "Any biographer must do exactly what we do. You try to learn as much as you can about family situations." At that time I wasn't even thinking about writing James's biography. All I was concerned with was the plays. I hadn't formed any idea of my career.

He explained some of the things he was doing. He talked about his clinic, that he had established various clinics. And individual psychology, which he explained to me too. Freud's idea of the Oedipal had become a cliché, whereas he was concerned with individual psychology. He considered himself the founder of individual psychology. Even books today speak of him in that way.

He was breaking away from Freud's psychoanalytic model.

But what was original, as I saw later in Adler, was his study of man's drive to power. That's really the inferiority complex. There's no such thing as the superiority complex. There's only that certain men feel inferior to other men, and therefore have certain drives to try to overcome that inferiority. He was very eloquent on that subject, that in this world we are all, aside from

our place in society, equals as humans. The distinctions come in our societal roles, roles that we play in society where we can feel ourselves inferior to other people, or equal of other people, or else think other people inferior to us.

Always inferiority. That's where the emphasis is.

That's right. And then the power drives to overcome, to compensate. It's all pretty old hat now to talk about that.

It would seem, however, almost like an August moment for you, in the sense that your first major project—that is, James—would involve the study of a man who had that great drive for power.

Yes.

Who identified with Napoleon of all people.

I didn't know that then.

But later, it would seem almost August.

James's identification with Napoleon was with one specific thing. That was Napoleon's belief that there was no such thing as the impossible. That's the power. I found in one of James's articles, he said someone was Napoleonic, in the sense that he had no sense of difficulties, no sense of difficulties at all. And James had no sense of difficulties. James was always overcoming his problems. James also, as I

discovered later, had a fear of not completing something. Everything he started had to be completed.

Did James ever have any problems that he couldn't solve?

Well, I suppose *Guy Domville* was a problem he couldn't solve. Playwriting was the problem that he couldn't solve. He solved all his other problems.

What about women?

He never wanted women.

He dealt with that problem.

He had dealt with that problem very early. He announced he wasn't going to marry. He was announcing that before he was 30. He felt that the bachelor was a very useful institution in society. There's a marvelous letter on the subject.

In your early interpretations you concluded that he felt women in some cases would draw on a man's strength and weaken him so that he would never be able to do the impossible.

That's right. That is what I got from Adler, aside from his geniality and having gotten involved in a strange way with a very large figure in modern psychology, as he was at the time. He had a great following. It's amazing how many different countries were represented in that seminar.

The rest of the week I was welcome to come to the Cafe Siller anytime I wanted. He greeted me every time. He didn't put me next to him then; he had other people sitting next to him. But I saw him, we chatted. We said hello. I came two or three times during my week in Vienna. And on other weekends, I sat next to some of his clinical workers and they talked and further elaborated. They tried to explain individual psychology to me in terms of clinical cases and so on. And they were the ones who told me that he had begun as a plant man.

A botanist?

Yes. And that he had observed the struggle of plants to overcome inferiority. The clinicians talked about that. Later, I read up on him. So what I say in this book [*Stuff of Sleep and Dreams*] is not just from that one week in Vienna. It's my knowledge of Adler as a physician, and so on.

But that was an adventure.

I came back to Paris and I remember going out and asking for some books on Freud. I didn't look for Adler's book. Freud was what I wanted to get first. I knew that he was number one. I remember reading his essays on infantile sexuality and so forth.

That was the Adlerian experience.

I later met Shula in London. I went to her concerts. She was a very good pianist. She taught. She's written a book. She's still alive.

She's an old lady now. She came to Westminster Abbey when I gave my lecture there. I suddenly saw her in the audience and recognized her. I hadn't seen her in 30 years. She was there with her one of her brothers.

So in '51, when I did this thing on *The Killer and the Slain*, I was already deep in this method. I was really applying these things.

And embarking on the James biography.

I had already started writing the Henry James biography. From the beginning, I remember sitting down and suddenly saying to myself, how can I ever do this? How do you dare undertake something as mammoth as Henry James? There's just so much material! Alright, so you've done the plays, you've done the five years. But what else was going on in his life, and so on. Then I reached a moment when I said, okay, just start at the beginning.

I remembered that room full of stuff at Harvard that I hadn't yet read. I was beginning to work as a teacher. I didn't have enough time to go and do research at Harvard.

I just started. I wrote the first part without having done all the research, but I was already applying my method. Because I had read some of James's letters to his mother and explored the mother. If you look at my first four chapters in the biography, they are thematic chapters. The father, the mother, the brother…and art—the great dream of the Louvre [from James's *A Small*

Boy and Others]. It's only at the end of that that I bring in the birth of Henry James in Washington Square.

This is the part I wrote very rapidly. Because it came out in '53. I signed the contract in '50, or '51. I'd started working on the old man, the grandfather. I decided I wasn't going to waste much time with him. I'd do it in one page, practically, and sail right into the father's religious crisis.

The mother was very hard to draw. To this day we don't know much about her. The portrait that I drew was pure deduction of what she was like from the kind of letters she wrote to her sons, from little hints and references to herself. I read some of her letters to William, some of her letters to Alice, and the ones to Henry. All her children.

Out of that came the chapter called "Mere Junior." There I was applying the Adlerian—I won't say Freudian. Henry hated being a mere junior. He was Henry James Jr. That meant he was number two as far as father was concerned, and number two as far as his brother was concerned. And he didn't like it.

He was a walking illustration of Adler's idea, and he felt this great power in himself. The power of his imagination. The idea that whatever he wants to do is not impossible. He can do it.

So your psychological method was in gear and working.

All that I did in my first volume was to analyze Henry's attitude towards women, his life in the family. And I said to myself suddenly, I'm not going to tell the story of James's education. What a job that would be! So I said, "Scenes from an Education," and I took some characteristic episodes out of his autobiographies.

And I suddenly found that I had started out on the episodic method. When I started volume two, I said to myself, that was okay for the childhood, now I've got to do it differently. And it didn't work. So I went back to the episodic.

After a while I realized that this was the only way to do this biography. I'd started that way; it had to go on being that way. What I did was gather up my material and bring together out of the future and out of the past what was crucial at a given moment in James's life. As far as I was concerned, we were already living beyond James's future. Therefore it was all past. James himself was still in my story looking to the future, but I as narrator knew already what the future was.

And again, I was doing a psychological thing, showing the repetition pattern in life, which we all have.

Lord, I knew that in my own life I'd seen the repetition pattern, only too well.

So that was how I was launched on this method. The method is the key to the biography.

You're merging an episodic approach with the psychological approach.

But beyond the psychological approach, I got into problems of method of a purely pragmatic kind.

Such as?

My publisher came to me and said, "Look, that first part that you've written, by itself, if you never write any other book, it's worth publishing."

I said, "What if I find some new letters, what if I want to change my mind about some of these things that I've said about James? Some of these might be tentative. I might have better material."

