

“The Hard Worldly Basis”: History and Infrastructure in Henry James’s “Julia Bride”

I may use the word, for the alley and the gutter were
mine, as they will be my deathbed.

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*¹

I

Unlike other late James stories, “Julia Bride” (1908) remains critically neglected. We know James regarded it highly because it was published in book-format in 1909 and made its way into the New York Edition of his work. Set in the narrowing circles of New York high society, “Julia Bride” centers around a young woman who is trying to clear her name in order to marry a wealthy gentleman who has no proofs yet of a “dreadful past” (531) that includes “nine nice distinct little horrors” (529), namely, her mother’s three divorces and her six broken engagements. In the tale’s opening scene, set on the first floor of the Met, she asks for help to her mother’s second ex-husband, who is also trying to recoup social credit and remarry. To that end he demands Julia’s assistance. The perverse comedy feeds on the symmetries of reciprocal moral exploitation. Unable to make use of this connection, Julia turns to one of her ex-fiancés, Murray Brush, who is now in town after some years in Europe. They meet in Central Park, by the Museum. She explains her plight and asks him to lie on her behalf, describing their former relationship as one of friendship. He agrees but informs her of his recent engagement to a woman that would be most interested in benefiting from the social connections that Julia’s intended husband, Basil French, enjoys. Once again, her project founders in the ironies of symmetric retribution. Julia is not alone in pressing others for “aid for a

foundation" (531). Here, as elsewhere in James, personal confession is less an absolute gift than "an offering which expects something in return" (Cutrofello 5). The upshot is relentless moral degradation. To be sure, James's characters are not discreet consciousnesses judiciously interacting in the moral sphere. When they practice confession, it is as "an abasement (*Erniedrigung*), a humiliation (*Demütigung*), a throwing away of [oneself] in relation to the other" (Hegel 405). "Julia Bride" deploys *abasement* through a rich variety of figural allusions to the topologically low—most notably "the basest of vices" (525). All three implications, the spatially base, the morally abased and the socially debased, merge in a powerful strand whose import is, according to Marxian logic, necessarily dependent on the latter—forces and relations of production and class struggle in the social sphere. Though not a bastard, Julia's plight takes on a distinctively Shakespearean bitterness: "Why brand they us / With base? With baseness, bastardy? Base, base?" (*King Lear* 1.2.9-10). In materialist-dialectical thought, the terms *base* and *basis* transcend these three implications (spatial, moral, social) to acquire an overtly *structural* significance, visible in the opposition *Basis-Superstruktur*. This, and the apparently marginal fact that both nouns—*basis* and *superstructure*—occur in the story, provide the initial motivation of my reading of "Julia Bride" as a dialectical fable of social knowledge. This lexical tracking may seem a meager foundation, I am aware, but nothing is too slim for a symptomatic reading to get started. The reader is right to expect something like a Marxist elucidation of a tale whose author, for reasons that do not pertain here, has oddly resisted the advances of materialist exegesis.²

Julia's fate vividly recalls that of Lily Bart, the protagonist of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, published only four years earlier. It also resembles the case of Mrs. Headway in the "The Siege of London" (1883), the story of a young woman striving desperately to present herself "on a new basis" (*Complete Tales* 585). "Julia Bride" has also been read as a late companion study to *Daisy Miller*, as both tales similarly probe the social latitudes of American freedom.³ "Julia Bride" reads in fact as a critique of the social changes that transformed America in the last years of the nineteenth century, while James was living in Europe. Buitenhuis argues that the tale interweaves two related sociological issues—the fact that divorce had become "cheap-and-easy" (James, *Selected* 526) and the deterioration of the manners and speech of American women, abandoned by men in the task of inventing a social life different from money-minded activity (Buitenhuis 140).

But the meaning of "Julia Bride" is more far-reaching than that. The story grapples more broadly with a cognitive dilemma that is also a rhetorical-cum-ideological conundrum. Dramatized in the story and described in the preface James wrote in 1909, this problem is that the attempt to trace the life of a mind that belongs in expanding and interlocking webs of multiple connection fails before the impossibility of portraying the whole, of depicting, that is, the social totality. Since "the knowledge of society as a totality" is the goal presupposed by any "dialectical method" (Adorno, *Prisms* 33), "Julia Bride" can be said to read like a dialectical fable. To depict the wholeness of the "social field"—a term used by James and popularized by post-Marxists—you first have to know it.⁴ The challenge therefore is originally cognitive. It is

also ideological because ideology is admittedly, in accordance with a Spinozist insight revived by Althusser, an imaginative effect of limited knowledge, of overlooking our “real conditions of existence” (Althusser 109). And it is rhetorical because knowledge is gained and lost through the implementation of tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche) that act in place of absent or indistinct reality, the most remote of which is obviously *the (untruth of the) whole*.⁵ A moral entailment of this question is that the exploited cannot see the whole. Still, social debasement may prove an enabling contingency, endowing the humiliated victim with rare faculties of seeing and understanding. If Julia’s comedy is that she is pulled further down when, and because, she is trying to move up, and her tragedy is that she finally falls, her (Balzacian) moral proves far more comforting: only the upward or downwardly mobile catch a glimpse of the whole. The story, moreover, dramatizes the Marxian truth aptly formulated by Eagleton as the fact that “the low is always a shadowy presence lurking within the high” (146). The adjective *humiliating* crops up in the enraged consideration she makes while conversing with her ex-fiancé:

What you may or mayn’t have done doesn’t count, for *you*; but there are people for whom it’s loathsome that a girl should have gone on like that from one person to another and still pretend to be — well, all that a nice girl is supposed to be. It’s as if we had but just waked up, mother and I, to such a remarkable prejudice; and now we have it — when we could do so well without it! — staring us in the face. That mother should have insanely *let* me, should so vulgarly have taken it for my natural, my social career — *that’s* the disgusting, humiliating thing: with the lovely account it gives of both of us! (543)

We are suddenly confronted with what, since *Daisy Miller* at least, James had taught himself to discriminate as vulgarity and lowness. The “humiliating thing” is that her mother should have let her take a manifestly disreputable social career. Surely, what is discreditable in a course of broken engagements is the base social station that the person embarked in it is ultimately bound to reach due to a predictably gradual loss of social worth, or, to put it in Marxian terms, *exchange value*. To be debased, on this logic, is to be lowered from your presumed naturalized social position to an inferior locus, and thus to be reminded of your “basic rootedness [...] in conditions of materiality” (Galvan 301). This move, of course, stimulates an increase of knowledge and a corresponding attenuation of ideological delusion. Interestingly, James spares the reader the full dramatization of Julia’s demotion, as we never get to see her touching the seabed that the maritime metaphors—the “troubled waters”, the “depths” (535)—constantly suggest. But if we don’t see those depths, if they are not given to us as part of the story’s representation, shall we assume that someone else (Julia, James) enjoys some kind of—visual, rhetorical, cognitive—access to them? No answer yet, but let me recall that *that is* the question. So far, we only know that denizens of the upper East side, Julia and her mother already dwell in the fringes of social hell—or sewer, as Julia survives with “the cold swish of waters already up to her waist” and yet miraculously not “up to her chin” (545), craving for “a bit of a margin just wide enough to perch on till the tide of the peril should have ebbed a little” (543).⁶ She begs for “an aid for foundation” (531), and a foundation is a basis. One distinctive merit of Wharton’s *House of Mirth* was to afford a vivid glimpse of the social netherlands—Lily Bart “learning,” like a Dickens pariah, “to be a milliner” (285)—

