explorations

Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

INTERVIEW

Counting one's blessings

Prof. Greg Zacharias talks to Jacek Gutorow about Henry James's letters

Professor Greg W. Zacharias

JACEK GUTOROW*: It was in 1997 that the Center for Henry James Studies, based at Creighton University (in Omaha, Nebraska), started its astonishing project of publishing all the known letters of Henry James. You have been the Director of the Center and the co-Editor of the Complete Letters edition from the very start. What were the very beginnings of the Center and the Complete Letters project? How did it come about? And did you realize how much work lay ahead of you?*

GREG W. ZACHARIAS: In the late 1980s and early 1990s Leon Edel's grip on the Henry James papers weakened and the executor of the James family papers began to favor more open access to them. As a result, access to those papers, which had been very

difficult to obtain, became easier. During the conference to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Henry James's birth in 1993 in New York, Fred Kaplan, who was at the time working on or had just finished *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* and who had used the immense archive of Henry James letters at Houghton Library, Harvard, to work on his book, advocated vigorously for two concepts that were crucial for the future of Henry James studies. First was that the letters that had been restricted showed a Henry James that was not the one Edel championed in his biography of James. Rather than an aloof "master," Kaplan told us, the letters showed James as an ambitious and hard-working professional author who had a wide and strong network of friends. Second, Kaplan rallied scholars to read, study, edit, and publish the letters so that they would be more widely available for others. At the time of the 1993 conference, I was a beginning assistant professor with only two years on my first job. But I had read James since I was an undergraduate, written on James for my graduate degrees, published a little on James, and was inspired by the possibilities Kaplan had shown us and the fortunes of history seemed to have generated. During that conference I began to imagine how such a project would be organized and carried out. Several problems became evident.

The first problem was getting my mind around the immense size and scope of the project. The second was my own lack of status in the James community. The third difficulty was the process by which such a project could be carried out. I was favored by fortune in solving all three. When I began to discuss with colleagues the organization of a comprehensive edition of James's letters, I learned that Steve Jobe, with the assistance of a grant from the United States National Endowment for the Humanities, was compiling *A Partial Calendar of the Correspondence of Henry James*. Soon Steve shared his work with me. When I saw the calendar, which listed 8,544 letters and their archival locations along with accession numbers when available, I knew that a comprehensive edition of Henry James letters would be possible. Without a calendar, such an edition would be close to impossible. With it, there was a clear path to realizing the edition. Jobe's *Calendar* was the most important part of the project's foundation.

I knew too that I could not take on such a project myself. Edel had tried to edit a large edition by himself and the lack of partners and collaboration produced a flawed edition that was not scholarly. I knew another beginning professor, Pierre Walker, with whose work I was acquainted and whose skills complemented mine. Having developed an editorial plan, I asked Pierre if he would be interested in working as co-general editor. He agreed to join the letters project. Given that I was a beginning assistant professor and didn't have the authority or reputation to promote such a project, I also needed help from established Jamesians. I made copies of Jobe's *Calendar,* and, describing the plan for the edition with the *Calendar* in-hand, as it were, appealed to senior Jamesians to endorse the plan for an edition of James's letters that would include all extant letters and telegrams. I asked those James scholars to endorse the project by serving on an advisory board. I hoped that they would share expertise too. Every James scholar I asked to help agreed to support the project.

Having developed an editorial and production plan for the project and having had the good fortune to gain the agreement of a co-general editor and an advisory group, I sought a publisher that would commit to a comprehensive edition of more than 10,000 Henry James letters. The University of Nebraska Press, headquartered in Lincoln, which is about sixty miles from my home in Omaha, had then as they keep today, a reputation both for high-quality design and publication. Both were necessary for the James letters

project. In addition, the Press was beginning to explore electronic/digital/web publication, which appealed to me for the edition. Finally, the Press was working to build their list of Henry and William James-related books. I wrote a plan, included Jobe's *Partial Calendar*, and approached the Press. At the same time, hoping that I could secure an institutional home for the project, I approached the appropriate upper-level administrator at my university to inquire whether Creighton University would be interested in becoming both partner and home to the project. Over the course of the next few months and a number of meetings, both the University of Nebraska Press and Creighton University accepted my appeals with open arms. The only requirement the Press placed in front of us was that we would be obligated for each volume to gain the "Approved Edition" seal from the Committee on Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association. At about the same time, I approached the James family for their approval of the edition and also to find out whether they would be interested in becoming involved in the project in any way. Soon I had a response from Bay James, William James's great-granddaughter and the executor of the family papers. Ms. James approved the project, gave blanket permission for us to publish the letters under her authority, and let me know that her brother, Henry, would like to serve on the advisory. Fortune was again in favor of the project. Thus Pierre (whom Michael Anesko replaced about two years ago as co-general editor) and I began the edition.