My editor said, "Look, you can sit with this thing on your desk all your life. Is this or is this not the young Henry James? Do you believe in it or don't you? If this is the young Henry James, I want to publish it." Then he said, "Take your manuscript home and reread it."

So I took it home and reread it. And I realized that I had to write two or three more chapters. And I wrote them. Two or three of the best chapters are the ones that sort of see the mythic. The chapter on J Compagnia ["James Group" or "James Society"] was written to underline the struggle between William and Henry.

And I strengthened the chapter on the mother. And I did all kinds of tightenings.

Then I handed the book back to him and said, "Okay, I'm ready to take the consequences." I did

the Napoleonic thing. I said, "Whatever problems arise in the later volumes, and I can foresee an awful lot, and if I find more letters, I'll solve them then."

That of course happened. And for a while I floundered. In fact, for eight years I floundered. I was busy establishing myself in academia, making up for the lost time, and making myself a place as a college professor. But in the meantime I was struggling with how to go on with the method that I had started.

And here were these new letters about things that could have gone into *Volume One*. But you can't put everything in. That I knew. I told myself, I can't follow the method that Auchincloss describes where they put everything in.

Then suddenly I realized—and I began to do it in the second and third volumes, but even more in the third—what's wrong with using a flashback? But where do I put the flashback? Then I said, okay, there's this bunch of letters, leave them there. And there would come a moment when I would say, my God, now's the time. Just come in with a little chapter which says, back when he was a young man, he did this and that, and I brought it all together.

I started doing that more and more.

So there was the psychological method, there was also the method of Proust, of moving forward and back in time, and there was the simple method of all the English novels.

Your method grew out of that modernist movement you explored at McGill. All the techniques that were being used by the modern novelists you were using to tell James's story, moving back and forth in a kind of timeless state.

And biographers do not dare do that. Read Edgar Johnson's Dickens. It's strictly chronological. The standard biographies, they're all chronological.

You have to at times dip into the future in order that your reader won't lose touch with the past, where you are now. Because the significance of this moment in the future is now.

One of the ways in which I foresaw the future was that chapter that introduced the Napoleonic theme. Because I had found the last dictation and copied it. I knew that Harry had ordered it destroyed. The woman in charge said, "Have you seen something called 'Henry James's Last Dictation?'" I said, "Yes, I saw it."

I'd already copied it.

She said, "Mr. James wants to see it." Somebody had inquired about it because Theodora, the typist who took that dictation down, had mentioned it somewhere. I knew exactly where it was. I gave it to her. She was very grateful. I didn't tell her I had copied it.

She sent it to Harry James and she got it back saying, "This shows the disintegration of my uncle's great mind. I suppose it ought to be destroyed."

Later, when all the materials were given to Harvard, it wasn't. So it was destroyed.

And I had copied it out. I put it away in my safety deposit box and just left it there, figuring that some day I would use it.

Did you?

I already was able to use it by the Napoleonic theme in my fourth chapter. When the end came, of course, I used it. I published the whole thing.

By that time you were able to decide what should and should not be used.

By that time there had been several deaths in the James family and the new members didn't care one way or another. I said that I had copied parts of it, which I believe were later destroyed. But Bosanquet had kept parts. In Bosanquet's papers I found that she also had kept copies of it because it was so interesting. She, after all, had taken it right on the typewriter from him when he was delirious.

That just goes to show you how destruction wouldn't have worked anyhow. He wanted to dictate it.

It seems that James wanted his last thoughts to be known.

Oh, sure. He wanted to dictate it. And it's not incoherent.

There are some marvelous phrases in that Napoleonic dictation. I loved using it in the last chapter.

I also had to fight on that because Theodora Bosanquet, I discovered, had quoted a little bit of it on a BBC broadcast, and H. Montgomery Hyde, who lived in Lamb House and wrote a book called *Henry James at Home*, was going to use it. So when I saw that was going to come out, even though it had been on the BBC, I figured it was time for me to get the whole thing out. So I wrote an essay quoting the whole thing and got it into print in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, "Henry James's Last Dictation."

By that time there was no one in the James family who argued one bit.

So I think you're right. I was using all the methods. And as I went along in my researches I also realized that one of the things that happens in a biography is that you're nearly always with your main figure, because you're quoting him. Either his work or his notebooks or his letters.

That was why I collected all those books of people who crossed his path. Louis Auchincloss mentions my having found William Jones Hoppin's two-volume diary at Harvard. Hoppin had pasted in some of James's letters. He pasted

everything in! He pasted all the dinner programs, the invitations. Hoppin was a man in his 60's and he was Secretary of the American Legation in London.

So I started reading his diary and looking at all this stuff, and it gave me a wonderful sense of all the dinners James went to, because he was going to them too. And suddenly I came on this long section in which he writes an essay on society in London. "Mr. Henry James, success. Of course, the writers have an advantage," and so on.

He was jealous as all hell about it.

That enabled me to leave James entirely and see James through the eyes of the Secretary of the American Legation in London. And the undersecretary, [Ehrman Syme] Nadal, had written his memoirs, and an article about James. He had memories of James at that time. So I had his observations of James.

So everywhere I could…James observed…I worked it in.

I can't tell you how many books contribute to the first two pages of my final volume, *The Master*, which starts like a novel, with Henry James leaving Lamb House and walking down into the town, as if he were the master of the town. That I got from all the different memoirs of people who observed him, who saw him at Rye, the anecdotes. It even included Virginia Woolf remembering meeting him once in Rye. Leonard had loaned me a letter in which she had written a description of James in High Street in Rye.

So by the time I got to *The Master*, the method had fully evolved.

The Master is the best volume of the lot because I am master of my method. I knew exactly where I was going, what I had to do. I'd done the first three volumes. I'd started the fourth, thinking it would be the last, and then discovered that's where I was going to do the analysis of Henry James's terrible depression, after his playwriting failure. So it deals with the six years after the playwriting.

If you look at the structure of my books, you'll see at the end of the third volume James is looking forward to great success in the theater. *Guy Domville*. That's the end of the third volume. The fourth volume begins with *Guy Domville*. I go back in time for a while. Also, I started doing the flashbacks at the beginning of the fourth volume and the fifth, to pick up material that I'd left out.

There's something else you get involved in when you're writing biography, and that is the synchronic and the diachronic. The synchronic is when you've got so many things going on that you simply can't describe them all or you'd have a hodgepodge on your page. Some biographers have hodgepodges like that. I avoided that. My synchronic became diachronic. I separated these events and then came back to them.

When William James was at Lamb House having heart attacks and Henry James was also being kind to Stephen Crane, who was living

down the way, who was also dying, most biographers would say, 'Meanwhile, Stephen Crane…' I left Stephen Crane out. I stayed with William. I stayed with my story line.

