The failed American dream: Cousin Robert Temple and James's "jolly corner"

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42661227">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42661227</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Failed American Dream: Cousin Robert Temple and James’s “Jolly Corner”

Charles and Tess Hoffmann

In “The Jolly Corner” the protagonist Spencer Brydon, back in New York after thirty-three years of self-exile in Europe, confronts his alter ego ghost face to face at the climax of the story. James is quite specific about one aspect of the ghost’s appearance: “The fact that one of these hands had lost two fingers, which were reduced to stumps, as if accidentally shot away...” The mutilation serves the narrative function of causing revulsion in Brydon, preparing him for the horror of the ghost’s face, too hideous to be identified as anything like his other self. The face of the ghostly (and ghastly) presence belongs to a stranger.

The mutilated hand has provided a focal point for critics seeking an autobiographical interpretation of the story. They have equated the wound with James’s own youthful “obscure hurt” incurred nearly fifty years before the 1908 publication of this story, the missing members symbolizing variously James’s fear of castration, separation from American roots, lack of passion in war or love, and inability to write if he had stayed in America. But James had a ready and literal source outside himself for the ghost’s wound in the real person of his first cousin, Robert Temple. On 4 January 1877, Temple wrote to his uncle, Henry James, Sr., from Fort Townsend, Washington Territory, where he was serving in the U.S. Army, that while hunting, “some 5 weeks ago, I accidentally wounded myself in the right hand tearing away 2 fingers. I have had to suffer amputation of one, the other I shall save, though disfigured.”

James’s use of his cousin’s mutilated hand in the story is significant, because in a deeper sense Robert Temple was the model for Spencer Brydon and his ghastly other self. Like Spencer Brydon, Robert Temple lived a dual life; his was a divided

2 Dr. Saul Rosenzweig, a Freudian psychiatrist, was one of the first to link the mutilated hand of the ghost in the story to James’s “obscure hurt,” a physical injury that, Rosenzweig claimed, crystallized into a “castration anxiety” involving “not only the manliness of war... but also the virility of love.” “The Ghost of Henry James: A Study in Thematic Apperception,” Character and Personality, 12 (1943-1944), 98. Not to be outdone by a psychiatrist, and a Freudian at that, Maxwell Geismar interpreted the ghost as James’s own unconscious and the mutilated hand as “the physical confirmation of his lack of passion in any adult or mature sense.” Henry James and the Jacobites (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), p. 98. It remained for Leon Edel to connect the ghost with William James and the mutilated hand with both Henry James’s writing, which would have been “crippled” if he had stayed in America, and “the memory of his father’s amputation.” The Master: 1901-1916 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), pp. 313-316. More recently, Cushing and Teut confident that Brydon’s dream of a commercially successful career “is analogous to James’s own persistent and doomed wish for a commercial success in the theater.” “Henry James’s Dream of the Louvre, ‘The Jolly Corner’, and Psychological Interpretation,” Psychohistory Review, 8 (1979), 51.
3 Robert Temple to Henry James, Sr., 4 January 1877, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Henry James, Jr., received a similar letter from Temple, also written in pencil, and in addition a copy of the one sent to his father.
persona in conflict with itself. In the light of this information a new perspective on “The Jolly Corner” as biographical story and a fresh understanding of James’s elegiac tribute to Robert Temple in Notes of Son and Brother are possible.

I

The image of Robert Temple haunted Henry James throughout his life. In Notes of a Son and Brother, James wrote that Temple’s “fitful hovering presence, repeatedly vivid and repeatedly obscured, so considerably ‘counted’ for us, pointing the sharpest moral, pointing fifty morals, and adorning a perpetual tale.” Temple, born in 1840 and thus the oldest of the first cousins, a group that included his brother William and the two oldest James boys, was naturally the leader, tall and good looking, irreverent and humorous, with a derisive and mocking mind that was impudent and impertinent, neglecting no occasion “for graceless adventure.” It was he who early on had the reputation of being the “writer” in the group; his letters were eagerly awaited. He was the first to go alone to Europe, albeit to the wilds of Scotland to be educated at the University of Aberdeen in Scotch Presbyterian sobriety. In youthful defiance he converted to Catholicism (the Temples and the Jameses were Protestants). Yet for all his talent, he was a paradigm of the wastrel, an example for them of all to avoid—though James did not specify in any detail in Notes of a Son and Brother what Robert Temple had done. What Robert Temple did over a period of years was to squander his inheritance and become an alcoholic, ending as a convicted felon, forging checks and extorting money from his relatives.

