THE EMERGING CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRE OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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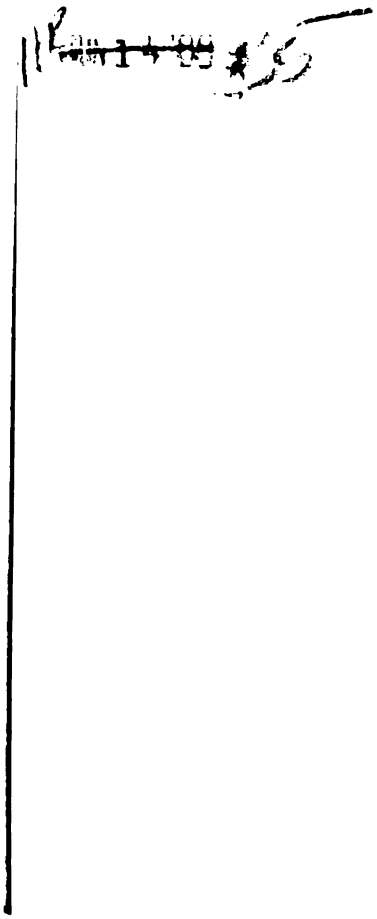

ABSTRACT

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Many critics have, over the years, treated Henry James's idea of the centre of consciousness. This method of narration was at first hailed as not only the best but also the only modern way of telling a story, or rather showing a story; "show, don't tell" became the cry. Naturally an adverse reaction set in against such a senseless limitation of the freedom of the novelist until today "point of view" has, in some circles at least, become almost a disreputable term. James himself was never as dogmatic as his supporters have become. Furthermore, he developed a far broader conception of the values and limitations of the centre of consciousness and the objective method than most critics who came after him.

The general objective of this study, then, is to focus critical and scholarly attention on the process of development of James's fictional theory and practice as it evolved in the years from 1864 to 1881, with special

attention given to the growth in subtlety and scope of the centre of consciousness. This study falls into two parts. The first is based upon James's own critical pronouncements as found in his reviews, letters, notebooks, and Hawthorne, all written before 1882, and is supplemented with the Prefaces, which were composed 1907-1909 for the collected "New York" edition of his works. This section examines James's early search for a theory of realistic expression and demonstrates the way in which that search was influenced by his ambivalent attitudes toward his native land and toward Europe. The manner in which the centre of consciousness developed both from James's realization of the shallowness of the "surface" realism of his time and from his basic interest in character and human relationships is traced. This first part of the essay also treats the relationship between "felt life," the objective method, and the centre of consciousness. Definitions are offered of such key terms as centre of consciousness, commanding centre, confidant, reflector, and objective method. Despite the claims of a number of critics, James gave to the centre of consciousness a role that reached beyond merely aiding in the disappearance of the narrator; the several other functions of the centre are examined and illustrated from the fiction.

The second part of this essay consists of a study of James's use of the centre of consciousness in three

novels of this period: Roderick Hudson (1876), The American (1877), and The Portrait of a Lady (1881). The centre of consciousness is simply one element, albeit an important one, of James's objective method in these novels. When it is employed most successfully, it operates in close conjunction with the confidant, the reflector system, the interior monologue, and the self-effacing narrator. It is important for an understanding of James's method and his fiction not to accept the erroneous belief that his major goal as a writer was the total elimination of the narrator or the rendering of a story exclusively through dialogue. What James did seek and find was a way of portraying the inner life, a means of dramatizing consciousness. He wrote as if consciousness were the distinguishing characteristic of the human condition, as if events were real and meaningful only as they were perceived by someone. James chose to reveal the reality that he experienced through the objective method. This approach is virtually an epistemological system, for like such a system it presents a theory of knowledge. A man learns about his fellow men in certain ways, none of them like the way the reader learns about characters in the fiction of most novelists before James's time. What James sought to achieve in his fiction, then, was a representation of the process of human perception in terms that duplicated life as nearly as possible.

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By

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PREFACE

The publication within the last decade of a complete Henry James bibliography, three additional volumes of a proposed five volume biography, and several major studies of themes and individual novels as well as the reissue of the "New York Edition" of the novels and tales are all testimony to a continuing academic interest in a writer whose popularity has waxed and waned several times in the last one hundred years.

Many critics and scholars have, over the years, treated James's idea of the centre of consciousness. This method of narration was at first hailed as not only the best but the only modern way of telling a story, or rather showing a story. "Show, don't tell" became the cry. Naturally an adverse reaction set in against such a senseless limitation on the freedom of the novelist until today "point of view" has, in some circles at least, become almost a disreputable term. James himself was never as dogmatic as his supporters have become. Furthermore, he developed a far broader conception of the values and limitations of the centre of consciousness and the objective method than most critics and many novelists after him.

The general objective of this study, then, is to focus critical and scholarly attention on the process of development of James's fictional theory and practice as it evolved in the years from 1864 to 1881, with special attention given to the growth of the use of the centre of consciousness. This essay is intended to be expository rather than argumentative and to offer a definition and an explanation of the development and the functions of the centre of consciousness in the so-called "early period." To be shown are the ways in which: the centre of consciousness developed from James's realization that "surface" realism was shallow and from his basic interest in character and human relationships; the centre of consciousness as James created it functions; James's use of the centre of consciousness grew in subtlety and scope.

The groundwork for this study has been prepared by two exceptional critics, James himself and Percy Lubbock. James's comments are perceptive but sometimes sketchy and usually scattered throughout his writings; although he was a fine critic, he was not always a systematic one. Furthermore, the best of his criticism (to be found in the Prefaces) was written thirty years after the fact. This study does make extensive use of the Prefaces, but, as much as possible, relies more on his critical expressions from 1864 to 1881 and the novels themselves. Thus the focus is intentionally on the development, rather than the

fully-realized theory of the later years. Lubbock's work, The Craft of Fiction, as far as its chapters on James are concerned, deals with the fully-dramatized consciousness of two of the later novels, The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove. Lubbock's unconcealed bias in favor of the unobtrusive narrator has greatly influenced modern fictional theory and in recent years provoked a number of reactions to that bias, such as that expressed by Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction. Although this groundwork is used in the present study, this essay approaches the technique of the centre of consciousness more from the other end--that is, from the viewpoint of the early texts, both critical and fictional. It is an attempt to go beyond recent dogmatic criticism to the sources themselves to examine James's theory and practice during the seminal period of his creative lifetime. Thus this study draws most heavily on two groups of sources. First, James's own critical pronouncements as found in his reviews, letters, notebooks, and Hawthorne, all written before 1882. Supplementing these sources are the Prefaces which were composed 1907-1909 for the collected "New York Edition" of his works. The second group of sources are three early novels, Roderick Hudson, The American, and The Portrait of a Lady.

Because the nature of this dissertation is essentially expository, it does not admit to simple generalizations. It therefore seems advisable to characterize the contents of each chapter.

Chapter I examines James's early search for a theory of realistic expression. James's attitudes toward his native land and toward Europe have a bearing on his early ideas about realism and are connected with his dissatisfaction with what might be called "surface realism." Inherent in his concept of realism is the morality of the work, produced most effectively through its "felt life." The variety of realism that most appealed to him was that realism which derived from characterization and dramatization. Major sources are the many book reviews that he wrote between 1864 and 1882 and the full-length study, Hawthorne (1879). Also consulted are the letters written during this period. Here James is in the process of formulating the critical theories of literary realism as well as working out his own approach to the writing of fiction. A study of these reviews and letters, by showing what he admired and what he deplored in the works of other writers, reveals the artistic goals that James sought from the beginning of his career, many of which goals he came to achieve through a skillful use of the centre of consciousness.

Chapter II treats the relationships between "felt life," the objective method, and the centre of consciousness. In a discussion of Flaubert's Madame Bovary (in French Poets and Novelists, 1878), a work which many contemporaries regarded as somewhat scandalous, James writes: "Every out-and-out realist who provokes serious meditation may claim that he is a moralist; for that, after all, is the most the moralist can do for us." Thirty years after penning this comment about Flaubert, when he came to write the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, he put it this way: "Recognizing so promptly the one measure of the worth of a given subject, the question about it that, rightly answered, disposes of all others--is it valid, in a word, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life? . . . There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it." [emphasis added] The second chapter examines James's use of the centre of consciousness to produce "felt life" in his early novels. It also defines the objective method and the centre of consciousness and explores the notion of the register of impressions. The chapter concludes with a description of the kind of character required to provide an accurate, sensitive registration and to function effectively as a central intelligence.

Chapter III analyzes the functions of the centre of consciousness. The centre of consciousness is at once a technical and structural method or strategy and a subject. It involves both form and content. As an element of form, the centre of consciousness is a pair of eyes, a window in the house of fiction, a secondary narrator. As content, it is the very subject of the novel. In the case of The Ambassadors, for example, the plot is mainly internal and is Strether's view of things (including himself) and his growing awareness of the possibilities of life. Form and substance, technique and subject, the dual nature of the centre of consciousness submits to many finer gradation. It may perform a number of precise, though sometimes overlapping, functions in the work of fiction. The use of the centre of consciousness may give to the novel:

1. unity
2. structure
3. dramatic intensity
4. a view and a meaning of action and characters
5. an escape for the assumed author
6. greater reader involvement
7. a subject

Chapter III defines and illustrates these functions.

Chapter IV treats Roderick Hudson (1876). In this first novel that he wanted to preserve, James struggles with the problem of reconciling a somewhat intrusive

narrator with the necessity of keeping the balance in the center of Rowland Mallet's consciousness. Even this early in his career James is tentatively feeling his way toward dramatizing consciousness and producing that "felt life" that he believed to be so important. Although his success is limited in this novel, his experiments are valuable to the emerging of consciousness in the development of his work.

Chapter V examines The American (1877). As The American opens, the first person narrator stands between the reader and the scene and alternately faces one, then the other, seeming to include the reader as a confidant. The effect is to place narrator and reader above and somehow superior to the characters of the fiction. Throughout the novel, James seems to be attempting to change this relationship. He reveals his goal in the Preface:

> If Newman was attaching enough, I must have argued, his tangle would be sensible enough; for the interest of everything is all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we 'assist.' He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it.

This chapter addresses itself to an investigation of that not-always-successful struggle to reduce the presence of the assumed author and to dramatize the consciousness of Christopher Newman.

Chapter VI discusses The Portrait of a Lady (1881). In this the last novel of the group under consideration, James achieves a measure of success in the form that he was not destined to match for nearly twenty years--until he wrote The Ambassadors. His success is due in large part to his growing skill in dramatizing consciousness and in the use of the objective method generally. This book, he declares in the Preface, is to focus on Isabel's adventures in Europe. But he recognizes that these are, in themselves, quite mild. "Without her sense of them, her sense for them, as one may say, they are next to nothing at all; but isn't that beauty and the difficulty just in showing their mystic conversion by that sense, conversion into the stuff of drama or, even more delightful word still, of 'story'?" Chapter VI examines the manner in which James creates this "stuff of drama" through his use of the centre of consciousness and the reflector system which works so well here.

It is indeed a pleasure to acknowledge the debts of gratitude incurred while preparing this thesis. It has been said that a teacher's influence never stops. There are a number of teachers who over the years by their example of wisdom and honesty exerted unacknowledged influence. It is impossible to name them here and proffer individual appreciation. I can only let several teachers serve as their representatives. Professors Russel B. Nye, James H. Pickering, and Clyde Henson, all of the Michigan

State University English Department, have in their own ways been most helpful. Professor Nye's interest encouraged me to continue when I was most in doubt. Professor Pickering, who as graduate chairman has led the way through the thicket of requirements and regulations, has as a member of my thesis committee offered valuable advice and suggested needed revisions. Professor Henson has served long and well, through courses and seminars, and beyond the call of duty in Florentine repasts. His unselfish devotion to the highest principles of education has most often found its expression in his concern for his students. For this, much thanks. To my fellow students in the English department and my colleagues at Lyman Briggs College goes my gratitude for helping to create a Jamesian milieu and for showing that they cared. Professor Kristen Lauer deserves special recognition just for being herself.

My greatest debt, however, is owed to my family, especially my wife, Evelyn. Without their help and sacrifice, this thesis could not have been written.

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CHAPTER I

THE SEARCH FOR A THEORY OF REALISM: 1864-1881

The path that Henry James traveled in his apprenticeship in the art of fiction was uniquely his own. One of a long line of New World expatriates, he never completely shook off his American heritage in the process of absorbing a different one. Yet, because he was a man of the world, he was doomed to be a man without a country. So often an outsider, he was forever seeking to penetrate beneath the surfaces of life to the underlying realities. He was never satisfied as an artist with merely reconstructing the appearance of reality--of barking dogs and sunny garden parties, of teeming slums and the ruins of ancient cities. Instead he sought ways of expressing that inner reality.

Although he experimented with his art throughout his lifetime, it was during the years between 1864 and 1881 that he was most actively engaged in the process of formulating his critical theory of literary realism as well as working out his own approach to the writing of fiction. His non-fictional writings during this period (reviews, letters, notebook entries), by showing what he

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admired and what he deplored in the works of other writers and the way he felt about his own life and work, illuminate his search for a theory of realistic expression.

James's feelings toward his native land as a home and a source for American writers would seem to reflect his developing attitudes as a writer. James was twenty-four and living with his family in Cambridge, Massachusetts when he wrote to his boyhood friend, Thomas Sergeant Perry: " . . . We young Americans are (without cant) men of the future. I feel at least, that my only chance for success as a critic is to let all the breezes of the west blow through me at their will. We are Americans born--il faut en prendre son parti." One cannot but remark the striking juxtaposition in the last sentence, his turning to the French language even while proclaiming his pleasure in his American birthright. The great advantage, as he sees it, is that the American has "no national stamp" and is thus free to absorb what he will of other cultures, perhaps to forge "a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various tendencies of the world." But like Emerson, Whitman, and so many other American writers before him, he also hoped to see a purely American literature develop. "We must of course have something of our own--something distinctive and homogeneous--and I take it we shall find it in our own moral consciousness, our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour."[1] As early as 1867 then,

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the young writer saw his American background in terms both positive and negative--the liberating freshness of the new world which permitted him to see with undimmed vision. As the years passed, James was less apt to dwell upon these advantages, and more likely to emphasize the effects on the writer of the negative qualities of the American scene.

Two years after James wrote this letter, he traveled to Europe for the first time as an adult (he had lived there with his family from 1855 to 1858, but he was a youth at the time). The fifteen months that he spent there in 1869 and 1870 were like a rebirth; he found more than enough to fill his blank slate. The richness of the arts, the manners, the people, the landscape was almost too much for the young artist to bear. In the Preface to "The Reverberator" James recalls how, during several weeks in England, he had become re-acquainted with that land and how he "had, perceptively and aesthetically speaking, taken the adventure of my twenty-sixth year 'hard,' as 'A Passionate Pilgrim' quite sufficiently attests." This whole trip was a bittersweet one for the young man, uncertain as he was of his future. Looking back nearly forty years the older James remembers it well:

> A part of that adventure had been the never-to-be-forgotten thrill of a first sight of Italy, from late in the summer of 1869 on; so that a return to America at the beginning of the following year was to drag with it, as a lengthening chain, the torment

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> of losses and regrets. The repatriated victim of that unrest was, beyond doubt, acutely conscious of his case: the fifteen months just spent in Europe had absolutely determined his situation. The nostalgic poison had been distilled for him, the future presented to him but as a single intense question: was he to spend it in brooding exile, or might he somehow come into his 'own'?--as I liked betimes to put it for a romantic analogy with the state of dispossessed princes and wandering heirs.[2]

It was with great reluctance that Henry James returned home to Cambridge in the spring of 1870.

James was restless and unhappy during the next two relatively dreary years that he passed in the United States (1870-1872). In his biography of James, Leon Edel develops the parallel between the dispossession felt by Clement Searle in "A Passionate Pilgrim" and that experienced by James during those long months when his greatest desire was to return to the spiritual wealth of the Old World. James was a double exile, Edel maintains, with "his sense of being an outsider at home, his fear of being an outsider in Europe."[3] Finally in May of 1872 he accompanied his sister Alice, whose delicate health was the reason for the trip, and his Aunt Kate on a summer's tour to Europe. When the ladies returned to Cambridge in the fall, Henry remained, prolonging his stay as long as possible. During the next year and one-half, James wrote prolifically--short stories and art criticism for Atlantic Monthly, travel sketches for The Nation, and dozens of book reviews for a welter of periodicals. So productive was he during this period that he could in 1875 bring out in book form

two collections assembled from these materials: A Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales and Transatlantic Sketches. It was in the spring of 1874 in Florence that this burst of creative energy began to yield even more solid results, the novel Roderick Hudson. Family and financial pressures to return home were mounting, but he was determined to get a good start on this novel which was under contract to the Atlantic. That fall he returned to Cambridge before trying life in New York City for several months. It was during this winter that he published a review of his friend William Dean Howells' new work, A Foregone Conclusion. "A most characteristically American talent" is the way he described Howells. But by now, eight years after the letter to Thomas Sergeant Perry, James had begun to recognize the limitations of the United States as a home for the artist. Howells "reminds us how much our native-grown imaginative effort is a matter of details, of fine shades, of pale colors, a making of small things do great service. Civilization with us is monotonous . . . we have to take what we can get." James does not deny that there is some value, perhaps, in this state of events: "All this refines and sharpens our perceptions, makes us in a literary way, on our own scale, very delicate, and stimulates our sense of proportion and form."[4] Perceptions sharpened, James still required something to feed them. And what he saw about him in Cambridge and New York was

mighty poor fare. In Europe it could be so different! He had given his homeland one last try and found that it had little to offer him as an artist. In August of 1875 he convinced the editor of the New York Tribune that he was just the man to be the paper's Paris "correspondent"; he offered to write sketches (at $20 gold each) on French life and manners. This connection assured him of a regular income, not princely perhaps, but sufficient he felt to allow him to live in Europe independent of his parents.[5]

Before he sailed in October, he wrote a review essay about the definitive edition of Balzac. One passage is especially revealing:

> A monarchical society is unquestionably more picturesque, more available for the novelist than any other, as the others have as yet exhibited themselves; and therefore Balzac was with glee, with gusto, with imagination, a monarchist. Of what is to be properly called religious feeling we do not remember a suggestion in all his many pages; on the other hand, the reader constantly encounters the handsomest compliments to the Catholic Church as a social regime. A hierarchy is as much more picturesque than a "congregational society" as a mountain is than a plain. Bishops, abbés, priests, Jesuits, are invaluable figures in fiction, and the morality of the Catholic Church allows of an infinite chiaroscuro.[6]

Although Balzac is the subject here, James seems to be giving, in part at least, his own rationale for going to Europe. As a writer he felt that he needed the complexity of relationships to be found there, perhaps too a kind of moral ambiguity unlike the simpler morality that he believed to characterize relationships in New England and New York. Whether he was aware of it at the time or not,

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this move was to be in effect a permanent one, for throughout the rest of his life he was to return to the United States only occasionally and then only for what amounted to short visits.

The next few years in Europe were fruitful ones for James, as if to prove that he was accurate in his assessment of the writer's needs. In 1876 Roderick Hudson was published in book form. The following year The American made its appearance, and The Europeans and French Poets and Novelists in 1878. Of course, he was writing a large number of shorter pieces as well--reviews, "letters," tales. "Daisy Miller" and Hawthorne came out in 1879. This last work, a marvelous, low-keyed study of the best-known serious man of American letters, acknowledges James's debt to Hawthorne. It also provides the opportunity for James to evaluate from the vantage point of Europe the benefits and limitations of his native soil for the writer. James explains the difficulties in a well-known passage. Hawthorne's work teaches

> a valuable moral. This moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. American civilization has hitherto had other things to do than to produce flowers . . . .[7]

James believes that Hawthorne has achieved a great deal and that what he has achieved is directly attributable to his New England roots which do penetrate "a crevice of that immitigable granite." James explains to his English

readers that while a town such as Salem may seem young to them it had, for Hawthorne, a sense of the past, limited as that past might be in comparison to the Old World. For Hawthorne this was important: ". . . He [Hawthorne] goes on to say that he has never divested himself of the sense of intensely belonging to it--that the spell of the continuity of his life with his predecessors has never been broken."[8] As a man and an artist, James lacked the strong Puritan heritage and sense of place and past which he sees motivating and stimulating Hawthorne; hence he could not have emulated Hawthorne, even had he wished to do so. Having spent his formative years in such varied places as New York City, the continent, Albany, Newport, and Cambridge, James was denied the roots to a place and to an ancestral past that Hawthorne had inherited. Furthermore, James notes that Hawthorne's work, perhaps because of the cultural limitations noted above, lacks a realistic quality that is of growing importance to himself. Of these cultural limitations, he writes:

> . . . One might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools--no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow;

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> no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class--no Epsom or Ascot! Some such list as that might be drawn up of the absent things in American life--. . . [9]

Even the life that Hawthorne led was barren: "Everything in the Notes [Hawthorne's published notebooks] indicates a simple, democratic, thinly-composed society; there is no evidence of the writer finding himself in any variety or intimacy of relations with anything."[10] This lack of a complexity of relationships is, perhaps, what pained James himself the most.

