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THE INFLUENCE OF PAINTING ON THE FICTION THEORY OF HENRY JAMES AS EXEMPLIFIED IN *THE AMBASSADORS*

by

William Horace Dodd, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

March

1959

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **William H. Dodd, S.J.,** has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **English.**

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 2, 1960
Date

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Signature of Adviser

LIFE

William Horace Dodd, S.J., was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, June 10, 1935.

He was graduated from St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, June, 1953, and from Loyola University, Chicago, June, 1958, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in June, 1958.

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CHAPTER I

WHY A THESIS ON JAMES'S NOVEL-THEORY

Literature is a fine art, and as a fine art it has as its purpose the arousing of appreciation in the reader. What is at stake in literature is the communication of some human experience in such a way that the reader is pleased, that he somehow experiences what the author had felt, and that he appreciates the author's feelings about that experience.

A distinction must be made, however. In the reader there can be two types of appreciation. Just as the author first lives his experience and then goes through the process of creation, so the reader can have a double experience. First he can feel himself re-living the experience which originally inspired the author, but he can also, if he is a careful and intelligent reader, experience the very creation of the piece of literature itself, by attentively noting the method of the author. As Percy Lubbock puts it: "But the pleasure of illusion is small beside the pleasure of creation, and the greater is open to every reader, volume in hand."[1]

This point of re-creation-while-reading seems to be overlooked frequently. And yet it remains the personal experience of this writer and that of all the other musicians whom he has questioned, that the musical pieces from which they

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[1]Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1929), p. 23.

derive the most listening pleasure are those played by the instrument which they themselves play. They realize much more fully than the listener who is not familiar with the difficulties of the instrument, what art is being practiced by the musician, and this realization adds a distinct pleasure to their appreciation.

If then, the novel reader is to be furnished with this second type of reading pleasure, this re-creation, he is going to have to be taught a few of the methods and tools, a few of the difficulties, which face the novelist, and which afford him such pleasure when properly handled. The novel reader informed along these lines will fully appreciate the piece of art presented to him. In his case, complete artistic communication will take place.

The desire to make himself a better novel reader led this writer to Henry James, for there is no one who has written more penetratingly on the novelist's method than has James. As a matter of fact, probably no one has written on the creative process in general with more acumen than Henry James. As Mr. Brewster Ghiselin puts it, speaking of the writings on the creative process: "Perhaps the greatest body of such writing is the monumental work of Henry James, the prefaces to the New York edition of his work."[2]

A distinct advantage, too, of studying James for an understanding of the novel method, is the fact that he is not only a theorist. He himself has written over fifteen novels and many short stories. He puts his theories to practice in each of these works, and so the student of the James theory is not

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[2]Henri Poincare et al., The Creative Process, ed. Brewster Ghiselin (New York, 1955), p. 11.

left with the abstract principles; he can go to the works and find the principles concretized there. (The fourth chapter of this thesis will be a study of The Ambassadors, to exemplify the points that James makes in his theorizing in the above-mentioned prefaces to the New York edition of his works, which prefaces will be studied in the third chapter.)

The fact then, that Henry James is both a theorist and a practitioner makes him a valuable study for the student trying to understand more deeply the form and method of fiction. And it should be remembered that a deeper understanding of form-method theory should lead to a greater appreciation, since it enables the reader to re-create as well as to enjoy the author's original inspiring experience.

A further question arises. Why the emphasis on painting in this thesis? The answer cannot be formulated in one sentence.

One of the aspects of James's novel theory is the fact that he criticizes harshly many of the classic authors. The great Russians, Tolstoi and Dostoyevsky, fall first and fall the hardest. But Dickens, Thackeray, and Zola are soon to follow. Many of the other greats receive adverse comment.

As he first read James's prefaces and ran across his treatment of these classic authors, the writer felt that if a man could understand why it was that James could be so apparently brazen and sure of himself, if he could understand what it was about James's background that would cause him to balk at the lack of form in these great novelists, that man would be well on his way to having a deep understanding of James's attitude to art in general, and to the novel in particular.

It did not take much reading in James's prefaces to indicate to this

writer that what James resented in these classic authors was lack of form, carelessness in method and in execution. James admitted openly that these authors felt life deeply, but he could only shake his head sadly at what "might have been" had they only paid more attention to the art of novel writing.

The problem then became: what in James himself was responsible for this attitude? What was it about him that made him incapable of really enjoying one of these authors? In a word, what made Henry James so form-conscious?

As the writer continued to read in James, a hypothesis occurred to him. He felt sure that it was primarily James's early interest in painting that accounted for his peculiar yet pertinent criticism of the novel form. The point of the thesis is to present to its readers the data which the writer believes substantiates this hypothesis.

When the hypothesis first occurred, the writer naturally hurried to secondary sources to find who had written on the problem before. He was surprised to find that very little had been done on this peculiar aspect of James study. There were a few articles (which will be quoted later) written about the influence of painting on particular novels, and there were a few book-chapters which dealt with James's interest in painting, but no article or book was devoted to the very intimate connection between painting and James's novel theory. The only thing left to do was to turn to primary sources and to see if the theory had any validity after a reading of them.

It is important to understand the significance of this theory. If the theory is valid, it could well give a new slant to much of James's criticism. If it is true that James's *a priori* structure, so to speak, was that of a painter, could not much more light be thrown on each of his novels, as well as his

novel theory? If, in studying his methods in the novels themselves, the scholar kept in mind the fact that James was trying to reproduce in the novel the principles and methods of picture composition, would not each novel be a much more intelligible piece of art?

Another point which this theory will help to explain will be the criticism of James for "lack of life." Too much method in James, the critics say, and not enough life. And then they say no more. If this theory of painting's influence on James is true, then they cannot end their criticism abruptly with the charge of lack of life. They will have to go much deeper, into the method of James himself, and they will have to face the problem of novel method squarely. Should or should not a novel conform to principles of painting? That is the problem that Henry James raises, and it is on that level that he must be criticised.

A summary of what the author hopes to accomplish in his thesis can be given, then, by indicating the purpose of the thesis again. The proximate purpose of this thesis is a deeper understanding of Henry James's fiction theory, to be achieved by studying the effect that James's interest in painting had on this theory. The ultimate purpose of the thesis is to increase the appreciation of novel readers, which, it seems to this writer, ought to be the purpose of all novel study, and more generally, of all study of literature. The ultimate purpose is to be attained by a deeper understanding of the fiction theory of Henry James, considered by some as the greatest thinker on the creative process.

CHAPTER II

PAINTING IN THE LIFE OF HENRY JAMES

The purpose of this chapter is simple: to show that Henry James was deeply interested in painting. The quotations mentioned in the chapter will almost all deal with the early years of James's life dating from 1843 to 1876, in which year he published his first novel, Roderick Hudson. In these early years Henry lived in an atmosphere of art, and his chief interest among the arts was painting. Later in his life his explicit interest in painting dwindled. It is the contention of this thesis that this lessening of explicit interest in painting was by way of sublimation, not in any way at all a repudiation. But more of this later.

Henry James was born on April 15th, 1843, the second son of Henry James, Sr., the first son being William, destined to become the famous American psychologist, who was born a year earlier. Henry was followed in 1845 by Garth Wilkinson, in 1846 by Robertson, and in 1848 by Alice.

The interesting person in the family, the one who is hard to imagine, is Henry James, Sr. He was a man for whom ideas were life.[1] As a young man he had suffered much illness, lost a leg, but had finally fought his way through much discouragement to a life of thought. It was from ideas and convictions

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[1]Frederick W. Dupee, Henry James (Garden City, 1956), p. 6.

which hovered about words like Creation, Selfhood, and Society that he took great consolation.[2] He found that the highly imaginative religion of Swedenborg unified all these great thoughts and gave to his life the religious meaning that it needed.

Such a father was bound to have a strong influence on his sons, especially when you consider the fact that he was a born leader.[3] The big lesson that he taught his sons was that the unexamined life is not worth living. And it was in part because of his insistence on their thinking for themselves that they became the independent creative thinkers who would so influence their country. With their father leading the way, William and Henry especially, but the whole family as well, learned to notice ambiguities, to feel that evil was more apt to be hidden than open, and to appreciate an interesting failure instead of being drawn always to the glaring success.[4] Such a sense for the fine and the subtle was to become a characteristic of Henry's attitude toward life.

