IMAGERY IN HENRY ADAMS' DEMOCRACY

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Henry Brooks Adams is most often and perhaps most justly remembered for the theories of history expressed in his two famous writings, The Education of Henry Adams and Mont Saint Michel and Chartres. Less attention goes to the novel Democracy, published as early in his career as 1880 and his first of only two extended works of fiction. This writer does not claim that the novel is an overlooked classic or that it should stand beside the Education and the Chartres as Adams' masterpiece. However, because Adams' celebrated theories of history are represented by the well-known symbols or images of the dynamo (which stands for the twentieth century in the Education) and the Virgin (which stands for the Middle Ages in the Chartres), it is worthwhile to examine the best of his fiction as well for whatever imagery it may yield.

To give this inquiry maximum scope and significance, imagery is here defined to include not only word-pictures appealing to the senses, but also symbols, metaphors, and similes—in short, figurative language in the loosest sense. For the purposes of this study, images so compartmented, on occasion, as trite—or to be of little interest (e.g., "Sybil's face was wreathed in smiles") are ignored. Also omitted are

several chance, isolated images which contribute to no apparent pattern. In other words, this investigation does not purport to catalogue with precision each image in Democracy, but to point out meaning in those images which seem worthy of analysis.

The images may be approached and analyzed according to tenor, vehicle, speaker, distribution, and probably other systems. Each system has its unique advantages; speaker analysis, for example, illuminates our understanding of point of view, since each image may be attributed either to a character or to the author. However, vehicle analysis—that is, study according to the kind of image and not its message or speaker—best lends itself to the discovery of image patterns and is therefore the basis of this paper.

Any kind of imagery research may seem hardly applicable to the work of Henry Adams. Admittedly, his writing is not so rich in images as, say, Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray. However, even Adams’ History of the United States, written after his fiction and a seemingly less likely repository of imagery, has drawn attention for its figurative language. In the History, Adams satirized Jefferson’s proneness to mix metaphors in his annual messages to Congress,” although Adams himself was apt to commit the same stylistic error, according to his older brother, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. Charles had “an almost unerring sense of Henry's weaknesses and extravagances, his addiction to picturesque

epithets and high-colored figures of speech, the 'Macaulay flowers of literature,' in Dr. Holmes's famous pun. 3 If Adams as a writer of history was known for figures of speech, chances are good that images in his first novel are also worth examination.

Furthermore, whatever images and image patterns can be found in Democracy might shed light on the second novel, Father, and on the sophisticated symbols of the Education and the Chartres. This inquiry, then, is significant not only as an investigation of the work at hand but as an indirect tribute to the writing of the more mature Adams.

Adams, in this first novel, was able to express some of his political views, once having actively wished "to attack the caucus-system, the heart of party organization, as the source of the worst corruption in the existing parties." 4 By the time Democracy was written, he was content to set down his opinions in a work of fiction, "published anonymously, its authorship a close secret until 1900 and not widely known until 1920," two years after Adams' death. 5 Politics is half of the concern in Democracy.

The other subject of the novel is society, which is the target of satire along with political life. Democracy draws heavily on Adams' observations of the 1870's in Washington, D.C.,

3Middle Years, p. 392.


where the novel is set. The social life of Mrs. Bland Lee, chief character in the novel, had a real-life counterpart in a similar circle of brilliant acquaintances centered on Adams and his witty wife. The Adams salon was a group "unique in the capital--the embassies and the White House were dull beside it."\(^6\) In fact, Democracy owed its early popularity to its thinly disguised portraits of these famous politicians and socialites. The social activities of the characters in Democracy receive as much treatment as their political doings.

Political and social concerns may be seen in the plot of Democracy, summarized as follows: The widowed Mrs. Lee and her younger sister, Sybil Ross, moved from New York to Washington sometime during the Reconstruction period. Having tired of charity work, Madeleine hoped to become familiar with the operations of political power. The novel was basically concerned with the ultimately unsuccessful attempt of the powerful and corrupt Illinois Senator, Silas P. Ratcliffe, to woo Mrs. Lee. Their romance was destroyed by the revelation of an idealistic young Virginian lawyer, John Carrington (also in unrequited love with Madeleine), that Ratcliffe had been bribed and his Senate votes dictated by a steamship company. Madeleine had known about Ratcliffe's involvement in other shady affairs, but the news of the bribe made her reject him.

Adams described very few episodes in detail; most of the action is merely outlined in Democracy. "Instead of exhaustiveness

\(^6\) Brooks, p. 354.
it aims for verbal dexterity, a dry, witty economy that compresses its material and communicates insight in the form of epithet.7? Such conciseness would indicate the probability of the writer's dependence on images to convey meaning.

One of the more underdeveloped image patterns in the novel was the series of shadow images, initiated by Madeleine to explain her motivation for moving to Washington, and elaborated by the British ambassador, Lord Skye, in a later discussion with her. Weary of the homogeneity of New Yorkers, Madeleine complained to them, "'You are just like the rest of us. You grow six inches high, and then you stop. Why will not somebody grow to be a tree and cast a shadow?'" (pp. 16-17) and wondered whether the heads of government might be "the shade trees which she saw in her dreams" (p. 17). Long shadows were what she sought; heroes were the object of her search. At the end of her stay in Washington she brooded over Ratcliffe's proposal and reverted back to the same line of imagery, asking herself, "Had she not come to Washington in search of men who cast a shadow, and was not Ratcliffe's shadow enough to satisfy her?" (p. 176). Perhaps her final question, although rhetorical, did as much to accent Ratcliffe's moral failings as some of the more unpleasant images attached to him. The shadow image contrasted Ratcliffe with the heroes Madeleine had hoped to meet, and the difference was great.

Two months after the move to Washington which initiated all the musings about shadows, just before "Lent throws its calm

7Hochfield, p. 25.
shadow over society" (p. 67), Madeleine visited Mount Vernon with several friends. There, she and Lord Skye argued about the development of an American culture. According to Skye, "Your national mind . . . has no eyelids . . . It prefers shadows which you can cut out with a knife." (p. 73) It was not only Mrs. Lee, then, but all of society that wanted to see bold shadows, that insisted upon the obvious rather than the subtle. Perhaps impatience or lack of discrimination in the national character is implied. Here for the first time an image pattern is used to expand the traits of one character into the hallmarks of his society, a development obvious again and again through imagery in Democracy.