James's attitudes toward his native land, then, have important lessons for him as a writer. The first lesson is the advantage of being without a significant heritage--both literary and otherwise. Thus he is free to choose and synthesize. Indeed, he must synthesize for as James observes in his Notebooks in November 1881, just as The Portrait of a Lady was appearing in book form, the American writer, unlike his European counterpart, must deal not only with his own land, but with Europe as well.[11] This belief is reflected in the themes he chose to treat in his fiction. It may be seen in the international aspects of Roderick Hudson, The American, and The Portrait of a Lady, for example. The second lesson is that because of the paucity of culture in the United States the American writer must pay the closest attention to external detail. The second of these lessons has a significant bearing on the development of his fiction and criticism.

Virtually from the beginning of his career, James had some definite ideas about realism as it was developing in the practice of his contemporaries and its limitations in their works. In an early (1865) review of a novel by Anthony Trollope he writes of the "virtues" of the work, but clarifies his intention: "We use this term advisedly, because its virtues are all virtues of detail: the virtues of the photograph. The photograph lacks the supreme virtue of possessing a character. It is the detail alone that distinguishes one photograph from another."[12] In choosing to compare this variety of realism to the photograph, James is establishing a distinction that he will continue to make with ever-increasing force as his art developed. He sees in such photographic, or surface, realism some definite problems and limitations if the art of fiction is to continue to be a significant element in human affairs. The following year (1866) he again castigates Trollope, this time for his novel, The Belton Estate. Once more he pays due respect to Trollope's powers of observation, but writes that he has searched in vain for anything more. "He [Trollope] is apparently as incapable of disengaging an idea as of drawing an inference. All his incidents are, if we may so express it, empirical. He has seen and heard every act and every speech that appears in his pages."[13] Even James's friend, William Dean Howells, is not spared on this count

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but is damned with faint praise: "Mr. Howells has an eye for the small things of nature, of art, and of human life, which enables him to extract sweetness and profit from adventures the most prosaic. . . . " [14] Howells and James shared a rewarding friendship during the years of their early development as novelists and critics, and yet their ideals were not always the same. James grieves for Howells and for the great talent that he sees wasted on the "prosaic." "He seems to have resolved himself, however, [into] one who can write solely of what his fleshly eyes have seen," James confides to his friend Charles Norton in 1871, "and for this reason I wish he were 'located' where they would rest upon richer and fairer things than this immediate landscape."[15] In offering this solution, James can think only of the remedy that worked for him--removal to Europe. Howells, for his part, is quite satisfied with the American scene as a source for his fiction, and is sometimes rather sensitive to any suggestions that the United States provides impoverished fare for the novelist. In a review entitled "James's Hawthorne" Howell takes exception to James's notions: "After leaving out all those novelistic 'properties,' as sovereigns, courts, aristocracy . . . [etc.], by the absence of which Mr. James suggests our poverty to the English conception, we have the whole of human life remaining, and a social structure presenting the only fresh and novel opportunities

left to fiction, opportunities manifold and inexhaustible."[16] In a subsequent letter to Howells James continues the disagreement but then soothes Howells' feelings: "I should say we had just so much less of it ['the whole of human life'] as these 'paraphernalia' represent, and I think they represent an enormous quantity of it. . . . I must add, however (to return for a moment to this), that I applaud and esteem you highly for not feeling it; i.e. the want. You are certainly right--magnificently and heroically right--to do so, and on the day you make your readers--I mean the readers who know and appreciate the paraphernalia--do the same, you will be the American Balzac."[17]

A letter that James wrote to his friend Grace Norton in 1870 contains the kernel of James's objections to the growing employment of surface realism. More frank here than he is in published reviews, he bemoans Howells' treating of "subjects belonging to la petit littérature." It simply is not worthy of him. "The more I think of it the more I deprecate the growing tendency--born of the very desperation of the writer--to transfer directly and bodily, without any intellectual transmutation, all the crude accidents of his life as they successfully befall into the subject matter of literature."[18] Yet later James praises another aspect of Howells' realism--his

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characterization. He is especially pleased with Howells' fictional females who are so real that they have "a national aroma."[19]

Let no mistake be made: Henry James is an observer of life, he frequently concerns himself with external details--a woman's dress, a family's drawing room, a garden. Often he finds the names for his characters in newspaper accounts. His Notebooks and his Prefaces are filled with gossip that he picked up at dinner parties and then developed into plots for tales and novels. James is aware of the value of the right realistic detail and the air of verisimilitude. But he is also cognizant of the necessity of intellectual and artistic transmutation, of the role played by the consciousness of the artist. James was not a photographer and had no desire to become one. He was a painter, instead. He makes this abundantly clear in a review of the work of Gustave Flaubert, reprinted in French Poets and Novelists:

> M. Flaubert's theory as a novelist, briefly expressed, is to begin on the outside. Human life, we may imagine his saying, is before all things a spectacle, an occupation and entertainment for the eyes. What our eyes show us is all that we may be sure of; so with this we will at any rate begin. As this is infinitely curious and entertaining, if we know how to look at it, and as such looking consumes a great deal of time and space, it is very possible that with this also we may end. We admit nevertheless that there is something else, beneath and behind, that belongs to the realm of vagueness and uncertainty, and into this we must occassionally dip. It crops up sometimes irrepressibly, and of course we do not positively count it out. On the whole we will leave it to take care of itself and let it come off as it may.[20]

James proceeds to describe the "pictorial," that is the descriptive element, in Flaubert, especially the "disagreeable." Then he concludes, "Realism seems to us with 'Madame Bovary' to have said its last word." What he means is that this aspect of realism--rendering the outside of things, especially disagreeable things in the pictorial mode--has been done well, probably as well as can be done. James, of course, is interested in pushing beyond the mere representation of the outside of things, although he is capable of doing that too; he is more concerned with that "something else."

Sometimes in the hands of a talented artist surface realism can be made to contribute to a larger end than the mere mechanical reproduction of detail. And when this occurs, James is ready to acknowledge the success. Ivan Turgenev, whose work James admires most highly, is such a talented artist: " . . . his object is constantly the same--that of finding an incident, a person, a situation, morally interesting. This is his great merit, and the underlying harmony of his apparently excessive attention to detail."[21] Perhaps the major reason that James regards Turgenev as one of the world's finest writers is that the Russian surmounts the banality of a profusion of detail: 'It is life itself,' we murmur as we read, 'and not this or that story-teller's more or less clever "arrangement" of life.' M. Turgénieff deserves this praise

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in its largest application; for 'life' in his pages is very far from meaning a dreary liability to sordid accidents, as it seems to mean with those writers of the grimly pathetic school who cultivate sympathy to the detriment of comprehension."[22] Thus Turgenev avoids the pitfalls of the naturalist.

James finds the developing trends of naturalism disheartening. For instance, he is troubled by what he calls Émile Zola's "uncleanness" in Nana: "Decency and indecency, morality and immorality, beauty and ugliness, are conceptions with which 'naturalism' has nothing to do; in M. Zola's system these distinctions are void, these allusions are idle. The only business of naturalism is to be--natural. . . . " The problem here as James views it is that all this decadence is not natural: "Does he call that vision of things of which Nana is a representation, nature? . . . On what authority does M. Zola represent nature to us as a combination of the cesspool and the house of prostitution?" Then James comes to the real point:

> Reality is the object of M. Zola's efforts, and it is because we agree with him in appreciating it highly that we protest against its being discredited. . . . The real has not a single shade more affinity with an unclean vessel than with a clean one, and M. Zola's system, carried to its utmost expression, can dispense as little with taste and tact as the floweriest mannerism of a less analytic age.[23]

George Eliot also falls victim to James's critical wrath: " . . . Middlemarch is too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley." He complains of the many discursive passages in which Eliot seems anxious "to recommend herself to a scientific audience."[24]

James has warned against surface realism with its emphasis on the exterior of life. The excesses of naturalism are the results of his warnings going unheeded, in that surface realism may be seen as leading almost inevitably to the indecent and unnatural, as in Zola, and heavy-handed determinism, as in Eliot. These results lead away from the variety of realism that James found most valuable as both a reader and a writer of fiction and ignore the treatment of the "morally interesting" that he prized as such a valuable attribute of the works of Turgenev.

It is in a deeper variety of realism that James sees great possibilities for the treatment of moral truth. The task of the realist is not an easy one, as he points out in a review of Alexandre Dumas' novel, Affaire Clémenceau: "To be completely great a work of art must lift up the reader's heart; and it is the artist's secret to reconcile this condition with images of the barest and sternest reality."[25] This double responsibility of the novelist is not easily or often met. James does discover

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in that old romantic, Hawthorne, a quality that he often seeks but cannot find in his contemporaries, despite their concern with "real life." Of Hawthorne's tales, James is pleased to report that "They are moral, and their interest is moral; they deal with something more than the mere accidents and conventionalities, the surface occurences of life. The fine thing in Hawthorne is that, he cared for the deeper psychology, and that, in his way, he tried to become familiar with it."[26]

The naturalists often overlook this deeper psychology and the moral truth available to it, and rely instead entirely on empirical truth, according to James. In 1880 he criticizes Zola (in Nana) for not creating real human beings:

> This is what saves us in England, in spite of our artistic levity and the presence of the young ladies [the typical readers of novels]--this fact that we are by disposition better psychologists, that we have, as a general thing, a deeper, more delicate perception of the play of character and the state of the soul. This is what often gives an interest to works conceived on a much narrower program than those of M. Zola--makes them more touching and more real, although the apparatus and the machinery of reality may, superficially, appear to be wanting.[27]

The "play of character and the state of the soul" are subjects worthy of the artist's attention and it is for his treatment of the "morally interesting" that James recommends Turgenev. "He believes in the intrinsic value of 'subject' in art; he holds that there are trivial subjects and serious ones, that the latter are much the

best, and that their superiority resides in giving us absolutely a greater amount of information about the human mind."[28]

James does not insist on strict adherence to any given moral code. He does not ask that works of fiction become object lessons in conduct for the middle class. His open-mindedness is made abundantly clear in an observation on the works of Balzac: "He had no natural sense of morality, and this we cannot help thinking a serious fault in a novelist. Be the morality false or true, the writer's deference to it greets us as a kind of essential perfume."[29] This open-mindedness is even better shown in James's attitude toward Flaubert's Madame Bovary. According to James, the novel was actually prosecuted for immorality but subsequently acquitted. Although he finds limitations in Flaubert's style of realism, he defends the work in the final analysis for an interesting reason: "Every out-and-out realist who provokes serious meditation may claim that he is a moralist; for that, after all, is the most that the moralists can do for us. They sow the seeds of virtue; they can hardly pretend to raise the crop."[30]

It seems strange that contemporary critics so frequently point to Henry James as an example of the man who lived for art and who was concerned with form more than substance. James himself would deny such characterizations. He believed that art could not be divorced from

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life and that form and substance were inextricable, as he points out in a comment on Turgenev's "The Memoirs of a Sportsman": "It would be difficult to name a work that contains better instructions for those heated spirits who are fond of taking sides on the question of 'art for art.' It offers a capital example of moral meaning giving a sense to form and form giving relief to moral meaning."[31] James was to devote a good deal of concentration to this relationship in his own work.

More than thirty years after he penned those comments on Turgenev, he once more considers the question of the integral relationships of the elements in a work of fiction and the place of the moral sense in a work of art. In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, written for the collected "New York Edition" of his works in 1907-1909, James codifies what has been his life's practice in the writing of fiction:

> Recognizing so promptly the one measure of the worth of a given subject, the question that, rightly answered, disposes of all others--is it valid, in a word, is it genuine, is it sincere, the result of some direct impression or perception of life? . . . There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it.[32]

This statement clarifies what James believed to be the real relationship between realism and moral value. James's brand of realism was to be based to a large extent

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upon this notion of the importance of the "felt life" of a work of art as well as the belief that form and moral meaning were mutually dependent.

The several ways in which James sought to infuse his works with this "felt life" are of great significance to the development of one stream of realism and of his own art. He had a good sense of what was involved virtually from the beginning of his writing career. His 1866 review article of the works of George Eliot shows its inception: "Her observation, I think, is decidedly of the feminine kind: it deals, in preference, with small things. This fact may be held to explain the excellence of what I have called her pictures, and the comparative feebleness of her dramatic movement."[33] Thus James recognized early the value of dramatization, of what has come to be called showing rather than telling.

In 1873 James advises Howells in a letter of the benefits of dramatization. He refers to Howells' latest book, A Chance Acquaintance: "Your fifth part I extremely relished; it was admirably touched. I wished the talk in which the offer was made had been given (instead of the mere résumé), but I suppose you had good and sufficient reasons for doing as you did."[34] This is the distinction that James was to make between what he called "picture" and "scene." Simply stated, in a "picture" the assumed

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author or narrator interposes himself between the reader and the action and reports that action to the reader, perhaps after it has taken place. An example of this would be the "résumé" that Howells uses. A "scene" on the other hand is a dramatic occurence with the reader looking directly at the action. It is scene or dramatization that James is calling for when he tells Howells, "I wished the talk in which the offer was made had been given . . . ." Actually these distinctions are over-simplified; James later discovered a method of dramatizing picture, but a clarification of this modification must wait until another chapter of this study.

James notes that Turgenev is often saved from dullness by his use of dramatic form. Of Turgenev's "Hélène," which James regards as one of his most successful tales, James writes: "The scene, the figures, are as present to us as if we saw them ordered and moving on a lamp-lit stage; and yet, as we recall it, the drama seems all pervaded and colored by the light of the moral world." James finds evidence here in Turgenev of the possibility of combining dramatic presentation and moral truth. It is not necessary to use a narrator's résumé to imbue the work with a moral tone; this can be lent with greater credence dramatically. James continues on the subject of Turgenev's skill: "Everything with him takes the dramatic form; he is apparently unable to conceive anything

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independently of it, he has no recognition of unembodied ideas; an idea with him is such and such an individual . . . ."[35]

Although James had striven toward dramatization in his own work for several years, he sometimes had difficulty in actually achieving the ideal. Leon Edel cites a letter written in the summer of 1874 that sheds light on his problems of composition. James was at work on Roderick Hudson when he wrote to Mrs. Sarah Wister: "The fault of the story, I am pretty sure, will be in its being too analytical and psychological, and not sufficiently dramatic and eventful . . . ."[36] Again in 1880 when he was writing The Portrait of a Lady for serial publication, he complains to himself in the Notebooks: "There has been a want of action in the earlier part leading up to Isabel's marriage, and it may be made up here." James had been writing and publishing The Portrait of a Lady in installments, so that it began to appear in the Atlantic before he had finished writing it. When he says that the shortcoming "may be made up here," he means in the second half of the work. He continues: "The weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological--that it depends too little on incident; but the complete unfolding of the situation that is established by Isabel's marriage may nonetheless be quite sufficiently dramatic."[37] The idea of dramatizing is one that remained with James

throughout his creative lifetime. It, probably as much as the lure of financial rewards, led him to work in the theatre later in his career.

Still a second way of instilling a sense of "felt life" is through characterization. Dramatization and characterization are closely related as James points out in a discussion of Hawthorne's treatment of character in The House of the Seven Gables: " . . . Hepzibah Pyncheon is a masterly picture. I repeat that she is a picture, as her companions are pictures; she is a charming piece of descriptive writing, rather than a dramatic exhibition."[38] Although James admires Hawthorne's insight into character and study of the "deeper psychology," he believes that Hawthorne fails in the dramatization of the people he creates.

Once more it is Turgenev who masters the problem. James admires Turgenev's "portraits" which "have each something special, something peculiar, something that none of their neighbors have, and that rescues them from the limbo of the gracefully general." James also notes the Russian's "preference for a theme which takes its starting-point in character."[39] This approach is so much like his own that it is no wonder that James feels him to be a kindred spirit. As James points out several times in the Prefaces, the Letters, and the Notebooks, his "germ" for a work is often a character. In the Preface

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to The Portrait of a Lady, he explains: "Trying to recover here, for recognition, the germ of my idea, I see it must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a 'plot,' nefarious name, . . . but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a particular engaging young woman, to which all the usual elements of a 'subject,' certainly of a setting, were to need to be super-added."[40] Thus it is character that James begins with. It is also character that he dramatizes to give to his work the air of realism, the moral sense, and the felt life that he so earnestly seeks.

A third part of his program of realism involves the roles of the author, the assumed author (who may simply be an unidentified narrator), and the narrator. Although the chapters which follow will deal with this question in detail, it seems advisable to discuss it here, at least briefly. For want of a better name, it might be called the principle of the disinterested observer. One of James's first formulations concerning the position of the teller of the tale was written in 1865 in a review of Dickens' work: "A story based upon those elementary passions in which alone we seek the true and final manifestation of character must be told in a spirit of intellectual superiority to those passions. That is the author must understand what he is talking about."[41] In the years that followed James refined this principle. In an 1875 review

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he writes of Balzac: "His strength was to lie in representing the innumerable actual facts of the French civilization of his day--things only to be learned by patient experience. . . . [But] The great general defect of his manner . . . is the absence of fresh air, of the trace of disinterested observation . . . ."[42]

How peculiar it seems, then, given James's remarks above about the value of the disinterested observer, that he himself is taken to task by his friend and critic, William Dean Howells, for committing the same crime for which he convicts Balzac. It is 1875, the same year, that Howells writes in his review of A Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales:

> In the whole course of the story ["A Romance of Certain Old Clothes"] nothing is urged, nothing is dwelt upon; and all our story-tellers, including Mr. James himself, could profitably take a lesson from it in this respect. At other times he has a tendency to expatiate upon his characters too much, and not to trust his reader's perception enough. For the sake of a more dramatic presentation of his persons, he has told most of the stories in this book as things falling within the notice of the assumed narrator; an excellent device; though it would be better if the assumed narrator were able to keep himself from seeming to patronize the simpler-hearted heroes, and from openly rising above them in a worldly way.[43]

By the time he published Criticism and Fiction sixteen years later, Howells was certain of the value of dramatic presentation and a self-effacing author. He finds grounds to criticize Balzac, Trollope, and virtually all of English criticism for employing and condoning the intrusive

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author in works of fiction. Nowhere in that volume, however, does he feel the necessity of once more chastizing Henry James for that lapse.[44]

At this point in this study it will perhaps be sufficient to state that the use of the principle of disinterested observation enables the writer to dramatize more effectively and more often. The precise way in which this works and its reciprocal relationship with characterization, a moral sense, and felt life--these are the subjects of the chapters that follow.

During the years between 1864 and 1881 Henry James developed an approach to realistic expression that provided him with a method of treating life as he experienced it, the life that throbs beneath the surface appearances--of people and their relationships with one another and with their own souls. This approach is essentially pragmatic, thus avoiding the hazards of doctrinaire realism, with its empirical focus on the exterior of life, while skirting the pitfalls of literary naturalism, with its restrictions of human freedom through a belief in biological and social determinism. His realism never degenerates into photography; his morality never escalates into preaching. He is saved from both dangers by putting into practice his theory of realistic expression, which relies on the introduction of characters of depth and moral interest and the use of those characters dramatically, letting

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the reader see the character in situations and hear him working out his own life. It is by means of this approach that James was able to penetrate to the heart of a secret that he discovered at the very beginning of his career:

> In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. When he makes him ill, that is makes him different, he does no work; the writer does all. When he makes him well, that is, makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labour. . . . The grand point is to get him to make it. I hold that there is a way. It is perhaps a secret; but until it is found out, I think that the art of story-telling cannot be said to have approached perfection.[45]

The single technique that James developed that enabled him to fully realize these three qualities of dramatization, characterization, and disinterested observation was the technique of the central intelligence or centre of consciousness. It was the development of this approach that freed him from the limitations of the old romances, the newer surface realism, and the newest naturalism; it is this method that characterizes his own special variety of realistic expression. Through the employment of the centre of consciousness as the dominant focus of his works, James was able to explore new depths of the human mind formerly inaccessible to the novelist and to transform the more-or-less ordinary relationships between people into the stuff of drama.

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[34]Letters of Henry James, I, p. 34.

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[36]The Conquest of London, p. 170.

[37]The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 15.

[38]Hawthorne, p. 108.

[39]"Ivan Turgénieff," French Poets and Novelists, pp. 213,223.

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CHAPTER II

"FELT LIFE" AND THE OBJECTIVE METHOD

Perhaps the major way that James chose to imbue his works with that sense of "felt life" that he believed to be so important is what has come to be called the indirect approach or, as James believed and Welleck and Warren suggest, the objective method. This method also enabled him to overcome those shortcomings of which Howells complained in 1875--of expatiating "upon his characters too much" and not trusting his "reader's perception enough." As James developed and refined this indirect approach, it enabled him to solve some of the most serious of technical problems: the author's relations to the work and to his audience, the audience's relations to the work, techniques of revelation and presentation, and the selection and treatment of realistic subjects.