Henry James, Sr., was also a restless fellow, a trait that fits in perfectly with the rest of his unconventional ways.[5] Because of this restlessness the family was always moving, not only from house to house, but from continent to continent, seeking improved homes, better teachers, and in general, seeking to be different. With all this moving, and with his father's emphasis on the unusual in intellectual pursuits, Henry could hardly be expected to develop as

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 9

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 5

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 21

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 17

a normal child. Henry himself, on looking back upon his youth, notes that his interests were not the practical ones, the ones which concerned other young men of his age: "The bright and empty air was as void of 'careers' for a choice as of cathedral towers for a sketcher, and I passed my younger time, till within a year or two of the Civil War, with an absolute vagueness of impression as to how the political life of the country was carried on."[6]

The one definite interest of the time, the one thing that was certainly always a topic of interest in the James family, was art. Later in life, trying to picture his early years, Henry vaguely remembers seeing numerous artists about his home. He mentions Thomas Hicks, Paul Duggan, C. P. Cranch, Felix Darley, landscapists Cropseys, Coles, and Kensett, and sculptors Ives and Powers.[7] When the great author Thackeray came to visit the James home in New York, Henry remembers that Thackeray's secretary, who was a young artist, established his easel right in the midst of the house and proceeded to paint. His subject? Henry James, Sr.[8]

And then the happy young days in New York, from 1843 to 1855, there were frequent visits to the museums and various art displays. "If one wanted pictures there were pictures, as large, I seem to remember, as the side of a house, and of a bravery of colour and lustre of surface that I was never afterwards to see surpassed."[9] His description of the trip the family took to see Leutze's

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[6]Henry James, Henry James, Autobiography, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1956), p. 30.

[7]Ibid., p. 36.

[8]Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[9]Ibid., p. 151.

painting of Washington crossing the Delaware is full of enthusiasm as he remembers the thrill he felt before the great event depicted. He recounts many details of the picture which he remembers struck him forcefully that night.[10]

But the interest of the family in painting was not limited to appreciation. Henry himself notes: "It was an odd enough circumstance, in respect to the attested blood in our veins, that no less than three of our father's children, with two of his grandsons to add to these, and with a collateral addendum representing seven, in all, of our grandfather's, William James's, descendents in three generations, should have found the artistic career in general and the painter's trade in particular irresistibly solicit them."[11]

Later in his life Henry would follow the example set by his father and maintain close friendships with many of the great figures of his time. Just as Emerson, Carlyle, J. S. Mill, and Hawthorne were friends of Henry James, Sr., and were welcomed at his home, so William Morris,[12] John Ruskin,[13] Flaubert,[14] Zola,[15] Turgenev,[16] Huxley,[17] Gladstone,[18] Lord Houghton,[19] Tennyson,[20] Heinrich Schliemann,[21] Herbert Spencer,[22] George Eliot,[23] James Russel Lowell,[24] Daniel Sargent,[25] Daudet,[26] the de Goncourt brothers,[27] R. L. Stevenson,[28] Matt

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[10]Ibid., p. 151-152.

[11]Henry James, Notes of a Son and a Brother (New York, 1914), p. 45.

[12]Henry James, The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), I, 16.

[13]Ibid., p. 20.

[14]Ibid., p. 49.

[15]Ibid., p. 50.

[16]Ibid., p. 49.

[17]Ibid., p. 52.

[18]Ibid., p. 53.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., p. 75.

[25]Ibid., p. 102.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 120.

Arnold,[29] Coppee,[30] Meilhac,[31] Sarcey,[32] Albert Wolff,[33] Gandarax,[34] Blowitz,[35] Oliver Wendell Holmes,[36] Kipling,[37] Wells,[38] and Henry Adams[39] were all friends of the younger Henry James. This is but another example of the influence which Henry James, Sr., exercised in moulding his sons' lives.

To return now from this glimpse of James's future friends to his early life, the aspect of his own impressionability will be taken up. If as a youth James had been a stolid sort of child, unattentive to what was going on about him, the atmosphere of his home would, perhaps, have had little influence on him. The opposite, however, is the case. Led on, again by his father, he and his brothers cultivated attentiveness and observation.

In speaking of his reaction to being an hotel child, Henry exults: "For there, incomparably, was the chance to dawdle and gape; there were human appearances in endless variety and on the exhibition-stage of a piazza that my gape measured almost as by miles; it was even as if I had become positively conscious that the social scene so peopled would pretty well always say more to me than anything else."[40] To dawdle and to gape were his pleasure.

What an impression the following scene must have made on the ten-year-old Henry to enable it to be recalled by the aging novelist fifty years later:

> It had been remarked but in the air, I feel sure, that Marie should seek her couch--a truth by the dark wing of which I ruefully felt myself brushed; [he was at his cousin, Marie's home] and the words

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[29] Ibid., p.125.
[30] Ibid., p.154.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., p.244.
[37] Ibid., p.270
[38] Ibid., p.298.
[39] Ibid., p.431.

[40] James, Henry James, Autobiography, pp. 19-20.

seemed therefore to fall with a certain ironic weight. What I have retained of their effect, at any rate, is the vague fact of some objection raised by my cousin and some sharper point to his sentence supplied by her father; promptly merged in a visible commotion, a flutter of my young companion across the gallery as for refuge in the maternal arms, a protest and an appeal in short which drew from my aunt the simple phrase that was from that moment so preposterously to 'count' for me. 'Come now, my dear; don't make a scene--I insist on your not making a scene!' That was all the witchcraft the occasion used, but the note was none the less epoch-making. The expression, so vivid, so portentous, was one I had never heard--it had never been addressed to us at home; and who should say now what a world one mightn't read into it? It seemed freighted to sail so far; it told me so much about life. Life at these intensities clearly became 'scenes'; but the great thing, the immense illumination, was that we could make them or not as we chose.[41]

Such is the impressionability of the boy with whom we are dealing. The examples of his openness, his observation, are numerous in his writings. He remembers how the protruding lower lip of a school companion frayed his nerves, though he was but eleven at the time.[42] He refers to himself, on one of his trips to London, as the "little gaping American."[43] He remembers that Holman Hunt's "Scapegoat" so frightened him that "I was glad I saw it in company."[44] And on one of his trips through the Louvre he refers to the pictures: "They only arched over us in the wonder of their endless golden riot and relief, figured and flourished in perpetual revolution . . . The glory [of the pictures etc.] meant ever so many things at once, not only beauty and art and supreme design, but history and fame and power, the world in fine raised to

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[41] Ibid., pp. 106-107.

[42] Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[43] Ibid., pp. 171-172.

[44] Ibid., p. 178.

the richest and noblest expression."[45] Finally Henry James himself explicitly recognised his acute observational talents when he said: "Young as I was, I myself clearly recognised that ground of reference, saw it even to some extent in the light of experience--so could I stretch any scrap of contact; kept hold of it by fifty clues, recalls and reminders that dangled for me mainly out of books and magazines and heard talk, things of picture and story, things of prose and verse and anecdotal vividness in fine, and, as I have elsewhere allowed, for the most part hoardedly English and French."[46]

It is not surprising then to learn that such an impressionable boy as Henry, living in the artistic atmosphere of his family and friends, should himself spend much of his time drawing. Though he began to draw even by the age of eleven, drawing and painting would become a still greater interest later on. His autobiography pictures the young boy of eleven, bent over his paper, writing and drawing. The portrait is as intriguing as it is important:

> I was so often engaged at that period, it strikes me, in literary--or, to be more precise in dramatic, accompanied by pictorial composition--that I must again and again have delightfully lost myself . . . . I sacrificed to it [dramatic form] with devotion--by the aid of certain quarto sheets of ruled paper bought in Sixth Avenue for the purpose; . . . grateful in particular for the happy provision by which each fourth page of the folded sheet was left blank. When the drama itself had covered three pages the last one, over which I most laboured, served for the illustration of what I had verbally presented. Every scene had thus its explanatory picture, and as each act--though I am not positively certain I arrived at acts--would have had its vivid climax . . . . Entrances, exits, the indication of 'business', the animation of dialogue, the multiplication of designated characters, were things delightful in them-

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[45] _Ibid._, pp. 195-196.

[46] James, _Notes of a Son and Brother_, p. 365.

