Letras

Revista do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria

n. 71

Original Article

Letras, v. 71, p. 01-11, e89949, 2025 - DOI:10.5902/2176148589949 - ISSN 2176-1485
Submitted: 27/11/2024 Approved: 27/11/2024 Published: 06/10/2025

Dossiê Henry James

The absence of personal loyalty: service (and disservice) in Henry James's "Brooksmith"

A ausência de lealdade pessoal: serviço (e desserviço) em "Brooksmith", de Henry James

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Abstract: Often pilloried for being an apologist for the Anglo-American class system, Henry James could also interrogate the legitimacy of social structures. In his 1891 short story "Brooksmith," James explores the decline of personal loyalty within the British class system, culminating in the presumed suicide of a butler thrown out of work and society after his employer passes away. Through an anonymous narrator, the chronicle of the butler's social death becomes more poignant, as his invisibility becomes a stubborn line of defense against any responsibility for Brooksmith's disappearance.
Keywords: Personal loyalty; Deference; Anonymity

Resumo: Frequentemente criticado por ser um apologista do sistema de classes anglo-americano, Henry James também era capaz de questionar a legitimidade das estruturas sociais. Em seu conto de 1891, "Brooksmith", James explora o declínio da lealdade pessoal dentro do sistema de classes britânico, culminando no presumido suicídio de um mordomo que é excluído do trabalho e da sociedade após a morte de seu empregador. Por meio de um narrador anônimo, a crônica da morte social do mordomo torna-se ainda mais comovente, à medida que sua invisibilidade se transforma em uma linha de defesa teimosa contra qualquer responsabilidade pelo desaparecimento de Brooksmith.
Palavras-chave: Lealdade pessoal; Deferência; Anonimato

When most of us come across a reference to James's intriguing biographical study of Hawthorne (1879), we probably recur in memory to the infamous enumeration of "the items of high civilization" which James felt were "absent" (as he said) "from the texture of American life." The list hardly bears repeating—if only because most Jamesians probably know it by heart—or at least, one might bet, the latter half of it, which gets so comically specific. ("No great Universities," James lamented, "nor public schools"—not a bad line for a Harvard drop-out!) Indeed, it is easy to forget that James begins his notorious catalogue in social (and specifically political) terms, observing, for example, that in Hawthorne's day the United States of America could barely lay claim to "a specific national name," let alone display the imposing manifestations of nationhood, as Europeans commonly

understood them. Henry Adams (1838-1918), we recall, felt exactly the same way as he struck his Gibbon-like pose, contemplating the unraised pillars scattered around the still-unfinished Capitol building in Washington, D.C., and wondering when (if ever) a recognizable—and powerful—State would come into existence.[1] America had neither a standing Army, nor an established Church, and certainly no monarch to oversee them, which is how James's long list of cultural negatives starts off. "No sovereign," as James put it, "no court, no personal loyalty."[2] My analysis will focus on this particular item from James's list—his mention of *personal loyalty*—and will try to make audible some of its resonances—in the Master's life and work.

Of course, even to refer to James as "the Master" (as we habitually do) already presumes that a rather peculiar form of personal loyalty continues to exist between the writer and his audience; and it is a habit that was formed very early. The biographical evidence to support such a claim is both widespread and wickedly funny (that is when it is not also sometimes rather pathetic). Readers of his letters surely know that James excelled in the art of condescension, but that did not prevent a faithful congregation of admirers, devotees, protégés, and acolytes from surrounding him, especially in his later years; and we know that James guarded their attention quite jealously. When H. G. Wells (1866-1946), for example, rudely broke out of the charmed circle (by publishing his superficial parody, *Boon*, in 1915), the sting was quite profound. "His vast paragraphs sweat and struggle," Wells jabbed; "they could not sweat and elbow and struggle more if God Himself was the processional meaning to which they sought to come. And all for tales of nothingness... It is leviathan retrieving pebbles. It is a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea which has got into a corner of its den."[3]Almost all the rest, however (Percy Lubbock [1879-1965], Theodora Bosanquet [1880-1961], Howard Sturgis [1855-1920], Edith Wharton [1862-1937]—just to name the most familiar) were loyal to the end—and then some.