Because Adams "had grown up in the shadow of presidents," including his own illustrious great-grandfather and grandfather, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, he may have been especially quick to satirize the politicians he knew. Satire in Democracy was often greatly aided by image patterns. The character of the Hoosier President, whose administration was antagonized by the bipartisan enmity of Ratcliffe, liked to be called "Old Granite" (p. 91). "Granite" is enough like "Grant" to be considered a slur on that notorious Reconstruction President, for Adams' fictional Chief Executive was a figure of comic coarseness and naïveté. Old Granite's stoncutting ability, especially since

8Brooks, p. 266.

it was publicized during the election campaign, would seem to
parody Railsplitter the Lincoln's 1860 campaign. In fact, the
"social gaucherie" of Lincoln is thought to be reflected in the
roughness of the fictional President. Thus did the choice of
a single epithet or image lend to a satire of at least two
Presidents.

The granite epithet developed into a full-blown image in
a passage describing the campaign, in which the posters of Old
Granite's party had depicted him "with a terrific sledgehammer,
smashing the skulls (which figured as paving-stones) of his
political opponents, or splitting by gigantic blows a huge rock
typical of the opposing party" (p. 91). The quarryman's opponents
had made fun of this image by depicting him "breaking the heads
of Ratcliffe and other well-known political leaders with a very
feeble hammer" (p. 91). Adams did not use this amusing image
again, with the exception of a single interjection into a later
description of the President, settled in office and enjoying an
evening with friends, as he "swore with some unnecessary granite
oaths" (p. 102). The whole line of imagery, of course, suggests
in the word granite stubbornness and inflexibility, which
accompany crudity in the character of the Wabash President.

A few historical figures, however, cast longer shadows than
Grant or Lincoln over the novel in the form of images. One of
Adams' subllest devices of characterization, for example, was

the adaptation of the image of an equestrian statue. Madeleine's
typical composure, evidenced even while furniture was being moved
into her new Washington home, was expressed as she sat "calm as
the statue of Andrew Jackson in the square under her eyes" and
issued "her orders with as much decision as that hero had ever
shown" (p. 19). Later, the image was echoed in an allusion to
the same statue, indicating this time not a state of calm, but
one of restlessness in the demeanor of the less poised sister,
Sybil. After Carrington had left town, entrusting her with the
letter revealing the extent of Ratcliffe's corruption, she was
for days "nervous and restless. . . . She went out and sat for
hours in the Square, where the spring sun was shining warm and
bright on the prancing horse of the great Andrew Jackson" (p. 145).
Although no explicit comparison was drawn between Sybil and the
statue, although no image existed, Adams' "prancing horse" seemed
to emphasize her nervousness and his mention of the statue seemed
to count on the reader's memory of the earlier appearance of it,
in order to create maximum contrast between the calmness of the
original image and the restlessness of the allusion to it. In
this manner, the difference between the composed Madeleine and
the fluttering Sybil is made clear, by reference to a statue
which is paradoxically both calm (immobile, obviously) and
restless (in the captured motion of the horse and Jackson's
gesture of lifting his cap). Furthermore, since this very statue
(now on the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol) did in fact,
during the 1870's, stand in Lafayette Square in Washington, Adams has very artfully integrated the elements of setting, imagery, and character.

The more sedate shadow of George Washington loomed even larger in the imagery of Democracy, although indirectly. Only once was his name used in an image, but that image was part of an important, larger pattern. Carrington thought of his former commander, Robert E. Lee, as "our Washington" (p. 119), a metaphor which adds to the reader's high opinion of Carrington himself, whom other characters had compared to Washington but who thought his own commander the only person worthy of such a comparison. This image was but one example of the elements in a pattern of setting (Mount Vernon) and characterization (deducible from remarks different members of the Mount Vernon excursion party made about Washington) centered on the first President. Most of these elements, having nothing to do with imagery, are beyond the scope of this paper, but one critic's explanation of the importance of the figure of Washington in this great pattern leads us to another category of imagery expressing much the same idea of grandeur or stability.

According to the critic, there is a statement in the Education

which partially bears out the significance

Washington holds for Democracy: "George Washington was a primary, or, if Virginians liked it better, an ultimate relation to the Pole Star, and amid the endless restless motion of every visible point in space, he alone remained steady, in the mind of Henry Adams, to the end." 11

If Washington represented stability to Henry Adams, and if he also represented a stability which none of the characters in Democracy could find, he was not the only such representation. For the "Pole Star," to which the comment in the Education referred, also stands for stability, and is part of a class of astronomical images, some of which carry the same message. Madeleine, at the end of the novel, wanted to flee to Egypt, saying, "'Democracy has shaken my nerves to pieces. Oh, what rest it would be to live in the Great Pyramid and look out forever at the polar star!'" (p. 189) The Polar Star, of course, is the one star in the sky which appears to our eyes a stable object, and Mrs. Lee was certainly looking for stability and security which she could not find with Ratcliffe in Washington. When a colleague of Ratcliffe's deplored the senator's bad manners at ignoring a social invitation, he said, "'Why, under the stars, couldn't he say, like other people, whether he was coming or not?'" (p. 40). Although the expression is almost trite, it is still based on the idea of stars as symbols of stability. Similarly, when the federal government is facetiously called "the grandest government the sun ever shone upon" (p. 83), this common phrase confers a kind of false grandeur upon the government by association with an object of grandeur and stability. The total effect of star images representing stability is probably to make the reader aware how little security or stability is present in the lives of the characters of Democracy.

Astronomical images, logically enough, can also represent

\[^{12}\text{Edenbaum, 249.}\]
inaccessibility. Exemplifying a duality of concerns we often find in Adams' image patterns, one of these astronomical images describes political and erotic love (social) ambitions. Thus the two threads of the plot are reflected in the same kind of imagery. Mrs. Lee wondered whether it was not "better to be a child and to cry for the moon and stars" (p. 82) rather than settle for a government run by imperfect and corruptible men. She was, of course, denied this moon and these stars, she who was herself the unattainable "moon and stars" (p. 130) sought by the luckless Carrington.