Pierre and I spent several months trying to estimate how much work and time it would require to edit the edition. I began to try to find a way to fund the hiring of four full-time editors, whose work Pierre and I would supplement, manage, and supervise. With four people working full-time and two part-time during the academic year and six working full-time in the summer, we calculated that the edition would require about fifteen years to complete. This plan produced both good and bad news. Since then, the good news is that the number of person-hours required for the average letter has remained fairly consistent with what we anticipated from the results of our work-plan study. The bad news is that I've never been able to fund the project so that even one person could be paid to work full-time through the year. Instead, we work with 3-5 part-time editors and assistants. The co-general editors devote ten to twenty hours per week during the academic year and then as much as possible over the summer. So while the amount of work to be done editing the letters and annotating them (where the bulk of the time is required) has remained consistent with the estimates produced during early planning for the edition, funding the project has been far more difficult that I thought it would be.

JG*: How many letters does the Center possess? In* Henry James. A Life in Letters *Philip Horne speculates that their total number may amount to something between 12 000 and 15 000. The center's website speaks of 10 500 items. Do you think we should consider a possibility that more letters will be available? In any case, the numbers are colossal.*

GZ: The Center for Henry James Studies owns only a handful of original letters and holds for the James family several dozen original Henry James letters. In addition, and most important for the letters edition, we own approximately ten thousand letter copies in color digital scans, microfilm, and paper photocopies. We use those copies to begin our transcription and editing. Whenever possible and/or necessary, we consult the originals before finalizing the editing. Each year more letters come to our attention in auction

catalogues, library acquisitions, and through discovery of one type or another. But the number of new letters is not large, somewhere between, say, five and thirty letters each year, with five being closer to the norm and thirty being the rarer event. I've heard stories of letter troves stored and later ferried away to undisclosed locations. But none of those stories has become more than a story. That having been said, I would not be surprised or shocked if someone should come forward with one hundred or more Henry James letters to an ancestor.

JG*: I suppose it is pretty difficult to obtain the publication rights. Does it require talks, negotiations, personal communications, persuasive talents?*

GZ: Here, again, I count my blessings. To date, securing letter copies and permissions has required effort and good organizational skills. But the process overall has been straightforward and predictable. This is due, I think, to a couple of factors. First, most of James's known letters are in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the US and UK, the restrictions on permissions for Henry James letters are relatively similar. There are two orders of permission: one for using letter images, the rights to which are owned by the respective letter's owner; and one for using the intellectual content (the words per se) in the letters. Since we don't except in rare cases plan to publish any letter images or images from letters, in general image permission hasn't been a concern. For the few times we have wanted to use an image from a letter, the owner/archive granted permission readily. With the intellectual content of the letters now being in the public domain, most archives don't require publication permission, which, in any case, Bay James granted at the outset of the project. But when an archive requires permission, we ask for it in the way the archive specifies, agree to any conditions (such as the representation of the collection's name from which the letter comes) and have never been denied. There are a half-dozen or so letters whose originals are owned by private individuals who wish to remain anonymous. After identifying the owner, we seek their permission to publish. In no instance has that permission been refused. Some private owners notify us of their letters, send copies, and offer permission. Others have given permission, but ask not to be identified as the owner in publication. This is the publication condition that would produce "private" in the ownership line of our edition. The owners of several originals have died, the owner's descendants sold the letters, and the current owners are unknown. In those cases, we proceed without use of the original and specify that the copy-text used for producing the edited letter is a photocopy or transcription or other source text.

