

TEXT, CONTEXT, AND AUDIENCE: *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY* IN *THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY* AND *MACMILLAN'S MAGAZINE*, 1880-81

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Abstract Critical discussions of *The Portrait of a Lady* tell us little about its original serialization in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Macmillan's Magazine* (1880-81). The first one-volume edition of the *Portrait* has conventionally been taken as the novel's original text, and critical interest has focused on the differences between this text and the revised edition of 1908. Focusing on the coherence of the novel and the craft of the writer, critics have concentrated on the stylistic changes James made for the 1908 edition, and viewed the serialized versions and the 1881 book editions as being practically identical. This paper argues, however, that from the point of view of the writer as well as the general reader the differences between the serialized novel and the later book editions were substantial and significant. Working with reference to recent work in serial fiction, this paper considers the distinctive ways in which the first readers of the *Portrait* might have experienced the novel, and suggests some directions for further study of this topic.

The 1881 and 1908 editions of *The Portrait of a Lady* have provided James scholars with rich material for textual criticism. Some have argued that the 're-reading' James made of the earlier text for the New York Edition reveal a master craftsman at work; others have

contended that his revisions transform the story but do not improve it. Differing in their conclusions, the critics have nonetheless agreed on their subject matter, concentrating on literary technique, the coherence of the novel, and the craft of the writer. Because of this emphasis on stylistic development, and because the changes made between the earliest, serialized versions of the novel and the 1881 first editions are comparatively minor, very little attention has been paid to the 1880-81 versions. Critics have skipped over the serializations, regarding them as essentially the same as the book-form editions of 1881. From the perspective of the textual critic it may be true that there is little difference between the serialized text and the first editions; from the point of view of the reader, however, the experience of reading the serialized *Portrait* is quite different to the experience of reading the novel in a volume edition. In our discussions of the *Portrait* we need to be aware of the fact that stylistic differences are not the only aspects of a novel which change from one edition to another. The two serialized versions of the *Portrait* deserve to be included in our studies of the novel, its author, and its audience.

The focus of this paper, while it considers two of the various versions in which the *Portrait* appeared, is not really comparative, and is not primarily concerned with the technique of the writer. It differs in this regard from the well-known studies of textual revision in the *Portrait* which stress the stylistic differences between the 1881 and 1908 editions. F.O. Matthiessen, for example, concentrates on the revisions James made for the second book edition, on the basis that "the changes that can instruct us in the evolution of [James's] technique are naturally those he introduced when returning to the book after more than a quarter of a century" (577). Anthony J. Mazzella argues that in the 1908 edition the subject of the portrait is more fully

realized, reflecting the “fuller identity of her creator” (1975, 598). The focus of this paper is not comparative in this sense, nor does it deal with the question of comparative textual coherence, as Nina Baym does in her essay on revision and thematic change in the novel. While there is an interest here in the effects of serialization and audience on the novelist, the primary focus of this paper is not on writer and text, but on audience and context.

This paper argues that a new contextualization of the *Portrait* should be added to its conventional contextualizations within the works of Henry James or the American literary canon. We should also consider the novel as it appeared in monthly parts and in its original format as a part of a periodical text. This paper also argues for the significance of the *Portrait*’s audience, specifically, its general audience. This is not to ignore the author: it is clear from James’s notebooks and letters that he himself was aware of his general audience while writing. Studies of the reactions of early professional readers of the *Portrait* already exist: the relevant volume of the Macmillan Casebook Series edited by Alan Shelston, for example, offers a selection of early reviews and responses, and Marion Richmond has provided a review of early *Portrait* criticism from 1881 to 1916. But these responses come from professional reviewers and literary critics, and they are the responses of people impelled to respond, and required to criticize. What of the ordinary subscriber to *Macmillan*’s or to the *Atlantic*? Richmond tells us that the novel, when first published as a book, was “a considerable success by prevailing standards,” even though her emphasis is on what she portrays as the misreadings of the early critics (158). Using her review of early critical responses to the novel to show “how much we have advanced in the study of criticism of fiction,” Richmond’s study naturally has more to say about the history

of professional criticism than about the *Portrait's* first audience (159). At present we can only speculate about the extent to which the early critics reflected public opinion; further work on the popular response to the novel might be revealing. It would be particularly interesting to discover what kinds of responses the novel produced while it was in the process of being serialized and while its conclusion was still unknown — even unwritten.

