A HISTORY OF THE CRITICISM AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE JAMESIAN POINT OF VIEW

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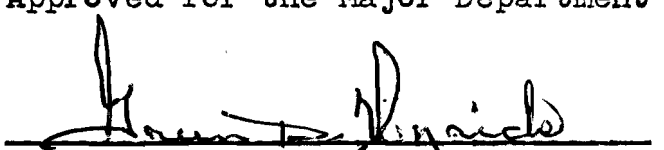

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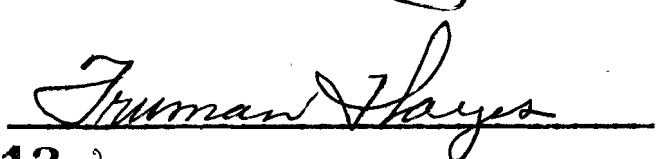

PREFACE

A thesis on Henry James can be a dangerous undertaking. An exceptionally wide divergence of opinion (and consequent quality of readings) exists over James and his penchant for art. Some literary authorities cannot summon words of praise enough; certain novelists have flattered him by direct imitation, and many twentieth-century novelistic techniques find their origin in James's experiments and practices. More severe critics cannot summon words of damnation enough; discouraged readers claim that James's fiction is dull and obscure, and most of the psychoanalytic critics believe that James merely exhibited his sexual aberrations. The general reading public may subscribe to neither of these extreme attentions, for most may never have read a single James novel at all. For this student of literature, the following study has yielded a deep admiration for Henry James, who must, indeed, have been a brilliant man.

Special thanks for assistance with this study go to Dr. Green D. Wyrick and Dr. Brian Byrd. To Dr. Wyrick, my first reader, I wish to ascribe Ian Watt's statement: ". . . greater love hath no man than hearing his friend out patiently."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

A PRIMER OF POINT OF VIEW

During his lifetime, Henry James's fiction never achieved the distinction of widespread popularity.[1] After his death in 1916, readers almost completely ignored him.[2] In 1934, with the Jamesian issue of Hound & Horn, the "revival" of Henry James began.[3] Subsequent scholarship has increasingly become aware of James's merit as a literary artist in his own right and his influence on more recent authors. Jamesian criticism, then, has performed some major reversals, making some blatant errors in reading, jumping to emotionally biased conclusions, and misunderstanding what James often did or did not intend.

The criticism has not yet fully comprehended and appreciated James's fiction.[4] Since one of the primary concerns of Jamesian criticism has been his use of the technique of point of view, one may conclude that the critical commentary has not yet thoroughly understood this Jamesian technique. Each one of the eminent critical authorities on

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[1]Frederick Wilcox Dupee, Henry James, pp. 70-71.

[2]Leon Joseph Edel, Henry James, p. 40.

[3]Robert E. Spiller, "Henry James," Eight American Authors: A Review of Research and Criticism, Floyd Stovall, editor, p. 379.

[4]Edel, op. cit., p. 7.

James's fiction has had something distinctly his own to say about the now famous technique. The controversy is not yet settled; a definitive description of the Jamesian point of view has not yet come forward. Thus, the intent of this study is to review the criticism of this technique, to examine James's development of point of view through selected short stories and novels, and, finally, to present a definition of the Jamesian point of view.

Joseph Warren Beach's study, The Method of Henry James (1918), marked the first major book-length examination of Henry James's artistic accomplishments. In this study, Beach treated the point-of-view technique as one of several major techniques and did not devote extensive comment to point of view. Beach concluded that James, as the author, followed "closely the thoughts and feelings of his characters."[5] In most of his novels, James, according to Beach, identified with his characters. Beach's later work, The Twentieth-Century Novel (1932), reinforces this conclusion by stating that James viewed his fictional situation through the eyes of one of the characters, seeing what that person saw and wondering about what that person wondered about.[6]

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[5]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, p. 61.

[6]Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Technique, p. 199.

By identifying with the characters, James eliminated ". . . the intrusions of an officious author, . . ." and, instead of listening to the chronicle of an outsider, the reader follows ". . . the action in the spotlight of someone's consciousness . . ." inside the fictional world.[7]

Following shortly after The Method of Henry James, Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction (1921) again took up the discussion of the Jamesian point of view. Lubbock described James's technique as dramatic. Instead of facing the story-teller and listening to him, the reader turns toward the story to watch the characters enact their own drama; thus, the reader has no direct concern with the author of the story at all, and the reader has to make of the story what he can.[8] After having reached this conclusion, Lubbock decided that the author did not completely efface himself, after all. The "seeing eye" in James's books is a combination of the author's vision as well as his character's vision, both at the same time.[9] The author looks over the character's shoulder, sharing and deepening his power of observation, but, Lubbock declared, the author never leaves the character's point of view; the rules of the game require

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[7]Joseph Warren Beach, "The Novel from James to Joyce," Nation, CXXXII (June 10, 1931), 634.

[8]Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p. 111.

[9]Ibid., p. 258.

that the author never proceeds to set up another viewpoint of his own.[10] Although Lubbock attempted to resolve the problem of James's use of first-person pronouns in apparently dramatic novels (which Beach had ignored), he became caught in the contradictory statements that the author did not establish his own point of view but yet provided observations which the characters themselves could not have.

Six years after Lubbock published his book, E. M. Forster included a study of Henry James in Aspects of the Novel (1927). Forster asserted that nearly all of James's major characters fit into a type of observer-character. All situations were "adjusted" to this observer's point of view.[11] Forster maintained, in other words, that James identified with the character, never deviating from that point of view, and that most of James's fiction centered in one character's point of view, or consciousness.

F. O. Mattiessen, in American Renaissance (1941) and The Major Phase (1944), did not markedly disagree with preceding criticism. Matthiessen stated that James's most characteristic device was ". . . a narrator through whose consciousness all the events are to be sifted and thus given the form of a complete impression."[12] James employed this

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[10]Ibid., pp. 260-261.

[11]Edward Morgan Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p. 221.

[12]Francis Otto Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman, p. 297.

device both to frame and to interpret experience.[13] Matthiessen, then, implied that James, as the author, effaced himself from his fiction, leaving only the character and the character's consciousness of the events which occurred.

Caroline Gordon's book, How to Read a Novel (1953), added fuel to the discussion by declaring that most of the earlier critics had not yet correctly described and evaluated James's fiction: "I do not believe that any great writer has ever been more misunderstood and misrepresented--in short, so badly read."[14] Miss Gordon agreed with most of her predecessors by stating that James had almost obliterated himself as the narrator and that his characters revealed themselves through dramatic action rather than through the author's telling about them; but she disagreed with earlier critics over the description of the major consciousness or consciousnesses left on the fictional stage. In addition to the dramatic revelation through actions and words, the characters further reveal themselves through their relationships with their families, friends, and enemies; the reader sees the major characters through the eyes of other characters.[15]

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[13]Francis Otto Matthiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase, p. 22.

[14]Caroline Gordon, How to Read a Novel, pp. 114-115.

[15]Ibid., p. 125.

Miss Gordon also elaborated upon the relationship between the author and the reader as no earlier critic had attempted to do for James's fiction. The author stands at a window, looking out onto the field of humanity, but he does not hoist up the reader (who is in the room with him) to the window to look out with him, nor does he specifically point out special events, nor does he turn away from the window to tell the tales of his own adventures. Instead the author stays at the window and asks only that the reader look steadily and attentively into his eyes, seeing what is mirrored in the author's eyes, and thus perceiving more than would be revealed by a casual glance.[16] This method of James's does not, then, restrict the reader to one man's vision of the events, as in an author's omniscient or scenic viewpoint, or limit the reader to the even more restricted first-person viewpoint, but James's method actually doubles the vision by having two pairs of eyes witnessing fictional events rather than merely one.[17] Having established this relationship of the author to the reader, the author allows the reader to see his major characters through the eyes of the other characters by ranging over the whole case of persons and giving the reader their views upon the action.[18]

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[16] Ibid., p. 129.

[17] Loc. cit.

[18] Caroline Gordon and Allen Tate, The House of Fiction: An Anthology of the Short Story With Commentary, p. 444.

Because Miss Gordon maintained that the hero's psyche constitutes the stage for the action, she used the term "Central Intelligence" to designate the Jamesian technique of point of view.[19]

John E. Tilford, Jr., in his 1958 article, "James the Old Intruder," tackled head-on the obvious problem of James's use of first-person pronouns which no other critic had yet specifically treated. Tilford argued that pervasive references of "I," "we," and "our hero" in a supposedly objective presentation of a self-contained fictional world counted as inconsistencies in James's method. Ironically, James was often ". . . almost as affably omniscient as Thackeray, however slovenly it might be."[20] Tilford declared that James had not, like a playwright, vanished altogether from his fiction, but that he interposed with his knowledge of a character to inform the reader about the future and sometimes shifted to other characters' points of view.[21] Tilford caught James using "a kind of tiptoe technique," in which he pattered quietly back and forth between authorial omniscience and his character's point of view.[22] Against Gordon's theory

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[19]Ibid., p. 443.

[20]John E. Tilford, Jr., "James the Old Intruder," Modern Fiction Studies, IV (Summer, 1958), 159.

[21]Ibid., pp. 158-159, 161.

[22]Ibid., p. 160.

of consistency from a central intelligence's point of view Tilford argued that James's method was inherently inconsistent.

In defense of James's method, Wayne C. Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961), began by saying that James had not been dogmatic about a rejection of all but his own methods, nor had James's concern with realism ever led him to the notion that all signs of authorial presence were inartistic; James's persistent enemy was intellectual or artistic sloth, not necessarily a peculiar method of telling or showing a story.[23] The specific function or effect which an author sought determined, finally, attitudes toward subject matter, structure, and technique, and since James wanted to create an intense illusion within the reader, he was not perturbed ". . . if the visible structure of the work was 'marred' with obvious signs that the work was written by a human being."[24] Any piece of fiction would be unintelligible if it did not somehow include enough "telling" to make the reader aware of, and accept, at least temporarily, the value system which gives the work meaning.[25] Thus, authorial interpositions, when as carefully wrought and as

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[23]Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp. 23, 50.

[24]Ibid., p. 58.

[25]Ibid., p. 112.

pertinent as the presented scenes, are not only justified but essential to narrative fiction.[26]

The device employed to embody this necessary amount of telling is, as Booth observed, difficult to describe.[27] When the author has an identity of his own and does not share all the narrator's beliefs and characteristics, Booth termed him the "implied author," or the author's "second self."[28] This implied author is distinct from the real man, but the critical vocabulary has not before created an accurate term to describe the implied author. The terms, "persona," "mask," and "narrator," more commonly refer to the speaker in the piece of fiction, who is, after all, but one of the elements created by the implied author and who may be distanced from him by great ironies.[29] It is the implied author, then, who presents the narration which communicates solely with the reader.

The implied author carries the reader with him in judging the narrator of a fictional work. A narrator may be called "reliable" when he consistently acts and speaks in accordance with the work's norms, or value system, as

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[26] Ibid., p. 205.

[27] Ibid., p. 149.

[28] Ibid., p. 151.

[29] Ibid., p. 73.

established by the implied author, but he is "unreliable" when he does not.[30] James often creates such unreliable narrators, and, because the reader travels with the main character, James has to provide clues behind the observer's back to prevent complete confusion for the reader. James may also deliberately confuse the reader by omitting enough obvious information to force the reader to face each decision as the hero confronts the crisis and to force the reader to make the generalizations himself for the purpose of breaking down a conviction about truth; the reader must, then, be ready to receive the truth when James presents it to him.[31] Booth, then, presents the theory that James uses unreliable narrators for specific functions, a primary one of which is to involve the reader in the work of fiction.

These variations in approach to James's technique of point of view, found in the best-known authorities on Henry James's fiction, give some indication of the discrepancies in the rest of the criticism of James. At this point, any attempt to reach a definitive description of the Jamesian point of view must return to the primary sources themselves, James's fictional works. Consequently, this study will trace the development of the technique in selected works from James's earliest short story to his last completed novel.

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[30] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

[31] Ibid., pp. 198, 285, 293.

The selection of these representative works has been completely arbitrary. James's earliest fictional experiments were his short stories. His first story, "A Tragedy of Error," published anonymously in 1864, was selected because it shows attempts on James's part to disassociate himself as author from his work. "A Most Extraordinary Case," published in 1868, demonstrates one of James's earliest experiments in trying to follow the story through the major character's point of view. The major character in "Osborne's Revenge" (1868) is the protagonist of the action as well as the observer. James attempts again in this story to restrict himself to the consciousness of the major character. Concluding the early period of James's writing is the novel, Portrait of a Lady (1881), which was selected because it is generally considered to be his best early novel and first major step toward his mature style and techniques. An examination of these early works comprises Chapter II.

Chapter III considers the middle years of writing from 1890 to 1900, which include James's attempts at writing plays. During these years, James experimented with a combination of the dramatic and narrative methods. The first book which James wrote after the dramatic attempt was The Spoils of Poynton, which later appeared in book form in 1897. This novel was included in this study because Fleda

Vetch, the central character in The Spoils, becomes one of James's unreliable narrators. What Maisie Knew (1897) exploits the possibilities of dramatic irony in a story seen from the consciousness of a young girl.

