

Reception: texts, readers, audiences, history

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Ildiko Olasz, “Written in Crude Defiance of the Illustrator’: Proto-Modernist

Authorship and the Verbal-Visual Reception of Henry James’s *Washington*

Square,” pp. 94-127.

A work can ‘occur’ only within a particular context, one that . . . allows it to work, that is to transform the very relations that bring about the encounter with art in the first place. (Krzysztof Ziarek)

It may be helpful to think of the readership not as an identifiable and potentially measurable group of people, but as a concept, as a community imagined by . . . editors who in the period before the introduction of reliable research techniques thereby hoped to stabilize and extend the circulations of their titles. (Aled Jones)

Nineteenth-century readers first encountered Henry James’s *Washington Square* in the 1880 illustrated serial edition of *Cornhill Magazine*, and the same illustrations were included in its first book version published in the United States a few months later. At the time, James was a rising new writer and George du Maurier was a famous illustrator; nevertheless, this novel’s reception was widely different from that of his previous work, *Daisy Miller*, and *Washington Square* never became a financial success. Unfortunately, the visual appearance might have contributed to this effect. The first vignette of Chapter 1 shows a lady sitting leisurely in the



Fig. 1. Vignette initial. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 7

theater (see Fig. 1), while the text depicts Dr. Sloper's efforts to become a well-known physician and the death of his son and his wife, leaving him with his daughter, Catherine. The expertise of the illustrator and the calming effect of the subject cannot alleviate the reader's shock, when he/she waits in vain to read about a woman who enjoys going to the theater. Indeed, most of the illustrations seem to focus on secondary elements of the text and the discrepancy necessarily leads to confusion in the reception process. This confusion did not allow the illustrations to improve the marketability of the text; instead, the images undercut the literary reception and set the negative tone for the overall reception history of the novel. James blamed himself for the sketchiness of the text and acknowledged having written it "in crude defiance of the illustrator" (ctd. in Ormond 392), yet his influence on the reception process reached beyond the mere writing of the text. His lack of interest in the editing process affected the illustration process and, ultimately, the reception of the text. Moreover, his attitude reveals the transformation from the close relationship between writer and audience to the author's proto-modernist self-distancing from the readers.

Although it took decades for reception studies to escape the literary domination of the

author, I believe it is time that we reintroduce the writer along with some other contributors, such as the publishers, editors and illustrators. In his *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918*, Philip Waller devotes a substantial passage to the elucidation of the social tactics some authors used to elicit favorable reception by fellow authors and critics.¹

Demonstrating that those authors were not only aware of reception processes, but that they intuitively ventured into setting the stage for a positive reception, is in itself an important milestone in the history of reception studies. My attention, however, is directed towards the creative aspects of the editing process that influenced literary reception. My purpose is to shed light on the role that James's understanding of the audience's *horizon of expectations* played in the visual appearance of *Washington Square* and ultimately in the reception of the verbal text. *The work* the contemporary audience first encountered included both the literary text and the visual images, so the revisitation of the role of the author, in light of the last decades' emphasis on textual authenticity, yields a better understanding of the visual factors that influenced the reception process. Such an examination is especially revealing since the second half of the nineteenth century shows a surge in such illustrated editions.

We have to remember that, while the present-day reproductions of nineteenth-century novels are rarely illustrated except for the cover image and illustrations created by the author of the text, their first editions were oftentimes richly illustrated with images that were ordered for the given publication.² Since the literary reception is always first and foremost visual, the reception of these illustrations contributed to the overall reception of the first edition, which, in turn, had a large impact on the overall history of the work and its readership. Mieke Bal maintains that the duality "word and image" prevents us from understanding these aspects as closely related: it underlines the differences and suppresses the similarities (286).³ This approach

is especially thought-provoking since in the illustrated texts, the reading of the words and the viewing of the images become an integral part of the same reception process. Samuel Edgerton claims that the Gutenberg Galaxy effect is not the transformation of a visual culture into a word culture, but rather into “a whole new kind of ‘image culture’” (190). The blurring of the boundaries between the two spheres, that of the images and that of the visual appearance of words, is best seen in the richly illustrated nineteenth-century texts, where the two reception processes intersect each other.

By the 1880s, the High Victorian literary and visual emphasis on didacticism gave way to the new dynamic between text and illustration and the redefinition of the artist’s role in society. “The writers of the earlier part of Victoria’s reign,” as Amy Cruse observes, “regarded the telling of a story as the main business of a novelist, and . . . the new school treated [the story] as subordinate to the setting forward of a philosophic theory and the minute dissection of character and motive” (*The Victorians* 282-283). This ‘telling of a story’ relied heavily on the early and mid-nineteenth-century view of the social role of intelligentsia and it envisioned the writers and illustrators as educators of society. By the end of the century, nonetheless, these goals faded to a certain extent due to the increase of mass-literacy.⁴ What is uniquely interesting in this period is the mode in which each of the two artistic disciplines, literature and drawing, undergo this transformation and how the growing discrepancy between the two styles impacts the reception of illustrated novels and ultimately the role of illustrations in the publication of fiction. *Washington Square* illustrates wonderfully what happens when the artistic desire for freedom collides with lack of communication between the writer and the illustrator. James misunderstood the expectations of the contemporary audience and hoped that to raise readerly interest through the proto-modernist ambiguity of his works. The majority of the contemporary audience, however,

was not prepared to appreciate his experimentations and his lack of interest in monitoring the illustration only contributed to the confusion of the readers' reception process.