JG: *I'm wondering about the ordeals of editorship. Once you have the letters, or their copies, how do you proceed? Is it just about transcribing and editing James's handwritten messages? We know that James's handwriting was rather peculiar and idiosyncratic – doesn't the work of editing and formatting change the writer's idiomatic signature? It seems that the only way to preserve the latter would be to provide the scanned versions of the original letters?*

GZ: Our approach is to provide for readers texts that serve as stand-ins for the *texts* of the letters but not for the *letter artifacts*. The distinction is both crucial and fundamental. We aim to provide texts that represent accurately all meaningful details of the letters. Of course, what is a "meaningful detail" is a matter of judgment. We don't consider, for

example, line endings or beginnings as "meaningful" and thus don't represent them. That is, unlike lines of poetry, say, in which the line length may be a function of poetic meter and rhyming and thus meaning for the poem, we judge that James's line length is controlled by the size of his writing and the width of the paper on which he wrote. Line length, then, does not affect either what or how James wrote. It's only a function of the paper. Likewise, we don't represent the page numbers James gave. They too, we judge, are a function of the paper and not of James's meaning. We think of meaning this way with the full knowledge that some readers *would* find meaning in James's lines and page numbering, say. For those readers, our edition would be inadequate. At the same time, using the plain-text approach to representing the letters' meaningful elements, we show all strikeouts, including the number of cancelation marks, and overwriting. Showing cancelations, insertions, and overwriting, for example, enables readers of the edition to see how James changed his mind during the composition of a letter and before he sealed it in an envelope for delivery. We also represent all underlining, including the type of underlining and number of lines. We do this because we judge, having studied thousands of Henry James letters, that the number of underlines and the type of underline (straight, wavy) is a part of the emphasis James placed on a word and is thus part of its meaning. A more complete explanation of our method is included in every volume of the edition. The edition, conforming to standards of scholarly editing, also records all emendations, including hyphenation, notes on misspellings, details of cancelations when there is overwriting rather than, say, lining-through, and provides informational notes to people, places, paintings, sculptures, and publications, among other items, named in the letters. Our aim with the annotation is to help our readers understand the content/meaning of the letter more nearly as James's correspondents did. We don't at all seek to represent the "look" of the letter, since, in terms of our project, the "look" is not a part of the letter's meaning we aim to convey. The edition, then, is not in any way a typographical facsimile or anything approaching one. Such an edition would be the goal of other editors of another edition. The set of meaningful elements is known to us at the point of transcription. At the same time, all project editors remain open to the discovery of new meaningful elements in the letters and are committed to finding a way to representing those elements that conforms both to the editorial principles of our edition and to the standards of Anglo-American textual editing, at least.

Following the transcription of a letter, two two-person work teams read the transcription carefully against an image of copy-text, usually the letter itself. In that standard process, one team member reads the transcription aloud to the partner, one word or piece of punctuation at a time, while the second partner, reading the copy-text at the same time, confirms the reading or suggests an alternate one. Following the two readings on each team (four readings in all), the two work teams share results. Discrepancies are discussed and resolved and the original letter is consulted. Informational notes are drafted and revised for style and accuracy. Front and back matter is written, including thumbnail biographies for individuals whose names appear, generally, several times in a volume. At that point, we prepare the application for the Committee on Scholarly Editions' (CSE) "Approved Edition" seal. We also submit a copy of the full volume to a copy-editor. CSE and copy-editor queries are answered in due course.

Following resolution of CSE and copy-editor queries, the book is typeset and the editors review page proof, make any corrections, and return the corrected proof. Several months later, we review a second page proof and make any corrections. If the corrections

are substantial, there may be a third proof. When the page proof corrections are completed, the book goes to an indexer and then to printing itself.

Greg Zacharias receives the "Approved Edition" seal for the eighth volume of *The Complete Letters of Henry James* from Rosemary Feal, Executive Director of the Modern Language Association of America.