> selves--while I panted toward the canvas on which I should fling my figures; which it took me longer to fill than it had taken me to write what went with it, but which had on the other hand something of the interest of the dramatist's casting of his personae, and must have helped me to believe in the validity of my subject.[47]

Henry was not alone in all his attempts at drawing. His older brother William, whom he followed doggedly in the early years, was also avidly interested in painting. Henry describes William's most characteristic posture in those early years: "As I catch W. J.'s image, from far back, at its most characteristic, he sits drawing and drawing, always drawing, especially under the lamplight of the Fourteenth Street back parlour; and not as with a plodding patience, which I think would less have affected me, but easily, freely and, as who should say, infallibly; always at the stage of finishing off, his head dropped from side to side and his tongue rubbing his lower lip."[48] Henry says, speaking of his own attempts at drawing in relation to William: "So he drew because he could, while I did so in the main only because he did; though I think we cast about, as I say, alike, making the most of every image within view."[49] And speaking of a stay in London, Henry adds of William and himself: "I see again that we but endlessly walked and endlessly daubed, and that our walks, with an obsession of their own [observation], constantly abetted our daubing."[50]

These very early years with his brother were very important for Henry James. Psychologists universally maintain the importance of the early years in the formation of the man. Impressions are made during childhood and adolescence that become well nigh indelible. We have seen that painting was the con-

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[47] James, Henry James, Autobiography, pp. 148-149.

[48] Ibid., p. 118. [49] Ibid., p. 150. [50] Ibid., p. 174.

stant boyhood companion of the future novelist. It was his interest, his pastime, and a bond of union between himself and William.

In 1861, however, when Henry was eighteen years old, something happened which was to push painting even more toward the center of his life. While in Paris in that year, William decided that he would like to take up painting professionally. Henry James, Sr., after some consideration, consented. Although Paris seemed the perfect spot for William to pursue his studies, nevertheless the senior James was beginning to feel the urge for movement, and so the James family sailed for America. They settled in Newport, Rhode Island, home of William Morris Hunt, foremost American painter of his day, who had consented to tutor William.

This artist, William Hunt, was to have a profound influence on Henry, as well, of course, as on William. Henry describes his contact with Hunt in the following manner: "I find my reference to William Hunt and _his truly fertilising action_ on our common life much conditioned by the fact that, since W. J., for the first six months or so after our return, daily and devotedly haunted his studio, I myself did no less, for a shorter stretch, under the irresistible contagion."[51]

It was at this time too that the charm of art, furnished by his constant contact with Hunt, completely overshadowed his interest in other studies, especially the sciences. "Frankly, intensely,--that was the great thing--these were hours of Art, art definitely named, looking me full in the face and accepting my stare in return--no longer a tacit implication or a shy subterfuge,

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[51] James, _Notes of a Son and Brother_, p. 79. Italics not in original.

but a flagrant unattenuated aim. I had somehow come into the temple by the back door, the porte d'honneur opened on another side, and I could never have believed much at best in the length of my stay; but I was there, day by day, as much as any one had ever been, and with a sense of what it 'meant' to be there that the most accredited of pupils couldn't have surpassed; . . ."[52]

There can be little doubt of how the impressionable Henry felt toward William Hunt, the very paragon of all that this new world of art could be. The young boy must have heard over and over the principles of good paintings and dinned them into his head as the ipsissima verba of the lord of art. At his own canvas over in a corner, removed from where William and the artist were at work, the younger James must have tried again and again to put into practice the injunctions he heard being levelled at his brother.

Since Hunt was the first artist with whom Henry really became intimate, it was he who first embodied for the young man the artist, the man whose entire life was dedicated to his work with the brush. Long years later Henry would write a short story entitled "The Lesson of the Master", in which the hero would preach that the artist is a priest, a victim on the altar of art. His life can be nothing but art, if he is to be great. William Hunt was the first of the priest-artists whom Henry would meet. Henry himself said that Hunt became for him "a self-sacrificing vision of the picturesque itself, the constituted picturesque or treated 'subject', in efficient figure, personal form, vivid human style."[53] William Hunt, the first artist to whom Henry really be-

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[52] Ibid., p. 81.

[53] Ibid., p. 83.

came devoted, remained a life-long inspiration for the future fiction writer.

William Hunt, however, brought more than himself when he entered the life of the James family, for he introduced to the family a man who was to have a greater influence than himself on Henry. That man was John La Farge.

This amazing personality, strong, decided, and controversial, who moved in the William Hunt circle, was quickly accepted at the James home in Newport. At the start, John was a bit of an antithesis to Henry. Young James was undecided as to his lifetime work; John La Farge had decided wholeheartedly that painting was for him. Unlike Henry, who, we have already seen, was ill-informed as to what was going on in the country and the world outside his own family circle, La Farge was abreast of his times, with strong opinions on every topic. But especially was he the art-theorist.

The effect that such a personality would have on the James family can be easily imagined. He was immediately admired. He was different and decided, and yet he was artistic. The discussions he incited were frequent and furious, and they usually centered about art. Henry was to say later that "he had never seen a subtler mind . . . . addressed to the problems of the designer and painter."[54]

And what was the pleasure of the James family when La Farge began to paint right under their very eyes, commenting on taste and style and principles as he went. Especially did he emphasize the necessity of taste, a virtue which was to become an earmark of Henry's theory and practice as a novelist.

It is not easy to overemphasize the importance of the influence that John

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[54] Ibid., p. 91.

La Farge had upon Henry James's life. Their relationship was not that of oracle and listener, but it was a relationship of deep and lasting friendship.

This was an important time in Henry James's life. For it was daily becoming clearer and clearer to him that he did not have the talent required to become a painter. His scratchings in the Hunt studio did not require the censure of the artist to convince Henry that his work was poor. He knew it by looking.

In his friendship with La Farge, a man who was obviously going to make a great success of painting, Henry found sympathy, understanding, and counsel. And the sympathy, it must be noted, was not superficial, for only a painter could realize what it must mean to someone who wants to paint to discover that the brush and the canvas were not to be his life, because he simply lacked the native skill.

Even after La Farge married and, as a result, passed from immediate and frequent contact with the Jameses, he remained close friends with Henry. Many were the discussions they had, and it was finally through his friendship with La Farge that Henry found consolation in the conviction that the "arts were after all essentially one and that even with canvas and brush whisked out of my grasp I still needn't feel disinherited."[55]

This last quotation is important, the author feels, for the words "arts were after all essentially one." This principle was to remain with Henry James as long as he lived and was to underlie the attitude with which he finally

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[55] Ibid., p. 97.

determined to give himself wholeheartedly to developing the art of fiction. And it is because this conviction developed out of his friendship with La Farge that the painter has been given such space in this thesis.

Henry's attitude toward La Farge can be aptly summed up, then, in his own words: "There recurs to me for instance . . . the time when he proposed to me that we should drive out to the Glen, some six miles off, to breakfast, and should afterwards paint--*we* paint!--in the bosky open air."[56] The attitude of the young James, the respect and admiration he felt for La Farge, is surely obvious here.

It is time now, in the thesis, to turn from Henry James's own statements about his early life, and to begin to study his work. We have just been discussing the years immediately before and after 1860. James was not turning out novels furiously until 1880. The years in between were given over to a process of feeling himself out. During these years he had many talks with his friend La Farge and others whom he thought could help him. More and more he became certain that art was his life, but what art? His interest in painting during these years remained acute, so much so that he actually wrote painting reviews and verbal sketches of his European trips. But more and more too, he moved closer to fiction as his art form, and the closer he moved to fiction, the less explicit became his interest in painting.

Thus, from 1860 to 1880 James no longer expressed his enthusiasm for painting by attempting to use the brush himself. During these years of gradual approach to fiction it was the pen of criticism which spoke of James's con-

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[56] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

tinuing interest in the art of easel and brush.

The following pages will attempt to present James's painting "theory"; they will attempt to separate the principles from critical writings. He did not explicitly state a theory of painting, but in looking for what he repudiates and praises in the works he criticizes, it is possible to discover what he thought were the essential points of good painting, and what the superfluous.

The first characteristic which Henry James looked for in the artist, the painter, was one which grew right out of his own background. The painter is an _observer_ of life. The painter never allows his aesthetic distance to become too short, for the moment he allows himself to get too involved in the happenings about him, he loses his capacity for reflection about life. When he is too busy, too tense, too nervous, the painter never paints well. He has nothing to communicate, for he hasn't the time nor the mental relaxation required for true artistic insight. Thus the painter must stay his distance and watch, watch always, watch diligently, and watch with a pencil and notebook in hand.

It is easy to see how this aspect of James's convictions about artists grew out of his background. His father had raised this very attitude to the status of virtue. He kept his family constantly on the move precisely so that they would never become too involved in one situation, so involved that they would start leading lives of activity, instead of lives of observation, reflection, and discussion. Remember too, how Henry referred to his and William's habits of roaming through the places in which they lived, gaping and drawing, always studying what they watched. Speaking of his brother Robertson, who also aspired to painting at one time in his life, Henry says: "I have known no other

such capacity for absorbing or storing up the minutest truths and shades of landscape fact and giving them out afterward, in separation from the scene, with full assurance and felicity."[57]

His trips to Europe were almost observational orgies for Henry James. He absolutely revelled in what he saw. "The mere use of one's eyes, in Venice, is happiness enough," he would call out,[58] and then in a following chapter he would go into feverish detail to indicate to his readers precisely how they should spend a week in Perugia, enumerating the many spots they should visit, even marking out the angles from which to look at various scenes.