Chapter IV deals with James's major phase of writing. The major phase opens with the publication in 1902 of The Ambassadors, which James thought of as his best novel. This novel appears in this study for James's attempt to keep the entire novel within the compass of his hero's consciousness. James's last completed novel, The Golden Bowl (1905), was chosen because it uses two centers of consciousness to tell a story almost entirely of the minds of the protagonists.

Jamesian criticism has differed widely. With the history of this criticism in mind, a study of the development of James's technique may yield a more accurate definition of the Jamesian point of view in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PHASE: THE EARLIEST EXPERIMENTS

James experimented first in the short story form of fiction before he published any of his novels. Although these early tales do not reveal the overriding concern with technique which James exhibited in his later works, they do often contain the germs of devices which he later developed with intensive consideration. At the close of the first phase of James's writing career, The Portrait of a Lady marks a culmination of the early experiments with techniques and also counts as a major step toward the maturation of James's techniques in the last years of his life.

As one might expect of the first fictional attempt by a young man of the nineteenth century, the viewpoint of editorial omniscience dominates "A Tragedy of Error (1864)."[32] For example, in the first paragraph of the story appears this sentence: "My story begins with a gentleman coming out of the office and handing her a letter" (p. 295). Other instances attest to the omniscient point of view controlling the story in these two authorial comments: "There are

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[32]"A Tragedy of Error," originally published anonymously in the February, 1864, issue of The Continental Monthly, was reprinted in New England Quarterly, XXIX (September, 1956), 291-317, as it appeared in the earlier publication. Page numbers cited from this story are from the reprint in the New England Quarterly.

moments of grief in which certain aspects of the subject of our distress seem as irrelevant as matters entirely foreign to it" (p. 298), and

> We say a countenance is "lit up" by a smile; and indeed that momentary flicker does the office of a candle in a dark room. It sheds a ray upon the dim upholstery of our souls. The visages of poor men, generally, know few alternations. There is a large class of human beings whom fortune restricts to a single change of expression, or, perhaps, rather to a single expression. Ah me! the faces which wear either nakedness or rags; whose repose is stagnation, whose activity vice; ignorant at their worst, infamous at their best! (p. 304).

With the question, "Do you read the pantomime?" (p. 313), the author appeals directly to the reader, inviting him to participate in the action of the story.

James tempers this omniscience, however, with several devices. He introduces one of these devices in the second paragraph of his story by remarking that Madame Bernier and Monsieur de Meyrau

> . . . seemed to be full of interest for the passers by, most of whom stared hard and exchanged significant glances. Such persons as were looking on at the moment saw the lady turn very pale as her eyes fell on the direction of the letter (p. 295).

James, the author, does not see what happens, but some other person views the scene. Here is an early attempt at indirect or objective presentation.[33] In addition, this apparently ordinary occurrence assumes greater significance

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33Krishna Baldev Vaid, Technique in the Tales of Henry James, p. 129.

because the observers' glances cast an aura of guilt over the scene.[34] Another example of James's use of an observer within this story is Josephine, the maid, who peeps through the keyhole to see the scene of her distressed mistress drinking brandy by the glassful and looking out to the sea (p. 300). Characteristically, Josephine does not understand what she sees (foreshadowing the unreliable narrator), and she functions as a reflector of the action when she converses with the cook.

Another supplemental device, closely related to that of using an actual observer within the story, is James's use of a hypothetical observer. Such phrases as these reveal this type of observer: "Although, to a third person, it would have appeared that. . . ," "A wayfarer might have taken him for a ravisher. . . ," and "if for any reason a passer by had happened to notice her. . ." (pp. 298-301, et pas.). A striking instance of the attempt to objectively verify his story is James's footnote to the statement that Hortense was a pretty woman:

> I am told that there was no resisting her smile; and that she had at her command, in moments of grief, a certain look of despair which filled even the roughest hearts with sympathy, and won over the kindest to the cruel cause (p. 314).

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[34]Quentin Guild Kraft, "A Study of Point of View in Selected Short Stories of Henry James" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1963), p. 93.

James seems to be trying to divorce himself from his fiction by apparently desiring to give his work an appearance of authentic scholarship.[35] "Hortense is not to be considered, then, a creation of an author's imagination; she is to be taken for a real, live villainess whose influence has been actually felt by persons known to the narrator."[36] James wants to make his account realistic.

Still another device in this short story is the noticeable lack of editorial comment from the omniscient narrator during the major scenes. James refrains from editorially describing Hortense Bernier's reaction to the news in her letter that her husband expects to return the next day, and from commenting on the relationship between Madame Bernier and Monsieur de Meyrau. Instead, these scenes are reflected indirectly and James leaves the reader completely free to form his own impression.[37] Again, James does not intrude in the "little drama" which Hortense witnesses between the boatman and the young boy; the reader must discern the nature of the boatman without any overt help from the author.

This scene which Hortense mutely watches brings the action of this section of the story into line with Hortense's

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[35] Ibid., p. 90.

[36] Ibid., p. 91.

[37] Vaid, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

point of view expect for one authorial intermission. The reader receives the boatman's description from her ". . . sidelong scrutiny of her ferryman's countenance. He was a man of about thirty-five. His face was dogged, brutal, and sullen" (p. 304). Because the scene now comes through Hortense's vision, James no longer directly tells the reader exactly what any other character's motive may be. At one point Hortense fails to comprehend fully the boatman's motive when the man ". . . gave one of those conscious, cautious, dubious smiles, which may cover either a criminal assumption of more than the truth or a guilty repudiation if it" (p. 308). At one of Hortense's remarks the boatman "was evidently surprised," and his motive can only be described as "probable" (p. 309). Although James does not sustain this point of view, the germ of the technique of the point of view limited to a single consciousness presents itself in "A Tragedy of Error."

A final bid to divorce the real man behind the work from the illusion of the fictional world emerges in the words, "Though I have judged best, hitherto, often from an exaggerated fear of trenching on the ground of fiction. . ." (p. 316). James aspires to convince the reader that he is recording truth, not fiction. As early as his first short story, James is working "to cut the umbilical cord" which binds him to his fiction.[38]

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[38]Leon Joseph Edel, Henry James: The Untried Years, 1843-1870, p. 216.

Four years later, James published "A Most Extraordinary Case" (1868).[39] James again resorts to the omniscient point of view in this short story, but with a significant difference in the method of divulging privileged information. Noticeable evidences of the omniscient point of view freely exercised emerge in the descriptions of physical appearances and past histories of two of the major characters. The omniscient narrator describes Horace Knight as

> . . . a young man of good birth, good looks, good faculties, and good intentions, who, after a three years' practice of surgery in the army, had undertaken to push his fortune in Mrs. Mason's neighborhood. The adjacent country, moreover, offered a promising field for a man of energy. . . (p. 465).

Again, the omniscient narrator discusses Mason's history:

> For the past three years he had been stretched without intermission on the rack of duty. Although constantly exposed to hard service, it had been his fortune never to receive a serious wound; and, until his health broke down, he had taken fewer holidays than any officer I ever heard of. . . . The sense of lost time was moreover, his perpetual bugbear. . . . I cite the fact merely as an evidence of the uninterrupted austerity of his life for a long time before he fell sick (p. 466).

In these passages the point of view is not confined to a character's point of view because none of the characters within the story had access to the information presented except those whose histories are related, and they do not divulge the facts of their lives.

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[39]"A Most Extraordinary Case" originally appeared in Atlantic Monthly, XXI (April, 1868), 461-485.

The omniscient narrator, then, controls the story, yet he chooses to withhold some knowledge until that knowledge can come to the reader naturally through a character's awareness of it. James singles out Mason for this purpose, and he clearly states that the point of view belongs to no one else. James first calls attention to the fact that he is not narrating "A Most Extraordinary Case" from Mrs. Mason's vision:

> If I were telling my story from Mrs. Mason's point of view, I take it that I might make a very good thing of the statement that this lady had deliberately and solemnly conferred her affection upon my hero; but I am compelled to let it stand in this simple shape (p. 467).

Again, James cautions the reader that he chooses to restrict his powers of omniscience when he denies that he knows the thoughts of Miss Hofmann:

> I repeat that I do not undertake to follow Miss Hofmann's feelings; I only know that her words were those of a woman of great instincts (p. 477).

James speaks most clearly in this passage about his voluntary limitation of point of view:

> This young lady has had no part in our story, because our story is perforce short, and condemned to pick and choose its constituent elements. With the least bit wider compass we might long since have whispered to the reader, that Miss Stapleton--who was a charming girl--had conceived a decided preference for our Ferdinand over all other men whomsoever. That Ferdinand was utterly ignorant of the circumstance is our excuse for passing it by; and we linger upon it, therefore, only long enough to suggest that the young girl must have been very happy at this particular moment (p. 483).

Thus, James obviously declares that his story concerns itself primarily with Mason's point of view.

Once James has decided on this restriction of confining most of the knowledge which the reader receives to Mason's conscious awareness, he gains certain interesting effects. By using Mrs. Mason to relate a description of Miss Hofmann's history and character to Ferdinand Mason, the major character (pp. 467-468), James creates an early version of the ficelle, or confidante. Mrs. Mason only approximates this role, however, because Ferdinand never confides in anyone (which is why his death appears to be such an "extraordinary case").

Another effect which James discovers becomes the famous "showing" in place of "telling." Without authorial comment, James dramatizes the process of Mason's falling in love with Miss Hofmann from their first brief meeting in the hall, which apparently left no impression on the convalescent Mason's weak and weary mind, to several scenes which subtly indicate his emotional reorientation. For example, the thought suddenly overcomes Mason that Miss Hofmann does not like him, thinks him dull and stupid, and visits with him only out of a sense of duty (pp. 469-470). Later, as Mrs. Mason and Miss Hofmann prepare to leave for a ball, Mason buttons Miss Hofmann's gloves "with great deliberation and neatness" (p. 473). He "gravely" and "solemnly" assists her with her shawl, and finally stands

> . . . leaning against the parlor door, watching her; and as she rustled past him she nodded farewell with a silent smile. A characteristic smile, Mason thought

> it. . . . Mason went to the window and saw the carriage roll away with its lighted lamps, and then stood looking out into the darkness (p. 473).

In spite of this use of his new-found technique, James fails to resist the temptation to resort to omniscient authorial telling:

> In fine, Mason was in love. It will be seen that his passion was not arrogant nor uncompromising; but, on the contrary, patient, discreet, and modest,--almost timid (p. 474).

James seems to be toying with the new technique of "showing," of which he may or may not be fully conscious, because he abandons it when he declares to the reader that Mason is in love. Perhaps he did not trust his character or his reader to recognize what was happening to Mason.

A third effect which James achieves with the limitation of point of view in this story is the occasional exclusive adoption of Mason's point of view. During most of the story, James concentrates almost entirely on Mason, and perhaps inevitably, James moves into this character's point of view.[40] Indeed, much of the story depends on Mason's failure, while his own love is growing, ". . . to perceive and interpret correctly the overt signs" of the attachment developing between Miss Hofmann and Dr. Knight.[41] The most striking instance of James's adoption of Mason's point of

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[40]Kraft, op. cit., p. 110.

[41]Loc. cit.

view occurs when Mason falls asleep one morning during one of Miss Hofmann's occasional hours of playing the piano to him. On waking, Mason observes a silent scene between Miss Hofmann and Dr. Knight who

> . . . was leaning on the instrument with his back toward the window, intercepting her face. Mason sat for some moments, hardly sensible, at first, of his transition to consciousness, languidly guessing at her companion's identity. In a short time his observation was quickened by the fact that the picture before him was animated by no sound of voices. The silence was unnatural, or, at the least, disagreeable (p. 470).

Mason ignores the obvious and concludes that the two had merely been attempting ". . . to decipher a difficult piece of music" (p. 470). The reader then enjoys the irony of Mason's declaration, "What a clever fellow he is!" (p. 470). James again uses his protagonist's point of view when Miss Hofmann evidently warns Dr. Knight not to remain for dinner (p. 478). Although Mason cannot understand the scene, the reader learns later that Miss Hofmann feared that an evening with Dr. Knight present would betray the secret of their engagement. This use of a restricted point of view in crucial scenes ". . . gives the story something of the interplay between objective fact and subjective conception"[42] which strongly characterizes James's later fiction. Several times in this story James utilizes Mason's subjective conception to speculate about other character's motives through his

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[42] Ibid., pp. 111-112.

reading of their accents or gestures.[43] When Mason infers a meaning incorrectly, James does not always overtly correct the impression; he manages to maintain his restricted point of view in some sections of the story.

At the conclusion of "A Most Extraordinary Case," Mason has died from unrequited love for Miss Hofmann, and the other characters have assembled to hear the reading of his will. Having necessarily abandoned Mason's point of view, James now concentrates on an ironical contrast of points of view of the remaining characters. Dr. Knight, unaware of Mason's love for Miss Hofmann, declares that his patient was a good and generous fellow and that Mason should not have died but should have recovered complete health (pp. 484-485). Dr. Knight silently wishes to make an autopsy. Contrasted to this purely physical, emotionally disinterested view is Miss Hofmann's attitude of silence and thoughtfulness, which was "certainly natural under the circumstances" (p. 485). From this short paragraph containing the juxtaposition of points of view of characters other than the protagonist, James achieves an irony which would not have been possible if he had restricted himself exclusively to Mason's view.