without compromising the balances of bourgeois domestic realism. But James avoided such risks. He shunned the dangers of a mimetic imbalance and moral impropriety he tended to impute to Dickens.⁷ In fact, however effectively he managed in *The Princess Casamassima* to portray the trademark revolutionary setting—"the five-person meeting in an out-of-the-way suburb" (Badiou, *Communist* 254)—James was disinclined to address the pictorial (mimetic) challenge of the low. While he was keenly alert to the structural logic enabling debasement—the logic that traces the differential fall from superstructural allowances to an ever-receding (*bodenlos*) basis—he could hardly meet the demands of proletarian social realism without incurring, like, say, Elizabeth Gaskell, melodrama. In fact, the residual trail of sentimental, romance-inspired notions like "aberrations" or "horrors" running through "Julia Bride" seems to operate beyond genuine ironic-authorial control. In *The American Scene*, the travel-book of social notes he published in 1907, two years after his visit to America, there is plenty of room for the shocks of social squalor, but the phenomenology of the humiliated was not likely to find a straightforward descriptive outlet in the contemporary narratives. Here it is hinted as a threat, likely to surface only in figurative or extradiegetic outbreaks. Indeed, the tropic undertow of the abased forcefully haunts "Julia Bride," whence the pertinence of reading it too as a ghost story. If a dialectical fable of social knowledge is also a ghost story, then its villain can only be the specter of the unknowably base, indirectly conjured in a grotesque comment made by Julia's ex-fiancé, who describes the mission of acting on her behalf as "the prescription of humility of service, his consenting to act in the interest of her avidity, his letting her mount that way, on his bowed shoulders, to the success in which he could suppose she still believed" (547). This bitter jest subtends the connection, at

work in many of James' stories and particularly in "The Turn of the Screw," between subaltern abasement and melodramatic-Gothic collapse. At stake in these narratives is—to use Samuel Richardson's powerfully allegorical phrasing—the dread of harm inflicted "under the specious veil of humility" (643).

These two phrases, "the humiliating thing" and "the humility of service," trace the forced or voluntary taking of a lower position on the socio-moral scale. The bottom of this position is reported through tropes like "ground" or "earth." Julia, for instance, sees her gorgeous body as "the burden of physical charm that had made so easy a *ground*, such a native favoring air, for the aberrations which, apparently inevitable and without far consequences at the time, had yet at this juncture so much better not have been" (527; my emphasis). The resulting moral *abasement* is beholden to the "ground," and the challenge is to evade it by climbing to a new "foundation." Although the term is also used in the once-metaphorical sense of argumentative base retained from potential invasion, as in *ground* as starting position in a debate, the implication that her physical charm becomes a physical ground and cause for aberrations is more powerful, turning her material beauty into their (her mother's and hers) single, residual, and very perilous argument. The appearance of the term "earth" is less revealing, restricted to the idiomatic expression "what on earth." Still, the fact that the two occurrences of the idiom convey exasperation about the impossibility of remedying the humiliations of vulgarity, allows us to literalize the trope "earth" as the lowest ground of social abasement:

Such were the data Basil French's inquiry would elicit: her own six engagements and her mother's three nullified marriages — nine nice distinct little horrors in all. What on earth was to be done about them? (529)

So that if he hadn't a sense for the subtler appeal, the appeal appreciable by people not vulgar, on which alone she could depend, what on earth would become of her? (539)

So what on earth? The answer is the same in both cases: she would be compelled to dwell on the bedrock of what in *Daisy Miller* is described as "the minutely hierarchical constitution of the society of that city" (16), meaning New York. Sure enough, this very ground, this very earth—literally, Manhattan's mineral rock-bottom undergirding the Babel heights of its emerging skyscrapers—will be described as *basis* later in the tale. Julia's ex-lover evokes their shared innocence and the way their engagement did not break because of the infelicity of the speech acts tending their relation: "What did we do but exchange our young vows with the best faith in the world—publicly, rejoicingly, with the full assent of every one connected with us? I mean of course," he said with his grave kind smile, "till we broke off so completely because we found that, practically, financially, on the hard worldly basis—we couldn't work it" (541). Note that two webs of connectivity are being simultaneously asserted: the high-order mesh of relatives and social connections and the lower fabric of productive, labor, and financial relations at the basis. In Marxian logic, "the totality of the relations of production forms the economic structure, the real basis from which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond specific forms of consciousness" ("Preface" to *Contribution*

159-160). Admittedly, Julia Bride and Murray Brush are two instantiations of the specific form of consciousness New York society could produce, and they embody the risks of subsiding from the legal-political superstructure which they never completely entered—they never married—back into the “hard worldly basis” they have never fully abandoned. This is the form of Julia’s consciousness before meeting Murray:

That would be the “history” with which, in case of definite demand, she should be able to supply Mr. French: that she had already, again and again, any occasion offering, chattered and scuffled over ground provided, according to his idea, for walking the gravest of minuets. If that then had been all their *kind* of history, hers and her mother’s, at least there was plenty of it: it was the superstructure raised on the other group of facts, those of the order of their having been always so perfectly pink and white, so perfectly possessed of clothes, so perfectly splendid, so perfectly idiotic. (528)

In this meditation, the disjunction Barthes once phrased as “l’histoire ou le bas-fonds de la *psyche*” (37) is resolved into a plain equation, insofar as “their kind of history” is little more than shallows and slums (*bas-fonds*), but it is also depsychologized into a public-social event. Their emerged *history* of psychological fatuity amounts, at (literal) bottom, to a *story* of underworld exposure. This is of course part of a general rhetorical tendency to abridge History—as traumatic invisible totality, as an experience of necessity forestalling “thematization or reification as a mere object of representation” (Jameson, *Political* 102)—into histories, and histories into stories. In *The American Scene* James shows pity for “the convicted state of the unfortunate who

knows the whole of so many of his stories" (142; my emphases). Indeed, what Julia apprehends as the "other group of facts" makes up a basis or infrastructure she can never just leave behind: it is the "ground provided" over which she and whoever comes along as marriage material are bound to remain, in full view of all, "walking the gravest of minuets" (528). Marx once quoted Smith to the effect that "wherever capital predominates, industry prevails: wherever revenue, idleness" ("Economic" 301), and Julia's is certainly an industrious career through the glamorous dancing floors and foul *bas-fonds* of capital-crazed Manhattan. No time for idleness, not even to contemplate the oils on the first floor of the Met.⁸ The *facts* at her *ground* level include those factors of physical appearance (features) and property (commodities) that constitute hers and her mother comparative *use value* as the basis from which to calculate their *exchange value*. In Engels' terms:

The production costs of two objects being equal, the deciding factor determining their comparative value will be utility (*die Brauchbarkeit*). This basis (*Basis*) is the only just basis of exchange. But if one proceeds from this basis, who is to decide the utility of the object? The mere opinion of the parties concerned? Then in any event *one* will be cheated.

