HENRY JAMES'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL--

STATIC OR DYNAMIC?

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
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in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
July, 1970

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PREFACE

The importance of Henry James as a literary figure is based both on his fiction and his critical work. This dissertation undertakes to clarify through a careful analysis of "The Art of Fiction" of 1884 and the Prefaces to the New York Edition of his novels and tales of 1907-1909, his two outstanding critical pieces, which aspects of James's theory of the novel remained stable and which aspects underwent a process of evolution during the time elapsing between the two. Theory is defined here as the general principles of the art of the novel as they are stated in the critical comments. James's theory of the novel is discussed in this essay in terms of the novel itself, the novelist, and three facets of the novelist's art--character, point of view, and representation.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the guidance and counsel given me by the members of my committee: Dr. D. Judson Milburn, Chairman; Dr. Clinton C. Keeler; Dr. Mary Rohrberger; and Dr. Leon Munson.

I wish also to thank Mrs. Jack Wettengel for her careful typing of the manuscript.

Finally, appreciation is accorded to my husband, Earl, my children, Margaret and Lynwood, and my parents, Mr. and

Mrs. George McConnell, for their cooperation and understanding during the completion of this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The steadily increasing interest in Henry James as a literary figure is based both on his work as a critic and as a practitioner of the craft of fiction. "The Art of Fiction" of 1884 is his most famous critical essay, while the eighteen Prefaces he wrote for the definitive New York Edition of his own fiction, 1907-1909, present the climax of his work as a critic. It is evident that the "germ," a term often used by James, of his mature theory of the novel as revealed in the Prefaces is contained in "The Art of Fiction." There is evidence too, in the two pieces, that his concept underwent change and development during the twenty-year period elapsing between their publications. This study analyzes "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces to the New York Edition with the purpose of clarifying both the substantiations of and the departures from James's earlier theory of the novel.

"The Art of Fiction" has been widely read and commented upon. Designating James as the greatest of theorists in the art of the novel, Leon Edel says that "The Art of Fiction" has become "a kind of novelist's manifesto, one of those great pronouncements which seems to offer the last word on

the subject."[1] Morton Dauwen Zabel has labeled it "the keystone of his [James's] arch."[2] Viola Hopkins Winner calls "The Art of Fiction" James's "classic defense of the novel" in which he expresses his "core of conviction" on the subject.[3] She continues: "The essay is rightfully read for its main intention--a declaration of freedom for the novel from moral and critical prohibitions and an apologia for James's own kind of novel, that of consciousness or sensibility."[4] Again, Edel, calling "The Art of Fiction" a brilliant statement, writes: "Many novelists had discussed one or another of Henry's points before: but never had the case for realism in fiction, and for the novel as social history, been put in the English world with such force, nor 'experience' defined with such psychological understanding."[5] Certainly the foregoing comments make clear the esteem in which "The Art of Fiction" has been held.

Late in his life James assembled the novels and tales which he wanted to preserve, omitting those he considered inferior. He carefully arranged the works, using both chronology and relatedness to make groupings. A great deal of effort was expended in rewriting and retouching and in preparing prefaces for the volumes. The expensive, plum-colored edition was published between 1907 and 1909 by Charles Scribner's Sons and is known as the New York Edition.

It is the conclusion of Christy Morgan Taylor that "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces to the New York Edition together constitute James's major argument for the novel as

a form of art.[6] Edel points out that "The prefaces are, in the opinion of most critics, a veritable cornerstone of modern fictional theory."[7] He says further: "Few writers on the art of fiction in recent years have ignored these prefaces. Packed with allusion and metaphor, filled with highly imaginative imagery, they have become a kind of fount and source for the critical terminology and criticism itself of fiction."[8] Writing of the attitude toward James, Edel concludes that "it has been marked by a full acceptance of James's fictional theories and the aesthetic of his prefaces. . . ."[9] Katherine Hoskins, concerned with the post-World War II novelist, asserts that "there is no chap-book on novel writing comparable in illustrative material, theory and particularity to James's prefaces to his novels and tales. . . ."[10] After pointing out that Carl Jung contends that the creative act can be sensed but not wholly grasped and will forever elude the human understanding, C. F. Burgess makes this claim: "Perhaps the most successful effort at fathoming the mysteries of the creative act was the series of Prefaces which Henry James wrote for the New York Edition of his works. . . ."[11] That the Prefaces are highly valuable and greatly appreciated can hardly be denied. Additional evidence of this fact can be seen in the number of studies based on the Prefaces.

A pioneer work is The Method of Henry James by Joseph Warren Beach, first published in 1918, two years after the death of James, and reissued with a new introduction in

1954. Beach says in the original edition: "A special invitation to the study of James is found in what he has written himself about the art of fiction, above all in the prefaces to the New York edition of his novels and tales. No writer of fiction, no literary artist in any genre, has ever told us so distinctly, and at such length, what he was trying to do."[12] Beach relied heavily on the Prefaces as well as making a thorough study of the novels in his analysis of James's method. His discussion centers on such topics as "Picture," "Point of View," and "Ethics."

In Edel's terms the Prefaces are "the scaffolding upon which Percy Lubbock erected his classic study of The Craft of Fiction of 1921."[13] According to Mark Schorer, "Lubbock performed the great service of compressing into the small compass of The Craft of Fiction, and of making coherent there, those major concerns of James that pertained to craftsmanship, to the means that permit the novelist to deal with his material at all."[14] Edel, too, made a brief study of the Prefaces, published in Paris in 1932 under the title, The Prefaces of Henry James.

One of the best-known analyses of the Prefaces is that of Richard P. Blackmur which serves as the "Introduction" to the collection of the Prefaces entitled The Art of the Novel. "What we have here to appropriate," he writes of the Prefaces, "is the most sustained and I think the most eloquent and original piece of literary criticism in existence."[15] Blackmur discusses the features which compose a

Preface; summarizes the major themes which have no definite locus and such additional themes as "The Finding of Subjects," "The Plea for a Fine Central Intelligence," "The International Theme," "On Wonder, Ghosts, and the Supernatural," and "The Dramatic Scene"; and lastly focuses attention on the Preface to The Ambassadors. D. W. Jefferson concludes that Blackmur's scholarly introduction "is indispensable, though he misses something of their spirit in his rigorous concern with points of abstract principle."[16]

That studies of the Prefaces are still being made is indicated by such titles as "Literary Allusions in James's Prefaces" by William T. Stafford[17] and "An Introductory Study of Imagery in the Prefaces to the New York Edition of the Novels and Tales of Henry James" by Vivien R. Leonard.[18] Laurence Bedwell Holland has included in his essays on the craft of James a discussion of the Prefaces which are to him "James's brilliant contribution to the theory and criticism of the novel."[19] Also there are numerous references to the Prefaces in recent books that will be cited in the presentation of material dealing with indications of the evolution of James's theory of the novel.

Opinions range widely regarding that evolution, from those of writers seeing little change to those of writers citing specific changes. Conceding that there were no doubt shifts of doctrine and changes of style from 1864 to 1914, René Wellek contends, however, that "on the whole, James's critical views are remarkably coherent and consistent and

show, at most, changes of emphasis due to a difference of audience or the changed atmosphere of the time."[20]

In his chapter on James's theory of the novel, Robert Marks makes this general statement regarding change in James: " . . . the ideas which pervade and support the work of James increased steadily in value, steadily and at an extraordinary rate, with the growth of his genius . . . the body of them, expressive of what he held most dear, a philosophy of art and life, emerging at the time of his later writing, from the greater experience and the more powerful intelligence, ushered in his completely full and rich period. . . ."[21]

Also writing in general terms is Donald Emerson: "James's view of realism, and his own practices as a writer, changed so considerably during the first half-century of his creative lifetime that one must distinguish three periods. These are merely a convenience of discussion and are sufficiently marked by James's departure for permanent English residence in 1875 and the failure of Guy Domville, 1895. The convenience lies in the possibility of comparisons which point up the change of emphasis and direction of interest of James's prolonged artistic experience."[22] Of particular significance for this study is the 1895 division between periods since this is virtually the midpoint between the publication dates of "The Art of Fiction" and the New York Edition of James's works.

J. A. Ward makes this distinction between James's early and more mature theories: "James's youthful ideas about the form of fiction are the germs of the principles expressed in the late prefaces. But his earliest dicta, in comparison to the late, are arid and formalist--dogmatically proclaimed, not experimentally discovered."[23] Ward goes on to say that James never renounced his taste for brevity and perfection of form and that these concepts are as prominent in the Prefaces as in the earliest reviews.[24] He continues: "But if James seems to have acquired his literary standards artificially and to have begun his career with a set of a priori principles to guide him, it was not long before he was to make these ideas his own by fully understanding their relevance to the craft of fiction. The early assumptions are not repudiated, but tested, clarified, and deepened."[25]

Referring to the period following the failure of Guy Domville noted previously, Walter Isle writes: "But the late nineties, for James, more than other parts of his career, are marked by a thorough-going search for at least a basic form which can be adjusted to the demands of a particular subject. At this time, more than any other, he was subject to his 'constant impulse to try experiments.' And James, through experiment, did discover and refine several principle features of a basic form which make a kind of common denominator in The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl."[26] Isle explains that James's activities during the first years of the 1890's had much to

do with the change in his outlook, particularly his attempt at the well-made play with its emphasis on technique. These years mark the great divide in James's career and show on the surface a marked change of direction.[27] "One side of his artistic personality became more and more formulary, more interested in method and the technical aspects of his art, as is evident in his prefaces and in the experiments in the novel. James became, in fact, though not all of his own doing, the great rule-maker and law-giver for the art of the novel."[28]

Perhaps the most specific comment concerning the evolution of James's theory of the novel is made by Holland, who writes:

> And the Prefaces present for fiction (whether comic or tragic) a strategy of representation in which the compositional strategies explored more tentatively in Partial Portraits take precedence over imitative modes, and the fusion of analytic and dramatic modes takes precedence over the strictly pictorial manner which governs the vocabulary of Partial Portraits and the design of The Portrait of a Lady. The "closeness of relation" to life that James had insisted on in "The Art of Fiction" as the distinct asset of the novel is rendered in the Prefaces as a combination of dramatic construction and intimacy of rapport which avoids direct reportage or "merely referential" narrative. And the "magnificence" of the novel's form, which had made other arts seem constrained by "rigid" conventions in Partial Portraits, is founded in the Prefaces on a sacrificial enactment which absorbs the strategies of painting and the drama and even builds on the friction between them. . . .[29]

It is significant to note here with regard to the present study the references to Partial Portraits, published two years after "The Art of Fiction" first appeared and

containing it therein.

From Beach's early work of 1918 to the present, critics have been interested in James's Prefaces. Beach relied heavily on them in his analysis of James's method as did Lubbock in writing The Craft of Fiction. Blackmur's essay which serves as the introduction to The Art of the Novel, the collection of the Prefaces, summarizes major themes and focuses attention on the Preface to The Ambassadors. Studies of literary allusions and imagery in the Prefaces have been made recently, and Holland includes in his essays on the craft of James a discussion of the Prefaces. Many other critics refer to the Prefaces occasionally to establish a point. None of these studies, however, analyzes the Prefaces with the purpose of assessing James's mature theory of the novel as contrasted with that of an earlier period.

This study undertakes to clarify through a careful analysis of "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces to the New York Edition of James's novels and tales which of certain aspects of James's theory of the novel remained stable and which underwent a process of evolution during the time elapsing between the publications of these most significant critical pieces. Theory here is defined simply as the general principles of the art of the novel as they are stated in critical comments rather than demonstrated in practice. The novel, the novelist, and three aspects of the art of the novelist--character, point of view, and representation--are discussed. It is acknowledged that these divisions are

somewhat arbitrary and that there will be some overlapping in treatment. James's comments on an important point from "The Art of Fiction" are presented first in each chapter, followed by relevant statements from the Prefaces and conclusions. Additional points are dealt with in the same manner. Stable aspects of James's theory of the novel are considered before those aspects apparently undergoing change.

NOTES

[1]"Introduction," The Future of the Novel (New York, 1956), p. x.

[2]The Portable Henry James (New York, 1951), p. 389.

[3]"Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," Criticism, IX, No. 1 (1967), 3.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Henry James: The Middle Years (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 123-124.

[6]"The Pictorial Element in the Theory and Practice of Henry James," unpubl. diss. (Stanford University, 1955), pp. 15-16.

[7]The Future of the Novel, p. 43.

[8]Ibid.

[9]"The Literary Convictions of Henry James," Modern Fiction Studies, III (Spring, 1957), 3.

[10]"Henry James and the Future of the Novel," The Sewanee Review, LIV (Jan.-Mar., 1946), 88.

[11]"The Seeds of Art: Henry James's Donnée," Literature and Psychology, XIII (1963), 67.

[12]Philadelphia, 1954, p. 2.

[13]The Future of the Novel, p. 43.

[14]"Foreword to Compass Edition," The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1957), p. i.

[15]New York, 1934, p. viii.

[16]Henry James (New York, 1961), p. 112.

[17]American Literature, XXXV (March, 1963), 60-70.

[18]Unpubl. diss. (Columbia University, 1966).