Among the many Albany cousins the two Temple boys, Robert and William, were a pair with the two older James boys, William and Henry. The friendly rivalry between the James brothers William and Henry is well documented by their biographers, but the significance to the Jameses of the Temple brothers’ rivalry has been overlooked. James himself made the distinction between the two cousins as “sharply differing brothers” even in their early youth, and it was William Temple who was Henry James’s favorite among all the Albany cousins (Autobiography, 325). Henry saw more of his cousins in 1861 when the Temple girls came to live in Newport with their guardians, Edmund and Mary Tweedy, next door to the James family residence at 13 Kay Street.

According to Henry James, William Temple was more handsome than Robert, with beauty of head and face. He was the one the younger Temple girls looked to when their parents died in 1854. He was the immediate favorite with his class at Harvard, the class of 1862, whereas Robert was already in disgrace as a wastrel. In this sense, William was Robert’s other self, the “golden boy” of his generation; although he never went to Europe like Robert, all opportunity seemed open to him.

---

5 In A Small Boy and Others, the first volume of his autobiography, Henry James describes how he was always trying to catch up with William “as if he had gained such an advance of me in his sixteen months’ experience of the world before mine began that I never for all the time of childhood and youth in the least caught up or overtook him” (Autobiography, pp. 7–8). For a more complete discussion of their rivalry see Leon Edel, The United Years: 1843–1870 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1953), pp. 58–66 and Howard M. Feinstein, Becoming William James (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 223–235.
6 According to the James Family Genealogy, six children (two sons and four daughters) survived Colonel Robert Emmet Temple (1808–1854) and his wife Catharine Margaret James Temple (1820–1854). They were Robert b. 1840, William James (1842–1863), Katharine (1843–1895), Mary (1845–1870), Ellen (1850–1920) and Henrietta b. 1853. Colonel Temple was a West Point graduate, class of 1838, who returned to civilian life in 1839, but was reappointed colonel and served in the Mexican War, 1847–1848. Katharine B. Hastings, comp. “William James (1771–1832) of Albany, N.Y., and his Descendants,” The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, 55 (April 1924), 116–117.
He was enough of his brother's double, however, to get into disciplinary trouble with the Harvard faculty, and the spring of 1861 at the outbreak of the Civil War was spent in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, rusticking, to use the English pedagogical term.

There are Jamesian characters of American descent who, as Yvor Winters has suggested, when subjected to the European experience are enriched by it, such as Ralph Touchett in Portrait of a Lady and Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors. Robert Temple lacked Strether's moral sense and resembled Chad Newsome, crude and uniformed, who could easily be corrupted by the European environment, as the Newsome family correctly suspected of Chad. On 18 July 1860, "Ambassador" Henry James, Sr., writing from Bonn to his friend Edmund Tweedy on tour in Wales (Tweedy was Robert's uncle and guardian), summed up their nephew, not yet twenty years of age: "Seriously he does not strike me as hopeless. He is a frivolous nature and will probably be a wreck in the end but it is not a sure thing. . . ." While young Henry James was being installed in a pension in Bonn to learn the German language, his cousin Robert was living in squalor in Neufchâtel, overspending his allowance and contentedly dreaming "under the shade of a magnificent beech, regarding the expanse of the lake with eyes so contemplative that one might fancy, here perhaps are planting the seeds of a great destiny." The two facets of his personality, the spendthrift and the dreamer, were already evident. In all probability, the example of Europe's negative effect on Robert Temple's character played a part in the elder Henry James's decision to return to Newport that fall, uprooting the entire family once again so that William could study painting with William Morris Hunt.

The following year Temple was back in Newport staying with the Tweedy's and the rest of his siblings and exhibiting for his "American" cousins his "European" convictions and standards as alternatives to the American grotesque. He was remembered by James in Notes of a Son and Brother as being then "all sarcastically and incorrigibly mutinous" (Autobiography, 325, 326).