Julia feels that her mother, unnaturally drawn into mother-daughter competition, has ended up deceiving and betraying her, whence her debasement. She is the *one* that has been *cheated*. Thrown into ever-growing phases of exchange, she witnesses what Marx calls in *Misère*, citing Proudhon, the raise of her venal value—"her measureless prize" (James, *Selected* 525)—to the third power: "Mettez qu'une personne ait

proposé à d'autres personnes, ses collaborateurs dans des fonctions diverses, de faire de la vertu, de l'amour, etc., une valeur vénale, d'élever la valeur d'échange à sa troisième et dernière puissance" (Marx, *Misère* 81). But what is striking in the above James passage is the use of the technical term "superstructure", which complements the noun "basis." I believe we should take this term as one of those "apparent accidentals of language in James's fiction" that, according to Zwinger, any "analytical inquiry" pursued as "close-in reading" should care to factor in (Zwinger 3, 14-15).⁹ James had already used the term "superstructure" in *An International Episode*, and he returns to it in the prefaces to the New York Edition.¹⁰ In the novella, Mrs. Westgate holds "that the most charming girl in the world is a Boston superstructure upon a New York *fond*; or perhaps a New York superstructure upon a Boston *fond*. At any rate, it's the mixture" (99). The contrast remains that between a basis or background (the *fond*) and the superstructure built on it. But James may well be activating the homophony *fond/fund* to render the "New York *fond*" all the more ambivalent—designating an infrastructural sewerage as well as a superstructural cash-nexus. The ambivalence is reinforced by an analogy James could have spotted in (perhaps lifted from) his brother's *Pragmatism*, published only one year before "Julia Bride":

Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs "pass," so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as nobody refuses them. But this all points to direct face-to-face verifications somewhere, without which the fabric of truth collapses like a financial system with no cash-basis whatever. You accept my verification of one thing, I yours of another. We trade on each other's truth. But beliefs verified

concretely by somebody are the posts of the whole *superstructure*. (576-77, my emphases)¹¹

Basis-superstructure is a traditional Marxian dichotomy William James was probably familiar with. But did Henry know it? Did the man who apprehend the Burkean connection between red radicalism, French barricades, and “the sinister passion of theories” (*A Little Tour in France* 167) ever read Marx?¹² Probably not directly. He admired, we know, William Morris, and was familiar with socialist and anarchist literature, at least since the composition of *The Princess Casamassima*.¹³ It is not unlikely therefore that, through indirect reading, distinctively Marxian figurations of social space infiltrated his writing. Or that he arrived at such figurations through different, yet converging, paths. The fact that Marx admired Balzac’s and Dickens’s social penetration provides a solid rationale to this convergence, as both novelists were presumably tapping the same narrative-rhetorical sources.

III

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels develop for the first time the dichotomy basis-superstructure. To explain what the *wirkliche* (real) *Basis* is they resort to the metaphor of the earth: “In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven [*von der Erde zum Himmel gestiegen*]” (47). The real basis is also a *materialistische Basis* or *irdische Basis* (earthy basis). The tropic displacement of the polarity basis-superstructure towards the opposition earth-heaven underscores the topological orientation of the trope, organized around notions of high and low, as well as the earth-bound quality of a basis

that is humble because enlivened, like earth, by humus. This humble ground is their new point of departure: “We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process” (47). Thus the earthy basis is opposed to the “idealistischen Superstruktur” (57). To prioritize the latter over the former entails a revolutionary shift in orientation, both axiological and topological. When they argue that “in the whole conception of history up to the present this real basis of history has either been totally neglected or else considered as a minor matter [*nur als eine Nebensache betrachtet*] quite irrelevant to the course of history” (59) they are significantly re-investing with fresh value a minor, low, humble matter. (Note that Marx’s sharp formula “this real basis of history” reads like a conflation of James’ above-quoted phrases “the hard worldly basis” and “their kind of history”). An implicit project of redemption suggests itself. Although Marx despised Proudhon’s idealistic leanings, he had unwittingly espoused the metaphysical dualism organizing the latter’s arguments. Proudhon ironically referred to God’s becoming human as a “humiliation de l’infini” (10), and to the act of creation as a delivery of “les existences les plus humbles” (6). Following Feuerbach, Marx replaced God with man, and spoke of a (human) process of creation of humble misery: “dans les mêmes rapports dans lesquels se produit la richesse, la misère se produit aussi” (Marx, *Misère* 177). The production of misery is synchronous with the growth of capitalism. Basis and superstructure simultaneously prosper in a logic of reciprocal (dialectical) interaction. The alienation process has rendered “the great mass of humanity propertyless and produced, at the same time, the contradiction of an existing world of wealth and culture” (Marx & Engels, *German* 56). Misery and wealth (and culture) are present “at the same time”. Their simultaneous

coexistence is, of course, a major challenge— a rhetorical-cum-ideological challenge— for a tradition of narrative realism, the one James saw himself as belonging to, that still relied confidently on the analogy of painting.

Note the emphasis: what is being constantly produced—the humble and miserable— becomes in turn the social infrastructure that generates the materials called upon to grow into human labor and forces of production. The base is produced by the transformation of the human into humus, of working men and women into fertilizing labor force and labor value. The upshot is downright dehumanization (*Entmenschung*), the production of “poverty conscious of its spiritual and physical poverty [*geistigen und physischen Elends*]” (Marx & Engels, *Die heilige* 44). But what is “spiritual poverty”? In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx described “the abstract existence of man as a mere workman who [...] tumbles day after day from his fulfilled nothingness into absolute nothingness, into his social and hence real non-existence” (336). Unfortunately, this spectral determination is plagued by circularity. We need to flesh out such inexistence, as Marx does in *Misère*, with the notation that the negligible differences between factory workers are reduced to the quantity of time they spend at their work post. In turn this quantity depends on material factors like the physical constitution and age of the workers, but also on “causes morales purement negatives, telle que la patience, l’impassibilité, l’assiduité” (101). Three Stoic-Christian moral virtues are posited as pre-conditions for spiritual misery and social inexistence, a lesson not lost on the creators of *Bartleby* or Joseph K. Nietzsche was not the first thinker to profess allergy to these virtues. Marx was also repelled by them, whence the constant sarcastic overlap, in *Capital*, of humbleness and humiliation.¹⁴ His analytic