[19]*The Expense of Vision* (Princeton, 1964), p. 155.

[20]"Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," *American Literature*, XXX (Nov., 1958), 295.

[21]*James's Later Novels* (New York, 1960), p. 158.

[22]"Henry James and the Limitations of Realism," *College English*, XXII (1960), 161.

[23]*The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction* (Chapel Hill, 1967), p. 3.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[26]*Experiments in Form* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 4.

[27]Ibid., p. 18.

[28]Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[29]*The Expense of Vision*, p. 159.

CHAPTER II

THE NOVEL

Basic to James's theory of the novel are his comments about the novel itself. He opens his discussion of the novel in "The Art of Fiction" by pointing out that only a short time before the English novel had had no air of having a theory, a consciousness of itself behind it. The comfortable feeling was that a novel is a novel as a pudding is a pudding.[1] A time of discussion appears to have opened, however, and James thinks that art lives upon discussion and experiment. Acknowledging the significance of theory, he writes: "The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting; and though there is a great deal of the latter without the former I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction" (AF, p. 392).

One of the first requirements James makes for the novel, in fact the only reason for its existence in his view, is that it attempt to represent life. "When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass" (AF, p. 393). James says further: " . . . the only classification of the novel that I can

understand is into that which has life and that which has it not" (AF, p. 405). That this concept was a consistent one is indicated by Blackmur's inclusion of the subject, "The Relation of Art and Life," with others which inhabit the Prefaces more or less without favor.[2] An illustration comes from the Preface to The Ambassadors: "Art deals with what we see, it must first contribute full-handed that ingredient; it plucks its material, otherwise expressed, in the garden of life--which material elsewhere grown is stale and uneatable" (Prefaces, p. 312). Blackmur writes: "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."[3] There are numerous uses of such phrases as "representation of life" to be found throughout the Prefaces. James says in the Preface to The Tragic Muse that "the novelist who doesn't represent, and represent 'all the time,' is lost, exactly as much lost as the painter who, at his work and given his intention, doesn't paint 'all the time.'"[4] The technique of representation must await consideration in a later chapter.

James contends that the only point of a novel that is open to contention is execution and that interminable confusions and crosspurposes are caused by losing sight of this. "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnée: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. . . .

If we pretend to respect the artist at all, we must allow him his freedom of choice . . ." (AF, pp. 406-407). James says, however, that nothing will take the place of "liking" a work of art and continues: "I mention this to guard myself from the accusation of intimating that the idea, the subject, of a novel or picture, does not matter. It matters, to my sense, in the highest degree, and if I might put up a prayer it would be that artists should select none but the richest" (AF, p. 407). The novel deals with multitudinous life, and there is no dogma which makes it unlawful to deal with any particle of it. "The moral consciousness of a child is as much a part of life as the islands of the Spanish Main . . ." (AF, p. 413).

In the Preface to Roderick Hudson, James parenthetically defines the novel as "a long fiction with a 'complicated' subject" (Prefaces, p. 4). Commenting on this definition and confirming the wide range of subjects indicated in "The Art of Fiction," Ward says: "A strong implication of the prefaces is that there is really no such thing as a fictional subject incapable of complicated development."[5] A specific example of this is James's comment that "the project for 'Maisie' rounded itself and loomed large--any subject looming large, for that matter, I am bound to add, from the moment one is ridden by the law of entire expression" (Prefaces, p. 144). Writing of the evaluation of a subject, James again insists on the close relationship between life and art when he says: "Recognising 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?" (Prefaces, p. 45).

James confirms his earlier stand on the importance of subject and the freedom of the novelist to choose his subject when he writes: "Essentially, meanwhile, excited wonder must have a subject, must face in a direction, must be, increasingly, about something. Here comes in then the artist's bias and his range--determined, these things, by his own fond inclination" (Prefaces, p. 253). Passages from other Prefaces indicate the freedom James himself used in selecting subjects. For instance, in spite of the title of the book, his subject for Roderick Hudson was not Roderick's adventure in the least but another man's view and experience of him (Prefaces, p. 15). Of Christopher Newman James writes: " . . . 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" (Prefaces, p. 22).

What might be considered a concluding statement on subjects comes from the Preface to The Ambassadors. Here James

echoes and expands his prayer from "The Art of Fiction" asking that artists should select none but the richest subjects.

> For I think, verily, that there are degrees of merit in subjects--in spite of the fact that to treat even one of the most ambiguous with due decency we must for the time, for the feverish and prejudiced hour, at least figure its merit and its dignity as possibly absolute. What it comes to, doubtless, is that even among the supremely good--since with such alone is it one's theory of one's honour to be concerned--there is an ideal <u>beauty</u> of goodness the invoked action of which is to raise the artistic faith to its maximum. Then truly, I hold, one's theme may be said to shine, and that of "The Ambassadors," I confess, wore this glow for me from beginning to end (Prefaces, p. 309).

James is in full agreement with Walter Besant, whose pamphlet he discusses in "The Art of Fiction," in including fiction as a fine art. He realizes, however, that there are many people to whom it has never occurred that a novel ought to be artistic and others to whom such a principle would bring distrust. Thinking that literature should be either instructive or amusing, they feel that "artistic preoccupations, the search for form, contribute to neither end, interfere indeed with both" (AF, p. 396). James thinks that Besant errs in attempting to say definitely beforehand what a good novel will be. He contends that the only obligation to which a novel may be held in advance is that it be interesting and that the ways that this can be accomplished are innumerable. "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to

the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. . . . The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact . . ." (AF, pp. 398-399). The latter statement leads logically to James's conception of the novel as "a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism . . ." (AF, p. 404). In each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The only way in which "the story" can be spoken of as something different from the organic whole of the novel is in the sense of its being the idea or the starting point. "The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread . . ." (AF, p. 411).

Joseph J. Firebaugh, among other critics, has commented on James's relativism. James sought formal perfection all his life, but he had no belief that it could exist apart from content or the changing relationships in the world of phenomena.[6] Ward, too, says that the search for form crystallizes the purpose of James's fiction. "Reading, like writing, began and ended for him in the search for form, in the attempt to discover the relation of parts to each other and to the whole. . . ."[7] James regularly refers to the creative process in organicist terms. He did not assume that a coherent form would magically emanate from free development. The novelist must hold the finished shape of his work in mind even as he allows the germ of his fictional situation to develop freely.[8] Ward continues:

> But a true organic unity can be achieved only by an application of the principle of the inseparability of parts. One part of a work--be it character, chapter, incident, scene, picture, or whatever--possesses tone insofar as other parts inhere in it. The principal effect of tone is the obscuring of separations, a benefit which only time performs in the work of architecture. In literature tone is most surely gained when parts are not fused merely from the outside--by style--but from the inside--by structure. This inward coherence can be gained only when the unity is dynamic rather than static.[9]

That James held to the dynamic principle can be seen in many of the Prefaces. They substantiate, too, the continuance of his concern with organic unity as expressed in "The Art of Fiction." In the Preface to The Awkward Age, James discusses the tendency of a mere grain of subject-matter to expand and develop when conditions happen to favor it. He considers this novel to have asserted an unforeseen principle of growth (Prefaces, p. 98). He comments further on the dynamic principle in the Preface to Daisy Miller: " . . . the simplest truth about a human entity, a situation, a relation, an aspect of life, however small, on behalf of which the claim to charmed attention is made, strains ever, under one's hand, more intensely, most intensely, to justify that claim; strains ever, as it were, toward the uttermost end or aim of one's meaning or of its own numerous connexions; struggles at each step, and in defiance of one's raised admonitory finger, fully and completely to express itself" (Prefaces, p. 278). James says that the high price of the novel as a literary form is its power to range through all the differences of the individual relation to

its subject-matter while preserving its form with closeness. Yet it positively appears more true to its character "in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould" (Prefaces, pp. 45-46).

In the Preface to The Ambassadors, James refers to the virtue of positive beauty as essentially the virtue of the whole (Prefaces, pp. 319-320). It is in terms of this virtue that he makes evaluative statements about certain of his novels. He holds that The Tragic Muse contains nothing better than preserved unity and quality of tone (Prefaces, p. 97). In The Awkward Age James sees the grave distinction between substance and form break down. " . . . I have been unable at least myself, on re-examination, to mark any . . . joint or seam, to see the two discharged offices as separate. They are separate before the fact, but the sacrament of execution indissolubly marries them, and the marriage, like any other marriage, has only to be a 'true' one for the scandal of a breach not to show. The thing 'done,' artistically, is a fusion, or it has not been done . . ." (Prefaces, pp. 115-116). Finally, of the Prince and Princess in The Golden Bowl James writes: "Their chronicle strikes me as quite of the stuff to keep us from forgetting that absolutely no refinement of ingenuity or of precaution need be dreamed of as wasted in that most exquisite of all good causes the appeal to variety, the appeal to incalculability, the appeal to a high refinement and a handsome wholeness of effect" (Prefaces, p. 329).

Thus far in this consideration of the novel, aspects of James's theory which seem to have been constant have been discussed. It remains now to consider what appears to be a change of attitude. In "The Art of Fiction," James mentions the old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident and concludes that this distinction is as little to the point as the celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance. Later he refers to these distinctions as "clumsy separations" and says that he "can think of no obligation to which the 'romancer' would not be held equally with the novelist . . ." (AF, p. 406).

Wellek has pointed out, however, that James often recognized the distinction between novel and romance and that in later years he treated romance and romanticism with increasing tenderness.[10] The fullest explanation in the Prefaces of James's later distinction between novel and romance is his analysis of The American. He asks by what art or mystery a given picture of life seems to surround its theme with the air of romance while another picture may steep the whole matter in the element of reality: this is a question "very much more of perceived effect, effect after the fact, than of conscious design . . ." (Prefaces, p. 30). James continues: "The determining condition would at any rate seem so latent that one may well doubt if the full artistic consciousness ever reaches it: leaving the matter thus a case, ever, not of an author's plotting and planning and calculating, but just of his feeling and seeing, of his

conceiving, in a word, and of his thereby inevitably expressing himself, under the influence of one value or the other" (Prefaces, p. 31). Since the distinction James makes is between the air of romance and the element of reality, it is appropriate to present here his definition of the real and the romantic as he gives them in the Preface to The American. He writes:

> The real represents to my perception the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later, in one way or another; it being but one of the accidents of our hampered state, and one of the incidents of their quality and number, that particular instances have not yet come our way. The romantic stands, on the other hand, for the things that, with all the facilities in the world, all the wealth and all the courage and all the wit and all the adventure, we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire (Prefaces, pp. 31-32).

In contemplating the projected romance, James concludes that the only general attribute that fits all cases is that it deals with liberated experience; "experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it . . ." (Prefaces, p. 33). He explains that the experience represented in The American is disconnected and uncontrolled--"uncontrolled by our general sense of 'the way things happen'--which romance alone more or less successfully palms off on us" (Prefaces, p. 34). "The way things happen is frankly not the way in which they are represented as having happened, in Paris, to my hero . . ." (Prefaces, pp. 34-35). The lack of control referred to enabled James to call The Turn of the Screw a

"sinister romance" and to say that in writing it he cast his lot with pure romance. "The thing had for me the immense merit of allowing the imagination absolute freedom of hand, of inviting it to act on a perfectly clear field, with no 'outside' control involved, no pattern of the usual or the terrible 'pleasant' (save always of course the high pleasantry of one's very form) to consort with" (Prefaces, p. 170).

In "The Art of Fiction," James sees no point in a distinction between the novel and the romance and refers to it as a "clumsy separation." He says further that he can think of no obligation to which the romancer would not be held equally with the novelist. Also in "The Art of Fiction" he writes: " . . . I may . . . venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel--the merit on which all its other merits . . . helplessly and submissively depend" (AF, p. 403). In the Prefaces he does not repudiate the necessity for the air of reality, but refers often to the need for verisimilitude in the novel. Yet in the Preface to The American, James admits that some pictures of life surround their theme with the air of romance while others steep the matter in the element of reality. He differentiates by definition the real and the romantic and says that the romance deals with liberated experience, exempt from conditions usually attached to it. Since James holds the air of reality to be a supreme virtue of the novel and since he

differentiates between works surrounded by the air of romance from those steeped in the element of reality, it can be concluded that his mature theory of the novel included a distinction between the novel and the romance.

NOTES

[1]*The Portable Henry James*, pp. 391-392--hereafter direct quotations only will be cited; citations will be AF in the text.

[2]"Introduction," *The Art of the Novel*, p. xiv.

[3]Ibid., p. xv.

[4]*The Art of the Novel*, p. 94--hereafter cited as Prefaces in the text.

[5]*The Search for Form*, p. 22.

[6]"The Relativism of Henry James," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XII (Sept., 1953), 237.

[7]*The Search for Form*, p. vii.

[8]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[9]Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[10]"Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," p. 302.

CHAPTER III

THE NOVELIST

Few people would argue against the idea that a novelist's art is largely determined by the character of the novelist himself. Yet perhaps even fewer would assert this concept as undeniably as James does. That he held this point of view is consistent, of course, with the emphasis he placed on the inner man, the consciousness, in both his critical comments concerning his work and that of other novelists and in the fictional characters that he created.