Carrington's hopeless love for Madeleine also gives rise to another small set of images—those images which employ not only the idea but often the word **immolation**. Carrington, proposing to Madeleine, not only humbled but "immolated" himself before her (p. 125); he told her that her marriage to Ratcliffe would be "a wretched self-immolation" (p. 140). Indeed, Madeleine, who admitted that "the fire is burned out" within her heart (p. 138), had surely lost most of her capacity for emotional involvement, so that any commitment she made would be more nearly out of immolation or sacrifice than out of love. As Sybil said, "I don't think she will ever let herself love anyone again. ... She is much more likely to go in for ambition, or duty, or self-sacrifice." (p. 134)

This idea that Madeleine was a self-sacrificing person also comes out in two religious images. "With a saint's capacity for self-torment, she wielded the scourge over her own back" (p. 149)
when she thought she had contributed to Sybil's supposed heartache over Carrington. Ratcliffe, in his proposal, told Madeleine she should not sit, aloof, "like a saint on a solitary column" (p. 186) and refuse to associate herself with what he considered his very realistic tendencies toward dishonesty.

Related religious imagery made light of various social and political customs and institutions. Sybil dressing for a ball turned her room into "an altar of sacrifice" (reminiscent of The Rape of the Lock) where the maids might enter to "lay incense at the shrine" (p. 152). On the political side, the steamer approaching Mount Vernon sent up "its small column of smoke as though it were a newly invented incense-burner approaching the temple of the national deity" (p. 70). Indeed, the master of Mount Vernon is "'Morality, Justice, Duty, Truth; half a dozen Roman gods with capital letters...he ought to be deified'" (p. 77), according to statesman and historian Albert Gore, a friend of Mrs. Lee's. The new President was given the mocking epithet of "this new political Buddha" (p. 90). But perhaps the crowning political parody accomplished by religious imagery was found in the words of Baron Jacobi, a wise old Austrian diplomat, to Ratcliffe:

"Your party system is one of your thefts from our Church; your National Convention is our Ecumenic Council; you abdicate reason as we do, before its decisions; and you yourself, Mr. Ratcliffe, you are a Cardinal." (p. 66)

Here corruption is ironically conveyed through church images; as we shall see, Adams uses many other kinds of images to the same
purpose, but this one is especially well put.

All of the religious imagery in *Democracy* should assume importance for the Adams student, since the second novel, *Esther*, has religion as its major concern. As one might expect, religious imagery is far more plentiful in *Esther*, but few of these figures seem closely related to the religious imagery of *Democracy*. No particular image refinement can be traced between the two novels in this category.

Religious imagery in *Democracy* was even used to satirize the fashion industry (it is called a "golden Calf," p. 20), and fashion in turn provided images to express the incompetency of government operations. Government can be not only a sacred cow but a frivolous one at that. To Madeleine, government "had less thought in it than one of Sybil's gowns, for ... they were at least adapted to their purpose, the parts fitted together, and they were neither awkward nor unwieldy" (p. 106). Presidents were turned out like dresses; Ratcliffe "had his own opinions in regard to the process as well as the fabric produced" (p. 106).

On two occasions, clothing imagery also helped to describe Mrs. Lee herself. She thought of politics as "bespattering with mud even her own pure garments" (p. 106), a graphic representation of her insusceptibility to corruption; and also "she had a habit of taking off her mental clothing, as she might take off a dress, and looking at it as though it belonged to someone else, and as though sensations were manufactured like clothes" (p. 116). Here we touch the limits of a later consideration of mechanical imagery.
which is also crucial in the characterization of Madeleine.

Another small group of social images is the dance images, one of which has literary precedent. Mrs. Lee tried to read philosophy, and "Ruskin and Taine danced merrily through her mind" in confusion (p. 17). Just as senseless as philosophy was to Madeleine was the clamor of office-seekers to the new President: "A wild dance was kept up under his eyes from daylight to midnight, until his brain reeled with the effort to follow it" (p. 93). This same activity, later called "the dance of democracy" (p. 95), is, according to one scholar, "the sordid jubilation that Carlyle had pre-figured in the carmagnole dance of the French Revolution."13

Dance imagery served on a less serious level, as Sybil thought that her "youthful diplomatists and admirers could not at all fill Carrington's place. They danced and chirruped on the hollow crust of society, but they were wholly useless when one suddenly fell through" (pp. 143-144). The government workers, then, for whom Adams so many times expressed his contempt, behaved as foolishly as the specters of office-seekers that haunted the President and seemed to have as little sense as the fragments of philosophy Madeleine tried to digest.

Related to the dance images are theatrical figures employed by Adams. Apparently he used them often, at least later in his writing career, for his biographer says of the History:

The literary artist in Adams neglected no opportunity to exploit a dramatic mise en

13Middle Years, p. 76.
scene ushered in with such phrases as the
actors in the drama assembled to play another
act in a tragi-comedy of increasing interest'
... or 'the curtain was about to rise upon
a new tragedy.'

These images from the History are recognizably akin to the
extensive one describing Madeleine's position as a spectator
of government at the outset of Democracy, which would indicate
that the use of such images was typical of Adams' work:

The stage was before her, the curtain was
rising, the actors were ready to enter; she
had only to go quietly on among the supernum-
eraries and see how the play was acted and
how the stage effects were produced, how the
great tragedians mouthed and the stage-manager
swore. (p. 18)

This effective image is unfortunately recalled only three times
in the book. Madeleine later reflected that politicians build
"elaborate show-structures" with nothing behind them (that is,
they give empty promises, p. 53); Ratcliffe was called an actor,
"like all great orators and advocates" (p. 99); and Madeleine,
as she left Washington for good at the end of the novel, was
"glad to quit the masquerade" (p. 176). In other words, the
political carnival is amusing, but not worth serious consideration.
Again Adams has expressed his disgust at Reconstruction politics
with a train of images.