The outbreak of the Civil War was the turning point in the lives of the four cousins. William James gave up studying art and joined the Newport Artillery Company, but his father sent him off to Harvard in the fall of 1861 to become a student instead of a soldier. Henry, having injured himself fighting a fire a few days after the firing on Fort Sumter, settled down to the serious but undramatic and lengthy business of becoming Henry James, writer. He too went to Harvard (in the fall of 1862) to attempt becoming Henry James, lawyer, a serious but disastrous decision to be practical. Of the four it was William Temple who made the dramatic gesture and enlisted in the regular army, receiving his commission in August 1861 as a Captain of the 17th United States Infantry regiment. Less than two years later he was dead, killed in action at the Battle of Chancellorsville, 1 May 1863. In Notes of a Son and Brother James wrote a eulogy for the self of William Temple that might have been: "I cling to the idea that the sittings and sortings of life, had he remained

8 Henry James, Sr., to Edmund Tweedy, 18 July [1860], James Family Papers, Houghton Library. Parts of this letter were published by Ralph Barton Perry in The Thought and Character of William James (Boston: Little, Brown, 1935), 1, 191–192. Edmund Tweedy of Connecticut and New York had achieved commercial success while still fairly young and had retired to travel in Europe, while at the same time supporting utopian communities such as the North American Phalanx, among others. In the 1840s he was treasurer of the American Union of Associationists. Alice James recalled in her journal that Temple referred to him as "the hatter." Henry James remembered him and his wife, Mary Temple Tweedy, affectionately in the Autobiography.
subject to them, would still have left him the lustre that blinds and subdues” (*Autobiography*, 307). Even in death William Temple was a model for his brother Robert to compete against.

Sometime in 1863 Robert Temple enlisted in the U.S. Army. It would be consistent with American mythology that Robert was carrying on where his brother had fallen. However, the antagonistic rivalry between the two brothers was of such long standing that it was originally “half the good reason,” according to Henry James, for separating them to begin with by sending Robert to Europe to be educated. In the fall of 1861, only a few months after receiving his commission, William was sent to Albany on a recruiting mission at the same time that Robert was there. William Temple may have attempted to recruit his brother. At any rate, Robert was provoked to write to William James in Cambridge in December 1861, “the Captain is here more disgustingly disputatious and arrogant than ever.” William James’s comment to his mother was, “that shows how they stand pretty well.”

How they stood in opposition to each other, even on the issue of the fate of the Union. It is possible that this antagonism and the impetus of John Wilkes Booth’s well-known pro-slavery views prompted Robert Temple a few months later, upon accidentally meeting William James at a Booth performance in Boston, to talk “in the most extraordinary way you ever heard about Slavery and the wickedness of society &c &c . . .” Whether it was the extraordinary talk or a physical change in Temple, William observed that “there was something peculiar about him—he seemed quite changed.”

Robert Temple was restless as well as changed—traveling from Newport to Albany to Boston and then back to Europe in less than a year. One change was that he had come of age and was no longer dependent on his uncle, Edmund Tweedy, for guardianship and support. The death of his brother, his being liable for the draft, and probably the need for more money brought Temple back from Europe in 1863. Since the U.S. Army then paid a bounty to enlistees, he signed up for what he later described as “6 years drudgery.” He may have been in Newport visiting the family in the summer of 1863, for Henry James describes a scene in a Newport garden with a group of his New York cousins as they all “listened for” the “boom of faraway guns” at the battle of Gettysburg. Eighteen sixty-three was a crucial year in the relationship between Henry James and Robert Temple: Henry (but not his brother William) was about to be drafted into the army. In the end, Robert joined the army and Henry was exempted from military duty by reason of physical disability.

The two cousins met next in New York in late October 1863. As far as is known this is the last time they saw each other. They spent their time together, at Temple’s insistence, being “entertained” one Sunday evening by a secular preacher, Mrs. Cora W. L. Hatch, who held forth “in a kind of underground lecture room” on the topic “the Evidence of the continued existence of the Spirit after death.” She spent an hour speaking “a string of such arrant platitudes” that the two cousins “turned and fled,” forfeiting the 10¢ each had paid to listen. The following Sunday they

---

10 William James to Mrs. Henry James, Sr. [December 1861]; James Family Papers, Houghton Library.
11 There are textual differences between the original letter deposited at the Houghton Library, which we are using, and Henry James’s version in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, p. 322. At this time both Henry and William James were sympathetic to the abolitionists, as was their father.
12 Hoffmann and Hoffmann, “Henry James and the Civil War.” It is an irony that did not escape the later James that his own “obscure hurt” was an “invisible” wound exempting him from serving in the army, whereas Robert Temple’s very visible wound was inflicted accidentally while off-duty. William Temple’s wound incurred at Chancellorsville was fatal, as was cousin Gus Barker’s received near Kelly’s Ford. James’s younger brother Wilky received his visible wound at Fort Wagner in the same fateful year of 1863 and suffered the rest of his life from it.
heard a service given by a “congregation of the new dispensation” and found it “wonderfully entertaining,” and no admission charged.\(^\text{13}\)