The aim of the indirect approach is "to make the presented occasion tell all the story itself . . . ." James liked to think of this method as objective: "This objectivity, . . . when achieving its ideal, came from the imposed absence of that 'going behind,' to compass explanations and amplifications, to drag out odds and ends from

the 'mere' storyteller's great property-shop of aids to illusion . . . ."[1] This approach seeks to make the narrator less obtrusive in his treatment of character and in his position before the reader by becoming something of a disinterested observer, to enlist the reader in actively aiding in the creative synthesis, and to present the felt life of personal relationships and inner experience in a realistic fashion.

Richard P. Blackmur, in his introduction to the collected Prefaces, describes the indirect approach: "The characterizing aspect of the Indirect Approach is this: The existence of a definite created sensibility [the centre of consciousness] interposed between the reader and the felt experience which is the subject of the fiction. James never put his reader in direct contact with his subjects; he believed that it was impossible to do so, because his subject was not what happened but what someone felt about what happened and this could be directly known only through an intermediate intelligence" (The Art of the Novel, xvii-xviii). Although it may be quibbling, it would seem that actually the reader is in direct contact with the subject, at least in such a work as The Ambassadors, because the subject often is the sensibility of that "intermediate intelligence." This objection may become clearer in a later discussion of James's meaning and use of "centres." Blackmur concludes his description of the indirect

approach: "The Dramatic Scene was the principal device James used to objectify the Indirect Approach and give it self-limiting form" (The Art of the Novel, xviii). But as René Welleck and Austin Warren explain:

> The objective method must not be thought of as limited to dialogue and reported behavior. . . . Such limitations would bring it into direct and unequal rivalry with the theatre. Its triumphs have been in the presentation of that psychic life which the theatre can handle but awkwardly. Its essentials are the voluntary absence from the novel of the 'omniscient novelist' and, instead, the presence of a controlled 'point of view.' James and [Percy] Lubbock see the novel as giving us, in turn, 'picture' and 'drama,' by which they mean some character's consciousness of what is going on (within and without) in distinction from a 'scene,' which is partly at least in dialogue and which presents, in some detail, an important episode or encounter. The 'picture' is as objective as the 'drama,' only it is the objective rendering of a specific subjectivity--that of one of the characters (Madame Bovary, or Strether), while the 'drama' is the objective rendering of speech and behavior.[2]

Lubbock makes the distinction between the pictorial method and the dramatic method as a matter of the relationship of author, audience, and work: " . . . in one case [the pictorial] the reader faces towards the story-teller and listens to him, in the other [the dramatic] he turns toward the story and watches it."[3] Lubbock prefers the self-effacing narrator and his work; The Craft of Fiction is a tribute to that species of narrator, especially in James. He takes writers like Thackery to task for their intrusions. "There is nothing more disconcerting in a novel," he writes, "than to see the writer changing his

part in this way--throwing off the character into which he has been projecting himself and taking a new stand outside and away from the story."[4]

A more recent critic, Wayne Booth, seeks to correct what he believes is Lubbock's undue emphasis on the disappearance of the narrator: "James's interest in realism never led him to the notion that all signs of the author's presence are inartistic. . . . His interest is not negative--how to get rid of the author--but positive: how to achieve an intense illusion of reality, including the complexities of mental and moral reality."[5]

Henry James himself had something to say in this dispute. The statement is lengthy but it seems worth reproducing here, not only for the light it sheds on the question of the disappearance of the narrator, but also for its illumination of James's notion of the indirect approach. It is taken from the Preface to The Golden Bowl:

> Among many matters thrown into relief by a refreshed acquaintance with "The Golden Bowl" what perhaps most stands out for me is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action; unless indeed I make up my mind to call this mode of treatment, on the contrary, any superficial appearance notwithstanding, the very straightest and closest possible. I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, and even to extravagance commented on, my preference for dealing with my subject-matter, for "seeing my story," through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. Again and again, on review, the shorter

> things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it--the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. . . . My instinct appears repeatedly to have been that to arrive at the facts retailed and the figures introduced by the given help of some other conscious and confessed agent is essentially to find the whole business--that is, as I say, its effective interest--enriched by the way. I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it; that nearness quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's--however avowed the "minor" quality in the latter--close and sensitive contact with it. Anything, in short, I now reflect, must always have seemed to me better--better for the process and the effect of representation, my irrepressible ideal--than the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible "authorship." (The Art of the Novel, pp. 327-28)

With this passage in mind it would appear that neither Lubbock nor Booth is entirely correct and that the truth must lie somewhere between their positions. The disappearance of the narrator is important to James's conception of the indirect approach, but it is only one aspect of that approach. It is probably best characterized as one means to the end of "an intense illusion of reality." Regardless of whether the problem be attacked from the view of technique or from the view of effect, one thing is clear--that at the very heart of the indirect approach is the centre of consciousness, which actually subsumes both views for it may be at the same time a technical device and a subject.

The centre of consciousness, then, is to play a large role in the evolution of James's indirect approach. The term, centre, by itself is often used in two related but confusing senses, both by James and by his critics. The first use of the term is the broader of the two. In his Preface to Roderick Hudson he describes this first kind of centre: "It [the novel] remains in equilibrium by having found its centre, the point of command of all the rest. From this centre the subject has been treated, from this centre the interest has spread, and so, whatever else it may do or not do, the thing has acknowledged a principle of composition and contrives at least to hang together" (The Art of the Novel, p. 15). The centre in this sense may be called the commanding centre. It is the point d'appui which is, at the same time, the subject or matter to be treated.

R. P. Blackmur in his introduction to The Art of the Novel discusses the commanding centre as a principle of composition: "The whole question is bound up with James's exceeding conviction that the art of fiction is an organic form, and that it can neither be looked at all round nor will it be able to move on its own account unless it has a solidly posed centre" (xxiii). This commanding centre may be inanimate, as in The Spoils of Poynton, which is concerned with the struggle of a mother and her son for possession of a collection of fine furniture

and works of art. In the Preface to this short novel, James relates how he began with the conception of the spoils themselves, the furniture, as the commanding centre: "The real centre, as I say, the citadel of interest, with the fight waged round it, would have been the felt beauty and value of the prize of the battle, the Things, always the splendid Things, placed in the middle light, figured and constituted, with each identity made vivid, each character discriminated, and their common consciousness of their great dramatic part established." But these things, of course, are not directly articulate, and while they could be the objects of a fiction, they could not be the subjects, the movers. And so, as James puts it, Fleda Vetch "marked her place in my foreground at one ingratiating stroke. She planted herself centrally, and the stroke . . . was the simple act of letting it be seen she had character" (The Art of the Novel, pp. 126-127).

Most frequently in James's longer works, the commanding centre is a character. He had earlier observed in the works of Turgenev, whom he regarded as one of the masters, a deep and humane concern for mankind. James notes that the Russian "believes in the intrinsic value of 'subject' in art; he holds that there are trivial subjects and serious ones, that the latter are much the best, and that their superiority resides in their giving us absolutely a greater amount of information about the human

mind."[6] For James, too, information about the human mind came to assume an ever-increasing importance as his art developed. He makes another telling comparison between his own method and Turgenev's by noting that the Russian almost always began with the idea of a character "who hovered before him, soliciting him." "I was myself," James continues, "so much more antecedently conscious of my figures than of their setting"--or plot, it might be added (The Art of the Novel, pp. 42-44). The Notebooks and the Prefaces are full of accounts of what James calls his "germs," the seeds of ideas that were to grow in due time into the tales and the novels. Perhaps one of the most interesting and instructive of such accounts is that of the germ for The Portrait of a Lady, which James recollects in the Preface to that work. According to James, Isabel Archer sprang full blown into his awareness. He had his corner-stone or, to put it another way, his commanding centre. Often this was the case with James--a character would appear to him or be suggested in an anecdote recounted by a dinner partner.

The fact that James more often than not began with the germ of a character, rather than a plot, that he was more interested in a person's reactions to external events than in those events themselves, led him to the development of a special kind of commanding centre--the centre of consciousness. This second use of the term

"centre" grows out of the first. If the commanding centre is a compositional hub as well as a subject, the centre of consciousness is, or at least may be, a particular kind of commanding centre which performs special functions. These special functions will be treated at length in the next chapter. The present object is to define the centre of consciousness, to examine the kind of character called for to fulfill that role, and to explore briefly a few other related elements of the indirect approach such as the ficelle, the confidant, and the register.

The center of consciousness is the mind and awareness of a character which functions as the focal point of the fiction. Sometimes called the central intelligence, it is the point of view from which the story is told. What the character sees and hears, what he feels, his confusions and illuminations, these are what the reader is shown. The author as narrator remains mostly out of the sight and the hearing of the reader. Although James wrote very little in his Notebooks and letters about this method during the early years of its development, he was to treat it extensively in the Prefaces, written for the collected New York Edition of his works (1907-1909). To a certain extent he attributes, especially to the earlier works, a more strongly controlled central consciousness than they actually have. He seems at times to be treating them in the light of a fully-developed indirect approach which was

in the years of Roderick Hudson, The American, and The Portrait of a Lady (1875-1881) just evolving. At any rate, what he has to say in those Prefaces is valuable in understanding his final conception of the centre of consciousness as well as in evaluating his growing skill in its use. In the Preface to Roderick Hudson he describes the role of the central consciousness, Rowland Mallet:

> . . . But as what happened to him was above all to feel certain things happening to others, to Roderick, To Christina, to Mary Garland, to Mrs. Hudson, to the Cavaliere, to the Prince, so the beauty of the constructional game was to preserve in everything its especial value for him (The Art of the Novel, p. 16).

His next major work was The American. Of its centre of consciousness, Christopher Newman, James writes:

> If Newman was attaching enough, I must have argued, his tangle would be sensible enough; for the interest of everything is all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we "assist." He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it (The Art of the Novel, p. 37).

James's comments about Isabel Archer in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady show the relationship of the commanding centre and the centre of consciousness:

> "Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness," I said to myself, "and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that--for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relation to herself" (The Art of the Novel, p. 51).

Because of his success in accomplishing this goal of placing the centre of the subject in Isabel Archer's consciousness, James believed this novel to be "the most proportioned of his productions after 'The Ambassadors'--which was to follow it so many years later and which has, no doubt, a superior roundness" (The Art of the Novel, p. 52).

Each of the preceding passages proclaims the ideal toward which James was working in his development of the centre of consciousness. In none of these early novels, with the possible exception of The Portrait of a Lady, does he completely fulfill these aims. As he indicates in the Preface to the The Portrait of a Lady, ideally, the centre of consciousness and the commanding centre are the same in any given work. It seems that James's art reaches its highest level when he accomplishes a fusion of these elements. The work in which this occurs most perfectly and most profoundly is probably The Ambassadors, which is undoubtedly one of the reasons that he considered that novel to have "a superior roundness." Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction describes the unity of centre of consciousness and subject (or commanding centre) in much of James's best fiction as a "seamless web of observation and experience." He asserts rightly: " . . . We tell ourselves that the old-fashioned question, 'Who is the protagonist?' is a meaningless one. The convincing texture of the whole, the impression of life as experienced by an

observer, is itself surely what the true artist seeks." Sometimes this unity can create problems, however, if the fusion is imperfectly made, resulting in "a double focus that seems to spring from an incomplete fusion of original subject with the new subject that develops once a seriously flawed narrator has been created to reflect the original."[7] Often, however, the problem is less one of incomplete fusion than one of distance and reliability (as in The Sacred Fount or "The Turn of the Screw").

It was stated earlier that as James's theory of fiction matured he tended more and more to emphasize not a series of external events (for so long the pattern of narrative), but rather a character's view of those events. In a notebook entry made in 1879, for example, James records an idea for "A story told in letters written alternately by a mother and her daughter and giving totally different accounts of the same situation."[8] Although the epistolary form had been employed many times before, James's interest in it was as another experiment in the indirect approach and in a method of focussing on the characters' views of their experiences.

The difference between James's indirect approach featuring a central intelligence and other modes of narration is one of kind, not of degree. Percy Lubbock, one of James's earliest critics points out that with the indirect approach " . . . all the picture of life is still

rendered in the hero's terms. But the difference is that instead of receiving his report we now see him in the act of judging and reflecting; his consciousness, no longer a matter of hearsay [as with the intrusive, omniscient narrator], a matter for which we must take his word [as with the first person narrator] is now before us in its original agitation. . . . A distinction is made between the scene which the man surveys, and the energy within him which converts it into the stuff of his own being."[9] What James created and perfected is a new point of view for the novel.

In the years that followed the popular success of "Daisy Miller" in 1879, there were many readers who came to feel that James's fiction, by its increasing stress on consciousness and awareness, was losing interest and excitement. James was aware of this growing disaffection. To those readers who, for the sake of "the economy of interest," say give us the experience, the doings, and omit the feelings, James would plead " . . . the unreality of the sharp distinction, where the interest of observation is at stake, between doing and feeling." He justifies his attitude thusly: "What a man thinks and what he feels are the history and the character of what he does; on all of which things the logic of intensity rests. Without intensity where is vividness, and without vividness where is presentability?" (The Art of the Novel, pp. 64, 65, 66).

This belief is at the heart of James's method and his selection of subjects and centres. It is, in fact, his rationale for the use of the centre of consciousness.

The matter of the kind of character required to satisfy the heavy demands of a central intelligence was one to which James gave careful thought. It is in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima that he observes that " . . . the figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it." Thus it is "the acute, the intense, the complete" who " 'get the most' out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get the most." The success of this method depends completely on what James called the register. The register is a record, like a hotel register, a record, in this case, of impressions made upon a character's consciousness. It is not sufficient for the centre of consciousness to show emotional responses to his situation; a fairly high degree of intelligence and articulateness is also called for. "The interest of the attitude and the act would be the actor's imagination and vision of them, together with the nature and degree of their felt return upon him. So the intelligent creature would be required and so some picture of

his intelligence would be involved." (The Art of the Novel, pp. 62, 63). Awareness, intensity, acuteness, intelligence, and articulateness--these are the qualities a character must have to bear the burden of the central consciousness of one of James's fictions.

One may ask, what of the other kinds of characters that have populated imaginative literature since its beginnings? They, too, have their places still. James acknowledges the human value even of "fools" in literature. But he must draw a line: "At the same time I confess I never see the leading interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness (on the part of the moved and moving creature) subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement." Even fools then might be used in a novel but not as a centre of consciousness. The fool would, instead, be mirrored in that consciousness. "This means, exactly, that the person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it so dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away, the value and beauty of the thing" (The Art of the Novel, p. 67). James also explains why he does not employ such majestically heroic figures as Hamlet or Milton's Satan; it has to do with "the rule of an exquisite economy. The thing is to lodge somewhere at the heart of one's

complexity an irrepressible appreciation, but where a light lamp will carry all the flame I incline to look askance at a heavy" (The Art of the Novel, p. 129). Later, James was to engage in an occasional experiment in which he violated these rules, but only for a special purpose. One example is to be found in What Maisie Knew in which he uses a young girl as the central intelligence. Here he makes the child's early confusion then growing awareness of the relationships of her divorced parents into the heart of the story.

For the most part, however, James follows his own observations on the necessity for a fine consciousness. Sometimes, the danger lies in the other extreme--that of making the central intelligence too fine. The problem, he knew, was one of balance, a delicate balance between having the centre of consciousness "feel enough and 'know' enough . . . for his maximum dramatic value without feeling and knowing too much for his minimum verisimilitude, his proper fusion with the fable" (The Art of the Novel, p. 69). If the balance tips, making the intelligence too fine, the results are disasterous. The character becomes unnatural and atypical. He loses credence and compassion. The reader, in turn, loses "bewilderment"--suspense and interest (The Art of the Novel, pp. 64-64).

An excellent example of this problem of balance may be seen in two reactions to Christopher Newman in

The American. James, in a passage from the Preface cited earlier, writes of Newman, the central intelligence: " . . . the interest of everything is all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation; at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated . . . " (The Art of the Novel, p. 37). James appears to be satisfied that he struck the balance here. One of his generally sympathetic critics, however, is not. Joseph Warren Beach feels that the balance is missed: "A story in which the main character is so uninitiated can bear no very close resemblance to the story of Isabel Archer or Lambert Strether. There is no revelation of anything through Newman's consciousness--nothing depends upon his understanding. There is in fact no spiritual dilemma. That is why the book is not among the greatest of its author's."[10]

A device that James developed to further the indirect approach is the figure of the ficelle. The ficelle, the French word for "thread" or "string," is a character, usually subordinate, whose major purposes are to advance the progress of the plot and to aid the reader. James distinguishes between "true agents" and ficelles: "It is a familiar truth to the novelist, at the strenuous hour, that, as certain elements in any work are of the essence, so others are only of the form; that as this or that character, this or that disposition of material, belongs to the

subject directly, so to speak, so this or that other belongs to it but indirectly--belongs intimately to the treatment" (The Art of the Novel, p. 53). The first kind of character is the "true agent"; the second is the ficelle. In the Preface to The Ambassadors James describes the ficelle as "the reader's friend," "an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity" (The Art of the Novel, p. 322). Henrietta Stackpole in The Portrait of a Lady is an example of a ficelle in one of the early novels. In a later work Maria Gostrey and Waymarsh perform that function in The Ambassadors. The critic Wayne Booth describes the ficelle as a character "whose main reason for existence is to give the reader in dramatic form the kind of help he needs if he is to grasp the story."[11]

The ficelle is the "reader's friend" but it is also the writer's friend because among other things it obviates direct exposition and furthers the indirect approach, especially as it aids in the revelation of the centre of consciousness. This is especially true when a specific variety of ficelle is employed--the confidant. The simplest confidant in the earliest works does little more than listen to the centre of consciousness and occasionally provide information, almost as a messenger in the Greek tragedies or in Shakespeare does. James describes this function of the confidant in the Preface to The Ambassadors: " . . . I had thus inevitably to set him up a confidant or

two, to wave away with energy the custom of the seated mass of explanation after the fact, the inserted block of merely referential narrative . . . ." (The Art of the Novel, p. 321). The confidant here enables James to turn what might have required rather dull exposition at the hand of the author-narrator into scene, to substitute the dramatic for the narrative, to show instead of tell. It is another step in the disappearance of the assumed author as narrator.

As James saw the value of the confidant, he expanded its role. Sister M. Corona Sharp points out that "The culmination of the development is to be found in the stories of the later period, 'The Altar of the Dead,' 'The Beast in the Jungle,' and 'The Jolly Corner.' In these stories the confidante not only serves the original and fundamental, technical purpose, but is also a character whose presence forms an integral part of the story."[12] Perhaps the full value of the confidant in this kind of situation may be most clearly seen in a comparison of passages from Roderick Hudson (1876) and The Ambassadors (1903). In Roderick Hudson the narrator at one point in the opening chapter gives the reader nearly eight pages of unadulterated exposition which begins: "This little profession of ideal chivalry (which closed the conversation) was not quite so fanciful on his lips as it would have been on those of many another man; as a rapid glance at his antecedents may help the reader perceive." The

narrator then goes on to tell the reader about Rowland Mallet's father, mother, education, youth, life up to the present, and his personality: "Yet few young men of means and leisure ever made less of a parade of idleness, and indeed idleness in any degree could hardly be laid at the door of a personage who took life in the conscious, serious, anxious fashion of our friend." It should be recalled that, while the narrator is directly addressing the reader, Rowland Mallet is nominally the centre of consciousness of this work. The narrator concludes his eight pages of exposition: " . . . He engaged to believe that all women were fair, all men were brave and the world a delightful place of sojourn, until the contrary should be distinctly proved."[13] The contrast of this passage with its judgmental summary with one from The Ambassadors is striking. Here James uses Maria Gostrey as a confidant and engages her and the central consciousness, Lambert Strether, in a dramatic scene to reveal exposition in a more indirect way. Strether has come to Europe to persuade the son of a friend to return home to the United States:

> He looked at the hour without seeing it, and then, on something again said by his companion, had another pause. "You're really in terror of him."
>
> He smiled a smile that he almost felt to be sickly. "Now you can see why I'm afraid of you."
>
> "Because I've such illuminations? Why, they're all for your help! It's what I told you," she added, "just now. You feel as if this were wrong."
>
> He fell back once more, settling himself against the parapet as if to hear more about it. "Then get me out!"

