

# The Palace of Thought

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During the afternoon of a day spent at Newmarch, the country house where most of *The Sacred Fount* is set, the unnamed narrator contemplates for a moment the “perfect palace of thought” that his mental exertions have built for him.<sup>1</sup> In his childhood, as he recalls, “I used to circle round enchanted castles, for then I moved in a world in which the strange ‘came true,’ ” and recent events have allowed him to recapture this feeling (128). By means of this highly caricatured character, *The Sacred Fount* explores the relations among thought, *jouissance*, and obsession, the neurotic form of masculinity. Examining the ramifications of a theory concerning his fellow guests, the narrator will locate femininity as a force that threatens his calculations; his response to the disruption that it creates will lead him to undertake the symptomatic act of writing, through which he can prolong his relation with an enjoyment that disturbs him, but which he cannot escape.

## I

### A RELATION OF TRANSMISSION

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator generates a theory in order to make sense of three puzzling and embarrassing incidents, which, when taken together, wound his sense of his own high intelligence. Upon boarding a train that will take him to a party at Newmarch, he encounters a distant acquaintance, a man named Gilbert Long, whom he has met at other gatherings. He chooses not to greet Long, who had “always, in the interval” between their meetings at house parties, “so failed to know me that I could only hold him as stupid unless I held him as impertinent”; to his surprise, however, Long welcomes him promptly, and seems to behave with an intelligence far greater than he has ever exhibited before (2). A moment later, the narrator encounters another surprise; a woman who will be sharing their compartment

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enters, and when she sees that he does not recognize her, she "turn(ed) to me with a reproach: 'I don't think it very nice of you not to speak to me.' " Catching "at her identity through her voice," he realizes that "she was simply . . . Grace Brissenden," a middle-aged woman who has suddenly and inexplicably recovered her youth, and who has thereby become almost unrecognizable; embarrassed by his failure to realize immediately who she is, he suspects that "she might easily have thought me the same sort of ass as I had thought Long" (3). His sense of perplexity is soon compounded when he arrives at Newmarch and almost immediately encounters and fails to recognize Grace's new husband Guy, who has also undergone a metamorphosis. A man who is not yet thirty, Guy Brissenden has become middle-aged, and the narrator, shocked by this third change, can only marvel at "the oddity of my having been as stupid about the husband as I had been about the wife" (30).

These incidents have a strong effect upon the narrator, because they not only seem to result from a force that may inherently be disturbing, but also because they wound what Leon Edel has called his "extraordinar[y] va[nity]" about his powers of observation.<sup>2</sup> Having elevated his sense of his intelligence into a master signifier, and having therefore, consistently defined himself as the "cleverest man" at Newmarch or anywhere else he may happen to be, he sees in these seemingly minor failures of recognition a subversion of his status, and he reacts to these surprises in a way that is characteristic of obsession (37). All of his references to the possibility of seeming stupid betray a concern that his appearance of cleverness may be little more than a mask, beyond which lies a mind as ignorant as any other of the forces that change people whom he believes that he knows. In a manner typical of obsessional neurosis, he does not care to acknowledge for more than a moment the emptiness that his usual pretensions may conceal; therefore, partly in order to escape these lapses, but also for more complex reasons, he develops a theory which he will spend the rest of the book trying first to establish, and then to defend.<sup>3</sup> This theory, however, will go far beyond being a mere attempt to cover over his failures, for it will also testify to his sense that, if his powers of cognition have failed momentarily, they may have done so because of his encounter with a bizarre force. They have perhaps been disturbed because he has come face to face with a mysterious libidinal power, which his theory will be an attempt to locate. As he now suggests, he has witnessed the effects of secret and supernatural events, for somehow, by means of an act that defies any easy explanation, Guy's youth has been transmitted to Grace, and the intelligence of an unknown person has been given to Gilbert.

The donors' primary motive for taking part in this process lies in their attempt to achieve an enjoyment that manifests itself through one of the strongest ambitions of love: the wish to participate in an act of "fusion" that will, in Lacan's words, "make one out of two."<sup>4</sup> Guy Brissenden "loves [Grace] passionately, sublimely," and through the process that transforms her into a young woman, he allows a portion of his youth to flow into and suffuse

her, thereby uniting them as possessors of a common substance (30).<sup>5</sup> This dream of union is thus part of an attempt to achieve a *jouissance* of the body, a sense of Oneness that will allow him to leave behind the divisive power of discourse and the social world; all other interests are sacrificed to this single overriding fascination. Having taken part in a relation that Grace herself, when discussing Gilbert Long, will characterize as "so awfully intimate," the donor will have little interest in social exchange; s/he can only regard society as an alien element that will, at best, fail to comprehend this union, and at worst, be hostile to it (33). This attitude becomes explicit later in the novel, when the narrator is in the presence of a woman whom he believes to be the source of Gilbert's intelligence. This woman, he surmises, derives no pleasure from the festivities at Newmarch. Instead, her purpose in attending the party is to be near her lover and to use a "complex diplomacy," which will prevent anyone from suspecting that her covert relation has changed her; in this way, she hopes to protect her secret from those outsiders who would disapprove of this union (139).

In his own formulation of this theory, however, the narrator does not refuse to acknowledge the action of discourse; instead, he immediately realizes the impossibility of making one out of two, and therefore portrays these characters as having been marked by a cut. His earliest attempts to make sense of the mysterious changes among these people assumes the existence of a "phallic function," which has expelled from the realm of possibility these hopes for a *jouissance* uncontaminated by division.<sup>6</sup> This function has its origin in the young boy's sense of a threat that he will be deprived of his penis if he does not relinquish his infantile "autoeroticism," a term that should be understood in its broadest sense; it extends beyond a reference merely to masturbation, and embraces instead the possibility of an enjoyment that would pervade not only his entire body but also his language. Within this state, the infant uses words not so much to create meaning, but rather as a way of experiencing *jouissance*; the isolated, meaningless signifiers issuing from his mouth have been imbued with this enjoyment, which he can experience in the very act of speaking.<sup>7</sup> Such a condition, however, will be almost impossible to maintain, for the changes within the boy's body can precipitate a reaction that will destroy it; the penis' movement from tumescence to detumescence will create in his own mind the fear that he can lose it altogether, and he embodies this possibility within a perceived parental threat that he abandon his *jouissance* or be deprived of the penis. In order to relinquish this enjoyment, he must begin to connect his first signifiers with other words, and to produce meaning from them; once these terms become enmeshed within articulations, the *jouissance* with which they had been saturated will be expelled from them and from the body, and they will become the early basis of an identity. The phallic function will thereby become the name of the process by which the boy rejects enjoyment, submits to the realm of language, and allows a signifier to represent him in relation to other words.