By the time Robert returned from the army in 1869 to stay at the James home in Cambridge, Henry was already in Europe. Writing to James on 17 September, Temple imagined him to be standing on the Bridge of Sighs at that very moment, since James was visiting Venice for two weeks as part of his European pilgrimage. Both cousins were at a crossroads in their lives: Henry’s return to Europe, alone, was a first step toward independence; Robert’s return to Cambridge for his sister Ellen’s wedding to Christopher Temple Emmet was, he hoped, but a short interval on his way to becoming rich. Discharged from the army in July, penniless and living off the “bounty” of his friends and relatives, he nonetheless held onto the American Dream of making it rich quickly. Part of him recognized he was a failure, but he solaced himself by being contemptuous of the rich: army life had taught him “that there are other people in this world, & a precious sight better ones than the vaunted Upper Classes. My hopes & fears, my aspirations, & my life, are henceforth among the lower orders.” Part of him, however, envied wealth and position: “I am not without hope of becoming at some future day, an Aristocrat,” and he hoped to strike it rich and then “revisit the dear European scenes. . . . Vain, vain Dreams!!”\(^\text{14}\)

The reality of his American self at age 29 was that he was an alcoholic, albeit sober at the moment. He had no capital and no prospects except the vague promise of “a berth, a humble situation on his Oregon Road” from his new brother-in-law, a builder of railroads. Europe is the past of his youth: “When I want to go to Europe I must live in the Past. Memory must serve in place of the Cunarder.” The future is the West: “‘Tis useless looking at the Past—Look ahead! I say to myself. I intend to devote myself heart & soul to whatever I find to do—the further away the better from this stilted fashion governed East.—away, away to the West, the Free untrammeled West!”\(^\text{15}\) Drunk on words, Robert Temple was caught up in his rhetoric. He had, James wrote of him nearly fifty years later in Notes of a Son and Brother, “the pure derisive, the loose and mocking mind . . . which expressed itself, in particular by the pen, with a literary lightness that we used to find inimitable” (Autobiography, 323–324).

\section*{II}

The duality of Robert Temple’s character was underlined by the fact that when he reenlisted in the army at some point in the 1870s while out West, he did so under

\(^{13}\) Henry James, Jr., to Thomas S. Perry [November 1863] in Virginia Harlow, Thomas Sargeant Perry: A Biography (Durham: Duke University Press, 1950), pp. 268–271. James had his revenge on the Cora Hatches of the spiritual world some twenty years later with the publication of The Bostomians. It was only coincidental that the first installment appeared in the February 1885 issue of Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, the same month he wrote to Robert Temple, telling him what he thought of him for menacing his family.

\(^{14}\) Robert Temple to Henry James, Jr., 17 September 1869, James Family Papers, Houghton Library. In this same context Temple wrote to Henry that “the Country’s Aristocracy really consists of but Three Mighty Classes, the Railroad Kings, the Steamboat Captains, & the Hotel Clerks.” The railroad had supplanted the steamboat as the major means of transportation, and the American Dream for young men after the Civil War was not the romantic image of being a Steamboat Captain but making a quick fortune out of the railroads. This was true of both Wilky and Bobby James, Henry’s two younger brothers, as well as of Robert Temple. Indeed, at that very moment Robertson James was in New York “negotiating for a position on a Texas Railroad,” and though Wilky had just left to go back to his failed American Dream, the Florida plantation he had purchased after the war to help the ex-slaves, by 1871 he too was working on the railroad. Neither Bobby nor Wilky James ever became “Railroad Kings,” or even Hotel Clerks, but they did both become railroad clerks. See Jane Maher, Biography of Broken Fortunes (Haddan, Conn.: Archon Books, 1986), pp. 109–140, for an excellent summary of their business careers in the Midwest.

\(^{15}\) Robert Temple to Henry James, Jr., 17 September 1869, James Family Papers, Houghton Library.
an assumed name. Why he adopted an alias is unknown, but the most probable reason is that his military record from the 1860s, given his weakness for alcohol, made the adoption of an alias necessary. It is also possible that he needed to assume another identity because he was in debt to Christopher Temple Emmet, who by the 1870s was a wealthy railroad entrepreneur and lawyer in Oregon and California. Yet by all accounts it would have been within his character to make a new start in the West by quixotically changing his name. Whatever his reason, in 1877, when he had his accident, he was back in the army serving under the name of Robert Travis. The army was the only real career he ever had. Consequently, his being found “unfitted for military duty” was a personal disaster far beyond the fact that he was to be discharged with only $30 severance pay. At age 36 he was a defeated man, unable to continue his army career but too poor and untrained to set himself up in any other. Ironically, the one “career” from which the accident did not bar him was as a writer of begging letters; it merely added an effective element of desperate self-pity that touched the skeptical hearts of the recipients.