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[43]Walter Francis Wright, The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James, p. 114.

A useful comparison to show development of the point of view technique can be made between "A Most Extraordinary Case" and another short story, "Osborne's Revenge" (1868).[44] Quentin Guild Kraft classifies the former story as one of the omniscient narrative stories because the author-narrator can look at will into the minds of other characters or predict the future, even though James does abstain from the full use of his superhuman vision.[45] "Osborne's Revenge," although quite similar in use of technique, begins by showing ". . . virtually no sign of conventional omniscience. All events and characters are seen from Osborne's point of view."[46] Kraft believes that James used a point of view which is exclusively Osborne's until the author reached a stage in the story at which he appeared to have lost his confidence in the new technique.[47]

Unlike the occasional deviations from Mason's point of view in "A Most Extraordinary Case," consistency of vision from Osborne's consciousness governs the first two-thirds of this later story. To throw the reader's reliance entirely on Osborne's point of view, James avoids allowing

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[44]Henry James originally published "Osborne's Revenge" in Galaxy, VI (July, 1868), 5-31.

[45]Kraft, op. cit., p. 150.

[46]Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[47]Ibid., p. 123.

the reader to see Robert Graham at all. Instead, the reader learns about Osborne's friend through a short, morbid letter from Graham, through a report of Graham's circumstances at the medicinal springs in New York from Mrs. Dodd, and through a correspondence announcing Graham's suicide from an anonymous mutual friend (pp. 5-7). Thus, both Osborne and the reader set out on the journey of revenge in equal ignorance of Graham's true actions during his absence in New York.

Sincerely believing that the object of Graham's affections during his absence, Henrietta Congreve, had virtually destroyed Graham, Osborne travels to New York to seek revenge on Miss Congreve, whom he has mentally pictured as a wicked woman. When he happens to meet a pretty lady by the sea, he

> . . . had been for ten days in search of a wicked girl, and it was a momentary relief to find himself suddenly face to face with a charming one (p. 11).

The charming lady, he learns, is, in fact, Miss Congreve. This first view of her is strictly confined to Osborne's point of view.

As Osborne learns more about Miss Congreve, James creates another technique which he has not used in the two previous stories. Osborne's initial impression of the young lady is supplemented and modified by other characters' views of her. All of these viewpoints come out in

conversation with Osborne, the main character, and thus remain within the limitations of his point of view. For instance, Mrs. Carpenter once remarks that Henrietta is a "good, quiet girl" who ". . . hates to have a noise made about her" (p. 14). Later Mr. Stone, a young clergyman, defends Miss Congreve against the implications of Osborne's questions, as when he declares that the last term he would use to describe her would be "coquette" (p. 19). Finally, Major Dodd gives Osborne an objective report of what actually did take place between Miss Congreve and Robert Graham in New York (pp. 29-30).

For the most part, then, "Osborne's Revenge" stays within the realm of Osborne's consciousness. At a point approximately two-thirds of the way into the story, in spite of the preceding consistency of use of the point of view technique, James appears to step outside the boundaries of Osborne's vision into the realm, once again, of omniscience. It is at this point which Kraft notes a loss of confidence on James's part: the author was apparently afraid that his readers, limited solely to Osborne's point of view, might get the wrong idea, either going along too easily with Osborne's judgment of Henrietta Congreve or considering Osborne a simpleton for not seeing the woman as the paragon of virtue she obviously is.[48] James breaks away from

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[48] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

Osborne's view by presenting more than two pages of explanatory material defending Philip Osborne (pp. 22-24). Furthermore, apparently due to his loss of confidence in his technique, James deems it necessary to add a scene between Miss Congreve and her fiance, Mr. Holland, of which Osborne has no knowledge (p. 28).

In this short story, then, James follows more closely than before one character's point of view without interference or comment from an omniscient author. At this early stage in his writing career, however, he feels that he cannot yet trust either his characters or his readers to carry the heavy burden of acting and reading the story on their own.

By the time James turned to the longer form of fiction in the novels, he had demonstrated his interest in the possibilities of the limited point of view. Even as early as his first short story James tries to locate the "I," the narrator of the story, within the fictional world of the story. In "A Most Extraordinary Case" James concentrates his attention much more on one character and even adopts his point of view at crucial moments in that story. To supplement and extend the increasing restriction of vision, James introduces one of his earliest experiments with the ficelle character in this short story. Finally, in "Osborne's Revenge," James stays within the protagonist's field of vision until he loses faith in his technique.

Concluding the first phase of James's writing career and developing these devices which he discovered in his early short stories is the novel, The Portrait of a Lady (1881).[49] This novel establishes James's basic method with which he continues to experiment, refining and elaborating, but which he uses as the fundamental method throughout his succeeding novels.

The opening paragraph of The Portrait of a Lady introduces the narrator of the novel and establishes the tone which the novel maintains. Although the following quotation is long and unwieldy, it is necessary to an understanding of what James achieves.

> Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not--some people of course never do--the situation is in itself delightful. Those that I have in mind in beginning to unfold this simple history offered an admirable setting to an innocent pastime. The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country-house, in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. . . . From five o'clock to eight is on certain occasions a little eternity; but on such an occasion as this the interval

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[49]Because this study traces the development of James's technique of point of view, I selected editions of his novels which are reprints of the original publications rather than the standard New York Edition for which James revised his works. This edition of The Portrait of a Lady is published in New York by The New American Library as a reprint from the 1881 first edition.

> could be only an eternity of pleasure. The persons concerned in it were taking their pleasure quietly, and they were not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony I have mentioned. The shadows on the perfect lawn were straight and angular; they were the shadows of an old man /who/ rested his eyes upon the rich red front of his dwelling. The house that rose beyond the lawn was a structure to repay such consideration, and was the most characteristic object in the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch (pp. 5-6).

In his appraisal of this paragraph, Richard Poirier observes that while the author-narrator's voice is not identical with Ralph Touchett's, ". . . it expresses an equally amused and undefensive urbanity of mind."[50] The diction uses such amusing phrases as ". . . the ceremony known as afternoon tea," ". . . some people of course never do," and ". . . the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony." These phrases exhibit what Poirier refers to as a "fastidious pomposity," and James designed the diction for the reader's delight.[51] James, then, according to Poirier, assumes a definite personality to fill a definable role in the novel:

> He sounds like an overly impressed American who has "gone" English, who is more English than the English. None the less, the voice teases itself, as of a man who does take delight in English habits, but with such amused and self-assured adaptability that he can exaggerate and gently spoof them.[52]

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[50]Richard Poirier, The Comic Sense of Henry James: A Study of the Early Novels, pp. 190-191.

[51]Ibid., p. 191.

[52]Ibid., p. 192.

The author-narrator's stance in the opening paragraph of the novel asserts itself as a definite personality, not as a direct observer isolated from his medium.[53]

This personality pervading James's pages, which Poirier nebulously terms "a definable role," Wayne C. Booth defines as the implied author or the author's "second self."[54] Booth's terms suggest that the author does not project himself into the novel, but rather, as Maurice Beebe recognizes, the artist may elect to display a sort of dual personality: one half as the creative artist and the other half as a member of the human race.[55] James's attitude toward unity and integrity of the fictional world demanded that he, as the author, never intruded into that world; therefore, the personality so evident in The Portrait of a Lady, the "I," is not Henry James, nor is it even Henry James disguised, but an implied author.[56]

If the identity of the implied author does not equate with Henry James, neither does it identify with one of the characters. However, some critics (perhaps guilty only of

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[53]Laurence Bedwell Holland, The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James, p. 44.

[54]Booth, op. cit., p. 151.

[55]Maurice Beebe, "The Turned Back of Henry James," So Atlan Q, LIII (October, 1954), 528.

[56]Elizabeth Stevenson, The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James, p. 152.

overpraise) assert that the action of the novel is seen through Isabel Archer's consciousness. For example, Joseph Warren Beach declares that the background circumstances reveal themselves through the consciousness of Isabel, who is the foreground figure.[57] Clinton Hartley Grattan sees this novel as remarkable because the consciousness of a woman views the action.[58] These critics overlook those scenes of which Isabel Archer never acquires any knowledge. In the opening pages Isabel remains offstage and she returns to the wings behind the curtains several times while other characters talk about her, such as when Ralph and his father alter the elder man's will (pp. 167-172); Ralph's consciousness sometimes controls the scene; Osmond and Madame Merle conduct their meetings without Isabel; and even minor characters occasionally appropriate the point of view. With these shifts in mind, one cannot say that the point of view belongs to the consciousness of any single character.

The charge now stands open that James uses, after all, the omniscient point of view. Several other critics subscribe to this idea. For instance, Robert Stallman, assuming that the narrator is omniscient, believes that the narrator apologizes for being duped by Isabel's charm

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[57]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, p. 209.

[58]Clinton Hartley Grattan, The Three Jameses, p. 303.

himself and condemns her ignorance, her bias, and her egotism.[59] Bruce McElderry remarks:

> Telling the story from an omniscient point of view, James is free to move from character to character, to analyze and interpret as he goes. Characters frequently turn up with no particular motive except to be useful to the author.[60]

D. W. Jefferson concurs with McElderry's sentiment, arguing that James's inclusion of first-person pronouns indicates the presence of an omniscient author.[61] James does, indeed, use personal references, such as "I," "we," and "our heroine," on the average of at least once in every ten pages throughout the entire novel. Furthermore, the narrator seems to be overtly conscious of his own existence when he utters such words as "Our heroine's biographer can scarcely tell why. . ." (p. 102), and

> Poor Caspar Goodwood may be pardoned if for an instant this exclamation seemed to him to have the infernal note, and I cannot take upon myself to say that Isabel uttered it in obedience to an impulse strictly celestial (p. 146).

This narrator also sometimes speaks directly to the reader: "Smile not, however, I venture to repeat, at this simple young lady from Albany. . ." (p. 95); or the narrator says, ". . . but this would not have convinced you. . ." (p. 212).

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[59]Robert Wooster Stallman, The House That James Built and Other Literary Studies, pp. 22, 24.

[60]Bruce Robert McElderry, Jr., Henry James, p. 62.

[61]Douglas William Jefferson, Henry James, p. 136.

The reader and the narrator even share secret information: "The reader already knows more about [poor Ralph] than Isabel was ever to know, and the reader may therefore be given the key to the mystery" (p. 365). Finally, certain passages exemplify traditional attitudes of omniscient narrators. The narrator of The Portrait of a Lady can relate thoughts of characters besides Isabel whose words remain "perfectly inaudible" (p. 191). He predicts the future:

> . . . there was a last vague space [her imagination] could not cross--a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous, and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet (p. 289).

He exercises his "privilege to look over" Isabel's shoulder to "read the brief query" from Henrietta Stackpole (p. 421). He makes his own jokes--"The porter replied, as porters always reply, that he had gone out about twenty minutes before. . ." (p. 421)--even during Isabel's midnight vigil: "Poor Isabel, who had never been able to understand Unitarianism!" (p. 399).

In spite of this accumulation of evidence supporting the contention that James's narrator is omniscient, one may suggest that James is actually aiming toward an entirely different effect. James's implied author conducts a guided tour through a house of art, but, instead of telling his listeners all about the house, the works of art and their histories, and about his own experiences as a tour guide

(as an omniscient author would do), James's implied author merely presents each work of art with an absolute minimum of comment, allowing each work of art to speak for itself. In more concrete terms, James presents his characters and then leaves them on the stage to speak for themselves and comment upon each other. With this process James never interferes. He eliminates the obvious, self-intrusive, and interpretive narrator and thereby shifts the point of view to the reader, who must now interpret and understand for himself.[62]

As James states in his Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, he placed ". . . the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness, . . ." while emphasizing less heavily her "satellites."[63] He built his "house of fiction" with its million windows around Isabel Archer.[64] Her consciousness acts as a point of focus, or compositional center, but the heroine is not the center of vision; she is a young woman who stimulates others' consciousnesses.[65]

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[62]Sister Kristin Morrison, "James's and Lubbock's Differing Points of View," NCF, XVI (December, 1961), 247.

[63]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, Richard P. Blackmur, editor, p. 51. Hereinafter referred to as The Art of the Novel.

[64]Ibid., pp. 46-48.

[65]Joseph Wiesenfarth, Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy: A Study of the Major Novels of the Middle Period, p. 39.

Cornelia Kelley feels that James had a weak agent in Isabel and he faced the danger of the story's becoming that of some other character (such as Ralph); consequently, James decided against making his story about Isabel's relation to the other characters but determined to make it of their relation to her.[66] To keep "the centre of the subject" in Isabel's consciousness, James looked at the other characters, Kelley observes,

> . . . only as their plotting involved her, and except for Ralph, who was lovingly watching and seeing all, he stayed as much as possible out of the minds of those surrounding her. He kept everything focussed upon her; then he looked at everything as she saw it.[67]

Isabel makes herself known to the reader, then, by the "extraordinary company she keeps."[68] The reactions which Isabel and her company provoke among themselves constitute the story of The Portrait of a Lady.[69]

Before her marriage to Osmond, Isabel's character emerges from three principal relationships, those with Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood, and Gilbert Osmond.[70] Lord

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[66]Cornelia Pulsifer Kelley, The Early Development of Henry James, p. 292.