Politicians appeared not only as mouthing tragedians, but,
from a slightly grimmer viewpoint, as warriors in Democracy.
War and weapon imagery abounded, as a great variety of social
and political interchanges were described in martial terms. At
the trivial end of the scale were small exchanges such as the

14Middle Years, pp. 399-400.
"incessant fire of small conversation" on the part of a visiting head of state (p. 166), a "bath of sarcasm" used by Madeleine against Ratcliffe (p. 183), her comment to him with "a sharper edge than she had intended" (p. 184), and various remarks that pierce through the "armor" of Mrs. Lee (p. 138) and Gore (p. 50). On a more serious level one finds descriptions of the assumption that Ratcliffe was unwilling to be a conscientious lawyer ("you didn't care who made the people's wars!" p. 65) and Gore's willingness to "die in the ranks" of democracy rather than desert the democratic ideal (p. 51).

Several other images of this category involve weapons. Mrs. Lee was faced with Ratcliffe's marriage proposal "like a pistol" (p. 165), and Sybil clutched "like a concealed weapon" the crucial letter documenting Ratcliffe's acceptance of bribes (p. 168), which would ruin that proposal. Madeleine recognized "the bath of Gore's enmity" toward her suitor (p. 109) and Jacoby used "his dialectic rapier" against the same man (p. 65). In addition, Ratcliffe's admirers said it was "time to swap knives" (p. 90) when the feud with the President-elect seemed to be going against them, and Old Granite uttered "a volley of oaths" (p. 93) against his foe. Adams has obviously conveyed through these images the idea that real weapons are no more dangerous than the cruel words people utter as part of the political or social routine or some of the actions they perform.

Battlefield images frequently figure in the novel, too, as hyperboles for courtship maneuvers. Sybil described Madeleine's
and Ratcliffe's final argument as "'a regular pitched battle'
(p. 190). Ratcliffe had been intent on driving Carrington from
"the field" of Mrs. Lee's affections (p. 180), and Madeleine
had "the field entirely to herself" as she rejected Ratcliffe
(p. 177). Lovers' quarrels may not be as bloody as real battles,
but the struggles seem just as deadly to those involved.

In other miscellaneous instances which further tarnished
character by attributing warlike qualities to social actions,
the President called Ratcliffe "a court-martial by himself"
(p. 103); a ball for foreign dignitaries was ridiculed by
having Lord Skyre act as a "buffer" between the Duchess and the
First Lady, who hated each other (p. 155); and Madeleine felt
that "her whole soul was in revolt" at the prospect of becoming
Mrs. Ratcliffe (p. 172).

It is not only the institution and weapons of war, but also
the people who wage it, that seemed to Adams despicable enough
to use as images for satiric purposes. Adams, in an aside to
the reader, spurned "an army of ingenious authors" who wrote
about typical courtships without the realism of Madeleine's
(p. 150), and the Duke danced "with a precision and momentum
that would have done honor to a regiment of Life Guards" (p.
158). Ratcliffe was greeted at his office by cronies called
the "Clan Ratcliffe" (p. 84), as if they were Scottish warlords.
Carrington felt at one point that Ratcliffe had "fairly out-
generaled him" in the contest for Madeleine (p. 125) and
planned his own defense "with the air of a general" (p. 129).
A graceful touch lent by Adams' sound classical education is found in the beautiful visualization of the graves at Arlington Cemetery as "long white ranks of headstones, stretching up and down the hillsides by the thousands, in order of battle; as though Cadmus had reversed his myth, and had sown living men, to come up dragons' teeth" (p. 117). This is one of the rare images in Democracy effective for its sheer beauty.

Adams' knowledge of games was another resource for images, and games are only the comic aspect of wars. Again, social and political activities are ridiculed by the use of imagery. Adams described Ratcliffe's zest for life in the Senate by saying that "nothing could have drawn him away from the political gaming-table" (p. 68). Ratcliffe was overanxious to win an argument when he tried to "pin his opponent to the wall" (p. 178), and Madeleine shuddered at the idea of turning "moral somersaults" (p. 175) to compromise her principles with those of a dishonest politician husband.

Adams' favorite game images, however, were drawn from cards. One can imagine card games as a normal part of the activity in the Adams salon in Lafayette Square. In the novel, Carrington realized how well "Ratcliffe was playing his cards" to win Madeleine (p. 129); the lawyer "was at his wits' end to know what card he could play that would not lead directly to Ratcliffe's trump suit" (p. 125); he thought of the damaging letter concerning Ratcliffe as the "last card" he held (p. 143). If war images make courtship tactics seem ferocious, card images make them appear silly.
The fondness for card-game images stayed with Adams through the subsequent writing of *Esther*, in which such phrases as "I throw up the hand. You must play it out with Hazard" recall *Democracy*, especially since they are again used to depict courtship maneuvers.

In fact, game imagery in general has developed variety in *Esther*, where about half of these images (shooting, riding, cattle-punching) are used to poke fun at a backward Colorado girl in much the way granite images jeered at the real President of *Democracy*.

One esoteric image in particular, in *Democracy*, connected the categories of women and sport imagery with a related but specialized group—images of netting and trapping. In the linking image, Ratcliffe's control of the President was likened to "the lost art of the Roman paterius, who from a safe distance threw a net over his adversary, before attacking with the dagger" (p. 89). The other figures of this specialized class ranged from Sybil's conception of Carrington "'trying to catch'" some "'first principles'" for Madeleine (p. 120) to several novel images of nets and webs. These nets all referred, again, to social and political maneuvers, and added to the reader's general impression of the characters as devious and predatory. Satire was strengthened in this way, also.

"The snares and pitfalls of Mrs. Lee's society" (p. 61)

did not claim the glib Ratcliffe as a victim; the "little trap" laid by Carrington to force the senator to withdraw criticism of George Washington (p. 28) did not catch him; and "the senator was not to be lured into a trap" set by Jacobi (p. 66) to expose his ignorance of cultural history. Ratcliffe, then, was like a clever hunted animal, lowly but smart. When the Virginian tried to expose Ratcliffe's dishonesty, "even when Carrington thought him hopelessly entangled, he would sweep away all the hunter's nets with a sheer effort of strength" (pp. 63-64). The President's intention to "'corral'" Ratcliffe, as he expressed it in his backward western dialect (p. 85), was also foiled by the scheming Illinoisan.