> Her face fairly brightened for the joy of the appeal, but, as if it were a question of immediate action, she visibly considered. "Out of waiting for him?--of seeing him at all?"
>
> "Oh no--not that," said poor Strether, looking grave. "I've got to wait for him--and I want very much to see him. But out of the terror. You did put your finger on it a few minutes ago. It's general, but it avails itself of particular occasions. That's what it's doing for me now. I'm always considering something else; something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment. The obsession of the other thing is the terror. I'm considering at present for instance something else than you."
>
> She listened with charming earnestness. "Oh you oughtn't to do that!"
>
> "It's what I admit. Make it then impossible."
>
> She continued to think. "Is it really an 'order' from you?--that I shall take the job? Will you give yourself up?"
>
> Poor Strether heaved his sigh. "If I only could! But that's the deuce of it--that I never can. No--I can't."
>
> She wasn't, however, discouraged. "But you want to at least?"
>
> "Oh unspeakably!"[14]

Not only has James set forth the requisite exposition in this scene, but even more important he has, through the use of the confidant, allowed the centre of consciousness to reveal certain things about himself, his own untenable position, his yearnings, his handicaps--and all of this is shown dramatically. Surely, it is an example of the indirect approach at its finest.

Through the indirect approach Henry James made his assays at realistic expression, sometimes tentative and uncertain, sometimes masterly and sure, always pragmatic with an eye toward the effect. The technique of the centre of consciousness proved to be one of the most significant and fruitful in these attempts. As James saw the central

intelligence, its potential was unlimited. Perhaps his best description of that potential is in the metaphor of the house of fiction in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady: "The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million--a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will" (The Art of the Novel, p. 46). That vision and that will are characteristic not only of the artist's need to create but also of the capability of the centre of consciousness to experience the richness of life.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 111. Further references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[2]Theory of Literature, 3rd ed. (New York, 1956), pp. 223-24.

[3]The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1957), p. 111.

[4]The Craft of Fiction, p. 87.

[5]The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961), p. 51.

[6]"Ivan Turgénieff," French Poets and Novelists (New York, 1964), p. 217.

[7]The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 346.

[8]The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1961), p. 11. James used this device twice, in "A Bundle of Letters" and in "The Point of View."

[9]The Craft of Fiction, p. 143.

[10]The Novels of Henry James (New Haven, 1918), pp. 204-205.

[11]*The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 102.

[12]*The Confidante in Henry James* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1963), p. 3.

[13]*Roderick Hudson* (New York, 1907), pp. 9, 15, 16.

[14]*The Ambassadors* (New York, 1909), pp. 19-20.

CHAPTER III

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CENTRE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Henry James's house of fiction metaphor, applied to the centre of consciousness, implies that that observer may function as a pair of eyes for the reader, looking out on the landscape of life and registering what he perceives. He may even become, as indeed he does in many of James's works, a secondary narrator. While he is performing these technical functions, he himself is often the subject of the fiction. James points this out quite clearly in his Preface to Roderick Hudson: "My subject . . . had defined itself--and this in spite of the title of the book--as not directly, in the least, my young sculptor's [Roderick's] adventure. This it had been but indirectly, being all the while in essence, and in final effect another man's, his friend's and patron's [Rowland Mallet's], view and experience of him."[1] Thus the centre of consciousness may be on the one hand a technical and structural method and on the other a subject. It involves both form and content.

This dual nature of the centre of consciousness submits to many finer gradations. It may perform a number of reasonably precise, though overlapping, functions in

the work of fiction. The use of the centre of consciousness gives to the novel:

1. Unity
2. Structure
3. Intensity
4. A view and a meaning of action and characters
5. An aid to the self-effacement of the author-narrator
6. Greater reader involvement
7. A subject

This chapter takes up these functions individually, explaining briefly what is meant by each one and illustrating its use in the fiction of Henry James. In the succeeding chapters on the three early novels the functions are considered in more detail and in relation to one another. Also to be considered, as it relates to several of these functions, is a critical problem that has caused quite a misunderstanding in the last several decades. The dual nature of the centre of consciousness, although clearly and frequently posited by James, seems often to have been overlooked by his many critics, both friendly and otherwise. Most stress his doctrinal insistence on the disappearance of the narrator. The results have often been unfortunate for James's reputation and for the practice of fiction in the twentieth century.

Unity

A single, consistent point of view gives the value of virtually everything as it appears and relates to one character, the central intelligence or centre of consciousness. Thus Roderick Hudson is given a oneness through Mallet's consciousness, despite the title of the novel. In this early novel, however, James fails to achieve a perfect fusion. There are elements of the work which certainly seem more relevant to Roderick than to Rowland. The problem of the artist is one of these. In terms of philosophy and plotting this is Roderick's area; he is the artist whose development and eventual failure is the object of the reader's concern. Yet even here, the centre effects a unity, for it is Roderick's development as viewed by Rowland and as it affects the latter that must concern the reader most. Furthermore, the problem of the artist is not focused in the figure of Roderick alone; other artists in the work, Gloriani and Singleton, present other sides of the question. Rowland Mallet, then, as an "outsider," is perhaps better able to perceive these differing temperaments and abilities. So, while a misplaced centre (perhaps) may be responsible for a lack of complete unity in this novel, it is finally the centre in the person of Rowland who gives the work what unity it has. It soon becomes clear that in discussing the first of these functions of centre of consciousness, its

relationship with the last one, subject, may be seen. The subject of Roderick Hudson is Rowland Mallet's consciousness.

Critics have from time to time found fault with James's lack of consistency in the handling of the centre of consciousness. The Portrait of a Lady is one occasion for such criticism. Oscar Cargill points out that not all of this story is centered in Isabel's consciousness. "There are episodes in which she is not a participant, between Ralph and his uncle, Ralph and his aunt, Henrietta and the Countess Gemini, Ralph and Goodwood. The final scene between Osmond and Mme. Merle is out of her focus . . . " Cargill views these reversions to an assumed narrator and to scenes out of the reach of the vision and the sensibility of the centre as weaknesses better avoided. Of the scene between Osmond and Mme. Merle, he writes; "James yielded to an impulse to include this for its drama, but its chief accomplishment being the revelation of Osmond's ingratitude toward his one-time mistress, the drama should have been sacrificed for integrity in point of view and the substance of the revelation brought to Isabel indirectly."[2]

Actually, "the substance of the revelation" is "brought to Isabel indirectly" two chapters later by Countess Gemini. Artistically, the treatment works well. The direct confrontation adds drama, as Cargill notes. The indirect revelation by Countess Gemini comes in the climatic chapter in which Isabel first receives word that

Ralph is dying, then has the final interview with Osmond, and finally learns of the relationship between Osmond, Mme. Merle, and Pansy. James has sacrificed the integrity in point of view for intensity. By handling the matter as he does, James is true to his statement in the Preface where he stresses the value of "the scale of her [Isabel's] relation to herself." Countess Gemini's revelation to Isabel removes the instantaneous quality of the scene between Mme. Merle and Osmond with the result being a situation in which Isabel can reflect, can view the information as it relates to herself.

Thus it is true that James has made little attempt to establish or preserve any "integrity in point of view" in the sense of making every scene fall into the direct purview of Isabel as a register or centre of consciousness. Also there is still a very apparent narrator throughout. But Isabel is the only significant centre of consciousness and the sole commanding centre of the work. The value of any of the scenes in which she is not present is their value for her or for the reader's view of her. The value of a scene as it affects the reader's view of a character is highly significant in most of James's works. James's interest in character in preference to action or what might be called external plot has been discussed earlier. Many of his novels are simply revelation of character, that is, there might be little real change or development

in a major character through the course of a novel. The progress of the fiction is then located in the reader's growing understanding of the character as little by little the character is subjected to various events, influences, and other characters. To a large extent this is true of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady. The reader's "bewilderment," then, is less often centered around what will happen next (in the sense of external plot) than around the unveiling of another facet of character. The first chapter of The Portrait illustrates the way in which a scene in which the central consciousness does not participate still has value for the reader's view of Isabel and thus serves the purpose of helping to unify the work. Although it is perhaps the simplest of examples and lacks the richness and complexities of many of the ensuing scenes, it does illustrate the point. The setting is in the garden of an English country house. Isabel has not been introduced into the novel yet. Before she is even mentioned by the characters in the scene, their focus is on the house from which she later makes her entrance into the garden. In their polite small talk, Ralph, Mr. Touchett, and Lord Warburton reveal a sense of anticipation, of waiting. Their conversation turns to talk of marriage and then of Isabel and of Isabel's eligibility. Even when Isabel is not physically present, she affects the scene and the reader and serves as a unifying element.

In terms of "integrity in point of view" as it functions to unify the novel, James probably reaches the peak in The Sacred Fount and The Ambassadors. In The Sacred Fount the centre of consciousness is also the first person narrator, one for whom "the vision of life is an obsession."[3] The entire story is his search for the sacred fount, the source of the strange changes that come over (or appear to come over) several of the characters. His ignorance (if there is anything to be ignorant of) and his gropings unify the work and all its parts--the many characters and their changing groupings, his responsibility to live up to the freedom and wit of Newmarch, the carrefour device in the garden, the paintings in the gallery, the turned backs of the guests. In fact, the integrity of the work is so great, the fusion of subject and treatment so complete that the problem of the meaning of it all is raised by the reader's doubts about the reliability of the narrator-centre. This, however, is a problem of distance, to be discussed below in the section entitled "greater reader involvement."

Oscar Cargill, who decried James's handling of view in The Portrait of a Lady, holds a different attitude toward The Golden Bowl. Although it might seem that James's use of two centres of consciousness in this novel is potentially destructive of unity, Cargill affirms that

> actually the omniscience of each principal, when the point of view is his or hers, is peculiarly limited by ignorance of the motives of the persons who are,

> in turn, of chief concern. Thus the Prince knows less than we about his wife and father-in-law in the first book and Maggie is in ignorance of the true feelings of her husband in the second, our view of his mental processes being cut off just at the moment when they would reveal too much to us.[4]

The use of a centre of consciousness in the novel can provide the work with a sense of unity by means of a consistent (or fairly consistent) point of view. Closely related in effect to this unity is the second function of the centre of consciousness, STRUCTURE.

Structure

Form, compositional value, structure--James employs all of these terms to describe that quality of a work of art that he prizes so highly. Early in his career, in an 1877 review article on George Sand, he writes: "It has been said that what makes a book a classic is its style. We should modify this, and instead of style say form. Madame Sand's novels have plenty of style, but they have no form. Balzac's have not a shred of style, but they have a great deal of form."[5]

The shape or form of a work of fiction continued to interest him in the years that followed. Often he would criticize the work of a contemporary as being shapeless, formless, diffuse. Both Thomas Hardy and Victor Hugo came under fire on this count. R. P. Blackmur summarizes James's attitudes toward form in art as it relates to life: "Art was serious, he believed, and required of the

artist every ounce of his care. The subject of art was life, or more particularly someone's apprehension of the experience of it, and in striving truly to represent it art removed the waste and muddlement and bewilderment in which it is lived, and gave it a lucid, intelligible form" (The Art of the Novel, xv). To a large extent James came to rely on the technique of the commanding centre and more especially the centre of consciousness to circumscribe that portion of "life" that he wished to illuminate in his fictions. Many of the realists and the naturalists of James's time wished to mask the act of artistic selection with the illusion of seeming to include all aspects of life. This was not James's way. To make life intelligible it was necessary somehow to refine it, to filter it through an intelligence, and not to present it to the reader in its original unassimilated formlessness.

The device most readily adaptable to that end, James found, was the central intelligence. He describes the manner in which it operates in the Preface to Roderick Hudson: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so" (The Art of the Novel, p. 5). James could begin, "by a geometry of his own," by first locating the centre of his circle. This would be in the consciousness of a character, say Lambert Strether or

Rowland Mallet. The radius of the circle would be limited by his relationships with other characters and by those events which come into his perception or affect him in one way or another. The limitations of his horizon would become the circumference of the circle. Included within that circle would be everything as it affects him or affects the reader's understanding of him, not necessarily limited only to those events of which he has a direct perception and immediate knowledge. So one of the ways that the centre of consciousness functions as an element of form is by circumscribing the circle of relations. Again in the Preface to Roderick Hudson, James explains: "It [Roderick Hudson] remains in equilibrium by having found its centre, the point of command of all the rest. From this centre the subject has been treated, from this centre the interest has been spread, and so, whatever else it may not do, the thing has acknowledged a principle of composition and contrives at least to hang together" (The Art of the Novel, p. 15). The centre here is, of course, located in Rowland Mallet's consciousness.

James is fond of architectural metaphors to describe his theories. The house of fiction metaphor discussed earlier is one example. He uses another variant to explain the function of the centre of consciousness of Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady. The character of Isabel had appeared to him as a disponible, a disembodied, unsituated germ, long before the conception of the novel came

to him. His problem became what to do with this figure. "The point is, however, that this single small corner-stone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny, had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of 'The Portrait of a Lady.' It came to be a square and spacious house--or has at least seemed so to me in this going over it again; but, such as it is, it had to be put up around my young woman while she stood there in perfect isolation" (The Art of the Novel, p. 48). Several pages later, he continues with the figure, describing how he built "brick upon brick" until he reached "fine embossed vaults and painted arches." "Such is the aspect that to-day 'The Portrait' wears for me: a structure reared with an 'architectural' competence, as Turgenieff would have said, that makes it, to the author's own sense, the most proportioned of his productions after 'The Ambassadors'" (The Art of the Novel, p. 52).

Another way in which the central intelligence may function as a compositional element is through the pattern of his inner struggle or growing awareness. While one may perceive several kinds of structure in a work such as The Ambassadors, (temporal, spatial, dramatic, etc.), certainly one of the most significant is the organic structure of Strether's developing awareness--of a sense of loss, of the missed opportunities, of the self-fulfillment still possible. Blackmur points out that "The whole question is

bound up with James' exceeding conviction that the art of fiction is an organic form, and that it can neither be looked at all round nor will it be able to move on its own account unless it has a solidly posed centre" (The Art of the Novel, xxiii). It is very difficult to discuss the matter of organic structure in a novel in a small space; therefore, a thorough exposition of this kind of structure must be postponed until the chapters following.

In his later works, especially, James employed still a third means of imposing form on life through the centre of consciousness. This is to limit the realm of the work wholly, or nearly so, to that which falls within the perceptions of the centre alone. The earlier method was not nearly so restrictive. Even in The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors there are scenes and pictures that do not fall into the ken of Isabel and Strether. James does not rigidly limit himself to their consciousnesses. The Sacred Fount, however, is one work in which he does restrict everything to the perceptions of a single character, the first person narrator. The reader knows only what the narrator perceives, sees only what the narrator sees, and so the mystery (if, indeed, there is one) is never solved for the narrator--centre. The difficulties involved in using a central intelligence in this manner are many; the fact that no one seems to agree on what the work is "about" is ample testimony to that. A more successful use of the

method is to be found in The Golden Bowl. This work is neatly divided into two parts. In the first, the centre of consciousness is that of the Prince, in the second part his wife, the Princess, takes over. As James explains:

> . . . The whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters. The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us. . . . Having a consciousness highly susceptible of registration, he thus makes us see the things that may most interest us reflected in it. . . . The function of the Princess, in the remainder, matches exactly with his; the register of her consciousness is as closely kept [as his own] . . . ; the Princess, in fine, in addition to feeling everything she has to, and to playing her part just in that proportion, duplicates, as it were, her value and becomes a compositional resource, and of the finest order, as well as a value intrinsic. (The Art of the Novel, pp. 328-29).

This double vision informs the structure of the work: "It is the Prince who opens the door to half our light upon Maggie, just as it is she who opens it to half our light upon himself; the rest of our impression, in either case, coming straight from the very motion with which that act is performed" (The Art of the Novel, p. 330). Thus the centre of consciousness may function as an element of form in at least three ways.

Intensity

There are two varieties of intensity which may be fostered by the use of the centre of consciousness. The first of these varieties of intensity is what might be called dramatic intensity which arises through the

presentation of a character's inner life. James was deeply concerned with this quality of the heightened emotion as the passage from the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady reveals: "Without her [Isabel's] sense of them [her 'mild adventures], her sense for them, as one may say, they are next to nothing at all; but isn't the beauty and difficulty just in showing their majestic conversion by that sense, conversion into the stuff of drama or, even more delightful word still, of 'story'?" The process of "conversion into the stuff of drama" is the process of intensifying the pictorial, the non-scenic through the medium of consciousness. James continues, "The question here was that of producing the maximum of intensity with the minimum of strain." He then gives two examples of what he means. The first occurs in chapter xviii when Isabel enters the drawing-room at Gardencourt and encounters Madame Merle for the first time. The young American girl sits quietly as the stranger finishes the piece on the piano. Isabel senses "a turning point in her life." The second is what James calls Isabel's "extraordinary meditative vigil." "Reduced to its essence, it is but the vigil of searching criticism; but it throws the action further forward than twenty 'incidents' might have done. It was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture" (The Art of the Novel, pp. 56-57). Nothing "happens" in this twenty page chapter--nothing external, that is. But, Isabel's meditation in which she ponders her relationship with her

husband, Osmund, with Pansy, with Warburton, and considers her future course of action, has all the intensity of the most dramatic of scenes.

Another example of James's use of centre of consciousness to build dramatic intensity occurs in The Ambassadors. A real confrontation between Strether and Chad, the young man he has come to Europe to "save," is postponed on their first meeting by using the necessity of their remaining quiet in the theatre while the play is in progress. The intensity of the scene is magnified even while the moment they can talk becomes eagerly anticipated. Strether can do nothing but meditate--about the past and the future, about Woolett and Paris, about himself and Chad. His state of mind is revealed and the beginning of his internal crisis is dramatized.

The second variety of intensity that James sought is what Wayne Booth has called "'intensity of illusion'--most often the illusion of experiencing life as seen by a fine mind subject to realistic human limitations."[6] This was the problem James faced in Roderick Hudson in the difficulty of making Hudson's collapse seem likely and realistic despite a faulty time scheme in the novel: "Since one was dealing with an action one might borrow a scrap of the Dramatist's all-in-all, his intensity--which the novelist so often ruefully envies him as a fortune in itself. The amount of illustration I could allow to the grounds of my

young man's disaster was unquestionably meagre, but I might perhaps make it lively; I might produce illusion if I should be able to achieve intensity" (The Art of the Novel, p. 15). He recognizes what really "saved" him as being produced, in part at least, by locating the centre in Rowland Mallet's consciousness. "The centre of interest throughout 'Roderick' is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of the consciousness--which I had of course to make sufficiently acute in order to enable it, like a set and lighted scene, to hold the play" (The Art of the Novel, p. 16). Booth observes, "There can be no intensity of illusion if the author is present, constantly reminding us of his unnatural wisdom. Indeed, there can be no illusion of life where there is no bewilderment, and the omniscient narrator is obviously not bewildered. The process most like the process of life is that of observing events through a convincing, human mind, not a godlike mind unattached to the human condition."[7]

Thus the intensity that James so frequently strained to achieve is of two kinds: the dramatic intensity which holds the reader's interest by heightening emotional moments and the intensity of illusion which adds verisimilitude to the perceptions of the fiction. Both varieties are pursued with the assistance of the centre of consciousness.

A view and a meaning of action and characters

At its simplest, most unsophisticated level the centre of consciousness provides the reader with a view and a meaning of the elements of the fiction--the action and the other characters. He, if he is reliable as are most of James's centres, indicates the norms of the world of the novel. His assessments are usually those that the reader accepts. This is not to say that everything is given through him. Often the reader is shown something that the centre is not privileged to know. This is irony, and James knows how to make use of it. But in the main, the centre represents the standards of the author and the work.

Sometimes, even in an early work such as Roderick Hudson the centre of consciousness seems almost to assume the role of a secondary narrator in clarifying a situation. Such is the case toward the end of that novel when Roderick has degenerated a good deal: "The great and characteristic point with him [Roderick] was the perfect separateness of his sensibility. He never saw himself as part of a whole; only as the clear-cut, sharp-edged, isolated individual, rejoicing or raging, as the case might be, but needing in any case absolutely to affirm himself. All this to Rowland was ancient history, but his perception of it stirred within him afresh at the sight of Roderick's sense of having been betrayed."[8]

This method can become quite complex as the following passage from the same scene demonstrates. Rowland remarks to Mrs. Hudson and Roderick about Christina: "'You took, her, I did think, too seriously at first but you take her too harshly now. She had no idea of wronging or of so terribly upsetting you.'" Roderick is not soothed by the kind words for the girl who has disappointed him: "'That's consoling for me who have lost her!'" Roderick's mother comes to his side:

> "Oh yes, Mr. Mallet show a little mercy!" said Mrs. Hudson in a tone which for all its gentleness, made Rowland stare. This demonstration on his part covered a great deal of concentrated wonder and apprehension--a presentiment of what a small, sweet, feeble, elderly lady might be capable of in the way of abrupt and perverse animosity. There was no space in Mrs. Hudson's tiny maternal mind for complications of feeling, and one emotion existed only by turning another over flat and perching on top of it. She had evidently not penetrated at all, having no imagination for it whatever, the strange cloud of her son's personal situation. Sitting without, in dismay, she only saw that all was darkness and trouble, and as his gained position, or what she had been deeming such, appeared quite to exceed her original measure and lift him beyond her jurisdiction, so that he had become a thing too precious and sacred for blame, she found it infinitely uncomfortable to lay the burden of their common affliction upon Rowland's broad shoulders. Had he not promised to make them all rich and happy? And this was the end of it! Rowland felt as if his trials were only beginning.[9]

In this passage a multitude of shades of feeling is shown through the consciousness of Rowland Mallet. In dialogue, Rowland presents his view of Christina to Mrs. Hudson and Roderick. But in his thoughts and observations, that is in his consciousness, there register his impressions of

Roderick's and his mother's views of Christina. Also presented is Rowland's view of Mrs. Hudson and of the dangers she might present to him. These expressions are clearly Rowland's and not the implied author's.