Whatever hopes that the donor may have had when entering into this process of exchange, the narrator sees that they could not be achieved; instead, he presupposes from the beginning that this relation has been defined in terms, not of a *jouissance* of the One, but of the absence that the signifier introduces. Recalling that Guy Brissenden has aged just as much as his wife has been rejuvenated, he posits the existence of a lack at the center of this process of transmission;

the "miracle" that has allowed Grace to regain her youth is expensive. Mrs. Briss had to get her new blood, her extra allowance of time and bloom somewhere; and from whom could she so conveniently extract them as from Guy himself? She has, by an extraordinary feat of legerdemain, extracted them, and he, on his side, to supply her, has had to tap the sacred fount. But the sacred fount is like the greedy man's description of the turkey as an 'awkward' dinner dish. It may be sometimes too much for a single share, but it's not enough to go around. (29)

The narrator thus immediately rejects the ideal that the substance possessed by the donor—whether it is youth or intelligence—is inexhaustible and free of signifying division; declaring this position to be impossible, he instead defines all of the participants in these relations in terms of the two fundamental positions within the fantasy. This psychic structure, which Lacan writes as  $\$ \diamond a$ , consists of the relations between a libidinal object and the subject, which has escaped from its alienation within a signifier that usually stands in for it in the realm of language. The subject, which Lacan writes by means of an  $S$  that has been cut by a bar, is a pure absence, for it is nothing more than a hole within the set of signifiers; nevertheless, by attempting to reach and to identify with the object, it can escape its sense of blankness.<sup>8</sup> This object—the object ( $a$ )—is only a finite residue, for it is the small element that remains of infantile enjoyment after the subject has submitted to the signifier and has expelled this *jouissance* from his/her body; it is incarnated, in its purest form, by the breast, the feces, the gaze, or the voice.<sup>9</sup> The narrator's own theory, of course, does not reduce this object to its radical purity; instead, having sensed, in the events that have disturbed him, the subterranean presence of a small element of libidinal enjoyment, he is content to embody it within the substances of youth and intelligence. Since these forces are finite rather than infinite, the two donors are in a position that will eventually threaten their lives. As the process of transmission continues, all of the substance that enables them to live will eventually be drawn out of them, and therefore, as one of the narrator's interlocutors remarks, Guy, after "paying to the last drop . . . can only die of the business" (30).

The recipients of these positive qualities will be marked by a different form of lack. Throughout his early formulations of his theory, the narrator assumes that they feel a genuine affection for the donors; they cannot bear the idea that, in taking into themselves the substance with which they iden-

tify, they are gradually draining their partners of life. To enjoy the process of destruction itself would be the opposite of the donor's nostalgia for a mythical unity, but as the narrator's later reflections will make clear, he imagines that it would constitute a *jouissance* of such intensity and horror that it too would stand outside the phallic function. He therefore excludes the possibility of this enjoyment, and argues that the recipients are dominated by a determination not to know what is occurring. The donor and the recipient, instead of being united completely by their love, are thus, according to the narrator, separated even at the level of knowledge; Guy Brissenden has a "beautifu[l]" consciousness of his sacrifice, but is not joined in this awareness by Grace, who maintains her ignorance through an act of repression (31). Her perception of her husband's depletion, "if she had it, would be painful and terrible—might even be fatal to the process. So she hasn't it. She passes round it. It takes all her flood of life to meet her own chance. She has only a wonderful sense of success and well-being" (30). Grace Brissenden and Gilbert Long thus become barred subjects marked by the willed unavailability of any signifiers through which they could understand the process of which they are supposedly a part. As the embodiments of ignorance and a lack of understanding, they have become the location of the very characteristics which the narrator had been forced, after the three surprises, to situate within himself. He fears and wishes to deny that he is characterized by this subjective vacancy, a vacancy that will recall to him, ultimately, the parental threat which had led him to inscribe the signifier of cleverness upon himself; he does not, however, refuse completely to acknowledge the existence of the  $\$$ . Therefore he locates it within the two people who had first surprised and disconcerted him, and in this way, he initiates an unavowed identification with them.

Through this delineation of the relation between donor and recipient, the narrator has defined both of these figures in terms of their adherence to the structure of masculinity. In his mathemes of "sexuation," Lacan constructs masculinity in terms of a set— $\forall x \Phi x$ —that gains its logical consistency by means of its opposition to an external term:  $\exists x \neg \Phi x$ .<sup>10</sup> According to these formulas, all elements  $x$ —all men—can be said to have submitted to the phallic function, because there is at least one term that is outside their set. This external force is the location of precisely the *jouissance* that has been expelled from these subjects by the phallic function; in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud embodies this enjoyment in the mythical figure of the father of the primal horde, who submits to no external law, and who acknowledges no impediment to his own *jouissance*.<sup>11</sup> By expelling the enjoyment embodied within this external term, the set of men is able to constitute itself as a closed and homogeneous class, a set that is defined by the submission of all its members to the phallic function.<sup>12</sup> In presenting a fantasmatic theory in which each of the elements—the barred subject and the exhaustible object—has been marked by the phallic limitation of *jouissance*, the narrator has placed everyone who belongs to the relations of transmission inside the structure of masculinity. He

has therefore included even Grace Brissenden within this set, and this step will later cause him great difficulty.

Such problems will not confront him immediately, however, for at first his exploration of this theory will not force him to face issues that make him uneasy, but instead, will allow him to maintain without difficulty his sense of his own intelligence. His obsessional determination to evade any hint of subjective emptiness manifests itself not only through his use of the hypothesis to explain his early mistakes, but also in his very choice of cleverness as the signifier that will stand in for him in discourse. "Intelligence" is the perfect master signifier for a figure who feels the necessity to verify that a representation has effaced his blankness; through it, he can do so constantly, with every mental effort that he makes. In bringing forth a "knowledge" that consists of a complexly articulated network of relations—S2—he can demonstrate with each new discovery that his intellectual mastery remains as strong as it has ever been.<sup>13</sup>

Within the context of this emphasis on thought, the ambiguity of the text becomes important. One of the reasons that he is fascinated by these relations is that they are radically unprovable by any direct means, for they have as their basis a supernatural event occurring during an act of transmission that is so intimate that he cannot witness it. He is unable even to obtain confessions from the participants, for the recipients remain unconscious of the process, and the donors are probably "uncomfortable . . . when they suspect or fear" that any member of the outside world has intruded upon their hidden concerns (31). Instead of direct proof, the narrator is left with masses of indirect evidence, much of which, as the final chapters will suggest, can also be read in opposing ways.<sup>14</sup> This unprovability, rather than serving as an obstacle for the narrator, is instead an attraction, for, as Freud notes in his case history of the Rat Man, obsessionals feel a "predilection . . . for uncertainty and doubt," and therefore "turn their thoughts by preference to those subjects . . . which must necessarily remain open to doubt."<sup>15</sup> Because he can never prove conclusively that these relations of transmissions exist, the narrator hopes that he will be able to prolong indefinitely the period during which he can contemplate them; the seemingly endless ramifications of his theory will provide him with material by which he can never cease to re-establish his cleverness. For much of the book, indeed, this strategy seems to succeed splendidly, for wherever he ventures at Newmarch, his mind is able to transform seemingly ordinary appearances into new aspects of his magical theory; with each addition to his knowledge of these relations, he derives an "absur[d] excite[ment]," which he has not felt "since the days of fairy-tales and of the childish imagination of the impossible" (127, 128).<sup>16</sup> The narrator feels, therefore, that he has uncovered a marvelous means of occupying himself; if his later experiences in examining the process of transmission prove to be as rewarding for him as was his initial investigation, then he will be able to look forward to a deeply gratifying inquiry.<sup>17</sup>

The events that occur in the course of the book will not, however, bear out these expectations, and the narrator will be confronted more and more with elements of his theory that he would have preferred not to emphasize. His earliest pronouncements have indicated a possibility whose implications he has not yet grasped fully: the fantasmatic relations will not continue to exist in exactly the same form in which he had first detected them. Instead, the fantasy will submit to a series of transformations that will force him to confront a far more radical and harrowing manifestation of barred subjectivity than he had first contemplated; ironically, although he has not yet fully recognized its consequences, this process has already begun at the moment when he celebrates the magical quality of his research. Under the pressure of this sense of absence, the fantasy will undergo a succession of changes that will finally convert it into a very different psychic form: the symptom.