In his essay “The New Isabel” Anthony J. Mazzella has argued that “there are two *Portraits*, not one, and that each is a different literary experience” (597). The emphasis in the essay is on textual revision, and so it is not surprising that Mazzella talks only of the two *Portraits* of 1881 and 1908. Nonetheless, textual detail is not the only aspect of a literary experience. Readers first encountering the novel in its thirteen-month serialized version had their own quite distinct experience of the text. In talking of the experiences of the novel's readers, then, we need to include not only the 1881 and the 1908 book editions but also the serializations of the novel in *Macmillan's Magazine* from October 1880 to November 1881 and in the *Atlantic Monthly* from November 1880 to December 1881.

If difference in literary experience can come from elements other than textual wording, then at the extreme it could be argued that any edition of a novel — hardback, paperback, illustrated or dog-eared — may constitute a “different literary experience.” To argue that the serialized versions of the *Portrait* are significantly different to the book-form editions is not, however, to go this far. The serial versions differ from the later books primarily because they appeared in parts, over an extended period of time, and within the context of a larger, stylistically consistent publication. The 1881 and 1908 books appeared as single self-contained works in one, two or three volume editions, the

whole novel accessible at the same time. Where the 1881 book edition placed the novel within the context of that year's latest fiction and the 1908 edition placed it within the context of James's New York Edition, serial publication placed the novel firmly within the heterogeneous contexts of the periodicals in which it appeared.

The value of reading the *Portrait* in the context of its original publication has been suggested before, notably by Nina Baym in the course of her defense of the thematic unity of the 1881 edition. Arguing that the revisions in the 1908 text have "overlaid and in places obliterated the coherence of the 1881 version," Baym recommends that readers undertake a rediscovery of the original thematic context of the work through a reading of the novel in the *Atlantic* (185). Baym argues that after twenty-seven years James would have been "unable to reproduce the context from which the work had originally been created," and suggests that we can "recapture the context . . . to some extent ourselves" by reading the serialized version. Baym's interest in the *Atlantic* version is purely thematic. She stresses that in reading the serialized form we would rediscover it "amidst many fictional and essayistic treatments of the new American girl," mentioning specifically the Kate Gannett Wells essay "The Transitional American Woman," published in the December 1880 edition of the *Atlantic*. Baym's suggestion that we read the *Portrait* in the *Atlantic* springs from her desire to emphasize the "topical and timely" aspects of the novel; she is stressing the "context from which the work had originally been created," and using the context to justify her interpretation of the strengths of the 1881 edition.

Nina Baym's reference to the contextual significance of the *Portrait*'s first publication is suggestive, but, in demonstrating the topicality of the novel's thematic interest in 'the woman question' by

stressing the “many fictional and essayistic treatments of the new American girl” to be found in the *Atlantic* at the time, this line of argument draws attention away from the extremely mixed nature of the articles and stories published in the magazine, making it sound rather more thematically organized than it was. In the volume that includes the first two installments of the *Portrait* and the essay on “The Transitional American Woman” the first items listed in the index are “The Aesthetic Value of the Sense of Smell,” “Mr. Aldrich’s Fiction,” “American Colonial History,” and “Among the Pueblos” The ‘American woman’ is just one of the themes to be found in volume 46 of the *Atlantic*, and throughout the thirteen months of its serial appearance the novel appears in consistently surprising textual surroundings. *Macmillan’s* covers equally varied ground: the index for volume 42, in which the *Portrait* makes its first appearance, includes topics as varied as “An Escape for Life from a Fijian Cyclone,” and “*Cymbeline* in a Hindoo Playhouse.”