[67]Ibid., p. 297.

[68]Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, p. 97.

[69]Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, p. 257.

[70]Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, p. 27.

Warburton remarks over Isabel's brilliant mind, expressing some fear of it: "You can't improve your mind. . . . It's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all; it despises us" (p. 75). Both Ralph Touchett and his father, with unconscious foreshadowing, pity Lord Warburton (pp. 66, 70). Caspar Goodwood stands at a pole almost opposite to Lord Warburton.[71] Goodwood represents the self-made American businessman, who overwhelms Isabel with his strength of character. Isabel's "personal independence" does not frighten this man as it confused Warburton; her strength of character only adds grace to his image of her "ardent spirit" (p. 149). Gilbert Osmond, finally, meets Isabel's ". . . conception of the way in which a man of cultivated mind and developed sensibility should express his interest in a woman."[72] The "satellite" characters also comment upon Osmond. Madame Merle, for instance, informs Isabel that ". . . he was one of the cleverest and most agreeable men it was possible to meet. He was altogether above the respectable average, quite another affair" (p. 226). Thus, as Isabel's character emerges through these three relationships, the natures of the relationships are clarified by observations from satellite characters.

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[71] Ibid., p. 33.

[72] Ibid., p. 40.

The reader also receives nearly every character's view of Isabel, often from the character's own vision. Henrietta Stackpole, who has a ready opinion on any person, confides to Ralph that she finds Isabel "fearfully changed," because the heroine ". . . is taking different views, and turning away from her old ideals" (p. 111). Henrietta is the first of Isabel's friends to predict her disaster.[73] Mrs. Varian, Isabel's aunt, and Mrs. Ludlow, Isabel's sister, express, from their points of view, their prejudiced opinions of her (pp. 46-47, 295-296). Mr. Touchett, on his deathbed, offers his son an opinion of Isabel: "Isabel is a sweet young girl; but do you think she is as good as that?" (p. 172). Of all the characters, Ralph knows Isabel best. He learns early that she possesses an independent mind and refuses to take advice from anyone (p. 43). He knows, also, that she will set out after the European experience (the controlling symbol of the novel), see the ghost, and ". . . drain the cup of experience" (pp. 139-140).

This function of the satellite characters to inform each other and the central character about all of the characters increases in importance before Isabel's marriage to Osmond. Nearly every character except the implied author

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[73]Sister M. Corona Sharp, "The Role of the Confidante in Henry James" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1962), p. 89.

presents his view of the approaching marriage. Mrs. Touchett tells Isabel that Serena Merle (who has covertly arranged the marriage for Osmond) ". . . has no faults" (p. 180), although Mrs. Touchett later learns, and tells Isabel, that Madame Merle engineered Isabel's engagement (p. 308). Ralph, on the other hand, instinctively dislikes Madame Merle, for Serena's "modesty is exaggerated" and ". . . her merits are in themselves overstrained. She is too good, too kind, too clever, too learned, too accomplished, too everything" (p. 232). Concerning Osmond, all of the characters but Isabel believe the worst. The Countess Gemini, Osmond's sister, cynically observes, "There are no good [husbands]. Osmond won't be a good one" (p. 250). She asserts that her brother believes ". . . he is descended from the gods, . . ." and she therefore fears for Isabel's future happiness (pp. 251-252). Ralph, whose opinion nearly always survives the test of events, cannot help but feel ". . . that there's something small in Osmond, . . ." that he is "narrow, selfish" (p. 319). Ralph refuses to give Osmond the credit for being "a good fellow" (p. 274).

Most of these views come from the characters' own points of view while Isabel remains unsuspicious of the discussions taking place around her (p. 256). The implied author roves from character to character, presenting each one's point of view without comment of his own. The effect

which James thus achieves is a variety of opinions on each important event, guided by little or no omniscient comment establishing the absolute. Hence, the reader follows the action, sometimes waiting in suspense to "see it through," often enjoying the contradiction or lack of knowledge in various views, and perhaps having to judge characters, views, and events for himself.

This effect for which James strove works exceptionally well in his handling of the state of Isabel's marriage after the necessary time has elapsed to determine its success or failure.[74] Various characters speculate about the marriage. Little Ned Rosier hears from Madame Merle that Isabel and her husband disagree on marital matters (p. 332). He concludes for himself that Isabel is afraid and will not help him advance his suit with Pansy (pp. 336-358). Mrs. Touchett entertains her opinion that the marriage is a "shabby affair," for social reasons, but she does not speculate about whether Isabel is happy (p. 361). Countess Gemini is certain that Isabel leads a more brilliant life than her own and is ". . . having a beautiful time" (p. 413). To Caspar Goodwood's intuition, Isabel ". . . pretends to be happy" (p. 460). Ralph, again, sees Isabel better than the other characters:

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[74]Kelley, op. cit., p. 298.

> The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. "What did Isabel represent?" Ralph asked himself; and he could answer only by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond (p. 363).

By this time, Ralph knows exactly what kind of man Osmond really is (p. 364). When Isabel visits Ralph, he intuitively guesses how unhappy she must be (pp. 428-430). Ralph's guess proves to be accurate when Madame Merle confronts Osmond with the words, "You have made your wife afraid of you" (p. 482). Only to Henrietta does Isabel disclose her unhappiness, and the former ". . . saw that Isabel's trouble was deep" (p. 498). Perhaps the most important view of Isabel's situation is her own realization of the failure of her marriage during her midnight vigil (Chapter 42).

Throughout the novel the narrator roves among the characters to present their points of view. The reason for the roving reporter is James's discovery, voiced by Isabel: "We see our lives from our own point of view" (p. 109). This fact of each person's view creating his own reality makes truth relative.[75] When the reader ". . . feels the way in which people see one another, . . ."[76] he can no longer be certain about any absolute truth. If truths vary according to the individual observer and have no absolute

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[75]Michael Swan, Henry James, pp. 50-51.

[76]Leon Joseph Edel, Henry James: The Conquest of London, 1870-1881, p. 428.

validity, the novelist has no place as an ". . . omniscient spectator and arbiter, surveying and judging his creation as God surveyed the universe; . . ." instead, the story must now be presented through the consciousness of the characters within it.[77] As a direct result of the greater reliance on the consciousness of the characters, James used ". . . the bafflements and illusions of ignorance for his 'complications,' as he was able to use, more consistently than any other novelist, 'recognitions' for his crises."[78] Finally, the fact of each character's having his own point of view isolates him from all of the other characters. People in the novel rarely comprehend what others think or what their motives are. For example, both Isabel and the reader see only the surface of Madame Merle's conduct early in the novel, but not her reasoning.[79] As a result, Isabel mistakenly judges her character and motives. In another instance, Ralph cannot always fathom what Isabel means (p. 463), and Caspar Goodwood says to her, "You are perfectly inscrutable. . ." (p. 471). Even Isabel cannot read the

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[77]Henry Bamford Parkes, "The James Brothers," Sewanee Review, LVI (1948), 327.

[78]Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, p. 216.

[79]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, Francis Otto Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, editors, p. 17. Hereinafter referred to as The Notebooks.

countenances of those around her. Pansy, her loving and simple step-daughter, remains unknowable (pp. 385, 434).

With his juxtaposition of points of view, then, James establishes the relativity of truth within his fictional world, replaces the omniscient narrator with the reader as adjudicator, and creates the lifelike inability to scrutinize motives of others. This basic method, which will remain the recognizable foundation for all of his subsequent work with the point of view technique, James formulates in The Portrait of a Lady.[80]

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[80]Many critics have expressed their dissatisfaction with the ending of The Portrait of a Lady; Wilfrid L. Randell, in his article, "The Art of Mr. Henry James," Fortnightly Review, n.s. XCIX (April, 1916), 621, neatly sums up their debate with the cryptic description of "Big-Endians and Little-Endians." Joseph Conrad's "Henry James: An Appreciation," North American Review, CLXXX (1905), 108, observes that James's novels represent an episode in life and therefore have no real beginning or end. The careful reader, however, should have no doubt about Isabel's future when the narrator hints, ". . . it was a proof that she should some day be happy again. It couldn't be that she was to live only to suffer. . ." (p. 517).

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND PHASE: THE MIDDLE EXPERIMENTS

The middle period of Henry James's writing career follows the years in which he devoted his talents to theatre production and playwriting and closes at the turn of the century; the "middle years" extend from 1890 to 1900. The novels which James produced during this period incorporate many of the techniques which he discovered while writing for the dramatic medium. Before the advent of his "middle period," James had experimented with the novel and the drama as separate crafts, but the works which emerge between 1890 and 1900 exploit the possibilities of both media.[81] Distinguishing features of these novels are better characterization and fewer irrelevant characters, fewer descriptive passages, more compact construction, tighter unity, greater intensity, and maximum economy of action.[82] Perhaps the most fruitful innovation to come out of this period is James's concern with point of view, his discovery of ". . . the principle that the action of each narrative should be recorded in the consciousness of one or more of the actors rather than in

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[81]Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, "Dramatic Lustrum: A Study of the Effect of Henry James's Theatrical Experience on His Later Novels," New Engl Q, XI (March, 1938), 112-113.

[82]Ibid., p. 114.

the vague impersonal register of an ex machina story-teller."[83] The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew provide a compendium of James's technique during his middle period.

James's first novel written after the close of his dramatic years was The Spoils of Poynton (1897).[84] James wrote in his Notebook jottings while working the story out in his mind that he could see the action up to a certain point but was having trouble finding the denouement.[85] His happy discovery of the solution to his problem he announced in the Preface as allowing the denouement to come through Fleda Vetch.[86] Although the center of interest is what happens to the art treasures of Poynton, Fleda Vetch, the main character, dominates the story through her point of view. Alan W. Bellringer observes that the story, after the first chapter, is told consistently from Fleda's vision.[87]

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[83]Morton Fullerton, "The Art of Henry James," Quarterly Review, CCXII (April, 1910), 394.

[84]James wrote The Spoils of Poynton before The Other House, which he published first. He started The Spoils of Poynton in the summer of 1895 and completed it in 1896. The novel appeared in book form in 1897. The edition used for this study is published in Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, The New Classics Series, which is a reprint from the original Houghton Mifflin Company text, copyrighted in 1896.

[85]The Notebooks, p. 198.

[86]The Art of the Novel, p. 127.

[87]Alan W. Bellringer, "Spoils of Poynton: James's Unintended Involvement," Essays in Criticism, XVI (April, 1966), 188.

Beach notes that James never before in his novels stayed so strictly within the limits of one consciousness.[88] More important than James's keeping within Fleda's consciousness, however, is that the internal analysis of Fleda, the development of her progressive concern for Poynton and Owen Gereth, becomes more central than the marriage between Owen and Mona, the inherited spoils, or the burning of Poynton.[89] Fleda reflects to the reader all the other characters and their impressions.

In spite of the praise heaped upon James for maintaining a consistent point of view, Fleda's, throughout his novel, most of the first chapter sifts through Mrs. Gereth's point of view. Fleda is not even present in the opening pages:

> Mrs. Gereth had said she would go with the rest to church, but suddenly it seemed to her she shouldn't be able to wait even till church-time for relief: breakfast was at Waterbath a punctual meal and she had still nearly an hour on her hands. To get away from it and out into the air, into the presence of sky and trees, flowers and birds, was a necessity of every nerve. The flowers at Waterbath would probably go wrong in colour and the nightingales sing out of tune; but she remembered to have heard the place described as possessing those advantages that are usually spoken of as natural. There were advantages enough it clearly didn't possess. . . . It was hard for her to believe a woman could look presentable who had been kept awake for hours by the wall-paper in her room (pp. 1-2).

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[88]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, p. 233.

[89]Melvin Friedman, Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method, p. 43.

This narrator of The Spoils of Poynton is less conspicuous than in the The Portrait of a Lady, but the prose style of the post-dramatic novel becomes "more prominent in its own right."[90] Like the implied author in the earlier novel, this speaker presents the emotional states of the characters in the novel, not his own emotional reaction to his characters, as an omniscient narrator would do.[91] Womble Quay Grigg, Jr., proposes that James transforms his implied author into a personage within the realm of the novel, creating a character more like the Stage Manager in Thornton Wilder's play, Our Town, than like the omniscient author in Thackeray's Vanity Fair.[92]

The attitude of the implied author creates the tone of the condescending intelligence toward those who are ignorant. The speaker shares Mrs. Gereth's attitude of indignation for being imposed upon, sarcasm, and irritation. The total effect is intended amusement for the reader. Toward the end of this chapter, the focus shifts away from Mrs. Gereth to Fleda Vetch, both in point of view and diction.[93] In spite of this shift, the originally established

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[90]Holland, op. cit., p. 57.