At the beginning of *Volume Five*, I went back, and one by one decided, yes, there'd be a chapter on Stephen Crane, and there was Joseph Conrad down the way—James and Conrad, one chapter. The first six chapters of *The Master* are throwbacks to what I'd left out of the end of Volume Four. H.G. Wells settles in the same neighborhood. So there's the friendship with Wells. I deal with it there. Several other episodes, it's all there. In *The Master* I'm around 1900, but I've gone back all the way to '95, '96, '97—all these years when James had moved into Lamb House and suddenly found himself with a lot of neighbors. I now deal with the neighbors.

So this is what I mean by the synchronic and the diachronic.

It would be almost impossible to synchronize all of those things.

I'm one of the few biographers who did that. Another biographer tried it and apologized for doing it. The great Boswell man at Yale, Frederick Pottle. [*James Boswell, The Earlier Years*, 1740–1769]. He suddenly reaches a point where he's putting too much together. So he says, to the effect: 'Dear reader, we're going to leave this to a little later.' Then he apologizes to the reader for not having had it in its proper place.

He published this volume in 1966. I published my volume five years later.

But there are very few biographers who have done that. Other biographers haven't had these problems. In the *Life of James*, I'm dealing with a man who is leading no love life, who is doing nothing but writing all the time, and meeting people. It's really very much a literary biography. He's just a man involved in literature and society. British Society. And I had to keep the reader's interest. And that, in my feeling, was one of the great achievements of my *Life of James*.

If I were writing a life of Byron…love affairs, travels in Italy, mistresses…you've got it made. I didn't have it made at all. I had a man who didn't sleep. We don't know whether he slept with the boys that he loved in his old age. He certainly didn't sleep with women. He was too scared to go to a brothel. I had no evidence at all of that. He was really a kind of old maid, in many ways. Except for the power that an old maid never has. Very few old maids have that. Well, some old maids.

So in a sense he led a very uneventful adventurous life.

I wrote five volumes, which really was the history of an imagination. And I made it exciting enough for it to come out in paperback now. And it has sold more copies in paperback, those five volumes. My readership has increased by leaps and bounds in paperback.

How many copies have you sold?

They printed 20,000 of the five volumes, in a box. That was the first printing. When I was in New York, about a year and a half ago, I met the paperback man. He said, "We've just printed our second 20,000."

Last year was really unexpected. I had an income tax problem.

But it's a biography of what? As I say, of an imagination. That makes it a very unusual biography.

You've got slimmer ones, of course. Keats lived for 25 years. The life of Stephen Crane. There's an 800-pager. It's the equivalent of two volumes of mine. He died at 30.

But I had to deal with a man who died in his seventies who had been so immensely productive. James's early stuff is still buried in the magazines. I'm just fishing it out now. I'm going to bring out the complete criticism of James. It's going to come out in a year or two. All of his critical writings in one volume. When that comes out, there'll be no more James buried in the magazines.

All those early essays from *The Nation*?

That got listed in the bibliography I did with Dan Lawrence. The bibliography's going into its third edition. We just brought it up to date. The Oxford is bringing it out this summer.

All I can say is that my method works. And the five volumes, that was my publisher's idea. Once

he published that first volume, I went out and did the second. And you know, the interesting thing is, I've often thought, why can't I abridge this into one volume? My agent has been after me, my publisher has been after me. A one volume James. My answer has been, my method defeats me. I can't do it. We've got it in two volumes. This has been tightened and revised. The idea of a 300 page book on James is possible, of course. It can be done. But I can't take my old biography and just slash chapters out and condense it. I would have to write a brand new one. And I'm too old for that.

Besides, I'm finished with James. Once I finish this last volume of his letters, I won't do any more James.

And the criticism.

Well, the criticism is a special thing.

And *Volume Four* of the letters.

There's the manuscript of *Volume Four*. It'll be thinner. These are the letters I've selected to be in *Volume IV*.

Do you keep any original letters here?

No, I don't keep originals. All those black notebooks are copies of letters, or excerpts from letters. I have an awful lot of them there. You know, William Faulkner's letters would go into two notebooks.

You have how many notebooks?

I've 120 notebooks there. You're looking at them.

I didn't realize they ran the entire length of the wall. Those are all his letters, and that's not all of his letters.

Year by year.

Are those all the letters?

No. They start in the year of his birth and they go to the year of his death.

Towards the end, when he's dictating, I have three volumes for one year. Here's 1912. Here's 1914, 1915. Look down below.

November 1907. I was already two months old.

(September 9. It's to William.)

No, he's writing to his nephew.

May 3rd we have four letters. On that day he sent the second half of his revised copy for *The Awkward Age*. That would be to the New York edition.

So he went to the Post Office that day.

He went, or Theodora may have gone.

Now this letter doesn't talk about that day.

Nevertheless, he sat down and wrote this letter to this woman.

Of course, Lady Mosley. Then he wrote to his agent. "Be careful, missing pages of *The American*…"

* * *

All this comes down to what you call "significant detail."

When a biographer talks about significant detail, the answer is going to be, how do you know it's significant? What is significant?

As a biographer, I could pile in a lot of irrelevance too. Many biographers do.

Significant detail is, first of all, the significance of the subject as attached to certain things. It is significant detail when Henry James writes a letter saying, "I hate being Junior." That's a significant detail—the fact that he hates being Junior, the fact that he gets rid of his Jr. as soon as his father dies. The day after, he writes to his publisher and draws a hand pointing at his own name on the letter. And he signs it Henry James without the Junior, saying "This is my name now."

That's significant detail. James himself makes it significant.

There are other things. For instance, when James is moving into Lamb House, I said to myself, he's settling into the house, I said to

myself, how much shall I give it? He's setting himself up as an English gentry householder.

Then I said to myself, the fascination with *Robinson Crusoe* was always, how did he make a go of it? What did he do? What kind of house did he create? Defoe made that novel so fascinating to us when we were young because he went into the detail—people's houses, the way people arrange their lives.

So I always made it a point with James. How he arranged his apartment in London, I consider that significant detail. And I found that people love it. I found that was part of the interest in my Bloomsbury book [*Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*], in which I did the same thing. Every time I got into a house, I described the house.

It's an old principle that I got from *Robinson Crusoe*.

That's significant detail. Significant detail is detail which gives you a vivid picture of the personality involved and how that personality is arranging his or her life. That's very important to a biographer.

When James knows Conrad, it is more significant than his knowing a hack writer to whom he wrote a letter or two. With Conrad, you've got another power figure. That's significant detail. So the relationship between the two was very important. I worked very hard to find out what it was and I wrote a whole chapter on it.

I kept looking for James's meetings with Mark Twain and I finally found them too. Because he knew practically every American writer at the time. I've got a chapter on Mark Twain in the last volume too. Their paths had been crossing within the earlier volumes, but I had nothing more than they were at a dinner together. I finally found it in the material of the last volume. James arrives at a fireside, Mark Twain is there, and they sit and talk, and James writes a whole account of the conversation to William James.