JG: *By the way, are his later letters (say, after 1900) handwritten or typed? We know that sometime in the 1890s James started dictating his novels, which might have been one of the factors influencing his late style. I'm wondering if a similar change might be detected in the style of his letter-writing.*

GZ: The later letters are for the most part still written. Many of those that James dictated for typing also carry hand corrections. The corrections in James's hand show that he re-read the letters after he dictated them and made adjustments he deemed necessary before he put the letter in an envelope. Some typed letters, moreover, carry additional handwritten sentences that James judged were too private or personal to record via his typist. In addition to the shift from only handwriting the letters to both handwriting and dictation/typing, there are great changes in James's hand over the course of his life. The earlier letters, especially business letters, through those written during the middle 1880s, in general, show a relatively careful and clear hand. Personal letters are a bit less careful and clear. There are far fewer easily legible letters from later in James's life, owing, at least in part, to his physical difficulties with the act of writing itself.

JG: *We all realize that Henry James would probably oppose the idea of his collected letters being published. In a 1910 letter he wrote: "My sole wish is to frustrate as utterly*

as possible the post-mortem exploiter." Some of the most memorable scenes from Leon Edel's biography involve James burning his letters in his Lamb House garden. In his stories we sometimes come across the repugnant figure of the villain who breaks the privacy of a dead man (usually a great writer) by illegally obtaining and disclosing his personal documents. For example, when the main character of "Sir Dominick Ferrand" accidentally discovers a bundle of letters written by a famous man now long dead, he wants not only to read but also to publish them. James's own reaction to this is embodied in the spontaneous exclamation shouted by another character: "Burn them up!" Don't we come here across an ethical question? Do we have the right to make somebody's private communications public?

GZ: Let me answer this good question with a couple of general remarks that almost go without saying—though I'll say them. First, James's fictional situations don't necessarily represent his life. The burning of letters in a story or a novel—a stock dramatic technique in fiction (and there's plenty of it throughout the fiction, as your question suggests—think of *The American* or *The Wings of the Dove*, for example), shouldn't stand necessarily for James's autobiography. Second, the letters James burned, possibly during periods of acute depression, were not letters he wrote. They were letters he received. So in the destruction of those letters, James protected his correspondents as much or more than himself. Third, Edel's relation to the letters and the family is not a simple one. But it has been discussed in detail by Pierre Walker ("Leon Edel and the 'Policing' of the Henry James Letters") and, best, by Michael Anesko (*Monopolizing the Master: Henry James and the Politics of Modern Literary Scholarship*). It's enough to say here that Edel had a significant personal and financial interest in protecting his version of Henry James ("the Master") and in preventing others from knowing anything about James that didn't conform to the portrait Edel created in his still-important and useful biography of James. In terms of James's own desires, I understand the nature of privacy during an individual's lifetime and, perhaps, for a period following death. Yet it's worth wondering exactly what James meant by "post-mortem exploiter." (He followed the phrase in the letter you refer to, of course, with "which, I know, is so imperfectly possible.") I bring up this point because James seems always to have sought ways to make his fiction and even his public personality, at least, widely known. That is, he seems to have wanted a popular reputation on his own terms, to the extent that that is possible. Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen provides a good discussion of this interesting and complicated matter ("'No absolute privacy': Henry James and the Ethics of Reading Authors' Letters" [http://www.authorship.ugent.be/article/view/765/759]). In addition, it's worth considering that the nature of privacy is different today than it was after James's death when immediate relatives and close friends who were named in letters were alive. Many of James's letters show excision marks, usually in blue pencil with "omit," and probably made by one of James's relatives as they prepared to have the originals retyped for Percy Lubbock's selected letters edition (1920). Those "omits" include, for example, James's opinions about his friends—few, if any, severe even without the cuts—or plans to attend a dinner or a party, for example. None of these would most of us consider today as "private." If there were embarrassing or otherwise compromising words about James's sexuality in the letters, it's worth remembering the obvious: that homosexuality was regarded very differently in James's time and through much of the twentieth century than it is today in the United States and United Kingdom,

at least. So what was damaging, even potentially criminal, in the past is not so now. Also, James was not the towering literary and cultural figure in the early twentieth century that he became later. The importance of his correspondence today, then, is much greater than he could have known while he was alive. And where James's family once worked to control what would be published about their relative, the family no longer places any restrictions on the publishing of the letters. Where some archives once restricted access to James's letters, none does today. So if someone, nearly anyone, wishes to read James's letters, they may in the original. Not a person would or should object to that. The edition, then, only makes access to those letters, at least to what we judge their meaningful elements (or no edition can substitute for the original), easier.