Nina Baym stresses the context “from which” the *Portrait* was created, using the periodical to support her argument that the 1881 version of the novel, with its focus on topical social concerns, achieved a thematic unity which the 1908 edition lacks. In this view, the periodical is valuable in that it reflects the social context from which, or within which, the novel was formed. This view of the serialized novel is framed within the conventions of evaluative literary criticism and uses the *Atlantic* as thematic background. The novel can, however, be placed more firmly within that background; indeed, a radical alternative to this ‘background’ view is to read the *Atlantic* (or, alternatively, *Macmillan’s*) as the text, and the novel itself as something akin to a recurring theme. The assumption that a serialized novel should inevitably be read as a self-contained work with a

supporting cast of minor texts is worth challenging, and recent studies in the field of the serial novel show us new ways of making such a challenge.

The first chapter of Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund's discussion of this topic, *The Victorian Serial*, provides a useful overview of work already done in the field of serial publication and outlines two major areas for further development. Studies in the history of periodical publication and the serial form, research into the readership and distribution of Victorian periodicals, analyses of the ways in which authors shaped their work specifically for serial publication, and discussions of the economic framework of serial publication are all, it seems, already available. All of these topics are relevant to the serial publication of the *Portrait*, with perhaps the third offering the most potential for development. How did the opportunities and constraints of serial publication affect the writing of the *Portrait*? To what extent was James influenced by publication format and by his understanding of the novel's immediate audience?

The two issues in the study of nineteenth-century serial fiction which Hughes and Lund identify as being particularly in need of further development relate particularly well to the study of a particular novel. One of these issues has to do with connections the authors discern between the serial form and Victorian cultural assumptions and values, and the other is concerned with they call "the dynamics of serial reading." Hughes and Lund suggest that for its readers "the serial embodied a vision, a perspective on stories about life, intrinsic to Victorian culture," and that for those readers, experiencing novels part by part, with month-long breaks between readings, the "publication format became an essential factor in creating meaning" (1-2).

The introduction to studies of serial fiction laid out in the first

chapter of *The Victorian Serial* suggests a wide range of ways in which the reading of James's *Portrait* in its first, periodical form could inform our understanding of its initial reception and enable us to appreciate the ways in which its first audience experienced the novel. Such a reading could tell us much, firstly about the social context in which James was initially received, and secondly about some of the assumptions James might have been making, consciously and unconsciously, about the reading habits and methods of comprehension of his immediate audience. Furthermore, a close comparative study of the two periodicals in which the *Portrait* was serialized could lead to some understanding of the extent to which James's British and American audiences differed - another point which would surely have interested the writer himself.

In their opening chapter, Hughes and Lund deal first with their contention that serialization was "a literary form attuned to fundamental tendencies in the age at large," and then go on to discuss separately the practical results of reading a novel in a serialized form, looking at the way in which the serialization of a novel contributed to the way in which it was understood (8). The following outline of ideas for a reading of the two serializations of James's *Portrait* is based on the Hughes and Lund study, but it does not follow their line of argument point by point. Elements of their analysis which seem particularly relevant to a re-reading of the *Portrait* have been reordered under four main headings. The first topic considered will be that of the extended reading period demanded by a serialized novel; the second deals with the ways in which the experience of reading a serialized novel was shared within a community or group of readers; the third topic has to do with the physical appearance of the novel in its periodical format; the fourth area of interest focuses on the effect

that serial publication had on the writer.

Readers of the *Atlantic* or *Macmillan's* who were just beginning the *Portrait* in the late fall of 1880 would not have been able to flip to the back and find out what happened to Isabel "in the end:" they had no choice but to be satisfied for a whole month with the first five chapters, the famously unfinished ending not at that time having even been written. Satisfaction, or at least the strong anticipation of satisfaction, was then deferred month by month for more than a year. Hughes and Lund draw an interesting parallel between this conventional deferral of satisfaction and Victorian middle-class capitalism: "the perseverance and delay of gratification necessary for middle-class economic success were, in a sense, echoed in serial reading," they argue (4).