In "The Art of Fiction," James establishes his well-known analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist. He says that as the picture is reality, the novel is history. The task of both the historian and the novelist is to represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men. "It seems to me," he writes, "to give him [the novelist] a great character, the fact that he has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter; this double analogy is a magnificent heritage" (AF, p. 395). Here James bestows upon the novelist a special character by virtue of the fact that he <u>is</u> a novelist.

James holds that there are innumerable ways by which the artist can make his novel interesting. "They are as

various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others" (AF, p. 398). The execution of a work belongs to the author alone, and it is what is most personal to him. There is no limit to his possible experiments. "His manner is his secret, not necessarily a jealous one" (AF, p. 399).

Apparently even the selection of the real is an individual matter, dependent to an extent on the artist himself. "The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix" (AF, p. 401). One cannot write a good novel unless he possesses the sense of reality, but it is difficult to tell one how to call that sense into being. Humanity is immense and reality has many forms. James thinks that it is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience. The aspirant to fiction writing must have taste; and if he have taste, he will have ingenuity. "But it is only a secondary aid;" writes James, "the first is a capacity for receiving straight impressions" (AF, p. 410).

To the young novelist James would say that there is no impression of life, no way of seeing and feeling it, to which his plan may not offer a place. He would admonish the beginner to try to catch the color of life itself without too much concern for optimism and pessimism. Zola, he says, is magnificent, but he has an air of working in the dark. "As for the aberrations of a shallow optimism, the ground

(of English fiction especially) is strewn with their brittle particles as with broken glass" (AF, p. 418). James's final admonition to the young novelist in "The Art of Fiction" is that conclusions must be drawn from a wide knowledge and that his first duty is to be as complete as possible and to make as perfect a work as possible.

Firebaugh has written that the most perfect art, to James, was that of the "extraordinarily perceptive observer, sensitively, impressionistically, recording the movements of phenomena among themselves, employing knowledge as the impressionist painter employed light, revealing now this, now that aspect of eternally changing actuality."[1] In "The Art of Fiction," James emphasizes the importance of exactness, of truth of detail. The air of reality is essential to producing the illusion of life. It is here that the novelist competes with the painter in his attempt to render the look of things that conveys their meaning. It is a very complicated business to produce the most momentary illusion; hence, James says, the novelist cannot possibly take enough notes. "He has to take a great many in order to select a few, he has to work them up as he can, and even the guides and philosophers who might have most to say to him must leave him alone when it comes to the application of precepts, as we leave the painter in communion with his palette" (AF, pp. 403-404).

That James remained concerned with the air of reality is indicated by references to verisimilitude, the appearance

of truth, in the Prefaces. He says the damage to verisimilitude is deep in his handling of Mary Garland and Rowland in Roderick Hudson. In his discussion of the real and the romantic in the Preface to The American, already considered in this paper, James writes: "It is difficult for me to-day to believe that I had not, as my work went on, some shade of the rueful sense of my affront to verisimilitude . . ." (Prefaces, p. 37).

James was aware, of course, that his thinking about art was dynamic. In explaining his procedure in writing The Princess Casamassima, he says that the very plan of the book directly confronted him with the rich principle of the note and did much to clear up for him, once for all, his practical view of it. Then follows a statement of his developed view, the germ of which was expressed in "The Art of Fiction." He writes:

> If one was to undertake to tell tales and to report with truth on the human scene, it could be but because "notes" had been from the cradle the ineluctable consequence of one's greatest inward energy: to take them was as natural as to look, to think, to feel, to recognize, to remember, as to perform any act of understanding. The play of the energy had been continuous and couldn't change; what changed was only the objects and situations pressing the spring of it. Notes had been in other words the things one couldn't not take, and the prime result of all fresh experience was to remind one of that (Prefaces, pp. 76-77).

How well James succeeded in taking and using notes for The Princess Casamassima is indicated by Lionel Trilling's comment: "The social texture of his work is grainy and knotted with practicality and detail. And more: his social

observation is of a kind that we must find startlingly prescient when we consider that it was made some sixty years ago."[2] Later Trilling writes: "For the truth is that there is not a political event of The Princess Casamassima, not a detail of oath or mystery or danger, which is not confirmed by multitudinous records."[3]

In addition to the freedom of the novelist, his intensely personal relation to his art, and his need for the sense of reality and note-taking, James insists in "The Art of Fiction" on wide experience and a fine mind for the novelist. "Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility. . . . It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative--much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius--it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations" (Af, p. 401). He tells the story of an English novelist who was able to give in one of her tales the nature and way of life of French Protestant youth. Once in Paris she had passed an open door in the house of a pasteur and had seen some young Protestants seated at a table round a finished meal; this momentary glimpse was her experience. With her knowledge of youth and Protestantism and her personal impression, James says, she was able to produce a reality.

In what might be called a summary statement on experience, James continues:

> The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it--this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, "Write from experience and experience only," I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" (AF, pp. 402-403).

After writing briefly in opposition to Besant's idea of a "conscious moral purpose" in the novel, James concedes that there is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very close together. This is in the light of the truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will be the quality of the mind that produced it. "In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground: if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of 'purpose'" (AF, p. 416).

The Prefaces show James's continued belief in the significance for his artistic productions of the novelist's experience of life or his sensibility. The "moral" sense of

a work of art depends on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it he asserts in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady. "The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs" (Prefaces, p. 45). In the Preface to The Awkward Age, the preeminence of mind is reemphasized: "The truth is that what a happy thought has to give depends immensely on the general turn of the mind capable of it, and on the fact that its loyal entertainer, cultivating fondly its possible relations and extensions, the bright efflorescence latent in it, but having to take other things in their order too, is terribly at the mercy of his mind" (Prefaces, p. 101). Saying that the mind has only to exhale a tropic air to produce complications, James finds the story-teller apt to flounder in a deep warm jungle if he has been "condemned by nature to a liberally amused and beguiled, a richly sophisticated, view of relations and a fine inquisitive speculative sense for them . . ." (Prefaces, p. 101). In the Preface to The Spoils of Poynton, James states his belief that a large part of the source of interest for the artist is in the strong consciousness of his seeing all for himself. He borrows his motive, but after that he "lays together the blocks quarried in the deeps of his imagination and on his personal premises" (Prefaces, p. 122).

James's admonition to the aspiring young writer that he try to be one on whom nothing is lost, already quoted from

"The Art of Fiction," implies a belief that there is freedom for the writer to expand his experience. Yet there is, in the Preface to Lady Barbarina, a passage that indicates a more deterministic point of view which may be a part of James's mature theory of the novel. He writes:

> . . . one never really chooses one's general range of vision--the experience from which ideas and themes and suggestions spring: this proves ever what it has had to be, that is one with the very turn one's life has taken; so that whatever it "gives," whatever it makes us feel and think of, we regard very much as imposed and inevitable. The subject thus pressed upon the artist is the necessity of his case and the fruit of his consciousness; which truth makes and has ever made of any quarrel with his subject, any stupid attempt to go behind that, the true stultification of criticism (Prefaces, p. 201).

James goes ahead to emphasize the importance of having experience, recognizing and understanding it, and getting from it all it has to give.

One reference to the imagination in "The Art of Fiction" has been included in material already cited; this suggests that James early regarded it as a factor in artistic production. Nevertheless, comparatively little attention is devoted to discussing the imagination in "The Art of Fiction." Much more consideration is given to it in the Prefaces, indicating that it became an increasingly significant attribute of the artist in James's opinion. He concludes the Preface to The Princess Casamassima frankly with " . . . if you haven't, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven't the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the

revealed and assured; but . . . if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal" (Prefaces, p. 78). Hoskins has called this statement "a proud crescendo which makes of the whole passage an eloquent and comprehensive statement of what James considered the rights and duties of the novelist."[4] Again, in the Preface to The Awkward Age, James says that the story-teller has nothing to do whatever with a relation not imaginative to his material (Prefaces, p. 106). He cites also that odd law which somehow always makes the minimum of valid suggestion serve the man of imagination better than the maximum. And in the Preface to What Maisie Knew, James writes: "One cherishes, after the fact, any proved case of the independent life of the imagination; above all if by that faculty one has been appointed mainly to live" (Prefaces, p. 152). Clearly, James came to consider the imagination to be of utmost value to the novelist.

Trilling, however, places too much confidence in James's imagination--more indeed than James would claim for it. After quoting the comment cited above from the Preface to The Princess Casamassima, Trilling concludes: "If, to learn about the radical movement of his time, James really did no more than consult his penetrating imagination--which no doubt was nourished like any other on conversation and the daily newspaper--then we must say that in no other novelist did the root of the matter go so deep and so wide."[5] Trilling must have overlooked or underestimated that

portion of the Preface dealing with the importance of observation and note-taking. James makes crystalline the fact that more than imagination is required of the artist and that his imagination was nourished by something other than conversation and the daily newspaper when he writes in the same Preface: "To haunt the great city and by this habit to penetrate it, imaginatively, in as many places as possible--that was to be informed, that was to pull wires, that was to open doors, that positively was to groan at times under the weight of one's accumulations" (Prefaces, p. 77).

James emphasizes in "The Art of Fiction" the freedom of the novelist and his individuality. He calls for taste and a sense of reality, the capacity for receiving straight impressions. Exactness and truth of detail are essential to the novelist's creation of the illusion of life. James insists, too, on wide experience and a fine mind for the novelist. In the Prefaces he continues to hold these principles, emphasizing verisimilitude and the importance of note-taking. The preeminence of the artist's experience or prime sensibility and the quality of his mind are maintained. James seems to limit somewhat, however, the writer's ability to expand his experience. Imagination is given much more attention in the Prefaces than in "The Art of Fiction," indicating James's increased interest in this attribute of the novelist. Perhaps it is a statement already quoted from "The Art of Fiction," however, which makes clear the nexus between experience and imagination.

Experience is an "immense sensibility," the very "atmosphere of the mind"; the mind which is imaginative takes the "faintest hints of life" (experience) and converts the very "pulses of the air" (experience) into revelations. Imagination is the quality of the mind which makes this conversion possible.

NOTES

[1]"The Relativism of Henry James," p. 237.

[2]"The Princess Casamassima," The Modern Critical Spectrum, ed. Gerald J. Goldberg and Nancy M. Goldberg (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962), p. 135.

[3]Ibid., p. 140.

[4]"Henry James and the Future of the Novel," p. 94.

[5]"The Princess Casamassima," p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER

It is but a short step for James from the sensibility and the imagination of the novelist to the exceptional qualities of his fictive hero. In fact, Gerald Bryan Hoag says: "The unique contribution of James to the theory of the novel is the idea that character development equals the development of imaginative awareness in the novelist. James prefers, for such considerations as economy and objectivity, to disguise the source of imaginative vision by filtering it through one of the actors in his drama, a counterfeit intelligence which itself often becomes the prime point of interest."[1] James has made amply clear that he requires his major characters to be special people with special talents; only through such people can he present the relations which he wants to reveal.

In "The Art of Fiction," James suggests that most people agree that a novel ought to be "good," but that each would have his own interpretation of the term. One would say that "good" means representing virtuous and aspiring characters, another would say that it means a happy ending, and still another would say that it means being full of incident and movement. But, James thinks, to many "It

matters little that as a work of art it should really be as little or as much of its essence to supply happy endings, sympathetic characters, and an objective tone, as if it were a work of mechanics . . ." (AF, p. 397). James takes the stand here, then, that characters need not necessarily be "sympathetic." He does make an important distinction about characters later, however, when he says that the characters "which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most . . ." (AF, p. 401).

James is a great deal more explicit about the characteristics of his fictive heroes in the Prefaces than he is in "The Art of Fiction." Many comments indicate that he continued to hold the idea that his characters need not be sympathetic and that they must seem real. The added dimensions show the development of his theory of character as it had evolved through experiment with the form of the novel. That his characters came of necessity to assume the qualities demanded for the novelist is amply demonstrated.

In discussing Roderick Hudson, James insists on both the exceptional and typical in his portrayal. James writes: "The very claim of the fable is naturally that he <u>is</u> special, that his great gift makes and keeps him highly exceptional; but that is not for a moment supposed to preclude his appearing typical (of the general type) as well; for the fictive hero successfully appeals to us only as an eminent instance, as eminent as we like, of our own conscious kind" (Prefaces, p. 12). In the same Preface James

discusses Rowland Mallet's consciousness in which the center of interest of the novel lies. He had to make that consciousness sufficiently acute "to hold the play" (Prefaces, p. 16). At the same time, James writes: "It had, naturally, Rowland's consciousness, not to be too acute--which would have disconnected it and made it superhuman: the beautiful little problem was to keep it connected, connected intimately, with the general human exposure, and thereby bedimmed and befooled and bewildered, anxious, restless, fallible, and yet to endow it with such intelligence that the appearances reflected in it, and constituting together there the situation and the 'story,' should become by that fact intelligible" (Prefaces, p. 16). His problem was to make Rowland's relation to everything sufficiently limited to be natural, but at the same time to make him a sufficiently clear medium to represent the whole of his experience.