His conviction that a notebook was a necessity he stated over and over again, but no more convincing proof of this point can be offered than his own notebooks, from which we will have occasion to quote later in the thesis. In speaking of his trip through Germany he states: "The smallest things become significant and eloquent and demand a place in your notebook."[59]

It is important to notice that James considered his observation to be that of a painter, a sketcher. In his criticism of a travelogue which he carried with him, _Memoires d'un Touriste_, by Stendhal, it is easy to find William Hunt and John La Farge in his words as he repudiates the author for his "want of the sketcher's sense--[which] causes him to miss half the charm of a landscape which is nothing if not "quiet", as a painter would say, and of which the felicities reveal themselves only to waiting eyes." [60]

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[57] _Ibid._, pp. 37-38.

[58] Henry James, _Transatlantic Sketches_, 3rd. ed. (Boston, 1884), p. 87.

[59] _Ibid._, pp. 360-361.

[60] _Ibid._, pp. 163-164.

Observation then, is one of the essential characteristics of the painter, of any artist. In Henry James this observation was carried very far, even to the point where it is fair to call it his life. He himself often calls himself an observer of life, but more strictly speaking, his observation was only a means. His life's work was the communication of what he felt _as a result_ of his observation. For Henry James was too penetrating a man to stop at the level of observation. And yet it was this same penetration which enabled him to see that observation, intense, constant, and recorded, was a _sine qua non_ of art.

For a moment now, we will digress. Strictly speaking the next few pages are not a digression, but they are more in harmony with the first part of the chapter about James's own _a priori_ structure, than they are with his theory. The section is inserted at this point, after the mention of his emphasis on observation, because it treats of James's own observation, his own practice of one of the points of his theory. But it seems to me that it is in watching how Henry James went about his observation that we can best understand just how much he had put on the painter's mind and attitude. His enthusiasm, vigor, and acuteness of observation can only be caused by a deep conviction that observe he must, if he is to be the artist he wishes to be.

Once again, then, we are trying to put on Henry James's mind. It is hoped that we can look through his eyes at the world he sees as he travels about Europe. What is it that he looks for? What does he call upon to interpret the sights he sees? Why is he so busily observing in the first place? All these questions can only be answered, it is believed, in terms of painting.

In _Transatlantic Sketches_, the whole purpose of which is to transcribe the

the scenes he observes, there are constant references which prove his vastness of observation. Frequently he states that if he only had the space he could present several more word-pictures than he has. His observation is obviously extensive, comprehensive.

As regards his purpose in wandering throughout Europe, he is explicit. He is "wandering hither and thither in quest of a picture or a bas-relief."[61] An interesting point is that the picturesque does not just come to the wanderer. To be a good observer requires work and his descriptions of himself give the reader funny images of Henry James, by this time rather plump, running up and down narrow European streets, peeping around corners, and ducking under archways, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the picturesque. The whole process is one which requires stamina, but it is one into which James threw himself with great enthusiasm.

In all of his observation he is looking through the eyes of a painter as much as he can. When he rides into Holland for the first time, he immediately reflects how the real thing is so close to the way the Dutch painters have portrayed it. Indication, too, of the fact that his eyes on these trips are those of a painter, is the fact that when he is reaching for a way of expressing the whiteness of the caps of some old French women, he finally decides to say that they are as white "as if they were painted."[62] And finally, as he is watching the Italian landscapes race by on the train, he finds that they "dispose themselves into pictures so full of 'style' that you can think of no painter who

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[61] Ibid., p. 273.

[62] James, A Little Tour, p. 115.

deserves to have you admit that they suggest him."[63]

Such pictures can leave little doubt that Henry James's mind, at least on these trips through Europe, was that of a painter. He was sensitive to what the painter would spot, and the sensitivity is not something affected. It is obviously sincere. It is the picturesque he enjoys, and when he comes to a city which he had heard would hold many pictorial treats for him, but which he finds dull, he is deeply saddened.

Sensitive to the picturesque, he is equally sensitive to what is hostile to the picturesque, and is shocked when he alights in Rome only to find a newspaper stand staring him in the face.[64] He is constantly disgusted with the terribly insensitive people with whom he is forced to share his observation of the picturesque, often criticising even the very monk who is showing him a masterpiece. When he is forced to come up with a name for many of his lowly and uninitiated fellow observers, he chooses <u>ignoramuses</u>.[65]

There is but one limitation that he puts upon the picturesque in all the books this author has read. The author of this thesis finds it humorous that the Jesuit Order, to which he belongs, is the occasion for James's only restriction. One day in Rome, he saw a group of school boys racing down the street followed closely by laughing cassocked Jesuits. James found the scene highly attractive and commented: "We all know the monstrous practices of these people [the Jesuits]: yet as I watched the group I verily believe I declared

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[63]James, <u>Transatlantic Sketches</u>, p. 149.

[64]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 111.

[65]James, <u>A Little Tour</u>, p. 160.

that if I had a little son he should go to Mondragone and receive their crooked teachings, for the sake of the other memories; the avenues of cypress and ilex, the view of the Campagna, the atmosphere of antiquity. But, doubtless, when a sense of the picturesque has brought one to this, it is time one should pause."[66]

Now we will develop a second characteristic of James's penchant for the picturesque — its extensiveness. The point that this chapter is constantly trying to make clear is the fact that the picturesque, the attitude of the painter, the pleasure in color, etc., were not mere sidelights in Henry James's life during these years. These were pre-possessions, almost passions. No man could speak so enthusiastically and constantly of the picturesque unless the painter's eye had become his method of looking upon the world.

The various objects and scenes which James explicitly labeled picturesque will be recounted here. These will be taken from the two books already mentioned, Transatlantic Sketches and A Little Tour in France. The writer's only wish in presenting this enumeration is to recreate the experience that he had as he first read James's travelogues. It struck him with great force that painting was a part of James's being. The constant repetition of the word picturesque, the revelling in the scenes he saw, the efforts he put forth to catch a glimpse of a particular object from the aesthetically perfect spot, but especially the very tenor of the books, all combined to convince this author that painting was truly a part of James's life-view.

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[66] James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 179.

When he asked himself how he could best convey this conviction to the reader of his thesis, he decided that he would try to create in the reader the same experience that was his in reading the books. He would have to overwhelm the reader as he himself was overwhelmed. So the author begs the patience of the reader as he recounts the various objects and scenes which James labeled picturesque.

Two points are to be remembered in this enumeration. The quotations will be taken from two books only, not from the many other books which James wrote in the same vein. The second thing to be remembered is that only the explicit use of picturesque will be noted. The whole tenor of these books is that of painting, of seeking the beautiful in the world about him.

In Transatlantic Sketches James frequently labeled objects and scenes in nature as picturesque. In Brussels it was the Parc,[67] in Italy the long blue stretch of the Campagna,[68] in Pineta the woods.[69] Beyond the Appennines there was a picturesque landscape,[70] in Grotta Ferrata an inclined plane of grass-grown cobblestones,[71] in Florence the Boboli Gardens.[72] James found the lakes throughout Italy highly picturesque,[73] as well as the monoliths at Stonehenge,

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[67] James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 399.

[68] Ibid., p. 163.

[69] Ibid., p. 338.

[70] Ibid., p. 147.

[71] Ibid., p. 313.

[72] Ibid., p. 176.

[73] Ibid., pp. 250-251.

England,[74] and the view of the sea from Lynton.[75] Nature picturesqueness, however, was not limited to Italy, Belgium and England. In a Little Tour in France James found a twist in the little river at Poitiers a thrilling picture,[76] and was also delighted with a small terrace at Les Baux.[77]

To return now to Transatlantic Sketches and a different type of object, human scenes, it is appropriate to note that James labeled picturesque the very rides he took through the towns he visited.[78] He found the monks in the Castle Vincigliata[79] and a humble brother standing at prayer in a garden in Rome, scenic.[80] A Venetian comedy was picturesque[81] as well as a vesper service at the Gesu Church in Rome.[82] Even funerals receive the inevitable label.[83] Finally there is the village life in Rome,[84] Vaudois,[85] and Bologna,[86] especially the peasants swilling down wine in this latter Italian city.[87]

The only mention of a picturesque scene in A Little Tour in France is a

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[74] Ibid., p. 54.

[75] Ibid., p. 42.

[76] James, A Little Tour, p. 122.

[77] Ibid., p. 207.