If, as Hughes and Lund suggest, a nineteenth-century audience's long-term "investment" in a serialized novel was expected to lead "from its advertised commencement through a long publication to its satisfying conclusion" (5), then we may find it easier to understand why the ending of the *Portrait* was at first regarded as so distinctly unsatisfying. It is true that much of the evidence commonly cited for this early response to the novel's conclusion comes from reviews that were written after the novel was published in book form, but as Hughes and Lund point out, "even in the cases where volume publication followed an initial serialization, the shaping influence of the installment text was often more important than has been recognised" (14). The anonymous reviewer from *Lippincott's Magazine* who commented on the novel's "unsatisfactory" ending was writing in February of 1882, shortly after the serialization ended and the novel was published in volume form, both events having occurred the previous November (Shelston, 86). Given that the novel took thirteen

months to publish in both the *Macmillan's* and the *Atlantic*, it seems likely that the reviewer, having read the novel in one of these periodicals, was still suffering from unfulfilled expectations. James "cannot bring himself to the vulgarity of a regular *dénouement*," the reviewer complained: the endings of his novels were "unsatisfactory both from a popular and an artistic point of view." Despite the fact that "everything in one of Mr James's books seems to be leading to a simple and satisfactory end," that "simple and satisfactory end" never materialized (86).

The regular, monthly arrival of each installment of the *Portrait*, then, prevented readers from establishing their own reading pace or skipping ahead, while at the same time it served to build up strong expectations of future satisfaction. The stop-start form of magazine publication had other results. Hughes and Lund suggest, for example, that this form of interrupted narrative encouraged the use of realism in serial fiction. Their argument is based more on an interpretation of the readers' experience than on the writers' intentions: they contend that readers of periodical literature would have had a particular tendency to turn from the fictional world to their own social world without noticing much difference between the two, using "much the same set of critical faculties" to understand both. The implication is that this reading habit affected the way in which novelists wrote.

Hughes and Lund suggest that the nineteenth-century audience of a serialized novel approached the mixed texts of the periodical in which it appeared in similar ways; they also suggest that readers made little distinction between other forms of narrative—newspapers, for example, letters, and conversation. Perhaps we have a clue here to another of the ways in which early readers of the *Portrait* have 'misread' the text. If James was not employing the sort of realism that Hughes and

Lund are referring to – and it seems likely that he was not – then this disjunction between style and expectation may have caused the mystification or even distaste that some early readers seem to have felt in the face of James’s method of characterization. In a joint review and implied comparison of the *Portrait* with W.D. Howells’s *Dr. Breen’s Practice* in the *Atlantic* of January 1882, the reviewer praises the second novel for making “no shameless betrayal of secrets” and for therefore not giving the reader any “guilty sense of having intruded upon a sacred privacy” (130). Speaking of the portrayal of Dr. Breen, and criticizing by implication the portrayal of Isabel Archer, the reviewer talks of “secrets which could be known only to her and the author” – Howells, apparently, does not reveal the secrets he shares with his heroine; James does. This remark does seem to suggest that the reviewer is evaluating fiction according to the polite conventions of real life, and talking about the relationship between author, character and reader as if all three were equally real people. The mixing of ‘reality’ and ‘realism’ which Hughes and Lund suggest was conventionally assumed by author and audience can be seen at work here, causing reading problems for the *Portrait*’s first audience.

Another area of concern raised by Hughes and Lund about the ways in which the breaks in the rhythm of a serialized novel may have affected the ways in which it was read – and written – has to do with the novel’s pace. This, too, relates well to a reconsideration of the *Portrait*. Talking of the alternation created by serial publication between short, intense periods of reading and long periods away from the text, Hughes and Lund suggest that this oscillation between crowded, dramatic installments and long stretches of inaction actually correlated comfortably with a newly relative approach to time developing at the end of the nineteenth century. Time, they argue, “at

once contracted and expanded," as new technology speeded things up, seeming to make time move more quickly, while new work in history and science seemed to show that on the contrary it moved more slowly than anyone had previously imagined. Hughes and Lund also connect the popularity of serial literature with an interest in historicism and a growing awareness of the ways in which events developed gradually over long stretches of time.

The reference in this context to the idea that the late nineteenth-century witnessed a newly complicated understanding of time is stimulating, and in relation to the *Portrait* it leads one to wonder whether some connection can be made in that case not only with the alternation of periods of reading with periods of silence, but within the text itself with the relative pace of the various sections of the story, the speed at which it moves. It has been widely noted that James has a tendency to pick up speed as he approaches the end of a story, and this has often been attributed to the pressure of contractual obligations to finish a novel within a certain number of installments. The question arises, when one considers the nature of the serialized novel, of whether in its original form these changes in pace would have been as noticeable as they are in a volume publication.