Writing of Isabel Archer, James points up his requirement of complexity in his central characters when he says: "It was naturally of the essence that the young woman should be herself complex; that was rudimentary . . ." (Prefaces, p. 52). James emphasized, too, intensity of feeling, writing in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima: "But there are degrees of feeling--the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense, the complete, in a word--the power to be finely aware and richly responsible" (Prefaces, p. 62). It

is those who possess the latter, of course, who get the most from what happens to them and who help the reader also to get the most. "Their being finely aware--as Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware--makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them" (Prefaces, p. 62).

Again, however, in the same Preface James cautions against filling "too full any supposed and above all any obviously limited vessel of consciousness" (Prefaces, p. 63). Such vessels may be shown as knowing or feeling too much for their remaining natural and typical, "for their having the needful communities with our own precious liability to fall into traps and be bewildered" (Prefaces, p. 63). The reader, according to James, warns the novelist against making his characters "too interpretative of the muddle of fate," too "priggishly clever," or too intelligent (Prefaces, p. 64). Of Hyacinth Robinson, James says that his passion of intelligence is his highest value for our curiosity and our sympathy; yet the "truth for 'a young man in a book' by no means entirely resides in his being either exquisitely sensitive or shiningly clever" (Prefaces, p. 69). There are other faces of his character and situation. "If he's too sensitive and too clever for them, if he knows more than is likely or natural--for him--it's as if he weren't at all, as if he were false and impossible" (Prefaces, p. 69). The artist's difficulty is extreme in making his character feel enough and know enough to be of

"maximum dramatic value without feeling and knowing too much for his minimum verisimilitude, his proper fusion with the fable" (Prefaces, p. 69).

Various other comments serve to augment these illustrations of James's concept of character. He says: " . . . I never see the leading interest of any human hazard but in a consciousness . . . subject to fine intensification and wide enlargement. It is as mirrored in that consciousness that the gross fools, the headlong fools, the fatal fools play their part for us--they have much less to show us in themselves" (Prefaces, p. 67). In the Preface to The Wings of the Dove, James parenthetically describes his registers or reflectors: "burnished indeed . . . they generally are by the intelligence, the curiosity, the passion, the force of the moment, whatever it be, directing them" (Prefaces, pp. 300-301). And he refers to Merton Densher and Kate Croy as a far from common couple with superior passion and superior diplomacy (Prefaces, p. 303). Writing of Strether in the Preface to The Ambassadors, James confesses that he rejoiced in the promise of so mature a hero who would give him more to bite into--"since it's only into thickened motive and accumulated character . . . that the painter of life bites more than a little" (Prefaces, p. 310). Strether would be handsomely possessed of character in that he would have imagination galore and would have felt that he had it. "It was immeasurable, the opportunity to 'do' a man of imagination, for if there mightn't be a chance to 'bite,' where

in the world might it be?" (Prefaces, p. 310). Here are confirmation of the principle of complexity mentioned earlier and almost a glorification of the opportunity to "do" a man possessing that quality so important for the novelist himself, imagination.

In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James concerns himself with the value of the young feminine nature. Confronted by the conception of a young woman affronting her destiny, he questions how logically "this slight 'personality,' the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl" should be endowed with the high attributes of a subject (Prefaces, p. 48). As he ponders the question, James sees that in the world even smaller female fry insist absolutely on mattering; and he mentions that George Eliot and Shakespeare have noted this. Referring later to another of his "light vessels of consciousness," James writes in the Preface to What Maisie Knew:

> . . . I at once recognized, that my light vessel of consciousness, swaying in such a draught, couldn't be with verisimilitude a rude little boy; since, beyond the fact that little boys are never so "present," the sensibility of the female young is indubitably, for early youth, the greater, and my plan would call, on the part of my protagonist, for "no end" of sensibility. . . . I should have to invest her with perceptions easily and most infinitely quickened. So handsomely fitted out, yet not in a manner too grossly to affront probability, she might well see me through the whole course of my design (Prefaces, pp. 143-144).

James refers to Maisie's so limited consciousness as the very field of his picture.

Dorothea Krook has commented extensively on James's characters, pointing out that they are very superior people. "They are all, these Jamesian heroes and heroines, endowed in an extraordinary degree with the gifts of intelligence, imagination, sensibility, and a rare delicacy of moral insight; and they are all extraordinarily articulate about all that they see and understand."[2] Krook goes ahead to say, however, as James himself does, that they must not be too fully cognizant. Writing of the limited consciousness, she contends that the common notion of a partial view will not meet the Jamesian case. "For it would not be true to say that the Jamesian centres of consciousness are 'partial' in the ordinary sense--in the sense of being limited, by this or that obvious blind spot, this or that obvious patch of stupidity or perversity or inconsequentiality, which shuts out from their vision some portion of the world. They see 'everything,' these remarkable consciousnesses of the late novels. . . ."[3] What is the limitation, then, of these exceptional people? Krook says it is that which marks the division between men and angels, what old-fashioned moralists have called the passions. "To match the beauty and refinement of their virtues, the destructive passions in the late novels accordingly appear in their most refined, most subtle, forms; and in these forms they are . . . so inseparably bound up with the virtues that it is not at all easy to see at what point they cease to be graces and become sins."[4] These virtues in their sinful aspect can be named,

however, and include pride, boredom, cankerous sexuality, and finally worship of the beautiful, "that infernal aestheticism by which . . . such men believe themselves saved but are in fact damned."[5] Krook concludes her discussion of character by distinguishing James from other novelists by the amount of intelligence he affords his centers of consciousness. She writes: "By allowing so much, he risks at every moment the annihilation of the very possibility of destructive passion: one more turn of the screw, one feels, and they really will be angelic intelligences; and that will be the end of all story and drama."[6]

The qualities which James found essential for his characters have been emphasized to this point in the discussion. It remains now to consider how he presents and uses his characters. In "The Art of Fiction," he shows his agreement with Besant's position that the novelist must make his characters clear in outline. He says, though: " . . . but how he shall make them so is a secret between his good angel and himself. It would be absurdly simple if he could be taught that a great deal of 'description' would make them so, or that on the contrary the absence of description and the cultivation of dialogue, or the absence of dialogue and the multiplication of 'incident,' would rescue him from his difficulties" (AF, p. 404). But the "how" cannot be disclosed, and these methods melt into each other anyway since they are intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. As these parts are not distinct, so, James

says, there is no distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident. "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it?" (AF, p. 405). It is an incident, James says, when a woman stands up with her hand resting on a table and looks out at you in a certain way; it is also an expression of character. In these statements, James's organicism is prominent, and he indicates the difficulty involved in an attempt to teach one how to create character.

The discussion of the novel has shown that James's organicism is maintained in the Prefaces. Although he may have continued to think that certain aspects of the artistic process could not be taught to another, the careful delineation in the Prefaces of many facets of his method clearly shows his later acceptance of the fact that much can be revealed, and profitably so. A great deal is shown of his mature theory of character presentation and use.

Beach says that the most notable peculiarity in the conception of James's stories "is the refined, not to say fine-drawn interpretation of character, of motive, and of personal relations."[7] He points out further that for the situations and reactions of character to be conveyed through the consciousness of persons in the story the persons must be of fine discrimination, of keen penetration, of delicate sensibility.[8] Here Beach touches on the use to which James

put his characters. James details this process in several of the Prefaces.

That the center of interest in Roderick Hudson is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness and that James delineates carefully the kind of consciousness his must be, have been referred to. Rowland's purpose is to reflect his total adventure: what happens to him is above all to feel certain things happening to others (Prefaces, p. 16). James uses Rowland, then, to project Roderick's story; but his subject remains Rowland's view and experience of Roderick. In The American, Christopher Newman is the "lighted" figure. James writes: " . . . for the interest of everything is all that it is in his vision, his conception, his interpretation . . ." (Prefaces, p. 37). The center of the subject in The Portrait of a Lady is in the young woman's own consciousness. James said to himself: "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" (Prefaces, p. 51). He should make her only interested enough in other things that this relation would not seem too limited. Other characters were to be satellites, interests contributive only to the greater one.

As well as being centers of interest, Rowland Mallet, Newman, and Isabel Archer are mirrors or reflectors. In the Preface to The Princess Casamassima, James says that he caught in rereading his productions from Roderick Hudson to The Golden Bowl "that provision for interest which consists

in placing advantageously, placing right in the middle of the light, the most polished of possible mirrors of the subject" (Prefaces, p. 70). He names in addition to the above list as unmistakable examples, Merton Densher, Lambert Strether, "he a mirror verily of miraculous silver and quite pre-eminent," and the Prince and the Princess of The Golden Bowl (Prefaces, pp. 70-71). Confirming the earlier discussion in this chapter of the eminence of his characters is James's comment: "I should note the extent to which these persons are, so far as their other passions permit, intense perceivers, all, of their respective predicaments . . ." (Prefaces, p. 71).

A somewhat different use of character, yet closely related to the mirror, is that to which James puts Maisie and which he labels in one place "associational magic" (Prefaces, p. 147). James writes: "She is not only the extraordinary 'ironic centre' I have already noted; she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension; of lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them, a precious element of dignity" (Prefaces, p. 147). Specifically, she makes other characters portentous by the play of her good faith. She makes her mother above all concrete, immense, awful (Prefaces, p. 147). James presents a similar interaction in discussing "fools" and "free spirits" in the Preface to The Spoils of Poynton. He says: " . . . the fixed

constituents of almost any reproducible action are the fools who minister, at a particular crisis, to the intensity of the free spirit engaged with them. The fools are interesting by contrast, by the salience they acquire, and by a hundred other of their advantages; and the free spirit, always much tormented, and by no means always triumphant, is heroic, ironic, pathetic or whatever, and, as exemplified in the record of Fleda Vetch, for instance, 'successful,' only through having remained free" (Prefaces, pp. 129-130).

That James deliberately ascribed to characters certain attributes for the purpose of conveying his theme is perhaps most clearly seen in the Preface to The Wings of the Dove. James explains that the situation on which this fiction rests--that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life but early stricken and condemned to die--had long been vividly present to him. He realized that his concern could not be with the act of dying but must be with the act of living; the process of life gives way fighting. Defining drama as the portrayal of a catastrophe determined in spite of oppositions, James says that his young woman would herself be the opposition to the catastrophe announced by the Fates (Prefaces, pp. 288-290). To her, life would be dazzlingly livable and "if the great pang for her is in what she must give up we shall appreciate it the more from the sight of all she has" (Prefaces, p. 201). Accordingly, James invests her with all things but health--freedom, money, a mobile mind and personal charm, the power to

interest and attach; she is "the last fine flower--blooming alone, for the fullest attestation of her freedom--of an 'old' New York stem . . ." (Prefaces, p. 292).

Finally, a discussion of James's conception and use of the confidant is warranted here although the confidant is intimately involved with both point of view and representation. Sister M. Corona Sharp, in her study of the confidante, asserts that the type was perfected by James to meet a fictive need not generally felt before his time and which was to be met by his followers by such devices as the stream of consciousness.[9] While developing his observer as protagonist, James saw the technical advantage of converting friendship with a mature woman into a confidential relation. The device he developed he called a ficelle, defined by Sharp as "any device (literally, 'string,' and by extension, 'stage trick') used by James to obviate a difficulty in the method of narration, or presentation of character."[10] The ficelle can provide the protagonist with facts and interpretations and also can elicit data from him for the benefit of the reader. For this exchange the confidant as well as the center must be exceptional. Sharp continues: "Most Jamesian protagonists are isolated and lonely. They need and desire a friendship to help them unfold, expand, and make their way. In order to achieve this, the confidante must be sympathetic, must have a keen intelligence to keep up with the divinations of the 'center,' and is better off if endowed with a vivid imagination."[11]

In the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James says that it is a familiar truth to the novelist that certain elements in any work are of the essence, belonging to the subject directly, while others are only of form, belonging only indirectly (Prefaces, p. 53). Henrietta Stackpole in The Portrait and Maria Gostrey in The Ambassadors belong to the latter classification. "Each of these persons is but wheels to the coach; neither belongs to the body of that vehicle, or is for a moment accommodated with a seat inside" (Prefaces, p. 54). They are cases, each, of the light ficelle according to James. Writing of Strether, James explains: "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 . . ." (Prefaces, p. 321). Maria Gostrey is not Strether's friend in essence. "She is the reader's friend much rather--in consequence of dispositions that make him so eminently require one; and she acts in that capacity, and really in that capacity alone, with exemplary devotion, from beginning to end of the book. She is an enrolled, a direct, aid to lucidity; she is in fine, to tear off her mask, the most unmitigated and abandoned of ficelles" (Prefaces, p. 322). James holds that the ficelle character is artfully dissimulated throughout The Ambassadors "to that extent that, with the seams or joints of Maria Gostrey's ostensible connectedness taken particular care of, duly smoothed over, that is, and anxiously kept from showing

as 'pieced on,' this figure doubtless achieves, after a fashion, something of the dignity of a prime idea . . ." (Prefaces, pp. 323-324). Maria's specific value to James's dramatic method will be left for discussion in a later chapter.