An aid to the self-effacement of the author-narrator

This is the function of the centre of consciousness that has attracted the most attention and caused the greatest misunderstanding about James's method in this century, leading to this apocalyptic reaction in 1966: "We are told that Joyce represents a dead end in the art of fiction. Actually, the influence of James, should it prevail, would be much more pernicious; for the Jamesian method leads inevitably to the death of narrative art by a kind of artistic suicide. The narrator is to eliminate himself for the good of his art."[10] This warning sounded by Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg is perhaps a bit overexuberant. One reason is that James never did entirely dispense with the assumed author as narrator with the minor exceptions of such relatively short experimental pieces as "The Turn of the Screw" and The Sacred Fount where he uses a first-person narrative style. Even The Awkward Age, which is probably his most scenic and dramatic work, shows signs of a narrator. Furthermore, despite an occasional overstatement by James himself, he was not concerned only or even primarily with the disappearance of the author-narrator. That is one

small result of the use of the centre of consciousness which itself is but one means of the objective method. His ultimate goal in his fiction was to present life as he saw it, life in which meaning was imposed by intelligence, in which the activities of the sensibility were the most interesting, and in which the most exciting movements were those guided by a moral sense. He writes in the Preface to The Golden Bowl: "The 'taste' of the poet is, at bottom and so far as the poet in him prevails over everything else, his active sense of life . . . " (The Art of the Novel, p. 340). The indirect approach and the centre of consciousness were the methods James chose to present his "active sense of life," not ends in themselves.

Before going any further in this discussion, it seems advisable to consider more precisely what is meant by the phrase, "an aid to the self-effacement of the author." It begins in impartiality, as William Dean Howells pointed out in an 1882 review article, "Henry James, Jr.": " . . . That artistic impartiality which puzzled so many in the treatment of Daisy Miller is one of the qualities most valuable in the eyes of those who care how things are done, and I am not sure that it is not Mr. James's most characteristic quality. As 'frost performs the effect of fire,' this impartiality comes at last to the same result as sympathy." Howells admires in James what he calls the lack of "downright petting," which is so insistent in

Dickens and Thackery. "The new school derives from Hawthorne and George Eliot rather than any others; but it studies human nature much more in its wonted aspects, and finds its ethical and dramatic examples in the operation of lighter but not really less vital motives. . . . This school, which is so largely of the future as well as the present, finds its chief examplar in Mr. James; it is he who is shaping and directing American fiction, at least."[11]

If the disappearance of the assumed author began in impartiality, it was not long before it went further. James writes, in 1909 toward the end of his career: "Anything, in short, I now reflect, must always have seemed to me better--better for the process and the effect of my representation, my irrepressible ideal--than the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible 'authorship'" (The Art of the Novel, p. 328). It is valuable to note that his "irrepressible ideal" is not to do away with the narrator, it is not even to do away with "irresponsible 'authorship'." Doing away with the latter is a means to his ideal: representation of life. In the most successful of his works the procedure involves the self-effacement of the assumed author as narrator and the reliance on a character within the work to do as much of the narration as possible. That is, to relinquish the author's prerogative of standing above and outside the world created in the fiction and commenting at will about it or moving freely about within it, changing his position and entering characters' minds as he wishes. As

Norman Friedman points out, "If artistic 'truth' is a matter of compelling rendition, of creating the illusion of reality, then an author speaking in his own person about the lives and fortunes of others is placing an extra obstacle between his illusion and the reader by virtue of his very presence." Thus James dramatizes the narrator. Friedman clarifies the distinction: "It might be questioned as to exactly how this mode of presentation [the centre of consciousness as dramatized narrator], where the author shows us internal states, differs from normal omniscience, where the author peers into the minds of his characters and tells us what is going on there. It is chiefly that one renders thoughts, perceptions, and feelings as they occur consecutively and in detail passing through the mind (scene), while the other summarizes and explains them after they have occurred (narrative)."[12]

Critic Wayne Booth refers to Strether, "through whose vision most of The Ambassadors comes to us," as one of the "great narrators." Strether, of course, is not the narrator of the work; there is someone else telling the story, someone who talks about Strether as "he," an implied author. But that author-narrator is modestly retiring. As Booth continues, he explains why it is that he refers to Strether as the narrator: " . . . The effect of The Ambassadors is much closer to that of the great first person novels, since Strether in large part 'narrates'

his own story, even though he is always referred to in the third person." Later, he adds more justification: "We should remind ourselves that any sustained inside view, of whatever depth, temporarily turns the character whose mind is shown into a narrator . . . ."[13] Booth's general thesis about James is eminently sensible. James was concerned first and last with the illusion of reality and to this he sacrificed, when necessary, impersonal narration, a consistent point of view, anything else. Many of James's critics have failed to recognize that James voluntarily and consciously made these sacrifices for that illusion; instead they condemn his inconsistency.

Certainly James could be inconsistent. At times he might better be called Thackery James for his intrusiveness, especially early in his career. At other times he uses the kind of centre characterized by Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether as registers but with the author-narrator still present on occasion. The fully dramatized narrator-centre is used in The Sacred Fount, a first-person narrative. In The Awkward Age there is little evidence of a narrator, and in the plays, which he wrote mainly between 1889 and 1896 there is of course no narrator at all; everything is scene. Not only did James vary his practice from one work to the next (and not always in the straight-line progression suggested above), but within a given work he often mixed his approaches and thus his effects. He was highly conscious

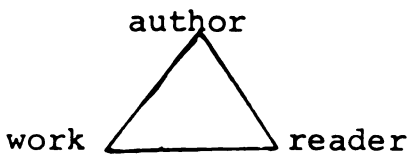
of the value of the alternation of picture (summary) and scene (presentation). And James was always an experimenter, as he noted in a letter to his brother William, who had complained about the "thinness" of The Europeans: "Being very 'artistic,' I have a constant impulse to try experiments of form, in which I wish not to run the risk of wasting or gratuitously using the situations. But to these I am coming now [1878]. It is something to have learned how to write, and when I look round me and see how few people (doing my sort of work) know how (to my sense) I don't regret my step-by-step evolution."[14]

As this section began with ominous words about James's contribution to the death of narrative art, so it will end with another observation by Messrs. Scholes and Kellogg, who maintain that there is a sophisticated link between cultural conditions and the shape and technique of the narrative: "Just as psychological knowledge impinges on the novelist's choices and the reader's expectations with regard to characterization, epistemological knowledge and notions about how we perceive inevitably impinge, for writer and reader, on the question of point of view. And the more realistic or representational a work is, the more insistent these non-esthetic pressures will be." They argue that in an age of relative values such as ours "the authoritarian monism of the fully omniscient mode of narration has become less and less tenable . . . ." They believe that

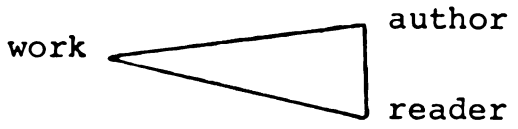
James was wrong when he worked to dramatize the narrator for dramatic reasons. "The narrator does not need to be dramatized for the modern audience so much as he needs to be relativized. A narrator who is not in some way suspect, who is not in some way subject to ironic scrutiny is what the modern temper finds leasts bearable."[15] If Scholes and Kellogg are correct, and it would seem that they are, James has done the right thing (at least the modern thing of bringing the narrator closer to the reader's scrutiny) for the wrong reason. The ironic scrutiny of which they speak is a necessary task of the reader of James, for as James's narrators are dramatized they are nearly always "relativized" as well. Although it is most clearly called for in some of the later works such as The Sacred Fount and "The Turn of the Screw" (both first-person narratives), a position of ironic scrutiny is a wise one for the reader to take before nearly all of his works because of the self-effacement of the author-narrator. It was the author-narrator who in times past provided the norms of a work. In James and many of the writers who have followed him, the norms are not so readily apparent and the reader is involved in deciding what they are before he can begin to judge them and the characters who live within that framework.

Increased reader involvement

Ever so closely bound up with the question of the self-effacing author-narrator are the problems of reader involvement and aesthetic distance. These problems center on the relationships between the author, the characters of the fiction, and the reader. Each of these three elements may be thought of as the point of a triangle:

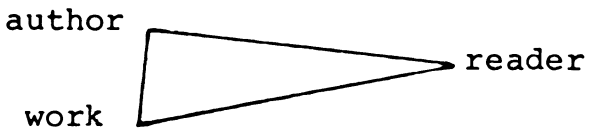


In the narrative in which the author-narrator assumes unlimited omniscience and freely intrudes in direct address to the reader, the distance between reader and author is diminished. The narrator confides in his reader and the two are even capable of smugly looking down on the characters of the fiction. Such a god-like posture results in a decreased distance between author and reader but an increased distance between them and the work (and its characters):



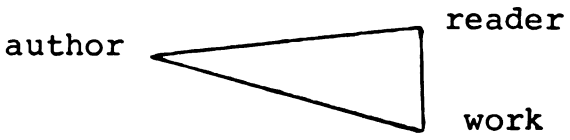
In this situation the author is like the bard who sings to the court. A variety of this relationship is what James deplored in Thackery and Dickens and sought to avoid in his own work. It is typical of the middle Victorian novel.

A second possible relationship places the author close to his work with an increased distance between them and the reader. This might be illustrated thusly:



When this relationship is in effect, the work is probably an essay, a lyric poem, or a prose fiction like Thus Spake Zarathustra.

The third possibility sees the reader and the work in a close relationship with the author at a remove. The most extreme example of this kind of relationship is the play, from which the author has retired completely (although, of course, he is present in the stage directions). In this situation the reader moves closer to the characters, if only because he has to do some of the sorting out, some of the work of deciding the meaning of it all--tasks that the author-narrator might otherwise have done:



This is the relationship that characterizes most twentieth-century fiction. Much of Hemingway's fiction maintains this relationship with the author-narrator doing little more than briefly (and without comment) setting the scene and indicating movements. James's The Awkward Age, however, probably marks the limits of James's experiments of

this sort until he turned to the theatre in an attempt to carry this relationship to its logical fulfillment.

This attempt to systematize the relationships between author, reader, and characters is obviously an oversimplification. While it takes into account what has been called aesthetic distance, it leaves out emotional distance, for example--the sympathy or antipathy an author may feel for his characters and seek to evoke from the reader. It also omits the kind of distance experienced by the reader when the characters are far superior or inferior to him in freedom of action and moral strength. It is helpful as a tool, however, to aid in illustrating another function of the centre of consciousness in James's fiction--that of increasing reader involvement by decreasing the distance between the reader and the central intelligence. This works in conjunction with the author-narrator's self-effacement, that is his increasing distance from his main characters and his reader.

Wayne Booth explains how this relationship operates to involve the reader with James's centres of consciousness. The writer may reduce the presence of the implied author (or author-narrator):

> . . . because his central intelligence is of the kind that will seem most sympathetic if presented as an isolated, unaided consciousness, without the support that a reliable narrator or observer would lend. Such an effect is possible, I think, only when the reflected intelligence is so little distant, so close, in effect to the norms of the work that no complicated deciphering of unreliability is required of the reader. So

> long as what the character thinks and feels can be taken directly as a reliable clue about the circumstances he faces, the reader can experience those circumstances with him even more strongly because of his moral isolation.

Lambert Strether and Isabel Archer are probably the two centres of consciousness that, because of their distance from the author and their subsequent moral isolation, invoke most strongly such a deep reader involvement. The reader's involvement is not limited to a feeling of sympathy for the character. At its most complete it may result in identification and participation with the character. This participation is made possible by James's practice of showing what the centre is feeling as those feelings occur. "Leave the reader to choose for himself, force him to face each decision as the hero faces it, and he will feel much more deeply the value of the truth when it is attained, or its loss if the hero fails," Booth adds.[16]

Nothing has been said here about the problems that arise with unreliable or insensitive centres. James made little, if any, intentional use of such centres in his early work, always seeking during these years the sensitive, intelligent, articulate character who would register impressions accurately. In some of his later writing he did elect central intelligences that cause difficulties for the reader when their suspected unreliability is coupled with a detached author. But that is a problem for another time and another place.

A subject

The last function of the centre of consciousness to be discussed is one of the most important, yet it is the one that will get the shortest shrift here because it has been discussed in the preceding pages and will be taken up again in the chapters that follow. Given the statements that James made about the centre of consciousness as a subject (many of them cited earlier) and given the novels themselves, it should be immediately apparent to anyone interested in James's work that he employed the centre of consciousness not simply as a technical device which functioned as a narrative frame and permitted the author-narrator to retire, but that the central intelligence was an integral part of his subject, was indeed the subject itself in many cases. Unfortunately, many otherwise capable critics seem not to have noticed this truth or, noticing, have forgotten it. The story of The Portrait of a Lady, for instance, is not about Isabel Archer, it is Isabel Archer. It is called, after all, a portrait.

As much as James gave to future generations of novelists in the way of technical innovations, perhaps this was his most valuable gift--the gift of the human sensibility. Far from bringing about the death of the novel, Henry James liberated the form and gave it new life.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 15. Further references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[2]The Novels of Henry James (New York, 1961), p. 109.

[3]Henry James, The Sacred Fount in Three Novels (New York, 1968), p. 329.

[4]The Novels of Henry James, p. 423.

[5]"George Sand," French Poets and Novelists (New York, 1964), p. 180.

[6]The Rhetoric of Fiction, (Chicago, 1961), p. 42.

[7]The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 45.

[8]Roderick Hudson (New York, 1907), pp. 429-30.

[9]Roderick Hudson, pp. 431-32.

[10]Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (Oxford, 1966), p. 270.

[11]"Henry James, Jr.," Discovery of a Genius: William Dean Howells and Henry James, ed. Albert Mordell (New York, 1961), pp. 114, 120-21.

[12]"Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," The Theory of the Novel, ed. Philip Stevick (New York, 1967), pp. 113, 127-28.

[13]The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 149-151, 164, 59.

[14]Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), I, 66.

[15]The Nature of Narrative, pp. 275-77.

[16]The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 274, 293.

CHAPTER IV

RODERICK HUDSON

Henry James began to write Roderick Hudson in Florence in the spring of 1874 and spent the rest of the year working on it as he moved from there to the Black Forest, then to Boston and on to New York. The power that Europe (especially Italy) held over his imagination vibrates throughout his story of a young promising American sculptor, brought to Rome from the Massachusetts town of Northampton by a wealthy patron. But as James observes in the Preface, this was to be only indirectly the story of the sculptor, Roderick Hudson. James's intention was that it be in reality "another man's, his friend's and patron's view and experience of him."[1] The friend and patron is Rowland Mallet; his view and experience of Roderick is meant to be the subject of the novel at the same time that his consciousness of the experience is to be the primary means of representation. In other words, Rowland as centre of consciousness is both subject and treatment.

This novel is James's first extended attempt to employ the indirect or objective method and its most useful technique, the central intelligence. Critic Cornelia

Kelley characterizes her reactions to the method: "It is as though James had written the novel using Rowland as the [first person] narrator and then re-written it to avoid the excessive use of the first person."[2] A simple example of the way in which Rowland's consciousness operates as a means of presentation is to be found in this passage when Christina Light, her mother and their Cavaliere are visiting Rowland's apartment:

> The Cavalier approached Rowland to express the pleasure he had derived from his splendid collection. His smile was exquisitely bland, his attitude seemed to call attention to its exemplary correctness. But he gave Rowland an odd sense of looking at an elaborate waxen image adjusted to perform certain gestures and emit certain sounds. It had once contained the marvellous machinery of a spirit too, but some accident, had apparently befallen that part of the mechanism, to the cost of the perfect limitation of life. Nevertheless, Rowland reflected, there are more graceless things than the mere motions and passes of a very old civilization--the civilization that had given this personage his exhausted impetus never having struck him as so immemorially old.[3]

Of course, it might be claimed that all that James does here is to take the comments of the old-fashioned intrusive narrator and attribute them to Rowland instead. To some extent this is true. The description is interpretive: the Cavaliere was not just smiling or even smiling weakly, "his smile was exquisitely bland." This observation might have been made by an intrusive author-narrator. Even the recognition of the hollowness of the Cavaliere in the next sentence, although attributed to Rowland's register ("he gave Rowland . . . "), is not necessarily characteristic

of Rowland's intelligence. But the final sentence clearly belongs to Rowland; it comes from his cumulative experience of Europe. Furthermore it illustrates, even further, his growing awareness of the qualities of life and art in the Old World.

James seems to try to keep everything within Rowland's purview. One result is the somewhat "staged" quality of the scene in the coliseum (pp. 257-265). Rowland is visiting the ruin alone and has climbed to the upper tiers when, hearing voices, he discovers Christina and Roderick meeting secretly below him. James apparently felt that his eavesdropping on their clandestine meeting was the only way to present that meeting scenically and have it fall within the province of Rowland as well. On another occasion, after Roderick had lost his artistic powers, he came upon Sam Singleton, the watercolorist, at work. Roderick questions him about the regularity of his work habits, clearly comparing them in his mind to his erratic inspiration. "'Damnation,'" is all that Roderick can say. Rowland is not present at this brief scene, presented by the way in direct quotation of dialogue; "Singleton related the incident afterwards to Rowland," the narrator reveals (pp. 484-485).

Roderick's decline presented a problem to James, one that he never felt that he completely solved. The beginning of the decline is not really shown through Rowland's eyes, but through letters from Roderick at

Baden-Baden: "'I know I've been a great brute. . . . I've lately learned terribly well how to do nothing.'" But when Rowland has finished reading the letter, James lets the reader see his reaction of surprise and doubt. Two more letters follow, asking for money to clear up gambling debts, before Roderick rejoins Rowland at Geneva. Then James uses the technique of picture (summary) to allow Roderick to reveal to Rowland in his own words his account of his adventures at Baden-Baden (pp. 134-139). James remarks in the Preface on the difficulty of making Roderick's decline plausible and blames his failure to achieve complete success in this regard to a faulty time scheme: "Everything occurs . . . too punctually and moves too fast: Roderick's disintegration, a gradual process, and of which the exhibitional interest is exactly that it <u>is</u> gradual and occasional, and thereby traceable and watchable, swallows two years in a mouthful . . . ."[4]

Perhaps the problem lies partly in his failure to present the early stages of Roderick's decline scenically, letting the reader <u>see</u> the disintegration. As it is, the first instances of his fall come to Rowland second hand. James, of course, was faced with the choice of the greater vividness of scenic presentation, on the one hand, and the greater economy of summary on the other. He leaned toward summary in the early stages of the disintegration with the result that the changing nature of the young sculptor is less vivid and immediate to the reader.

When James revised the text of Roderick Hudson for the collected edition of 1907-1909, he made many alterations, some of which were designed to add depth to the changes in Roderick. Hélène Harvitt has compared the texts of the 1883, two-volume book edition with the Macmillan edition (1921), which is essentially the same as the New York edition. Because Roderick Hudson is the most heavily revised of James's novels, it seems desirable to summarize her findings. Other than the few touches that James added to Roderick's disintegration (making him more testy toward Rowland), the revisions have little bearing on the subject under discussion. James did try to add interest and charm to the character of Mary Garland, justifying the attraction that both Rowland and Roderick feel toward this plain girl. The remaining alterations are primarily stylistic, frequently metaphoric, and often, in the judgment of Miss Harvitt, changes for the worse in the substitution of analysis and obscurity for spontaneity and clarity.[5] It seems justified then, to adhere to the standard text of the New York edition throughout this chapter because it is so much more readily available and because the revisions appear to have little bearing on a discussion of point of view.

In this early attempt to dramatize the narrator James resorts to a variety of devices, perhaps never with the sure touch of the later novels but with amazing skill considering that he was just beginning to develop his indirect method. One of these devices is the letter, used on

a number of occasions, from Roderick, from Mary Garland, and to and from his cousin Cecilia. The latter correspondent serves not only to present information (as the earlier letters from Roderick do) but to provide Rowland with a listener in whom he can confide his thoughts, especially his doubts and fears about Roderick. Some of Rowland's observations, such as this one about Roderick appear more natural when included as part of a letter, devised in solitude and committed to the more thoughtful and formal medium of the written word, than when they are intended to represent spontaneous thoughts:

> . . . In the summer I began to be uneasy, though I succeeded in keeping down alarm. When he came back to Rome, however, I saw that the tide had turned and that we were close upon the rocks. It's in fact another case of Ulysses and the Sirens; only Roderick refuses to be tied to the mast. He's the most extraordinary being, the strangest mixture of the clear and the obscure. I don't understand so much power--because it <u>is</u> power--going with so much weakness, such a brilliant gift being subject to such lapses. The poor fellow isn't <u>made</u> right, and its really not his fault; nature has given him his faculty out of hand and bidden him be hanged with it. (p. 294)

This kind of summary of Rowland's reactions to Roderick's behavior and these suppositions about his genius, natural as they are in a letter, would be less so as instantaneous reactions in a scene. Furthermore, the expanded analogy of Ulysses and the Sirens is more realistic when presented in this fashion.