The interrupted stop-start rhythm of serial publication, bringing the latest news from the world of the *Portrait* as in a letter from abroad, must have created for its regular readers a very particular experience of that novel. Many of the people who actually discuss or write about the novel today probably read it for the first time at considerable speed, perhaps for a college class. In the summer of 1881, on the other hand, Isabel Archer's destiny could well have formed a topic of general conversation within certain social groups. When it first appeared, the *Portrait* had what its reviewer in the *Atlantic* of January

1881 called an “interrupted existence,” and that “interrupted existence” undoubtedly affected the ways in which it was read. Further study of the ways in which the novel’s first extended reading period affected public response to its conclusion, its unconventionally realistic character portrayals, and its variable sense of time and pace is called for.

Closely related to the issue of the extended period needed for the first reading of the *Portrait* is the question of the extent to which the novel was received by readers aware of the fact that they were participating in a shared experience. Hughes and Lund suggest that a journal such as the *Atlantic* or *Macmillan’s* would have possessed a community of readers – a group of people who were all reading the same thing at much the same time, perhaps lending and borrowing the journals, maybe reading them aloud, probably talking about the stories and essays they contained. Roger Hagedorn has even argued that the main function of the serial form of narrative is to produce not just a community of readers but “a dependable audience of consumers” (5). This “dependable audience,” or “community of readers” ensured that what we might call the ‘gaps’ between readings were not silent – discussion of the texts would have continued, predictions might have been made, and interpretations discussed. Hughes and Lund, locating their study in England and focusing on English magazines, talk for instance of the excitement of “magazine day,” when the month’s new magazines appeared on sale, and argue that the shared sense of anticipation and the common practice of sharing magazines by reading them aloud rendered literature a public and shared event.

Interrupted publication and shared interest together led therefore not only to a build-up of suspense and anticipation and to the mixing together of life and art, Hughes and Lund suggest: it also led to a

process of what they call “concurrent interpretation,” in which the novel was discussed and interpreted while it was still in the process of being published (and perhaps written). Hughes and Lund argue that “much of what made literature meaningful to the nineteenth century occurred during the reading of a work, before its ending had been reached” (12). This would have been true both informally and formally – “concurrent interpretation” would have taken place both within families and small groups of friends and also in the public forum of weekly journals and newspapers. Hughes and Lund suggest that a record of audience response to the various stages of serialized novels can often be found in the columns of weekly papers. A study of public (and, if available, more private) responses to the *Portrait* in process might turn out to be very interesting, perhaps revealing a great deal about audience expectation and giving us a record of the reading experience of what may be the only substantial readership for this novel that experienced the story with no preconceptions regarding its outcome or overall design. Again, any perceptible differences between American and British responses would be instructive.

The whole area of the shared reading experience needs to be investigated. What would the effect of this sense of community have been? In what ways can it be compared to the social importance that the shared viewing and discussion of popular television series have today? To what extent, we can ask, did interpretations and opinions spread and become influential? Were there conventions to be observed in reading and interpreting? Were there socially unacceptable ways of reading and reacting? If a sense of shared readership affected the reception and interpretation of a novel, and if popular response affected the novelist, then this community of readers may have been very influential. This may have been particularly true in the case of a

novel like the *Portrait* which probably appeared to be attempting a realistic portrayal of contemporary life involving characters recognizable as contemporary types. An American controversially living and working in Europe who was writing about the American experience of Europe, and Europe's experience of Americans, must surely have produced a response in his community of readers that mixed reality and realism with a vengeance. If, as Hughes and Lund suggest, nineteenth-century magazine readers tended to blur the distinction between fiction and real life, then the early reviewers' concern with the believability or fairness of James's portrayals of American 'types' becomes more understandable.