NOTES

[1]"Henry James and Formalist Criticism of the Novel in English in the Twentieth Century," unpubl. diss. (Tulane University, 1965), p. 42.

[2]The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge, 1962), p. 15.

[3]Ibid., p. 402.

[4]Ibid., p. 403.

[5]Ibid., pp. 403-404.

[6]Ibid., p. 405.

[7]The Method of Henry James, p. 64.

[8]Ibid.

[9]The Confidante in Henry James (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1963), p. xiii.

[10]Ibid., p. xxiii.

[11]Ibid., p. xxiv.

CHAPTER V

POINT OF VIEW

Most critics who have written about James have included in their evaluations, especially if their main concern has been with James's technique, comments about point of view. There is not always agreement, however, regarding either James's understanding or use of the term or other terms closely related to point of view. Analysis here of James's own statements and some of the diverse criticism may serve to clarify this portion of his mature theory of the novel.

Beach has noted the fact that the stories of James are records of seeing rather than doing, the process of a story being a "process of vision."[1] "In a story so conceived, a matter of prime importance must naturally be the point of view from which the vision is had, the source of information or the medium through which what is to be seen is conveyed to the reader."[2] In the choice and maintenance of a point of view, James seeks a consistency of effect that comes from centering attention on a chosen consciousness.

Various ones of these centers have been discussed in the preceding chapter dealing with character--Rowland Mallet, Isabel Archer, Maisie, Strether. Considered, too, are "registers" whom James uses for alternating points of

view in the same novel--Kate, Milly, and Merton and the Prince and the Princess. Beach contends that the author pays for the privilege of seeing the situation from more sides than one. "He pays with the loss of that growing intensity, that larger consistency, which derive from uninterrupted continuity of the same conscious observation such as we have in 'Poynton,' in 'Maisie,' in 'The Ambassadors,' and . . . 'Roderick Hudson.' At any rate, one gets from 'The Dove' much less of a sense of unity and distinctness, in the whole, and in many of the parts, than from 'Poynton' or 'The Ambassadors,' or . . . from 'The Golden Bowl.'"[3] Of the confidants Beach says: "These persons do not tend to confuse the point of view. They serve rather to strengthen the light thrown upon the situation from the mind of the chief observer."[4]

Sharp proposes that James devised and perfected the limited point of view to meet the demands made by his method as he moved away from expository to dramatic narrative. She finds that the confidant is a device needed to supplement the limited point of view, a fictive aid in the expression of innermost experiences.[5]

Krook maintains that James's theory of the novel revolves around three seminal principles, which are not easy to define: the key words, however, are "aspects," "conditions," and "internal relations."[6] To help clarify the meaning of these terms, she writes:

> That art concerns itself to render the world of appearances; that these appearances exist only in the consciousness, indeed are the content of the consciousness, of human observers; that the world of art therefore is a beautiful representation of the appearances present to a particular consciousness under particular conditions, and the artist's overriding task is accordingly to exhibit in the concrete, with the greatest possible completeness and consistency, as well as vividness and intensity, the particular world of appearances accessible to a particular consciousness under the specific conditions created for it by the artist; these are the elements of James's theory of art.[7]

This view gives rise to those special technical problems about which James has written in the Prefaces. The novelist is under the most binding obligation to present exhaustively the limiting conditions of the protagonist center of consciousness so that he may show only those apprehensions which are accessible to that consciousness. Likewise, the limiting conditions of other persons who make up the situation must be exhaustively rendered.[8] "And this, the complete rendering of all the conditions, is the way in which the novelist defines his centre of consciousness, and consequently . . . the 'aspect' or 'point of view' under which the world in that particular novel is being presented."[9]

Perhaps these interpretations provide a sufficient background for understanding what James himself has said about point of view. In "The Art of Fiction," James uses "point of view" only twice and both times in a non-technical sense having nothing to do with execution of the novel. Nevertheless, the attitude toward freedom expressed in this piece is relevant to the discussion here. James argues for

the freedom of the artist to feel and to say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, he says, is a limitation of freedom. Only after the author's choice has been made and his standard indicated can others follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. "Then in a word we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution" (AF, p. 399). Only with his philosophy of freedom of execution could James have experimented with the form of the novel as he did and perfected his particular technical use of point of view. This is the background of the development of this aspect of his theory. That his interpretation of point of view could not have been presented in "The Art of Fiction" is obvious; his method had not yet evolved.

William B. Thomas emphasizes the infrequent use by James of the term "point of view," saying that this signifies not so much a rejection of it as the simple fact that he had almost no use for it. "James' principle terms were central intelligence and center of interest or center of the subject (in someone's consciousness; not 'center of consciousness,' as so many commentators have written); he makes a great deal of 'center' and 'centers' . . .; in addition he used, in the Prefaces to the last great novels, the words mirror, reflector, and register."[10] Statements in the Prefaces relevant to point of view may, then, not actually contain the term. For example, James shows the strictures

he placed on himself in this regard in these terms: "Superficially, in 'A London Life,' it might well have seemed that the only way to picture the intervention on Laura Wing's behalf of the couple just named [Lady Davenant and Wendover] was to break the chain of the girl's own consciousness and report the matter quite straight and quite shamelessly; this course had indeed every merit but that of its playing the particular game to which I had addressed myself. . . . Any muddle-headed designer can beg the question of perspective, but science is required for making it rule the scene" (Prefaces, p. 137).

The same demand for a focal point is evident in the Preface to What Maisie Knew. James writes:

> The one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it. . . . I should have to stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably saw; a great deal of which quantity she either wouldn't understand at all or would quite misunderstand. . . . To that then I settled--to the question of giving it all, the whole situation . . . only as it might pass before her and appeal to her . . . so that we fellow witnesses, we not more invited but only more expert critics, should feel in strong possession of it (Prefaces, pp. 144-145).

James says further that Maisie's simpler conclusions depend on her terms, while our commentary attends and amplifies and seems to represent us as going "behind" the facts. But it is her relation that concerns us; we simply take advantage of the facts better than she herself (Prefaces, p. 146).

It is in the Prefaces to the late novels that James becomes somewhat more specific in regard to point of view.

In the Preface to The Wings of the Dove, he describes his use of successive centers: "There was the 'fun,' to begin with, of establishing one's successive centres--of fixing them so exactly that the portions of the subject commanded by them as by happy points of view, and accordingly treated from them, would constitute, so to speak, sufficiently solid blocks of wrought material, squared to the sharp edge, as to have weight and mass and carrying power; to make for construction, that is, to conduce to effect and to provide for beauty" (Prefaces, p. 296). As James continues, he details the execution, saying that each piece is true to its pattern, never letting go of its scheme of clearness. Clarity is obtained in Book First, James writes,

> . . . through the associated consciousness of my two prime young persons [Kate Croy and Merton Densher], for whom I early recognized that I should have to consent, under stress, to a practical fusion of consciousness. It is into the young woman's 'ken' that Merton Densher is represented as swimming; but her mind is not here, rigorously, the one reflector. There are occasions when it plays this part, just as there are others when his plays it, and an intelligible plan consists naturally not a little in fixing such occasions and making them, on one side and the other, sufficient to themselves (Prefaces, pp. 299-300).

James says that he has never embraced the logic of any process superior to proceeding by centers. After they are selected and fixed, they determine and rule. "There is no economy of treatment without an adopted, a related point of view, and though I understand, under certain degrees of pressure, a represented community of vision between several parties to the action when it makes for concentration, I

understand no breaking-up of the register, no sacrifice of the recording consistency, that doesn't rather scatter and weaken" (Prefaces, p. 300). Writing of Densher's interview with Mrs. Lowder, which is not "seen over Kate Croy's shoulder," James questions whether or not his apparent deviation here counts as a muddle. He answers: "No, distinctly not; for I had definitely opened the door, as attention of perusal of the first two Books will show, to the subjective community of my young pair" (Prefaces, p. 304). James admits that he had scarcely availed himself of the privilege of seeing with Densher's eyes; but, he contends: " . . . the point is that I had intelligently marked my possible, my occasional need of it" (Prefaces, p. 305). Beach, it will be recalled, holds that James pays in loss of intensity and consistency for seeing the situation in The Wings of the Dove from more than one side. James apparently thinks that he does not so pay because of his use of what he calls the fusion of consciousness.

A new block of material begins with Book Third, a new mass of interest governed from a new center. James strives to keep strong his center, which dwells mainly "in the depths of Milly Theale's 'case,' where close beside it, however, we meet a supplementary reflector, that of the lucid even though so quivering spirit of her dedicated friend" (Prefaces, p. 305). The latter is, of course, Milly's confidant, Mrs. Stringham. James says that the "more or less associated consciousness" of the two women deals with the

next presented face of the subject. Under the concept of organic re-economization, James has Mrs. Stringham register a highly particular moment, appealing directly to the reader (Prefaces, p. 305). Book Fifth readopts the previous center, "Milly's now almost full-blown consciousness." James concludes his discussion of Milly with: " . . . I find striking, charming and curious, the author's instinct everywhere for the indirect presentation of his main image. I note how, again and again, I go but a little way with the direct--that is with the straight exhibition of Milly. . . . All of which proceeds, obviously, from her painter's tenderness of imagination about her, which reduces him to watching her, as it were, through the successive windows of other people's interest in her" (Prefaces, p. 306). The attitude expressed here seems to explain James's need for additional centers and a confidant in The Wings of the Dove.

For The Ambassadors James uses only one center, his hero, Strether. He writes: "The thing was to be so much this worthy's intimate adventure that even the projection of his consciousness upon it from beginning to end without intermission or deviation would probably still leave a part of its value for him, and a fortiori for ourselves, unexpressed" (Prefaces, p. 317). Other persons with their situations and their relation to the leading motive would people the scene. "But," James says, "Strether's sense of these things, and Strether's only should avail me for showing them . . ." (Prefaces, p. 317). The advantages to be gained from

the use of only one center are a large unity and the grace of intensity (Prefaces, p. 318). If James had endowed Strether with the "romantic privilege" of the "first person," variety and many other queer matters might have been smuggled in by a back door. He writes: "Suffice it, to be brief, that the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness, and that looseness, never much my affair, had never been so little so as on this particular occasion" (Prefaces, p. 320). He further explains his rejection of first person when he says:

> The "first person" . . . is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with, at the best, by our English tradition, so loosely and vaguely after all, so little respectfully, on so scant a presumption of exposure to criticism. Strether, on the other hand, encaged and provided for as 'The Ambassadors' encages and provides, has to keep in view proprieties much stiffer and more salutary than any our straight and credulous gape are likely to bring home to him, has exhibitional conditions to meet, in a word, that forbid the terrible fluidity of self-revelation (Prefaces, p. 321).

At this point in the Preface, James discusses the confidant as a ficelle which has already been considered in chapter iv.

In the Preface to The Golden Bowl, James again refers to the "marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view" of his presented action. Although, he says, he may decide to call his mode of treatment the "very straightest and closest possible" (Prefaces, p. 327). James reiterates his preference for dealing with his subject-matter through the sensibility of a more or less detached witness or

reporter who contributes to the case "a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it" (Prefaces, p. 327). He writes: "I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it. . . . I track my uncontrollable footsteps, right and left, after the fact, while they take their quick turn, even on stealthiest tiptoe, toward the point of view that, within the compass, will give me most instead of least to answer for" (Prefaces, p. 328). Despite James's announced preference for the detached reporter, he concedes that in The Golden Bowl there is no other participant than each of the real, the deeply involved participants. He says: " . . . but I nevertheless affect myself as having held my system fast and fondly, with one hand at least, by the manner in which 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. . . . The function of the Princess, in the remainder, matches exactly with his; the register of her consciousness is as closely kept . . ." (Prefaces, p. 329). More specifically James writes: "We see Charlotte also at first, and we see Adam Verver, let alone our seeing Mrs. Assingham, and every one and every thing else, but as they are visible in the Prince's interest, so to speak--by which I mean of course in the interest of his being himself handed over to us. With

a like consistency we see the same persons and things again but as Maggie's interest, her exhibitional charm, determines the view" (Prefaces, p. 330).

At the outset of this chapter, it was asserted that various attempts to interpret James's concept of point of view have been made. Lubbock asks referring to The Ambassadors how the author is to stand aside and let Strether's thought tell its own story. He answers: "The thing must be seen from our own point of view and no other,"[11] Later he writes: "But though in The Ambassadors [sic] the point of view is primarily Strether's, and though it appears to be his throughout the book, there is in fact an insidious shifting of it, so artfully contrived that the reader may arrive at the end without suspecting the trick. The reader, all unawares, is placed in a better position for an understanding of Strether's history, better than the position of Strether himself."[12] Finally, Lubbock concludes: "The Ambassadors [sic], then, is a story which is seen from one man's point of view, and yet a story in which that point of view is itself a matter for the reader to confront and to watch constructively."[13] Lubbock refers to the two points of view that he presents as a paradox which, indeed, they seem to be. James says, it will be recalled, that Strether's sense only should avail him [James] of showing other persons and things in the novel. Of Maisie he says that the whole situation is given to her; the fact that the reader amplifies means simply that he takes advantage of the

facts better than she, not that he is more "invited." Perhaps in The Ambassadors there is the shifting of point of view to the reader which Lubbock proposes, but James's explanations in the Prefaces certainly do not indicate that it was "artfully contrived," intentional or even recognized.