Hans Robert Jauss emphasized the role of expectations and the effect of the reader's previous experience on the interpretation of the "announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions" of the text (23). His attention to the influence of the general audience's literary experience brought reception studies closer to the understanding of the process of reception and interpretation. This approach was groundbreaking in the history of literary criticism, yet it remained in the realm of broad-spectrum analysis by defining reception as "the historical life of the work in literature" (73). My study relies on Jauss's notion for a very specific purpose: to elucidate how James's misunderstanding of the contemporary *horizon of expectations* combined with his own expectations influenced the reception of *Washington Square*. In a sense, this approach revisits the textual critics' arguments about the role of the editors and what constitutes *the work* itself. Jerome J. McGann asserts that "literary works are fundamentally social rather than personal or psychological products, they do not even acquire an artistic form of being until their engagement with an audience has been determined" (44). He sees the editing and publication of a text as a "translation of the initially psychological phenomenon (the 'creative process') into a social one (the literary work)" (62-63). Consequently, McGann reaches the conclusion that "[i]n cultural products like literary works the location of authority necessarily becomes dispersed beyond the author" (84). In a similar fashion, James Thorpe maintains that

The process of preparing the work for dissemination to the public . . . puts the work in the hands of persons who are professionals in the execution of the process . . . Sometimes through misunderstanding and sometimes through an effort to improve the work, these professionals substitute their own intentions for those of the author, who is frequently ignorant of their craft. Sometimes the author objects and sometimes not, sometimes he is pleased, sometimes he acquiesces, and

sometimes he does not notice what has happened. The work of art is thus always tending toward a collaborative status. (48)

My study takes these ideas somewhat outside of these discussions by arguing that the visual appearance of the published text is part of the literary work to be received and the author's role (or lack thereof) in the illustration process has an effect on the work as a whole and its reception.⁵

While textual editing involves mainly choosing between versions and/or updating the spelling of the verbal text, visual editing often means the addition of another author's work within the pages of the publication. If we agree with Ellen J. Esrock that imaging is an essential part of the reception process, then providing the image next to the verbal depiction of the scene leads to a kind of repetition, or rereading—if you will.⁶ Indeed, Vladimir Nabokov claimed decades ago that “one cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it” (3). Matei Calinescu agreed:

when I make up my mind to read a book (not necessarily a classic), I most likely already know something about it: I may have been advised by a friend or a reviewer to read it, or perhaps forbidden to read it by an authority figure or censor; I may have been given reasons why I should, or perhaps should not, read it; or I may have simply heard it mentioned informally as an enjoyable book, or as being original, topical, scandalous, etc. Even the first book of the new author cannot be read totally ‘innocently’. (42)

The spreading of reception through oral channels before the common reader had a chance to read the work creates a certain *horizon of expectations*, and the nineteenth century definitely did not lack such influences on the individual reader's reception process. In fact, written influences often preceded the publication itself; publishers wished to secure their profit by spending considerable amount of funds on the advertising of the work to be published.⁷ Nonetheless, the reception of illustrated texts reminds us more of Calinescu's notion of the *double* reading, where the *rereading* penetrates the very first reading: “it can adopt, alongside the prospective logic of reading, a retrospective logic of reading” (18). In fact, Calinescu here argues for the linear

reading of the text that is interrupted repeatedly by the recollection of earlier passages. Due to the accessibility of the visual image, the illustrations constituted both embedded elements in the reception of the whole work and precursors of the passages which they illustrated. Having in mind Calinescu's argument that a rereading revolves around questions instead of the trusting approach that the first reading ideally exhibits (14), we have to realize that the *rereading* of the scenes (and of the characters and gestures) in the verbal form *after* the image has been seen, necessarily brings about a *rereading/questioning attitude* in the process of literary reception. Paradoxically, the illustration thus becomes the basis and the verbal text the repetition, so that for every element of the narrative that is encountered by the reader first through an illustration, it is the text that fills the *gaps* of the illustration instead of the other way round.

This re-reading process then is further complicated by the text–illustration dichotomy:

The nub here is not the venerable issue of what a medium can (or conveniently can) represent: rather, the nub is what a medium must explicitly discriminate. The things that language must be decisive about and pictures must be decisive about are different.

It is not, by the way, that pictures do not represent narrative 'well'. It is rather that they do not replicate the grammatical and syntactical commitments of a verbal narrative well. They are committed to a structure and balance of narration that is actively different. (Baxandall 123)

This difference between the verbal and the visual can be seen through their different dimensions, the linearity of the verbal text and the two-dimensionality of the image, but the effect of this difference is more complex. The heavy reliance on the reader's recollection of earlier textual passages is replaced in the viewing process by a movement of the eye that leads to the recognition of the forms as people and things. Moreover, when the reader views these images *as illustrations*, he or she fuses the visual process with the verbal comprehension since the figures are identified with the characters and the places with the locations in the text. In this identification process, the reader cannot help but become conscious of the disjoint between the

text and the illustration every time the two lead to diverging perceptions about the characters, places or events. J. Hillis Miller highlights exactly this communicational dichotomy between the two: “The word evokes. The illustration presents” (67). James argues that the illustration appears to be a “competitive process” while the literary text is “putting forward illustrative claims (that is producing an effect of illustration) by its own intrinsic virtue” (Introduction IX). It is his fundamental belief that nothing should “reliev[e] responsible prose of the duty of being, while placed before us, good enough, interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all in itself” (Introduction IX-X). In such a context, the illustrations can only be “mere optical symbols or echoes, expressions of no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing” (Introduction XI). This is James’s choice for the New York Edition where the illustrations are Alvin Coburn’s photographs of certain locations without any reference to characters or events.

Indeed, for the nineteenth-century audience, James’s text alone was already a challenge. For James ambiguity was not simply a stylistic device, but the essence of a new literary work: it is apparent in his style, in his subject, in all the different layers of the work. In 1916, John Freeman described James as “[d]eliberate, steadfast, unhesitating, . . . striving always to attain his end not merely by choice of subject, but equally by means of the form which he is never tired of saying is inseparable from the presentation of the subject” (221). For the first readers’ of James’s works, nonetheless, ambiguity initiated a certain uneasiness that quickly turned into straight-forward concern. James’s first successful work, *Daisy Miller* appeared shortly before *Washington Square* and it generated both interest and questions. It is, in fact, during the publication of *Washington Square*, in August of 1880, that James had to respond to a concerned letter from Eliza Lynn Linton about what he meant in *Daisy Miller*. The story could have easily

been seen as the depiction of a promiscuous young woman and, although the literary text noticeably avoided clarifying the heroine's reasons, the readers felt the need to know *what he meant*. James seemed to be eager to set the reader's mind at rest claiming that the heroine was "above all things *innocent*. It was not to make a scandal, or because she took pleasure in the scandal, that she 'went on' with Giovanelli. She never took the measure really of the scandal she produced, and had no means of doing so: she was too ignorant, too irreflective, too little versed in the proportions of things..." (*Letters* 303). Nevertheless, he did not seem so interested in clarifying his later works; in fact, he seemed to grow more self-conscious in his use of ambiguity in spite of the audience's need to identify a clear moral undertone in his works.