Thus through the medium of a letter James is making an early use of the kind of character that he was to find

so valuable--the confidant. Rowland has, in addition to Cecilia, two other confidants, the Cavaliere and Madame Grandoni. The Cavaliere is only half a confidant, actually, and is closer to being a simple ficelle, for his main function in this regard is to give information to the centre of consciousness rather than provide a friendly and trusted ear. Sometimes, particularly early in the novel, Madame Grandoni performs only this limited function. But as Rowland comes to know her better and trust her judgment (and, perhaps, as James discovers the need), Madame Grandoni becomes a true confidant. Earlier in the novel, the narrator even refers to her as "the confidant of his innermost worries" (p. 365). Here she reveals to him that Christina has, without warning and after refusing to do so, married the Prince that morning. Madame Grandoni cannot understand. "'Well,' said Rowland, 'it's all none of my business, and perhaps I see things melodramatically. But certain suppositions have taken shape in my mind which serve as answers to two or three riddles'" (p. 417). Rowland reveals his suppositions: that the Cavaliere is in reality Christina's father, that this fact had always been kept a secret from her, and that her mother told her this secret to bring pressure to bear on her and force her marriage to the Prince. While this sample does not show the confidant in its fullest development, it does indicate James's early

use of that device to lessen the need for unassimilated information and, in this case, to illustrate the range of Rowland's perceptions.

As has been pointed out earlier, James unambiguously asserts in the Preface that the subject of the novel is Rowland's "view and experience" of Roderick and that the centre of interest is Rowland's consciousness. James's choices of the wealthy patron as the central intelligence is a fascinating one which raises many questions--why did he choose Rowland instead of Roderick Hudson himself? what are the advantages and limitations of that choice? does the centre of consciousness serve the end of unity in this novel?

If, as James holds, the subject is Rowland's view of Roderick, then what is the conflict of the work? Leon Edel claims that it is art vs. passion. But this is Roderick's conflict, not Rowland's. There is a second conflict, Edel claims--America vs. Europe.[6] Although Rowland is an American in Europe, he is able to maintain from the first a balanced view of the two cultures and accepts from each one what it has to offer. Roderick, on the other hand, once exposed to the richness of Europe, is lost. He succombs to the sensuous passion that he finds about him--in the sculpture, the architecture, the scenery, and the women, especially Christina. Rowland compares him to Ulysses before the Siren. A more apt comparison might be to one of

Ulysses' crew members in the land of the Lotus eaters. The point is this: that although the centre of consciousness may be Rowland Mallet, the "hero," the figure who struggles, is Roderick Hudson. Occasionally Rowland does struggle with his conscience--did he do the wise thing in bringing Roderick to Rome? does he have any right to think fondly of Mary Garland? But these debates are brief, unemphasized, and certainly insignificant when compared to Roderick's disintegration.

In the Preface James discusses the failure to portray convincingly Roderick's downfall due to a faulty time scheme. It seems strange that he is so concerned about this aspect of the novel, almost as if Roderick were the subject. He does not express the fear that Rowland's view of the downfall had insufficient time to mature. In fact, it would seem that James made a tactical error in working out his novel this way. Unlike the seamless web of The Portrait of a Lady or The Ambassadors, Roderick Hudson is badly split and the seam shows. Whereas in The Portrait of a Lady the subject and the treatment are unified in the consciousness of Isabel Archer, in Roderick Hudson the reader's interest is divided, perhaps fatally so, between Roderick and Rowland. The writer's effect is also divided and weakened by the inherent interest in Roderick as active "hero" and Rowland as a somewhat passive consciousness. Whereas Rowland is the centre of consciousness, Roderick would seem to be the commanding centre.

Oscar Cargill disagrees with this point of view, however: "James's great triumph in Roderick Hudson was to lodge his point of view in the consciousness of Rowland Mallet, whom, at the same time, he meant principally to portray." James, he adds, "accepted at the outset a great handicap in making Rowland the patron of a figure essentially more spectacular--the immature and romantic sculptor." But Cargill believes that it was a happy choice in that Rowland, as Roderick's patron, has good cause to be always close at hand. Roderick would not have made a good central intelligence anyway, with his thoughtless drive toward sex and art.[7] Certainly, given the choice between these two characters, Rowland was the only possibility for James to use as the centre of consciousness. He has all the requisites of the central intelligence: he is acute, intense, observant, articulate, intelligent. The degree to which he embodies these qualities may be seen in his guessing at the secret pressure that forced Christina to marry the Prince Casamassima against her wishes. Even his vision has its blind spot, though, as evidenced in his misunderstanding of Christina's feelings toward him. He is surprised and unbelieving when Roderick informs him of Christina's interest.

The question of whether James misplaced the centre in this novel is surely an important one, for upon the location of the centre rests the integrity of the work.

Joseph Warren Beach probably speaks for many readers when he complains: " . . . we naturally resent being cheated of the experience of Roderick by having it shown through the judicial optics of Rowland."[8] A second critic takes the opposite view. F. R. Leavis remarks on the difficulty of attempting to treat "postulated genius," especially in a sculptor (James being a writer) and suggests that the book is saved on this count by James's choosing Rowland as the centre of consciousness.[9] Perhaps the balanced view is that James made the best of a difficult task. Roderick is inherently more interesting as a character and his struggle is what moves the novel. Rowland is far better suited as a registering intelligence.

This discussion of the duality of focus of the work is further complicated by the suggestion that Roderick and Rowland represent either complementary or antithetical principles. Critics treating this problem have advanced theories that range from the obvious to the most imaginative. Gorley Putt, for example, states in Henry James: A Reader's Guide that the role of the hero is divided between Rowland and Roderick.[10] Cornelia Kelley begins with that observation and adds to it: "Because Roderick is seen through Mallet, the story may almost be said to have two heroes. Is not the real situation, however, somewhat like that which we have often seen in James's stories, that we have in Roderick one side and in Rowland another side of a

complete man, of, if you wish, James's own nature?" Miss Kelley also feels that James overemphasized one dominant trait of each man to make the point. She makes the same observation about other characters, especially Mary Garland and Christina Light.[11] There is some truth in this observation, and James's treatment of his character here sometimes resembles Hawthorne's romantic, almost allegorical, figures. T. S. Eliot wrote in 1918: "He [James] too much identifies himself with Rowland, does not see through the solemnity he has created in that character, commits the cardinal sin of failing to 'detect' one of his own characters."[12] It is interesting that whereas Eliot identifies James with Rowland, James's biographer Leon Edel views James as Roderick with his brother William as Rowland. He later suggests that the two characters may represent two sides of Henry James.[13] This is the same view held by F. O. Matthiessen: "Roderick Hudson is full of interest for James' development, since the two halves of his nature, the creator and the critic, are in a sense projected in Roderick and Rowland."[14]

In this the first novel that he wishes to preserve, James's difficulty is not limited to the treatment of Roderick through Rowland's consciousness; he also struggles with the problem of reconciling his early attempt at dramatizing consciousness with a somewhat intrusive author-narrator. A good case can be made that the narrator of

Roderick Hudson is strictly conventional--that he is frequently intrusive, that he passes judgments and assessments on characters and their actions, that he is consciously retrospective, that he addresses the reader directly, and that he insists on his own separate existence by numerous references to himself in the first person. All of these accusations are true and valid.

The narrator of Roderick Hudson sometimes seems as much the puppet-master as Thackery ever was. When he makes a statement like "Nothing especially pertinent to our narrative had passed between the two young men since Mrs. Light's ball save a few words bearing on a passage of that entertainment," the reader is not only made aware that someone is telling the story but that that someone stands above the world of the tale, clearly removed from it (p. 218). This kind of intrusion is not commonplace but it does occur at least a half dozen times. A different kind of intrusion is that of passing judgment on the characters or making assessments of them through words or tone. In the first chapter he characterizes Rowland neatly: " . . . He engaged to believe that all women were fair, all men were brave and the world a delightful place of sojourn, until the contrary should be distinctly proved" (p. 16). The reader gets the sense from the very outset that this story is being related in retrospect, and not through a character as Joseph Conrad frequently did, but by the

author-narrator himself, who hastens to point out on the very first page: "The truth was that, as it will be part of the entertainment of this narrative to exhibit, Rowland Mallet had an uncomfortably sensitive conscience . . . ." Also of interest in this short passage is the stance of the narrator, turned toward the reader. On several occasions the author-narrator, addresses the reader: "Very odd, you may say" or "the reader will remember." This author-narrator's presence is nearly always felt; sometimes he seems in plain view, while at others he stands off to the side and out of the way for the moment. Several times he even refers to himself, as when he talks about Rowland: "That Mallet was without vanity I by no means intend to affirm . . . ." (p. 5) Each of these intrusions has the effect of decreasing the distance between the author-narrator and the reader and increasing the distance between them and the characters, as was discussed in the last chapter. They tend to work at cross-purposes with the use of the centre of consciousness, diminishing the reader's involvement, the intensity, and the sense of unity of the work. The fact that the majority of these faults (faults in the ideal of the objective method) occur in the early chapters of the book or at least are most flagrant there may suggest that James grew more skillful as the novel progressed through the months of writing for serial publication.

One criticism that has been lodged against the author's relationship to the work deals more with plotting than with point of view. Oscar Cargill charges:

> Overplotting and melodrama are the real faults of Roderick Hudson. The complex of relationships that results in Christina's vague yearning for Rowland, who yearns for Mary, who will not have him but is passionately devoted to Roderick, who, ultimately bored by her, burns for a casually responsive Christina, is hardly plausible. There is a kind of management in this that makes one more aware of the presence of the author than one is in a Turgenev novel.[15]

The large number of implausible coincidences may be added to this charge; Rowland's happening to be in the coliseum to overhear Christina and Roderick is one example.

The drama of the writer struggling for mastery of his materials and his method is at least as exciting as the story is told. This struggle is perhaps most apparent as James seems to gain control of the point of view, lodging it in Rowland's consciousness, and then loses his grip on it as it slips back to the author-narrator again. One paragraph of Chapter XXII begins: "This was an arduous time for Rowland; he said to himself that he would see it through but must never court again such perils"--clearly James is using Rowland's consciousness. The paragraph continues in the same vein, concluding: "It often struck him that he had too abjectly forfeited his freedom. Wasn't it grotesque, at his age, to be put in a corner for punishment?" Rowland asks the question of himself. The next paragraph begins the same way, then the author-narrator

creeps in: "After that dreadful scene in Rome which had hurried their departure it was of course impossible that there should not be on the girl's part some frankness of allusion to Roderick's so pronounced and so public perversity. She had been present, the reader will remember [emphasis added], during only half this supreme demonstration of it . . . " (pp. 446-48). This is a rather bald example of the shift from the indirect method to an intrusive narrator. More often the change is more subtle and the narrator's observations seem almost to merge with Rowland's. An excellent example occurs when Rowland and Roderick are arguing about Christina:

> "So you back her up, eh?" Roderick cried with a renewal of his passion. "Do you pretend to say she gave me no hopes?" He had been speaking with growing bitterness, quite losing sight of his mother's pain and bewilderment in the passionate joy of publishing his wrongs. Since he was hurt he must cry out; since he was in pain he must scatter his pain abroad. Of his never thinking of others save as they figured in his own drama this extraordinary insensibility to the injurious effects of his eloquence was a capital example; the more so as the motive of his eloquence was never an appeal for sympathy or compassion--things to which he seemed perfectly indifferent and of which he could make no use. The great and characteristic point with him was the perfect separateness of his sensibility. He never saw himself as part of a whole; only as the clear-cut, sharp-edged, isolated individual, rejoicing or raging, as the case might be, but needing in any case absolutely to affirm himself. All this to Rowland was ancient history, but his perception of it stirred within him afresh at the sight of Roderick's sense of having been betrayed. (pp. 429-30)

The beginning of the passage, after Roderick's speeches, seems to be in the voice of the author-narrator, but

somewhere a transfer is made to Rowland's consciousness and his perceptions are given. Perhaps the reason that the narrator's observations merge so frequently with Rowland's is that James and his central intelligence have so much in common. Both are young Americans who have experienced the gift of Europe. Both are observers of the scene of life and students of the arts. This is perhaps a fruitless comparison to push too far; suffice it to note that their standards of conduct and morality are so similar that there is very little distance between them.

James is not the master of point of view and of the objective method in this novel; he is the apprentice, skilled but still learning. Yet the work contains within it the germs of most of the techniques that he later developed until they approached perfection. For instance, he experiments with several ways of handling exposition. In chapter I it is the narrator who provides Rowland's background and family history, sometimes slipping into the first person, once or twice engaging in irony, and concluding with an assessment of Rowland's character. This exposition lasts for eight pages (pp. 9-16). The Light family background, however, is presented dramatically through the agency of the confidant Madame Grandoni: "'I've known mama for twenty years,'" she begins (p. 161). Occasionally James seems to forget his decision to limit his omniscience and enters the mind of someone other than the centre of

consciousness: "Mr. Striker eyed his old friend for a moment with a look of some displeasure; he saw that this was but a cunning female device for pretending still to hang back and that, through some untraceable logic of treachery, she was now taking more comfort in the opinions of this sophistical stranger than in his own tough dogmas" (p. 62).

Even the concluding note of the novel is sounded by the narrator. Unlike the more ambiguous and unfinished ending of, say, The Portrait of a Lady, Roderick Hudson ends unequivocally, projecting Rowland's life into the years which follow:

> That cry still lives in Rowland's ears. It interposes persistently against the consciousness that when he sometimes--very rarely--sees her, she is inscrutably civil to him; against the reflexion that during the awful journey to America, made of course with his assistance, she had used him, with the last rigour of consistency, as a character definitely appointed to her use. She lives with Mrs. Hudson under the New England elms, where he also visits his cousin Cecilia more frequently than of old. When he calls on Mary he never sees the elder lady. Cecilia, who, having her shrewd impression that he comes for the young person, the still young person, of interest at the other house as much as for any one else, fails to show as unduly flattered, and in fact pronounces him, at each reappearance, the most restless of mortals. But he always says to her in answer: "No I assure you I'm the most patient!" And then he talks to her of Roderick, of whose history she never wearies and whom he never elsewhere names. (pp. 526-27)

James's major strengths and weaknesses in Roderick Hudson both appear to derive from his employment of the objective method. The work is clearly marred by the division of interest between Rowland and Roderick and by the

inconsistent point of view, alternately relying on the centre of consciousness and the intrusive narrator. But truly in this uneven novel the values of the central intelligence for adding felt life and a moral dimension to the drama are experienced by the writer and the reader. Henry James had discovered his métier.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1]*The Art of the Novel* (New York, 1934), p. 15.

[2]*The Early Development of Henry James* (Urbana, Illinois, 1965), p. 190.

[3]*Roderick Hudson* (New York, 1907), p. 120. Further references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[4]*The Art of the Novel*, p. 12.

[5]"How Henry James Revised *Roderick Hudson*: A Study in Style," *PMLA*, XXXIX (1924), 203-27.

[6]Introduction to *Roderick Hudson* (New York, 1960), vii-viii.

[7]*The Novels of Henry James* (New York, 1961), p. 29.

[8]Cited in *The Novels of Henry James*, n. 26, p. 36.

[9]"Henry James's First Novel," *Scrutiny*, XIV (September 1947), 296-97.

[10]*Henry James: A Reader's Guide* (Ithaca, New York, 1967), pp. 95-96.

[11]The Early Development of Henry James, p. 191.

[12]"Henry James," The Little Review (August 1918), rpt. in The Shock of Recognition, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, 1955), p. 864.

[13]Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1881 (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 175-77.

[14]Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1963), p. 153.

[15]The Novels of Henry James, p. 26.

CHAPTER V

THE AMERICAN

The major technical difficulties that faced James in The American are not the same ones that he encountered in Roderick Hudson. In the earlier novel the interest is divided between the somewhat passive, reticent centre of consciousness, Rowland Mallet, and the more exciting, mercurial artist, Roderick Hudson. In The American, the commanding centre is clearly balanced in Christopher Newman's consciousness. For this study, the significant difficulty that confronted James was the quantity and the quality of the consciousness as a register.

Several critics and historians have pointed out James's indebtedness to Turgenev for elements of this story, as well as the "reasons" that he wrote this tale of the wealthy American businessman, tired of scrambling for money, who has come to the Old World for culture, enlightenment, and, perhaps, a wife. Oscar Cargill claims that James is refuting a popular play of the time written by Alexandre Dumas, fils, L'Etrangère (The Foreigner), which satirically portrays Americans as vulgar, boorish, and violent. In The American according to Cargill, James "is

justifying American ways against a European caricature of them."[1] Turgenev's A Nest of Noblemen has been cited as a source for much of the plot of The American.[2] Whatever James's motivations and sources, it is clear that he moves far beyond them in this characterization of an American innocent confronting for the first time the complexities of life in the Old World.

Christopher Newman is the American, newly arrived in Paris on his first trip abroad. He has fought in the Civil War and attained the rank of brigadier general. He has devoted his life to the making of money and succeeded. He has, in fact, succeeded in virtually everything that he has attempted, although he modestly admits to taking "quite a back seat on oil."[3] Newman is likened to Benjamin Franklin, the archetypal American. Like Franklin, Newman is "a born experimentalist." The narrator describes his metaphysic: "His most vivid conception of a supernatural element in the world's affairs had come to him once when he felt his head all too bullyingly pummelled; there seemed to him something stronger in life than his personal, intimate will. But the mysterious something could only be a demon as personal as himself, and he accordingly found himself in fine working opposition to this rival concern" (pp. 26-27).

His name is, of course, symbolic. He explains to his old friend Tom Tristram his decision not to take advantage of a business competitor, thereby giving up a

half-million dollar opportunity. Afterward, he continues, "'I seemed to feel a new man under my old skin; at all events I longed for a new world'" (p. 32). The new world that he chose was the Old World, where he hoped to turn his back on commercialism and money-getting and concentrate instead on culture and beauty. He interprets his first name for Noémie Nioche, a copyist at the Louvre: "'Did you never hear of Christopher Columbus?' "Bien sûr! He first showed Americans the way to Europe . . . '"is her confused reply (p. 8). But as this second Christopher is the type of the new wealthy American confronting the ancient European culture, he does show Americans the way to Europe. Tom Tristram's wife, a perceptive American living in Paris, sees him in just this light: "'You're the great Western Barbarian, stepping forth in his innocence and might, gazing a while at this poor corrupt old world and then swooping down on it'" (p. 45).

An international novel has been described as "one in which a character, usually guided in his actions by the mores of one environment, is set down in another, where he must employ all his individual resources to meet successive situations, and where he must intelligently accommodate himself to the new mores, or, in one way or another, be destroyed."[4] Although Newman does "swoop down" on Paris for a short time, it is not long before he begins to feel out of his element in Parisian society: "'It's as if I

were as simple as a little child, and as if a little child might take me by the hand and lead me about'" (p. 28). Unlike James's earlier American abroad, Rowland Mallet, Christopher Newman is innocent, naive, provincial, and sometimes even commercial. Concluding his description of the kind of wife he seeks, he remarks: "'I want, in a word, the best article in the market'" (p. 49). He is at the same time, however, generous, open, friendly, and self-confident. In fact the contrast of Newman's innocence in his dealings with the Parisians he meets with what must have been his very down-to-earth experiences in the American business world is deeply ironic. Leon Edel notes that "Newman has not been corrupted by his gold; he is still one of "nature's noblemen' and he can, in the end, be as noble as the old corrupt Europeans."[5]

This is the character, then, that James chose to make the focus of his third novel. As James recounts it in The Art of the Novel, the subject of The American was to be "Newman's own intimate experience."[6] Christopher Newman is the centre of consciousness. Reflecting in the Preface to The American, James writes in 1907:

> If Newman was attaching enough, I must have argued, his tangle would be sensible enough; for the interest of everything is all that it is his vision, his conception, his interpretation: at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness we are seated, from that admirable position we "assist." He therefore supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels it, treats it, meets it. A beautiful infatuation this, always I think, the intensity

> of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature; the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest--and with the high enhancement, ever, that it is, by the same stroke, the effort of the artist to preserve for his subject that unity, and for his use of it (in other words for the interest he desires to excite) that effect of a centre, which most economise its value.[7]

The reader is frequently seated "at the window of his wide, quite sufficiently wide, consciousness," and James uses a variety of techniques to portray that consciousness.