depiction of the dehumanization of the lower classes is informed by a revulsion at the idea of moral submission. The implication of downward pressure when the low is further lowered down, already present the prefix sub- in the terms *subjection* and *submission*, is evoked in the term “Unterdrückung” (oppression, repression) lavishly used by Marx and Engels in phrases like “the oppression of the proletariat” or “the oppressed class.” In them, the prefix “unter” confirms a topological organization of the social space into a high heaven and a low earth that is ever on the verge of becoming a hell. Marx strongly suggests that it depends on the moral force of the workers to be able to prevent such slippage of the low into the lower. And yet, at this point of his argument, he gets entangled in moral ciphers with a remarkable potential for literary dramatization. Thus, to resist further humiliation the worker should not be humble. “Demut” (humbleness) entails “Demütigung” (humiliation): both nouns are used in *German Ideology*. Additional moral concepts employed by Marx to characterize this moral abjection, like “Niederträchtigkeit” (vileness), “Erniedrigung” (abasement) and “Unterwürfigkeit” or “Unterwerfung” (submissiveness), all incorporate an adverbial or prepositional index (*nieder, niedrig, unter*) denoting baseness. Marx’s most eloquent indictment of an ethics of submissiveness can be found in his 1847 essay on “The Communism of the Rheinischer Beobachter”:

The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement (*Erniedrigung*), submissiveness (*Unterwürfigkeit*) and humbleness (*Demut*), in short, all the qualities of the rabble, and the proletariat, which will not permit itself to be treated as rabble, needs its courage, its self-confidence, its pride and its sense of independence even more than its bread. (200)

Only free of these demeaning dispositions can the proletariat produce “the total earth [der ganzen Erde]” (Marx & Engels, *German* 47), a ground on which devolves at least one fraction of the superstructural heaven. But the human humus of this total earth must first learn to be unhumble. Surely, the prospective social specimen of the low unhumble creature that is totally cognizant of her plight is absent from James’s fiction. He refuses to grant a proletarian consciousness the distinction of being *fully* aware of its own misery—a privilege only available to those who, as William Morris pointed out, can fathom the structural causes of their destitution. Only this understanding—the working of an “idea” cultivated by a “liberal education” (Morris 4, 19) —can bring about “a change of the basis of society” (4). This cognitive-transformative virtue—the ability to grasp “how the political and social world are run” (Trilling 63)—is therefore reserved to centers of consciousness that are endowed with at least some superstructural affordances: this monition was never lost on Thomas Hardy. Even impatient and imaginative characters like the unnamed protagonist of “In the Cage” seem bereft of the real tools of their emancipation. The girl, described as “our humble friend” (James, *Selected* 341), works as a modest telegraphist in London. The narrow space she is afforded at the post office is literally her cage, but the title also tropes her social confinement: she is entrapped, by dint of her low social class and degraded place in the labor market, inside a base infrastructural region from which no possibility of redemption seems conceivable. She is what Marx and Engels would call a “restricted town-animal [bornierten Stadttier]” (*German* 69). The girl’s humbleness is therefore her lowness, the abasement of a consciousness that cannot understand its own predicament and is therefore bound to cognitive *restriction*.¹⁵ Even though the tale

submits the rather revolutionary postulate that “A good servant doesn’t need to be told” (383) the fact is that the girl falters morally and intellectually before “an abyss quite measureless” (382) and is finally bound to seek refuge in a “little home” (384) little better than her cage. Likewise, limited consciousness is also a hindrance for Brooksmith, another distinguished subaltern in the James canon. The butler is described as a man of “the servile class” (James, *Selected* 176) who aspires to breathe the polite and high-class “atmosphere of criticism” (176) and yet fails and is bound to return, in the company of his “bland and intensely humble” (184) mother, to a “short sordid street in Marylebone, one of those corners of London that wear the last expression of sickly meanness” (184).

In James, people dwelling at the basis of society—what Marx and Engels call “ordinary life [*gewöhnlichen Leben*]” and epitomize in the English *shopkeeper* (*German* 67)—are not necessarily able “to distinguish between what somebody professes and what he really is” (*German* 67). They cannot afford this blinding lucidity. Compared to these characters, Julia Bride is given exceptionally far-reaching latitudes of consciousness: she is aware that the ironic curse in her surname induces the “lengthening” of her “working-hours” (Marx, “Communist” 7)—meeting at noon with X in the Museum, at three with Y in the Park. Her grasp of the social space is significantly more comprehensive than other town animals. Sure enough, her strategy of denial and exoneration, her futile attempt to erase her “history” and “[produce] a cleaner slate” (542), evokes the logic of repression that governs the way ideology—a product of the superstructure—muddles and falsifies our representation of our real conditions of existence. But she grasps her cognitive plight: she knows that she knows (about the

“perfectly splendid and perfectly idiotic” nature of her fading material possessions, about the odds of social survival) and she knows that it is wiser to ignore. Strategic ignorance determines in turn the uneasy acceptance of her assigned role in the social script, a role placed only one inch higher than that of the *femme de mauvaise vie*.

Needless to say, James is neither George Eliot nor Dickens. His resources of moral pity for the humble are seriously compromised and perhaps outweighed by his fascination with the spectacle of the socially high becoming an inch lower. But like his realist precursors, he was nonetheless aware that moral-aesthetic fascination with the drama of social decline was dialectically pledged to social totality that posed immense artistic challenges. The details of Julia’s superstructural conversation and “subconversation” (Jameson, “Remarks” 300) can easily be reported, as the story profusely demonstrates, but her sordid “minuets” are far harder to depict, as they are by close implication related to basic labor force and relations of production—to all (workers, objects, networks) that interconnects in the infrastructure as the possibility of the above. Nobody knew it better than James, just as “nobody knew better than Julia that inexpressible charm and quotable ‘charms’ (quotable like prices, rates, shares, or whatever, the things they dealt in downtown) are two distinct categories, the safest thing for the latter being, on the whole, that it might include the former” (538).

Inclusion (sublation) and wholeness (totality): these figures map out the possibilities of dialectical thought. At a more unconscious level, one that was unerringly informed by romance symbolism and allegory (Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Hawthorne), James fathomed that “the things they dealt in downtown” are actually located in a social *inferus* (hell) that is never completely detached from mere *earth* as the site where the

postlapsarian curse of labor is inflicted. And earth remains the simplest and most reliable productive force, the humblest component of an infrastructure whose richness Marx, following a well-established physiocratic tradition, partly imputed to the humus.¹⁶ In *The German Ideology*, human history is described as springing from the “natural bases”—from “natural conditions in which man finds himself—geological, orohydrographical, climatic and so on” (42). In other texts, Marx returns to this compelling image of the *couche inférieure* or sub-soil to urge the induction that History is at one with humus.¹⁷

To be sure, although the elucidation of this relation holds scarce relevance for the social sciences, the Marxian clarification of the relationship between a *couche inférieure*—Julia’s “hard worldly basis” and “other group of facts”—negotiating basic infrastructural rapports and the dizzy and delusive heights of the superstructure is certainly revolutionary. The etymological misprision according to which there is no *human* without *humus* would appear to undergird Marx’s attempt to give new speculative life to the Stoic and tendentially Protestant lesson that there are “no dreams and delusions” without a “return to reality” (“In the Cage”).¹⁸ The best corollary to this theoretical vision holding that the spectral phenomena in the superstructure are but revenants from the earth was forcefully suggested by Derrida in his own return to Marx: “Tout revenant paraît ici venir et revenir de la terre, en venir comme d’une clandestinité enfouie (l’humus et le terreau, la tombe et la prison souterraine), pour y revenir, comme au plus bas, vers l’humble, l’humide, l’humilié” (154).