JG: *Let me somewhat qualify the previous question. Many letters contribute a lot to our understanding of James the artist. If they do not touch upon private matters, it makes perfect sense to publish them. However, there are letters which are evidently personal. I'm thinking, for instance, of the letters to Hendrik Andersen, some of them quite intimate. The decision to publish everything may have been difficult, I suppose?*

GZ: Some of the letters to Andersen are quite intimate. But so are many of James's letters to Grace Norton, Edmund Gosse, Walter Berry, Morton Fullerton, Edith Wharton, Alice James, his parents, Henrietta Reubell, and many others. So intimacy, per se, doesn't really seem to be the issue. The issue with the Andersen letters, of course, as well as to those written to Hugh Walpole and other men, is the precise nature of the intimacy. If it were intimacy that recorded James's homosexuality—and no letter is absolutely clear about that. (The most famous ones, perhaps, were written to Anderson and included lines such as the following: "I wish I could go to Rome and put my hand on you [oh, how lovingly I should lay them!]" [9 February 1902] and "Think only of my love and that I am yours always and ever" [28 February 1902]—and were already published by Edel in *Henry James Letters*.) It's worth remembering, however, that James included these lines in letters written to console Andersen immediately following the death of Andersen's brother, Andreas). Another difficulty is that I'm not sure how one separates who a person is or was—especially in terms of a part of life as fundamental as one's sexuality—from that person's art. Another way, James's art emanated from James the person. The relation of biography to art is not often—maybe not ever—simple or direct. But it's a fundamental relationship that shouldn't be ignored or pretended away.

JG: *One might be uneasy about the idea of completeness in reference to the writer who was so critical of the human pretensions to manage, oversee and supervise all aspects of life. Yet this idea seems to inform the* Complete Letters *edition. Do you feel that in the course of reading James's letters we arrive at the exact and full portrait of the man? Do they add up to give us something more than a regular biography, namely a biography of consciousness in its all (not only elevated but also mundane and trivial) aspects?*

GZ: I appreciate your question. Allow me to answer in very certain terms. There is and never has been the idea, hope, plan, desire, or attempt in the edition to offer or claim to offer an exact and full portrait of James. The only plan is to transcribe and edit in plain-text style and to annotate all known letters, notes, telegrams of Henry James. That's

it. Even if we were able to recover every letter, note, grocery list, etc., James ever wrote, there would still be a greater portion of his life left out of that written record. I'm not sure that the extant letters give a biography of consciousness. But they do record James's ways of responding in written language, or at least a portion of his responses, to certain events of which he was aware. That's as much as I can claim with any degree of certainty.

JG: *In one of your critical essays you discuss the body of James's letters (published and unpublished) in the context of Jacques Derrida's concept of the archive as a space of both preservation and constant transformation. For Derrida the notion of the archive is in fact self-contradictory, a kind of institution which deconstructs its own narratives (by imposing the fiction of institutional frames) and is itself deconstructed by them (as the narratives evolve and transgress the institutional protocols). Do you think we could apply Derrida's aporetic thinking to the institutional archive you represent, i.e. the* Complete Letters *edition? More importantly, can you think of any positive aspects of such a deconstructive approach?*

GZ: The question is for me, just as the archive was for Derrida, powerful and emotional. So just as Derrida's articulation of the archive was in a large way only his own, so will this answer be personal and, possibly, one of a kind (I hope for the better but maybe for the worse!). For me Derrida writes mostly about how language "means" and how meaning changes. He really doesn't write about deconstruction or deconstructing meaning—though that is one strategy Derrida uses to illustrate or "stage" concepts related to language and meaning. Given the nature of language/writing as Derrida offers it, "deconstruction" is a function of the instability of language and meaning itself. Following this understanding of Derrida's work, it's not really surprising that Derrida regards the archive—especially the one that will hold his own papers—as something that invokes or marks death and leaves him, as J. Hillis Miller wrote, "totally at the mercy of others" (*For Derrida,* New York: Fordham UP, 2009, p. 72). The archive is not, then, for Derrida, a sign of the continuation of life (though life and death would be part of the other term). Instead, Derrida imagines his remains—the archival boxes at the University of California, Irvine, library holding his papers—as gravestones (Miller 80). But what Derrida doesn't imagine, for it's not his purpose to do so when he associates the archive with death and thus his absolute exposure to the manipulation of others, is that while the archive marks without doubt the death of the person who wrote the items contained in the archive, the meaning of the contents of the archive will not be the same for any two people who read those documents. So rather than restricting or killing meaning, the archive, like any writing, fosters its own generation and regeneration of meaning. It thus offers the opportunity for new life. It offers the chance for reconciliation with the other, even of the other within itself, which is also the sign of new birth. Thus, the archival remains that show its author's death also enable a new meaning, new life. This should be as true of our edition of James letters as it is for the original letters themselves, held in archives around the world. In addition, the Derridean approach to meaning is quite Jamesian, at least in one sense. It was James, after all, who noted (and built a legacy on) two important concepts of language: 1) "relations stop nowhere" ("Preface" to *Roderick Hudson* and 2) "Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints" ("The Art of