For most of his life, though, James's needs for polite deference were also attended to by other, less visible (and less articulate) people. Like most other members of his privileged social class, James relied upon the labor of domestic servants on virtually every day of his adult life. Even in his earliest bachelor quarters in Piccadilly, his weekly rent—which was not much more than $12[4] —included provision for meals and household service; and it was through these simple arrangements that James was truly initiated into the customs of a social life in which demarcations of class were more strictly observed than they were in America. The delirious days of dining out 107 times in one London season were still ahead of him[5]; for now, at least, "society" was represented

[1] Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America*, 9 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889-91) 1: 31.
[2] Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879; rpt. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 55.
[3] H. G. Wells, *Boon* (New York: George H. Doran Co., [1915]), p. 110.
[4] Henry James to William James, 21 Mar. 1881: "I pay 2½ guineas a week for my second floor in Bolton St.; which, however, has always struck me as, for the situation, cheap." *The Correspondence of William James*, 12 vols., ed. Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth M. Berkeley (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1992), 1: 329; cited hereafter as CWJ. The sum would have been £2.12.6—the dollar equivalent at the time being $12.75.
[5] Henry James to Grace Norton, 8 Jun. [1879], *Complete Letters of Henry James 1878-1880*, vol. 1, ed. Pierre A. Walker and Greg Zacharias (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 20), p. 203; cited hereafter as CLHJ.

by the circle of James's immediate household and a small list of literary acquaintances. In his letters home, James wrote with touches of humor that were intended to magnify the grandeur of his really quite modest situation; but even here one senses that his style effortlessly becomes a strategic tool for defending bourgeois priorities. "I have an excellent lodging in this excellent quarter," he proudly confided to his sister Alice (1848-92),

> a lodging whose dusky charms—including a housemaid with a fuliginous complexion, but a divine expression & the voice of a duchess—are too numerous to repeat. I have just risen from my 1st breakfast of occasional tea, eggs, bacon & the exquisite English loaf, & you may imagine the voluptuous glow in which such a repast has left me. Chez moi I am really well off...[6]

The housemaid has a "fuliginous" complexion (begrimed by soot, that is); James's "voluptuous glow," on the other hand, largely depends upon her labor. Another significant compensation of her service, apparently, is the maid's "voice," by which James euphemistically refers to her pronunciation (like that of a duchess), a trait that further conceals (and presumably dignifies) her menial status. Also present in the household, James went on to say, was a young woman whose only job, it seemed, was to answer the front door. She wasn't really a servant, James observed, but rather a dependent relative of the landlady. "She's what they call in England a 'person,'" he noted. "She isn't a lady and she isn't a woman; she's a person."[77] Which meant, of course, that she was a kind of non-person, a nobody.

The power of class to subvert or erase the literal meaning of language sometimes brought James to the brink of absurdity. When a new servant girl appeared with his breakfast one day (even a "fuliginous complexion" did not prevent her predecessor from quitting her job—"to marry a deformed cobbler," he added), James naturally asked her what her name was. "Well, sir, it might be Maria," she hesitantly replied. "It might be?" "Well, sir, they calls me Maria." "Isn't it your name?" "My name's Annie, sir, but Missus says that's too familiar." So James called her Annie-Maria instead. In the letter home in which the novelist recorded this odd bit of dialogue (perhaps to show the folks back in Cambridge just how well he could transcribe Cockney speech), James also offered a more telling social comment. "It is part of the British code," he explained, "that you can call a servant any name you like." Without batting an eye, James added, "many people have a fixed name for their butler, which all the successive occupants of the place are obliged to assume, so that the family needn't change its habits."[8] In light of this fact, it is almost amusing that the butler and cook who had the longest tenure with James himself were a couple named Smith, which is about as close to anonymity as you can get.

[6] Henry James to Alice James, 13 Dec. 1876, *CLHJ 1876-1878* 1: 3-4.
[7] E. S. Nadal, "Personal Recollections of Henry James," *Scribner's Magazine* 68 (Jul. 1920): 89.
[8] Henry James to Alice James, 26 Mar. 1879, *CLHJ 1878-1880* 1: 141-42.