We have dealt with two relatively abstract concepts so far - the extension of the reading period and the existence of a community of readers-but we should now turn to look at a more concrete aspect of serial publication, the physical appearance of the serialized novel. The original audience of the serialized *Portrait* would have been used to the conventions of magazine form, but for the reader used to seeing the novel in volume form its appearance in the *Atlantic* or *Macmillan's* can be rather surprising. The most obvious feature of the serialized novel-obvious, but not at first obviously significant - is that it has been typeset in two columns to the page. This does not affect the text at all in regard to wording, but it most probably does have some effect on the reader. Investigation in this area probably comes under the heading of reading theory rather than literary criticism or even reader-response criticism, but it would nonetheless be rather intriguing.

The typesetting of a novel is not a common subject of study, and conventional textual criticism would probably assume that the physical format of a text could tell us little about an author's craft or intentions. Nonetheless, let us pause here briefly to speculate on the

columns of the *Atlantic's Portrait*, taking this rather trivial point as an example of the new possibilities for study which come up once the novel is considered within its original context. Here, as throughout this paper, the focus of interest is assumed to be the serialized novel and its original audience. The author is not central but neither is he excluded. It is assumed here, again as throughout this paper, that James would have been to some extent aware of the expectations and reading conventions of his audience, and that this awareness, or sensitivity to a "community of readers" and their experience of text, would have had some influence on his writing.

Lets us take the beginning of Chapter XI of the *Portrait* as a random sample of text, and as an experiment compare the *Atlantic* text of January 1881 with the 1992 Library of America text, which reprints the 1881 first American edition. Rather mystifyingly, William Stafford's textual notes for this recent edition explain that it reprints the 1881 Houghton, Mifflin edition because "its revisions were made soon after composition, and because it represents James's earlier intentions better than the periodical texts" (628). Chapter XI forms the beginning of the third installment of the American serialization of the *Portrait* and has the place of honor on page one of the issue, under the journal's heading. In this two-column format the average line length is eight words. The left-hand column of the *Atlantic* Chapter XI begins like this:

RALPH took a resolve after this not to misinterpret her words, even when Miss Stackpole appeared to strike the personal note most strongly. He bethought himself that persons, in her view, were

simple and homogeneous organisms, and
that he, for his own part, was too per —
verted a representative of human nat —
ure to have a right to deal with her in
strict reciprocity. He carried out his re —
solve with a great deal of tact, and the

The equivalent passage in the Library of America edition is printed as it appears below. The chapter opens on page 97 of the text under a simple enlarged “XI” and a page-wide horizontal line. The initial ‘H’ is enlarged, the second line being indented to accommodate it:

He took a resolve after this not to misinterpret her
words, even when Miss Stackpole appeared to strike
the personal note most strongly. He bethought himself that
persons, in her view, were simple and homogeneous organ —
isms, and that he, for his own part, was too perverted a rep —
resentative of human nature to have a right to deal with her
in strict reciprocity. He carried out his resolve with a great
deal of tact, and the young lady found in her relations with

Further study of the effect that this kind of difference in layout can have upon readers would be interesting. Does it influence their reading speed, their tolerance for syntactically complex sentences, or the size of the chunks in which they read? It is also worth noting here that the first word in this extract is different: presumably the gap between installments meant that James could not expect even his most eager readers to have carried over an idea of who “he” might be from the previous chapter. This is a small and easily explained difference, but

it is not insignificant, giving us a clear reminder of the ways in which the interrupted reading experience created by serialized fiction would have affected a reader's concentration and ability to pick up the story again and become relocated. Where a modern reader can simply refer to the previous page to find out who "he" is, a reader in 1880, who might have lent the previous month's issue to a friend, would have had more difficulty.

Chapter XI, appearing at the beginning of the January 1881 issue of the *Atlantic*, starts at the top of the page, preceded only by the magazine's banner. Other installments begin in the middle of a page, separated only by a line and a title from the end of the previous essay, poem or piece of fiction. Chapter XXV, for example, re-opens the novel for May 1881 immediately after an essay on current affairs in Japan. The next installment, beginning with Chapter XXIX, follows an essay which has attempted to answer the question "Who Lost Waterloo?" The installments of the *Portrait* appear on the same page and in exactly the same format as these other, wildly different pieces of writing. In physical appearance they are all clearly parts of the same text. Fiction is mixed in with nonfiction, poetry with prose, journalism, argument, comment and exposé with literary reviews and something akin to a "Letters to the Editor" section called "The Contributors' Club." It is at times difficult to distinguish one genre from another; with no assistance from a book jacket or from layout clues, it is occasionally even difficult to be sure whether we are reading fiction or nonfiction.