This process begins when the narrator takes his ideas about Gilbert Long to Grace Brissenden, whose reactions he will watch with interest, in part because they supposedly demonstrate how much greater his awareness is than hers. After he has elicited her interest in his theory, and has stimulated her to ask him questions concerning it, he feels able to remark patronizingly of her that "I had kindled near me a fine, if modest and timid intelligence." He then proceeds to demonstrate to himself the supposed inferiority of her conscious mind by addressing to her, and then watching her fail to grasp, a series of pointed allusions to the parallels between Long's position and her own. When she suggests that Long's donor may not be present at Newmarch, he replies that "It's my belief that he goes no more away from her than you go away from poor Briss" (40). A moment later, he again puzzles her by stating that they will be able to discover this unknown figure's identity by finding a person who "shine[s] as Brissenden shines. . . . By sacrifice" (43).

The narrator also, however, has a more significant reason for observing her response: he wishes to entrap her within his discursive mastery. She has a repressed knowledge of the relation of transmission, and therefore he hopes that, by skillful questioning, he can induce her to yield to him some of the information that, unbeknownst to herself, she possesses. In the context of this attempt, a question with which she confronts him will generate the new direction that his theory must take; she tells him that "if you'll only name" Long's donor, she will grant that the change in him is the result of a supernatural process (36). Asserting that she will help discover the identity of this figure, she names several unsatisfactory candidates before she notices that her husband is conversing with May Server, another frequent guest at Newmarch. She then proclaims triumphantly that this woman is the one whom she and the narrator have been seeking.

Although his first reaction to this suggestion is to dismiss it as being no more likely than any of the others, his attitude soon changes, and he starts to feel "a kind of chill—an odd revulsion—at the touch of her eagerness" to pry into the hidden lives of other people; only now does his own "curiosity . . .

beg[i]n to strike me as wanting in taste" (45). Taking leave of Grace Brissenden after agreeing, before he departs from Newmarch, to meet her one more time and to inform him of his own final judgment concerning May Server, he is forced to admit that this suggestion has made him "precipitately, preposterously, anxious" (60). Although he fails to recognize the source of his new uneasiness, and even asks himself, without much conviction, whether he had "suddenly fallen so much in love with Mrs. Server that the care for her reputation had become with me an obsession," the cause of his abrupt change can be found in his surprise at the success of his own theory (50–1).<sup>18</sup> He has hoped that her hidden knowledge would allow them to bring forth new information, but when he begins to suspect that it has actually done so, he is overcome with a sense that he has witnessed an uncanny event; having perhaps encountered the unconscious mechanisms whose existence he has posited, he reacts with an "agitation" whose source he is too disoriented to explain (60).

In the chapters that follow, as he becomes more accustomed to this suggestion, his discomfort will change into a sense of wonder, for evidence will mount that May Server is Gilbert Long's donor. Shortly after this conversation ends, he sees May speaking again to Guy and begins to suspect that she "may have a sympathy" for Grace's husband (76). Later in the day, the narrator learns from Guy that her frequent conversations with him are motivated by her misery and by her belief that he can help her preserve her "false appearance of happiness" (122). The information that will be decisive for the narrator, however, comes to him from his friend, the painter Ford Obert, who observes that her behavior at this gathering has been decidedly atypical; usually quiet, reserved, and a bit passive, she is now "all over the place," seeking frantically to engage one person after another in conversation (63). The narrator therefore begins to believe that through her animation, she is trying to prevent anyone from realizing that she has lost her brilliance. Moving with a "frantic art" from one person to another, she attempts to disguise her emptiness not only with a show of vitality, but also with the "glittering deceit of her smile, the sublime, pathetic, overdone geniality which represented. . . her share in any talk" (139).

The more the narrator investigates May Server, the stronger will his fascination with her become. Having postulated from the beginning that the depletion of the donor will finally and necessarily end in his/her death, the narrator must now begin to confront the implications of this conclusion. Standing before a person who has been "Voided and scraped" of almost all of the intelligence that she had once possessed, he can no longer think of her as the possessor of a positive substance, and therefore she ceases to be the incarnation of the object (*a*) (136). Instead, in watching her face a "small lonely fight with disintegration," he finds before him a far more radical embodiment of subjective absence than the two recipients have ever been (167). The fantasmatic structure whose existence the narrator has posited has thus begun to

force him to contemplate more deeply the emptiness with which, covertly, he identifies.

This change within the fantasy will have far-reaching consequences; the first of these will be the transformation into an unconscious signifier of a word that May Server utters carelessly and which the narrator will place in a complex relation not only with her empty subjectivity, but also with his own. During his investigations of her, before he has finally become convinced that she is Gilbert Long's donor, she uses this word in the midst of an exchange of opinions concerning an ambiguous portrait at Newmarch. The picture depicts a person and an object; the human figure is

a young man in black . . . with a pale, lean livid face and a stare, from eyes without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown. In his hand he holds an object that strikes the spectator at first simply as some obscure, some ambiguous work of art, but that on a second view becomes a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, in enamelled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn. (55)

Both the narrator and May Server feel that the relation between the face and the mask stands for the connection between life and death, but they disagree about which image portrays the former quality, and which is linked to the latter. When May suggests that the picture's title could be the "Mask of Death," the narrator disagrees, and argues that it is, instead, the "Mask of Life[.] It's the man's own face that's Death," for the mask is "blooming and beautiful." In trying to counter such an interpretation, May Server makes a statement that will have a profound effect upon him: the mask contains "an awful grimace" (55).

Later, after the narrator has become convinced that May Server is Gilbert Long's donor, "grimace" will become important to him both because of its relation to death, and because of the letters that it contains. On the afternoon of this day, while he is observing her once again, he creates an analogy between her exaggerated animation and the mask that, in his account, has been held by the embodiment of death. Noticing the condition of her fixed smile, he realizes that the day's exertions have left her so tired that even her appearance has begun to fail her. "Her lovely grimace, the light of previous hours, was as blurred as a bit of brushwork in water-colour spoiled by the upsetting of the artist's glass" (133). In this statement, the narrator, while adopting the term that she had used to describe the mask, applies to her face his own analysis of the picture: May Server resembles the deathly figure in the portrait because both have assumed a mask of life and happiness in order to hide the indications of their own extinction.