For the audience, the concerns of the mid-nineteenth century did not disappear by the 1880s. The less didactic novels were seen as a possible threat to Victorian values: such works could contribute to the spread of immorality at a time when financial and political equality between the genders was a daily topic, but the social double standard still existed and required women to display purity and stand for the moral superiority of the nation (Poovey 9-10).⁸ James, in contrast, introduced modernist ideals by questioning the need for literary works to display and solve social issues of the day. Indeed, his ambiguity reflected more the reality of the situation: not all villains were ugly as physiognomy liked to claim, nor were all the psychological drives of a person simply observable through their family history as suggested by psychoanalysis. It is in this sense that his works were more realistic and, at the same time, more modernist than the audience expected. Maureen Moran sees "the introspective tragedies of Henry James" as a continuation of the psychological realism that in the 1860s began to dominate fiction through George Eliot's influence (81). His ambiguity, on the other hand, can undoubtedly be regarded as a shift away from the utilitarian views of High Victorianism and a renewed emphasis on the

artistic form of the novel.

In James's work, the major gaps are what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan calls the *prospective gaps* since the reader "is made aware of the existence of the gap in the process of reading," and they are *permanent gaps* because they "remain open after the text has come to an end" (128-29). What is most important to notice in James's novels is that while the reader is constantly reminded of these gaps and left guessing at the end of the reading process, these gaps are what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan labels as *crucial and central in the narrative*, and the reception process revolves around filling these gaps in spite of the lack of any explicit guidance. Hence, ambiguity in many of his works does not cause merely textual gaps that the reader can fill easily or simply ignore, but it leads to a *ludic reading*: certain works, Calinescu argues, "lend themselves to (re)reading close to the ludic pole represented by games with rules . . . confronting the attentive reader with such questions as: What is really the make-believe game I am supposed to play in reading this text? What precisely am I to pretend to believe? How am I to determine this?" (193). This search for the rules of the game is what determines the relationship between the author and the reader, which does not always place the latter in a comfortable position. Indeed, Sheila Teahan emphasizes James's ability in *The Turn of the Screw* to plan for each of the reader's questions: "It seems impossible for a reader to make any move that has not been anticipated in the story itself" (26). Calinescu views these anticipatory moves as the rules the writer creates for the game that the reader is invited to play. He examines the reception process in the case of *The Turn of the Screw* to demonstrate how the reader's absorption becomes *ludic*:

we are willing to play the critical game so intelligently devised by the author, and important part of which consists of searching precisely for the textual gaps and attempting to define their strategic role in manipulating reader interest and in creating a desire to reread. It is by identifying and circumscribing these gaps through rereading that we are enabled to discover not the truth of the story but the more subtle, hidden, tacit rules by which the hermeneutical game it proposes can

be played and replayed, as well as incidental loopholes that may allow for new, unsuspected interpretive possibilities. The secret hope of solving the puzzle definitively, of triumphing where all other readers have failed, must not be discounted either: this ‘let-me-have-a-look-at-it’ attitude underlies much of the competitive rereading that forms the basis of literary criticism. (201)

Although not this openly, James’s other novels also invite the audience to re-evaluate the role of the reader, but not all of them delineate the possible interpretations so clearly as *The Turn of the Screw*. Many of his works revolve around what the main character will do, and Stefanie Markovits claims that this Jamesian concern “seems to grow right out of those repeated demands of ‘What should I do?’ made by Eliot’s heroines” (131). Markovits adds:

When James replaces Eliot’s ‘should’ with his own ‘will,’ he indicates that his ethical concerns will be more about freedom than about duty. In addition, James’s version of Eliot’s struggle with free agency takes place on a much more self-consciously formal level than do Eliot’s ethical dilemmas. Together, these shifts show the move from the Victorian to the modernist frame of mind. (131)

Washington Square is also structured around what the character *will* do and leaves the reader wondering *why* the character acted so. A moralistic interpretation was seen as a possibility by the contemporary audience, yet the problem arose when they, as Linton’s example shows, could not pinpoint this interpretation as the only correct reading of the text. As a result, the ambiguity led to *permanent* and *crucial* gaps, and even if the readers’ interest was maintained, they did not appreciate being left in the dark.

Analyzing the contemporary audience’s response, Cruse argues that the explanation of the decreasing interest in James’s novels lies in the fact that “he had made too great demands on his public. The fastidious elaboration of treatment that had at first proved attractive had become wearisome since . . . it required the close and concentrated attention of the reader” (*After the Victorians* 150). It is interesting to note that what Cruse identifies as the cause for the readers’ concerns was a conscious choice by James based on what he understood the contemporary literary audience would expect and appreciate. Even if that was not the case at the time, the late-

twentieth-century critics' interest in James's ambiguity and especially Calinescu's invitation to *ludic self-absorption* suggests what James might have desired. Nineteenth-century readers, however, did not recognize the uniqueness of the style; instead they regarded it as an unhappy accident, and some of them wondered about the choice of subject, too. Cruse provides as example Thomas Hardy's concern that James subjects were "those that one could be interested in at moments when there is nothing larger to think of" (ctd. in *After the Victorians* 150). On the other hand, Cruse acknowledges that there was a group of readers who were devoted to James. Arnold Bennett stated: "There is scarcely an author—unless it be Henry James—whom I find flawless, and whom therefore I can read with perfect comfort;" and Mrs. Atherton claimed that "In the nineties, . . . Henry James, and deservedly, was spoken of with bated breath as the Master" (ctd. in *After the Victorians* 150-51). Such readers, however, were few and others either struggled with his novels or gave up reading them altogether. Anne Douglas Sedgwick found *The Awkward Age* to be "a wonderful production, exasperating at times, but in its final effect really magnificent," and Stopford Brooke admitted frankly:

I have read Henry James's preface and to tell you the plain truth I do not understand half of it. . . . He has now arrived at such an involved and tormented a style that I find the greatest difficulty in discovering what he means. I read and read, again and again, his sentences, and it is like listening to a language I do not know. I read his last novel but one, and I was in the same hopeless condition. I believe his style is the fine flower of modern culture and that not to appreciate it is to be in the outer darkness, but I prefer outer darkness. (ctd. in *After the Victorians* 151)

Such readerly responses do not provide a detailed reflection on the reception process, but elements of their testimonies can be examined closely. Arnold Bennett found James's work flawless, but he admittedly had time to read the works "with perfect comfort." Anne Douglas Sedgwick's reading process was "exasperating at times," and it was the "final effect" that led her to an overall conclusion that it was "a wonderful production" and "really magnificent." If the

“production” referred to the detailed aspects of the work, then “wonderful” would be inconsistent with the confession that there were passages that were “exasperating” to read. Hence, “production” became “wonderful” in this reader’s mind once she had finished reading the novel, so it was her retrospective response that was favourable—in spite of the constant recalling of the unhappy moments of the reading process. Stopford Brooke’s response, “He has *now* arrived at such an involved and tormented a style...” (*my emphasis*), suggests a development from a problematic style to a highly difficult style. In this response it is also interesting to note that this reader complains about not being able to “discover . . . what *he means*” and feeling as if he were “listening to a *language* I do not know” (*my emphases*). Thus this reader seemingly did not expect to enjoy the reading (and the *ludic absorption* that Calinescu admires so much in James’s works), but to understand what the author *meant*, and as soon as he realized that he could not locate that *meaning*, he looked at the text as a *different language*. The next phase in his reception process is only logical: he recognizes the work as something new and admirable (“the fine flower of modern culture”), but does not keep up with culture if it requires the “appreciation” of such works. It is noteworthy that the reader earlier struggled to understand what the author *meant*, but eventually chooses to relinquish *appreciating* the work, although *appreciation* does not require the understanding of *the meaning* of the work. However, in the mind of the contemporary readers these two notions overlapped: you could appreciate a work only if you were able to understand its meaning. Such an approach to proto-modernist works is certainly a cause for the growing disjoint between the audience’s reception and the author’s understanding of that reception and of the *horizon of expectations*.

Ambiguity was the key factor in this dissonance and there were few readers who recognized that the works were not poorly written, but *delicately* constructed as a never-ending

game. *Washington Square* is especially relevant from this perspective because of its apparent superficial construction. The narrative is short and renders in detail only a few months within the story. At the beginning, there is a relatively quick reference to how Catherine Sloper was born and raised by her father and aunt, Mrs. Penniman. The story really begins with Catherine meeting Morris Townsend and falling in love with him. In a witty conversation with him, Dr. Sloper tries to distance Morris from Catherine by urging him to find a job outside of town. Townsend, however, manages to draw on false family reasons to reject the advice, so that Dr. Sloper's only option is to take Catherine for a long trip to Europe. When at their return Catherine continues her infatuation with Townsend, her father decides to 'save' her from an unhappy marriage by disowning her in case she marries Townsend. Ultimately, Townsend leaves Catherine with the doubtful explanation that he does not want to interfere with their father-daughter relationship. Catherine never marries while her father is still alive and when Dr. Sloper dies years later, Catherine rejects Morris's attention. The novel ends shortly after their last conversation without the reader having a chance to learn why Catherine decided so.

Nevertheless, the novel should not be regarded as a failed literary exercise. James's response to Grace Norton demonstrates his insistence on the artistic choices: "[*Washington Square*] had a very definite artistic intention; but most readers miss that (at all times) and I am happy that you should have found it" (*Letters* 315). A closer look at what this "definite artistic intention" might entail can shed light on the discrepancies between the text and the illustrations. The novel seems to revolve around ambiguity both thematically and stylistically. The theme of ambiguity is displayed through the reappearing emphasis on 'reading': the story depicts a young woman who is struggling to deal with the consequences of the discrepancy between her and her father's 'reading' of her suitor. Once the reader finds out about Morris's real intentions, the

constant question is what Catherine *will do* and what will influence her in her decision making. The text carefully drafts the heroine so that her choice cannot be predicted, nor her rationale guessed. Thus the *central gap* of the text becomes essentially psychological and the reader's interest in the heroine's choice and reasons is maintained through most of the novel. The uniqueness of the novel lies in the fact that even when her choice is finally determined (on the very last pages of the novel), her reasons remain obscure not because they depend on the overall reading of the text (as in *The Turn of the Screw*), or because they are withheld by the self-isolated heroine (as in *The Portrait of a Lady*), but seemingly because the narrator keeps it a secret. The heroine is in the building, we witness her discussion with Morris, yet we learn nothing about her thinking. As a result, the text clarifies for the readers what its *central gaps* are and requires a careful reading throughout the pages in an effort to fill those gaps, but once it suggests that there is a definite reason for the heroine's choice (her very clear response to Morris), it withholds that last detail from the reader as a *permanent gap*. Such an ending forces the reader to re-evaluate the reading process and reconsider Catherine's earlier choices as well.