Referring to Louis James's recent suggestion that a bound volume of a particular periodical can be read as a single text by a corporate author, Hughes and Lund argue that as subscribers read a great deal of each issue, the whole became "linked together in their minds," with

the various contributions printed in the same way and “tied together by editorial principles” (9). Louis James stresses the way in which a journal came to possess a “specific identity,” through “the total effect of its contents, tone and style” (349). A journal’s format, Louis James argues, becomes “a tone of voice, a way of conditioning our response.” The journal becomes, according to this line of argument, “a microcosm . . . of a cultural outlook” because of the way in which it chooses and organizes information (351). Louis James even goes so far as to argue that familiarity with a journal’s format can become associated, over time, with the ability to read its contents. This concept is critical to a close re-reading of the *Portrait* within both of its original magazine formats. An investigation of the patterns demonstrated by those journals in selecting and formatting contributions, and a study of the editorial principles that serve to unify each text as a whole, might be extremely informative. Such an investigation might give us some insight into the ways in which novels now generally considered within other contexts—literary history in general, for example, or a writer’s collected works—were originally contextualized.

Reading the journals in which the *Portrait* first appeared as whole texts in their own right—reading each as “a single text with a corporate author”—can be enlightening in very specific ways. The study of figurative language, for example, as it functions at large over a run of periodical volumes, can provide very useful insights into how particular images and figures were commonly used at the time, and what assumptions were generally being made by authors and readers about the significance of various images. This can be useful even when reading a work as sophisticated as the *Portrait*: it is helpful to be able to see that at one point James is tapping into a rich vein of

connotation with what, it transpires, is a rather conventional use of figurative language, and it is also helpful to be able to suspect that at another moment he is playing off the conventions of common use as he surprises his audience with an unconventional new twist on a popular metaphor. This kind of analysis depends upon an equally close reading of novel and context, but it produces interesting results. A close reading of the final scene between Isabel and Goodwood in the *Portrait's* last chapter, for example, that considers the imagery James employs and compares it to imagery used throughout the surrounding volumes of the *Atlantic* shows that much of what may seem ambiguous today, out of context, may well have been considerably clearer for the novel's original audience.

In his well-known essay on the textual revisions James made for the New York Edition, F.O. Matthiessen talks of James's need to "freshen his surfaces, to restore faded values" and to "bring out 'buried secrets'" (577). A study of the imagery James uses in the earliest *Portrait* and the ways in which that imagery would have spoken to the community of readers familiar with the *Atlantic* in the early 1880s suggests the possibility that he may have felt impelled to do this not to give the novel a clarity it had lacked, but, as Matthiessen in fact suggests, to "restore" values that had "faded." It is worth considering the possibility that James undertook some of his famous revisions not to change his book but to update it for a new community of readers. In other words: it seems possible that James made his revisions not in order to say what he had always intended to say (but had previously failed to articulate), but simply to say again what he had said before, to say the same thing for a new audience. Perhaps what he was doing was really 'saying' what he had previously implied, making himself more explicit. Perhaps James himself, re-reading his novel, was his

own 'new audience.' As Nina Baym points out in her defence of the 1881 version, "James would have been unable to reproduce the context from which the work had originally been created" (195). Baym is here talking of themes and topicality, but the remark is surely just as true of assumptions made at specific times about the connotations of particular images.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the kiss "like a flash of lightning." But it is worth emphasizing the idea that a community of readers with a shared vocabulary of images and figurative connotations would have been equipped to read that final scene in ways that readers in 1908 were not. For someone who is familiar with the *Portrait* as a part of the *Atlantic* text and in its 1880-81 version, Anthony J. Mazzella's discussion of the novel's last scene in his essay "The New Isabel" can come as something of a surprise. Mazzella seems to be claiming that the significance of Goodwood's kiss is clear for the first time in the 1908 edition. But, for the reader of the *Atlantic Portrait*, this 'new' meaning is an old story. Explaining his interpretation of the significance of the 1908 kiss, Mazzella remarks that "because the kiss meant none of this to the early Isabel, her decision to return to Rome seemed to some incomprehensible" (611). Within the context of the *Atlantic*, however, and given the contextual reverberations of the images used to describe the scene in the 1880-81 version, it can be argued that the kiss would always have had this 'new' meaning for some readers. The question of what "an early Isabel" might have consciously taken its meaning to be remains elusive. But James's revisions here seem to function mainly to make the meaning of the scene more explicit, not to change it.

