

## Henry James, *The Scapegoat*, and the William Holman Hunts

Although William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) did not have the close personal relationship with Henry James that Edward Burne-Jones had,<sup>1</sup> Hunt's effect on James's sensibility had begun very early when traveling with his family in England as a thirteen year old boy. In the summer of 1856 James experienced "the first fresh fruits of the Pre-Raphaelite efflorescence. . . . The very word Pre-Raphaelite wore for us that intensity of meaning. . . that thrills us in its perfection but for one season, the prime hour of first initiations."<sup>2</sup> Two years later: "Momentous to us again was to be the Academy show of 1858 where there were, from the same wide source, still other challenges to wonder." One of them was Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat*. Here James's memory plays him false because from all accounts it was in 1856 that Hunt's picture was shown and that would mean that James was even younger than he records having been when he saw it. At the show were five paintings by Millais, Wallis's *Chatterton* and Arthur Hughes's *April Love*,<sup>3</sup> yet the picture that impressed James most was Holman's Hunt's *Scapegoat* "which I remember most of all finding so charged with the awful that I was glad I saw it in company—it in company and I the same: I believed or tried to believe, I should have feared to face it all alone in a room."<sup>4</sup>

That early impression became the emotional center of volume two of *The Golden Bowl*, the masterpiece of his late phase. It is the climactic image taken from the East, for coinciding with Maggie's confrontation with her husband's mistress and her father's wife, Charlotte, and the production of the final lie that saves her marriage, she sees herself in her predicament as "the scapegoat of old of whom she had once seen a terrible picture."<sup>5</sup> The novel is loaded with Oriental icons, from the Oriental tiles Adam Verver, Maggie's father, purchases in Brighton, to a pagoda and Mohammedan mosque and, finally, through the prophesies of Mrs. Assingham, the sibyl of the book, to the mystery that is

evoked by the image of a caravan in the desert. But it is the scapegoat as Homan Hunt had portrayed it which continues to operate on Maggie's imagination as the potent and most extensive figure in the second half of the novel. It is the only work by a contemporary English painter (Hunt was alive until 1910 and *The Golden Bowl* appeared in 1905, the year Hunt's history of Pre-Raphaelitism was published) that we find in James's fiction. It is important in the novel because it controls the metaphoric machinery.

The first focus is the scapegoat's congruence with Maggie. As she watches the members of her family play bridge, they seemed to "put it upon her to be disposed of. . . and she promptly saw why: because she was there, and. . . to charge herself with it as the scapegoat of old, of whom she had once seen a terrible picture, had been charged with the sins of the people and had gone forth in the desert to sink under his burden and die" (G 457).

The "terrible picture" can only be *The Scapegoat* by Holman Hunt and it establishes the desert and its doomed victim as the dominant Oriental icons of the last part of the novel. The weary and dirty goat stands in the desert by the Dead Sea surrounded by animal skeletons, one of which he soon will become. The scapegoat is next transferred from Maggie to Adam who becomes Maggie's "victim": "I sacrifice you. . . to everything and to everyone" (G 480). The thirst that the scapegoat has experienced in the desert is then shifted to Prince Amerigo, Maggie's husband, as well as to Maggie, for they both feel "the torment of the lost pilgrim who listens in desert sands for the possible, the impossible, splash of water" (G 489). It finally settles permanently on Charlotte's shoulders, for it is she who is the victim of Adam's decision to transfer to America and Amerigo's decision to abandon her for his wife. When Fanny Assingham says that Charlotte, after Adam has decided to move to America,