IV

The reader may object that my discussion of “Julia Bride” has failed so far to provide one single piece of textual evidence confirming James’s conscious or unconscious structural-figural reliance on a *bas-fond* or *couche inférieure* effectively made of earth. We have seen Julia drowning in murky waters, shirking the grounds and bases of her shabby history, but not yet lying upside down in the mud. Still, the narration insidiously gestures towards “her now certain ruin” (549) in ways that are figuratively reminiscent of lowness and abjection. Her ironic characterization as “some desperate erring lady ‘hunted down’ in a play” (531) ironically foreshadows her biting the dust. Also, the final realization during the conversation in the park with Murray Brush where she has been “[patronized] from below upward” (545) is described as a grimy submersion into baseness:

And as she took it all in, as it spread to a flood, with the great lumps and masses of truth it was floating, she knew inevitable submission, not to say submersion, as she had never known it in her life; going down and down before it, not even putting out her hands to resist or cling by the way, only reading into the young man’s very face an immense fatality and, for all his bright nobleness his absence of rancor or of protesting pride, the great gray blankness of her doom. (545)

The figuration of “the great lumps and masses of truth” floating in the “flood” resonates with an earlier reference to “masses of fibs,” and both images presume the framing trope of the net in which the epistemic (sub-conversational) detritus get

caught.¹⁹ The “hard worldly basis” was the phrase that opened the story’s spatial logic, with Murray as the succubus of a “couche inférieure” that James tended to identify with a Parisian society never fully recovered from the Commune.²⁰ We must remember that Murray, the man of “bright nobleness” (545), has just arrived from Paris, and recall too that Marx quoted Timon’s diatribe against money, with gold upsetting the ontology of things, making “foul fair, wrong right, / Base noble” (*Timon of Athens* 4.3.29-30).²¹ Thus the Hegelian oscillation between a *noble* and a *base* consciousness—also much evoked by Marx—is here reworked as a swaying between Brush’s apparent bright nobleness and his real baseness. This ironic twist is nothing if compared with the fact that the man who is supposed to do justice to Julia’s surname and save here from her lower entanglements (her story, our History) should also turn out to be *base + ill + French = Basil French*.²²

But these reversals merely confirm what is otherwise revealed by the story’s spatial symbolism, to wit, the connection between her *humiliation* and metropolitan *humus*, between her moral *abasement* and the social *basis*. This symbolism, I am arguing, turns around the split between basis and superstructure, and it irradiates in generic oppositions like ground-air and earth-heaven, or, more specifically, downtown-uptown, Park-Museum. Julia is often compared to a bird only in need of “*that lift*” (543), learning, by the “beat of her wing [...] how high she was going” (537), or “[floating] even to her own sense swanlike away” (538), but also to a climber scaling “her altitude” (545) and “worldly height” (546). Her world is split between the higher and the lower, an unreachable heaven and the all-too-real earth where she and her mother have enjoyed a fleeting libidinal prosperity: “To have our reward in this world

we've had too sweet a time. We've had it all right down here!" (532). This split is reflected in the divided space of her meetings: she confers with Basil French and Mr. Pitman on the first floor of the Museum, and with Murray Brush in the Park nearby, at ground level. In *The American Scene*, published only one year before "Julia Bride", James is intrigued by the realization that "my Metropolitan Hospital was somehow in the garden, just where the soil, *the very human soil itself*, was richest" (141, my emphasis). The shock is rehearsed a paragraph ahead: "Was it in the garden also, as I say, that the Metropolitan Museum had meanwhile struck me as standing?" (141).

"She had walked with her friend to the top of the wide steps of the Museum, those that descended from the galleries of painting..." (522): the story begins at the top, then descends. While above, Julia is painfully reminded of the receding drift of superstructural comforts: "she saw the great shining room, with its mockery of art and 'style' and security, all the things she was vainly after" (533). And she descends into a "sequestered alley of the Park" (539) in order to talk with Murray. She had refused to meet Basil there because "those devious paths and favouring shades" were "haunted [...] by the general echo of her untrammelled past" (539). The place "reeks with old associations [...] with memories evoked by the young man who now awaited her" (539). The place, in short, stinks with her history. The associations reach out to New York downtown, a site of Capital overdetermined by infrastructural networks of debased human labor, forces of production and relations of production, but they are now suddenly crammed in the dense seclusion of the Park. The olfactory trope (*reeks with*) suggests the metonymic density of her demotic liaisons. As Bruce Robbins has noted, "the smell of the infrastructure is the smell of the public".²³ Haunted by her

history, tangled in her reticular basis, Julia regresses to a luscious ground enriched with all the tropic paraphernalia (“sequestered”, “devious”, “shades”) of Protestant-garden evil. Symbolic allusion and association (Spenser, Milton, Bunyan, Richardson, Hawthorne) are thicker in the Puritan anti-pastoral domains of this “rhetorical infrastructure” (Rowe 208). The twisted paths and alleys are there. The relations and connections are there. The facts of her history are there, in the “unweeded garden / That grows to seed” (*Hamlet* 1.2.135-36). Then, suddenly, two earthy revenants turn up, two spectral presences that appear to “venir et revenir de la terre, en venir comme d’une clandestinité enfouie” (Derrida 154). The sordid nature of Julia’s former society is evoked through a striking literary allusion: she and her ex-fiancé talking in the Park are compared to the “nefarious pair of Nancy and the artful Dodger, talking things over in the manner of ‘Oliver Twist’” (542). The comparison morphs turn-of-the-century Manhattan into pre-Victorian criminal London, thus ghastly archaizing the infrastructural hell from which Julia is trying to escape. The intertext casts Murray as the artful Dodger, and Julia as the young prostitute Nancy. Dickens’ outcast girl is a recursive phantom in James’ autobiographical reminiscences: he evokes staying at home as a child while his parents attended theatrical productions of Dickens, casting Charlotte Cushman—“terribly out picture and the frame we should today pronounce her, I fear—as the Nancy of Oliver Twist” (*A Small Boy* 98). Or a visit to London, in 1858, when the summer crowds accosted him as “figures reminding me of George Cruikshank’s Artful Dodger and his Bill Sikes and his Nancy, with only the bigger brutality of life” (241). In the same book he recalls the way he “pored over Oliver Twist” (103) and the impact that Cruikshank’s illustrations had on his innocent mind: “the scenes and figures [...] present themselves under his hand as but more subtly

sinister, or more suggestively queer, than the frank badness and horrors" (103). The figurative apparition of Nancy (as Julia) to Julia recalls Cruikshank's extraordinary illustration of "Monk and the Jew": in both cases (Julia, Oliver) the fragile hopes of social promotion are crushed by the eerie return of former associations. In his 1866 essay on the novels of George Eliot, James pointed out that "a man has no associate so intimate as his own character, his own career,—his present and his past; and if he builds up his career of timid and base actions, they cling to him like evil companions, to sophisticate, to corrupt, and to damn him" (*Literary I* 931) and F.O. Matthiessen described the omens of revolution that Strether could still feel in Paris as "black shadows looming large at the very edge of James's pictures" (35). Nancy and Jack are phantasmatic surrogates of two such evil companions, two such shadows, looming large at the edge of a painting that turns out to be—in *the last instance*—more edge (*marge, parergon, vestibule*) than picture.²⁴