[91]Womble Quay Grigg, Jr., "The Molds of Form: Comedy and Conscience in the Novels of Henry James, 1895-1901" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1961), p. 53.

[92]Ibid., pp. 54-56.

[93]Ibid., pp. 50-51.

attitude and tone do not change, for Fleda shares with her companion the same attitude toward Waterbath. Fleda, almost immediately upon seeing Mrs. Gereth's treasures at Poynton, shares Mrs. Gereth's great regard for the art pieces. James may have opened the novel with Mrs. Gereth's point of view to provide support for the reader's acceptance of Fleda's views and judgments. On the other hand, James may have wanted the reader to see Mrs. Gereth as an out-of-date old lady, sentimentally attached to the past and unable to adjust to new conditions and necessities. After all, her judgments of anyone else's art pieces is narrow and uncharitable. Furthermore, the implied author makes the subtle comparison of Mrs. Gereth's ". . . handsome, high-nosed, excited face . . ." to ". . . that of Don Quixote tilting at a windmill" (p. 36). This comparison implies that Mrs. Gereth fails to see clearly.

If Mrs. Gereth cannot perceive events and persons accurately and if Fleda wholeheartedly concurs with certain basic attitudes and judgments of Mrs. Gereth's, the obvious question arises concerning Fleda's ability to see and reflect accurately. Part of the difficulty in answering the question lies in the lack of authorial commentary. Because the implied author parrots Fleda's own style, much of the novel which the reader would ordinarily take as authorial comment assimilates into Fleda's circle of

consciousness.[94] Moreover, in this novel, for the first time, events draw Fleda into the center of the conflict and the central consciousness is no longer a mere observer but central participant in the action.[95]

As a result of watching a character who reports a view from the inside of the action, where points of view tend to be subjective, and receiving no obvious guidance from an outside omniscient intelligence, critics have encountered a real problem in determining Fleda's reliability as a center of consciousness for the novel. Several authorities insist upon Fleda's reliability as an objective and accurate reflector of her own and other characters' attitudes. Wiesenfarth states that the novel's framework denies the reader any source of knowledge other than the objective view of Fleda Vetch, which disentangles and judges all the complexities of the situation.[96] Philip L. Greene, following Booth's classification of reliable and unreliable, decides that the implied author totally commits himself to Fleda's reliability.[97] Greene notes an absence of difference

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[94] Ibid., p. 52.

[95] Walter Isle, Experiments in Form: Henry James's Novels, 1896-1901, p. 97.

[96] Wiesenfarth, op. cit., pp. 53-54, 56.

[97] Philip L. Greene, "Point of View in The Spoils of Poynton," NCF, XXI (March, 1967), 361.

in tone between the author's voice and the reflector's voice which would otherwise easily create irony.[98] Asserting that the author constantly violates Fleda's point of view, Greene believes that the implied author endorses Fleda's reliability.[99]

A significant number of critics disagree with the conclusions reached by Wiesenfarth and Greene. Robert C. McLean, for example, considers Fleda unreliable because of her "ethical relativism" and "tireless imagination."[100] Because Fleda invents most of her experiences, John Lucas sees "Fleda's interpretation of events as strikingly inventive and untrue, and wilfully blind to the obvious."[101] Grigg believes that the tone of the entire novel is mock-heroic, withheld from Fleda.[102] Finally, Isle says that the heroine ". . . is at once 'heroic, ironic, pathetic'; heroic from her own point of view, pathetic from Mrs. Gereth's, and ironic for the reader who must reconcile the two."[103]

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[98] Ibid., pp. 362-363.

[99] Ibid., p. 362.

[100] Robert C. McLean, "The Subjective Adventure of Fleda Vetch," Am Lit, XXXVI (March, 1964), 19.

[101] John Lucas, "The Spoils of Poynton: James's Intended Involvement," Essays in Criticism, XVI (October, 1966), 482-483.

[102] Grigg, op. cit., p. 60.

[103] Isle, op. cit., p. 113.

Arguments exist on both sides of the question concerning Fleda Vetch's reliability as a center of consciousness in her novel.

James gives the reader some clues in his Notebook jottings and his Preface. He considers Fleda a "fine" young woman who "resists" her "temptation."[104] However, he refuses to play the part of a telling author: "It must be unmitigatedly objective narration--unarrested drama."[105] In the Preface, James recalls, ". . . the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her understanding."[106] Qualifying this remark, he writes, "Fleda almost demonically both sees and feels. . . ."[107] James compares Mona Brigstock to Fleda: "She loses no minute in that perception of incongruities in which half Fleda's passion is wasted and misled. . . ."[108] Again, James says of his heroine: "Fleda, obliged to neglect inches, sees and feels but in acres and expanses and blue perspectives. . . ."[109] Although James does not openly declare in these remarks that Fleda Vetch

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[104] The Notebooks, p. 216.

[105] Ibid., p. 251.

[106] The Art of the Novel, p. 128.

[107] Ibid., p. 129.

[108] Ibid., p. 131.

[109] Ibid., p. 132.

unreliably reflects her situation, he sets the stage for the contention that she does perceive no better than Don Quixote.

The actual character of Owen Gereth and the true nature of his feeling toward Fleda helps to determine whether the heroine reliably reflects her experience. Early in the novel, the implied author makes a judgment of Owen: "Robust and artless, eminently natural, yet perfectly correct, he looked pointlessly active and pleasantly dull" (p. 9). Mrs. Gereth judges her son, consistently throughout the novel, in the same tone:

> His heaviness, which in her need of expansion she freely named, had two aspects: one of them his monstrous lack of taste, the other his exaggerated prudence (pp. 7-8).

Fleda, however, sees Owen as "absolutely beautiful and delightfully dense" (p. 10). As early as the tenth page in the novel Fleda thinks in terms of marriage, a thought inspired by her initial impression of Owen: "She herself was prepared, if she should ever marry, to contribute all the cleverness. . . ." Fleda judges Owen's actions with Mona Brigstock when the implied author reports her impression of ". . . intimacy--oh yes, intimacy as well as puerility--in the horse-play of which they had just had a glimpse" (p. 9). She sounds like a Puritannical grandmother scolding a teen-age girl for wearing lipstick. Owen's fiance, Mona Brigstock, also receives her share of hostile

criticism from Mrs. Gereth and Fleda because they think she is not worthy of Owen or the spoils. The implied author, to counteract some of their harshness, utilizes a technique which has appeared earlier in his works--the hypothetical observer:

> . . . and a person who had listened without enlightenment would have wondered of what fault the girl had been or had indeed not been guilty (p. 17).

Again, while the reader's judgment of Owen is still formulating, the implied author says of him, "It was clear enough, however, that the happy youth had no more sense for a motive than a deaf man for a tune . . ." (p. 22), and he twice calls the two women "wiseheads" for their occupation with Owen (pp. 22-23). In a very short time, Fleda falls in love with Owen and vows to never give him away and to protect him (pp. 31-32); one rarely judges objectively when one is in love. She shows signs of jealousy when she imagines the conversation between Owen and Mona:

> "Don't you think it's rather jolly, the old shop?" "Oh it's all right!" Mona had graciously remarked; and then they had probably, with a slap on a back, run another race up or down a green bank (pp. 33-34).

Meanwhile, in the background, the implied author compares Owen to a big dog (p. 34). James has some fun creating irony in dramatic juxtaposition of action between Mrs. Gereth's hateful action of throwing out the "female magazine" and Owen's simple-minded cry, "Good catch!" when Mona grabs the periodical (p. 42). Thus, without authorial

intermission, James achieves an evaluation of the character of Owen Gereth.

As the situation develops between Fleda and Owen, the implied author begins to clarify its true nature. Owen utterly depends on Fleda (p. 49). Fleda, not recognizing his feeling for what it really is,

> . . . gave herself, in her sentient solitude, up to a mere fairy-tale, up to the very taste of the beautiful peace with which she would have filled the air if only something might have been that could never have been (p. 52).

Yet the implied author judges Fleda gently: "It was not the crude love of possession; it was the need to be faithful to a trust and loyal to an idea" (p. 53). After all, Fleda does perceive accurately how Owen dislikes the pressure exerted on him by Mona; Owen directly reports this knowledge to her. Fleda does not, however, see Owen himself very well. She often romanticizes him, seeing him as the hero of a novel, a young gentleman, or a country squire.[110] Again, to maintain the norm, the implied author includes another suppositional observer report:

> Besides, people were saying that she fastened like a leech on other people--people who had houses where something was to be picked up: this revelation was frankly made her by her sister (pp. 70-71).

By this time, Fleda's imagination has created Owen's love, and she reads into his silence that he wants to make love

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[110]Isle, op. cit., pp. 107-108.

to her (pp. 75-80, 120-123). Concerning her reading of these silences, the implied author hints,

> Neither at Waterbath nor at Poynton had even Fleda's thoroughness discovered all there was--or rather, all there was not--in Owen Gereth (pp. 109-110).

He describes Fleda's feeling as ". . . her little gagged and blinded desire" (p. 143). Once more, the implied author subtly incorporates a standard of the norm:

> One of the effects of her intimacy with Mrs. Gereth was that she had quite lost all sense of intimacy with any one else. The lady of Ricks had made a desert round her, possessing and absorbing her so utterly that other partakers had fallen away. Hadn't she been admonished, months before, that people considered they had lost her and were reconciled on the whole to the privation? (p. 171).

If Fleda deceives both Owen and Mrs. Gereth (p. 186), she is capable of deceiving the reader.

Owen, who depends entirely on Fleda to regain the spoils for him, loves Mona (p. 197). He may be excited over his idea of "protecting" Fleda (p. 210), but what he wants from her, finally, is not love but to save him--to save Poynton's spoils for him since he declares himself already free from Mona (p. 223). Owen does not love Fleda, but worships her like a goddess:

> He clasped his hands before her as he might have clasped them at an altar. . . . He helped this effort, soothing her into a seat with a touch as light as if she had really been something sacred. She sank into a chair and he dropped before her on his knees. . ." (p. 227).

He admits to Fleda, contrary to what she has thought ever since she met him, that he had never even looked at her

until Mona "had regularly driven" him to it (p. 230). After Owen's declaration of love to Fleda, his weakness becomes obviously apparent; the realization momentarily appalls her, but she recognizes that his very weakness attracts her to him (p. 235). Now Fleda sees that her love had been one-sided (p. 253).

When Fleda realizes that she has been judging her situation incorrectly, the reader may recall James's statement of the story as Fleda's "march and progress" of understanding. Fleda does have and act by a "sense of honor" (p. 256). She now sees Mrs. Gereth accurately: "It was absolutely unselfish--she cared nothing for mere possession" (p. 258). She also recognizes that she loves Owen because he is weak (p. 272), and she looks around the room as though she had lost her umbrella--exactly as Owen had looked about him in one of their early interviews; she assumes a rightful place in their world for the first time. Fleda is now in command of her vision (pp. 309-311). She no longer conjectures about what Owen may be thinking; she simply admits her bafflement and inability to read the motive behind his silences (pp. 314-315). Fleda becomes a reliable narrator toward the end of the novel; for that reason she senses before she arrives the "disaster" at Poynton (p. 318).

In The Spoils of Poynton, Henry James capitalizes on his restriction of the point of view to one consciousness.

Fleda Vetch's consciousness, her growth in awareness, constitutes the story of this novel as she progresses from unreliable to reliable perception and reflection. Since a norm must exist to determine reliability and unreliability, the implied author, who nearly becomes a character within the framework of the novel, employs his own unobtrusive judgments, several reports from hypothetical characters and characters within the novel, and juxtaposed dramatic actions to establish the norm by which the reader must evaluate Fleda Vetch's point of view.

Again concentrating on the consciousness of one central character, James experimented with the additional difficulty of the more limited consciousness of a young child in What Maisie Knew (1897).[111] The critical debate over this novel centers around whether James limits the reader's knowledge to Maisie's consciousness, or point of view, or whether he provides added illumination from another point of view.

Arguing in support of the former theory, Leon Surmelian explains that the reader's knowledge is limited solely to the central consciousness and the reader receives no information which the character could not know:

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[111]This edition of What Maisie Knew is a Herbert S. Stone & Company impression of the 1897 original edition.

> We enter her mind and stay there, and we see all the other characters in the story through her eyes, as they appear to her, and not as they appear to the writer or to somebody else in the story.[112]

Edwin T. Bowden points out that although Maisie does not narrate the story, only she reflects and articulates.[113] J. W. Beach concurs with the idea of Maisie's awareness alone controlling the divulgence of information.[114] Finally, R. W. Short states that because James never allows the reader's knowledge to exceed the main character's, he sacrifices a rich source of irony.[115]

Standing on the other side of the fence in this debate, William York Tindall cogently notes,

> . . . no child of six or eight could know all that the observer must know. Looking into her head, James told what she saw and did not know, expressed what she could only feel, and, by judicious interference assisted the reader through her perplexities.[116]

Wiesenfarth places on the reader the burden of seeing and understanding meanings which Maisie herself would lose

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[112]Leon Z. Surmelian, Techniques of Fiction Writing: Measure and Madness, p. 57.

[113]Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James: A System of Observation Through the Visual Arts, p. 84.