That gave me my chapter on James and Mark Twain.

That doesn't mean that I don't come back. Later, when James arrives in America, he spends the first night in the house where Mark Twain is staying. So I allude to it. But by that time I've already established their relationship. I just have one sentence.

So there are these focal points in a biography. You've got focal points, you've got themes, you've got myths. All these things. And you're absolutely right, I was using what I'd learned out of the modern movement. That was why I was absolutely tuned right. When I got to the last volume, all that was orchestrated.

To me, your method has always been a psychological one. I never really examined your craft as closely as that. That is, the developing structure. And it is that of the modern novelist.

There is the traditional biographer gathering his materials. Then there's my examining material for its psychological content. But in the end, you're sitting at your desk, all that material is there and it's got to become a book. It's got to be put into words, it's got to be shaped into chapters. And that's where my method ends—in trying to write an interesting narrative and keep it an interesting narrative, keep a story line. Never let the story become confused. It's always one relationship, one situation, one observer looking at James. And in that way it builds up and it builds up and it builds up and you get James at his different stages.

One of the very funny things, when I was looking at James in the early parts, I was much older than him. He was a little boy and I was older. Then there came a moment when we were the same age, when I was writing *The Middle Years*. And then he was older than me. And then I buried him.

So I was moving in terms of time of life.

Did you find as he got closer to your age that the two of you were similar in any ways?

I think if I were writing his old age now I could probably do certain things from my own experience of aging that I didn't perceive deeply enough. But it's there mainly. I saw the aging process and I tried to bring it out very vividly.

DAY SIX

You're a regular in the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

The woman who does it says, "Here comes my favorite four-letter author." Both my names are four letters. Leon and Edel. And they always put James's biographer or Willa Cather's biographer.

There are a lot of popular culture references to you.

Here's one. Amanda Cross. *The Question of Max*.

That's one of the Kate Fansler mystery novels.

They're talking here about biography: "Look at the James family. They gave Leon Edel complete domain until he finished the biography, and never regretted it. No doubt other scholars did, but what decision has ever made everyone happy?"

The whole book hinges on biography.

This is Judith Krantz. *Princess Daisy*. It's a *Gold Magazine* blockbuster.

What page are you on?

450. Billy Bijur is trying to go to sleep…

I'll read. "However, just swallowing a pill made him feel calmer, even if it only acted as a placebo, he assured himself as he kept out of the bedroom so as not to wake his wife. He read a few more few pages of Leon Edel's five-volume biography of Henry James. This great scholarly work, detailed, leisurely and undoubtedly good for him, had the virtue of not being a page-turner. At about five in the morning, trying hard to think only about James turning out books in London, books Billy Bijur had never read, he ventured back to bed and usually managed to sleep for several hours before he woke up to another day of the *Princess Daisy* project."

What would you like to talk about now?

Let's talk about personal myths.

What I've discovered in the years that I've been writing about people's lives is that there is their public figure and there is their work. But the more you look at them, you realize that somewhere inside, somewhere way down deep, in their mind, in their nerves, in their whole being, there is a secret kind of personal drive that they wouldn't be able to explain themselves.

What's driving them? What's pushing them? *What Makes Sammy Run*?

Remember that novel?

If you put it on higher terms, why did Henry James sit for years and years in London writing eight hours a day? He was earning a living, of

course. Everybody's earning a living. But there are easier ways to earn a living than sitting and writing eight hours a day. Longhand remember.

What drove T.S. Eliot to write a long poem like *The Waste Land*?

Why was Ezra Pound the way he was?

In other words, there's this inner component, this inner part.

Why did Thoreau go to Walden Pond? It was more comfortable in Concord. His mother lived just a mile down the road. He could have stayed at home and been more comfortable. But no, he had to go and build himself a hut down there by the pond. And it didn't occur to him that when winter would come that hut wouldn't be enough. When the the cold weather came—the New England winter—you know what he did? He moved. He suddenly realized, I've got to plaster this thing. So he plastered his hut. And for almost a month he moved back with his mother while the plaster dried in his hut in the so-called wilderness. Then he could build a fire and make it warm and keep it cozy and spend his winter there.

Why did he do that? Why did he want to pretend that he was Robinson Crusoe? Only he wasn't.

This is what I call the *inner myth*. It's what makes that person do what he does.

It's the person they are down deep.

It's their real concept of themselves. You can say this as an absolute law: no one knows his inner myth. Because to know his inner myth, he would have to figure out why he made all the choices he made from childhood on.

If somebody discovers their inner myth, if it suddenly becomes a conscious entity, would that cause them to stop being so creative, to stop, say, needing to write?

No. I think if a person has become a fireman and is very happy being a fireman, that person can discover that deep down there is a fascination with fire, and a fear of fire too, and maybe way back that means this is a person who is full of anger and wants to burn things up. We speak of raging fires. Fires represent having elements of rage, passion. Look at the language. You burn with passion, you have a raging fire. There are all kinds of personal things cooking inside that made him decide, well, I'm going to be a fireman. I'm going to keep these flames under control. That means I'm going to keep myself under control too.

I'm not saying every fireman is like that, I'm just saying that could be one.

So if someone becomes aware of their personal myth, it won't necessarily stop them from wanting to be a fireman. They'll just become more aware of their motives.

That's right. There are choices that are made. A man who chooses to be a cop is making a choice. It's not just for a salary. Because sometimes they try and don't go on with it. It doesn't suit their inner personality.

But that inner personality, that inner myth, is particularly striking because it shows itself in the works that writers write. It shows itself in the kind of roles that actors play, or the personality they develop on the stage. It shows itself in every athlete. Part of it is a self-concept, and a great part is a fantasy of yourself in some superior position.

Hemingway's personal myth was the man of action.

That was not his personal myth. That was his public figure. The public figure of Hemingway was someone who couldn't stop doing. And he always had to be at the top. He always had to be a winner. And he had to be the best. He had to kill the biggest lion, catch the biggest fish. What's the name of that novel?

***The Old Man and the Sea*.**

That's right. Hemingway himself was growing old. There was the sea, and the thing to do was to go out and bring back the biggest fish. Of course, the sharks get it.

But what you see with Hemingway is the macho. He's got to be the great big macho. And therefore you can ask yourself, why does he need

that? If he felt reasonably secure in himself as a person, why is he pushing so hard? What is he trying to prove?

A man who chases around and has to get every woman has a problem. He's trying to prove something to himself.

The more you look at Hemingway, the more you realize that deep down—and it's coming out in his letters—instead of being the great, secure man on top of the world, this was a person who was scared. He was constantly trying to reassure himself. And his real myth, deep down, was that he obviously did not like women in everything he did. He really liked men. And that scared the daylights out of him. What if he were gay? And by God he was going to prove to himself always that he wasn't gay.