Henry James first acquired a staff of personal servants when he left his rooms in Bolton Street (in the Spring of 1886) and leased a much more spacious apartment in Kensington. "My man & wife are excellent," he reported to his Aunt Kate (1812-89), "& the woman even a better cook than I require—as I dine out so much." To this sometimes parsimonious relative, he particularly wanted to point out the delicious economy of his new scheme. "They are on board wages," he continued, "that is, I pay the two $50 a month, out of which they find all their own food, washing, beer &c. They 'do for' me altogether, & I don't have to give an order or worry about anything."[9] Not more than a year later, however, James would refer to the couple as a pair of "sad sticks," even while conceding that they were "perfect domestics."[10] Unlike the as-yet-to-be-imagined Brooksmith, these Smiths were seemingly devoid of imagination. "My excellent but wooden-faced cook… has just presented herself as usual," James reported to his brother, "(with a large, clean, wh[ite] respectful apron,) to ask fo[r] the 'orders for the day.' It is at these moments that I feel the want of assistance, especially as the lady in question is so reverent that she never presumes to suggest. On the other hand she & her spouse buy everything for me (I never have to go into a shop,) & don't cheat me. They are on board-wages (*i.e.* have to provide their own food,) & every bone that leaves my table comes back with a persistency that makes me say 'Is your master a dog that you should treat him thus?'"[11]

By the time that James lamented the absence of "personal loyalty" in America, its traditional function in Britain was being disrupted by the encroachments of a market-oriented economy and culture. Serviceability and immediate convenience were displacing a different, more vulnerable kind of reciprocity in the scale of social value. As a normative ideal for structuring relations between members of different classes, the customary expression of personal loyalty was implicitly reciprocal, though obviously paternalistic. The medium of exchange and empowerment in such a relation was not merely pecuniary, but also sentimental (a point nostalgically made, week after week, by such long-running television series as "Upstairs, Downstairs" or, more recently, "Downton Abbey"). The possession of capital was in this sense an anterior prerequisite for "personal loyalty," a condition for its coming into being, rather than a necessary determinant of everyday practice. As a sign of modernization, however, and the "rationalization" (so-called) of economic life, traditional forms of service came more and more to resemble the ordinary wage relations between capital and labor. The troubling instability of this shift affected James's life and art: in personal as well as professional spheres, James registered the consequences of an impending absence of "personal loyalty," a relation that could not survive in the modern world of ubiquitous contract.

James takes up this theme most directly in a touching short story called "Brooksmith," which was first published in *Harper's Weekly* and the British illustrated newspaper *Black and*

[9] Henry James to Catharine Walsh, 15 Apr. [1886], *CLHJ 1884-1886* 2: 84. The "man & wife" were Charles and Lydia Fanny Arnold Smith, recently married on 27 Mar. 1886 (84n84.4). As measured by the inflation calculator at www.in2013dollars.com, the Smiths' annual income would be less than $20,000 in today's dollars.
[10] Henry James to Catharine Walsh, 27 Sep. [1887], *CLHJ 1887-1888* 1: 235.
[11] Henry James to William James, 1 Oct. 1887, *CWJ* 2: 71.

White in 1891. The idea for the tale came to James seven years prior to this, however, for in June of 1884 he recorded the "germ" of it in his notebooks. Indeed, as we shall see, the intervening years had a significant impact upon the shaping of this curious little tale, for as market forces came to exert considerable pressure on James as a professional author (straining his own sense of "personal loyalty" to his publishers), so to do these forces insinuate themselves into the story of a sadly displaced servant.

It could be argued that "Brooksmith" is less a story than a kind of obituary (much like Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" [1853], which it uncannily resembles). The tale gets its title from the story's nominal protagonist, a butler in service to a distinguished retired diplomat, Mr. Oliver Offord (whose name is both a pun and a cynical play on words, since it rhymes with both its homonym, the generous past tense form, *offered*, and, slant-wise, with the more conditionally qualitative infinitive, *afford*). In a Dickens novel, "Offord" would probably be the metonymic name of a butler, not his master; but in James's ironic reversal, the best that Mr. Offord can afford his guests is the company of his butler, whose instincts for sociability radically transcend his menial station. "How was it," the anonymous narrator questions (as he reminisces),

> that we never were a crowd, never either too many or too few, always the right people *with* the right people (there must really have been no wrong people at all), always coming and going, never sticking fast nor overstaying, yet never popping in or out with an indecorous familiarity? How was it that we all sat where we wanted and moved when we wanted and met whom we wanted and escaped whom we wanted; joining, according to the accident of inclination, the general circle or falling in with a single talker on a convenient sofa? Why were all the sofas so convenient, the accidents so happy, the talkers so ready, the listeners so willing, the subjects presented to you in a rotation as quickly fore-ordained as the courses at dinner? A dearth of topics would have been as unheard of as a lapse in the service. These speculations couldn't fail to lead me to the fundamental truth that Brooksmith had been somehow at the bottom of the mystery. If he had not established the salon at least he had carried it on. Brooksmith, in short, was the artist![12]

That particular distinction, however, is also Brooksmith's curse, for when Mr. Offord dies, and his household is broken up, the artist/butler finds himself bereft of his *salon* and his patron; deprived of his station, Brooksmith finally must hire himself out (in the words of the narrator) as "a mere waiter" (p. 30), engaged temporarily for the night, like a kind of servile prostitute. Indeed, like Stephen Crane's Maggie, he disappears from the story a presumed suicide.