Indeed, the novel does not only lead the audience to reflect on the reading process, but it also reflects constantly how the characters 'read' each other. In this aspect the novel reminds us of some of James's other works: "for James, reading is the dominant metaphor of life and his art is designed to teach us how to read well" (Fetterley 147). Decidedly, the novel displays plenty of occasions for the theme of 'reading': Morris creates an image for himself that seems best to work on women, but fails to deceive the men (Dr. Sloper as well as his own cousin); Mrs. Penniman teaches Catherine that romance is to be regarded as the most important feature a suitor can have and supports her focus on behavior rather than internal characteristics; Dr. Sloper boasts about his years of experience in 'reading' people and takes only a few steps to prove for himself the

validity of his reading' of Morris. When it comes to Catherine, nevertheless, the theme is not that clear: does she fail to realize Morris' pretense or does she become a victim of the image she and Mrs. Penniman created about him? Does she recognize Morris's real intentions and stop short of confronting him out of decency, or does she subdue herself to her father's wishes even beyond the grave? These choices and others in the interpretation of the novel yield widely different final conclusions: readers might see her decision to send Morris away as a proof of her growing awareness and psychological strength, but it might also be viewed as a reiteration of her former subdued self. Even more, readers might find that the end of the novel reveals her true character that was hidden before by the appearance of foolishness and submission.

While the possible interpretations invite readers to the *ludic absorption* Calinescu discusses, the *permanent* and *central gap* frustrates and confuses the reader. So is the novel about the transformation a woman of Catherine's age and social stature undergoes when facing the materialistic world, or is it about the unhappiness of a woman who needs her father's strict rules to survive in the world? Yet another option: is it about the lack of real choices for young women in the nineteenth-century patriarchal society of high middle-class? The lack of clear moral message and the possibility that the novel makes irony of the choices that are available to young girls at the end of the nineteenth century, undercut the reader's *ludic absorption* into the text and transform him/her into a sentinel watching out for signs of immorality and lack of respect. Here the reception process surpasses the joyful *ludic* level and steps into the realm of contemporary social questions. Hence, the discrepancies between the text and the illustrations only further confused the audience.



Fig. 2. Frontispiece. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 2

As a more accessible register, the visual images could have brought the audience closer to a specific interpretation of the text and thus fill the gaps that the text so carefully maintained, but this was not the case. The first full-page illustration is a good example since it introduced the main characters for the readers (see Fig. 2). The image seems to represent three people talking at a social event. The location is depicted in a few lines to suggest the size and ornamentation of the place, and the other people are drawn as a mere background. The three figures in the foreground, however, are rendered through detailed strokes in order to introduce the main characters visually. The gentleman is very formally dressed and his hat in his hand, his facial expression and slight bow all suggest that he is very respectfully greeting the woman facing him. The other woman, standing next to him, views him with a very open look and touches his arm trustfully. Her overall appearance, face, hair and dress suggest that she is very young and fashionable. However, the lady whom we see from the back is hardly introduced to the viewer. The details of her dress indicate her social status, her narrow waist reflects her age and her hairstyle suggests her preferences, yet not seeing her face takes away the possibility of the viewer to get to *know* this

person. It is evident that she is young and wealthy, it is also probable that she is shy and withdrawn, but the reader does not have a chance to see how she looks like in spite of the text establishing her as the heroine of the novel. The illustration tends to focus more on the community aspect of the social event, the heroine meeting friends and new acquaintances, than on the main character herself. In this respect the illustration visualizes the title of the novel: Washington Square is not simply a location, but a community, where people's actions are defined by social regulations rather than individual characteristics.⁹ However, it is in contrast with the textual passage that it illustrates. The caption itself reads: "Marian Almond came up to Catherine in company with a tall young man" (*Washington Square* 26). Here the text seems to focus more on the names of the two characters that we know when this social event takes place, and it is the gentleman who is depicted through merely two adjectives, "tall" and "young," no name attached at all. These words, though few, tend to describe the man in a very positive light for a naïve young woman at the age of marrying. None of the words, however, suggest that the man is as respectful as the illustration implies, so early on the reader develops a misconception about Catherine's role and Morris's character.



Fig. 3. Vignette with Morris and Dr. Sloper. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 52

Throughout the novel, the illustrations seem to concentrate on Morris than on Catherine. At the beginning of Chapter VII, the reader encounters Morris conversing with Dr. Sloper (see Fig. 3). The posture, countenance and hand gesture all suggest an open person, who is eager to answer questions and impress his interlocutor. His position is further emphasized by Dr. Sloper's somewhat reserved stance. In the text, the passage is relatively short: "The Doctor talked with him very little during dinner; but he observed him attentively, and after the ladies had gone out he pushed him the wine and asked him several questions. Morris was not a young man who needed to be pressed, and he found quite enough encouragement in the superior quality of the claret" (*Washington Square* 54). The text casually mentions the topic of their discussion and reveals the first impressions they have on each other, but it does not elaborate further. In fact, the passage is followed by a detailed conversation between Morris and Catherine about what Dr. Sloper's might think about him, but the illustrations carefully avoid visualizing, through Catherine's face, her feelings and thoughts. Indeed, the other illustration of the chapter shows Morris playing the piano and two other characters reacting, but not Catherine (see Fig. 4). The reader sees Mrs. Penniman's adoring face and Dr. Sloper's reserved countenance, but he/she cannot see Catherine's facial expression in spite of the text highlighting Catherine's interest: "he sung two or three songs at Catherine's timid request" (*Washington Square* 56).



Fig. 4. Morris plays the piano. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 57

Even when the illustrations show her face, the image counteracts the text. At the beginning of Chapter XIX, Catherine is shown following her father in what seems to be a hurried walk (see Fig. 5). A similar passage appears in the text in Chapter XXIV, when Dr. Sloper inquires about Catherine's feelings six months into their trip to Europe. Seeing no change in Catherine, the father states angrily that Morris will leave her without a penny and starts walking towards the carriage: "He turned away, and she followed him; he went faster, and was presently much in advance. But from time to time he stopped, without turning round, to let her keep up with him, and she made her way forward with difficulty, her heart beating with the excitement of having for the first time spoken to him in violence" (*Washington Square* 179). In contrast, the illustration manages to keep most of the father's face hidden from the reader and Catherine's



Fig. 5. Vignette of Dr. Sloper and Catherine. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 141

facial expression is difficult to decipher since her eyes, nose and mouth are merely sketched through a few strokes. However, for a first-time reader the illustration is also confusing due to its appearance long before the father even plans their travel to Europe. Indeed, the image stands in front of a chapter that depicts Dr. Sloper's conversation with Mrs. Penniman and Catherine's decision to "appear good [for her father], even if her heart were perverted" (*Washington Square*

145).