In another sense, Ratcliffe was like a hunter or predator himself. His admirers urged him to be a partisan hero and to "'rope in the President'" (p. 90), as he is capable of doing at the beginning of the new, weak administration. "To keep himself in the background, and to fling over the head of the raw Chief Magistrate a web of intertwined influences, any one of which alone would be useless, but which taken together were not to be broken through . . . was Ratcliffe's intention," we learn. The senator also laid a "trap" for Carrington in winning him a diplomatic post far from the capital and Madeleine (p. 130).

Madeleine herself fell for a time under the senator's power; later, she realized he "had twisted her about his finger" (p. 175). Ratcliffe had plotted carefully; the offer of the foreign post to Carrington
was a new thread in the net that Mr. Ratcliffe flattered himself he was rapidly winding about the affections and ambitions of Mrs. Ics. Yet he had reasons of his own for thinking that Carrington, more easily than any other man, could cut the meshes of this net if he chose to do so . . . (p. 127)

This image is reiterated by Madeleine's resolve not to "tangle" her own life by marrying Ratcliffe (p. 125), by the description of politics as "a net of irresistible fascination" thrown over her mind (p. 49), and by Carrington's words to her: "'you may yet find yourself entangled in this wretched political life here!" (p. 139). Love, social competition in other forms, and political intrigue, then, all have woven webs or set other traps for the unwary. If fishing is a kind of trapping, then the "salmon" image to be discussed presently also fits the pattern. The characters in Democracy are dancers, actors, gamblers, warriors, and hunters, as well as the objects of such pursuits on the part of others.

But above all, the characters were described in animal images. The President, lampooned in other ways, also drew his share of animal epithets expressing the crudity of his character. His adjustment to the new job was like that of "a brown bear undergoing the process of taming" (p. 99), and to see him at a public reception was to see him "'ape royalty'" (p. 57) or "ape monarchy" (p. 157). Even the royalty being ogled, in the persons of a visiting Duke and Duchess, is referred to with scorn by the British ambassador as his "menagerie" (p. 148). This figure is also extended to all of society in its "aping of monarchial forms" (p. 55). The newspapers of society, with their vicious gossip columns, are like
"a poisonous spider" to Madeleine (p. 59). This extension of individual satire to social satire is not unique to Adams, of course. It has been said of all nineteenth-century American political novelists that "personalizing everything, they could brilliantly observe how social and individual experience melt into one another so that the deformations of one soon become the deformations of the other."\textsuperscript{16} In fact, this extension has been called one of the themes of Democracy.\textsuperscript{17}

But characterization of individuals was still important to Adams, even of minor personages. The coquettishness of the young Washington socialite Victoria Essex was emphasized by calling her a "floury yellow cat!" (p. 122), and her stupid chatter was compared to that of a parrot (p. 76). The sly Jacobi had "eyes like a cat" (p. 144), and Carrington felt like a "fastened dog" (p. 124) because of Ratcliffe's ability to control him. Sybil's brash youthfulness was "animal spirits" (p. 136); in fact, she was "bold as a lioness" (p. 135). In contrast to all these victimized, ferocious, or silly people, spring came to the city with "the fresh warmth of innocent, lamb-like, confiding virtue" (p. 67).

Senator Silas P. Ratcliffe, however, as the "one figure in whom the author's conscious ideas about democracy must be fully represented"\textsuperscript{18} was the paramount figure as far as animal imagery was concerned. Despicable as Adams may have intended Ratcliffe

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[16]Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel (New York, 1957), p. 163.
\item[17]Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
to be, the senator's very infamy made him perhaps the focal character of Democracy. Certainly the greatest portion of the imagery applied to him. Adams' first novel perhaps "taught him the immemorial lesson of Milton's Satan, the superior artistic attraction of villainy."\(^1\)

One of the villainous aspects of politics, name-calling, was certainly widespread during the Reconstruction about which Adams wrote. "Adams once remembered the simple expressiveness of a Cabinet officer's remark: 'A Congressman is a hog.' The animal suggested to him by senators like Blaine and Conkling he honored in the name of Ratcliffe."\(^2\) Adams went beyond the bestowal of an appropriate surname or the novel's antagonist, of course. Democracy is full of animal epithets for Ratcliffe.

The vulgar senator, responding to Mrs. Lee's charms, was described as a fish on a hook—not a novel image to apply to a man captivated by a woman, but developed beautifully by Adams. Ratcliffe, flattered by Madeleine,

rose to this gaudy fly like a huge, two-hundred-pound salmon; his white waistcoat gave out a mild silver reflection, as he slowly came to the surface and gorged the hook. He made not even a plunge, not even one perceptible effort to tear out the barbed weapon, but floating gently to her feet, allowed himself to be landed as though it were a pleasure. (p. 30)

Many other examples of animal figures applied to Ratcliffe had to do with his relationship with Madeleine and provided an interesting variation on the hooked-fish idea. Early in their

\(^1\) *Middle Years*, p. 190.

relationship, she planned to use him "as young physiologists use frogs and kittens" to carry out her investigation of political power and its sources (p. 31). She found it amusing to "lead him about like a tame bear" (p. 51); later, when he became repugnant to her, she avoided his touch "as though he were a reptile" (p. 187). Washington society even gossiped about them in animal terms. Women called Madeleine a "cold-blooded, heartless, unfeminine cat!" in pursuit of her prey (p. 59).

Victoria Dare told Madeleine she had "caught a ra-ra-rat, and Senator Clinton was only a m-m-mouse!" (p. 59), an obvious means of emphasizing the appropriateness of the surname Ratcliffe.

Gore warned Madeleine against involvement with the corrupt Midwestern by quoting a proverb: "'the man who washes his donkey's head, loses time and soap'" (p. 109). We cannot identify the donkey with a particular political party since Adams' satire was bipartisan, but the character implication is clear. Even the less dignified animal image applied to Ratcliffe as suitor is deflated by its context. Of Ratcliffe's rejection by Madeleine, it was said, "The eagle that soars highest must be longer in descending to the ground than the sparrow or the partridge" (p. 161). None of these figures made Ratcliffe sound anything but repulsive or foolish or otherwise less than admirable.

