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## Lord Leighton and his Paintings in Henry James's "The Private Life"

When Queen Victoria died in 1901 Henry James wrote to a friend:

I mourn the safe and motherly old middle-class queen, who held the nation warm under the fold of her big, hideous Scotch-plaid shawl and whose duration had been so extraordinarily convenient and beneficent. I felt her death much more than I should have expected; she was a sustaining symbol and the wild waters are upon us now.<sup>1</sup>

James under the safety of her "hideous" shawl had enjoyed absorbing all the arts that flourished under Victoria's reign—the Philistine *décor* he exposes in such vivid detail in the excesses of Waterbath in *The Spoils of Poynton*, as well as the aesthetic reaction against its "acres of varnish" among the Pre-Raphaelite painters.<sup>2</sup> Not only did James discover and champion Burne-Jones for the English in the 1870's but one of his tales is built around the famous *Sleeping Beauty* painting which had been publicly exhibited in London at the end of the century.<sup>3</sup> Victorian genre paintings, at the opposite pole, in the prints of Abraham Solomon are used analogically in "The Birthplace" (1903).<sup>4</sup> Even the academic giants take James's wide-ranging attention. Holman Hunt's *Scapegoat* which had terrified the American novelist when a small boy lies behind the great metaphor of sacrifice in *The Golden Bowl*.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most striking tribute to the paintings of Lord Leighton, president of the Royal Academy, appears in the story in which Leighton himself plays an acknowledged role. For the role of Frederick, Lord Leighton in James's "The Private Life"

(1892), is a matter of record. In his *Notebooks* for August 3, 1891, James noted the idea of using Frederick Leighton, whom he indicated by the initials "F.L.":