Fig. 6. Catherine and Mrs. Penniman. Henry James, *Washington Square*, 188

In another case, in Chapter XXV, the reader sees Mrs. Penniman trying on the shawl Catherine brought from Europe, yet Catherine's facial expression suggests no feelings in spite of the text's elaboration on their discussion about Dr. Sloper's attitude towards Catherine's planned marriage (*Washington Square* 184-91) (see Fig. 6). Through an emphasis on other characters and through showing her vaguely or detached, the illustrations on the whole provide a different sense than the text.¹⁰ The reader who encounters the story chapter by chapter is looking in vain for clarification about the heroine; moreover, he/she is further confused by the subject and style of the illustrations. Beyond the ambiguity of the text lies the incomprehensibility of the way it is illustrated: does the concentration on other characters suggest that the novel does not revolve around Catherine? Does Catherine appear to be superficially drawn because she is *not meant* to be a central character described in detail?

Since du Maurier was chosen due to his outstanding talent and conscientiousness, there seem to be two reasons left for the text–illustration discrepancy: the text was difficult to illustrate

and James did not contribute to the editing process.¹¹ Indeed, James focused on *The Portrait of a Lady*: “my next big novel; it will immortalize me” (*Letters* 265). He worked extensively on this novel and in the meantime he gained confidence not only in his writing, but also his understanding of the audience’s *horizon of expectations*. He specified to the editor Howells that he wants to publish a longer story the following summer “preferably told in a smaller number of long installments . . . six or seven numbers of twenty-five pages apiece” (*Letters* 251). Such a request demonstrates that James began to lay more emphasis on what he understood to be the audience’s expectations. He chose longer passages to better control the readers’ interest. His decision to have fewer installments demonstrates his confidence that the novel will be well received and it will yield a better profit than any of his previous works. His requests to the editor Theodore E. Child for the publication of his review of Emile Zola’s *Nana* are even more demanding:

- 1° Please send me *two* proofs. You shall have them back on the instant.
- 2 PLEASE IF POSSIBLE PRINT IT LEADED. This I beseech you.
- 3 Please send me half a dozen copies of the paper. (*Letters* 274)

What James failed to recognize during this transformation is that his understanding of the contemporary *horizon of expectations* was just a subjective intuition and that his struggle for fame happened to the detriment of the publication of *Washington Square*, which the audience could not overlook. James admitted to having written *Confidence* and *Washington Square* as a way of financial survival while he was writing and discussing the publication of his long novel that would secure him the ultimate fame.¹² His letters prove his dissatisfaction with the appearance of *Confidence*, and he refers to *Washington Square* as “a poorish story in three numbers” (*Letters* 268), or “a slender tale, of rather too narrow an interest” (*Letters* 308). While he warned those close to him about the problems associated with the publication of these two short novels, the audience at large read them with the high expectations set by *Daisy Miller*.¹³

There were only a few British critics who admired *Washington Square*, and even those had concerns: the unsigned reviewer of the *Athenaeum* complained about the difficulty of the style (Hayes 107) and Leonora B. Lang suggested in the *Academy* that James “contriv[es] to the very last to keep us in suspense as to the result” (Hayes 185). However, Lang also admitted that “guess[ing] with certainty how the characters will act, or what the end is to be” is difficult for all of James’s novels (Hayes 185). It is noteworthy that even the positive response is a misunderstanding of what the novel can deliver: Lang appears to be concerned about the ending, but does not consider the interplay between the possible interpretations. Similarly, the *Spectator*’s unsigned reviewer, R. H. Hutton, protested that “Mr. Henry James strikes us as in nothing less humane than the indifference with which he treats his characters, after he has brought them through such melancholy shifts in their lot as he generally provides for them” (Gard 89). His lack of understanding of the textual subtleties is suggested by his analysis of Dr. Sloper as *the main* character of the novel, whose “cold-hearted experiments on his daughter’s nature, and utter failure to do anything except rob her of her admiration for him” only confirm the reviewer’s sense that James “has no interest in the moral equities of life” and does not care for Catherine (Gard 89).¹⁴ Such criticisms suggest that even the readers who were most familiar with the contemporary literary styles found James’s style a hard nut to crack. Their emphasis on other characters and the linguistic style of the text make much of their reception process visible for us: they did not appreciate the complexity of the design and disregarded the text’s invitation to *ludic absorption*. Their reflections can only suggest that the reception process of readers who were less familiar with literary styles and new trends was even further away from what James expected to happen. There seemed to be no worried readers asking the writer to elaborate on the subject or a character’s rationale, as in the case of *Daisy Miller*. The general audience most

probably regarded the novel just as James prepared it: as a short story of little importance. It is at this moment in literary history that the novel is judged to be one of James's novels of *lesser importance*, and its reception never recovers this first blow.

The confusion caused by the first illustrations only further distanced the audience from the *ludic absorption* the text required. The illustrations did not emphasize Catherine as a main character, nor did they guide the readers through her psychological dilemmas. As a result the reception of the text exhibits the audience's confusion. *Washington Square* is unique in this sense, since it is the novel where James first realized the contradiction between the text and the illustrations and the impossibility of his texts being favorably illustrated. He reluctantly admitted later: "I am fondly and confusedly conscious that we first met [with du Maurier] on the ground of the happy accident of an injury received on either side in connection with him having consented to make drawings for a short novel that I had constructed in a crude defiance of the illustrator" (Ormond 392). It is this "crude defiance of the illustrator" that best explains the discrepancy between the text written by an outstanding writer and the illustrations drawn by a talented artist. Beyond the shortness of the story lies the conciseness of the heroine's characterization that is so central to the interpretation of the novel. The first chapters of the text, for instance, introduce the young Catherine succinctly:

She was a healthy, well-grown child, without a trace of her mother's beauty. She was not ugly; she had simply a plain, dull, gentle countenance. The most that had ever been said for her was that she had a 'nice' face; and, though she was an heiress, no one had ever thought of regarding her as a belle. Her father's opinion of her moral purity was abundantly justified; she was excellently, imperturbably good; affectionate, docile, obedient, and much addicted to speaking the truth. (*Washington Square* 16)

Such a depiction of the heroine reflects more the effect she has on her environment than the actual details of her appearance. The reader does not learn more about Catherine's eyes, nose or hair, but he/she is constantly reminded how she would be seen by others, "among whom it must

be avowed, however, that she occupied a secondary place” (*Washington Square* 17). It appears that the reader has to believe what somebody else believed about the heroine and the overlapping reception processes can be quite challenging for the nineteenth-century reader. Indeed, most of what the reader learns about the heroine is filtered through the father’s expectations based on his son who died at the age of three. He sees her as “an inadequate substitute for his lamented first-born,” as “a disappointment,” and he “would have liked to be proud of his daughter; but there was nothing to be proud of in poor Catherine” (*Washington Square* 11-18).

Throughout the novel, the verbal text is very careful when portraying the heroine and it leaves aspects of her thinking and feeling blurred. The reader does not gain access to the confessions she must have included in her frequent letters from Europe; and when she is present at discussions that decide her fate, the text reveals hardly anything about her reactions.¹⁵ For instance, when Mrs. Penniman reports Morris’s first visit to their home, Dr. Sloper responds:

“Oh, his name is Morris Townsend, is it? And did he come here to propose you?”
 “Oh, father!” murmured the girl for an answer, turning away to the window, where the dusk had deepened to darkness.
 “I hope he won’t do that without your permission,” said Mrs. Penniman, very graciously.
 “After all, my dear, he seems to have yours,” her brother answered.
 Lavinia simpered, as if this might not be enough, and Catherine, with her forehead touching the window-panes, listened to this exchange of epigrams as reservedly as if they had not each been a pin-prick in her own destiny. (*Washington Square* 42-43)

The passage wonderfully highlights how little the reader has access to Catherine’s thinking. He/she witnesses only her “murmuring” and “turning away to the window, where the dusk had deepened to darkness.” The dusk seems to conceal Catherine’s reaction and her listening “reservedly” appears to characterize less her inner self and more her social behavior. As a consequence, the reader learns very little about what the heroine feels and has no foundation for estimating her actions. This is the means through which James manages to maintain the question

“What will she do?” throughout most of the novel. There is no clear authorial intention: “it is hard to determine the moral and epistemological authority of its narrator, whose confident tone is sometimes disconcertingly similar to the ironically treated authoritarian voice of Doctor Sloper” (Buelens 196). This ambiguity about the narratorial voice is a technique to avoid clear categorizations. As Markovits observes, James is more interested in the character’s psychology than the development of the plot (133).¹⁶ Such a writerly goal, however, demonstrates James’s misunderstanding of the contemporary *horizon of expectations*. Nineteenth-century readers were not prepared for such a *ludic absorption* and could see the *crucial and permanent gap* in the text only as an unfortunate accident. James had to clarify his intentions even to his brother: “The young man in *Washington Square* is not a portrait—he is sketched from the outside merely and not *fouillé*. The only good thing in the story is the girl” (*Letters* 316).

It is obvious that both the illustrator and the general audience became victims of James’s need for the freedom to search for what the character *will* do. James defines this freedom as “the air of reality [which is] the supreme virtue of the novel—the merit on which all its other merits (including th[e] conscious moral purpose...) helplessly and submissively depend” (*Art of Fiction* 173). This goal brings him into new literary spheres, where not all the contemporary readers followed him. His modernism is most visible in his wish to break away from the subjects and styles of High Victorianism: the world cannot be transformed, James argues, “into conventional, traditional moulds, . . . [the] eternal repetition of a few familiar clichés . . . Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet” (*Art of Fiction* 177). Such an approach, however, leads to a discrepancy between the text and the illustration, and causes eventually a disjoint between the audience’s *horizon of expectations* and the author’s own understanding of these expectations.

Towards the end of the century, James grows more and more self-conscious about his style and in 1996, he openly states to Clement Shorter, the editor of the *Illustrated London News*: “I confess I am afraid your artist—although I regard my story as essentially and absolutely dramatic—won’t find in my situations a great deal of suggestion for variegated or panoramic pictures. But I *like* so little to be illustrated (I resent it so, amiably speaking, on behalf of good prose and *real* writing) that I won’t hypocritically pretend to pity him too much” (ctd. in Bogardus 60).

Notes

¹ In part II of Chapter 4 “Reviews and Reviewers,” Waller analyzes the rise of the complementary copy system reaching acquaintances as well as famous literary people, but he also refers to pre-arranged interviews and extreme cases such as lunch invitations aimed to “clarify” the value of the work being published (125-36).

² Recent editions of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (such as Princeton, 1994; Thames and Hudson, 2001; Tate, 2007; FQ Classics, 2007), for instance, include full-page renderings of his text and illustrations so that the reader can witness the text–image interaction in a way similar to the experience of the eighteenth-century audience. William Makepeace Thackeray, on the other hand, is considered to be a writer above all, so *Vanity Fair* is rarely published with all his illustrations (such as in the Norton 1994 edition and the Barnes and Noble 2005 edition), indeed, most of the editions contain no illustration at all.

³ Bal proves the existence of this unity between the verbal and the visual in theater performances and she argues that it goes unnoticed in other arts (313).

⁴ The increase in evening classes, libraries and legal incentives improved the population’s literacy immensely during the 1825-90 period (Altick 212-14). Mason Jackson is one of the contemporary critics who wrote about the improvement of the printing technology and costs. Contemporary essays collected by Andrew King and John Plunkett highlight other aspects of the publishing industry: Francis Hitchman discussed the surge in the periodical publication (King 241); and Innes Shand and Alexander William analyzed the distribution of papers and books throughout the country (King 45, 27). Twentieth-century studies, on the other hand, reveal the change of the observer at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Crary); the proliferation of

images of people reading (Curtis 220-40); and the audience's interest in visual perception and new devices such as the zootrope, phenakistiscope, kaleidoscope, stereoscope and diorama (de Bolla 69). It is also noteworthy that along with the rise of the reading public, the illustrated editions expanded too. The readers were so interested in the illustrations of the periodicals that many publishers printed separate issues containing the best illustrations of the year (Reid 11-19).