On 2 February 1877, Henry James wrote to his brother William, enclosing two letters from Robert Temple that described the accident and explained the need for money: “It seems a sad story,” Henry wrote. Feeling compelled to help his cousin, he enclosed a postal order for £7 ($35) to which he suggested William might wish to add a similar amount to send as a lump sum. However, Henry also requested that William write to Robert’s captain, asking “if his story is literally true—if he is indeed forced to leave the army,” to say nothing of the fact that when he does get the money, “it will be at the mercy of his squandering it.” Still, Henry was able to see the humor in the situation: “Bob’s letters are very ‘touching.’”17 So touching that a week later Henry sent another $12 for Robert Temple alias Robert Travis. Conscious of Temple’s double identity, Henry warned his brother William to make out the money order in Travis’ name and to address him by that alias.18

Temple sent a similar letter to his uncle, Henry James, Sr., in case his cousins were not “touched” by the situation: “This accident happened after I had made and was keeping a firm resolve to do well, to keep sober, & to try to get along. It will throw me out of the only living I have been able to make, for life.” He needed money, he explained, to go to Montana where he had friends and where he could get work “at one of 3 things I can do. I can either teach school, take care of the stage horses at a station on the overland road from Utah to Montana, or Cook in a mining camp.” Gone were the dreams of becoming rich and a Railroad King; indeed, he acknowledged he could not go to the Emmet brothers for help, however humble he might be. He closed his letter with a literary allusion that must have been read with mixed feelings by young Henry, who when he saw a copy of the letter exclaimed of his cousin: “What a wonderful phenomenon he is!” For the allusion was to James’s novel, The American, then appearing serially in The Atlantic Monthly: “Were I a man like Harry’s Christopher Newman it would be different—But I am not, & never can be now.”19

14 Robert Temple is tracked in the Houghton Library “Brief” to the James Family Papers, but not always correctly, being confused for Boss Tweed in 1873 and sentenced to Sing Sing. Feinstein, pp. 304–305, adds him to the list of James progeny who appeared to suffer from a family, “genetically determined disorder.” In his case, he was “alcoholic and had been imprisoned for forgery.”

17 Henry James, Jr., to William James, 2 February [1877], James Family Papers, Houghton Library.

18 Henry James, Jr., to William James, 9 February [1877], James Family Papers, Houghton Library.

19 Robert Temple to Henry James, Sr., 4 January 1877, Houghton Library.
James had created in Christopher Newman an American type, a new man, a
Westerner who easily achieved the American Dream of success and riches. Even
the Civil War had been a success story, for he had attained the rank of brigadier-
general by the end of the conflict. In the three years after the war, with no capital,
he had made a fortune partly in California railroads, just as Christopher Emmet
had, and was now at age 36 ready to enjoy Europe and its cultural heritage. But
it was one thing to create such a character in fiction; it was quite another matter
to cope in real life with Christopher Newman’s opposite. Temple at 36 was a defeated,
self-pitying man, a confirmed alcoholic, reduced to begging his relatives to send
him money until he could find “suitable” work. The work he proposed to do out
West would certainly be unacceptable to an Eastern “gentleman” in the persona
of Robert Temple, descendant of Sir John Temple.

Perhaps if Robert Temple had waited until the final episode of The American
appeared in the May 1877 issue of The Atlantic Monthly, he might have taken solace
from Newman’s taste of defeat in Europe and his sense of having been wronged
by others and ultimately by his own good nature. Christopher Newman lost the
American Dream; once having had it, he became indifferent to its lures. Robert Tem-
ple, never having achieved even the illusion, could not give it up.

The idea that out West one could do anything for a living, even teaching, and
not be ashamed did not trouble the imagination of Henry James. It was the notion
that Robert Temple would be a suitable teacher that bothered him. “There is some-
thing most tragical in the idea of his seeking work as a teacher!” Two years later
the reality of Temple as a teacher was even more amazing to contemplate. Writing
to his mother in April 1879, Henry James enclosed a letter from Temple and com-
mented, “was there ever a more exquisite turn of fate than his being in a pastoral
capacity?—having a cure of unspotted lambs!”