Thomas emphasizes the importance of terms which include "center" as one of their parts, pointing out that James used centers as a means of concentrating and unifying the action about one prominent character. He says further: "It is imperative that we avoid confusion of view with center. The latter term, to James, was always center of the subject; that had to be concentrated within or upon a central character. Center, then, is inseparable from a prominent participant in the action, though not necessarily the protagonist; point of view approximates what James meant by register."[14] Thomas is using "point of view" here to mean the twentieth-century concept of wholly limited or complete singleness of view at which he says James never arrived. He writes: "The most misleading assumption has been that center, in James' mind is equivalent to the point of view of a third-person protagonist, as the latter term is now universally used and understood."[15] Instead, Thomas contends that in The Ambassadors in which James approached this point of view, he has made Strether assume the function of the omniscient author. Strether is allied with the typical third-person protagonist by presenting all the exposition of the initial situation.[16] Thomas says, however: "What distinguishes him is his

super-perception--that which enables him to see everything James wants him to see and filter it through his own mind along with his responses to it before relaying both the fact and response to the reader. What James wants him to see, in order to carry out the authorial purpose, is what the older method required the author to present directly. This is what James means--not simply a third-person protagonist's point of view--in discussing center and central intelligence."[17] Perhaps James did only approach the twentieth-century third person limited point of view. Nevertheless, there is a problem involved in accepting Thomas's designation of point of view as approximating what James meant by "register" as opposed to "center." It is not indicated in the Prefaces that James differentiated between center and register. In fact, it seems clear that he did not make such a distinction. Thomas errs, too, in thinking that center always refers to center of the subject. Milly's situation in The Wings of the Dove is the center of the subject, for instance, but James tells of establishing successive centers from which portions of the subject would be treated. It is somewhat difficult to accept Thomas's identification of Strether with the omniscient author, for Strether, like all Jamesian characters, has limitations as James carefully shows and Krook cogently interprets.

Another effort at definition of terms is made by Taylor. She distinguishes between "center of composition," the focal point, and "central intelligence," the most

important figure because he directs the point of view. This can be seen, she says, in The Spoils of Poynton where the "things" are the focal point, but Fleda Vetch is the central figure.[18] Concerned with structure, Elizabeth Stevenson says that it was for the further ordering of the relevant parts of the whole that James developed the element which he named "point of view." She writes: "The 'point of view' in this sense is simply the logic of the consciousness exhibited inside the story. It is not necessarily the same logic from one story to another, but it is necessary that one method be chosen for each story, and then that method be held to for the honor of the maker."[19] The distinction made by Taylor can be accepted without question, it seems; and Stevenson's definition is consistent with James's analyses in the Prefaces.

Stevenson asserts, too, that "It is to this truth, the importance of structure, that anyone who reads James with care returns again and again. What beauty there is in him, what poetry, what truth, are all welded into structure."[20] Point of view is a specialized means, along with others, which contributes to the structure or, as James thought of it, the living organism.[21] Ward says that the principle of dynamic unity explains the structure of many of James's works and accounts for many of the techniques he developed. The use of a single character's point of view as a compositional center is a way of insuring that the part be indistinct from the whole.[22] Roger B. Salomon writes of James's

achievement: "James' great compromise was to bring to realism the principle of point of view--the device of using centers of consciousness built around various characters to give a sense of the coherence and fusion of all experience without the author himself abandoning his objectivity or his use of 'present' time as the primary setting of the novel."[23] In addition to being a means to structure, unity, and fusion, James's achievement with point of view contributes also to illusion. Wellek writes: "The point of view in James is not . . . just a technical device serving the 'economy of treatment,' permitting 'recording consistency.' It serves to heighten the consciousness of the character and hence to increase the reader's identification with him. Ultimately it is another device to achieve the general effect of illusion."[24]

NOTES

[1]*The Method of Henry James*, p. 56.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 67.

[4]Ibid., p. 71.

[5]*The Confidante in Henry James*, pp. xxii-xxiii, xxix.

[6]*The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James*, p. 399.

[7]Ibid., pp. 399-400.

[8]Ibid., pp. 400-401.

[9]Ibid., p. 401.

[10]"The Novelist's Point of View: A Study in the Technique of Henry James," unpubl. diss. (Bowling Green State University, 1968), p. 5.

[11]*The Craft of Fiction*, p. 156.

[12]Ibid., p. 161.

[13]Ibid., p. 170.

[14]"The Novelist's Point of View," p. 136.

[15]Ibid., p. 5.

[16]Ibid., pp. 73-74.

[17]Ibid., p. 74.

[18]"The Pictorial Element in the Theory and Practice of Henry James," p. 60.

[19]*The Crooked Corridor* (New York, 1949), p. 145.

[20]Ibid., p. 157.

[21]Ibid.

[22]*The Search for Form*, p. 17.

[23]"Realism as Disinheritance: Twain, Howells and James," *American Quarterly*, XVI (Winter, 1964), 543.

[24]"Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," p. 313.

CHAPTER VI

REPRESENTATION

According to Holland, James uses the term "representation" for the generic act of rendering reality in the arts.[1] But, Holland points out, in Partial Portraits which includes "The Art of Fiction," "he holds particularly to representational painting--in the narrower sense of three-dimensional or illusionist painting--as a governing model for literature, rather than to specifically dramatic representation; the cast of his vocabulary is predominantly pictorial."[2] "The Art of Fiction" is governed by the view that representation is fundamentally an act of imitation, and yet the discussion of the relation of morals to art and the function of form is a conception of representation founded on the act of construction or manipulation.[3] These two facets of representation are considered in this chapter.

The analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist, which James calls complete in "The Art of Fiction," has been discussed in chapter iii. Elaborating on the analogy, he writes: "Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle) is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each

other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another" (AF, pp. 393-394). In considering the freedom of the artist to experiment, James says that it is here especially that the novelist works like his brother of the brush. Of him we may always say that he has painted his picture in a manner best known to himself. One modification James admits, however; the literary artist much less than the painter can teach the fundamentals of his art. "If there are exact sciences, there are also exact arts, and the grammar of painting is so much more definite that it makes the difference" (AF, p. 399). This comment is important in understanding James's abundant appropriation of pictorial terms in his criticism. He felt keenly the dearth of adequate literary terms. Of the significance of his adaptations, Winner writes: "Though James did not develop a terminology drawn from the visual arts sufficiently fixed and technical to furnish subsequent literary criticism with a viable critical vocabulary, his adoption of analogous terms was precise enough, context controlling meaning, for his own purposes. It enabled him to develop and express a theory of the novel which has had an undisputed influence on modern criticism and fiction."[4]

The importance to James of exactness, of truth of detail has been discussed previously. Without the air of reality (solidity of specification) all other merits of the novel are as nothing. The beginning and the end of the art of the novelist is the cultivation of success in producing

the illusion of life. " . . . it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in his attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. . . . All life solicits him, and to 'render' the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business" (AF, p. 403). There are additional references to the similarity of novel and picture. Writing of the supposed distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident, James says that he can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as speaking of a picture of character. "What is either a picture or a novel that is not of character?" (AF, p. 405). Again, concerning the "modern English novel," he says: "One writes the novel, one paints the picture, of one's language and of one's time, and calling it modern English will not, alas! make the difficult task any easier" (AF, p. 406). And James asks, referring to Besant's "conscious moral purpose," how a novel, being a picture, can be either moral or immoral.

James deplores the fact that many people speak of the novel as a factitious, artificial form which alters and arranges things. He counters the idea with: "Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life without rearrangement do we feel that we are touching

truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention" (AF, p. 409). Apprehensive about Besant's position regarding selection, James maintains that while art is essentially selection, "it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive" (AF, pp. 409-410). Inclusiveness applies to subject, too, and James says that a psychological reason is to his imagination "an object adorably pictorial" (AF, p. 413).

In the first of the Prefaces, that to Roderick Hudson, James uses "representation" in the generic sense to which Holland refers. James writes of the novelist: "He embarks, rash adventurer, under the star of 'representation,' and is pledged thereby to remember that the art of interesting us in things--once these things are the right ones for his case--can only be the art of representing them. This relation to them, for invoked interest, involves his accordingly 'doing'; and it is for him to settle with his intelligence what that variable process shall commit him to" (Prefaces, pp. 8-9). Throughout the Prefaces James emphasizes pictorial representation as he does in "The Art of Fiction," but he gives a great deal of attention also to dramatic form which will be considered later. Taylor says that the most striking resemblance between the essay and the Prefaces is James's persistent use of the analogy of the painter. For James the novel is a representation of life in words as a painting is a representation of life in pigment.[5]

Beach, too, has emphasized the importance of pictorialism to James. He contends that while the essential method of fiction had always been narrative, James's pictorial preoccupation went so far as almost to bring about a reversal of the essential method.[6] Beach writes: " . . . in the most distinctive work of James the sense of progress, of story, is almost altogether lost. You have rather a sense of being present at the gradual unveiling of a picture. . . ."[7]

Viola Hopkins makes a useful and accurate distinction among James's varied uses of the term "picture." A knowledge of these distinctions will serve to clarify his comments since he relied heavily, by his own admission, on context to make his meanings precise. Hopkins writes:

> By "picture" James very often meant the over-all design of the novel, its compositional unity, its formal qualities; he also used it to denote the method of narrative development within the work which he opposed to the "scene" or to the "drama." To complicate matters further, he also at times used "scene" or "drama" and architecture and architectural metaphors to designate the over-all formal structure. Most significant, however, is his use of "picture" or "painting" as synonymous with "representational art form," for this usage reflects what he felt to be one of the most crucial problems of the literary artist.[8]

Taylor discusses in detail aspects of James's theory and practice relating to the pictorial composition which she finds to be central to his method. The first of these is the use of a "logical centre" or "commanding centre" which is a principle of composition of the novel corresponding to the establishment of a focal point in painting. In painting this is the ideal point where all lines converge and the

unity of the composition is realized; in the Jamesian novel the "commanding centre" is also a means of giving unity to the structure of the work.[9] Since James's comments in the Prefaces regarding his use of centers and their relationship to minor figures have been presented, further consideration is unwarranted here.

The second major idea which James appropriated from the art of painting is the device of foreshortening. Taylor says: "To the painter, the foreshortening of an object or figure springs from his use of correct perspective. . . . To James, foreshortening is a pictorial technique for creating the effect of a lapse of time without resorting to a full narrative development or an elaborate scene with dialogue."[10] In the Preface to Roderick Hudson, James asks how he can "boil down" many facts so that the "distilled result," the produced appearance, should have intensity, lucidity, brevity, and beauty. To treat his subject while confining his picture the artist must give all the sense without all the surface (Prefaces, pp. 13-14). James's idea here seems to be related to a mechanism of the dream which Sigmund Freud calls condensation in The Interpretation of Dreams, first published in 1900. Dream-content, the actual dream, is meager when compared to the copiousness of the dream-thoughts hidden in the dream. A comparison of the dream-content with the dream-thoughts reveals that a tremendous "work of condensation" has been accomplished.[11] Freud says that "the dream-elements have been formed out of the

whole mass of the dream-thoughts, and . . . every one of them appears, in relation to the dream-thoughts to have a multiple determination."[12] James sees the need to synthesize material as the mind condenses thoughts during a dream.

Continuing, James writes: "This eternal time-question is . . . always there and always formidable; always insisting on the effect of the great lapse and passage . . . and on the effect of compression, of composition and form, by the terms of literary arrangement" (Prefaces, p. 14). Elimination cannot be the answer; intensity must be achieved. In the Preface to The Tragic Muse, James calls the successfully foreshortened thing that in which representation is arrived at not by the addition of items but "by the art of figuring synthetically, a compactness into which the imagination may cut thick, as into the rich density of wedding-cake" (Prefaces, pp. 87-88). Later he writes: "Working out economically almost anything is the very life of the art of representation; just as the request to take on trust, tinged with the least extravagance, is the very death of the same" (Prefaces, p. 224). Perhaps James's most comprehensive statement about foreshortening appears in the Preface to Daisy Miller where he says that any real art of representation is an economic mastery of the conflict between the expansive, explosive principle in one's material and the need to keep down its characteristic "space-hunger" and "space-cunning." He continues: "The fair flower of this artful compromise is to my sense the secret of

'foreshortening'--the particular economic device for which one must have a name . . ." (Prefaces, p. 278).