This association between death and May Server's smile is conscious; what transforms "grimace" into an unconscious signifier is the manner in which this symbolic awareness of death insinuates itself into the heart of a

word that is a perfect verbal representation of the fantasmatic relation. "Grimace" is an anagram of the names of the two female members of these couples, "Grace" and "May," the "y" in whose name has been transformed here into an "i." It may not usually strike the reader immediately as an anagram, for it blends these names so skillfully that any blatant connection between them has been cut; by thus molding into a single signifier two names that refer to the separate positions of donor and recipient, it becomes the verbal equivalent of Guy Brissenden's attempt to transform two into one. "Grimace" will assume its unusual power within this text, in part, because it serves thus as the signifier where these two chains of ideas intersect; it embodies the aspiration to reach the One through love, and by its association with the narrator's sense of May Server's depletion and eventual death, it acknowledges the force that will prevent the donor and recipient from achieving a genuine union.

"Grimace," generated as an unconscious signifier by the spectacle of the absence within the donor, serves as a representation of the barred subject. Through this word, the narrator's theory becomes similar, in some ways, to the fantasy that Freud describes in "A Child Is Being Beaten." Both of these fantasies bring to the forefront the relation between two terms that can fill in the emptiness of the barred subject: the signifier that will stand in for it and the object that will allow it to experience a small enjoyment. In Freud's essay, this subject manifests itself in two ways. First, within the analysis, the analysand occupies this position because of her/his inability to remember the second phase of the fantasy; whenever s/he approaches the latter, s/he shows her/himself to be marked by a repression that cannot be lifted. This phase is encapsulated in a sentence that depicts an act of violence somewhat reminiscent of the scenes of torture in Sade: "I am being beaten by my father."<sup>19</sup> Within this fantasmatic scenario, the child, finding her/himself in a position of wordless suffering, serves as a second means of imagining the condition of a subject who is not represented by a signifier.

These embodiments of an empty subjectivity have precise structural equivalents within the narrator's fantasmatic theory, but the father is a different matter, for he incarnates a power that has made itself felt in the relation of transmission only through its absence. Finding enjoyment in the act of inflicting pain and laying bare the emptiness of the subject—an emptiness from which he is himself exempt—this father is the embodiment of the *jouissance* that has been expelled from the set of men by the phallic function. As such, he is analogous to Sade's "Supreme-Being-in-Evil" and to the father of the primal horde, who, while recognizing no law that would bind him, finds *jouissance* in the act of imposing castration upon his sons.<sup>20</sup> In beating the child, however, he is doing something more than exposing the hole of subjectivity, for he is also simultaneously affixing to the subject the signifier that will represent her/him and creating a spectacle in which the libidinal object

can appear. The blows that fall upon the child's body become figures for the meaningless signifying marks with which the subject, in the first moments of the process by which s/he enters language, will identify; such marks will come to serve as S1, and will represent her/him in relation to other signifiers. This fantasy thus becomes, in part, a dramatization of the painful process in which the child is captured by the signifier; this aspect does not, however, exhaust the significance of this scenario, for if the second phase enacts the process of alienation, the third phase introduces a separation from the signifier.<sup>21</sup> The latter phase, which the subject describes with the simple statement, "A child is being beaten," witnesses the appearance of the object (*a*) in the form of the gaze; the analysand, when asked to locate her/himself in the scene, replies that "I am probably looking on."<sup>22</sup> This object enables the subject to use this enactment of alienation as a means of gaining a sense of her/his desire. By apprehending this object and identifying it as the deepest part of her/himself, the subject will be able to salvage from this scene of loss and torture a small remainder of *jouissance*.

In *The Sacred Fount*, "grimace" enters the narrator's fantasy as the equivalent of the signifier that the father has inscribed upon the subject, but the narrator approaches these relations between the subject and signifier in a peculiarly obsessional way. The obsessional, Lacan has suggested, "denies . . . desire . . . by forming the fantasy to accentuate the impossibility of the subject's vanishing."<sup>23</sup> Instead of using this scenario as a way of allowing the subject to fade before the object that would give him a sense of his own desire, and which would thus palliate the effects of alienation, he transforms it into yet another means of avoiding any full confrontation with the *Œ*. The signifier that is produced will serve to conceal the most radical manifestation of an empty subjectivity, which will not, thus, be experienced as a point of pure fading, and which will feel no necessity to realize its deeper identification with any libidinal object. At first, "grimace" functions in precisely this manner, and therefore allows the narrator to maintain a certain distance between himself and a condition that would make him uneasy. May Server's exaggerated and almost grotesque behavior has prevented him from having to confront directly the void that his own calculations have located within her; he has thus not been forced to come face to face with the absence that has led him, in his attempt to dissociate himself from it, to manufacture this theory. For this reason, he will feel no need to introduce into his thought any genuine refinements concerning the object (*a*); not having encountered fully an external embodiment of his own subjectivity, he will not be led to identify with an object that could allow him to elaborate more fully a sense of his own libidinal urgings. Instead, by means of his unconscious identification with the *Œ* of the fantasy, he will, in a way that will not become evident until later in the book, pin this signifier to himself. Instead, he will identify with "grimace" so strongly that this new signifier will determine his destiny.

## II

### FEMININITY AND THE SYMPTOM

The transformation of the fantasy does not end with the depletion of the donors, for a short time later, the narrator makes a discovery that will affect the structure of his theory even more radically. At the end of a musical performance, he sees Grace Brissenden and Gilbert Long engaged in a "familiar colloquy," and immediately wonders, "Had *they* also wonderfully begun to know?" (182). If the recipients, through a shadowy process which his own investigations have perhaps indirectly initiated, have learned the donors' secret, then this knowledge may well, as he had suggested at the beginning, be fatal to the process of transmission. Will Gilbert Long, the narrator wonders, now return to his former condition, and "would Grace Brissenden [and her husband] change by the same law? . . . And if it took this form for the others . . . [w]ould [May Server], at a bound as marked as theirs, recover her present of mind and her lost equipment?" (191). During his long final conversation with Grace, however, the narrator discovers that this particular speculation has been incorrect, for in seeing her before him again, he realizes that she "had at no other moment since her marriage so triumphantly asserted her defeat of time"; this indication that the supernatural act is still continuing soon becomes conjoined with a determination, on her part, to repudiate any belief in it, for she declares that "I feel there's nothing in it and I've given it up" (240, 260). Expanding upon this statement, she will offer the unsupported assertion that Long, instead of having been transformed into a brilliant man, remains what he has always been: a "prize fool," who utters nothing but platitudes (292). She argues, further, that since he has not changed, there is no longer any reason to believe that he must be involved with a woman who would be willing to give up her intelligence for him; instead, according to Guy, Long is conducting an affair with a more egoistic woman—Lady John—who has often appeared in his company. Finally, Grace will make another suggestion that is supposedly based upon her husband's words: May Server, instead of being in love with Long, has set her sights elsewhere, and has been "mak[ing] up to poor Briss" (316). Faced with these unexpected arguments, the narrator must adjust his theory to account for the change in Grace's opinion. Therefore, he "divine[s]" that she is now in league with Gilbert Long, who suspects him of wishing to expose their secret and to put a stop to the process of exchange; Long has thus used his new intelligence by "direct[ing]" her to prevent the narrator from progressing any further in his investigation (254).