[78] James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 151.

[79] Ibid., p. 287.

[80] Ibid., p. 165.

[81] Ibid., p. 206.

[82] Ibid., p. 193.

[83] Ibid., p. 185.

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

[85] Ibid., p. 65.

[86] Ibid., pp. 327-328.

[87] Ibid., p. 175.

glimpse James caught of an old woman cleaning a pot in the streets of Tours.[88]

To return now to Transatlantic Sketches for the final category of James's delight in the picturesque, the man-made picturesque, it is fitting that we should begin with his favorite, i.e., Church structures. Cathedrals at Pistoia,[89] Milan,[90] and Ravenna,[91] a monastery at Palazzuola,[92] and another cathedral at Wells in England,[93] are all praised for their pictorial qualities. Castles Gandolfo[94] and Vincigliata[95] are praised for their beauty as well as an ancient banqueting hall which he spotted on the grounds of an old medieval mansion in Wells.[96] The wall about Lucca[97] and the Roman walls in the springtime are also singled out.[98] Next on the list of the picturesque come the Abbey of Glastonbury near Wells,[99] an old vine-covered bridge at St. Gothard,[100] the domestic architecture at Lucca,[101] and the Piazza in Siena.[102] A rather surprising entry is the very dirtiness itself of Darmstadt.[103] And just to indicate again the variety of James's enjoyment of the picturesque, there is ancient silverware shown to him at Verne.[104] One of James's favorite sights is

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[88]James, A Little Tour, pp. 15-16.

[89]James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 325.

[90]Ibid., p. 78.

[91]Ibid., pp. 335-336.

[92]Ibid., p. 166.

[93]Ibid., p. 44.

[94]Ibid., p. 174.

[95]Ibid., pp. 284-285.

[96]Ibid., p. 49.

[97]Ibid., p. 324.

[98]Ibid., p. 141

[99]Ibid., p. 51.

[100]Ibid., p. 243.

[101]Ibid., p. 325.

[102]Ibid., p. 254.

[103]Ibid., p. 373.

[104]Ibid., p. 236.

the street vista with its shadows and riot of colors titillating his senses. He mentions explicitly that the streets of Venice,[105] Florence,[106] and Como[107] charm him. And to close out the list of the objects mentioned in Transatlantic Sketches as picturesque, there are three cities: Brussels,[108] Lucca,[109] and Siena.[110]

In turning now to A Little Tour in France, we find that there are some repetitions of favorites which he mentioned in the earlier book. For example his taste still runs to cathedrals, since he mentions the church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Couture as picturesque,[111] and he finds the streets of Loches pleasant.[112] In Beaune he is introduced into two rooms which immediately make him wish he were a masterful sketcher,[113] and then he goes on to admire the place in Le Mans.[114] To finish off this list of Henry James's litany of the picturesque, there is the fact that he found the peasants of Tarascon quite pleasant and pictorial, contrary to his expectations.[115]

It is hoped that the preceding list has not been too tedious for the reader. The author feels confident, however, that his point has been made. Object after object, scene after scene, call from Henry James the reaction that we would expect of a painter. It has taken three pages to complete the list of the things which he found picturesque and which he expressed in only two of the

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[105] Ibid., p. 310.

[106] Ibid., p. 271.

[107] Ibid., p. 253.

[108] Ibid., p. 399.

[109] Ibid., p. 324.

[110] Ibid., p. 258.

[111] James, A Little Tour, pp. 94-95

[112] Ibid., p. 72.

[113] Ibid., pp. 251-252.

[114] Ibid., p. 92.

[115] Ibid., p. 185.

books he wrote on his travels. If the author included the uses of _picturesque_ in the other books which James wrote on his observations of places, books such as _Italian Hours_, _The American Scene_, _Portraits of Places_, and _Partial Portraits_, the list would most likely run to ten or twelve pages. It is hoped, however, that what has been presented in the past few pages will suffice to convince the reader that the painter's attitude was very much a part of Henry James during these years.

We return now to the theory of Henry James. It will be good to mention again that this theory was never explicitly stated as such, but that it is implicit in James's criticism of paintings themselves.

Another point to be clarified before we proceed, is that this analysis of James's painting theory is not at _all_ meant to be profound and exhaustive. The author does not feel that any such intense study is necessary for his purpose. The purpose of the next few pages will merely be to organize a few of James's statements about painting into some principles of the art. What is it that James considered the essence of painting? What is it that he looked for in a painting?

It should be mentioned also that the author does not feel that Henry James offered anything original to the theory of painting. His comments were not at all creative; they were only a summary of what he had heard from William Hunt and La Farge. Henry James saved his original thought for fiction theory.

As a help in organizing James's writings on painting into some sort of system, the author turned to John Hospers's book, _Meaning and Truth in the Arts_.[116] In his first chapter Mr. Hospers divides all of aesthetic experience

[116] John Hospers, _Meaning and Truth in the Arts_, (Chapel Hill, 1946).

into three levels: the life-value level, into which category he puts the basic insight of the artist, that which he has to say about life, about man; the second category is the aesthetic-form level, in which he includes everything like unity, composition, form, balance, variety, etc.; and finally he has the surface-level category in which he includes the sensuous as sensuous, the lines, the colors, the words, etc. These three levels of life-value, form, and surface, will be the categories which the author will use to organize the dicta of Henry James on painting.

The author will take first what Henry James himself puts in first place, i.e., the life-value level. An interesting point to notice immediately is that he feels that any real insight into life-values will come directly from attentive and receptive observation. He even finds himself longing that his observations speak to him about life. We have already seen that he was impressionable. It is this impressionability that he now began to see as a distinct virtue. Out of the impressions that he took in, came ideas, ideas which spoke to him of life and what it was worth. And he saw clearly that the life-values which the painter expressed had been found in observation.

He is constantly asking himself what the masters are saying to him. Often he will stop short, despair of formulating explicitly what message he is receiving, and resign himself to a mere passive reception of the artist's insight. He speaks of Leonardo's "Last Supper" as containing a "moral", and insists that every painter once in his life ought to see the painting and breathe in its message.[117]

His absolute favorite, however, is Tintoretto. Words almost fail him when

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[117] James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 82.

he is trying to express to the reader of his travelogues and reviews what he feels before Tintoretto's works. But in the final analysis he is forced to the conclusion that it is not the fact that Tintoretto had painted so much, nor is it his intense activity and life-likeness. Ultimately Tintoretto's appeal comes down to life-value, for as James puts it, the watcher "gets from Tintoret's work the impression that he _felt_, pictorially, the great, the beautiful, the terrible spectacle of human life very much as Shakespeare felt it poetically . . . ."[118]

Among others who receive similar commendations from James are Titian, Raphael, and Botticelli. Messonier is complimented for the way he maintians keen human expression in the midst of a perfect revel of execution.[119] And in speaking of Eugene Delacroix, James says, "I think there is no question, that, on the whole, the artist we value most is the artist who tells us most about human life."[120]

This insight seems significant. With all the emphasis that James will subsequently put upon form, it must never be forgotten that life-value is being presumed. Criticism frequently accuses James of being all form and no life, as we shall see, but this writer feels that the accusation is not grounded in the writings of James himself.

The same point of emphasis on the life-value aspect of painting comes out

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[118] _Ibid._, p. 93.

[119] Henry James, _The Painter's Eye_, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 75.

[120] _Ibid._, pp. 185-186.

in James repudiation of painters. He frequently tabs a painter as one who has put forth a lot of effort to explain nothing, who tries very hard to convey what is not worth conveying. Often he will point out the beauty of detail effected by a painter, only to mention that it all seems mechanical, devoid of real inspiration.

The question which is most likely haunting the reader at present is, "Granted that James looks for life-value in a painting, does he ever describe what constitutes that life-value? In a word, what is the essence of life-value for James?"

The question is a good one. In Transatlantic Sketches James makes a statement which is surprising. In speaking of Rembrandt he says that "he is not an intellectually suggestive painter."[121] And as an example of someone intellectually suggestive he immediately mentions his old stand-by, Tintoretto.

In itself this statement about Rembrandt would not be too significant in leading to the essence of life-value for James. But when he says of a certain Mrs. Stillman that "the principle charm of her work is the intellectual charm--that which, when it exists, always seems more precious than other merits, and indeed makes us say that it is the only thing in a work of art which is deeply valuable," we begin to see that intellectual suggestiveness and charm are of prime importance for James.[122] In other passages he identifies imagination with this intellectual elevation and goes on to say that it simply cannot be purchased, studied, or acquired. After we read in another passage that he "bows

[121] James, Transatlantic Sketches, pp. 389-390.