V

Fredric Jameson has recently faulted James with the "reactionary political gesture" of responding, with *ressentiment*, against various modes of "political activism" ("Remarks" 304). The Master is thus implicitly identified with Badiou's *reactive subject* (54-58). The gathering nomenclature is informed by a logic whereby some people *act* (the active, the activists) whilst others merely *react* (the reactive and reactionary). One distinctively passive mode of reaction is that of the distant, uncommitted spectator placed above the social fray. The gathering prefix re- (reaction, *resentiment*) also inventories the temporal layoff characteristic of theoretical reflection (Jameson speaks of *reflexivity*). It is no doubt tempting to assign this role to James—the role of Rorty's

liberal ironist, nonchalantly shuffling provisional vocabularies—and lay the nagging question of his politics to rest. It was, some may argue, never a question in the first place. Still, the logic of this assignation bears revision. Commenting on James's fascination with "aristocratic extravagance", John Carlos Rowe resorts to characteristically Marxian vocabulary to show that

the "art of life" that seems the ultimate labor of James's aristocrats is, in fact, an artistry akin to the rhetoric involved in the production of capital, they "style" of what Marx termed "the theory of surplus value." In a capitalist system of economics, the very identity of the capitalist depends upon his ability to generate a "surplus" product in excess of the cost of the laborer's maintenance. In one sense, the capitalist's own labor is precisely the artistry required to exploit his workers to produce such a surplus. (137)

If we take this powerful analogy literally, then Julia is the maintained character whose effort to remain above the infrastructure she metonymically attracts is the labor that keeps the show rolling: the resulting surplus lays the ground where Jamesian artistry displays itself. On this ground, James as narrator is the capitalist whose art of life is to contemplate others and chronicle, with analytic style, the day, week, or year of their living dangerously. Julia is the worker, and James the capitalist as exploiter. But, and this is Rowe's shrewd point, James is also a skilled worker in his own right, a practitioner, like the grandsons of Balzac, of the serious craft of style. So we have Julia teetering on the edge of a precipice (the worker as exploited), and we have James reporting her vertigo (the worker as capitalist or exploiter). Both are of course gifted

with theoretical-reflective powers, and more or less capable of diagnosing the moral malaise that brings about her downfall. Still, the part of the social theoretician is fully taken by James in his New-York-Edition prefatorial remarks to the tale, which are anything but sparse or slight.²⁵ If the analogy holds, then this arch-critical James plays the role of Marx, addressing, from a distance, the entire logic of Capital—scrutinizing both the exploiter and the exploited, the capitalist and the worker. Interestingly, his first important remark turns on the novelist’s rhetorical exploitation of the girl whose labor force (her life) is metonymically bolstered with “the rest of the quantity of life” obtained from “other lives”:

Julia is “foreshortened,” I admit, to within an inch of her life; but I judge her life still saved and yet at the same time the equal desideratum, its depicted full fusion with other lives that remain undepicted, not lost. The other lives, the rest of the quantity of life, press in, squeeze forward, to the best of their ability; but, restricted as the whole thing is to implications and involutions only, they prevail at best by indirectness; and the bid for amusement, the effect presumably sought, is by making us conceive and respond to them, making us feel, taste, smell and enjoy them, without our really knowing why or how.

(*Literary II*, 1265)

The question here is how many *other lives* are allowed to cram into the produced picture. How far can the webs of “involution and implication” go? The tale alludes to some important lives—her mother, her mother’s ex-husbands, her ex-fiancés—that determine Julia’s fate, but the convoluted phrasing suggests more. The suggestion

(implication) of an invisible, potentially unlimited totality that the two minds (Julia's and James') metonymically experience as an expanding web where things "prevail by indirectness," is of course James' trope for the novelistic imagination. The capitalist (novelist) takes pride in having hired a worker *on whom nothing is lost*. Marx would object that what is lost is the worker, but James the theorist is also profoundly aware that she may well perish of rhetorical exertion. To Julia, the theorist observes, attaches a distinctive "note [...] of multitudinous reference" (1265). The argument is predictably catachrestic: her "detrimental anecdote" (540) works, metonymically, as "a key to a whole view of manners and morals, a whole range of American social aspects" (1266). A Neoplatonic, Leibnizian and Whitmanesque logic of *pars pro toto* or *multum in parvo* organizes her synecdochic part. The theorist describes her as a "small reflector" of "absolutely minimum size" that allows us "to catch [...] the very movement of life" (1265). Note, however, the studied vagueness of "social aspects" and "movement of life": experience may not be limited, but James, who was neither Zola nor Whitman, knew where to stop. Julia's small reflector catches, however, by indirection, just like a spider senses the capture of potential prey without having to confirm by seeing. Unseen, not lost: undepicted, not lost. But if the art of fiction is (like) the art of the painter, then how do you depict the *undepicted, not lost*? In "The Art of Fiction" James confidently praised "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern" (*Literary* 153). But to the late theorist, the novelist's challenge seems rather more formidable: how to play the notes of "multitudinous reference," that is, of the totality of the "New York public scene," when one is only pressing the small key of a girl afflicted with "up-town debility" (1266). Yet the risk is worth taking, for "what if she

were the silver key, tiny in itself, that would unlock a treasure?—the treasure of a whole view of manners and morals, a whole range of American social aspects?” (1266). Precisely because the catachresis is not typical (Julia is neither a lady nor a prostitute, neither accommodated bourgeois nor proletarian), and because those very manners and morals were abasing themselves to the point of indistinction—the heinous murkiness of “unrestricted freedom” (1267)—her representativeness becomes unbound and therefore virtually inefficient: the pressure of a tendentially total (one could say, Whitmanesque) incorporation proves too strong for her minor, tiny, silver constitution.