Throughout the alterations that he makes in response to these changes, he endeavors to preserve his most important premises: he does not want to believe that these two figures have become the repositories of a *jouissance* that goes beyond the strict phallic limitations under which he had first placed

them. Just as he does not abandon his sense that these couples fail to achieve an idealized union outside the requirements of discourse, so also he refuses to accept any suggestion that the injury done to the donors creates, in itself, an horrific *jouissance* within the recipients. Grace Brissenden and Gilbert Long do not, indeed, want to reverse or even end the process; however, instead of wishing specifically to deplete their partners, they want merely to enjoy their possession of the substances with which they have been endowed. What they are trying to achieve, in their "fight" to prevent the narrator from endangering their new condition, is simply their hope for a "possible life in the state" of consciousness that "I had given them" (295). According to the narrator's latest calculations, the survival of the relation is the only surprise that the recipients' new awareness has created for him. The fundamental structure of the process has remained the same, for the participants within it have merely exchanged places: marked now by a radical incompleteness, Guy and May are in the position of 8, while because of their new libidinal power, Grace and Gilbert have become the repositories of the (a).

Faced with a situation in which his interlocutor wants to put an end to this theorizing, the narrator responds with aggression; having identified with "grimace," he now implants this signifier upon his own body, and covertly mobilizes it against her. In doing so, he is seeking to state, in an occult manner, that he knows her secret and understands the nature of her strategy; he hopes that he will be able thereby to draw a sense of strength from his own cleverness, even if she herself cannot fully recognize what he is doing. Therefore he injects a strong element of contempt into gestures such as smiles or laughter, for because of May's example, he associates them with "grimace," and then propels them at his opponent as if they were weapons. When, for example, she becomes confused by the complexities of their debate, and accuses him falsely of having asserted to her that May Server is involved with Gilbert Long, the narrator points out her mistake with an "indulgen[t]" and superior smile (269). Later, when Grace maintains that no single incident has caused her to lose faith in his theory, he "break[s] into laughter" in order to drive home his point that she has been unable to explain her change of mind adequately (290).

Nevertheless, as their conversation wears on, she is able to combat him with increasing effectiveness, and he begins to show that beneath his bravado, he is deeply uneasy about his own relation with her. Although he is faced merely with a series of assertions, rather than with a devastating disproof of his theory, the narrator begins to feel more and more ill at ease. Throughout the later stages of their conversation, Grace exerts a mysterious power over him, a power that becomes manifest when, for example, she utters two simple and supremely confident words to show her certainty that Long is intimate with Lady John: "I know" (304). Despite the fact that he does not genuinely accept this assertion, he nevertheless begins to feel great apprehension.

It was the oddest thing in the world for a little, the way this affected me without my at all believing it. . . . It was the mere sound of it that, as I felt even at the time, made it a little of a blow—a blow of the smart of which I was conscious just long enough inwardly to murmur: "What if she should be right?" (304–5)

The narrator's growing sense of disturbance will manifest itself most strongly in the gestures that he has adopted in order to allude to "grimace." At one point, she asserts to him, "I think you're crazy," and in order to show his amused contempt for this idea, he responds by laughing at her. Upon hearing the sound of his own laughter, however, he has an uneasy sense that her statement has had a stronger effect upon him than he will admit to her. "I risked that long laugh which might have been that of madness. . . . And whether or not it was the special sound, in my ear of my hilarity, I remember just wondering if perhaps I mightn't be" (278). This unpleasant feeling that his own unexpected weaknesses are beginning to emerge will be transformed, as his sense of her power grows, into an increasing inability to keep his wits about him; throughout the last stages of the conversation, he will find his own capacity to reply to her fading before her "supreme assurance" (318). This situation comes to a head in the final pages when Grace, who is still apparently unaware that he now believes May Server is Gilbert Long's donor, states that May is "awfully sharp." At this moment, his cleverness fails him completely, and he can only gasp and "stupidly" return her own words to her: "Awfully sharp?" (317). Surprised by this reaction, she repeats her earlier accusation, "My poor dear, you are crazy," and he can only agree that he has indeed lost something of his former manner: "I should certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together" (318, 319).

This final and complete failure of his power to reply to her is not caused by the strength of the unsupported assertions with which she has confronted him; although they certainly demonstrate that his is not the only possible interpretation of the events at Newmarch, he can easily dismiss them as fabrications. Instead, his reaction results from a possibility which he will never articulate fully: in a manner that is utterly inconsistent with his original premises, which had posited that the relation of transmission can occur only between two people who have experienced great intimacy, the narrator and Grace have begun to form such a couple. Throughout the later stages of their conversation, her ability to respond to each new twist in the debate waxes and his wanes, just as if she were now draining his mastery from him. If such is the case, then, in initiating this change, she is seeking, in part, to bring out his own subjective emptiness. She is trying to reveal his status as  $\emptyset$  by draining him not of the object ( $a$ ), but of one facet of the signifier that has represented him throughout his discussions with her: his definition of himself as clever. In the course of their final conversation, with the strengthening of her ability to impose upon him her own interpretation of events, the narrator, at

least for the moment, has felt the weakening of an aspect of his own mental power, and his panic-stricken sense of this change will itself contribute to the complete disappearance of his composure in the final pages of the novel. He is not losing his theoretical faculty itself, for he still has "three times her method" (319). Rather, he is being deprived of his ability to use it as the means to make himself the master of his discourse; he has ceased to be able, in his conversation with others, to lead them confidently and surely onto the terrain of his own concerns, where he can draw from them a knowledge—S2—which they themselves have been unaware that they possessed. His conversation with Grace has taught him that "I too fatally lacked . . . her tone," and her repeated assertions that he is crazy are, in part, attempts to demonstrate the failure of his capacity to draw people into his concerns (319). As she asserts to him, his ability to make her participate in his search for knowledge has declined steadily. She ceased to believe in his theory, she now tells him, when he first left her alone this morning; "[a]s soon as I was not with you—I mean with you personally," she tells him, "you never had my sympathy." Indeed, in the course of the day, the power of his presence has weakened considerably; "it's not, thank God [so irresistible] now!" (287). By thus allowing her declaration that he is mad to "work" inside his mind, she is attempting to lay bare the subjective emptiness that his former mastery has hidden (280).

In observing the "supreme assurance" with which she deprives him of his manner, the narrator now discerns within her the very *jouissance* that he had sought so carefully to exclude from the recipients (318).<sup>24</sup> When he witnesses the mingled triumph and contempt with which she tells him, for a second time, that he is crazy, he links this declaration with the other source of her enjoyment: her recovered youth. "[G]ather[ing] herself up into the strength of twenty-five," she manifests, at the very moment when her accusation delineates the absence within him, the *jouissance* that suffuses her body (318). For the first time, she seems to derive enjoyment specifically from the act of laying bare the subject's emptiness.