Why did he write a book called *Men Without Women*? It's a book of short stories. Who are these men without women? They're all machos. They're prize fighters, they're bullfighters. They're real he-men. They don't need women. In other words, he was saying, in reality he didn't need women. Of course he married five times. If he'd gone on living, he'd probably have married another couple of times.

He had a real enjoyment of the immediate things. He loved eating, he loved drinking. There were a lot of good qualities in Hemingway. And a lot of power. But that power was driven curiously enough by a scared, little boy who was really

afraid that he wasn't a big strong man, and by God, he was going to keep proving it.

Once you've proved you're a big strong man, you don't have to go on telling the world I'm a big strong man. But when Hemingway would come into a bar, he had to be Papa Hemingway. "Who's the greatest writer?" They'd have to say "Papa Hemingway!"

And he made it.

These people are sometimes driven. They usually get what they set out for when the drive is that strong. It must have been a high-powered myth.

Hemingway's myth.

But the myth was really the reverse of what the world saw.

It's a very good illustration of the Adlerian theory. Deep down Hemingway really felt that he was lower and lesser than most. He couldn't be as great as certain people. And his great problem was that he knew he was not as great a writer as Chekov, or the great masters. But he found a way of making himself not only a writer but the writer personality. The macho personality.

Norman Mailer realized it in a more conscious way when, after trying to be a novelist like every other novelist, he suddenly decided he had to go out and advertise himself. Why did he write *Advertisements for Myself*? That tells us something. That's another way of putting it.

I'm going to turn the whole subject around, in terms of myth. I'm going to take Pope John Paul I. He was Pope for one month. Remember?

Everybody liked him. He'd been a journalist. He made a very good impression, and he was elected Pope. What interested me very much was one thing. When he came to be crowned Pope, he didn't want the crown put on him. This crown has been put on the heads of Popes for centuries and centuries. It's part of the tradition. He was accepting to be Pope. And everybody said, what wonderful humility. I'm not denying it. But what this one act said to me, what he was saying to me, and as I read him, I think he was saying it to the whole world, "I don't want to be Pope."

It was an acceptance with reservation.

And he died a month afterwards of a heart attack.

If you want to put it in religious terms, God granted his wish. He didn't remain Pope. He took the job as a compromise candidate. And one saw a rather delicate and charming person. But he gave us a signal. He was accepting the job, and the job demanded that he wear all kinds of trappings, and he was wearing them. But he would not wear the crown. He didn't want the crown put on his head. He had the ceremonies and everything. But the famous crown, he didn't want it.

So his personal myth surfaced with his desire not to be crowned.

When you add it together with everything else, including his just living one more month, you could say that's a coincidence. Maybe he was going to die anyhow. Maybe yes. But we could say maybe if he hadn't suddenly had this responsibility, he might have lived longer. There were various things which suggested to me inner conflict. Because he had been very happy in all his other roles in the church. The whole account of his biography was of interest to me.

Then came John Paul II. He allowed himself to be crowned. He accepted the ceremony, he's accepted everything relating to the Papacy. He's very virile.

He's surviving the recent assassination attempt.

He's already healing. He's got one more operation to go through. And the chances are, he's a tough Pole and he'll make it. He wants to make it. And he wants to be Pope. He enjoys being Pope. He welcomes it.

What I'm saying now is not really myth. I'm saying this was merely a sign or a signal that we read. If I were writing the biography of John Paul I, I would start to investigate from this point of view. My hypothesis would be that he didn't really want that kind of greatness, or that kind of responsibility. He would have preferred a humbler role in the church.

He wasn't a man after power.

That's right. He did not want the power.

But to get the myth, we would have to get back into why did he originally go into the priesthood? Why did he choose to be a priest? We get into religious questions of various kinds. And there we get into problems again with men without women. Because priests are men without women too.

So when a writer creates a character, that character is not necessarily just an embodiment of the mask that he wears, or that public self. In the case of Hemingway, a lot of his male characters, his heroes, were often victims of women. So in terms of the myth, it's almost as if the whole writer comes out in spite of himself when he's creating a character.

That's right. It's the psychological signals that we get, these signs that are given to us in various ways. The great mistake that a lot of teachers of literature make is they start looking for the persona of the author in the book. The persona of the author may be spread out among six characters. Like the castrated narrator, Jake Barnes. The very fact that Hemingway includes someone who is castrated, someone who is weaker than the other people, that's part of Hemingway. He hasn't got what it takes.

So this is what I mean when I talk about the inner myth of the writer, or the artist. In other

words, what is the artist really expressing? And everything he does is the expression of that myth.

Let's talk about James's myth.

I was not thinking in mythic terms when I began working on James. It was only after I'd finished my work on James that I realized that I told the myth of James. It's there in the *Life* I've written on him. There you have an American who is also very quiet, modest, no seeker of publicity. He avoids publicity like the plague. He never gave any interviews until very late in life, and very few. You can count them on your fingers. He wouldn't talk to the press. He disliked the press. He wrote a marvelous little novel attacking the press called *The Reverberator*—that's the name of the newspaper—in which he really predicted Walter Winchell and all the gossip columnists.

It's a charming story about this young, innocent little American girl traveling abroad, and this Frenchman from a very distinguished French family falls in love with her. They're going to get married. Meanwhile, around the hotel she has met an American journalist whose great goal is to pick up as much gossip as he can. And she talks very freely to him about her fiancé and this French family and its idiosyncrasies—all the things that go on in a French family. He writes a column about this American girl who's marrying into an aristocratic family. He spills all

the gossip and practically ruins the marriage. It's a very fine piece of writing.

James was always critical of the press.

However, coming back to his own myth, what we see in James is a man with a terrific drive. He's quiet. As a child they wondered what's going to become of him. He just sits and reads. But he's taking in the whole world. He really absorbs it, with a power of observation that's extraordinary. And a memory. And then a language. Someday they're going to wake up to realize that James was *the* great American stylist. Even today, every week you open some journal and they quote Henry James. There are endless little phrases from James that are quoted.

Some people have said that he did for the novel what Shakespeare did for the theater, realizing that the novel was the one literary form that was not taken very seriously. Everybody told a story any old which way. Couldn't stories be told in a very special way? That was very American of him. The know-how.

He studied the ways in which stories were told. He took novels apart and put them together again. That was why, long before modern storytelling, you'll find in James the forecasting, the prophesy of modern techniques, some of them very cinematic.

He'll have two characters meet and he won't tell you as an author about these people. Dickens would describe them right away—this man wore this kind of a mustache, this man was clean

shaven and had this color eyes, and so on. James doesn't tell you anything of the kind. He tells you what Number One sees in Number Two and he tells you what Number Two sees in Number One. And in that way he conveys to you how they are seeing each other. Then he stands back and gives you a glimpse of the two of them. But he doesn't stand back very much. He isn't going to help the reader. That's what he got into in *The Ambassadors*. *The Ambassadors* is a very cinematic novel. In his later work, he's doing it all the time. That's what he called "Point of View," meaning angle of vision. He's the great master of angle of vision.