Many critics have written about the effectiveness of James's foreshortening. Ward comments that the foreshortened passage not only gives a dramatic unity to a sequence of disconnected events, but also produces the effect of simultaneity. It depicts a string of episodes as a pervasive condition and converts separate events into what James calls a picture. The emphasis is on singleness of effect.[13] Winner calls "foreshortening" a key word in James's discussions of the relation of form to reality; it is the economic device by which the illusion of complexity is created without loss of compactness. " . . . as applied by James to fiction, it refers to the technique necessary to reconcile representational truth with aesthetic aims."[14]

According to Taylor, the third of James's adaptations from the manual of the painter is that of selection of details. Regarding selection Emerson writes: "'To see and reproduce' was contrasted in James's mind with 'to think, to imagine, to select, to refine, to compare,' and he was ever on the side of selection and comparison."[15] Winner points out that every artist faces the problem of selection. "What is peculiar to James is that he believed both that art should be true to the complexities of reality--the 'multitudinous references' and cross-references to developments that every experience calls forth--and that it should be in form balanced, proportioned, unified."[16] James's reference to

the importance to selection of typicality and inclusiveness in "The Art of Fiction" has been noted. In the Prefaces he writes: "Life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and selection, the latter, in search of the hard latent value with which alone it is concerned, sniffs round the mass as instinctively and unerringly as a dog suspicious of some buried bone" (Prefaces, p. 120). The difference, James explains, is that the dog desires his bone to destroy it while the artist finds in his tiny nugget "the very stuff for a clear affirmation, the happiest chance for the indestructible" (Prefaces, p. 120).

James asks, then,

> what are the signs for our guidance, what the primary laws for a saving selection, how do we know when and where to intervene, where do we place the beginnings of the wrong or the right deviation? . . . The answer may be after all that mysteries here elude us, that general considerations fail or mislead, and that even the fondest of artists need ask no wider range than the logic of the particular case. The particular case, or in other words his relation to a given subject, once the relation is established, forms in itself a little world of exercise and agitation (Prefaces, pp. 120-121).

In light of James's contention in "The Art of Fiction" that we feel we touch truth only in so far as fiction presents life without rearrangement, the use of "intervene" and "deviation" here suggests a subtle change in attitude. This indicates James's increased emphasis on form by the time he wrote the Prefaces.

Of course, James was early concerned with form as references already cited from "The Art of Fiction" show. Artistic preoccupations, freedom to feel and say, unlimited

possible experiments and experience, and a sense of reality have been discussed. James considers, too, the literal opposition of description and dialogue and incident and dialogue which some people accept. He writes: "I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art--that of being illustrative" (AF, p. 404). It is significant to recall here that James advocates the purpose of making a perfect work as being the least dangerous purpose in a work of art, the least source of corruption. While references to pictorial representation abound in "The Art of Fiction," there are no specific references to scenic or dramatic representation, indicating that this was a later development.

Critical opinions differ a great deal regarding James's use of dramatic technique. Wellek says that James's insistence on objectivity makes him condemn first-person narration and that he is not satisfied with the usual narration by an omniscient author. One way to eliminate the latter would be to approximate fiction to drama and to compose through dialogue by scenes rather than by narration and description. Wellek contends, however, that in general

James does not approve of an attempt to emulate the drama. This, he thinks, is a result of James's own unlucky experiments with the drama which sharpened his consciousness of the distinction between the novel and the play.[17] James did recognize, of course, the distinction between the two types, but there is little doubt that he did "emulate the drama."

Hoskins holds the opinion that the soundest rule James ever evolved was the necessity to dramatize. "When he understands drama as action seen, vividly unrolling before the spectator, he is infinitely right in his demands for it."[18] Isle says that in a sense one may characterize any of James's work by placing it either before or after the first years of the 1890's, the time of his dramatic efforts. These years "mark that great divide in his career which James mentions in his preface to The Golden Bowl, and they show on the surface a marked change of direction, a turning from the novel to the drama."[19]

That James recognized his debt to drama is well illustrated in a passage from the Preface to The Tragic Muse. "If the art of the drama, as a great French master of it has said, is above all the art of preparations, that is true only to a less extent of the art of the novel, and true exactly in the degree in which the art of the particular novel comes near that of the drama. The first half of a fiction insists ever on figuring to me as the stage or theatre for the second half, and I have in general given

so much space to making the theatre propitious that my halves have too often proved strangely unequal" (Prefaces, p. 86). Of the scenic form, he writes in the same Preface: "Miriam is central then to analysis, in spite of being objective; central in virtue of the fact that the whole thing has visibly, from the first, to get itself done in dramatic, or at least in scenic conditions--though scenic conditions which are as near an approach to the dramatic as the novel may permit itself and which have this in common with the latter, that they move in the light of alternation" (Prefaces, pp. 89-90). Again, James says of The Reverberator that he felt his subject as a small straight action and so placed it in "that blest drama-light which, really making for intelligibility as nothing else does, orders and regulates, even when but faintly turned on; squares things and keeps them in happy relation to each other" (Prefaces, p. 182). It is a case of the planned rotation of aspects and of scenic determination of them.

Most critics recognize dialogue as a basic element in James's scenes; some de-emphasize it, however, taking the position that James did not put maximum reliance on it. In the Preface to The Awkward Age, he calls dialogue "one of the happiest of forms" although he criticizes editors and publishers and the reading public for demanding it without regard for its quality. Clarifying what he thinks it should be, James writes ironically: "This wisdom [need for dialogue] had always been in one's ears; but it had at the same

time been equally in one's eyes that really constructive dialogue, dialogue organic and dramatic, speaking for itself, representing and embodying substance and form, is among us an uncanny and abhorrent thing, not be dealt with on any terms" (Prefaces, pp. 106-107).

It is in the Preface to The Awkward Age, generally conceded to be the most dramatic of James's novels, that he most fully describes his dramatic method. In carrying his design through, he says, he glimpsed the confidence of the dramatist strong in the sense of his postulate. The dramatist has to build; he is committed to construction and must drive deep his vertical supports and lay across and firmly fix his horizontal resting pieces. His scheme holds, and so James felt his scheme hold giving him more than he had hoped for (Prefaces, p. 109). When he sketched his project for his publisher, he drew on a sheet of paper a circle consisting of small rounds distributed at equal distance about a central object. He writes: "The central object was my situation, my subject in itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be so to light with all due intensity one of its aspects" (Prefaces, p. 110). Each of the "lamps" would be the light of a single "social Occasion" in the history of the characters involved and would bring out the "latent colour" of the scene in question and cause it to illustrate its bearing on the theme. James says: "I

revelled in this notion of the Occasion as a thing by itself, really and completely a scenic thing. . . . The beauty of the conception was in this approximation of the respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play. . . . The divine distinction of the act of a play . . . was, I reasoned, in its special, its guarded objectivity" (Prefaces, pp. 110-111). James's intention, then, was to make the presented occasion tell all its story itself.

Exhibition in a "story" may mean twenty different ways, but the play consents to the logic of but one way, mathematically right, James says. "We are shut up wholly to cross-relations, relations all within the action itself; no part of which is related to anything but some other part--save of course by the relation of the total to life" (Prefaces, p. 114). The picture of Nanda Brookenham's situation presents itself on absolutely scenic lines, and each of these scenes in itself and in relation to other scenes abides by the principle of the stage play (Prefaces, p. 115). It is at this point that James sees the breakdown of the distinction between substance and form which was discussed in chapter ii. He concludes with his claim that the synthetic "whole" is the dramatist's form, the only one we have to do with (Prefaces, p. 118).

James explicates his use of the scene in later Prefaces. Describing the "quiet recitals" of <u>What Maisie Knew</u>, James says that they are "little constituted dramas, little exhibitions founded on the logic of the 'scene,' the unit of

the scene, the general scenic consistency . . ." (Prefaces, p. 157). R. W. Short interprets the logic of the scene as applying to only a part of a given work, but this part in relation to other parts.[20] James explains: "The point, however, is that the scenic passages are wholly and logically scenic, having for their rule of beauty the principle of the 'conduct,' the organic development, of a scene--the entire succession of values that flower and bear fruit on ground solidly laid for them" (Prefaces, p. 158). The unit of the scene, according to Short, is the self-unity of the separable scenic part, "what we might in a strict use of the word call a single scene--a dramatic meeting and exchange among characters."[21]

The word "alternation" has appeared in earlier quotations from the Prefaces. At this point the significance of the term must be considered. In the Preface to What Maisie Knew, James says that the treatment by scene regularly recurs; the intervals between the scenes remain preparative. "The great advantage for the total effect is that we feel, with the definite alternation, how the theme is being treated" (Prefaces, p. 158). Contending that the material of The Ambassadors is taken absolutely for the stuff of drama as is the material for The Wings of the Dove, James writes of the scenic consistency of the latter:

> It disguises that virtue, in the oddest way in the world, by just looking, as we turn its pages, as little scenic as possible; but it sharply divides itself, just as the composition before us does; into the parts that prepare, that tend in fact to

> over-prepare, for scenes, and the parts, or otherwise into the scenes, that justify and crown the preparation. It may definitely be said, I think, that everything in it that is not scene . . . is discriminated preparation, is the fusion and synthesis of picture. These alternations propose themselves all recogniseably, I think, from an early stage, as the very form and figure of "The Ambassadors" (Prefaces, pp. 322-323).

James's explanation of his use of alternation of picture and scene shows a departure from his comment in "The Art of Fiction" that he could not imagine composition existing in a series of blocks. Alternation is, of course, a part of his recently-developed dramatic technique. Certainly he is still concerned with the aesthetic whole, and Short asserts that scenic consistency embodies the Jamesian equivalent of the dramatic unities, "the sum total of the forces making the whole work cohere in a completely unified aesthetic organism."[22]

In connection with the alternation between scene and picture, James discusses the function of Maria Gostrey as a ficelle. She dines with Strether in London and accompanies him to a play: through these activities James treats scenically the whole question of Strether's past. The scene in which the situation at Woollett is revealed James describes as "an excellent standard scene; copious, comprehensive, and accordingly never short, but with its office as definite as that of the hammer on the gong of the clock, the office of expressing all that is in the hour" (Prefaces, p. 323).

Ward says that it was when James resumed writing novels after his experience in the theater that he formulated the

principle of the alternation of picture and scene, "that is, the alternation of foreshortened narration, made concrete and immediate so as to resemble a picture, and dramatic scene."[23] He continues: "Each technique tends to convert an episode or a series of episodes into a single presentation. Relationships between incidents are not sequential, but--as James puts it--logical. Incidents are occasions in which aspects of a situation are exhibited; and the situation is looked upon as static, not fluid."[24]

Isle calls James's use of alternation the method by which he achieved a unique texture for the novel. He refers to the picture as a "meditation by the central character, often approaching an interior monologue."[25] Morris Roberts shows a similar interpretation when he says that James uses picture as a "prolonged moment of reflection."[26] It is by James's reference to narrative passages as "pictures" that he made clear that he did not have in mind an abundance of visual detail or of description to "set the time and the place" according to Winner. She writes: "Instead, he was expressing his adherence to the ideal of integration that he found supremely realized in Tintoretto and Delacroix: thoughts, gestures, speech and décor in the novel should be fused as color and line, detail and mass, figures and background, in the greatest paintings are inseparable."[27]

Elaborating on the meaning of James's standard scene, Short says that it treats all the submitted material, all that has been amassed by the preparative passages and all

that exists between the characters participating in it. It must have its own beginning, middle, and end; it must be principally dialogue.[28] Differing with Ward, Short writes: "It [scene] must never become static, since it bears the heavy responsibility of communicating to the fiction its illusion of delicately surging life, that is, to use the term James insisted upon, life which is 'represented' not merely reported."[29] Short finds it difficult to establish the limits of pictures since they lead so inevitably to scenes that one's mind begins early to reformulate their static values into terms of action.[30] James surely would not object to this comment since he himself writes: "Beautiful exceedingly . . . those occasions or parts of an occasion when the boundary line between picture and scene bears a little the weight of the double pressure" (Prefaces, p. 300).

Some writers see the alternation of picture and scene as giving an overall pictorial effect, while others see the whole as scenically constructed. Espousing the former position, Taylor says that the parts that prepare for scenes and the scenes themselves fuse to give the synthesis of picture. "The 'dramatic' scene in the novel is, then, a device used to frame the reader's attention; it focuses on one small area of the canvas; when all of these areas have been examined and put together, the whole picture emerges. The dramatic scene is thus a means to the end of developing the novel as picture."[31] On the other hand, Isle finds scenic

construction to be something more than the extensive use of dramatic scenes in dialogue for moments of crisis. It is the whole basis of representation, of rendering rather than telling, in a novel.[32] Isle writes: "Scene becomes the key to character in action and in conflict with others, dialogue begins to assume specialized forms, and the 'picture' elements become mainly 'scene-setting,' and are themselves very often 'dramatized,' made scenes without dialogue, quite often taking place in the mind of one of the characters. The balance between picture and scene is one key to the form of these novels; another is the realization that both scene and picture are dramatized, made immediate and living."[33]

James concludes his analysis of The Ambassadors on an interesting note. He is moved to add, he says, after so much insistence on the scenic side of his labor that the charms of the non-scenic may still keep their intelligibility. "Infinitely suggestive such an observation as this last on the whole delightful head, where representation is concerned, of possible variety, of effective expressional change and contrast" (Prefaces, p. 325). James illustrates his point by calling Strether's first encounter with Chad Newsome an absolute attestation of the non-scenic form which yet lays the firmest hand on representational effect. He says further that from an equal play of such oppositions the book gathers an intensity that fairly adds to the dramatic. He ends the Preface with his famous comment that "the Novel remains still, under the right persuasion, the most

independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms" (Prefaces, p. 326). Perhaps Francis Fergusson's assessment is the most profound of all when he writes: "I should prefer to say that the late novels are narrative and dramatic and plastic. The heresy would be to insist on one aspect of their form to the exclusion of the others."[34]

NOTES

[1]*The Expense of Vision*, p. 121.