Because of the narrator's new fear, the function of "grimace" changes and becomes an attempt to conceive of femininity as a structure that resurrects the very element that his theory has rejected. The laugh with which he responds to her first assertion that he is mad serves, like his earlier laughter, as an allusion to "grimace," but within this new context, this signifier no longer functions as a verbal equivalent of the fantasy; because the fantasy is a component of the structure of masculinity, it has ceased to be an adequate means of understanding the process of transmission. This particular reference to "grimace," instead, has become an attempt to conceive of femininity as a structure that is radically distinct from masculinity, and which can be understood in terms of the relation between two logical formulas:  $x \not\Phi x$  and  $x \bar{\Phi} x$ . The first of these two statements suggests that there is not one term  $x$  that has not been marked by the phallic function.<sup>25</sup> The implications of this assertion are twofold: not only is there not a single woman who bears no relation

whatever to it, but there is also, in femininity, no external term that would be parallel to the one that stands outside masculinity. In contrast with masculinity, which founds itself by means of its reference to at least one element that has not submitted to this function, this matheme denies the existence of any equivalent term that would be located in opposition to the feminine set; thus it signals a very different relation to phallic limitation. Unlike the male subject, any person who locates herself as female will not be confronted with the inaugural threat of an initial castration, and therefore will not feel the need to submit absolutely to this function; she will acknowledge it partially, because it is linked to the process by which she allows herself to be represented by a signifier for other signifier, but she will not conform to it entirely.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason, Lacan pairs this first matheme with a second one— $x\Phi x$ —which specifies that “not all” elements  $x$  have been marked by the phallic function. He refers to this condition when he states that a woman’s “being not all in the phallic function does not mean that she is not in it at all. . . . She is right in it. But there is something more”: the enjoyment that has been expelled can come flooding back to her, and can appear in the midst of elements that have submitted to the phallic function.<sup>27</sup> This “not all”—*pas toute*—also refers to set theory, where it designates the refusal of the class of women to cohere into a homogeneous whole. Masculinity has constituted a unified set of men, each constituent of which has submitted to the phallic function; the “set” of women is also defined in relation to this function, but resists enacting this process of closure. The members of this group have been marked only in a provisional manner, and the *jouissance* that exists outside this function can return to any of them without warning; therefore, it is impossible to define a uniform set of women in terms of all of its members’ rigid subordination of themselves to phallic limitation, and femininity establishes itself as the realm of the *pas-toute*.<sup>28</sup>

At the pivotal moment of his “mad” laugh, the narrator transforms the meaning of “grimace” in an unconscious attempt to conceive of precisely this structure; in doing so, he also throws new light on his earlier use of this signifier. Even when this word referred to the fantasmatic connection between donor and recipient, it pointed to his hidden need to reassure himself about the relation between women and the phallic function. He can now be seen to have been uneasy about defining Grace Brissenden and May Server in terms of masculinity; by inscribing an anagram of their names at the heart of the fantasmatic relation, he has been attempting, through the force of his own unconscious volition, to enforce upon them an adherence to phallic limitation.

Now, however, he begins to use “grimace” in a different way because he is faced with two possibilities that contradict his earliest formulations: he has discerned within Grace the eruption of the *jouissance* that he had established to be absent from her, and he has begun to fear that, in spite of his emphasis upon the necessarily intimate relation between donor and recipient, he has,

merely through his conversations with her, become coupled with her in a relation of transmission. Responding to Grace Brissenden's first assertion that he is mad, the narrator utters a laugh that seems to admit what he wants to deny; in this way, it acknowledges the uneasiness that he feels when he contemplates this new possibility, a possibility that, a few hours earlier, he would have dismissed as irrational. Through this laugh, "grimace," as a word that combines "May" with "Grace," becomes an attempt to conceive of this new development. Although its relation to femininity will be traversed by opposing tendencies, this signifier, in its most radical aspect, becomes a way of understanding the coexistence of two seemingly contradictory approaches to *jouissance*: as he has verified earlier, not one of these women has not submitted to the phallic function, but as the change in Grace seems to suggest, she has nevertheless become the place of an enjoyment that remains unmarked by it. Through this word, the narrator locates femininity as a structure that can maintain divergent relations with the phallic function, and which therefore imposes inconsistencies upon his theory of a process of transformation in which, until now, men and women have occupied interchangeable places.<sup>29</sup>

Although it allows him a provisional way to conceive of a femininity that differs from masculinity, "grimace" is not completely equal to this most recent task, for its very form is discordant with this new understanding. This word first became important because, through its relation with a series of associations, it served as the almost perfect signifier not only of the power of depletion and death, but also of the impulse to achieve unity. Its anagrammatical character embodied the aspiration toward an idealized Oneness, because, instead simply of adding the essentially separate names of donor and recipient, it molded them together and created from them a new "unity." Even after the narrator's concern with the One recedes, for a time, and "grimace" has been transformed into an attempt to conceive of the structure of femininity, it continues to suggest this sense of unification. As an anagram, it still implies that the separate qualities of Grace Brissenden and May Server have been combined into some genuinely new element; it therefore contains a latent pretension to be the signifier of a unified and homogeneous set of women. For this reason, it becomes discordant with the very understanding of femininity that he is trying to formulate, for this structure resists any attempt to unify its members in this manner. Once Grace has been endowed with a new *jouissance*, she stands in radical disparity with May, who remains in steadfast conformity to the phallic function; the absence, in these two figures, of a common relation to this term makes it impossible to mold them into a unity. This dissonance between "grimace" and the conception of femininity with which it has become related will mark a point of instability; unable to accommodate a structure of such radical alterity that even the unconscious signifying chain cannot quite comprehend it, the text will attempt to change it into a form that can be dealt with more easily. "Grimace" will be transformed into a "symptom," a term that should be understood in the sense in which Lacan

employed it during the final years of his teaching; in doing so, the narrator will place himself in a profoundly paradoxical position, for he will escape from the "threat" of feminine *jouissance* only by petrifying himself within another form of enjoyment.

In the middle of the 1970s, Jacques Lacan pinpointed the importance of the symptom within literary texts when he began to examine the works of James Joyce; intrigued by the extreme difficulty of producing a coherent meaning from almost any of the sentences in *Finnegans Wake*, he suggested that this very problem allows the reader to sense "the *jouissance* of the one who wrote it." Because this particular text employs, "not in each line but in each word," an extraordinarily complicated series of puns and equivocations, its words become so dense with allusions that they cannot cohere into meaningful sentences; therefore, "the meaning, in the sense that we habitually give it, is lost."<sup>30</sup> Once a word, in this fashion, becomes cut off from the other words within a chain of thoughts, its function changes. It ceases to be an element that is important primarily for the meanings that it can produce through such combinations; instead, it becomes once again what it had been in infancy: a vehicle of *jouissance*. The enjoyment that has been expelled by the phallic function comes flooding back and invades the isolated signifier, which thereby becomes a symptom.<sup>31</sup>

*Finnegans Wake* provides the most blatant instance of the eruption of enjoyment into signifiers that have been cut away from articulated meaning, but the symptom can also manifest itself in a less dramatic and obvious form. When it invades a literary text, it need not encompass the entire work, as it does in Joyce's final book, for in *The Sacred Fount*, it is located within a single word—"grimace." Indeed, in order for a signifier to be transformed into a symptom, it does not even have to be rendered unrecognizable by the introduction into it of complex puns and deformations of spelling; "grimace" will become a symptom while retaining its conventional meaning. In cases such as this one, it is only necessary that a signifier that has become crucial for the subject be cut from the associations through which it has been raised to prominence. "Grimace," having, because of its meaning, assumed such importance that the narrator has identified with it and implanted it upon his body, now ceases to be enchaind with these other ideas. After this alteration, it will maintain its importance for the narrator, but it will nevertheless be transformed radically; just as *jouissance* was banished in childhood when the signifier that stands in for the subject became enmeshed in a series of meanings, so now, once these have been abolished, this enjoyment is able to return.