And so, sitting in his quiet little corner, his angle of vision was turned on to an awful lot of things. And he understood in the most profound way what America was, and what America's problems in relating to other countries were. There's nothing political in his writings, but that kind of problem is what James was concerned with. And America will have to become a part of the world. Your little American girl going abroad and marrying into a French family is going to have to understand that she has to consider the feelings of the French family she's marrying into. You don't just blab about them without their consent.

He's dealing in human terms with all America's values in relation to European values—the older, long established values. He's not always saying that the older ones are better;

quite often he's very critical. He can be very critical of the English, for instance. But he does it with kid gloves—his marvelous sensitive fingertips.

We think about Hemingway. Alright, what's going on in James? And I would say an absolutely terrific power drive like Hemingway's.

Born also out of insecurity?

No, not out of insecurity. It's a power drive coming out of something else altogether. It's someone saying, there's been a thousand years of literature, where the hell am I going to belong? I must find my place. I'm going to find my exact place in this. I'm going to use what's come out of the past, and then I'm going to reform it. I'm going to make some innovations.

There is something Napoleonic in that. He was setting himself territories to conquer. What were his territories? He was going to re-annex Europe to America. America had turned its back on Europe. He's re-annexing it; reconnecting America to Europe. Because the two can't just remain disconnected. And he's going to understand both sides.

Other novelists were writing stories about America while they were writing in France. James made himself international—the first great international novelist. Because he was very European in his childhood upbringing, he could go anywhere during his whole lifetime. Mr. James had introduced the international novel of

manners, manners being mores—French mores, British mores, Italian mores.

And the Americans, what kind of mores did they have and how did they understand these others? They didn't understand them all. It was a constant misunderstanding. It wasn't until late in life that James could see the possibility of a marriage between America and Europe. The differences were so great, in the earlier works.

Then there was that Napoleonic part of him, conquering territories, but in a very quiet way. He didn't need an army, he didn't need an advertisement for himself. He did it in a quiet way by the subjects he chose and the careful way in which he launched himself. The preparation he took—he was the cautious man who disciplined himself, trained himself. So finally, in the end, everybody called him Master. Joseph Conrad called him Master.

He regarded himself as a kind of emperor.

Yes. And people talked to him in this Mandarin style. When Hugh Walpole said, "How shall I address you?" he said, "Address me as Dear Master." And that was the way Hugh Walpole addressed him, as "Dear Master." The French use that term. It's really a translation—the French *Cher Maitre*.

Have you ever thought introspectively about why you write?

No, I haven't thought about it really. Writing for me is still a struggle.

When James sat down, he wrote continuously for eight hours. I'm not comparing myself with James. James mastered writing young. He had a grip on the language. I had a boyhood in a western town. It was in my teens that I began to write and read and pay attention to things. Because I drifted.

But I suppose I had a drive to power and discovered that writing, first on newspapers, was a way of having a sense of power. Your journalist has a sense of power. He comes in, he's sitting there, he's rather superior. He's not involved. He's got his notebook. He takes notes, or he's just listening, or he has a tape recorder. Then he goes away, and he's the one who's going to tell the public what happened. He's the master of that situation. Everybody's going to read what he says. They're either going to like it or they're not going to like it. He's the one. He's the communicator.

That's that strange sense of power that reporters have, which is a false sense of power really. Except that some of it, sometimes, is power.

So James's myth was that of a man with tremendous power reach. But he wasn't going to grab power the way a lot of people do, by just reaching for anything that would give them power. He had his plan. His power was going to

be through the word. He was going to be like Balzac, who said something to the effect, 'Men have conquered with the sword, I am going to conquer with a pen.' [Balzac's engraving on his bust of Napoleon: "What he began with the sword I shall achieve with the pen."]

I think James felt himself that way. The pen was his sword.

He had the Napoleonic idea that nothing was impossible. We see it in his letters, in his later life, where he gets an offer to do a series of articles for his American magazines. He doesn't care to do them. It's a long work. He begins by thinking, I don't really know the subject. Then he thinks about the money, and yes, I can make it happen. It's possible. He writes and publishes the articles and gets paid very well for it.

He was ready to accept the difficulties. He was not the kind of individual who tries to achieve power the easy way, where you muscle yourself into power. That was foreign to him. And he wasn't going to achieve power that other cheap way, which is to get yourself talked about in the media.

What I'm trying to say is, okay, every writer could in a sense say he's trying in some way to discover something, say something. Not all of them are seeking power. There are a lot of writers who write and don't publish very much. They don't even try to be published. A lot of people just keep their manuscripts.

For Kafka, writing was a form of prayer.

That's right. In his diary he said it was. He felt a relief in writing. He never tried to get his work published at all. His friends put some of his stories together and the first volume came out as a volume of short stories. That's the only volume published during his lifetime. All his manuscripts, he ordered them to be burned. And his executor decided not to burn them.

That was Max Brod.

Yes. When Kafka gave him the order, he said to Kafka, I may not obey you.

So it's not one formula. Not every writer is seeking power. What you're looking for in trying to find the individual myth of each writer is what that particular writer is really expressing in his work.

We can talk about a writer's poem about nature. Yes, it's a lovely poem about nature. But what is he saying in that poem that is also in all his other settings? How is he doing it? What is he looking at? And in that you will find that he is acting out, in a very mysterious way sometimes, some inner drama. It may just be, 'Look Ma, see what I've done.' It may just be the little boy in him wanting always to please Mama. And he pleases her. He's pleasing her when she's dead and he's 50 years old, 60 years old. He's still pleasing her. He's still writing poetry to please her. That doesn't mean he's not writing great poetry. But there are these inner motivations.

That's a very simplified way of putting it. Because it isn't just 'Look Ma,' it's a whole myth therefore of achievement that was expected of him, by the mother or the father, or both parents, that he then began to live out.

So the personal myth is something which is formed very early in life.

Yes.

It's formed in childhood. Then it becomes a kind of sea in which these elaborate metaphors form and emerge in one's writing.

At that stage, it may not have been writing. It was merely doing certain things. Then later it'll become the focus. It can be painting, it can be design, it can be architecture, it can be medicine, or anything. It becomes a very constructive thing in such cases. It becomes a creative thing. There are certain kinds of achievement drives you get in people who are troubled and in a different situation. They'll achieve in the realm of crime. They'll become criminals.

One of your most interesting discourses is on Nero Wolfe and Sherlock Holmes, and their respective creators. With Holmes, we have this very conservative doctor, Arthur Conan Doyle, who, during his long hours of writing, got to live vicariously through the adventures of this sleuth.