Whether Robert Temple ever went to Montana to become a cook in a mining
camp is not known. What is known is that by 1882 he was living under his own
name in Cross Hollows, Oregon, a stagecoach station. The attraction for Temple
was not the stagecoach horses but the embodiment of the American Dream in the
person of August Scherneckau, a German immigrant who prospered as the
stagecoach owner and postmaster of Cross Hollows, becoming patriarch of the vil-
age and its wealthiest citizen. It should have ended there at Cross Hollows, for
Robert Temple seems to have settled down, married, and had a child. But Cross
Hollows, though it appeared to be prospering, eventually became a ghost town,
and Temple became a “ghost” to haunt Henry James, reappearing again in his life
under dire circumstances in the winter of 1884–1885.
On 8 January 1885, Henry James wrote to his brother William from London that Robert Temple had appealed to him "for $250 to get him out of prison." Henry enclosed a bank draft for $100, all he could spare at the moment in addition to the $35 he had sent Temple several weeks earlier for the same purpose. Robert Temple had been arrested late in 1884 for forgery, and apparently would have to serve a five-year sentence in the state prison at Pendleton, Oregon, unless he made restitution in full. Although there was a sense of déjà vu in Henry James's fear that if Temple received some of the money ahead of time he would waste it, the circumstances were quite different from eight years earlier when he had injured his hand. Then he was an object of pity, even a "wonderful phenomenon," but now "he is to me a terribly uninteresting object of charity...& I part with my $100 reluctantly."  

Three weeks later Henry wrote to William thanking him for returning the $100 instead of sending it on to Temple: "I should feel myself very guilty in contributing to his getting into circulation again." James was repelled by Temple's behavior "in the face of his singularly low & degraded menaces in regard to his family."  
The menace Robert Temple posed for his family was to appear again in their midst like a ghost from the past. His scheme was to use Governor Seymour "and other friends of my father" to approach Grover Cleveland (soon to be inaugurated President of the U.S.) for a "birth in some Indian agency, or in Alaska—something 'out West' which would provide for R.T. in his old age—&c." It was an improbable scenario, which Robert Temple recognized: "Then I pictured to myself the horror of the 'Family' (not my sisters, particularly) at the idea of a visit from its outcast, &c &c. Needless to say, 'twas but a dream." But the damage was done, since he had already sent letters to the Family, including William James, threatening to "haunt" them with his presence when he got out of prison unless they helped him now. Whatever he thought he would gain by his threats, he was disappointed; Temple's scheme backfired. Not only did William return Henry's bank draft, but he also enclosed a copy of Temple's threatening letter. As a result Henry wrote an angry letter, which must have been devastatingly direct even for Robert Temple, who decided not to send a copy to William for fear, he claimed, that the prison authorities would read it. More likely, he did not want William to know the contents, William being his last hope of obtaining the $100. The loss of the $100 check was for Temple "the 'Fatal Blow'"; it meant he would have to serve out his five-year prison sentence. There was no hope of appealing to cousin Harry: "Harry's letter has rudely shattered the last fondly clung to, rose-colored illusion of my life," Henry James's friendship.

III

In A Backward Glance Edith Wharton describes Henry James reminiscing about the past one evening in the autumn of 1904 during his American visit: it was, she wrote, "a summoning to life of dead-and-gone Emmets and Temples, old loneli-

---

26 Henry James, Jr., to William James, 8 January [1885], James Family Papers, Houghton Library. Writing to William on January 2, Henry referred to a letter from Temple that William enclosed and Henry is returning: "It goes hard, when one has so many poor relations, to give one's earnings to a being so degraded, nevertheless and shameless." Letters, III, 64.
27 Henry James, Jr., to William James, 29 January [1885], James Family Papers, Houghton Library.
28 Robert Temple to William James, 27 February [1885], Houghton Library. The Houghton card catalog misdates this letter [1887], but internal evidence and other family correspondence published and unpublished dates it as 1885.
29 ibid. "Now that even Harry has deserted me, and the last prop has gone, I must acknowledge that I feel 'blue.'" Robert Temple's hope of extracting the $100 from William James was not misplaced because he did ultimately send the money to Temple out of his own pocket.
nesses, old follies, old failures, all long laid away and forgotten under old crumbling gravestones” until ghostlike “they stood before us as they lived, ...”30 Having recently visited Ellen (Temple) Emmet (now Mrs. Charles Hunter, for she had remarried after Christopher Emmet’s death in 1884), James was filled with memories of his cousins. Indeed, his return to America, revisiting New York and Newport, Boston and Cambridge, was a return to the past of his youth. Even his journey to the West Coast was a “backward glance,” for he met his nephew Edward Holton (Ned) James, brother Robertson’s son, in Seattle. He had traveled from San Francisco on Christopher Emmet’s railroad, the Oregon Road. Undoubtedly, they too reminisced about the Emmets and the Temples in the heart of Christopher Emmet–Robert Temple territory. But not until the following year, after his return to England, did the disparate images of his American experience coalesce for James in “The Jolly Corner.”31