This metamorphosis occurs during the final stages of the discussion with Grace Brissenden, and first manifests itself when she asserts that, during her conversation with Gilbert Long after dinner, she had told him that he was a fool. She thus contradicts the narrator's belief that during this interchange, they first became conscious of their status as recipients, and he responds to this information not only with the same sense of unease that dominates the

final pages of the novel, but also with yet another smile, which he now uses differently than he has ever done before. "I weighed (this assertion) with the grimace that, I found, had become almost as fixed as Mrs. Server's" (293). His grimace reappears in the final pages of the novel, when Grace contradicts another of his secretly cherished beliefs by claiming that May Server has been seeking a romantic attachment, not with Long, but with Guy Brissenden. Her assertion "brought . . . I fear, for me, another queer grimace" (317).

With these appearances, this word ceases to be either an aggressive means of alluding to his knowledge or an urgent attempt to understand how femininity differs from masculinity; "grimace" is no longer a signifier that creates a specific psychic meaning through its connections with a series of related ideas. It has been cut away from these associations as a result of the disturbance set up by the collision of two incompatible elements: a femininity that resists any effort to confine it within rigid delimitations and an unconscious signifying chain that attempts fruitlessly to enclose it inside stable boundaries. Confronted with the ungraspable quality of the feminine, the text makes a move that will have far-reaching consequences; it reverses the way in which the anagram functions. Shifting attention away from the associations that have conferred meaning upon this signifier, and have thus raised it to importance, the work concentrates instead upon the power of this word as a unique arrangement of letters. Once it is considered as a positive term in its own right, it becomes the embodiment of an enjoyment with which the narrator will be obliged to assume an intimate relation.

Forced to face a specifically feminine approach to *jouissance*, he has responded by bringing forth a symptom, which will be connected in a very different way with enjoyment. As the only signifier that has been irradiated by this *jouissance*, "grimace," unlike the symptom in *Finnegans Wake*, has been set radically apart from the other words in this novel. Its new relation to them—and especially to signifiers with which it had once been associated, such as "May" or "Grace"—will therefore be homologous to that of the  $x\Phi x$  to the  $x\Phi x$ , within masculine sexuation. Like the primal father—the one term untouched by the phallic function—"grimace" becomes the definitive location of an enjoyment that is as absent from the other signifiers in *The Sacred Fount* as it is from the set of men. In this way, *jouissance*, which the narrator has feared when he had merely expected its existence within Grace Brissenden, will make itself present to him for the first time, and will appear upon his own body.

His attempt to "protect" himself from feminine *jouissance* by imprinting enjoyment upon himself must seem puzzling; at first glance, it would seem more likely that this fear would lead him not to embrace a specific manifestation of enjoyment, but rather to flee from it in as direct a manner as possible. He follows this less straightforward course because, although it will not eliminate the source of his dread entirely, it seems to hold out a stronger hope for escaping some of the problems that Grace Brissenden embodies for him; con-

fronted with an enjoyment that exists as a heterogeneous element within femininity, he attempts to find a way, in two senses of the word, to "contain" this *jouissance*. He seeks to find an enclosure for it, for in doing so, he will give it a precise location, and will thus prevent it from appearing anywhere without warning, as it has done in femininity.<sup>32</sup> By creating such a receptacle, he will be "containing" the threat that enjoyment supposedly carries with it; he will be cordoning it off so that it cannot affect anything else. "Grimace," the signifier of the condition that allows enjoyment to return within women, is thus transformed into the vessel in which this *jouissance* can be safely and precisely quarantined; having accommodated "May" and "Grace" too perfectly within itself, and thus having failed to be a completely satisfactory means of understanding femininity, it now begins to function purely as an enclosure. Through this maneuver, the narrator hopes to lessen his deepest fears about femininity, for if *jouissance* cannot return to it unexpectedly, then he will not have to worry that his careful calculations have been disrupted; he can therefore feel more confident in denying both that he has become Grace Brissenden's donor and that she enjoys the act of depleting him. Such tactics may not meet with complete success, for his fear will appear even in the final moment of their conversation, but they offer, nevertheless, the strongest obsessional defense against feminine *jouissance*.

The narrator must pay for this change, however, with a dramatic alteration of his own relation to *jouissance*, one that he will find himself unable to escape. In seeking to deprive Grace Brissenden of an enjoyment that he fears, he has been forced to locate a symptomatic *jouissance* in himself, and in doing so, he has witnessed the return of a force whose actual existence he had judged to be impossible. At the beginning of the book, when contemplating Guy's wish to unite himself with his wife, the narrator had immediately rejected any suggestion that this attempt would be crowned by success; he had refused to believe that anyone can become the pure embodiment of a *jouissance* that stands outside the signifying articulations of discourse. Now, however, in the form of a symptom that incarnates the enjoyment that has not conformed to the phallic function, the *jouissance* of the One has reappeared, stripped of the idealized veil that clothes it whenever the urge to escape from discourse is presented in terms of love. By the end of the book, therefore, the narrator has placed himself in a paradoxical position; his submission to the phallic function and his horror of an enjoyment that threatens the integrity of his theory have led him to imprint *jouissance* upon his own body. Such a condition, when seen from the perspective of a masculine uneasiness with enjoyment, can only be regarded as an impasse, and James's later texts, particularly *The Wings of the Dove*, will attempt to resolve this situation. This novel, in spite of its obvious differences from *The Sacred Fount*, will examine obsessional responses to symptomatic *jouissance* in somewhat similar terms; lacking a first-person narrator, it will not locate the symptom within a specific character, and therefore the enjoyment that invades language will manifest its presence in a less direct

manner. Nevertheless, this later text, in taking up the concerns surrounding the symptom, will begin at precisely the point at which *The Sacred Fount* concludes: the juncture at which the symptom, having appeared in an attempt to contain the *jouissance* that is presumed to exist within femininity, becomes itself a burden to the obsessional.

For the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, however, this symptomatic enjoyment will continue to maintain its hold over him, for it cannot be expelled from his mind, nor can its force even be lessened; instead, it will persist and invest the act of writing. While he relates the events that occurred during his final evening at Newmarch, he makes one of his few references to the period in which he is narrating his account, and in doing so, admits that the symptom still retains its power over him. He states that, at one point during the events of that evening, he experienced a strong, if fleeting revulsion against the all-consuming power of his preoccupation, and therefore, when he saw May Server one last time, he hopes that he would never again encounter her. Then, in an aside, he confesses that although he has not come face to face with her again, she has remained present to him in other ways. "I did see her again; I see her now; I shall see her always; I shall continue to feel at moments in my own facial muscles the deadly little ache of her heroic grin" (197). After the conclusion of the events that he has recounted, the narrator retains his connection with a *jouissance* that has taken its place within the palace of thought; each time that he reflects upon his splendid theory, he will also feel the presence of this enjoyment.<sup>33</sup> Through his act of composing his story, the enjoyment that fascinates and troubles him will ensure that it can continue to force itself upon his mind, and it will therefore never cease to write itself upon his body or upon the page.

#### Notes

1. Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1979) 311. Subsequent references will appear in the text.