[122] James, The Painter's Eye, p. 92.

low to it [intellectual elevation] when he meets it," we are convinced that intellectual suggestiveness, intellectual meaning, something which makes us think as we observe a painting, is what constitutes the life-value of a work.[123] When we look at a Tintoretto we find ourselves looking for the meaning which we are sure is there. Why? James would say that intellectual suggestiveness in the painting conveys to us the conviction that there is much meaning to be had if we continue our quest. We will learn much of life, the painting seems to tell us, if we give careful attention to it.

Such then, is the first level of artistic experience as Henry James sees it in painting. This level of life-value is of primary importance in a painting, and it is constituted by an intellectual grasp on some aspect of life, subtly suggested in the painting.

In moving to the second level of aesthetic experience suggested by John Hospers, a very important distinction which James makes must be noted. It is not the fact that the distinction itself is so profound, but it is the fact that James puts so much emphasis on it, especially later on, that makes it significant for our purpose. It is in moving to this second level of form, that James would insert his distinction between subject matter (really the first level of life-value) and execution. When we move to the level of form, the unity, composition, etc., of a picture, we have moved to the level of execution, and James would have us note the fact well. He praises a picture when he sees accord between the aim (the expression of a certain life-value) and the result (that life-value expressed, or executed). He praises also a young portraitist

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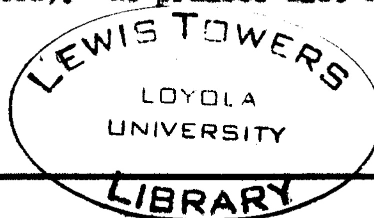
[123] _Ibid._, p. 66.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of his day, Frank Duvenek, for "his combination of breadth of handling with complete preservation of the essence of his subject."[124] This distinction between subject matter and execution must be remembered, for it will return with vigor later in the thesis.

In treating of the form-level of painting experience, we will concern ourselves with but three of the elements which fall into this category. James mentions frequently unity, composition, and a certain atmosphere about the painting which we shall call tone. By tone is not meant merely the brightness of the colors. By tone is meant a mood within the picture, a motif, an atmosphere which can usually be expressed in some adjective of quality such as mild, bright, soothing.

James places very great emphasis on the necessity of unity in a picture. After life-value, the novelist looked for unity of impression as the mark of great work. Nothing must interfere with the oneness; nothing must distract the viewer from the _one_ impression of life-value to be taken from the picture. When he is talking of Fra Angelico, he can think of nothing to say which could praise the monk more than the fact that "no later painter learned to render with more masterly truth . . . a _single, concentrated_, spiritual emotion."[125] He constantly exults in the fact that Eugene Delacroix saw his pictures as "wholes"[126] and praises Daniel Sargent for the same virtue.[127]

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[124] _Ibid._, p. 105.

[125] James, _Transatlantic Sketches_, pp. 296-297. Italics not in original.

[126] James, _The Painter's Eye_, p. 184.

[127] _Ibid._, p. 222.

In 1876 Mr. A. T. Stewart of New York bought the picture "Friedland" for 380,000 francs. Messonier, the painter, was renowned at the time, and James was excited about the picture. When he saw it, however, he was disappointed, and his comments, though long, will be given here for their importance on this point of unity: "It [the "Friedland"] seems to me a thing of parts rather than an interesting whole . . . That great general impression which, first and foremost, it is the duty of an excellent picture to give you, seems to me to be wanting here . . . Each man is perfect, but when M. Messonier has made him--an elaborate, accomplished historical image--he has done his utmost. He feels under no necessity to do anything with him, to place him in any complex relation with anything else, to make any really imaginative uses of him."[128]

Unity, then, is an absolute necessity if the life-value of the picture is to be communicated. One of the chief means of attaining this unity is a careful composition, according to James. He noted the composition of parts immediately when he was confronted with Leonardo's "The Last Supper." But most interesting of all his statements on composition are the ones he issues concerning the picturesque objects of his observation. He constantly speaks of watching a landscape compose as he rides by. Once as he was walking across a small bridge at the Castle of Chaumont, he glanced down the little stream and noticed that "the whole picture composes, as the painters say."[129]

Among the painters he feels that Rubens completely lacks this sense of composition, and as a result, loses much effectiveness. Besides his very great

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

[129] James, A Little Tour, p. 50.

favorites like Tintoretto, Titian, etc., he singles out Delacroix and Van der Helst as masters of composition.

This next point has been mentioned before, but it is repeated now for its importance. Henry James would go to great efforts in his search for the picturesque, to situate himself at precisely the aesthetic distance from the object of his pleasure. He was convinced that this added immeasurably to the enjoyment of a scene. This is just another aspect of composition, the point of view. The point of view will become a significant part of his novel theory, and therefore, we thought it would be good to mention James's awareness of this aspect of picture-viewing. Only one example will be given. Speaking of the cathedral of Le Mans, he mentions that it is "very sketchable, if the sketcher could get far enough away from it . . . ."[130]

The third element to be treated under the form level of aesthetic appreciation is tone, the atmosphere of the painting. This aspect of a painting is also a great aid in attaining the unity of impression required for the communication of life-value.

This element too, James noticed in his observation of picturesque objects. Atmosphere and tone were not limited to paintings. He speaks often of how the particular type of air in a location illumines the scenes in such a way as to make them highly picturesque. He speaks of the pictorial "general atmosphere" of Rome.[131] One day as he was introduced to a garden within an ancient monas-

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[130] Ibid., p. 91.

[131] James, Transatlantic Sketches, p. 200.

tery, he found that he could best describe the whole scene as "mild."[132]

In paintings too, however, he found this same unifying tone, especially in the works of Cornelius Huysmans and Sodoma. He singles out, too, the "Crucifixion" of Pietro Cavallini, a pupil of Giotto, as a picture which is unified by a "direfully lugubrious" tone.[133]

There is little need to place much emphasis on the third and last level of aesthetic experience, i.e. surface, because it merely deals with the colors as colors, and the lines, brush strokes, etc. of the paintings. Let it suffice to say that James over and over again notes the striking colors of various objects in nature and of paintings.[134] He also manifests an awareness of the brush strokes[135] and lines[136] of various painters.

It is interesting and enlightening to note that James was ready to change his opinion as regards paintings. This point can be exemplified in his attitude toward the Impressionists. When he first became acquainted with their work, he was actually bitter. He refused to call their efforts paintings, charging them with having nothing to do with life. He seemed implacable.[137] These outbursts occurred between the years 1876 and 1878.

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[132] _Ibid._, p. 172.

[133] _Ibid._, p. 216.

[134] See _Transatlantic Sketches_, pp. 24, 59-60, 184, 203-204, 274, 291-293, 328-329.

[135] James, _Transatlantic Sketches_, pp. 347-348.

[136] _Ibid._, p. 146; see also _The Painter's Eye_, p. 179.

[137] James, _The Painter's Eye_, pp. 114-115, 143, 165.

But gradually there was a change. He began to admit that at least one might call the efforts of the Impressionists interesting experiments in painting. More and more he began to see that they were attempting something truly ingenious, and by the year 1894 he could write in his notebook: "The formula for the presentation of it [a story he was trying to write, "The Coxon Fund"] in 20,000 words is to make it an Impression--as one of Sargent's pictures is an impression."[138] And other surprising examples can be given of his complete change of heart with regard to the Impressionists.[139] This point of Impressionism will come up later in the chapters on theory and The Ambassadors.

In summary, then, we began with the purpose of showing that Henry James was deeply interested in painting. The thesis turned to various family influences, all leading Henry to painting: his father, William, William Hunt, and John LaFarge. During these years it was seen that Henry himself was constantly painting and constantly listening to talk of the art. It had also been shown that the young James boy was highly impressionable.

The thesis then turned to the years from 1860 to 1880, years in which Henry James was gradually feeling his way to his profession of novelist, and years in which his interest in painting continued, and even grew. He became a critic and an acute observer.

Finally an attempt was made to gather together some of his ideas on painting into a quasi principles-scheme. It was found that his chief desire in a

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[138]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. Kenneth Murdock and F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1947), p. 160.

[139]James, The Painter's Eye, see pp. 209, 218, 222, 223, 258-259.

painting was an expression of life, an expression steeped in intellectual suggestiveness. To this end, on the form level, he demanded unity, through composition and tone.