The exact date of Robert Temple’s death is unknown, but references to him disappear in the extant letters of William and Henry James after 1892, when he apparently was released from prison.32 In all probability, by the time James wrote “The Jolly Corner” in 1906, Temple was dead. Certainly the sketch of cousin Robert in Notes of a Son and Brother, published in 1914, had the tone of a eulogistic tribute rather than a living profile. But whether or not Robert Temple was still alive in 1914, he was already “dead” to the family, appearing “ghostlike” in Henry James’s memory as he summoned to life the “dead and gone Emmets and Temples” in his memoir.

Indeed, the portrait of Temple that James created in Notes of a Son and Brother is suggestive of a ghost story, almost as though he were illuminating the hidden source of the ghost in “The Jolly Corner.” Images are “traps for remembrance,” and the image of Robert Temple had either to be dodged or patiently suffered when caught. The attempt “to brush past the image” of his kinsman is in vain, for “he waylays,” and “his fitful hovering presence, repeatedly vivid and repeatedly obscured” is “a perpetual tale.” “His figure bristling,” he was for a long time “a possession of the mind.” As an American image of the Orphan, he appeared with “the effect of strong and thick and inimitable colour.” But after his European experience, he reappeared, Heathcliff-like, a “rich alien influence” rising “before us, tall and goodlooking and easy, as a figure of oddly civilised perversity.” Indeed, “he had dangled there, further off and nearer, as a character” to be put into a book (Autobiography, 322–326, passim).

For Henry James, Robert Temple existed on several levels. On the level of reality, there was the unfolding chronological story of his life as a failure. Temple’s life ran

30 Edith Wharton, A Backward Glance (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 193), p. 194. Assuming Robert Temple was dead, only Ellen and Henrietta were alive in 1904.
31 Henry James would have been acutely aware, having visited both his brother Robertson in Concord and Robertson's estranged wife in Florida during his American tour, how in many ways Robert Temple was Robertson’s dopplegänger. Both had gone West to seek their fortunes and failed. Both were unable to meet the responsibilities of marriage and raising a family. But Robertson was no “monster,” nor had he ever done anything criminal. His failed life, despite the parallels, tended to reinforce the essential difference between him and Robert Temple—criminality. Robertson James’s life is the “biography of broken fortunes,” as he himself characterized it, but Robert Temple’s life is the biography of betrayed dreams.
32 Although Robert Temple himself indicated that he had been sentenced for five years and would be released in 1890, as of 20 January 1892, he was still in prison. Whatever the circumstances of his continued imprisonment, the James brothers were still sending him money, each sharing equally in the cost. “I also subtracted from your share 12.50 for R. T. sending to him in prison $25 from both of us. If you have already sent him more on your own account, I will refund you the 12.50 next time. There seemed to be need of haste, if the money was to go to him at all, so I took the liberty.” Cf. William James to Henry James, Jr., 20 January 1892, James Family Papers, Houghton Library.
33 In 1893 William James made a passing reference to Robert Temple in order to emphasize his impression of Paul Bourget as a man who surrendered himself “to a life which he knows to be bad, for the lack of just that grain of reality-feeling and will which in common men at a given moment can say stop!” William James to Henry James, Jr., 17 December 1893, James Family Papers, Houghton Library.
the gamut from the charming but wild youth, to an object of pity in 1877 when he accidentally injured his hand, to a convicted felon in 1885 who shocked James with his extortion scheme, and finally to an object of charity to whom both William and Henry sent money out of a sense of duty and family obligation rather than friendship. It is this level of biographical reality, revealed selectively in letters and memoirs, that provided James with the model for the duality of Spencer Brydon and his alter ego in "The Jolly Corner." The essence of Temple's character, as the pattern of his life emerged, was the duality of his nature.

The second level of Robert Temple's character was as a paradigm of the man whose own weakness causes his dreams to fail. It is this level—the symbolic—that transformed the raw material of life into the potential for fiction. In his youth Temple was the paradigm of the wastrel to his elders, but to his peers he was a romantic figure of rebellion who had a flair for adventure and a talent for words. The reality of the Civil War changed all that for the young cousins. The pattern of failure induced by alcoholism developed so that by 1869 the gulf between Robert Temple's dreams and his harsh realities created an unbridgeable duality. He went West to embrace his destiny of failure, objectified for James in the mutilated hand. But the ultimate degradation was the consequences of his own acts of forgery and extortion. It split his character in two, betraying the image of romantic youth with the reality of his criminal self.