Fiction"). That the relation of signs to other signs in a linguistic system is ever variable and ever changing, accounting for its vitality and interest, is central to Derrida and to James, is also reason for regarding similarly any archive. More, for me again, James's letters as well as his fiction, are deeply humane. In the letters James shows that he is deeply empathetic and that the value he places on empathy in the letters is represented as well in some of his fictional characters and also in his reviews. Such deep humanness likewise marks Derrida's so-called late work. And if James privileges "discussion" and "the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints" as the lifeblood of art (and thus of living), Derrida privileges the same as the essence of culture and thus of life in the "The Future of the Profession, or the University without Limits."

JG: *In his introduction to* A Life in Letters *Philip Horne argues that James's letters should be treated as his other literary efforts and are in effect "major works or contain major writing." Is that your feeling, too? Do you think this gigantic correspondence may be read as, say, James's longest (perhaps most bizarre) novel, a fragmented life story, or a "narrative of passionate creation," as Horne puts it?*

GZ: There should be no doubt that Philip Horne is one of the best Henry James scholars, perhaps the very best, alive today. He is also my colleague and friend. But I wouldn't fully agree with him that the letters are literary works in the same way that the novels, especially, and tales, say, are crafted works of art that take the art of fiction in a decidedly Jamesian direction. I agree with Philip, though, that the letters contain important writing in the sense that like James's best fiction, though in a different way, the letters display James's articulation (and thus organization) of experience through language and in writing. That is, the letters, like James's best fiction, though in a different way, display Henry James's sense of his world through language and writing. This is the case as much with James's way of explaining the matter of life and death or friendship, say, in letters of consolation and affirmation to those closest to him as it is with James's relation to the commercial world when he negotiates with publishers.

JG: *A personal question: what initially attracted you to James's oeuvre? Can you still feel this attraction after so many years of reading, interpreting and editing James's texts? And have the letters changed your perception of the writer? Do you think they still might hold something surprising and unexpected for you?*

GZ: The answer to this question has to do with my own genetics, I suppose, and also the fortunate timing of life events. I'll give the short version, if that's ok. First the genetics. I've always been a compulsive reader. My parents told me that I began to read when I was two years old. I cannot remember a time when I didn't read. I've read at every chance all of my life and still do—as many of us do. And while my parents didn't have an easy time with family bills (sometimes, I believe, they had a very difficult time with them) as they worked to build a good middle-class life for their four children, they never denied or even postponed any request to buy a book for me or any of my siblings. In addition, they never restricted my reading. One of the great moments of my childhood (I must have been about seven years old), was when I was able to have my own borrowing card for our local library and my mother instructed the library staff that I should be allowed to borrow any book—those reserved for adults as well as those marked