The tale is not quite as sentimental as this synopsis might suggest, however, largely because it is presented to us in the past tense and by a displaced first-person narrator. One might say that Brooksmith is the story's nominal protagonist because, like so many of James's mature short fictions, this tale also depends for its effectiveness on the strategic use of a central narrative consciousness, a voice other than Brooksmith's:

[12] Henry James, "Brooksmith," *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1963) 8: 15-16. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

> "We are scattered now" (so the narrator begins) "the friends of the late Mr. Oliver Offord; but whenever we chance to meet I think we are conscious of a certain esoteric respect for each other. 'Yes, you too have been in Arcadia,' we seem not too grumpily to allow. When I pass the house in Mansfield Street I remember that Arcadia was there" (p. 13).

This opening has the effect of etching a thick black border around each of the story's pages, as if James had composed it on Victorian mourning stationery. The story's mode of telling presupposes a kind of helplessness over its outcome, which serves both to intensify Brooksmith's little tragedy and to insulate the narrator from complicity in it. As the story unfolds, it soon becomes apparent that Brooksmith, not Mr. Oliver Offord, is the true subject of commemoration: the obituary, after all, will be his.

Inevitably, Offord's death precipitates Brooksmith's crisis; but this event also provokes the narrator (much like the American sociologist William Graham Sumner [1840-1910]) to reflect upon the question of what, exactly, do social classes owe one another?[13] It's all very well," the narrator asks to himself midway through the tale, "but what *will* become of Brooksmith?" His answer, far from satisfactory, foreshadows Brooksmith's sorry fate: "No doubt Mr. Offord would provide for him, but *what* would he provide? that was the great point. He couldn't provide society; and society had become a necessity of Brooksmith's nature" (p. 21).

At the same time, however, the narrator also works a clever reversal by insinuating himself as an object of sympathy, for if Brooksmith will suffer from the absence of "society," the narrator confesses that *he* will suffer from the absence of Brooksmith. For the first time in the story, the narrator jeopardizes the class-bound security of his first-person plural form of address—the *we* that necessarily excludes Brooksmith—by admitting that, at least toward the end of Offord's days, it is for the butler's company that he knocks in Mansfield Street. But a genuine equality cannot be achieved: even when Brooksmith receives his guest "at the familiar foot of the stairs," the servant remains standing while the narrator casually sits down (pp. 20-21). Significantly, James employs the language of the marketplace to aggravate this vexing problem of reciprocity. As the narrator describes him, in these sorrowful days Brooksmith

> had the solemnity of a person winding up, under depressing circumstances, a long established and celebrated business; he was a kind of social executor or liquidator. But his manner seemed to testify exclusively to the uncertainty of *our* future. I couldn't in those days have afforded it—I lived in two rooms in Jermyn Street and didn't "keep a man;" but even if my income had permitted I shouldn't have ventured to say to Brooksmith (emulating Mr. Offord), "My dear fellow, I'll take you on." The whole tone of our intercourse was so much more an implication that it was *I* who should now want a lift. Indeed there was a tacit assurance in Brooksmith's whole attitude that he would have me on his mind. (p. 21)

[13] The premise of Sumner's treatise, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), was simply that "one man, in a free state, cannot claim help from, and cannot be charged to give help to, another" (p. 27).

The narrator's intrusive extenuation here deliberately confuses the issue of responsibility at the same time that it seals Brooksmith's fate.

Ironically, then, Brooksmith's demise is graciously prepared for; and in keeping with his own high regard for decorum, the butler disappears from the story without so much as a whisper. When his executors disclose the terms of Offord's will, Brooksmith learns that his master thoughtfully has left him a legacy of eighty pounds. "It was so like him to think of me," Brooksmith says, apparently without irony (p. 24)[14]. But such a modest bequest cannot shield Brooksmith from the inexorable measure of the market, and it soon becomes evident that Offord's rare patronage has done his servant no special favors. In fact, a suspicion quickly spreads (and is confirmed) that the generous terms of his previous employment have "spoiled" Brooksmith. Among the former members of Offord's *salon*, "a certain embarrassment, a sensible awkwardness… attached to the idea of using him as a menial: they had met him so often in society" (p. 26). Poor Brooksmith: merely the first of the overqualified applicants!