[114]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James, p. 62. Heidi Specker, in her article, "The Change of Emphasis in the Criticism of Henry James," Engl Stud, XXIX (April, 1948), 44-45, makes a statement similar to Beach's.

[115]R. W. Short, "Some Critical Terms of Henry James," PMLA, LXV (September, 1950), 671-672.

[116]William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature, 1885-1946, p. 289.

between her seeing and understanding.[117] Grigg points out that the opening section forms the narrator's introduction to this novel in the person of the traditional omniscient narrator who speaks directly to his readers; Maisie's consciousness, then, supplements but does not completely replace the traditional author-narrator.[118] D. W. Jefferson explains that the novelist does not withdraw, for he tactfully translates Maisie's uncertain glimpses of truth into ". . . formulations of quite elaborate literary charm without ceasing to be cherished as the thoughts of a child."[119] Isle contends that James constantly directs the reader's attention beyond the girl's understanding by means of the linguistic style of the novel, speech, gestures, and actions of other characters, and implicit irony in Maisie's innocent responses to uninnocent events.[120]

In his Notebooks, Henry James decided early that all events would take place before Maisie.[121] In the backward look from the Preface, James adds,

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[117]Wiesenfarth, op. cit., p. 58.

[118]Grigg, op. cit., pp. 104-106.

[119]Douglas William Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader, pp. 136-137.

[120]Isle, op. cit., pp. 120-121, 133-136.

[121]The Notebooks, p. 238.

> The infant mind would at the best leave great gaps and voids. . . . we not more invited but only more expert critics, should feel in strong possession of it. . . . Amusing therefore as it might at the first blush have seemed to restrict myself in this case to the terms as well as to the experience, it became at once plain that such an attempt would fail. Maisie's terms accordingly play their part--since her simpler conclusions quite depend on them; but our own commentary constantly attends and amplifies.[122]

The point of view, then, originates in Maisie's consciousness, employs supplemental guides from the implied author, and depends upon the reader to make connections and generalizations.

The opening section of What Maisie Knew, preceding the numbered chapters, has little obvious relation to Maisie's point of view:

> The litigation had seemed interminable, and had in fact been complicated; but, by the decision on the appeal, the judgment of the divorce-court was confirmed as to the assignment of the child. . . . This was odd justice in the eyes of those who still blinked in the fierce light projected from the divorce-court--a light in which neither parent figured in the least as a happy example to youth and innocence.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Nothing could have been more touching at first than her failure to suspect the ordeal that awaited her little unspotted soul. There were persons horrified to think what those in charge of it would combine to try to make of it; no one could conceive in advance that they would be able to make nothing ill (pp. 1-5).

Although at first glance the words in this section of the novel sound like the typical style of an omniscient narrator, significant differences exist in this passage. The tone

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[122]The Art of the Novel, pp. 145-146.

creates a quiet irony while the narrator relates the bare, unelaborated facts of the divorce suit. The narrator omits obvious personal comments upon the sordid case, and, whenever a bitter evaluation of the disputants appears, some hypothetical observers make the statement.

In the numbered chapters of the novel, nearly all of the action comes to the reader through Maisie's awareness. Maisie has a part in the first exchange of vile words between her parents: "And did your beastly papa, my precious angel, send any message to your loving mama?" to which Maisie replies, "He said I was to tell you from him . . . that you're a nasty horrid pig!" (p. 15). Maisie hears reports from and exchanges between most of the characters. She shares Miss Overmore's confidence about seeing Beale Farange (pp. 21-22), Mrs. Wix often discusses the current situations with her, the Captain praises Mrs. Farange for her (pp. 191-193), her father lies to the "Countess" in front of Maisie (pp. 246-248), and Sir Claude often talks to her. Thus, James accomplishes nearly the same effect in What Maisie Knew as he did in The Portrait of a Lady of roving from character to character; the characters' frank talks before Maisie render the situation from several perspectives.[123]

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[123]Joseph Anthony Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction, p. 39.

At the same time, the implied author stands beside Maisie throughout the novel. He occasionally formulates what Maisie cannot conceptualize for herself; for example, he explains her emotion when she first meets Sir Claude as ". . . a strange, shy pride in him" (p. 73). He forecasts events, such as the occasion when Mrs. Wix would be ". . . grander than all of them put together" (p. 92). Finally, the implied author surveys what Maisie knows: "Oh, decidedly, I shall never get you to believe the number of things she saw and the number of secrets she discovered!" (p. 264). While the implied author seldom makes direct comments, his tone (different, for example, than the voice in the Preface) is ironic, worldly and unshocked, amused and mature.[124] As the implied author transposes Maisie's nonverbal awareness into verbal awareness, he becomes her consciousness, with the result of double displacement.[125] The implied author becomes part of Maisie's consciousness, but he provides the ironic turns, uses the comic tone to keep the girl's experience from being too pathetic, maintains the squalor of the situation at a distance, and "heightens and solemnizes" Maisie's triumph at the end of the novel.[126]

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[124]Sallie Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James, pp. 28-29.

[125]Ibid., p. 30.

[126]Isle, op. cit., p. 140.

While the implied author works closer to the consciousness of the central character, the reader must himself often see the irony. The reader knows, for instance, that Miss Overmore arrives at Maisie's father's house, not for Maisie's sake, but to consummate an affair with Maisie's father. Maisie only innocently understands that her friend has arrived; the narrator remains silent and the reader catches the irony. James does not "tell" but "shows." Because Maisie does not recognize the nature of the relationships which her parents and stepparents establish, the reader must reconcile the various perspectives of each situation.

As the novel progresses, Maisie does learn to understand the occurrences around her. After her turning point, Maisie "knows" the situation in which she lives.[127] She achieves

> . . . the death of her childhood . . . after which (with the inevitable shift, sooner or later, of her point of view) her situation will change and become another affair, subject to other measurements and with a new centre altogether.[128]

Maisie begins to understand her situation in Chapter XX:

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[127]Ward S. Worden, "Henry James's What Maisie Knew: A Comparison with the Plans in The Notebooks," PMLA, LXVIII (June, 1953), 375.

[128]The Art of the Novel, pp. 146-147.

> Maisie had known all along a great deal, but never so much as she was to know from this moment on, and as she learned in particular during the couple of days that she was to hang in the air, as it were, over the sea which represented, in breezy blueness and with a summer charm, a crossing of more spaces than the Channel. It was given to her at this time to arrive at divinations so ample that I shall have no room for the goal if I attempt to trace the stages; as to which therefore I must be content to say that the fullest expression we may give to Sir Claude's conduct is a poor and pale copy of the picture it presented to his young friend. . . . Maisie had by this time embraced the implication of a kind of natural divergence between lovers and little girls (pp. 259-260, 262).

After this point, Maisie has the capacity to see fully "madness and desolation," "ruin and darkness and death" (p. 225). She now recognizes why Sir Claude's eyes follow the supple movements of the young fishwife (p. 303). She comprehends Mrs. Wix's "naughty slap" at Sir Claude (p. 329). She perceives the limits of Mrs. Wix's mind and realizes that she has progressed beyond her old governess (p. 343). Understanding more than ever before, Maisie recognizes that Sir Claude fears himself (p. 420) and then realizes that she is afraid of herself (p. 437). Ironically, none of the other characters senses how much Maisie does know: Sir Claude laughs, ". . . vous-n'y-etes pas" (p. 426), not seeing that she is "there."

Maisie proves that she has arrived at full knowledge when her fear of herself is "dashed down and broken" (p. 446). She offers herself to Sir Claude, urging him to take her with him. By this time Maisie is "afraid of nothing" (p. 455). Because Sir Claude is a slave to his passion over

Mrs. Beale, he does not leave with Maisie. The young girl understands that he cannot go because his weakness is his sexual passion. She then controls the situation: ". . . she showed she knew the way" (p. 456). Having attained this stage of awareness and control of her situation, Maisie shifts her point of view to adult awareness and her story as an innocent child ends.

In this middle period of writing, then, James concentrates on one center of consciousness for reflecting the story to the reader. The reader still receives reports from other characters, but only as told to or interpreted by the central character. The implied author takes a stance beside the major character, offering more subtle guides than in James's earlier work and allowing the characters and events to speak more often for themselves, or "showing" in place of "telling." Finally, James relies more heavily upon the reader to interpret the action of the novels.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAJOR PHASE: THE LAST EXPERIMENTS

With the advent of his final period of writing, 1900 to 1916, Henry James brought to a culmination all of the innovations which he had discovered in his earlier works. The novels of this phase are his longest ones; the style is more complex and difficult, and the fictional techniques are subtly refined. In spite of this achievement in fiction, James continued to experiment: The Ambassadors, of all of James's novels, constitutes the ultimate experiment in the use of a single central consciousness, and The Golden Bowl continues to experiment with the basic point-of-view technique of The Portrait of a Lady.

The novel for which James has received the greatest fame and critical commentary has been The Ambassadors (1902).[129] James himself considered this novel the best "all round" of his productions.[130] Entertaining no similar high regard, F. R. Leavis calls the novel an exhibition of senility.[131] Alexander Cowie disagrees wholeheartedly with Leavis and insists that no novelist of the English language

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[129]James published The Ambassadors with Harper and Brothers Publishers of New York in 1902.

[130]The Art of the Novel, p. 309.

[131]Frank Raymond Leavis, The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, p. 126.

had so thoroughly ". . . devoted himself to creating a work of art that is self-sustaining or so completely effaced himself from its record."[132] The Ambassadors, either James's best or his worst novel, at least shows James at his most typical.

The critical question about The Ambassadors centers around whether James, as the author, completely effaced himself from the novel. Of those critics who believe that James did eliminate the author from the novel, W. C. D. Pacey and Christof Wegelin claim that all of the novel's commentary remains within Strether's point of view, while James never utters any words of sympathy or condemnation of Strether.[133] In support of this view, McCullough describes James as an impersonal, or effaced, narrator.[134] Beach and Matthiessen agree with the view of an effaced narrator because the facts of the novel come only through Strether's knowledge.[135] Asserting that Strether's mind is in full

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[132]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel, p. 730.

[133]W. C. D. Pacey, "Henry James and His French Contemporaries," Am Lit, XIII (November, 1941), 256; Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, p. 99.

[134]Bruce Walker McCullough, Representative English Novelists: Defoe to Conrad, pp. 288-289.

[135]Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Technique, p. 191; Joseph Warren Beach, Henry James, The Major Phase, p. 22.

sight, Percy Lubbock reasons that authorial interposition would disturb the novel: "The author does no such thing, it need hardly be said."[136] Finally, Alwyn Berland cites James's subtle authorial intrusions, but concludes that because the reader learns nothing significant about Strether's case from these intrusions, the point of view consistently remains Strether's.[137]

Other critics more quickly point to the novel's omniscient commentary. Ford Madox Ford, for example, states that the reader hears James continually patronizing his characters.[138] D. W. Jefferson decides that in his later novels James manifests himself more than ever before.[139] Scholes and Kellogg sarcastically observe that James's style makes him perpetually visible: "He wears only one mask, and that one looks exactly like his face."[140] Charles Child Walcutt shares these authors' resentment against James's apparent presence and concern for the "poor" hero.[141] Tilford claims

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[136]Lubbock, op. cit., pp. 146, 161-162.

[137]Alwyn Berland, "Henry James," UKCR, XVII (Winter, 1950), 107.

[138]Ford Madox Ford, Henry James: A Critical Study, p. 24.

[139]Douglas William Jefferson, Henry James, p. 138.

[140]Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, p. 271.

[141]Charles Child Walcutt, Man's Changing Mask: Modes and Methods of Characterization in Fiction, p. 175.

that James's authorial intrusions violate his pronounced theory of fiction.[142] Because James interposes with his knowledge of the future of a character and occasionally shifts to other characters' points of view, Tilford states, the center of vision does not always reside within the compass of Strether's vision.[143]

A third group of critics acknowledge the authorial commentaries but accept the intrusions as a functional part of James's art. Beginning with the view that the author establishes the authority in The Ambassadors, Rubin notices that James objected to using authorial omniscience in place of properly creating characterization; instead, James used his authority to accomplish the feat of being in two chronological positions simultaneously, a feat which Strether could not accomplish alone.[144] Arthur J. A. Waldock observes that James creates infinite flexibility with the slight shifts in point of view.[145] Wright sees these shifts as a method of allowing the reader to watch the characters on an outer stage and draw ". . . conclusions about them in

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[142]Tilford, op. cit., p. 161.

[143]Ibid., pp. 158-159, 161.

[144]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The Teller in the Tale, pp. 92, 98-99.

[145]Arthur John Alfred Waldock, James, Joyce, and Others, p. 23.

hard, perhaps inflexible terms, only to see them again in Strether's consciousness and to accept his tolerant view."[146] Thus, James again achieves relativity of vision. Finally, James Oliver Black remarks that the reader has a double view: Strether's vision of the events of the novel and the vision of what Strether himself cannot see--Strether.[147] If the reader saw only what Strether, with characteristic naivete, sees, the novel would lose much of its comedy and irony as well as the deeper meaning of the story.[148]

James, in his Preface to The Ambassadors, relates his concern of the novel as being the demonstration of Strether's seeing process.[149] James concentrates on ". . . employing but one centre and keeping it all within my hero's compass."[150] Other characters people the scene of the novel, but ". . . Strether's sense of these things, and Strether's only, should avail me for showing them; I should know them but through his more or less groping knowledge of them. . . ."[151] James, then, claims to keep the

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[146]Wright, op. cit., p. 233.