for children. Though I almost never borrowed books for grown-ups (adult novels, say—though I read every biography and history I could get my hands on), that my parents encouraged and enabled me to read anything I wanted to read made for a powerful moment as I developed a sense of who I was. This is all to say that to one degree or another, I was "born" a reader. But until just before I went to college, I had never read Henry James. That changed when I fell in love with the woman who is now my wife. (Maybe this is a matter of genetics too!) The father of the woman with whom I fell in love was an extremely interesting man in the sense that he had an amazing life story (to me). He was also an extremely kind person. An MIT-educated engineer with his own engineering business (which involved, among other products I'm sure, high-precision gears), Jack Shahan was also a veteran of WWII, fought in Italy with the Tenth Mountain Division of the US Army (skiing, mountaineering, etc.) and worked after the war as a low-level intelligence officer in Vienna at the very beginning of the Cold War. (He told me that you could tell who were the other low-level intelligence operatives because they all dressed like spies in the movies—trench coats, etc!) More important, perhaps, Jack Shahan had the gift of finding what interested me or anyone else he talked with. He then made that point of interest one of the subjects of the conversation as I waiting for his daughter to get ready for our movie date or whatever else brought me to his home. Suffice it to say that I developed and still carry a great deal of admiration for him. During one of our conversations, I learned that Jack was a Henry James reader. He had read James novels aloud in the evenings to his wife during their Vienna days. During my first semester in college just a few months after getting to know Jack Shahan, I was excited to see several Henry James stories and a novel on the course syllabus for one of my English courses. The professor of the course, Edward Chalfant, like Jack Shahan, was an important influence (I carry his memory into every class I teach). The first James stories in the course, probably "Daisy Miller" and "The Turn of the Screw," didn't engage me. But because Jack Shahan had read James and because the stories were required reading in a course taught by a professor I admired, I didn't give up. The James novel in that course was *The Wings of the Dove*. To read it, I decided to slow my reading speed almost to that of reading aloud. All at once, then, reading the class assignment one day, reading James turned from being a bit of a chore to very comfortable. From that moment on, as they say, I was hooked. I was fortunate later to have other terrific instructors in Henry James courses. Josephine Hendin organized what we knew as a "colloquium" course at NYU on James and then later directed my dissertation. James Tuttleton was also a very good teacher for me also at NYU and there were others too. But by that time, I was already on my way. And aside from some detours in Milton and Twain studies, I never turned back. I offer a James novel in most courses I teach and never come away from a reading without something new and exciting. The only change in my reading that has been fostered by my work with the letters is an understanding of James as a hard-working professional writer. This was not my view of James as author when I began reading the novels and stories as an undergraduate in the late 1970s. Each time I look at a letter, any James letter, I find something interesting, if not exciting.

JG: *Is there anything in James's letters that strikes you as quintessential to his correspondence and his work in general?*

GZ: James's correspondence ranges so widely in terms of subjects and correspondents and covers so many years of his life that it's difficult to point to a phrase, sentence, metaphor, or image that could stand for the whole or almost for the entire 10,500 or so known letters. But maybe the fact that James seems to have had to live through and by his writing—letters, fiction, criticism, travel essays, plays—in order to realize both his personal nature and to arrange a secure financial situation for himself (clearly he made a living doing what he chose to do in life, which is both highly honorable and also enviable!), is the most representative aspect of the letters in relation to James's life.

When he was elected to the Reform Club, an important London men's club in 1878, he coined a term "club=business" in his report of the election to his father (*Complete Letters of Henry James, 1876-1878*, vol. 2, p. 141). In making a new term that described the connectedness of the personal/social and professional lives he sought through membership in the men's club, James shows the extent to which he lived in and through writing. Kenneth Burke wrote in *Language as Symbolic Action* that those who write compulsively and obsessively (and Henry James certainly did both) must write as expressions of their nature as birds must fly and fish must swim and that by using "language as symbolic action" writing functions for them as therapy. Writing helps them to cope with life. For through language those individuals understand themselves. Wrote Burke:

> Even if you would write a drama, for instance, simply for the satisfaction of writing a drama, you must write your drama about *something.* And you or your potential audience will be more interested in some subjects than others. These subjects involve tensions or problems—and since you can't make a drama without the use of some situation marked by *conflict,* even though you hypothetically began through a sheer love of dramatic exercise, in the course of so exercising you tend to use as your subject matter such tensions or problems as exercise yourself, or your potential audience, or mankind in general. (Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* p. 29)

Henry James's writing in his letters and also elsewhere was a representation of living for him in such a fundamental way that even on his deathbed, incoherent following a series of strokes, barely conscious when conscious as all, he continued to move his hand on the bedcover as if he were writing with a pen on paper.

JG: *Professor Zacharias, thank you.*

GZ: I'm honored to be able to think about answering your questions.

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