Not only a sleuth but a fantastic sleuth. He could in his imagination be this strange character, Sherlock Holmes, who kept such irregular hours, and found it necessary to give himself a shot of cocaine every now and again.

And chase through the dark streets of London.

And get into the world of crime.

You could say, well, he's catering to an audience. Of course he's catering to an audience. He's catering to an audience that wants to read exactly that kind of fantasy. But it is his fantasy. He made it up. He created it. And it was his fantasy that triggered the fantasy of Rex Stout.

Conan Doyle himself never lived out this fantasy, this myth. He lived the very secure, sane and conservative life of a doctor.

That's right.

His myth became embodied in this fantasy detective. That was the real Conan Doyle, in a way.

It was a myth to achieve, to be more, to be a national figure. He finally became "Sir Arthur." He was a hawk during the Boer War. That's why he got the "Sir." He didn't get it for his writings. He got it for his work. He was also quite an athletic man, a very robust man. Later in life, he took up spiritualism. He was the head of the World Spiritualists. It was a very strange career.

Do you know why he chose the name Sherlock Holmes? Conan Doyle had a great admiration for Oliver Wendell Holmes, father of the Supreme Court Justice. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. was a New England doctor who had done marvelous work. He discovered, just by observation, why women died in childbirth from puerperal fever. He cleaned up the Boston hospitals and they stopped dying. He was also a literary doctor. He wrote verse. He wrote a book called *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. All America read it at the time.

So Arthur Conan Doyle named Sherlock Holmes after Oliver Wendell.

What role does Dr. Watson play in this psychological landscape?

Dr. Watson is the reader. The reader does not think of himself as having all the eccentricities. They love the eccentric Sherlock Holmes. But they themselves are more sensible and down to earth. Watson was very helpful.

And Watson got converted into Goodwin.

Which brings us to Rex Stout. How did you get interested in his story?

Although I read Nero Wolfe for years, it wasn't until recently that I became interested in his personal history. I was giving a lecture on biography in Boston when a young man who was about to begin work on a life of Rex Stout asked me if I had any advice to offer. At that moment,

this question surfaced: If you can figure out why a man named Rex, which is the Latin word for king, would turn his detective into an emperor, Nero, you'll probably find out a lot about Rex Stout. And why did he choose Nero, a wicked emperor?

Stout himself, on the few occasions I saw him, was always a thin man; and yet he made his Nero Wolfe into a 260-pounder. So Rex, the thin king—his mother named him Rex because 'he came out like a king'—created Nero, a fat emperor. He seemed to be working out opposites. But what about the *Wolfe*?

I began rummaging around and found that Rex had a middle name, which was Todhunter, after his mother's family name. Now, Tod is the Scottish word for fox. I then found that Stout had created an earlier detective who didn't catch on, and his name was Tecumseh Fox, after the Indian chief who wanted to become an emperor among Indians. So the idea of emperor and fox had been linked in his mind long before. Even as the king is given the name of a wicked emperor, Nero the fox becomes a ferocious animal—a wolf.

You really can't argue about it. I mean, a fox is a fox and a wolf is a wolf.

Then someone called to tell me that he had once met Stout, and the author had said to him, "You know, Sherlock Holmes is the king of detectives, and I said to myself, if I'm going to create a detective, I must make him the opposite of Sherlock Holmes."

There's the transformation again. Holmes was thin; Stout made Nero fat. Holmes was always on the go, rushing about London; Stout made Nero sit at home—he probably said to himself, 'I'm going make him so fat he won't want to move.' He gave Nero Archie Goodwin, an American version of Holmes' Dr. Watson, to go out and 'win the good' for him. Stout had two games going—the game of making Nero Wolfe the opposite of Sherlock Holmes, and the game of making him the opposite of himself, as evidenced by the intimacy of the naming process.

When you're doing the biography of a writer, you're really writing the history of an imagination.

Still, there remains the question why Stout named his rather dour but lovable big detective after an evil emperor—Nero, after all, really does have a bad name in history. And why does a fox become a wolf? We must ask ourselves, why did Stout give a good man an evil name?

Stout himself was a wonderful man, a great champion of democratic ideas. From his radical youth as one of the founders of the New Masses, he went on to make a fortune in business and to form and preside over the Society for Prevention of World War III, the United World Federalists, Freedom House, the Fight for Freedom Committee and the Author's Guild, where I met him. He was an embattled champion of copyright reform, constantly going to Washington to see the president and senators. He was imperial in his

ability to direct, guide and serve the institutions he helped create.

In a word, he was a leader, long before he decided to sit down and create a detective who stays at home raising orchids and drinking beer, wearing an evil name but fighting evil without leaving the house.

And here lies Stout's myth. He was a man driven by kingly ambitions, an activist and reformer who seems to have felt guilty about so much self-assertion. His guilt got mixed up with his good intentions. He punished himself for his good deeds by calling himself a bad name. He played the fox in public, but thought himself a wolf. He caught murders but called himself Nero.

That's quite a story.

It's very hard to explain this because personal myths are invisible. And what makes it fascinating is when you read a writer's work you begin to see what the motivations were for it. We are all motivated in some way. Your fireman will say, "I like putting fires out. I like to protect property." But deep down there may be a real fear of what's burning inside himself.

And for some it's the writing that helps them engage the fire within.

For me, it isn't the writing, it's the discovering that's exciting. Then it becomes a challenge. How can I best tell my story?

You said in an interview that the biography of Richard Nixon might be the most interesting of all. Why is that?

The biography of Richard Nixon is interesting because you would find a very limited little man.

With a huge myth.

But the myth of an extraordinary opportunist, and no values of any kind. No standards of any kind. It's the sort of biography that doesn't interest me, but I think the historian would find it fascinating to see how he ultimately did himself in.

Why wouldn't it interest you?

Because there's no imagination. There's no imagination of any kind.

Want to take a short break?

If you want to, go ahead. Smoke a cigarette.

* * *

So what brought you to Hawai'i?

I came to Hawai'i in 1955 for the first time. I taught here for a whole summer. I spent ten weeks, visited all the other islands. I was greatly taken with the contrast between that—I'd never been in a subtropical or tropical place—and the life I'd lived in New York, or the prairies and so

on. And I enjoyed it very, very much. In '55, there wasn't a single high-rise in Honolulu. In '68, I was invited to come and visit in the Citizen's Chair for a year. I was the first. They'd had a number of visitors. They were looking for someone who would take it permanently. A whole year in Hawai'i, I decided I couldn't do that. But I was able to take half year leave of absence from NYU. I came here for the spring term. I arrived at the end of January.

I saw the changes—skyscrapers hadn't been here in 1955. 1969 was different, but I saw a great deal that pleased me still—the kinds of standards and values in Hawai'i that I like, a great deal of courtesy.