⁵ In fact, I agree with McGann's assertion that "when the author is himself involved in the printing of his manuscript—when he proofs and edits—then the printed form will necessarily represent what might be called his final intentions, or 'the text as the author wished to have it presented to the public'" (*Critique* 41). Nonetheless, my study is not intended as an argument against the accuracy of present-day copy texts choices since it focuses exclusively on the contemporary reception of the first editions of these illustrated novels. I believe that the exploration of the factors that contribute to the dichotomy between the first reception and a more recent one presents an entirely different subject, nonetheless worthy of further elucidation.

⁶ In *The Reader's Eye*, Esrock examines the effects of imaging on the reception process, such as the enhancement of memory, clarification of descriptions and concretization of fiction (188-93).

⁷ For example, the 1846 advertising of *Dombey and Son* cost £67, 5s., a seventh of the publication expenses, and these costs were maintained even during the decades when printing costs became less expensive (Sutherland 23).

⁸ Henry Mayhew draws attention in his *London Labor and the London Poor* to the number of fallen women increased in the Victorian Age and his concern reflects the general anxiety of the audience. In *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, Andrew Mearns discusses the moral degradation brought about the housing conditions, John Ruskin's treatises about ethics are founded on Victorian ideals of morality and the wide public's interest in the sustainability of Victorian morality is apparent in the publicity and aftermath of Oscar Wilde's trials. For a comprehensive analysis of the effects of mid-Victorian ethics on political economy, see Geoffrey Searle's *Morality and the Market in Victorian Britain*, which includes a special chapter on "Family and Women."

⁹ Ian F. A. Bell's *Henry James and the Past: Readings into Time* examines in depth the relevance of the topographical location in the interpretation of the novel and connects the theme of materialism to the scene of the fashionable Washington Square in New York in an effort to demonstrate how Morris and Dr. Sloper are alike in their understanding of the social and financial conventions of the community (17-60).

¹⁰ Indeed, portraying figures facing away from the viewer was a standard encyclopedias used from the eighteenth century in order to demonstrate the actions to be performed (Barrell 98-101). Nineteenth-century readers would have felt the consistent use of this standard as an incentive to identify themselves with the heroine in spite of the ambiguity of the text that prevented any such engagement.

¹¹ Du Maurier once confessed to James that he had to reject members of the London social circle in favor of some servants who represented the characters more visually for him. James admitted

in the preface to the New York Edition, that his novella *The Real Thing* was based on du Maurier's story and thus he shared both his beliefs about appearance versus essence and his reflections about an artist's search for the perfect subject.

¹² In fact, James did not monitor the editing of either of these two short novels, but Michael Anesko wonderfully highlights how the author negotiated for better financial benefits for the book edition of *Confidence* (53-59). *Washington Square*, in contrast, maintained the serial illustrations for its first book version in spite of James's concern about them, which demonstrates that James paid less attention to the publication of this book.

¹³ *Daisy Miller* was well-received in England and due to the lack of American copyrighting, it was quickly printed and sold in the United States as well. In *Henry James: A Literary Life*, Kenneth Graham states that the novella "became a talking-point on both sides of the Atlantic . . . and Daisy as 'the American girl' suddenly became a new literary and cultural type—even a hat was named after her" (50). Indeed, both British and American critics seem to praise the work due to the author's ability to suggest Daisy's beauty and ignorance without, as Richard Grant White phrased it, "being exactly a fool" (Gard 61), and Mrs. F. H. Hill draws attention to James's depiction of her as "a real personage" as well as his "cunning" placement of the her "in just the right distance to survey" (Vann 17). Some critics, such as the author of the "*Graphic Review*," saw him as "the perfect artist", but also mentioned his oddity (Hayes 75); while others bestowed on him what the reviewer of the *Pall Mall Gazette* calls the "full honors due to an English novelist" (Hayes 73). As for the general public the inquiries received by James prove W. D. Howells's point that "Henry James waked up all the women with his *Daisy Miller*, the intention of which they misconceived, and there has been a vast discussion in which nobody felt very deeply, and everybody talked very loudly. The thing went so far that society almost divided itself in Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites" (Gard 74). Overall, the reception of the novella was not uniform, but the work was regarded as an achievement and the expectations of the audience were set accordingly.

¹⁴ The American critical reviews of the period suggest very much the same concerns arguing that *Washington Square* displays what the reviewer of the *Californian* calls a design "blunder" (Hayes 115); the "*Literary World Review*" labels as "literary dilettantism" (Gard 91); and the "*New York Tribune Review*" considers to be "a serious blemish" because there is no character to like (Hayes 105). The "*Lipincott's Review*" concurs adding that there are four characters who are merely upholding their roles (Gargano 47). The "*Chicago Tribune Review*" objects that James "talks too much and says too little" (Hayes 101); and in the *New York Herald*, Thomas Powell invites the reader to "imagine a cynical dandy lying back in his easy chair and telling a story leisurely to a friend or two" and claims that this provides a "fair idea of Mr. Henry James, Jr.'s, manner as a novelist" (Hayes 101). The "*Atlantic Review*" complains that the wit appears only in the author's reflections, not the characters (Gard 92); and the "*Scribner's Review*" suggests that readers are led to overlook the characters and be "merely concerned with the evident cleverness of the author" (Hayes 111).

¹⁵ Darshan Singh Maini in "The Epistolary Art of Henry James" draws attention to the lack of letters within James's novels as a conscious choice on his behalf (389).

¹⁶ Markovits calls attention in *The Portrait of a Lady* to James's "complex awareness of the relationship of action and consciousness to the moral life," and his preference to "leave Isabel a free agent at the end of his narrative" (140-41). Catherine in *Washington Square* is very similar to Isabel since she is, against all appearances, left to decide for herself what her priorities are.

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