The most typical of these techniques is the narrator's description or summary in his own words of Newman's registration. Newman's first visit through the streets of the Faubourg Saint Germain, where Claire de Cintré lives, is treated in this fashion. As he walks, he notes that the houses "present to the outer world a face as impassive and as suggestive of the concentration of privacy within as the blank walls of Eastern seraglios. Newman thought it a perverse, verily a 'mean' way for rich people to live; his ideal of grandeur was a splendid facade, diffusing is brilliancy outward too, irradiating hospitality" (p. 59). The contrast between the windowless walls of houses turning inward and warm, hospitable facade opening outward is highly suggestive of the differences between the tightly-closed society of the Bellegarde family and the Bourbon aristocracy that it is meant to represent on the one hand and the open-handed and open-hearted style of life of Christopher Newman and his American compeers. Newman's

responses to his position as an "intruder" into the tight circle of the Bellegarde family are sometimes expressions of cautious wonder. He is invited to dine: "Once seated at table, with the various members of so rigidly closed a circle round him, he asked himself the meaning of his position. Was the old lady responding to his advances? Did the fact that he was the solitary guest augment his credit or diminish it? Were they ashamed to show him to other people or did they wish to give him a sign of sudden adoption into their last reserve of favour?" (p. 218).

Sometimes James employs Newman's own words, directly quoting his thoughts to intensify the sense of life of the work. His first meeting with Claire's mother, the Marquise de Bellegarde, is recorded in this way: "'She's a woman of conventions and proprieties,' he said to himself as he considered her; 'her world's the world of things immutably decreed. But how she's at home in it and what a paradise she finds'" (p. 183). Joseph Warren Beach has made a valuable observation on James's use of language in the depiction of his character's registration: "However much James may limit himself to the point of view of his character, however closely he may identify himself with the character's mentality, it is always in the language, the syntax, of Henry James that the character's experience is rendered . . . ."[8] The truth of this assertion is illustrated in the passages cited above. It seems to make

little difference whether the narrator tells in his own voice what Newman is thinking or whether Newman's thoughts are directly quoted; the thoughts are couched in a somewhat formal written style. This fact seems strange considering James's ability to write lively colloquial speech, amply illustrated in the scene in Chapter II when Newman meets an old American acquaintance, Tom Tristram. James's use of the central consciousness in his early novels bears little resemblance to the stream-of-consciousness technique as employed by such a writer as James Joyce whose characters' experiences are phrased in language that borders on the pre-verbal and is frequently pre-conscious. It is a mistake to fault James, however, as his concern was exclusively with consciousness in its fullest and richest development.

As he did in the earlier novel, Roderick Hudson, James employs the letter not only to introduce information of an expository nature but also to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the centre. He also continues to make use of the confidant. The major confidant here is Mrs. Tristram, but Newman also confides in Valentin Bellegarde and Mrs. Bread.

On several occasions during the course of his adventure, Newman displays rather acute perceptions. He describes the Marquise de Bellegarde to Mrs. Tristram:

> "Well, she's a bad, bold woman. She's a wicked old sinner."

> "What then has been her sin?"
> He thought a little. "I shouldn't wonder if she had done someone to death--all of course from a high sense of duty." (pp. 246-47)

This conversation transpires long before Mrs. Bread has given him any hint of the Marquise's foul deed. Newman perceives Urbain's true nature in the same way: "'If he has never committed murder he has at least turned his back and looked the other way while some one else was committing it'" (p. 247). Newman is correct in his assessment of both characters. He also perceives the role that the Bellegarde's English cousin, Lord Deepmere, has played in the Bellegarde's repudiation of Claire's engagement to Newman.

Although Newman is not a terribly deep figure, there are several signs of growth in his character, beginning with his changing attitudes about money and those who spend their lives getting it. It is toward the end of his summer's touring the continent that "It had come back to him simply that what he had been looking at all summer was a very brave and bristling world, and that it had not all been made by men 'live' in his old mean sense" (p. 102). His unhappy experiences with the Bellegardes have taught him something about "reading" people and their actions; when he visits the Marquise's friend, The Duchess, with the intention of revealing the deathbed letter to her and unmasking the Marquise as a murderer, he is no longer the innocent that he was at the beginning of the novel. Although the

Duchess receives him politely, even warmly, Newman realizes that she deliberately avoids all mention of Claire and her family and of Newman's broken engagement: "There was not a symptom of apprehension he would trench on any ground she proposed to avoid. 'Upon my word, she does it very well,' he tacitly commented. 'They all hold together bravely, and, whether any one else can trust them or not, they can certainly trust each other'" (p. 504).

Newman would have been incapable of any such observation upon his arrival in Paris. The narrator reinforces the reader's awareness of this growth in a scene between Newman and Tom Tristram in which the latter, in an ill-considered attempt to console his friend, reveals his provincial prejudices and shallowness as well as his insensitivity to Newman's state of mind in his condemnation of the Bellegardes. Newman listens for a while, "gazing at Tristram during this harangue with a lack-lustre eye; never yet had he seemed to himself to have outgrown so completely the phase of equal comradeship with Tom Tristram" (p. 511). The reason for this state of affairs is only partly attributable to Newman's growth. Another element is his coming to know himself better and the renewed sense of the wisdom of following his natural convictions. His ultimate refusal to exact revenge upon the Marquise and her sin is the prime example. Although he has the deathbed letter accusing the Marquise of murdering her husband, he rejects the idea of

exposing her to her friends. The reader who feels that Newman has a right to his retribution and who is disappointed that he does not exact it, perhaps failed to see the refusal to take advantage of another person as a basic part of Newman's character. The anecdote related early in the novel about his opportunity to "get even" with a business rival in the United States should serve to prepare the reader for Newman's final gesture--the burning of the death-bed letter. James, in the Preface, explains the significance he attaches to this aspect of Newman's character: " . . . one's last view of him would be that of a strong man indifferent to his strength and too wrapped in fine, too wrapped above all in other and intenser, reflexions for the assertion of his 'rights.' This last point was of the essence and constituted in fact the subject: there would be no subject at all, obviously,--or simply the commonest of the common,--if my gentleman should enjoy his advantage."[9]

Unfortunately, Christopher Newman's "intenser reflections" fail in the presentation. For despite the instances cited of the operation of his consciousness he is, on the whole, not an ideal, and many would argue not even an adequate, register. The narrator frequently alludes to the limitations of Newman's perceptivity: "He was not 'subjective'" (p. 42), "the states of Newman's own spirits were but scantily chronicled" (p. 42), "I am afraid the

picture was lost on Newman" (p. 232). This American businessman has always been primarily a man of action, not contemplation, as he himself is quick to point out: "' . . . I have never had time to 'feel' things so very beautifully. I've had to do them, had to make myself felt'" (p. 43). In this regard he is unlike his predecessor, Rowland Mallet, who was sensitive to virtually all of the nuances of social living. When Newman confides in Valentin of his love for his sister, Valentin tries to explain the difficulties and complexities of life in his culture. Newman's light-hearted response bears ironic overtones: "'It's a pity,' said Newman, 'that I don't wholly catch on. I shall lose some very good sport'" (p. 162). He is destined to lose more than some "very good sport" as a result of his failing to catch on.

Sometimes Newman's perceptual shortcomings are the result of ignorance and they may be of little moment. The first time that Newman really notices Mrs. Bread, the narrator points out Newman's ignorance in matters of dress: "She was tall and straight and dressed in black, and she wore a cap which, if Newman had been initiated into such mysteries, would have sufficiently assured him she was not a French woman; a cap of pure British composition" (p. 251). On other occasions, however, his limitations have more serious results, as when the Marquise tells him of her plans for a party: "We have noted him for observant, yet on

this occasion he failed to catch a thin sharp eyebeam, as cold as a flash of steel, which passed between Madame de Bellegarde and the Marquis and which we may presume to have been a commentary on the innocence displayed in the latter clause of his speech" (p. 285).

Valentin de Bellegarde, who, unlike Christopher Newman, was born into society, has the perceptive powers that a centre of consciousness in one of James's novels needs and James himself possessed. The contrast between the two young friends is striking as they discuss a young Italian woman, separated from her husband. Valentin declares his interest in following her downfall: "'Yes, I know what you're going to say; this horrible Paris hardens one's heart. But it quickens one's wits, and it ends by teaching one a refinement of observation. To see this little woman's drama play itself out is now for me a pleasure of the mind'" (p. 146). The words might have been spoken by such an earnest observer as James himself. Newman, however, is not of the same mind: " . . . I don't find it a pleasure of the mind to watch her prospective adventures. I don't in the least want to see her going down hill'" (p. 147).

The sad beauty of the situation is that Newman thinks and acts in the novel exactly as such a man would think and act. Not born into the kind of life where sensitivity to social relationships comes naturally, like

Valentin was, nor possessing the inclination in this direction that Rowland Mallet had, Newman is just as he should be. A self-made man with little formal education, he is intelligent and desirous of improvement. He is of strong moral fibre and the indications are that even when he was engaged in money-getting he was honest. He makes a very believable and sympathetic nineteenth-century American abroad for the first time. He "collects" cathedrals untiringly, but for him the act of collection is limited to placing a check mark or perhaps the words "Beautiful!" or "So true!" in the margin of the appropriate guide book (p. 103). He is not an insensitive boor; it is simply that his character and personality do not run to acuteness or genuine interest in people and the arts. He is perhaps best characterized in this regard by the reactions of two men with whom he travelled during parts of his summer's tour. One, a colorless Unitarian minister, found him too passionate and unpredictable to bear. The other, a well-travelled Englishman, pronounced him in Newman's words "a poor creature, incapable of the joy of life" (p. 105).

A number of critics have complained about James's handling of Newman as a centre of consciousness. One of these is Oscar Cargill, who writes:

> However satisfactory Newman may be judged as a type, he is much less satisfactory as a "centre." It is true that James keeps him in focus admirably, but it is not true that he endows him with much perceptivity, despite his final illumination. . . . James failed to

> avail himself thoroughly of the most obvious advantage in making Newman imperceptive, namely, of ascribing to Newman's ignorance whatever James himself did not know about the Bourbon faction in the old aristocracy of France.[10]

Perhaps even harsher in his judgment of the novel is Joseph Warren Beach:

> A story in which the main actor is so uninitiated can bear no very close resemblance to the story of Isabel Archer or Fleda Vetch or Lambert Strether. There is here no revelation of anything through Newman's consciousness--nothing that depends upon his understanding. There is in fact no spiritual dilemma. That is why the book is not among the greatest of its author's.[11]

The irony of the technique of the novel is that had Newman been truly perceptive and acute in the fashion of other of James's centres, he would not have been as valuable for reasons of plotting. James needed Newman's naiveté and his expansiveness to move the plot along--to get him embroiled with the Bellegardes while seeking the most admirable woman in Europe. Rowland Mallet would have been a more perceptive centre, but he would not have had the innocence and then the temerity to fall into the clutches of the Bellegardes. The balance that James had to find in his characterization of Newman was indeed a difficult one and if he erred in making him not fine enough as a centre of consciousness, it is at least an understandable mistake. Surely the romantic and melodramatic elements of James's plot are at least partly responsible for the necessity of the major character's features.

Another factor that must have had a bearing on James's use of Newman as hero and as centre of consciousness is the way that James "arrived at" this novel. His "germ," he explains in the Preface, was a theme or a situation, not a character as it was for The Portrait of a Lady: "in another country and an aristocratic society, of some robust but insidiously beguiled and betrayed, some cruelly wronged, compatriot: the point being in especial that he should suffer at the hands of persons pretending to represent the highest possible civilization and to be of an order in every way superior to his own" [emphasis added].[12] Starting with the idea of this romantic plot, James then arrived at a character to fit. This may help to explain the weaknesses of Newman as a centre of consciousness; he was not designed with this function in mind and when James, working in the objective method that he began to develop in Roderick Hudson, attempted to employ him as the central intelligence the character of Newman could not satisfy the conflicting demands. James himself admits that his hope of presenting the novel entirely as Newman's experience might not have been fulfilled: " . . . I was perhaps wrong in thinking that Newman by himself, and for any occasional extra inch or so I might smuggle into his measurements, would see me through my wood."[13]

It is perhaps as a consequence of Newman's limitations as a centre of consciousness that James puts an

excessive load on the narrator, to the detriment of the objective method. The engagement party that the Marquise de Bellegarde gives demonstrates admirably both Newman's perceptive limitations (although these limitations are clearly an important element in the plot here) and the narrator's penchant for stepping in and illuminating the situation for the reader. Urbain de Bellegarde is escorting Newman through the rooms to introduce him to the family's aristocratic friends. The differences between Newman's impressions and the narrator's insights are great: "Every one gave Newman extreme attention, every one lighted up for him regardless, as he would have said, of expense, every one was enchanted to make his acquaintance, every one looked at him with that fraudulant intensity of good society which puts out its bountiful hand but keeps its fingers closed over the coin" (p. 322). Newman perceives only the surface appearances while the narrator penetrates those appearances to the underlying reality. Frequently the narrator feels the need to reassure the reader about the accuracy of Newman's observations, as on this occasion when he visits the Duchess: "He fell at this juncture to admiring the Duchess for her fine manners. He felt, most accurately, that she was not a grain less urbane than she would have been if his marriage were still in prospect. . . . " (pp. 504-505). The narrator is just as quick, however, to correct Newman when his impressions are erroneous.

Toward the end of the novel Newman visits the convent and hears the nuns chanting a dirge: "He listened for Madame de Cintré's voice, and in the very heart of the tuneless harmony he imagined he made it out. We are obliged to believe that he was wrong, since she had obviously not yet had time to become a member of the invisible sisterhood . . . " (pp. 480-81).

The narrator of The American speaks in a voice not surprisingly similar to James's own. When he describes Newman's tour of Europe's cathedrals and ruins, the narrator remarks on the American's lack of discernment as he pays equal homage to virtually all edifices regardless of the quality. "But there is sometimes nothing like the imagination of those people who have none . . . " he adds ironically (p. 89). Much as James might sympathize with Newman generally, he cannot overlook his shortcomings, and to James artistic appreciation is a quality to be held in high esteem. As Rowland Mallet bears striking resemblances to his creator, Christopher Newman is better noted for his differences.

The narrator's stance is outside and above the world of the novel--that is, he takes no part in the story as a character and he is clearly superior to his characters in knowledge and in tone. He speaks any number of times in the first person, confiding in the reader some little perception of his about the characters. Of Newman's

sometime travelling companion he comments: "Mr. Babcock's moral malaise, I am afraid, lay deeper than where any definition of mine can reach it" (p. 92). James, or the narrator, is not above tenderly patronizing even the reader when the occasion requires. Of M. Nioche's "pigeon English" he explains: "The result, in the form in which he in all humility presented it, would be scarcely comprehensible to the reader, so that I have ventured to attempt for it some approximate notation" (p. 63). Furthermore, he is a conscious story-teller, forever referring to Newman as "our hero," thus diminishing by that much the illusion of reality that he seeks to create. Although he does stand above his characters, his omniscience is strictly limited as this example illustrates: "I know not whether in renouncing the mysterious opportunity to which he alluded Valentin felt himself do something very generous" (p. 160). With one or two minor exceptions he restricts himself to Newman's register alone. Such a narrator, although helpful here, is a retrograde step in James's development of the objective method.

The combination of factors detailed in this chapter--a relatively imperceptive centre of consciousness, an inappropriate, romantic plot, an intrusive narrator--all serve to render the objective method nearly inoperative and to lessen the sense of reality in The American. James has overcome the problem of the division of interest that

plagued Roderick Hudson by consolidating his centre of consciousness and his "hero" into one figure, but he has done so at the cost of realistic rendering of interior states of consciousness. If The American fails in the presentation, it is because James attempted to use the centre of consciousness technique on the wrong kind of character in the wrong kind of story. In The Portrait of a Lady he finds the right combination.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1]*The Novels of Henry James* (New York, 1961), p. 46.

[2]Daniel Lerner, "The Influence of Turgenev on Henry James," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, XX (December, 1941), 43-44; Cornelia Kelley, *The Early Development of Henry James* (Urbana, Illinois, 1965), pp. 239-41; and Cargill, *The Novels of Henry James*, p. 42.

[3]*The American* (New York, 1907), p. 44. Further references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[4]Oscar Cargill, *The Novels of Henry James*, pp. 46-47.

[5]*Henry James: The Conquest of London* (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 252.

[6]*The Art of the Novel* (New York, 1934), p. 34.

[7]*The Art of the Novel*, pp. 37-38.

[8]Introduction to *The American* (New York, 1949), ix.

[9]*The Art of the Novel*, p. 22.

[10]The Novels of Henry James, p. 49. Like several other critics, Cargill believes that James did not know or understand the French aristocracy, that he was never admitted into its circles, and that he took his view of it from the theatre and from Turgenev.

[11]The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 204-205.

[12]The Art of the Novel, pp. 21-22.

[13]The Art of the Novel, p. 39.

CHAPTER VI

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

In the figure of Isabel Archer, Henry James found the combination of intriguing subject and polished reflector that was ideal for his approach to fiction. The conception of this young woman, which, he says, hovered about him as a disponible for some time, was the germ of The Portrait of a Lady. James relates in the Preface to The Portrait his finding himself in accord with his master, Ivan Turgenev, in beginning a work with the vision of a character; the problem remaining was "to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out. . . . ." Reaching back through the veils of memory, James recalls the words of Turgenev, spoken decades earlier: "'To arrive at these things is to arrive at my "story,"' he said, 'and that's the way I look at it. The result is that I'm often accused of not having "story" enough. I seem to have as much as I need--to show my people, to exhibit their relations with each other; for that is all my measure.'"[1] To find the right character and then to work out the relations that will present that character--that is the essence of Henry James's method, too.

Having the germ of The Portrait, the figure of Isabel Archer, in hand, James then saw that the problem facing him was what to do with her, how to treat her, how to make an "ado" about her. Such women, of course, had appeared before in fiction. But "They are typical none the less, of a class difficult, in the individual case, to make a centre of interest . . . ." James had noted George Eliot's failure to achieve this end in her treatment of Dorothea Brook in Middlemarch. Furthermore, the earlier females in fiction are all stoutly supported by other characters (male) and strong plots. James decided to take the more difficult way: "'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that--for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be so largely the scale of her relations to herself. . . . Press least hard . . . on the consciousness of your heroine's satellites, especially the male.'" And this is what he did.[2]

His two earlier experiments with the central intelligence had used male characters (Rowland Mallet and Christopher Newman). This time he would use a young woman, which fact in itself might raise some difficulties, for Isabel's adventures are relatively mild: "Without her sense of them, her sense for them, as one may say, they are next to nothing at all; but isn't the beauty and the difficulty just in showing their mystic conversion by that

sense, conversion into the stuff of drama or, even more delightful word still, of 'story'?"[3] The interest and the excitement was to lie in Isabel's "inward life." The Portrait of a Lady was to be a drama of consciousness.

James began to write The Portrait in the spring of 1880, just six years after he started Roderick Hudson and in the same city, Florence. Like that work too, The Portrait commenced serial publication before James had finished writing. Perhaps this process, which enabled him to see installments in print while he was still at work on later sections, gave him a clearer perspective of what he had written and enabled him to perceive whatever shortcomings were inherent in the earlier parts. At any rate, sometime during the course of the writing and the serial publication (the entry is undated), he reminded himself in his Notebooks that the first half of The Portrait was somewhat slow: "There has been a want of action in the earlier part and it may be made up here [the five installments after Isabel's marriage]. . . . The weakness of the whole story is that it is too exclusively psychological--that it depends too little on incident; but the complete unfolding of the situation that is established by Isabel's marriage may nonetheless be quite sufficiently dramatic."[4] Joseph Warren Beach agrees with James about the first half of the novel and points out the differences of treatment in The Portrait and in the later novels. He maintains that

"Nearly the whole first volume [of the three-volume English edition] is taken up with material which would have been excluded from the more distinctive work of the later years." He exemplifies by noting that just as James has launched Isabel on her adventures he halts the forward movement for two chapters while he provides exposition of Isabel's background and girlhood and of Ralph's past. "And this is not done, as it would have been done after 1896, by reminiscence and dialogue as an integral part of the narrative of present experience."[5] The second half of the novel, however, Beach calls "a masterpiece of revelation." Like so many other critics, Beach tends to read the earlier novels in the light of the later ones: " . . . if the details brought out are chiefly details of 'background'--having to do with the characters of Osmond and Madame Merle--that is essentially the case in the later books."[6] This is the method that Beach names "revelation." " . . . In the most distinctive works of James the sense of progress, of story, is almost altogether lost. You have rather a sense of being present at the gradual uncovering of a wall-painting which had been whitewashed over and is now being restored to view. The picture was all there from the start; there is nothing new being produced; there is no progress in that sense." And he adds: "The story is rather the process by which the characters and the situation are revealed to us."[7] This method of revelation is the way all men experience life

most of the time. They have no god-like voice whispering in their ears, explaining what will happen next or presenting an outline of a life. They learn what they learn about other men by watching their actions, listening to their words, hearing what others say about them, ideally always weighing the reliability of the impression.