Painting was surely an integral part of Henry James's view of life. When he looked at the world it was through the eyes of a painter, as has been said before. As John Sweeney says " [painting] furnished hardy returns in background manner and metaphor which he James could and did securely invest in his private enterprises."[140]

The reader is now capable of seeing the full import of the following quotation. The thesis turns to James the fiction writer from James the painter, and so it is fitting to mention James's own sentiments as he made that same turn. Earlier, James had been discussing the possibility that all of his interest in painting had been so much wasted time. But then he says:

> My face was turned from the first [beginning of his life] to the idea of representation--that of the gain of charm, interest, mystery, dignity, distinction, gain of importance in fine, on the part of the represented thing (over the thing of accident, of mere actuality, still unappropriated;) [sic] but in the house of representation there were many chambers, each with its own lock, and long was to be the business of sorting and trying the keys. When I at last found deep in my pocket the one I could more or less work [fiction] , it was to feel, with reassurance, that the _picture was still after all in essence one's aim._ So there had been in a manner _continuity,_ been not so much waste as one had sometimes ruefully figured; so many wastes are sweetened for memory as by the taste of the economy they have led to or imposed and from the vantage of which they could scarce look better if they had been current and blatant profit.[141]

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[140] John L. Sweeney, from introduction to _The Painter's Eye_, p. 11.

[141] James, _Henry James, Autobiography_, pp. 149-150. Italics not in original.

CHAPTER III

PAINTING IN JAMES'S FICTION THEORY

The purpose of this chapter is to show that James's interest in painting was responsible for the type of novel-writing theory which he evolved. The chapter is trying to explain why James's theory on the writing of novels turned out to be the type of theory it is.

The quintessence of James's theory is heightened by a fight he had with H. G. Wells. Issues always become clear when hot words fly back and forth. When there is heated discussion it is usually safe to presume that each party is defending things which he considers truly important.

At first James and Wells were friends. Their friendship began in 1895 when James was attempting to be a playwright, and Wells was just attaining reknown as a clever social critic and an interesting writer of scientific romances. The relationship was immediately a warm one, but became even closer when Wells and his wife settled at Sandgate, just on the other side of the Romney Marshes from Rye, where James was living.

As James began to move about, their friendship was expressed in letters. For sixteen years they were to trade letters full of warmth and good-natured joshing. In these letters James again and again informed Wells that he read him with "unstinted admiration."[1] He told Wells that, even though he had re-

[1] James, Letters, II, 180. See also pages 38-39, 138, 180, 181-182, 262 and 334.

servations, he found that he could read him with complete abdication of the principles which he usually held over the head of a novelist. Often, however, he would add little admonitions on form, but these were always given in good spirit.

Then one day in 1915 a bomb struck. Wells came out with a book entitled Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and the Last Trump, in which he mocks James's novels. Boon, know-it-all hero of the book, satirizes James's stories cruelly, and does not fear to give his reasons. The author will quote at length from this book, for the point it makes is, indeed, at the heart of the thesis. Boon reflected:

> In early life both these men [James and George Moore] poisoned their minds in studios . . . But James has never discovered that a novel isn't a picture . . . that life isn't a studio.
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> . . . .
>
> He wants a novel to be simply and completely done. He wants it to have a unity, he demands homogeneity . . . Why should a book have that? For a picture it's reasonable, because you have to see it all at once. But there's no need to see a book all at once . . .
>
> He has one of the strongest, most abundant minds alive in the whole world, and he has the smallest penetration . . .
>
> [Speaking of James's novel theory] It's one sustained demand for the picture effect. Which is the denial of the sweet complexity of life, of the pointing this way and that, of the spider on the throne. Philosophy aims at unity and never gets there . . . That true unity which we all suspect, and which no one attains, if it is to be got at all it is to be got by penetrating, penetrating down and through. The picture, on the other hand, is forced to a unity because it can see only one aspect at a time . . . But if the novel is to follow life it must be various and discursive. Life is diversity and entertainment, not completeness and satisfaction . . . But James sets out to make his novels with the presupposition that they can be made continuously relevant. And perceiving the discordant things, he tries to get rid of them. He sets himself to pick the straws out of the hair of Life before he paints her. But without the straws she is no longer the mad woman we love . . . Following up his conception of selection, see what in his own practice he omits. In practice James's selection becomes just omission and nothing more. He omits everything that demands digressive treatment or collateral statement. For example, he omits opinions. In all his novels you will find no people with defined

political opinions, no people with religious opinions, none with clear partisanships or with lusts or whims, none definitely up to any specific impersonal thing. There are no poor people dominated by the imperatives of Saturday night and Monday morning, no dreaming types--and don't we all more or less live dreaming? And none are ever decently forgetful. All that much of humanity he clears out before his story. It's like cleaning rabbits for the table.

But see how relentlessly it follows from the supposition that the novel is a work of art aiming at pictorial unities![2]

Some points must be noted immediately. Wells objects in this quote to James's theory that a novel must conform to the pictorial unities. Wells also objects to James's principle and practice of selection, which, he says, drains the novel of all that is human. And Wells blames the theory for this lack of life in James's novels. For Wells, once you grant James the theory he says that James holds, you must come up with a lifeless novel. This latter view might be disputed. The element which Wells calls lifeless could result from James's personality as well as from his novel theory.

This charge of lifelessness will be discussed more at length later. James's novels are certainly different from the ordinary run of novel, but to say that they are inhuman, that they lack life-value, is, this writer feels, over-simplifying the matter.

Finally, it will be noted that Wells believes very much what this author does about the theory of James, i.e., that it can best be understood in terms of painting. It is perhaps strange, that the only authority that this author has to call upon in defense of his primary point, is the greatest enemy that James's theory ever had. But the author points out that the chief point of the

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[2]Herbert G. Wells, Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump (New York, 1915), pp. 103-106.

thesis is not a value judgment on the validity of the theory, but a judgment regarding the origin of the theory in James. In dealing with the latter, however, some mention will be made of the former.

The problem before us, then, is whether or not painting's influence on James is primarily responsible for his novel writing theory. In answering this we will also be answering the second problem as to whether such a theory necessarily leads to a lifeless literature.

It may be well, before we try to answer the problems, to see that it is not Wells alone who objects to James. Wells is the only one who mentions the angle of painting. But others have leveled the same objections against James's novels, i.e., that they lack life, they lack humanity. John Macy says: "Mr. James is like a great scientific mind imprisoned with a few bugs. They are interesting bugs and he says wonderful things about them. So long as the door is shut and one cannot hear the clamour of life outside, one is content to study them with him, unflaggingly fascinated."[3]

And then there are the statements of James himself on the classic authors which shock the reader. He calls Dickens and Thackeray "naif,"[4] and of Tolstoi he writes: "He has a mighty fund of life, but the waste, and the ugliness and vice of waste [sic] , the vice of a not finer doing, are sickening. For me he makes 'composition' throne, by contrast, in effulgent lustre!"[5] Such statements

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[3]John Macy, The Spirit of American Literature, (Garden City, 1914), p. 335.

[4]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" in James, ed. Lyon N. Richardson (New York, 1914), p. 75.

[5]James, Letters, II, 324.

are taken as declarations of war by all those who have loved the works of these authors and the others whom James attacks. The battle then rages around the novels of James, and his enemies are quick to point out that his characters lack all life-likeness.

So the difficulty over this theory is not a pseudo-problem. James definitely attacks the classics, and is in turn attacked by their defenders. So the problem remains: why did James evolve the theory he did? And secondarily, does this theory necessitate an inhuman novel?

In looking for the novel-theory of Henry James two sources especially must be consulted: "The Art of Fiction," an essay written in 1887, adding his ideas to those of Walter Besant, who had also written an article on the nature of fiction; and the prefaces to the New York edition of his novels. This edition began to appear in the year 1907. He had been asked by Scribners to write a little introduction to each of his novels, and to do any re-writing of them that he thought would be helpful. To this job he devoted his full energies, begging in his letters that his friends be sure to read the prefaces. In the "Art of Fiction" we have James's broader view of the novel, his general approach In the prefaces we have the reflections of an aging man, often disillusioned by the ill success of his novels, but still doggedly convinced that his notions have validity. It is these two sources from which we will mainly gather our data for presenting James's novel theory.

To begin then, with the most general topic, what was Henry James's overall attitude toward the novel? It will be noted immediately, that we are already at the heart of the matter, since it is precisely this general view of the novel with which Wells quarrelled.

This general view is to be found in the "Art of Fiction." In Walter Besant's article there had been a plea to look upon the novel as a fine art, and with this sentiment Henry James was in full accord. He points out with Besant that people still seem to want the novel to apologize for being make-believe.[6] But James points out that any apology on the part of the novel is a step toward its annihilation. For "the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt [by apologising], the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself humble in order to be forgiven, and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist, is, so far as I am able to see, complete."[7] He then goes on to praise Besant for insisting that the novel be considered very artistic.