So Julia’s “history” is her basis or infrastructure, the ground of material forces and relations enabling her soaring up towards the superstructure (art, marriage) as well as the necessity of her decline: Marx, remember, considered the declining rate of profit the most important law of political economy.²⁶ For James, the “effacement of difference” in New York living habits is “the very law of the structural fact” (*American* 125), and this involves a “move up” (134) as much as a descent. The Balzacian fall into low relations is her “history.” But what about her story? Well, her story is “Julia Bride,” described by James in the Preface to the New York Edition as a “nouvelle” that aimed to make the “majestic mass” of the new “American social aspects [...] turn round” conveniently. But the tale, alas, failed to carry out the task. I mentioned at the beginning that in “Julia Bride” James was confronted with the artistic challenge of representing the social totality the protagonist and the narrator are so apprehensively aware of: “New York was vast” (532). But this is also her struggle, for she strives to sublimate her repressed basis, and move on. Hence the tentative identification between

James the narrator and the girl, and of both and James the theorist. Character, novelist, and theorist would thus merge in the same mind, a spider-like persona spinning a web of disembodied thought to capture the rubble of a “detrimental anecdote” (540).²⁷ What the three share is a keen realization of the importance of taking cognitive stock of the whole (the social totality), tempered by the dreadful expectation of confronting its inferior domains. *Apprehension* is the term that best describes the impossible effort to disown existing knowledge. The resulting awkwardness transpires in the unconventional and false solution given to the rhetorical problem thus posited: both the girl and James proceed to the representational foreclosure of totality (the whole range, the whole view) while asserting the minor key’s representative status: Julia obviously wants to save herself, and James does his best, in the preface, to win her back: “‘Here we are again!’ she seemed, with a chalked grimace, to call out to me” (1265). Unlike the experience of “poor little dim and archaic Daisy Miller” (1265), Julia’s is almost “never limited and it is never complete” (*Literary I* 52). Her peculiar way of being “related with a certain intensity to the world about her” condemns her case to a “complexus of larger and stranger cases” (1265). The use here of the odd term “complexus,” no doubt related to “superstructure” and “spider-web,” is proof of the exertions of a theory-charged imagination that works in excess of the available categories to describe what a narrative can do.²⁸ If a story is asked to leave areas of reality (life) undepicted but not lost, then these things must remain apprehended in the story through unconventional, extradiegetic means. Indeed, one may argue that it is because there is, in “Julia Bride”, an excess of History over story that we notice an excess of Telling over story. The surplus of telling—the capitalist’s artistry—attests to a deeper and larger excess of

residual, unincorporated (social) material, solely intimated through “involutions and implications,” the most poignant of which is the spectral figuration of Nancy in Central Park. Only through the *indirections* of literary *influence* (Follini “James, Dickens” 228) can we intuit what James calls, with demonic vagueness, “the whole thing.”

If Julia does not want to remember the whole of her history, James abstains too from seeing the whole of his (and our) History. Both foreclose totality by forgoing the infrastructure in their attempt to remain high up in the near-aristocratic network of “functions, forms” (1994: 120). They are like “New York, trying, trying its very hardest, to grow, not yet knowing (by so many indications) what to grow *on*” (*American* 122). James’s powerful meditation in the New York chapters of *The American Scene* on the absence of “implications of completeness, that is, of a sustaining social order” (123) is the best commentary to date on the social significance of “Julia Bride.” So what fails ultimately is a metaphoric logic of total representativeness: high society can no longer (alas) sustain the whole, but neither can Julia, placed between both orders—the morally sustaining (Ruskin’s vanishing aristocracy) and the materially sustaining (Marx’s expanding proletariat). Only a syntagmatic dynamic open to “the inevitable metonymical pull of differences” (Buelens 129) can actually evoke a slippery totality that is never limited and it is never complete.

VI

Fredric Jameson suggested long ago that “the coming into view of infrastructure itself is simply the sign of the approach of the concrete [the all-inclusive middle-class] irrespective of the width or narrowness of focus, of the generality or precision of

ultimate concrete detail (that is, the lower economic reaches of reality) which is thus registered" (*Marxism* 322). But how much of the wide infrastructure—those "lower economic reaches of reality"—can be crammed into the narrow focus of a story? For how long can Julia go on looking at her ground (her basis) without her story shifting from sharp moral drama into sensational melodrama? How much of History can a story bear? James construed this impasse as the choice between the attempt "to ride the nouvelle downtown" in order to confront "American town-life" or "renounce the nouvelle" altogether and renounce this "characteristic towniness" (*Literary II* 1275). Buitenhuis has argued that James was "disbarred" from any attempt at representing a whole area of American experience—the "world downtown," the major key—in his fiction "by sheer ignorance of [...] business operations." "He was confined, for subject," he concludes, "to the minor key of the 'uptown world'" (143). But this is not completely true. First, the downtown world was not exclusively one of business operations: it *implied*—and "implication" is a prized notion for James—a much wider realm of human labor and material relations of production, a humble and debased reality he seriously apprehended. To reduce downtown life to finance capital and Wall Street "extremities" (*Literary II* 1275) would be an error. There is more to "the sense of 'going' down" (1273), Henry James acknowledges, than the name "downtown" evokes, and this is something that Melville's *Bartleby* and Crane's *Maggie* give abundant proof of. And second, Julia and her mother are not quintessential specimens of the uptown world, for they live in a "horrible flat which was so much too far up and too near the East Side" (539). They are rather—like James himself—liminal, amphibious creatures in a democratic space increasingly marked by "equality of conditions" (Tocqueville 3).

When James the theorist suggests that the sound of the “major key” can only be grasped by indirection and implication he is not stating that of Capital we can only mark “the traces of its becoming” (Marx, *Grundrisse* 638), or track the trail: he is professing the inability, due to “an insuperably *restricted* experience,” to force his art all the way into the “monstrous labyrinth that stretches from Canal Street to Battery” (James, *Literary II* 1273; my emphasis), as other writers, perusing other locations, had done (Gaskell, Dickens, Eliot, Balzac, Zola) and would do (Hardy, Forster, Lawrence, Woolf). Like Marx, James factors in the relevance of the whole, and acknowledges the importance of not losing the infrastructure. Unlike Marx, he is more than content with leaving it undepicted. Like Freud, James “grants recognition to the detritus of the unconscious and the unacknowledged, asserting its value in the process of identifying the experience, known and unknown, of the individual” (Zwinger 10). Unlike Freud, he honors the powers of repression. Jamesian modernity partly originates in his readiness to permit this acknowledgement and this recognition to saturate his story-telling with an intolerable sense of what is not being told—what of History is not in the story, History being too the *whole* history of the individual. Small wonder if his story-telling inevitably tends to fade into sheer telling.