[2]Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[3]Ibid., pp. 122-123.

[4]"Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," p. 15.

[5]"The Pictorial Element in the Theory and Practice of Henry James," p. 17.

[6]*The Method of Henry James*, p. 38.

[7]Ibid., p. 39.

[8]"The Art of Seeing: Art Themes and Techniques in the Work of Henry James," unpubl. diss. (New York University, 1960), pp. 192-193.

[9]"The Pictorial Element in the Theory and Practice of Henry James," p. 48.

[10]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[11]Trans. A. A. Brill (New York, 1950), p. 175.

[12]Ibid., p. 181.

[13]*The Search for Form*, p. 32.

[14]"Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," p. 12.

[15]"Henry James and the Limitations of Realism," p. 161.

[16]"Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," p. 11.

[17]"Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," pp. 309-310.

[18]"Henry James and the Future of the Novel," p. 90.

[19]Experiments in Form, p. 18.

[20]"Some Critical Terms of Henry James," PMLA, LXV (Sept., 1950), 673-674.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., p. 674.

[23]The Search for Form, p. 33.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Experiments in Form, p. 10.

[26]"Henry James and the Art of Foreshortening," The Review of English Studies, XXII (July, 1946), 212.

[27]"Pictorialism in Henry James's Theory of the Novel," p. 15.

[28]"Some Critical Terms of Henry James," pp. 676-677.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 678.

[31]"The Pictorial Element in the Theory and Practice of Henry James," p. 86.

[32]Experiments in Form, p. 37.

[33]Ibid.

[34]"James's Idea of Dramatic Form," Kenyon Review, V (Autumn, 1943), 503.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

That James was one of the first writers to become articulate about the theory of the novel is evident from his comments in "The Art of Fiction." Certainly the careful delineation of his creative experiences in the Prefaces is an outstanding contribution to critical thought. One of the earliest of his demands for the novel was that it attempt to represent life. This remained a consistent requirement, for throughout the Prefaces there are numerous references to the necessity for verisimilitude in artistic rendering.

James believed in freedom for the novelist to choose his subject, his donnée. He found subject to matter in the highest degree, however, and hoped for novelists to choose only the richest ones; but it was not unlawful to him to deal with any particle of multitudinous life. He elaborates on the concept of freedom of choice and on the importance of subject in the Prefaces, but his basic premises remain the same.

Another aspect of freedom is evident in James's assertion in "The Art of Fiction" that one cannot say beforehand what a novel should be. Since it is in its broadest definition a direct impression of life, there must be freedom to

feel and freedom to say or execute. James describes the novel as a living thing like any other organism, but he believes that the novelist must hold the finished shape of his work in mind as he allows his germ to develop. That he held to the dynamic and organic principles is amply demonstrated in the Prefaces.

James is so intent on the organic principle in "The Art of Fiction" that he insists that there is no distinction between the novel and the romance. There is no obligation to which the romancer would not be held equally with the novelist. In the Prefaces, however, James admits that some pictures of life have an air of romance while others are steeped in the element of reality. He defines the real as the things we cannot possibly not know. The romantic, he says, stands for the things that we never can "directly" know. The only general attribute that fits all cases of romance is that it deals with liberated experience, that which is uncontrolled by our general sense of the way things happen. Since James has not repudiated his demand for the air of reality, of verisimilitude, in the novel, it can be concluded that his mature theory of the novel included a distinction between the novel and the romance which he did not earlier acknowledge.

The novelist's art is largely dependent on the character of the novelist himself. In "The Art of Fiction," James says that there are many ways in which a writer can make his novel interesting; and he holds that they are successful in

proportion as they reveal a particular mind. Even selection of the real is individual. To write a good novel one must possess the sense of reality, a capacity for receiving straight impressions. Exactness and truth of detail are essential to creating an illusion of life, and James finds the basis for exactness in copious note-taking by the novelist.

Many references to verisimilitude throughout the Prefaces show that James remained concerned with the air of reality. His experience in taking the notes which formed the foundation of The Princess Casamassima helped James clarify his practical view of note-taking which he elaborates in the Preface to that novel. The critical acclaim he received for truth of detail in the book bears witness to the wisdom of his theory.

James insisted, too, on a wide experience and a fine mind for the novelist. Defining experience as "impressions," an "immense sensibility" and the "very atmosphere of the mind," he holds it to be of utmost significance. "The power to guess the unseen from the seen" and "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!" are well-known quotations from "The Art of Fiction." James writes also in this critical piece that "No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind."

The Prefaces substantiate James's emphasis on the artistic sensibility and consciousness. However, he seems to limit somewhat the artist's freedom to expand his

experience when he says that whatever life gives we regard very much as imposed and inevitable. While imagination is mentioned in "The Art of Fiction," a great deal more consideration is given to it in the Prefaces. Apparently imagination, defined perhaps as the quality of the mind making possible the conversion of experience to revelation or truth, became to James an increasingly important attribute of the artist.

Character is the first-discussed of the three aspects of the art of the novelist to which this paper is limited. About the nature of character James includes little in "The Art of Fiction." He does say that characters need not necessarily be "sympathetic" and that those that strike one as real will be the most interesting. Many comments in the Prefaces indicate that he continued to hold these criteria. He is a great deal more explicit about the characteristics of his fictive heroes in the Prefaces, however, having expanded his concept as he experimented with the form of the novel. The Jamesian hero had to <u>be</u> exceptional and appear typical. His consciousness had to be acute without being <u>too</u> acute. He was complex and capable of intensity of feeling, a fine awareness. Nevertheless, James cautions against making a character too intelligent or too interpretative of fate lest he become false and impossible, out of tune with his situation or the other facets of his character. Krook has explained the limitations of Jamesian characters as residing in the passions, not in an inability to see, for

they see all in her opinion.

The qualities which James came to find essential for his characters are intimately related to his method of presenting them and the use he made of them. In "The Art of Fiction," he contends that the "how" of making a character clear cannot be disclosed. Emphasis on either description, dialogue, or incident will not solve the problem, for these methods melt into one effort of expression. As the methods are indistinct, so are the novel of character and the novel of incident. Character determines incident and incident illustrates character. James maintained his organismic position in the Prefaces and perhaps still thought that certain aspects of the artistic process could not be revealed. Surely by the time he wrote the Prefaces, however, he was convinced that much of his method could be taught for he explicates there his process of character presentation and use.

"Center" is the key word to understanding James's use of characters. The center of interest in Roderick Hudson is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness. His purpose is to reflect his total adventure: what happened to him was to feel certain things happening to others. The center of the subject in The Portrait of a Lady is in the young woman's own consciousness. Rowland and Isabel Archer, as well as being centers of interest, are mirrors or reflectors. Other prominent mirrors include Merton Densher, Lambert Strether, and the Prince and the Princess. Maisie functions somewhat

differently from the reflector. She, by "associational magic," creates for poorer persons an element of dignity simply by being associated with them. That James deliberately ascribed certain attributes to his characters for the purpose of conveying his theme is clearly seen in the Preface to The Wings of the Dove.

The use of the confidant was perfected by James because his method necessitated a ficelle, a "stage trick" to obviate a difficulty in the narration or presentation of character. He points out in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady that certain elements in any work are of the essence, belonging directly to the subject, while others are only of form, belonging indirectly. He identifies Henrietta Stackpole and Maria Gostrey as belonging to the latter and terms them cases of the light ficelle. The confidant's function is to provide the protagonist with facts and interpretations and to elicit data from him for the benefit of the reader.

James does not discuss the difficult matter of point of view in "The Art of Fiction." His argument for freedom for the artist to feel and to say is relevant to the subject, however. Only with his philosophy of freedom of execution could James have experimented with the form of the novel and perfected the particular use of point of view which is basic to his mature theory of the novel. The term "point of view" does not appear often in the Prefaces. Instead, James uses "center of interest," "central intelligence," "reflector," "mirror," and "register." And he writes that science is

required for making perspective rule the scene.

In the Prefaces to the late novels, James becomes somewhat more specific regarding point of view than he was in his earlier discussions of centers. Successive mirrors are used in The Wings of the Dove, and James explains the associated consciousness or fusion of consciousness of his two prime young persons. He writes in the Preface that he finds no process superior to proceeding by centers and holds that there is no economy of treatment without "an adopted, a related point of view." For The Ambassadors James has only one center, his hero Strether. The advantages to be gained from one center, he says, are a large unity and the grace of intensity. Strether has to keep proprieties in view and meet exhibitional conditions that forbid "the terrible fluidity of self-revelation." In the Preface to The Golden Bowl, James states his preference for dealing with his subject through the sensibility of a more or less detached witness or reporter who contributes a certain amount of interpretation of it. He concedes, however, that in The Golden Bowl there is no other participant than each of the real, the deeply involved participants. James contends that he held to his system at least with one hand by keeping the whole thing subject to the register of the consciousness of but two characters, the Prince and the Princess.

Numerous studies have dealt with James and the matter of point of view, and critics have held various opinions. Perhaps Stevenson's explanation of James's definition is the

most readily acceptable. She holds that James developed the element which he called "point of view" for the further ordering of relevant parts of the whole and that the term means simply the logic of the consciousness exhibited inside a story. Certainly James anticipated the twentieth-century concept of wholly limited or complete singleness of view even if he did not reach it. His achievement with point of view is a means to structure, unity, fusion, economy of treatment, and finally to the general effect of illusion.

Holland has said that James used the term "representation" for the generic act of rendering reality in the arts. In "The Art of Fiction," the analogy between the painter and the novelist is established; and James's vocabulary for discussing representation is primarily pictorial. Freedom for the novelist as for the painter is a necessity. Perhaps one difference between the two is that the painter can better teach the fundamentals of his art because the grammar of painting is so much more definite. For this reason James adopted many pictorial terms for use in literary criticism. He emphasizes in "The Art of Fiction" the need for the novel to offer life without rearrangement. Art is essentially selection, but it must be a selection whose main care is to be typical and inclusive.

Throughout the Prefaces James continues to write of representation in pictorial terms, using the term "picture" to mean the over-all design of the novel, the narrative development which he opposed to "scene," and

representational art form, depending on context. Pictorial aspects of James's composition which Taylor discusses include the use of a center which corresponds to the establishment of a focal point in painting. A second pictorial adaptation is foreshortening, a particular economic device. To treat his subject while confining his picture, James says, the artist must give all the sense without all the surface. Also an adaptation from the painter's manual is that of selection of details. James writes that while life is all inclusion and confusion, art is all discrimination and selection. The use of such terms as "intervene" and "deviation" in discussing selection indicates a change of attitude from that of holding it necessary to present life without rearrangement expressed in "The Art of Fiction."

That James was cognizant of the significance of form to the novel is shown in "The Art of Fiction" although there are no specific comments on scenic or dramatic representation which is so important to him in the Prefaces. James writes in the Prefaces that as the art of the drama is the art of preparations, the first half of a fiction figures to him as the stage for the second half although he admits that his halves often prove unequal. Placing a subject in that "blest drama-light" makes for intelligibility and keeps things in happy relation to each other. Dialogue is "one of the happiest of forms" if it is organic and dramatic, representing and embodying substance and form. The importance of the use of scenes is detailed in the Preface to The Awkward

Age. In the Prefaces to later works, James explains his dramatic method as one of alternation between scenes and the preparation for them which he calls "picture." This is a departure from his early position that composition should not exist in blocks. Certainly scenic construction based on alternation, the importance of which is made evident in the Prefaces, is a central element in James's mature theory of the novel.

Perhaps the most effective conclusion to a summary of the results of a study of changes in James's theory of the novel as evidenced in "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces to the New York Edition is a consideration of change by James himself. He discusses the process in some detail in the Preface to The Golden Bowl as he reflects on his preparation of the new edition. He writes:

> To re-read in their order my final things, all of comparatively recent date, has been to become aware of my putting the process through, for the latter end of my series . . . quite in the same terms as the apparent and actual, the contemporary terms; to become aware in other words that the march of my present attention coincides sufficiently with the march of my original expression; that my apprehension fits, more concretely stated, without an effort or a struggle, certainly without bewilderment or anguish, into the innumerable places prepared for it (Prefaces, p. 335).

In contrast to the coincidence of his critical attention with his original expression in the final things, James says:

> This truth [the coincidence] throws into relief for me the very different dance that the taking in hand of my earlier productions was to lead me; the quite other kind of consciousness proceeding from that return. Nothing in my whole renewal of

> attention to these things, to almost any instance of my work previous to some dozen years ago, was more evident than that no such active, appreciative process could take place on the mere palpable lines of expression--thanks to the so frequent lapse of harmony between my present mode of motion and that to which the existing footprints were due (Prefaces, p. 336).

Surely this is clear evidence of a distinctive shift during the period between the writing of "The Art of Fiction" and the Prefaces.

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