2. Leon Edel, "Introductory Essay," in James, *The Sacred Fount*, xiii.

3. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan discusses obsession in similar terms in two essays: "Hamlet, Logical Time, and the Structure of Obsession," *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 2.2 (Fall 1988): "The Limits of Discourse Structure: The Hysteric and the Analyst," *Prose Studies* 11.3 (December 1988): 66, 79. Colette Soler gives a somewhat different emphasis to this issue in "Hysteria and Obsession," in Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, Maire Jaanus, ed. *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 263.

4. Jacques Lacan, "God and the *jouissance* of The Woman," trans. Jacqueline Rose, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose *Feminine Sexuality* (New York: Norton, 1982) 138.

5. For a brief discussion of the relationship between the narrator's theory and popular nineteenth-century conceptions of sexuality, see Susanne Kappeler, *Writing and Reading in Henry James* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 116–117.

6. Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton University Press, 1995) 103–4.

7. Jacques-Alain Miller has discussed this enjoyment in his unpublished course, *Ce qui fait insigne*, during the session of May 20, 1987.

8. Jacques-Alain Miller has treated the fantasy in these terms in his unpublished course, *Du symptôme au fantasme et retour*, during the sessions of November 25 and December 1, 1982. For other discussions of the fantasy, see Marie-Hélène Brousse, "La formule du fantasme? 8 a." Lacan, ed. Gérard Miller (Paris: Bordas, 1987) 112–113, 116–120; Slavoj & Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989) 74, 114–115.

9. Jacques Lacan, "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar," *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, ed. Joan Copjec (New York: Norton, 1990) 85–87.

10. Lacan, "A Love Letter," *Feminine Sexuality*, 149.

11. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo, The Origins of Religion*, The Pelican Freud, vol. 13, trans. James Strachey, ed. Albert Dickson (London: Penguin, 1985) 185–6, 202.

12. The most detailed treatment in English of the mathemes of masculine sexuation can be found in Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 108–112. For a discussion of logical consistency, see Jacques-Alain Miller's unpublished course, *Extimité*, April 16, 1986.

13. For a different exploration of Jamesian thought, see Sharon Cameron, *Thinking in Henry James* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

14. For discussions of the novel's ambiguity, see Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity: The Example of James* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), and Susan Winnett, "Mise en crypte: The Man and the Mask," *The Henry James Review* 5.3 (1984): 220–1. James W. Gargano, on the other hand, has argued that the novel is not ambiguous, and that the narrator has proven his theory. "James's *The Sacred Fount*: The Phantasmagorical Made Evidential," *The Henry James Review* 2.1 (1981): 49.

15. Sigmund Freud, "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards *Case Histories II*, The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 9 (London: Penguin Books, 1979) 112.

16. E. C. Curtsinger, instead of seeing this statement as an indication is seeking a libidinal enjoyment from his theory, claims that in this sentence, James is "depicting the sources of his art." "James's Writer at the Sacred Fount," *The Henry James Review* 3.2 (1983): 124.

17. This fascination with a structure that demands an endless attention will serve both to differentiate the narrator from the author, and also to point to their common concerns. By implication, James criticizes the narrator's massively caricatured intellectual vanity, but this act of distancing himself from his created character also transforms the latter into his disavowed surrogate; the author, at a different level, repeats this fascination with a supposedly interminable process of thinking. If James is conceived as having fashioned a text of absolute epistemological ambiguity, one in which almost every detail can be read as both confirming and disproving the narrator's theory, then he too has constructed a "perfect palace of thought" (311). He has created an edifice whose intricacy serves as an obsessional monument to his own brilliance, and whose subtle and unresolved ambiguity can be contemplated without cease.

As the book progresses, the gap between these two figures will lessen. Once unconscious effects begin to manifest themselves within the text, they will presumably do so without the awareness of either narrator or author, who will be conjoined by their very lack of knowledge. Further, the symptomatic enjoyment with which the act of writing will become invested, and which will become crucially important for the narrator, can be assumed to be a force from which James himself is not entirely exempt.

18. Both Jean Prantz Blackall and E. A. Sklepowich, on the other hand, take seriously the narrator's suggestion that his anxiety arises from his love for May Server. See Blackall, *Jamesian Ambiguity and The Sacred Fount* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965) 64–5; Sklepowich, "Gossip and Gothicism in *The Sacred Fount*," *The Henry James Review* 2/2 (1981): 13.

19. Sigmund Freud, "'A Child Is Being Beaten': A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of the Sexual Perversions," *On Psychopathology*, The Pelican Freud, vol. 10, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1979) 170.

20. For Lacan's discussion of the "Supreme-Being-in-Evil," see *The Seminar, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 297; "Kant with Sade," trans. James B. Swenson Jr. *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 61.
21. Jacques-Alain Miller has approached Freud's essay in this fashion in *Du symptôme au fantasme et retour*, December 15, 1982. For another Lacanian reading of Freud's essay, see Marie-Hélène Brousse, "La formule du fantasme?  $8 < > a$ ," 113–116.
22. Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten," pp. 169, 171. See also Françoise Schreiber, "Des fantasmes à la phrase du fantasme." *Ornicar: Revue du Champ Freudien* 39 (October–December 1986): 103.
23. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966) 824. In "Hysteria and Obsession," Colette Soler provides a commentary on this statement and criticizes Alan Sheridan's rendering of it. See 269–270, 282. For Sheridan's own translation, see *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: Norton, 1977) 321.
24. John Carlos Rowe, in contrast to this argument, presents Grace Brissenden as an embodiment of the social order, and argues that she is "[f]rightened by [the narrator's] threat to the surface of social decorum." *Through the Custom-House: Nineteenth-Century Fiction and Modern Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) 187.
25. Lacan, "A Love Letter," 149.
26. Jacques Lacan, . . . *ou Pire*, unpublished seminar, January 17, 1972.
27. Lacan, "God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman," p. 145.
28. For discussions of the mathemes of feminine sexuation, see Marie-Hélène Brousse, "Feminism with Lacan," *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 5.1/2 (Spring/Fall 1991): 117–127; Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 113–117. Jacques-Alain Miller has provided an important discussion of sexuation in terms of set theory in *Extimité*, May 21, 1986.
29. William Veeder provides a different presentation of Jamesian relations to femininity in "Henry James and the Uses of the Feminine," *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*, ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) 220–228.
30. Jacques Lacan, "Joyce le Symptôme I," *Joyce avec Lacan*, ed. Jacques Aubert (Paris: Navarin, 1987) 25. My translation. See also Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "Lacan's Seminars on James Joyce: Writing as Symptom and 'Singular Solution,'" *Psychoanalysis and . . .*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Henry Sussman (New York: Routledge) 71–77, 80–86.
31. Miller, *Ce qui fait insigne*, January 28 and April 1, 1987.
32. Jacques-Alain Miller has discussed the symptom's status as container in *Ce qui fait insigne*, May 27, 1987.
33. In some ways, this account of the symptom rejoins Freud's own discussions of obsession, for although his emphasis is different, he also argues that thinking can become a source of enjoyment. Freud links such *jouissance* to "an early development and premature repression of the sexual instinct of looking and knowing"; he argues that in a person with these tendencies, the "thought-process itself becomes sexualized, for the sexual pleasure which is normally attached to the content of thought becomes shifted on to the act of thinking itself, and the satisfaction derived from reaching the conclusion of a line of thought is experienced as a sexual satisfaction." See "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," 124.