[147]James Oliver Black, "A Novel as a 'Work of Art': A Reading of The Ambassadors" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 1958), p. 24.

[148]Ibid., p. 28.

[149]The Art of the Novel, p. 308.

[150]Ibid., p. 317.

[151]Loc. cit.

knowledge of events and actions within the compass of his hero's consciousness.

The opening paragraph of The Ambassadors exemplifies James's meaning and means of keeping the action within Strether's point of view.

> Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. A telegram from him bespeaking a room "only if not noisy," with the answer paid, was produced for the inquirer at the office, so that the understanding that they should meet at Chester rather than at Liverpool remained to that extent sound. The same secret principle, however, that had prompted Strether not absolutely to desire Waymarsh's presence at the dock, that had led him thus to postpone for a few hours his enjoyment of it, now operated to make him feel that he could still wait without disappointment. They would dine together at the worst, and, with all respect to dear old Waymarsh--if not even, for that matter, to himself--there was little fear that in the sequel they should not see enough of each other. The principle I have just mentioned as operating had been, with the most newly disembarked of the two men, wholly instinctive--the fruit of a sharp sense that, delightful as it would be to find himself looking, after so much separation, into his comrade's face, his business would be a trifle bungled should he simply arrange that this countenance should present itself to the nearing steamer as the first "note," for him, of Europe. Mixed with everything was the apprehension, already, on Strether's part, that it would, at best, throughout, prove the note of Europe in quite a sufficient degree (p. 3).

Instead of wording the first sentence of this paragraph as he did, James could have written more direct and obvious narration: ". . . when Strether reached the hotel, he first asked, 'Has Waymarsh arrived?'" Ian Watt proposes that James intends, rather, to emphasize the subjective over the

objective, the meaning over the action.[152] The abstract nouns and passive voice verbs suggest mental ideas and states of being rather than actions and events, and in using the passive voice ("was about his friend"), James sets up the narrator to tell about and to interpret the action.[153] The narrator, then, will concentrate upon and objectify Strether's mind for the reader.[154]

Pelham Edgar notes that Strether's active mind marks him as one of James's intelligent and sensitive reflectors.[155] His complex mental processes range through all possible answers to a question. In these searches, Strether often hesitates, but he always strives for accuracy in his thinking.[156] From this combination of concentration on Strether's mind and his sensitivity to all possible aspects of a problem Jean Frantz Blackall concludes that Strether becomes involved in a perplexity which the reader must share in order to see in the hero a prototype of the reader's own perplexity.[157]

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[152]Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors: An Explication," Essays in Criticism, X (July, 1960), 256.

[153]Ibid., pp. 256-257.

[154]Black, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

[155]Pelham Edgar, "Henry James and His Method," Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Section II, Series III, XII (December, 1918-March, 1919), 232.

[156]Black, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

[157]Jean Frantz Blackall, Jamesian Ambiguity and "The Sacred Fount," p. 31.

The opening paragraph of the novel, as Watt declares, creates a multidimensional view from three minds--Strether's, the implied author's, and the reader's.[158] The "I" which appears in this passage, the implied author, allows the reader to see inside Strether's mind and to be outside, knowing more about the hero than he knows about himself.[159] Black observes that James could easily have told Strether's story without ever using the "I," but the implied author's presence is essential to remind the reader that he sees Strether objectively as well as subjectively and to retain the reader's sympathy toward the hero.[160] The presence of the "I" reveals the proximity of an author, but he is an implied author, not Henry James; thus, James has effaced himself from the novel but not quite in the terms of the current concept of the "effaced" author.[161] At the same time, this implied author considers only Strether's process of vision, and unlike an omniscient author, James's implied author does not tell the reader what to think, but gives him mere hints.[162] Consequently, James's inclusion of such

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[158]Watt, op. cit., p. 257.

[159]Ibid., pp. 266-267.

[160]Black, op. cit., p. 31.

[161]William B. Thomas, "The Novelist's Point of View: A Study in the Technique of Henry James" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, 1968), pp. 51-52.

[162]Black, op. cit., p. 32.

phrases as "I" and "our friend" does not violate the tenets of his theory of art, but on the contrary, is basic to what James accomplishes in his fiction.

The implied author of The Ambassadors performs certain functions. He draws the reader into the fictional world by removing touchstones from the outside world of reality. By omitting such brute details as the name of Strether's hotel, the narrative centers on the mental rather than the physical continuum, eliminating restrictions of time and place.[163] As a result, Poulet points out, James creates a new kind of time, which consists in establishing about a central focus a rotating circle of points of view, from one to the other of which the implied author proceeds.[164] The only change occurs in point of view; thus, time consists of the passage, not from one moment to another, but from one perspective to another.[165] By eliminating the traditional concept of time and place in this novel, James achieves universality.

The reader, drawn into the fictional world, relies, then, on the second primary function of the implied author--guiding the reader's responses to Strether. Strether's

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[163]Watt, op. cit., p. 257.

[164]Georges Poulet, Studies in Human Time, pp. 351-352.

[165]Ibid., p. 352.

"chronicle" manipulates the reader's sympathy for the protagonist from the beginning when the reader undertakes with "our friend" the first steps in the process of seeing (p. 80). The implied author occasionally gives hints of the difficult experiences lying in wait for Strether: "He couldn't see as yet how deep. Might he not all too soon!" (p. 113). The reader sympathizes with the hero when he falls in love with Madame de Vionnet:

> She was romantic for him far beyond what she could have guessed, and again he found his small comfort in the conviction that, subtle though she was, his impression must remain a secret from her (p. 207).

Strether receives moral support from the implied author when the obnoxious Pococks arrive; Strether knows ". . . himself more than ever in the right" (p. 241). In the recognition scene on the river, the tone kindly summarizes Strether's work as ambassador: "Verily, verily, his labor had been lost" (p. 389). In the end, Strether widens his vision from the narrow-minded, Puritannical Woollett to all of humanity:

> He was carrying on a correspondence, across the great city, quite in the key of the Postes et Telegraphes in general; and it was fairly as if the acceptance of that fact had come from something in his state that sorted with the occupation of his neighbors. He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris, and so were they, poor things--how could they all together help being? They were no worse than he, in short, and he no worse than they--if, queerly enough, no better. . . (p. 394).

Watt believes that Strether's painful search to see does not evolve into an ironic evaluation of humanity's general muddlement, but that the process of vision increasingly

becomes ". . . a touching example of how, despite all their inevitable incongruities and shortcomings, human ties remain only, but still, human."[166]

In spite of these subtle comments which the implied author provides, he rarely corrects Strether's impressions because the reader must travel inside Strether as well as see him objectively. The implied author occasionally even teases the reader's curiosity by withholding information, such as the name of the Woollett product (p. 43).[167] For the most part, the implied author remains silent. When little Bilham describes the attachment between Chad Newsome and Madame de Vionnet as "virtuous," the implied author gives no hint to the contrary (p. 124); the reader has, at best, only "the vain appearance" (p. 139). Later, when Strether sees "the truth" as he jumps to the conclusion that Chad loves Jeanne, Madame de Vionnet's daughter, the implied author again refrains from making any comment (p. 152). Strether thinks the worst that can happen to him would be Mrs. Newsome's breaking their engagement; neither Maria Gostrey nor the implied author indicate to either Strether or the reader the nature of an event more shattering (pp. 235-237). Finally, Strether himself makes certain

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[166]Watt, op. cit., p. 268.

[167]Blackall, op. cit., p. 9.

pronouncements which go uncorrected: "I see--I see. He felt he really did see" (p. 292), and "Oh, odd as it may appear to you, there are things I don't know" (p. 320). The implied author deliberately refrains from any commentary in these instances in order to force the reader into Strether's subjective view and to make the reader share Strether's perplexities as his own. Perhaps the most significant authorial omission, then, is the absence of his judgment of Madame de Vionnet.

Strether and the reader see and evaluate the situation from several perspectives. According to Edel, the characters in the novel mutually irradiate each other: Strether illuminates Maria Gostrey, she illuminates him, both shed light on Waymarsh, and he in turn lights the other two.[168] Priscilla Gibson sees the dialogue between Strether and the other characters as providing contrasts between the reverberations of one image in different minds, the resulting disparity of which sometimes effects important changes.[169] Maria Gostrey, for example, along with Little Bilham and Miss Barrace introduce new images and interpretations to Strether's thought.[170] The central question which the

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[168]Leon Joseph Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel, p. 36.

[169]Priscilla Gibson, "The Uses of James's Imagery: Drama Through Metaphor," PMLA, LXIX (December, 1954), 1079.

[170]Loc. cit.

characters discuss is the degree of virtue in the relationship of Chad and Madame de Vionnet. Strether arrives from Woollett, Massachusetts, expecting Madame de Vionnet to be the instigator of an illicit relationship, but his first impression of Chad is that the young man has immensely improved (p. 102). Strether's view of the heroine tends further to negate the suggestion of an illicit relationship. The heroine gradually reveals herself through what others say about her.[171] Little Bilham declares to Strether, ". . . it's a virtuous attachment" (p. 124), and Maria Gostrey refuses to deny Bilham's assessment (pp. 125-126). Chad assures the hero that Madame de Vionnet's life is ". . . absolutely without reproach. A beautiful life" (p. 165). The Pococks, on the other hand, firmly believe that the heroine has exerted a harmful influence on Chad (p. 343). After Strether has recognized that Chad and Madame de Vionnet are lovers, he hears Chad speak ". . . of being 'tired' of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner" (p. 423). Thus, Strether views his situation from several perspectives.

The reader, however, sees more than does Strether because the reader sees both Strether's view and Strether. Edwin Snell maintains that James's technical accomplishment

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[171]Gordon, op. cit., p. 118.

is that the reader's degree of enlightenment continues to be just enough greater than Strether's to allow the reader to perceive the immediate significance of the difference between what Strether does know and does not know; yet, the reader's enlightenment never becomes great enough to destroy his interest in the gradual clarification of issues occurring before him.[172] As a result, James writes, in Blackall's words, a sort of "intellectual detective story."[173] While Strether blindly pursues an idee fixe and the reader gradually perceives the truth, James achieves a comedy of the limited observer in which the reader's fun consists of outguessing the hero.[174] The reader, Baker believes, becomes aware that Strether is a changed man before he himself does.[175] The reader also outguesses Strether concerning the nature of the lovers' relationship, but the exact point at which this realization occurs cannot be recalled; lost ignorance can never be regained.

Thus, The Ambassadors centers in the consciousness of Lambert Strether, whose story is the removal of wool from his eyes. He learns to see as he views his situation from

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[172]Edwin Marion Snell, The Modern Fables of Henry James, p. 37.

[173]Blackall, op. cit., p. 37.

[174]Ibid., p. 148.

[175]Baker, op. cit., p. 278.

multiple perspectives. The reader's perspective encompasses Strether's vision as well as the more objective view for which the implied author provides subtle clues. Having accomplished the feat of bringing the reader into the fictional realm, it is no wonder that in his Preface James called the novel ". . . the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms."[176] James achieved a great deal with his point of view technique in The Ambassadors.[177]

Henry James's last completed novel was The Golden Bowl (1905).[178] Unlike The Ambassadors, this novel uses more than one character's consciousness to reflect the action. Much critical confusion has arisen from James's comments in his Preface. James writes that he kept the

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[176]The Art of the Novel, p. 326.

[177]As with The Portrait of a Lady, critics disparage the conclusion of The Ambassadors. F. O. Matthiessen (The Major Phase, p. 39) voices a representative complaint: "The burden of The Ambassadors is that Strether has awakened to a wholly new sense of life. Yet he does nothing at all to fulfill that sense." Strether rejects Maria Gostrey's implicit offer of marriage, however, because he has awakened. Maria offers him exquisite service, lightened care, warmth, and security (p. 431). Strether refuses, "To be right" (p. 432). He does not love Miss Gostrey; he covertly loves Madame de Vionnet. To marry Maria, as James says in the Notebooks, ". . . would be almost of the old order" (p. 415). In other words, Strether refuses because to marry Maria would result in the same situation as marrying Mrs. Newsome. Strether, then, does act on his newly awakened sense of life.

[178]London: Methuen & Company, 1905.

novel within ". . . the consciousness of but two of the characters, . . ." and that in the first book the reader sees all of the characters and events ". . . but as they are visible in the Prince's interest, so to speak--by which I mean of course in the interest of being handed over to us."[179] D. W. Jefferson, among other authorities, observes the obvious shifts in the point of view to other characters and concludes that James's practice and theory failed to coincide.[180] However, James also writes in the Preface that the Prince and Princess present "the compositional contribution," and James refers to these two characters as "subjects."[181] If Maggie and Amerigo constitute "subjects," they would fall into the same classification as the spoils in The Spoils of Poynton, where the art works are the subject of the novel while Fleda Vetch acts as the articulating center.[182] Because Maggie and Amerigo are subjects of interest in their own right, other points of view come to bear upon them, even while they, unlike the spoils, speak and see for themselves.