In the political realm, descriptions of the animal element in Ratcliffe are more profuse. We see him "show his teeth like a bulldog" (p. 61) and watch as he and Jacobi attack each other "like quarrelsome dogs" (p. 111). Even after he became Secretary
of the Treasury and polished his manners and appearance, one
still noticed an "animal expression about the mouth" (p. 159),
although the shaggy hair once "like that of a Scotch terrier"
(p. 160) had been trimmed. Ratcliffe's conceit, furthermore,
was called "clumsy and hide-bound senatorial self-esteem"
(p. 65); hide suggesting a creature with more than Ratcliffe's
two legs. The new President, before he fell into Ratcliffe's
trap, while partisan rivalry still colored his attitude toward
his future Cabinet member, threatened to get revenge for a dirty
campaign by taking Ratcliffe's "hide and tell-'em" (p. 85) and
by "asking him 'sicker than a stuck hog'" (p. 93). In his
delusions of power, he thought of Ratcliffe as a "man-eating
bite" (p. 92). Of course, these images in the mouth of one
whom Adams was poking for rusticity also revealed the character
of the speaker, so that these phrases carried double meaning.

Cora, another enemy, referred to the senator as "a clever
dog" (p. 109). "What is to be done with such an animal?" the
disillusioned Madeleine asked herself as she considered how to
refuse him (p. 182). The senator even thought of himself, only
a little distortedly, as "that honest beast who was invited to
dine with the lion" (p. 95), as he perceived himself at the
President's mercy.

Again, these non-complimentary epithets are extended to
the whole class of politicians. They were "vultures . . .
wolves in sheep's clothing, those harpies, those hyenas" to
the President (p. 91). Lobbyists were a "den of wild beasts"
The same gentlemen were "asses in lion's skins" (p. 100), capable of being "driven like Paddy's pig" in whatever direction money can buy (p. 113), and a "pack of political hounds" (p. 172). Finally, Congressman were "like birds of the air, which are caught only by the early worm," in their susceptibility to bribes.

Animal imagery in Democracy contrasts sharply to that in Esther. Most animal images in Esther suggest not cruelty or savagery or lowliness, but some admirable quality in the character with whom the image is associated. Esther is several times described as a solitary young bird in her independence, her friend Catherine is "pretty as a fawn" (p. 349), and various others are likened to horses to suggest high spirits and industry. This change in choice of animal images is obviously deliberate, since Esther of the two novels paints a kinder picture of man and his society, and reflects careful artistry in Adams' writing.

Not only animal images, but also a few images related to the sense of taste serve to highlight Crudity. The President's coarseness was described in sensual terms; he means a crude young humorist "coarse enough to suit even the President's palate" (p. 102). A pair of taste images expressed the difference between Madeleine's and Sybil's attitudes toward Carrington. Sybil, like most young women, had "a keen palate for whatever savors of experience and adventure" (p. 144); therefore she found the lawyer exciting because of his financial experiences and Civil War combat record. Her more refined older sister,
however, valued Carrington for his gentleness. Madeleine, "having tasted many more kinds of the wine of life than Sybil, had learned to value certain delicacies of age and flavor that were lost upon younger and coarser palates" (p. 23). This is not to imply that Sybil was coarse in the Ratcliffian manner, but only to show a difference in refinement between the two women which was basic to their respective characters. The fact that Ratcliffe's proposal included the plea, "The sound of your voice—the touch of your hand—even the rustle of your dress—are like wine to me" (p. 187), is a further tribute to Madeleine's elegance, recognizable even to the crude senator. Esther parallels such images with one of its own ("That woman has left a taste on my palate that all the tea in China will never wash off!" p. 287), suggesting that the taste imagery in Democracy was not a matter of later abandoned whim.

Perhaps the most interesting taste image in Democracy, however, occurred in Madeleine's retort to Sky's declaration that Americans are blind to their country's beauties:

'You want peaches in spring... Give us our thousand years of summer, and then complain, if you please, that our peach is not as mellow as yours' (p. 73).

In this way, the idea of crudity in the whole American society, as debated by Mrs. Lee, again had served to amplify a theme of individual crudity through the use of extended images. Furthermore, the contrast between European and American culture which so enthralled Adams in the Charlevoix is seen here in embryonic form. If this line of imagery suggests that "there is no place for the
sensitive and thoughtful man, perhaps there never was," it is no accident, for this is said to be one theme of Democracy. 21

Another group of generally unpleasant images also aided to the impact of the vulgarity or corruption theme: the disease images. Although this series of figures is slight, like the granite series, it is just as striking and fully developed. Early in the novel, the hypocritical Ratcliffe enlisted Mrs. Lee's sympathy with a recitation of the dirty tricks his colleagues played upon him. He "spared her nothing except the exposure of his own moral sordid. He carefully called her attention to every leprous taint upon his neighbors' person, to every rag in their foul clothing" (p. 96). But later, when Madeleine realized the full extent of Ratcliffe's own corruption, she termed it a "moral paralysis" (p. 181), or "atrophy of the moral senses" in a "moral impotence" (p. 182). Thus, "the mere thought of his touch upon her person was more repulsive than a loathsome disease" (p. 187), but because Ratcliffe had been the focus of her whole investigation of democracy, the development of disease imagery did not end with him. Madeleine reflected on her entire Washington experience in related terms:

Not until this moment had she really felt as though she had got to the heart of politics, so that she could, like a physician with his stethoscope, measure the organic disease. Now at last she knew why the pulse beat with such unhealthy irregularity, and why men felt an anxiety which they could not or would not explain. Her interest in the disease overcame her disgust at the foolishness of the revolution.

(p. 181)

21 Howe, p. 162.
Adams used disease images secondarily to describe the sufferings of unrequited love in *Democracy*. Again, a line of imagery has been applied to both the political and social conditions in the narrative. When Madeleine mistakenly thought that Sybil loved Carrington, she hesitated "to probe a healing wound" (p. 174) by mentioning his name, and wondered if Sybil felt "the depth of her own wound" (p. 175) at his departure from the city. Carrington, who had recently told Sybil of his hopeless love for Madeleine, referred to that emotion as an ailment "like toothache or rheumatism... it is a disease to be borne with patience, like any other nervous complaint, and to be treated with counterirritants!" (p. 132). Finally, Jacobi thought of Ratcliffe's rejection by Madeleine as still another wound (p. 189). Love may not ordinarily be conceived as a disease in the same sense as political corruption, but love turned out sourly for most of the characters in the novel.