When I got back to New York and I got the offer of the Chair, I decided that I wasn't getting younger, that I'd had enough of New York. I was nearing the end of my *Life of James*. *Volume IV* came out while I was here in Hawai'i. I discovered I could make a deal. I could spend the fall term in New York and the spring term here. And if I wanted to stay on through the summer, I could stay through the summer, or not. I still had the option, which I thought was enlarging my way of life. And I did that for two or three years. I came here in the spring, I had my falls in New York. I had the best of both worlds. And I enjoyed it very much.

That went on until it was making it difficult for me to write *The Master*. So I said to myself, you've just got to finish *The Master*. You've got

to. Just sit down and finish it. I'd spent the summer of 70 here, and in the fall I went back to New York and said to myself, this winter I'm going to finish the James so that I can be really clear of that. And free to move around as I wished.

I was breaking out of 20 years of New York life. Having established myself in academia, I'd then gone on working like a dog. I'd worked very hard. By that time, I had prizes and a reputation. And I said to myself also, this is very important. If this volume isn't good, it's going to be a letdown. The critics are going to say, well, he's finished the job. I said, No, this has got to be a triumphant finish.

And that fall, I just started writing. It was like my finishing the plays in six months. I had about 200 pages typed and maybe another 400 pages to write. And between October and the end of January, to my own astonishment, I wrote those 400 pages. I finished *The Master*. My finest volume was written in those four months.

So I knew I was coming to Hawai'i with the thing finished.

In January, I remember attending an evening at City University in which they invited me to speak on biography. And someone, as always, asked "When are we going to see your last volume? When do you expect to finish your work?"

I got a big laugh out of them. I said, "Next Tuesday."

And it was Tuesday, or Wednesday.

I'd gone into a work of total commitment. Every night I looked through the material. Every morning I woke up, I sat down at the typewriter and I wrote, and I kept writing, a straight line.

And when I left for Hawai'i at the end of January, I left the manuscript with Lippincott. I laid it right on the table. They called in all the executives. I said, "You've waited for the end of the project. Here it is. I think this is the best volume. It ends the story. And you've got to sell it. Give it all the push."

And they did.

At any rate, the reviews were terrific. Everyone agreed it was the completion of the work. It made a hell of a difference.

I then came here. It was an economic move. I'd turned 65 and NYU had dropped their retirement age from 68 to 65. I'd to come into teaching so late. I was 20 years behind other academics. When my brother retired after 40 years of teaching, his pension was practically the equivalent of his salary. If I'd retired at 65, my pension would have been very far below what I needed.

So I came here and took the Chair full time. I was inaugurated in 1972.

During that period, I greatly liked Hawai'i, and I continue to like it today.

* * *

Hawai‘i has been good for you.

I feel that I've put some roots down here. And I certainly like all the things I liked originally. I've retired and therefore I'm out of the swim. But I go to the mainland quite often, and I think this is going to be my pattern. After all, this is my home. We're settled here. But these periodic trips to the mainland will be my way of getting out of the backwater.

At the same time, it's a marvelous place for work. I can really work here. In the last ten years, I've written and published more than I did in the previous ten years.

You have those four volumes of Edmund Wilson.

I fell into that right after I finished James. Suddenly I recommitted myself to another big project. But I'm not as involved with that. I'll do as much of it as I can. I don't expect to go on doing it after I'm 80. I'll do what I can between now and then.

My main jobs are clear. My great desire is to have my collected papers in literary psychology published this coming year. Then I will do another volume of collected papers in literary biography. That's it right there. They'll republish the book *Literary Biography*, retouch it. And a lot of essays. That's another volume I have in mind. And the volume of James's letters.

The final volume.

Yes. It'll be four.

These are my projects, not counting the Wilson.

And that will be?

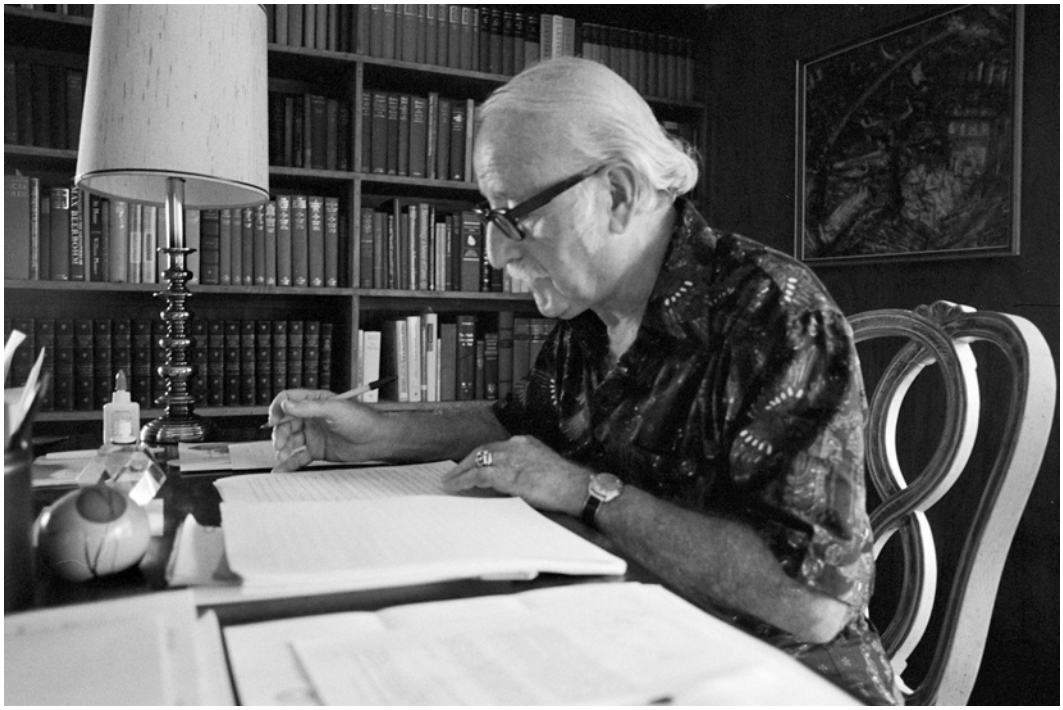
Three volumes to come. I have two out. *The Twenties* and *The Thirties* are out. *The Forties* is now being worked on. I have a research assistant on Wilson. He works in my office down at the University. Mostly footnotes.

Do you still keep an apartment down by Diamond Head?

I own an apartment at Diamond Head. I've rented it part of the time. I use it sometimes just as a guest house for friends. My brother's going to come and stay there all fall. We haven't decided what we're going to do with it. If we can afford it, we'll just continue to use it as a guest house.

What was that anecdote you mentioned the other day? I said something about there not being any snakes in Hawai'i, and you said…

I said, Hawai'i is not a paradise. The old claim that this place is a paradise is false. Because Paradise had a snake. Right?



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