In discussing the revisions James made of this last scene for the 1908 edition we have been approaching the last of the four areas for further

study of the *Portrait* in context suggested by Hughes and Lund's overview of work on serial fiction. This area has to do with the effect of serial publication on the writing process. Each of the three preceding areas becomes newly suggestive viewed from the point of view of the writer. Firstly, the extended publication and reading time demanded by the serial form must have affected the writer to some extent, if only by putting him under pressure to finish a work, and to finish reasonably on time. Once a novel had begun its serial publication an author could hardly abandon it – or even go back and revise the beginning to fit the end. Installment publication must have affected the way a writer thought of his novel and his writing process. James talks in his notebooks and letters in terms of installments – “after Isabel's marriage,” James wrote, for example, “there are *five* more installments” (Shelston, 73). Actually, there were six more installments, but this remark does show that James was thinking of the book in installment-sized chunks. In a letter to Howells also quoted in Shelston's *Portrait Casebook* James admits that the first installment of the novel is “very long” – he promises that the following numbers “will, as a general thing, be shorter by two or three pages” (78). And in another letter to Howells, James refers to a different work that is to be a “six-months' tale.” Clearly he is used to thinking in monthly parts.

James was well aware of the way in which a serialized novel could become a long-term part of its readers' lives. Hughes and Lund point out, for example, how in his review of the first book of *Daniel Deronda* for the *Nation* of February 24th, 1876, James remarks on the pleasure he felt at the “prospect of the intellectual luxury of taking up, month after month, the little clear-paged volumes. . . . For almost a year to come the lives of appreciative readers will have a sort of

literal extension into another multitudinous world" (155). James was also well aware of his community of readers, the second area of interest discussed above, and the power such an audience had in determining meaning. "Miss Stackpole is not I think really exaggerated," James wrote to Howells in December of 1880, just after the novel had begun its serialization, but "99 readers out of a 100 will think her so: which amounts to the same thing" (Shelston, 79).

Finally, James was conscious of the constraints and opportunities that came from the physical layout of serialized fiction. In his 1972 essay on the *Portrait*, Anthony J. Mazzella shows how James revised the end of Chapter XXVII to make it a better parallel to the final chapter of the novel when he found out that the New York Edition would end its first volume at that point. In the two-volume New York Edition, the ends of the two volumes reflect each other and the mid-point of the story is clearly marked. This suggests the extent to which James was aware of the physical format of his work and also the extent to which he was prepared to tailor his work to use that format in a textually meaningful way. Further analysis of the relationship between the structure of the original text and its breakdown into installments might be very instructive.

The purpose of this paper has been to argue that from a variety of scholarly perspectives, both literary and historical, the study of fiction in its original serialized form can be useful and suggestive. Taking the *Portrait* as an example text, the paper has outlined some of the lines of investigation which could be followed in making such a study. It has suggested an initial focus on four main areas: the extended reading period of a serialized novel, its community of readers, its physical appearance, and the effects that serialization have on the

novelist. The *Portrait* is in some ways a special case: the novel has long been the subject of detailed textual criticism focusing on the relative merits of its two well-known volume editions. In the case of the *Portrait*, the paper suggests that some of the revisions James made for the 1908 edition may reflect his sense of changes in the reading conventions of his audience as well as the increased sophistication of his writing style. Finally, while this paper is intended to function as an outline for future study, and as such reaches few firm conclusions, it does assume that such a line of study could be of value to literary critics and cultural historians alike, and it argues that 'great books' should not, simply because of their later 'greatness,' be entirely cut loose from the time and place of their original publication and the reading conventions of their original audiences.

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