To the already overwhelming strength of the corruption theme were added images of dirt and solidity. Adams elaborated on the old idea of political "mud-slinging" in several cases. Ratcliffe, becoming vicious in an argument with a Congressman, was said to have "rolled him over and over in the mud" (p. 43). When Madeleine became involved with the senator, she imagined herself "deep in the mire of politics" (p. 106) and later realized she had "walked into the quagmire of politics, in spite of remonstrance, in spite of conscience" (p. 172). She wondered whether Ratcliffe
had "a single clean spot in his mind" (p. 172). Somewhat related in intent was Sybil's remark that Victoria Dare had become engaged to a ""coronet and a peat-bog"" (p. 191)—that is, to a titled Irishman whose dilapidated family estate seemed to represent his personal worth.

Also, as in the case of the disease imagery, Ratcliffe had hypocritically pointed out to Madeleine "every slimy and fetid pool that lay beside their path. It was his way of bringing his own qualities into relief. He meant that she should go hand in hand with him through the brimstone lake" (p. 96). In other words, he was quick to see corruption in others.

A link between dirt and water imagery, still another major category, was the image in which Madeleine was still able to reaffirm her faith in democracy, although she had seen its failings:

Under the scum floating on the surface of politics, Madeleine felt that there was a sort of healthy ocean current of honest purpose, which swept the scum before it, and kept the mass pure. (p. 107)

According to one Adams scholar, this image is especially meaningful when juxtaposed with a later image in the novel of the same class, showing her change in attitude:22

[Ratcliffe] had not even enough sense of humor to see the absurdity of his own request, that she should go down to the shore of this ocean of corruption, and repeat the ancient role of King Canute, or Dame Partington with her mop and pail (p. 182).

In the first case,

she had employed her image to reconcile herself to the Ratcliffian morals... She had thought of him as helping, by whatever means, as foul as necessary, to sweep the scum away; now she perhaps could not help seeing him as the scum to be himself swept away, for he seemed as rotten as the material he handled.

At one time, Madeleine had perceived only the scum of corruption, but by the time Ratcliffe proposed to her, she saw the depth of his dishonesty and rottenness.

More generally, not only politics but history itself was described in terms of an ocean. Gore said about men like Ratcliffe who disregard the opinion of posterity that the "ocean of history is foul with the carcasses of such statesmen, dead and forgotten, except when some historian fishes one of them up to gibbet it" (p. 108). Furthermore, it is not only the "salmon" Ratcliffe who was at the mercy of some ocean in a figurative sense. Ocean images were used repeatedly to suggest the emotions upon which great enterprises depend. One statesman's friends wondered "whether he would manage to sink first his review or his yacht" (p. 33), as they reflected on his two pet projects. Ratcliffe described a political stalemate as "'dead water!'" (p. 46) and called his acceptance of a Cabinet post the "'fatal plunge of my life!'" (p. 98), although he had actually calculated the move long before.

The Chief Executive himself was hit by his new duties "in a deluge... like a wave" (p. 100), and Carrington told Madeleine

23Blackmur, p. 296.
that Ratcliffe "rose with the wave" to become popular (p. 25). When Madeleine thought of rejecting Ratcliffe, she mused, "If I throw him overboard, everything must go, for he is only a specimen" (p. 50). In an even broader application of the image, Adams as intruding author commented that

if the weak in faith sometimes quail when they see humanity floating on a shoreless ocean, on this plank, which experience and religion long since condemned as notion, mistake or not, may have thus far floated better by its aid than the popes ever did with their prettier principle, (p. 106)

in his own tribute to the democratic ideal, Madeleine ultimately realized the existence of an "impassable gulf" between herself and Ratcliffe (p. 188) that prevented even their friendship.

Ocean imagery to describe the predicaments of an individual or of society is nothing new; the symbol of a boat for the human soul had been much used by the poet Shelley, for example. However, even this rather overused imagery applied well to a novel about people lost in the midst of dishonesty, corruption, and apathy. Similarly, in Esther, we hear of "the bottomless ocean of theology" (p. 314) and "the eddies of matrimony" (p. 303). For Esther, like Democracy, is about bewildered people, and Adams used some of the same imagery to convey this bewilderment. We can conclude that ocean imagery in Democracy does not appear by chance.

Perhaps the most fascinating of the water images, and one of the most interesting figures in the entire book, is the following description of Madeleine's plan for her relationship with Ratcliffe:

Through him she hoped to sound the depths of statesmanship and to bring up from its cozy
bed that pearl of which she was in search, the
mysterious gem which must lie hidden somewhere
in politics (p. 30).

Besides adding to the concept of experience of life as an
adventure at sea and specifically enhancing earlier references
to politics itself as an ocean to be explored for riches or at
least for clean, fresh water, this image strikingly resembled a
phrase Adams had written in a letter years earlier, a "prediction
made in his youth to his brother, that he was going to 'plunge
under the stream' and 'remain under the water' and come up at
last 'with an oyster and a pearl'." 24 Although it doesn't seem
referred to an 'investigation of government and politics' in his writing
ambitions, the similarity in wording may show that Adams was not
an amateur a novelist as is usually supposed—that this image
may have been nurtured deliberately for years. Or, perhaps,

Relaxing with the fictive medium to which he
felt no professional responsibility, he turned
out to have a facility for thinking in images
that gave his style lightness and range. 25

Although the comment was made about all of Democracy, it could
also explain the specific example under present scrutiny. It
may be that the image, rather than being planned, was a happy
spontaneity on Adams' part. In any case, the image is intriguing.

In addition to image patterns suggesting corruption and
coarseness by reference to animals and diseases, Adams suggested
still another kind of moral failing in his characters and in
society with his extensive use of labor, industrial, and mechanical


25 J. C. Teverson, The Mind and Art of Henry Adams (Boston,
images. If these images seem overly caustic, it is well to remember Adams' rather Brahmin New England background and the fact that the novel's anonymity protected him from much criticism he would otherwise have had to face. Close friends such as John Hay and Clarence King, who knew the secret of the authorship, may have been too loyaty about Democracy. "Their approval may have come too easily and perhaps encouraged the snobbish alarm at mechanization and bureaucratization that lurks in so many corners of the book." 26

Such snobbery appears in Madeleine's evaluation of the new First Lady as a "coarse washerwoman" (p. 106), someone she would not "engage as a cook" (p. 104). Similar bias shows in such comments as the comment on the President that "No maid-of-all-work in a cheap boardinghouse was ever more harassed" (p. 100), or Ratcliffe's disgust at the prospect of being "put under the harrow of a small Indiana farmer" (p. 85).