From time to time, as the months (and then years) go by, the narrator meets up with Brooksmith in different London drawing rooms, but a common shame overshadows any incipient feelings of sympathy, for both of them acutely sense how drastically reduced their social world has become. "[W]e had been in Arcadia together," the narrator inwardly moans, "and we had both come to *this*!" (By which he means a particularly Philistine dinner party.) The other guests at table "required no depth of attention," the narrator confides—"they were all referable to usual, irredeemable, inevitable types. It was the world of cheerful commonplace and conscious gentility and prosperous density, a full-fed, material, insular world, a world of hideous florid plate and ponderous order and thin conversation" (p. 27). In the end, this indictment is rather self-serving, for the narrator of course has the privilege of declining such invitations, a reality that undermines his deceptive use of the first-person plural. It goes without saying that Brooksmith's options are foreclosed.

In a literal sense, Brooksmith cannot serve this public, because the public is incapable of appreciating his peculiar "genius" for service, which he has elevated to the realm of art. The story of Brooksmith, then, is a disguised variant of all those other Jamesian tales of writers and artists, parables of sows' ears and silk purses, which are tinged with the bitterness of autobiography, yet careful to avoid a compromised attitude of self-pity. In the difficult years between the first notation for this story (1884) and its composition (1890-91), James too had watched his popularity suffer and his market shrink. He, too, had been "spoiled," as Frederic Macmillan (1851-1936) was forced to point out; the novelist was rapidly becoming an expensive ornament on the publisher's list.

Throughout the 1880s, James had pressed Macmillan to advance him hundreds of pounds on royalties that his books would never earn back. Finally, with *The Tragic Muse*, the publisher

[14] In his own last will and testament, Henry James bequeathed £100 each to his gardener, George Gammon, his valet, Burgess Noakes, and his parlor maid, Minnie Kidd—if they were still in his employ at the time of his death. In a later codicil, he added Joan Anderson, the cook who had replaced Mrs. Paddington in 1911. Henry James, will dated 19 Dec. 1910, amended 25 Aug. 1915, proved 9 May 1916 (Center for Henry James Studies photocopy, Creighton University, Omaha, NE).

could no longer accommodate James's wishes. Looking back at a decade of declining sales, in 1890 Macmillan estimated the likely earnings of *The Tragic Muse* and offered James a two-thirds share in the profits, which he generously calculated to be "not less than seventy pounds."[15] Even Brooksmith (with eighty) did better than that! Which is exactly the point, for at this precise juncture in his career, James was willing to abandon his own "personal loyalty" to Macmillan and cast his literary bread upon the waters. "I thank you for your note," James politely responded,

> and the offer of £70.0.0. Don't, however, think my pretension monstrous if I say that, in spite of what you tell me of the poor success of my recent books, I still do desire to get a larger sum, and have determined to take what steps I can in this direction. These steps I know will carry me away from you, but it comes over me that that is after all better, even with a due and grateful recognition of the readiness you express to go on with me, unprofitable as I am. I say it is "better" because I had far rather that in those circumstances you should <u>not</u> go on with me. I would rather not be published at all than be published and not pay—other people at least... Farewell then, my dear Macmillan, with great respect—but with the sustaining cheer of all the links in the chain that remain still unbroken.[16]

James's immediate experience with his publisher only reinforces the poignance of Brooksmith's fictional dilemma. "The utility of his class in general is estimated by the foot and the inch," we are told, "and poor Brooksmith had only about five feet two to put into circulation" (p. 16). Even in the New York Edition, where (oddly) he grows by another inch, the diminutive butler just doesn't measure up[17]. Turned out of one place after another, and forced to accept piecemeal employment, Brooksmith eventually begins to lose his extraordinary distinctiveness, and to take on (as the narrator says) "the glazed and expressionless mask of the British domestic" (p. 30). Unsympathetically now, the narrator attributes this sorry transformation to some failing in the butler himself: "I said to myself that he had become a reactionary, gone over to the Philistines, thrown himself into religion, the religion of his 'place,'" and "had joined the band of the white-waistcoated who 'go out.' There was something pathetic in this fact, and it was a terrible vulgarisation of Brooksmith." Significantly, the narrator reverts to the language of the literary marketplace to describe Brooksmith's degradation.