In the Preface to The Golden Bowl, too, James describes the characteristics of the implied author. Again,

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[179]The Art of the Novel, pp. 329-330, et pas.

[180]Douglas William Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader, p. 137.

[181]The Art of the Novel, pp. 329-330, et pas.

[182]Ibid., pp. 126-127.

the first paragraph of the novel establishes the implied author's presence.

> The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on the legend of the City to which the world paid tribute, he recognised in the present London much more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case. If it was a question of an Imperium, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. It was not indeed to either of those places that these grounds of his predilection, after all sufficiently vague, had, at the moment we are concerned with him, guided his steps; he had strayed, simply enough, into Bond Street. . . . The young man's movements, however, betrayed no consistency of attention--not even, for that matter, when one of his arrests had proceeded from possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him on the pavement, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols held at perverse angles in waiting victorias. And the Prince's undirected thought was not a little symptomatic, since, though the turn of the season had come and the flush of the streets begun to fade, the possibilities of faces, on the August afternoon, were still one of the notes of the scene. He was too restless--that was the fact--for any concentration, and the last idea that would just now have occurred to him in any connection was the idea of pursuit (pp. 1-2).

The narrating voice is not the Prince's, nor does it belong to James; the implied author once again assumes a position. James writes that he shakes off ". . . the muffled majesty of authorship . . ." and gets

> . . . down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game.[183]

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[183] Ibid., p. 328.

This implied author James describes as

> . . . some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. . . . /T/he impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate. . . . I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it; that nearness quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's--however avowed the "minor" quality in the latter--close and sensitive contact with it (p. 327-328).[184]

The tone of the implied author, then, dominates the novel, allowing smooth transitions to occur from one character's point of view to another.[185]

When Maggie realizes at the beginning of the second book that her husband and Charlotte are engaged in an affair, the entire donnee lies before the reader.[186] Thus, the primary concern of The Golden Bowl resides in the various characters' views of the marital situations. Austin Warren observes that more important than the characters themselves become the relationships of characters.[187] James creates these relationships through the shifts into and from various

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[184]Ibid., pp. 327-328, et pas.

[185]Douglas William Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader, p. 138.

[186]Francis Otto Matthiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase, p. 83.

[187]Austin Warren, "Myth and Dialectic in the Later Novels," Kenyon R, V (1943), 561.

points of view. For example, in the first half of the novel, the reader hears from the Prince, Charlotte, Adam Verver, and Fanny Assingham, not only how innocent and good Maggie is, but also how she promises in some way a force with which to be reckoned.[188] Mrs. Assingham, for instance, observes, ". . . she wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it" (p. 54). She again says of Maggie, "It will be she who'll see us through. In fact she'll have to. And she'll be able" (p. 197). The Prince acts as the compositional center of interest: the marriages and the love affair virtually build up around him. He marries Maggie; because she has a husband, her father marries Charlotte; Charlotte and Amerigo feel excluded from the Verver's relationship and subsequently establish their own. Their shared point of view rationalizes their affair:

> Nothing stranger surely had ever happened to a conscientious, a well-meaning, a perfectly passive pair: no more extraordinary decree had ever been launched against such victims than this of forcing them against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid (p. 204).

Fanny Assingham, meanwhile, continually tries to guess whether the affair has commenced (pp. 261-268), and finally concludes correctly that it has (p. 281). Each of the characters has some knowledge which the others do not have,

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[188]Forbes, op. cit., p. 119.

and the reader stays just far enough ahead of all of them to feel their revelations as dramatic.[189]

With Book Second, the central subject shifts to Maggie and her realization of the affair. This shift occurs for several reasons. First, Cargill explains, the shift cuts off the reader's view of Amerigo's mental processes at the moment when they would reveal too much.[190] Naomi Lebowitz contributes the reason that Maggie's consciousness leads into deeper chambers of moral involvement.[191] The developments of the story have simply passed out of the range of the Prince's mind to Maggie, who has greater imaginative sensitivity.[193] The Prince's powers of perception, after all, are decidedly limited, for he often just does not pay attention (p. 75). Furthermore, Beach points out, the shift in perspective also serves to contrast points of view.[194] Maggie now has both greater knowledge and control

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[189]Francis Fergusson, "The Drama in The Golden Bowl," Hound & Horn, VII (April-May, 1934), 410.

[190]Cargill, op. cit., p. 423.

[191]Naomi Lebowitz, The Imagination of Loving: Henry James's Legacy to the Novel, p. 132.

[192]Joseph Anthony Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James, p. 152.

[193]Grattan, op. cit., pp. 297-298.

[194]Joseph Warren Beach, The Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Technique, pp. 198-199.

than any other character.[195] The vision of events, also, remains almost entirely within Maggie's control. Commencing her manipulations, she finds herself "very much alone" (p. 319).

James creates ambiguity, Krook perceives, with the shifts in the characters' points of view.[196] Maggie learns that any situation presents merely ". . . a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter" (p. 460). Early in the novel, Maggie uses traditional concepts, such as "good" and "evil," but as her story progresses, she learns that the old, rigid definitions fail to accommodate the given terms, and she must create new assumptions, ". . . redefining, in a process of continuous creation, her moral universe to the point where 'good' and 'evil' ultimately become indistinguishable."[197] Now Maggie's basic aim becomes the task of maintaining the equilibrium of the group (p. 299). She must work silently, maintaining tranquility, because if anyone were to question her actions for a motive, she would not be ready with a reason (p. 311).

The question then arises concerning the purity of Maggie's action, for she seems to assume the powers of a

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[195]Joseph Anthony Ward, The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction, p. 208.

[196]Krook, op. cit., pp. 310-311.

[197]Sears, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

god in manipulating the other people involved. The answer lies with the character of the implied author. E. K. Brown notes that while the reader visits several internal theatres, he also has access to the theatre without--the objective view of the quadrangular situation.[198] Sallie Sears adds that the subjective view of the situation is the vision of the character whose state of consciousness is doing the reflecting, while the objective view is the character being seen by other characters and the reader.[199] The implied author contributes to the objective vision. For example, the implied author makes a judgment of Charlotte which suffices for the entire novel: Charlotte carries around with her an impression which she keeps ". . . like a precious medal--not exactly blessed by the Pope--suspended round her neck" (p. 213). Thus, the novel, while upsetting the reader's traditional concepts of truth, reality, and morality, sustains a norm with subtle suggestions from the implied author.

In his last completed novel, The Golden Bowl, Henry James once more accomplishes a brilliant presentation through the technique of point of view. The implied author roves from one character's point of view to another,

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[198]E. K. Brown, "James and Conrad," Yale Review, XXXV (December, 1945), 284.

[199]Sears, op. cit., p. 175.

creating ambiguities in interpretation, but also providing quiet guidelines of stability.

CHAPTER V

JAMES'S ACHIEVEMENT: THE SACRED RAGE

Almost all of Henry James's works of art turn or concentrate upon the process of seeing. A typical Jamesian novel begins with an imaginative character whose powers of fine perception have not yet been through an experience to refine them and make them accurate. The Jamesian novel provides the necessary experience to bring the character out on the "other side," to "see him through." While undergoing this process of vision, the character realizes that his point of view constitutes only one view of a many-sided situation. He recognizes that other interpretations, other points of view, exist for other people. When the protagonist finally sees "all," he has perceived and incorporated into his own view many other perspectives.

All thinking begins with seeing, not through the eye alone, but through basic formulations of all the senses.[200] Whatever a person sees, to have meaning, must be employed as a sign or symbol to someone else; consequently, abstraction must occur, and symbols then become, not proxies for the original objects, but vehicles for the conceptions of the

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[200]Susanne Katherina Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art, p. 266.

objects.[201] The possibilities for misinterpretation or missing the idea altogether multiply rapidly. Charles Feidelson notes that James capitalized upon this discovery and strove to give language a sort of autonomy by conceiving it as a realm of meaning, and his structure explored is discovered in the language, not behind the piece of fiction in his mind or in front of the work in the external world.[202] Lyon N. Richardson states that one of the first steps which James took to create autonomy of the language was to locate the implied author, the "I," within the framework of his fictional world, making the fictional work a complete entity; no one pulls the puppet strings from the outside, and the reader's attention always remains within the pages.[203] To consider a literary work as a piece of language is to regard the work as a symbol: autonomous because the fiction exists distinct from the author's ego and from any world of pure objects, and creative because the work brings into existence its own meaning.[204]

In order to explore the fundamental human problem of seeing, James selects an intelligent, imaginative, but still

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[201] Ibid., pp. 53, 60-61, 72.

[202] Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature, p. 45.

[203] Lyon N. Richardson, "Introduction," Henry James: Representative Selections with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes, p. li.

[204] Feidelson, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

human character to follow through an experience of vision. Isabel Archer, Fleda Vetch, Maisie Farange, Lambert Strether, and Maggie Verver have extraordinary imaginations and intellectual capacities, but they all are equally capable of making errors in judgment. These characters, and all human beings, make mistakes because the intellect usually works with the minimum of actual perception or formal judgment in the process of understanding, reshaping, and employing linguistic symbols to experience.[205]

In every experience, Langer says, ". . . the form of a fact becomes the form of a specific human response to a specific event."[206] The experience which James provides in his fiction for the protagonist constitutes a test in perception for that character. Isabel Archer must learn to see accurately Gilbert Osmond and their marriage as part of her European experience. Fleda Vetch tempers her romantic view with a more realistic vision. Maisie acquires a concept of morality. Strether exchanges his narrow-minded, Puritannical attitude for the humanistic view. Maggie recognizes that evil does exist. After each of these characters achieves a kind of epiphany, he does see accurately.

At the beginning of a novel, James's protagonist perceives only from his own point of view. He arrives on the

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[205]Langer, op. cit., pp. 282-283.

[206]Ibid., p. 269.

scene unaware that

> . . . between the facts run the threads of unrecorded reality, momentarily recognized, wherever they come to the surface, in our tacit adaptation to signs; and the bright, twisted threads of symbolic envisagement, imagination, thought--memory and reconstructed memory, belief beyond experience, dream, make-believe, hypothesis, philosophy--the whole creative process of ideation, metaphor, and abstraction that makes human life an adventure in understanding.[207]

Full consciousness comes to the protagonist only after he comprehends the fact that his view comprises merely one perspective of the situation.

James traces the development of consciousness by concentrating on the individual case and surrounding him with characters who present contrasting points of view.[208] The protagonist then, Feidelson remarks, embarks upon a journey of discovery among the various perspectives, or symbolically, among the meanings of words.[209] He discovers the discrepancies between what really is (reality) and what he--and others--see (relativity). This process of vision, then, is the Jamesian point of view. The implied author stands beside the main character, or "center of consciousness"; he also roves among the other characters in the novel, revealing their points of view. For example, Isabel Archer is the

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[207]Ibid., p. 281.

[208]Lebowitz, op. cit., p. 79.

[209]Feidelson, op. cit., p. 47.

center of consciousness in The Portrait of a Lady. The implied author travels with her during most of the story, but he also shifts to other persons' points of view. However, he remains almost exclusively with her (as with Maggie Verver) after she reaches full awareness of her situation. The point of view, then, actually belongs to the roving narrator. James follows almost the same pattern in The Golden Bowl. The implied author roves among several points of view which surround the two central consciousnesses of Maggie and Amerigo. Similarly, Strether's consciousness constitutes the single center of The Ambassadors. The implied author renders the other characters' points of view through their conversations with Strether and their behavior. Thus, the implied author may still be considered a roving narrator. The reader and the implied author share the additional knowledge, concealed from Strether, gained from the additional perspectives which Strether cannot fully appreciate or evaluate because his view is subjective. The implied author presents both the subjective view (the protagonist's) and the objective view (other characters') of the given situation. The implied author, the "I" of James's fiction, then, controls and presents the overall point of view, which the reader shares. Because James's implied author concerns himself with multiple perspectives to achieve this inclusive point of view, he may be most accurately termed a roving narrator.

Henry James achieves in his novels, with his point of view technique, the undercutting of the dichotomy of subjective-objective.[210] He redefines the entire process of knowing and the status of reality by taking both poles of perception into account simultaneously and viewing the subjective and objective worlds as functions of each other through the forms of speech in which these worlds are rendered.[211] These forms of speech, which also are linguistic symbols, constitute the Jamesian point of view.

The Jamesian point of view, then, belongs to a roving narrator, who explores multiple perspectives from various characters. The story focusses upon one character's acquisition of the roving narrator's point of view. In the process of seeing, the protagonist--and the reader--learns that reality is not what he thought it was, nor what any other single character believes it to be; traditional concepts of reality, truth, and morality no longer serve the immediate demands of the situation. Truth becomes relative, dependent upon its context.[212] The Jamesian point of view is an inclusive view of both the subjective and the objective, becoming, in a sense, an autonomous linguistic symbol.

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[210] Ibid., p. 52.

[211] Ibid., p. 56.

[212] Langer, op. cit., p. 77.

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