The more strictly industrial and mechanical images, which were plentiful, greatly strengthened Adams' descriptions of politics and society. Several mechanical images cluster around Madeleine's description of a White House reception. The President and his wife were "automata ... two seemingly mechanical figures" shaking hands "with the mechanical action of toy dolls" (p. 84), a vivid description which has received much critical praise. 27 Madeleine further visualized, with horror, a future society modeled on this supposedly exemplary couple—a society whose "talk will be like the squeaking of toy dolls" (p. 55). This group of puppet

26 Jevenson, p. 97.

27 Ibid., p. 88.
images well expresses the inhumanity of a homogeneous, robot-like society which threatens to become dominant.

Society and politics in general are also compared to machines without feelings. Madeleine, for example, wanted to see "the machinery of society, at work" (p. 18). She thought of politics in the same way; she could see "how the great machine floundered about" (p. 106); and eventually she came to realize that she "had barely escaped being dragged under the wheels of the machine" (p. 175). Haveliée, in the midst of a political discussion, called a proposed Civil Service reform a "'wooden nutmeg! It's a clock with a show case and sham works... just another Yankee notion!" (p. 43), which not only adds to a chain of industrial images and hints at mechanical responses and solutions to human problems, but also enables the plainsman to poke fun at New England for a change in the novel. One Congressman commented that the new President is "'too old a politician not to have wires in his hand'" (p. 36) and that Gore "'has his own little hatchet to grind too'" (p. 37).

These are but a few of the men, not of "ordinary mould" (p. 18), whose acquaintance Madeleine had set out to make as she moved to Washington. Once settled, she visited Congress to learn how the machinery of government worked, and what was the quality of the men who controlled it. One by one, she passed them through her crucibles and tested them by acids and by fire. A few survived her tests and came out alive, though more or less disfigured, where she had found impurities. (p. 22)"

If the overwhelming emphasis on machinery is not yet evident,
consider the critical comment that

Mrs. Lee's determination to 'manufacture' something out of the natural resources suggests the course of her unconscious discoveries. From her initial resolve... to her final sense of a narrow escape... a persistent line of imagery implies that mechanization has taken command... 28

So it had. Mechanical imagery had even crept into such casual happenings as Carrington's sudden understanding of a Patecliffe plot ('The situation flashed before his eyes like electric sparks,' p. 124), and a description of Patecliffe's instinct for human weakness ('No magnetic needle was ever truer than his finger when he touched the vulnerable spot in an opponent's mind,' p. 56).

Of all mechanized people and institutions in the novel, the most surprising at first glance is Madeleine Lee herself. On the other hand, perhaps her mechanical qualities explain some of the lack of attraction many readers feel for her. 29 We have already seen how she mechanically evaluated men. Sybil told Carrington that her sister "went about like a machine" after the deaths of her husband and child (p. 134), which is understandable. But moreover, Madeleine said of herself as she left New York at the beginning of the narrative, "I am now pure steel. You may beat my heart with a trip-hammer and it will beat the trip-hammer back again" (p. 18). When she rejected Patecliffe, she told him, "Our lives run in separate grooves" (p. 173). Even

28Levenson, pp. 87-88.

when she was worried about Sybil, the worry was not a burden or a bother, but a "new coil tightening about her" (p. 165).

Even more memorable than these several images conveying Madeleine's coldness and efficiency is the extensive figure at the beginning of Democracy which expresses Madeleine's motive in coming to Washington:

It was the feeling of a passenger on an ocean steamer whose mind will not give him rest until he has been in the engine-room and talked with the engineer. She wanted to see with her own eyes the action of primary forces; to touch with her own hand the massive machinery of society; to measure with her own mind the capacity of the motive power. (p. 17)

And, as we learn a few lines later,

Perhaps the force of the engine was a little confused in her mind with that of the engineer, the power with the men who wielded it. (p. 18)

This well-developed image, besides giving further insight into the mechanical characteristics of Mrs. Lee, has been described as linking the character Madeleine to the heroine of Esther. Madeleine is the "secularly concerned counterpart of Esther Dudley . . . also interested less in the source of power than in the power itself."31

Furthermore, the whole pattern of mechanical images is a particularly interesting foreshadowing of the development of Adams' famous symbol of the twentieth century, the dynamo. Critics have said that the symbolic scene at Niagara Falls in Esther is the true foreshadowing of the dynamo image of the

30 Edenbaum, 246.

31 Ibid.
Education, but the wealth of mechanical imagery found in 
Democracy is almost totally absent from the second novel. But 
the development of the dynamo symbol, although apparently hinted 
at in Democracy, is the topic of another paper. 

Meanwhile, the imagery of Democracy is vital to that novel. 
Besides suggesting later developments in Alas' writing and, on 
occaision, revealing certain aspects of his personality, the 
figures of speech he used delineated both theme and character. 
This delineation was often accomplished by the use of one 
particular kind of imagery to describe a certain character 
and the accompanying use of the same kind of imagery to expand 
the idea into a characteristic of society as a whole. It seems 
that often the first application may be considered characterization 
by imagery and the second application may be thought of as theme 
development by imagery, since anything characteristic of society 
becomes a theme. The imagery applied to both the social and 
political aspects of the plot, as well it should to emphasize in 
the novel the importance of both realms of activity. A fine overall 
tribute to Democracy can be found in a critical comment which 
paraphrases certain key images in its concession that the novel 
is applicable even to life today:

Pure intelligence still contemplates with the 
corruption which it fears, is still unwilling 
to cleanse necessity by performing it, but 
asks corruption to reform itself first, and 
then flees to its great pyramid and its pole 
star where corruption refines the wooden antlers 
of reform. 32

The imagery may be fanciful, but its portraits of people and its 
comments on their society—and ours, still—are well worth noting.

32 Heschfield, p. 82.

33 Blackcom, 283-284.
List of Works Consulted