> It was the mercenary prose of butlerhood; he had given up the struggle for the poetry. If reciprocity was what he had missed, where was the reciprocity now? Only in the bottoms of the wine-glasses and the five shillings (or whatever they get), clapped into his hand by the permanent man. (p. 30)

[15] Frederic Macmillan to Henry James, 26 Mar. 1890, in *Letters to Macmillan*, ed. Simon Nowell-Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 171.
[16] Henry James to Frederick Macmillan, 28 Mar. 1890, *Henry James Letters*, 4 vols., ed. Leon Edel, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap-Harvard Univ. Press, 1972-84), 3: 275. When James's literary agent (A. P. Watt [1834-1914]) intervened, the author was given £250 for the English and colonial rights to *The Tragic Muse*. See Michael Anesko, "*Friction with the Market*": *Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. 130.
[17] Altogether, there are fewer than 50 substantive variants between the first book text and the New York Edition, the majority involving relatively minor alterations in phrasing (e.g., "received it" in place of "took it"; "after the manner of a butler" in place of "like a butler"; "to forward any enterprise" in place of "to further any enterprise", etc.).

The rather chilling pronoun shift into the third-person (whatever *they* get) betrays the utter absence of reciprocity and, indeed, one might say, the absence of personal loyalty. What if, just a few months before his death in 1891, Herman Melville had read this tale: "Ah, Brooksmith," he might have sighed, "Ah, humanity!"[18]

As we have seen, the narrative technique of this fascinating story gradually widens the social breach between the narrator and his increasingly pitiful subject. Necessarily, then, our access to Brooksmith's private thoughts about his dilemma also diminishes. In his Notebooks, James's initial jottings about this tale might lead us to think that an anecdote about an unfortunate lady's maid, deprived of the genteel company (and conversation) of her mistress, gave the author his immediate inspiration for "Brooksmith."[19] But a different source might deepen our appreciation of the extent to which the story's class-bound anxiety was rooted in the author's personal experience. One first-hand witness (writing soon after the Master's death) offered this intriguing testimony about James's ambivalent feelings about his adopted British home:

> I don't think he wanted to be in smart English society, because he really preferred the company of smart people. It was rather that he did not like to feel that he was shut out from that or any other kind of company. He would tell me that he wanted 'to be taken seriously' by the English; that was a phrase he often made use of. He told me once that he particularly detested 'that excluded feeling.' I dare say also that he wanted to be enough in smart company to know what it was like.[20]

"That excluded feeling" is precisely what pierces Brooksmith to the core. Trying to describe his bereavement to the narrator, the butler concedes:

> "Oh, sir, it's sad for *you*, very sad, indeed, and for a great many gentlemen and ladies; that it is, sir. But for me, sir, it is, if I may say so, still graver even than that: it's just the loss of something that was everything. For me, sir," he went on, with rising tears, "he was just *all*, if you know what I mean, sir. You have others, sir, I daresay—not that I would have you understand me to speak of them as in any way tantamount. But you have the pleasures of society, sir; if it's only in talking about him, sir, as I daresay you do freely—for all his blessed memory has to fear from it—with gentlemen and ladies who have had the same honour. That's not for me, sir, and I have to keep my associations to myself. Mr. Offord was *my* society, and now I have no more. You go back to conversation, sir, after all, and I go back to my place," Brooksmith stammered, without exaggerated irony or dramatic bitterness, but with a flat, unstudied veracity and his hand on the knob of the street-door. He turned it to let me out and then he added: "I just go downstairs, sir, again, and I stay there." (p. 25)

[18] The last line delivered by the anonymous narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivener" reads: "Ah, Bartleby. Ah, humanity."
[19] The preliminary note was recorded on 19 June 1884, referring to the dispersal of Mrs. Duncan Stewart's domestic staff after her death earlier that year, and the loss felt by her lady maid, Past. "Represent this—the refined nature of the little plain, quiet woman—her appreciation—and the way her new conditions sicken her..." *The Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 29.
[20] Nadal, "Personal Recollections," p. 90.

This is a speech the narrator claims to have always remembered, but, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), he had the experience but missed the meaning[21]. "Brooksmith" is a parable of social death, at the end of which the narrator simply muses, with a shrug, "He had indeed been spoiled."

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