In “The Art of Fiction” James compared the artistic dignity of narrative to that of painting: “The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life. When it ceases to compete as the canvas of the painter competes, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself *humble* in order to be forgiven (*Literary I* 46; the latter is my emphasis). Creative courage—lack of humility—builds upon the ambition to code a totality that includes both the humble

and the associated risk of nihilating abasement. This dialectical impasse stupefies “Julia Bride” by inserting a hiatus—a “yawning little chasm” (548), “gaps of connection” (542)—whose rationale is rhetorical: the part—the minor key: James and his girl—fails to serve the whole. To be sure, calling James a “minor key” or a “minor character” would be another disservice, but, as Fredric Jameson shows in a reading of Benito Pérez Galdós that reclaims the hermeneutic affordances the Christian *sermo humilis*, all narrators, including the Master, are exposed:

The prestidigitation whereby the formerly “omniscient narrator” is transformed, by a touch of the magic wand, into yet another minor character [...] nothing is more appropriately emblematic for our purposes here: Henry James—himself just such a minor character in real life, a listener and observer, a voyeur and a gossip, the eager recipient of hearsay and tall tales of all kinds (preferably usable ones!)—would have been indignant at being assigned so humiliating a position. (*Antinomies* 101)

This is a nice point, but “indignant” strikes me as too big a word.

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Ensayo sobre Zola: "the plunge into pestilent depths" (889)

Abstract

“The Hard Worldly Basis”: History and Infrastructure in Henry James’s “Julia Bride”

“Julia Bride” is a narrative haunted by the “disgusting humiliating thing” implied in the disreputable lives the protagonist and her mother have led. Their shared scandalous history is described as a “superstructure raised on the other group of facts”. Julia aims at social absolution—the overcoming of all the infrastructural determinants that map out the nether regions of the humiliating, humble and abased—what the narrator calls “the hard worldly basis.” The story is thus told from the perspective of a keen consciousness—shared by author and protagonist—of the *basis-superstructure* polarity, a central dialectical motif in Marxian thought. “Julia Bride” emerges as an illustration of James’s dialectical attempt to depict high-class consciousness as a superstructural phenomenological dynamic beholden to the apprehensive elimination (sublation) of factual life. But repressed History always returns, with a (ghostly) vengeance: the image of Dickens’ Nancy in Central Park epitomizes the shocks of dialectical survival.

¹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (267).

² The Marxian polarity has been critically deployed by some James readers like Fotios Sarris, Elizabeth Aileen Barnum, and Dorothy J. Hale. Less dialectically, Thomas J. Otten plays up the dichotomy in a neo-materialist direction.

³ The connection between both tales was suggested by James (*Literary II* 1265). Let me recall that Parrington memorably captured the irony of James's attempted but never fully achieved flight from "the crude turmoil released by the new freedoms" (128)

⁴ See Laclau and Mouffe (x). James uses it in his prefatory comments to "Lady Barbarina" (*Literary II*, 1213).

⁵ I allude to Adorno's sentence, translated as "the whole is false" (*Minima Moralia* 50). The original is "Das Ganze ist das Unwahre".

⁶ The correlation between the rising tide of oceans, the drive of democratic forces, and the resulting socio-moral indiscriminability attending "new" forms of literature organizes the very odd and compelling figural logic of the opening of James's essay on "The New Novel", published in 1914.

⁷ See for instance his early review of *Our Mutual Friend* in *Literary Criticism I* (853-858).

⁸ It is symptomatic of the abstract austerity of James's late style that he should spare the opportunity of using a painting of the Met collection to endow the story with symbolic depth. See Follini, "Museums and Exhibitions."

⁹ A cursory glance at *The Times* archives shows that "superstructure" was a common term at the turn of the century in documents dealing with naval engineering and architecture and was figuratively often used in legal-political contexts, in conjunction with "foundation".

¹⁰ Discussing the impression made by Mary Garland in his novel *Roderick Hudson*, James laments the fact that "the ground has not been laid for it, and when that is the case one builds all vainly in the air: one patches up one's superstructure, one paints it in the prettiest colours, one hangs fine old tapestry and rare brocade..." (*Literary Criticism II* 1051).

¹¹ The phrase "cash basis" is also used in "The Siege of London" (*Complete Stories 1874-1884* 616).

¹² I was led to this phrase by Adrian Poole, who quotes it in the "Introduction" to *The Princess Casamassima* (xxvii)

¹³ In private communication, Adrian Poole pointed out to me that, for the composition of *The Princess Casamassima*, James probably had direct access to anarchist literature, but that whatever information he had of Marxian literature he probably got "mediated" from "the media", especially the reading of *The Times*. In his extraordinary recent edition of this novel, Poole observes that Henry Hyndman was in the mid-1880s reading *Capital* (XLIV). In *England for All*, without mentioning Marx by name, Hyndman is already explaining that "labour is the basis of value" (38).

¹⁴ For the figural equivalence between the humble and the humiliated subaltern, see *Das Kapital*, vol. 23, 280, Note 104 and vol.25, 451-58.

¹⁵ Still, Gert Buelens rightly emphasizes that her "restricted physical world [...] has caused her to invest more energy in the imaginative thinking-through of such power as she does possess and has made her more deeply aware of what it is that she can do..." (133; my emphasis). In his "Introduction" to *The Princess Casamassima*, Adrian Poole alludes too to Hyacinth's "restricted views" (liv; my emphasis).

¹⁶ Marxian scholars have emphasized the relevance of the so-called humus theory for the development of Marx's ideas about the productivity of the land. He never quite forgot the rich significance of the humus-trope, with its implication of metamorphic materialism and bottom-up regeneration. See Saito 187.

¹⁷ Humus is mentioned in *Exzerpte und Notizen Juli bis September 1851*, and in *Misère* he examines the relationship between "l'humus et la composition de la couche inférieure" (219) of terrains that have a "history".

¹⁸ Following Derrida, de Grazia examines the overlay in *Hamlet* between "man and clay, [...] human and humus" (31).

¹⁹ Ezra Pound's "Portrait d'une femme" was published only four years after "Julia Bride".

²⁰ For the effect of the Commune in James's writings, see McCracken.

²¹ Also recycled in *Kapital*, the quote is first used in *German Ideology* (102).

²² There is also the protagonist of Wilkie Collins' *Basil*.

²³ We could add "the smell of the Commune suppressed" (from James's letters of the 1870s, qtd by McCracken 75)

²⁴ The French terms are Derridean notions drawn from his books *Marges de la philosophie* (1972) and *La vérité en peinture* (1978). Follini argues that the "forms of enabling identification between James and Dickens" cannot fully cancel "the risks such associations entail and which are implied by [James's] diminution of the socially ameliorative or amusing aspects of Dickens's genius in preference for the 'socially sinister' side of his work" (233).

²⁵ Alone such abundance and disproportion—the fact that James's theoretical reflections on "Julia Bride" are patently in excess of the discreet proportions of the tale—should have commanded more critical attention, drawing scholars to the tale itself.

²⁶ See Marx, *Grundrisse*, 745-758.

²⁷ I believe, with Sharon Cameron, we can safely give up the narrator (177n16). See also Zwinger, 122-24.

²⁸ Zwinger has brilliantly called attention to the "eruptive textual gestures lying outside homogenizing labels—the gestures, that is, by which James addresses or manifests the complexities of telling" (15).