It is on this third level of duality that James created a fictional character out of the reality of Robert Temple for "The Jolly Corner." This could be achieved only after James had acquired a perspective on his cousin. James transformed the dual nature of Robert Temple's character into the duality of Spencer Brydon and his alter ego. This splitting of the two selves and the creation of a ghostly "hidden self" was an inspired solution to the problem of portraying the double self and wedding it to the two warring cultures, the American and the European, within the consciousness of the same person. The psychological concept of the other self or the alter ego was part of popular culture by the end of the nineteenth century, and its recent literary antecedents were to be found in Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray. But Henry James's use of the alter ego in "The Jolly Corner" may have been inspired more directly by William James's essay "Great Men and Their Environment," which Henry read. In this essay, William describes the vocational freedom of choice available to a young man before the decision is made. But once he is committed, other vocational choices cease to exist: "He may sometimes doubt whether the self he murdered in that decisive hour might not have been the better of the two but with the years such questions themselves expire, and the old alternative ego, once so vivid, fades into something less substantial than a dream."33

Robert Temple decided to "go west" in 1869 and become a "Railroad King." Ever after he dreamed of the old alternative ego that would live in Europe. At the same time Henry James decided to "go east" and return to Europe to become a writer. He did not need to doubt which of the two was the better self, for he was able to create the dreams that alternative egos sustain. The dream behind Temple's American Dream of success was to be like Spencer Brydon, enjoying Europe superficially without having to worry about money. Then he would fulfill his destiny as

33 William James, "Great Men and Their Environment," The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy (New York: Longmans, Green, 1897), p. 227. Feinstein suggests that William James was thinking of his own "murdered self," the artist, which was lost when he became a scientist (p. 144).
a descendant of Sir John Temple, English aristocrat, rather than of William James of Albany, Irish immigrant turned successful real-estate speculator. For this dream Temple was willing to do almost anything—join the army, take a menial job from his brother-in-law whom he hated, write dunning letters to his uncle and cousins, forge a check, extort money from his family.

James objectified the duality of Robert Temple in "The Jolly Corner." As writer-narrator of the story he brought the two selves together, face to face. Only after reaching this perspective on his cousin through fiction could James write the tribute to Robert Temple in Notes of a Son and Brother, published six years after "The Jolly Corner." In this final level of relationship to his cousin, Henry James achieved a cathartic resolution of his own ambiguous feelings toward him.

The memorialized figure of Temple in Notes of a Son and Brother is neither a monster nor an object of pity. He is portrayed as a wastrel and a moral tale of wasted life, but he is also celebrated as a free spirit uninhibited and unrestrained by conventional morality—"a pure gift of free-handed chance to the grateful imagination." The alcoholism, the forgery, the extortion are unmentioned, for what remained in the memory after the specific acts of "misadventure" were forgotten, if not forgiven, was "a 'form' that appealed to the finer fibres of appreciation." The saving grace, which rescued Temple from being an unmitigated scoundrel, was his ability to write. The mutilated hand was transformed by James into the magic wand of the wordsmith. But because it is a "broken piece" it is a flawed gift: "His genius for expression again and again just saved him—saved him for bare life, left in his hand a broken piece of the effective magic wand, never perhaps waved with anything like that easy grace in an equally compromised interest" (Autobiography, 324–325). This was the ultimate tribute of one writer to another, and with this tribute James repaid the "deep debt" he felt he owed Robert Temple for inspiring the portrayal of the ghostly alter ego in "The Jolly Corner" with its theme of the failed American Dream.

James’s biographer, Leon Edel, described "The Jolly Corner" as "profoundly autobiographical." Rather, the mutilated hand of the ghost transforms the story into a profoundly biographical tale. The ghost’s wound is not James’s own "obscure hurt" symbolizing castration, separation from American roots, or lack of passion. It is the objective correlative of Robert Temple’s self-inflicted, psychic wound that symbolized the deep gulf between his dreams and his realities. The mutilated hand objectified for James the story-teller the corruption at the center of the American Dream of material success. The pursuit of success drove Robert Temple to a criminal act and to a "monstrous" scheme to extort money from his family. Its reverberating echo is found in the failed lives of James’s younger brothers, Wilky and Bob. Success, as both Henry and William James knew, was a constant, agonizing struggle of the mind, not a wish-fulfilling fantasy of sudden riches.