This is the manner in which The Portrait of a Lady proceeds. To be sure, there is a narrator who frequently offers summaries (pictures). That is partly because James has not fully developed the objective method and partly because of the economy of summary. But the narrator assumes a more limited degree of omniscience and a less intrusive stance than in the earlier novels, revealing Isabel's character more gradually and letting more of it be shown. Christopher Newman was fairly completely characterized in the early chapters of The American; the rest of the novel was concerned with his romantic quest. Furthermore he was a less complex figure. Isabel's revelation is never really complete because she is complex, because she grows, and because her character is presented in small pieces. What is revealed, how it is revealed, and what it signifies--these are the topics to be dealt with in the rest of this chapter.

Isabel Archer is the new American woman--independent, romantically idealistic, determinedly unconventional. In many respects she resembles her predecessor, Christopher Newman. Indeed, Leon Edel claims that "The Portrait was

envisaged as a kind of feminine version of The American, and James began with the thought that Isabel Archer would be a female Christopher Newman." In fact Edel even suggests that she is named after Spain's (and Columbus') queen, further linking her to the latter-day Christopher.[8] Surely they are similar, and they represent the expansiveness of the New World in all that is suggested thereby. There are some significant differences, however. Newman is a man of the world, his own world at least. Although he may not be wise to the ways of the French aristocracy, he is experienced in some aspects of life. He went to Europe seeking culture and perhaps a wife. The first goal is easily gained, for him at least: simply travel until you have checked off everything in the guide books. While his second goal, a wife, may not be easy of accomplishment in the long run, it seemed so to him at first. A wife could be acquired in virtually the same way that a copy of a Reubens could--by purchase. This summary of Newman's character is, of course, an over-simplification; the point is that his goals were fairly concrete, reasonable, and not impossibly hard to gain. Isabel, on the other hand, was more interested in experience when she went to Europe, the kind of experience that would fit and reinforce her notions of the world. Her life has been sheltered; she spent her earlier years largely reading in her grandmother's house, in a disused room with a disused door leading to the

outside: "She knew that this silent motionless portal opened into the street. . . .But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange unseen place on the other side. . . . ."[9] She never opened the door, preferring to retain the romance of the unknown. In its own way her life before the advent of Mrs. Touchett was as limited as was Roderick Hudson's life before Rowland Mallet entered it. Newman was innocent of the ways of the society which he tried to enter in France; Isabel is innocent of the ways of the world. These she must learn, and learn through suffering. Her attitude toward the world is almost childlike as she considers accepting Mrs. Touchett's offer to accompany her to Europe: "It appeared to Isabel that the unpleasant had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest and even of instruction" (I, 42). Her reading has had a formative influence on her character, leading her to view people and events as elements from the latest novel, and expecting them to correspond to their fictional counterparts. She frequently saw herself as a romantic heroine: "Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she might find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded" (I, 69). Of course, she finally got her wish.

Because of these traits and because of her native intelligence and feminine curiosity, she performs the function of the centre of consciousness admirably well. Unlike Newman, her consciousness is balanced--neither too dull nor too fine. She is perceptive enough to recognize the responsibilities and the dangerous freedom wealth may bring, for instance. She expresses her doubts to Ralph: "'A large fortune means freedom, and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing and one should make such good use of it'" (I, 320). Yet she is unable to see the inadequacy of her view of independence and freedom. Finally it is the wealth that she supposed would bring her freedom that leads to her entrapment.

As the central intelligence Isabel serves to unify the novel in its varying sub-plots and relationships and its large cast of characters. Oscar Cargill, however, takes issue with those who claim that all of the story is centered in her consciousness, pointing to scenes and episodes in which she is not present. He believes that James should have been more concerned with integrity of point of view and less with dramatic interest.[10] But James seems always to have been concerned with dramatic interest above all, seldom being dogmatic about integrity of point of view. Still James does employ Isabel to preserve the integrity of the novel as a whole, if not its point of view. The opening scene of the novel serves to illustrate this

point. The setting is tea-time on the lawn at Gardencourt, the Touchetts' English home. Ralph, his father, and their neighbor, Lord Warburton, have gathered for the pleasant ceremony. Isabel has yet to make her first appearance in the novel, but there is a sense of expectation, of waiting, during this longest, most leisurely part of a summer afternoon. The attention of the three men is focused on the house and the expected appearance of Mrs. Touchett and her niece, Isabel Archer. When the subject of marriage arises, Mr. Touchett warns Warburton jokingly: "'Well, you may fall in love with whomever you please; but you mustn't fall in love with my niece . . . '" (I, 12). They discuss the puzzling cable sent by Mrs. Touchett: "'Changed hotel, very bad, impudent clerk, address here. Taken sister's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent'" (I, 13). Their uncertainty about the precise meaning of the wire also serves to focus attention on the absent Isabel. The effect, then, is to make this Isabel's "chapter" even though she has not yet been introduced into the novel. The means vary throughout the work, but the result is always to give the value of everything for Isabel.

James employs a technique in this novel that was to become a most valuable addition to his objective method and an indisputable aid in his presentation of consciousness. The technique is the interior monologue, exemplified in Chapter XLII, the scene of Isabel's meditative vigil.

The chapter is so important in the structure of the novel and the form so significant in James's development of the objective method that it seems worthwhile to summarize the passage. Osmond has, in the preceding chapter, instructed Isabel to influence Warburton to marry Pansy, Osmond's daughter. Although Isabel finds Osmond's behavior offensive and his request unfair, when he tells her to think about it, she does. Left alone before the fire in the drawing room, with only a few candles for light, Isabel spends the night in a chair meditating. The narrator gives her thoughts without intrusion. She first considers Warburton: does he still love her? is that why he is interested in marrying Pansy--to be near Isabel? Isabel rejects this idea. She then reflects on the impression that she gained earlier in the day that there is something, some odd relationship, between her husband and Madame Merle. Osmond's behavior seems to have changed since their marriage; it is "as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favour a misfortune. Was the fault in herself, or only in the deep mistrust she had conceived for him?" (II, 188-189). His feelings seemed to have turned to hatred. Isabel then reflects on their courtship and on her highest motives of helping Osmond, of doing something useful and good with her money, "to make it over to the man with the best taste in the world" (II, 193). She is struck by the irony of Mr. Touchett's bequest; wealth

that she once thought would bring complete independence has instead linked her inextricably with the man who has come to hate her. Poor Mr. Touchett has become for Isabel "the beneficent author of infinite woe" (II, 193). Osmond she had once thought to be enlightened, open, and honest. Now she has come to see him symbolized by his house, "the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" (II, 196). She considers the contrast of their ideals: "His ideal was a conception of high prosperity and propriety, of the aristocratic life, which she now saw that he had deemed himself always, in essence at least, to have led." On the other hand, "Her notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty and the liberty a sense of enjoyment" (II, 198). She had expected her marriage to Osmond to be such a union. But he is concerned only with the appearance of nobility and aristocracy, only with the forms of life. Isabel seeks the reality (even in her romantic fashion) of an open, free, and noble existence. She is the true aristocrat; she achieves a natural nobility. "The real offense, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all" (II, 200). Because she could not accept his views of life, he came to hate her with a hatred that "had become the occupation and comfort of his life" (II, 201). What then of their future? "What would he do--what ought she to do?" (II, 202). Although she does hate him and does feel

largely responsible for the impasse, she recognizes the horror of their lives together: "Nothing was a pleasure to her now; how could anything be a pleasure to a woman who knew that she had thrown away her life?" (II, 203). This recognition, this admission, marks a turning point in Isabel's life. Ralph, now near death, only "made her feel what might have been" (II, 203). As the monologue nears its conclusion, the fire has gone out. It is four o'clock; she has spent "half the night, trying to persuade herself that there was no reason why Pansy shouldn't be married as you would put a letter in the post-office" (II, 205). She rises to leave the room, stops, and stands there "gazing at a remembered vision--that of her husband and Madame Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated" (II, 205).

James was quite pleased with this chapter. He explains in the Preface that it is an instance of dramatizing Isabel's "mild adventures" by showing her sense of them, that is by presenting their impact upon her consciousness. The key to James's technical aim is to be found in the words: "It was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture."[11] Now, picture as it includes the narrator's summary and compression of time and space is economical but usually lacks dramatic impact. It can, however, present the centre's thoughts directly. Scene, as it presents characters in confrontation has the

potential of great intensity and is a keystone of the objective method; it is also relatively uneconomical. It can present inner states of consciousness only as they are mirrored in dialogue and in action. The value of an interior monologue such as Isabel's meditation is that it combines most of the virtues of picture and scene without their limitations.

The interior monologue is James's attempt to dramatize picture, Kristin Lauer points out in her study of the technique in the later novels. It is a dramatic unit, like a scene, with a start, a turn, and a finish. There is a definite setting in which the character is usually isolated. The major purpose, beyond giving scenic qualities to picture, is to dramatize ethical conflicts in the consciousness of the register or, put another way, to externalize the inward life. The interior monologue is invaluable in characterization by revealing patterns of rationalization and motivation. Mrs. Lauer also observes that in the later novels there are fairly consistent patterns of imagery in these monologues, usually suggestive of illumination and discovery.[12]

As early as 1880, when he was writing The Portrait, James had sensed the strong need for such a device and the chapter of Isabel's vigil has most of the qualities of the later, more highly developed and more frequently used monologues. If James does not achieve the mastery

of the form here that he eventually reaches in The Golden Bowl, he does manage to make this chapter one of the most vivid and significant scenes of the novel. It brings together and contrasts Isabel's earlier romantic notions about life and about Gilbert Osmond with a growing awareness of the tragedy of her situation. Her ideas of independence and freedom are given a rude jolt as she realizes that what she once took for glorious freedom is indeed unremitting bondage. The union of great knowledge with great liberty that she had so hopefully perceived as the true aristocratic life has turned into a mere hollow existence full of empty forms and appearances. It is in this scene too that Isabel first voices her suspicions of the relationship of her husband and Madame Merle.

Isabel's conflict in this chapter is whether to help force Pansy to marry as Osmond wishes. As she approaches a decision on the matter, the action is advanced and her motivations for her later behavior are revealed. Whether she actually reaches a decision about Warburton and Pansy in this chapter is not clear, although two thoughts that occur to her at the end of the vigil suggest that she has decided not to betray Pansy. The language of the first thought is suggestive; "She believed she was not defiant, and what could be better proof of it than that she should linger here half the night, trying to persuade herself that there was no reason why Pansy shouldn't be

married as you would put a letter in the post-office?" (II, 205). That she had been trying to persuade herself implies that she was not successful. Further, it has long been obvious that she values Pansy more than "a letter in the post-office" even if Osmond does not. The second thought that strikes her as she rises to leave the room is "a remembered vision--that of her husband and Madame Merle unconsciously and familiarly associated" (II, 205). If these thoughts do not in themselves indicate Isabel's decision not to betray Pansy into a false marriage, they, along with the rest of the monologue, do provide the motivation for Isabel's later actions, notably her subtle warning off of Warburton. The impressions, the thoughts, the disappointments that are presented in this scene are such that Isabel would never reveal to anyone, not even a most trusted confidant. These reflections are too bitter for Isabel to voice to anyone. The interior monologue form, then, becomes a means of revealing the kind of information that could probably not be presented in any other way. As James developed and perfected it, it was a step toward the stream-of-consciousness technique that was to become a major instrument of modern psychological fiction. This kind of monologue is probably as close to that technique as James could come (or perhaps cared to come) while still preserving one of the highest functions of art--the imposing of order on life or the discernment of

meaning in its confusion. Unlike the stream-of-consciousness presentation, the interior monologue has the benefits of a literate, articulate consciousness located in a discernible structure. The narrator, although still present, stands to one side, letting the character's thoughts speak for themselves.

Even in this novel in which there is such a fine register, there is still an author-narrator present, although he is less intrusive than in Roderick Hudson and The American. His omniscience is perhaps more limited than in those works; even so he occasionally enters the consciousness of characters other than Isabel. Sometimes, especially in the early chapters, he treats her with a gentle irony such as when he reveals that she was spoken of as "a prodigy of learning, a creature reported to have read the classic authors--in translation" (I, 66). Even in the scene of her midnight vigil, he resorts to the first-person. But nowhere, even in the slower-moving first part of the novel is his presence as strongly felt--manipulating, interpreting, judging and assessing--as it is in the earlier works. And the reason is not simply that James wanted to reduce the narrator's presence, to refine him out of existence. The reason is rather that he does hit upon a character who enables him to develop more fully the values of the objective method.

This character's register is supplemented by what has been called the "reflector system." Like the centre of consciousness, the confidant, and the interior monologue, the reflector system was instrumental in the success of James's objective method. Briefly, this system consists of the presentation of characters' views of one another through comments and actions. Skillfully handled, these views reflect not only one figure's attitude toward another, but also reveal something about the first character. Now in itself this technique is not at all new. What is new and interesting is the way James used it consistently to reveal subtleties of character and relationships and to reveal a subject from several perspectives. In Chapter X of The Portrait, for example, Isabel, Ralph, and the American newspaperwoman Henrietta Stackpole reveal a good deal about themselves as they react to one another. The chapter opens with Henrietta's letter to Isabel, announcing her intention of writing newspaper sketches about England and Englishmen and expressing a desire to see Isabel. The letter reveals Henrietta's impulsiveness, humor and lack of respect for British institutions. When Isabel tells Mr. Touchett about Henrietta's arrival in England, she wisely decides not to show him the actual letter, realizing that it presents Henrietta in an undesirable light. Ralph is put off when Isabel tells him that Henrietta "doesn't care a straw what men think of her" (I, 115). Isabel admires Henrietta's

bravery and independence despite the correspondent's likelihood of violating good taste and hospitality by writing about Gardencourt and its inhabitants: "'I've not made her my bosom-friend; but I like her in spite of her faults.'" Ralph's rejoinder perfectly reveals the differences in outlook between him and Isabel: "'I'm afraid I shall dislike her in spite of her merits" (II, 116). Isabel's optimism and idealism are neatly contrasted with Ralph's light-hearted cynicism. Neither one is totally objective in his appraisal of her. With Henrietta's appearance, however, the views of both Isabel and Ralph moderate somewhat, coming closer to the reality of the situation and moving away from attitudes colored purely by their own characters. In Henrietta's presence Isabel finds her somewhat intrusive; Ralph, on the other hand, begins to like her wit and intelligence. Henrietta's fresh, democratic viewpoint also adds a fresh dimension to Gardencourt. Ralph, in his enjoyment of cultivated leisure, becomes, through her eyes, a decadent young man who should have steady employment. He is also guilty of avoiding the "duty" of matrimony. Henrietta's egalitarianism leads Isabel to describe her as "a kind of emanation of the great democracy--of the continent, the country, the nation" (I, 130). Isabel's emotions toward her native land are strong and she finds Henrietta an image of America: "'I like the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and

spreading till it stops at the green Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it, and Henrietta--pardon my simile--has something of that odour in her garments'" (I, 130-31). Ralph's rejoinder not only reveals his attitude toward his homeland but his impression of Henrietta as well: "'I'm not sure the Pacific's so green as that but you're a young woman of imagination. Henrietta, however, does smell of the Future--it almost knocks one down!'" (I, 131).

Leon Edel describes the reflector system as a "method of using shifting angles of vision so as to make us feel the way in which people see one another."[13] James uses the method throughout The Portrait, another excellent example being the views of Warburton alternately presented by the narrator, Ralph, Mr. Touchett, Isabel, and Warburton's sisters in Chapters VIII and IX, views that are at the same time statements about themselves. The reflector system in The Portrait is still a long way from what it was to become in the later works, especially The Wings of the Dove. In that novel, as James explains in the Preface, the reflectors are actually registers and instead of fixing the centre in a single consciousness James alternates registers, moving from Kate Croy to Merton Densher to Milly Theale.[14] The price that James must pay, and there is always a price, is some loss of unity and integrity of point of view. In The Portrait no such sacrifice is necessary because the

reflector system operates by means of speech and action and does not depend upon the use of supplementary registers of consciousness. Thus Isabel is preserved as the sole centre of consciousness.

The Portrait of a Lady is the culmination of many years of trial and error for its author. It is indeed what J. W. Beach has called it--"the first masterpiece of Henry James."[15] For in this novel James has solved the technical problems that hinder Roderick Hudson and The American. He has discovered a central intelligence neither too fine nor too dull, and worthy of the task. He has lodged the centre of the subject of the novel firmly in that intelligence. And finally he has added to his objective approach the technique of the reflector system and the interior monologue, which enable him to present the moral and ethical conflict, the inward life of Isabel Archer, in a realistic fashion.

In Isabel Archer James found the figure that enabled him to perform the seamless fusion of subject and treatment, of matter and manner. The novel is indeed the portrait of a lady. Isabel's consciousness gives structure to the novel as a revelation of the growth of the subject. It also gives unity to the many otherwise disparate elements and furnishes the intensity of the inward life. Conceived as an integral part of the objective method, the centre of consciousness is part and parcel of the gradual revelation which Joseph Warren Beach pointed out as characterizing James's method. In the centre of consciousness

Henry James has discovered the means to penetrate beneath the superficialities of the prevalent surface realism of his day to a new depth of psychological realism. The Portrait of a Lady is only a first step in that direction, but it is a giant step.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1]The Art of the Novel (New York, 1934), p. 43.

[2]The Art of the Novel, pp. 49, 51.

[3]The Art of the Novel, p. 56.

[4]The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1961), p. 15.

[5]The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 205-206. Oscar Cargill disagrees with Beach about the first half of the novel: "Beach's comment on the structure of The Portrait has no particular force save as it emphasizes James's change of aim in his career as a novelist." The Novels of Henry James (New York, 1961), p. 94.

[6]The Method of Henry James, p. 209.

[7]The Method of Henry James, pp. 39, 41.

[8]Henry James: The Conquest of London (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 421.

[9]The Portrait of a Lady (New York, 1908), I, 30. Further references are to this edition and are included parenthetically in the text.

[10]*The Novels of Henry James* (New York, 1961), p. 109.

[11]*The Art of the Novel*, p. 57.

[12]I am indebted for the definition and functions of the interior monologue to Kristin Lauer's dissertation, "The Interior Monologue in the Later Novels of Henry James" (in progress--Michigan State University).

[13]*Henry James: The Conquest of London*, pp. 428-29.

[14]*The Art of the Novel*, pp. 300-301.

[15]*The Method of Henry James*, p. 205.

CONCLUSION

The centre of consciousness was simply one element, albeit an important element, of James's objective method. When it was employed most successfully, it operated in close conjunction with the confidant, the reflector system, the interior monologue, and the self-effacing narrator. This observation requires emphasis because of the stress that various critics have placed on one of these elements or another to the almost complete exclusion of the rest. It is important for an understanding of James's method and his fiction not to accept the erroneous belief that his major goal in life was the total elimination of the narrator, for instance, or the rendering of a story exclusively through dialogue. What James did seek and find was a way of portraying the inner life, a means of dramatizing consciousness. He wrote as if consciousness were the distinguishing characteristic of the human condition, as if events were real and meaningful only as they were perceived by someone. As a story-teller he was more interested in why an action was taken or a choice was made than in what that action or that choice was.

The technique of the centre of consciousness grew out of James's search for a theory and a means of realistic

expression that could treat the moral and ethical experiences and conflicts that lie beneath the surface of man's existence. Each writer has his own notion of what the real is and each writer portrays that reality in his own way. James chose to reveal the reality that he experienced through the objective method. This approach is virtually an epistemological system, for like such a system it presents a theory of knowledge. A man learns about his fellow men in certain ways, none of them like the way a reader learned about characters in the fiction of most novelists before James's time. What James sought to achieve in his fiction, then, was to represent the process of human perception in terms that duplicated life as nearly as possible. To the extent that he desired to reduce the intrusions of the author-narrator, he did so in order to present the reader with a more "natural" situation, natural in that one's perception of life is not aided by an intrusive author-narrator.

Nowhere in his writings did James prescribe or proscribe for other writers. On the contrary, in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady he describes the house of fiction as a large edifice with "not one window, but a million," at each of which is posted a watcher, looking down on the human scene below. Each pair of eyes is different so that no two watchers see exactly the same thing although they are all watching the same scene. "The

spreading field, the human scene, is the 'choice of subject'; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the "literary form"; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher--without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has <u>been</u> conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his 'moral' reference."[1] The artist's freedom is restricted only by his own limitations.

Henry James expanded the world of fiction through the development of new techniques and the introduction of subjects which enabled him to treat with verisimilitude the human scene that he perceived through the windows of the house of fiction. Near the end of his life James claimed: " . . . the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms."[2] It was largely through his own creative efforts that this was true.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1]*The Art of the Novel* (New York, 1934), pp. 46-47.

[2]*The Art of the Novel*, p. 326.

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