Because the novel should be considered as fine an art as painting, we should give to the novelist the freedom we give to the painter. There should be no dictation of subject matter or of happy endings. The only thing that the reader can fairly ask of the novelist is that the book be interesting.[8]

"A novel," says James, "is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say."[9] And there we are certainly hitting a very important point for James.

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[6]James, "Art of Fiction," _James_, p. 76.

[7]_Ibid._, p. 77.

[8]_Ibid._, p. 81.

[9]_Ibid._

The novel should reflect life. The more intensely it reflects life, the better the novel. The only way the novelist can possibly reflect life is to reflect life <u>as he feels it</u>. He cannot reflect life in any other way. Therefore when people begin to dictate to him what they want in a novel, what ending, what style, what characters, what morals, etc., they are killing his art. They are preventing him from reflecting life as he sees it. And they are *ipso facto* killing all intensity, and therefore, all value, in his work. Thus, to sum up in James's words: " [just] as the picture is reality, so the novel is history [a reflection, impression of life] . That is the only general description (which does it justice) that we may give of the novel. But history also is allowed to represent life; it is not, any more than painting, expected to apologize."[10]

This is the very heart of the thesis. Henry James is describing his view towards the novel, and he does it in terms of painting. If the "Art of Fiction" had been read without a knowledge of James's background, it might have been surprising. As it is, it would be surprising if James didn't speak in terms of painting. We have already seen that he considers the arts as essentially one. We have seen too that in once-and-for-all turning away from painting to fiction, James was consoled by the fact that the painting was still in essence his aim. With such facts understood, James's novel theory expressed in terms of painting, comes as no surprise.

So, in a sense, it is possible to say, that H. G. Wells wins the first

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 77

round. When he said that James saw the novel as a picture, as a representation, he was correct. But there are many details yet to be considered. Mr. Wells may not fare so well after the entire subject has been considered.

The next point to which we turn is James's constant use of the terminology of painting to express his ideas on fiction. What James himself thinks of the analogy in "The Art of Fiction" has already been presented. But twenty years later, when the old novelist was reflecting on his theory, he could still find no better way of expressing what he had to say than through the analogy of painting. The writer found it interesting to see just how often James employs the painting analogy in his prefaces. He noted each reference as he read and the results were overwhelming.[11]

F. O. Matthiessen has also noted the frequency of the analogy and concludes: "When we turn to his novels we must recognize that his critical use of such words as 'composition,' 'relations,' and 'values,' is not loose analogy. By seeing life in pictures, he found his organic form. If we pursue the various implications that he elaborated from that fact, we may have a fresh source of appreciation of some of his finest effects."[12] (It will be noted,

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[11] Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934). Painting analogies occur on pages: 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 26, 27, 30, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 42, 49, 57, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 72, 75, 77, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 94, 95, 96, 100, 101, 105, 112, 115, 123, 124, 126, 127, 133, 136, 137, 139, 141, 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 153, 157, 179, 183, 198, 199, 203, 204, 218, 221, 223, 247, 255, 258, 259, 260, 264, 273, 278, 281, 284, 286, 298, 300, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 310, 323, 328, 332 (2), 333, 334.

[12] F. O. Matthiessen, "James and the Plastic Arts," KR, V (Autumn, 1943), 535.

incidentally, that this thesis is precisely a pursuit of the "various implications" of the painting analogy in James.) Thus analogy is just another indication of the fact that James looked upon his novel theory through the same eyes which he used to gaze upon the world. His was the painter's mind in theory as well as in life.

In the matter of construction, too, James looked upon his novel as a picture. To Robert Louis Stevenson he wrote, "I want to leave a multitude of pictures of my time."[13] It was in The Awkward Age that James completely left behind all picture and acted the whole story out. The Awkward Age is the extreme of dramatization in novel writing, the extreme in lack of description and picture. And yet it is interesting to note how he conceived the story:

> I remember that in sketching my project for the conductors of the periodical I have named, I drew on a sheet of paper . . . the neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance about a central object. The central object was my situation, my subject itself . . . and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of its [the subject's] aspects . . . . Each of my 'lamps' would be the light of a single 'social occasion' in the history and intercourse of the characters concerned and would bring out to the full the latent colour of the scene in question and cause it to illustrate, to the last drop, its bearing on my theme.[14]

The point to be noted about this quotation is that in constructing this pictureless novel, James pictured it! Even when dramatizing as much as possible, he would look upon the construction of the novel as he would look upon the construction of a picture, with all the details (lamps) of the picture subordinated

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[13]James, Letters, I, 138.

[14]James, Art of Novel, pp. 109-110.

to, and illuminating the subject.

Another hint as to the universality of the influence of painting on James is the number of stories that he wrote on or about painting.[15] More than this! In his notebooks we have evidence that at least three more subjects which dealt with painting suggested themselves to James, only to be rejected for one reason or another.[16] F. O. Matthiessen sees more in this penchant for painting stories than mere coincidence: "One of the ways in which he tried to escape Hawthorne's bareness was through the use, again and again, of a painter as the narrator of his stories. He hit upon this in "A Landscape Painter" (1866)--the second story he printed--and although the result there is hardly above the general run of New England local color sketches, what James was feeling his way towards was a density of impression that might best be given unity if seen through a painter's eye."[17] And might I add that we have already seen that for James a novel was an impression of life? Add to this the fact that most of the impressions made upon James himself came to him as they would come to a painter, and you have a further reason for this choice of subject matter.

The reader has undoubtedly noticed that there has not as yet been one mention of any of the specific points of James's painting theory, which were discussed in the second chapter. It is to these specific principles that we now

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[15]James's stories about painting: "A Landscape Painter," "The Story of a Masterpiece," "Travelling Companions," "The Sweetheart of M. Briseux," "The Madonna of the Future," Roderick Hudson, "The Liar," The Reverberator, The Tragic Muse, "The Real Thing," "The Tree of Knowledge," "The Beldonald Holbein," "The Special Type," "Mora Montravers," and "The Outcry."

[16]James, Notebooks, pp. 152, 265-266, 302.

[17]Matthiessen, KR, V, 535-536.

address ourselves.

It will be remembered that James placed great emphasis on the necessity of constant, attentive, and recorded observation for the painter. The same is true for the novelist, James is convinced. And this conviction is not a merely theoretical one. James had found that acute observation pays off for the novelist. This point was proved to his satisfaction especially in the construction of _Princess Casimassima_. In this story James was to write of anarchy. James writing of anarchy! It would seem an impossibility. He admits the difficulty to himself in his preface, and then tells his reader the clue to the air of reality which the book conveys. He knew that he would have to do some clever imagination-work, so he purposely went through the London streets, picking up impressions upon which his imagination could work. "I walked a great deal--for exercise, for amusement, for acquisition, and above all I always walked home at the evening's end, when the evening had been spent elsewhere, as happened more often than not; and as to do this was to receive many impressions, so the impressions worked and sought an issue, so the book after a time was born."[18] Nowhere have we a better example of James, the observer of life.

But this need for observation was not just something he practiced by chance. It was a practice he worked at; it was of the essence of being a painter of life. In speaking in the "Art of Fiction" of the qualities of the prospective novelist, he declares that "the first is a capacity for receiving straight impressions."[19]

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[18] James, _Art of Novel_, p. 59.

[19] James, "Art of Fiction," _James_, p. 91.

It was in this dogged application to constant observation that Henry James, Sr., was to live on in his novelist son. Far back in his childhood, as we have seen, young Henry was taught the importance of being an observer of life. And the pupil never forgot his lesson. As he approached painting he made observation an essential note of the art; and the same must be said of his attitude toward novel writing.

We come now to a second point which corresponds in the painting and novel writing theories of Henry James. It will be remembered that James distinguished between the subject of a painting, and the execution. The same distinction is found <u>throughout</u> his novel writing theory. As a matter of fact, it is one of the central notes of his theory. It is because of his notion of the novel (discussed on pages 44-47) that James places so much emphasis on this distinction. Since a novel is to be a direct impression of life, he demands that the critic grant the novelist his subject, his impression of life. If this is not granted, the novel dies before it begins to live. James then relegates the job of the critic to the realm of execution. What the novelist does with his subject--this is execution, and this is open to much criticism. It is the part of novel writing to which James gives most of his explicit attention in the prefaces. How to express what is to be expressed! This is execution, and this, according to James, is at the same time the ecstasy and the agony of the novelist.

(A note on the method of the thesis. On most of the subsequent points, there are often twenty or thirty quotations from which the author must choose. Rather than relating them all in the text, he will mention explicitly but a few and relegate the rest to references in the footnotes, whither the reader may go

if he desires further proof.)

This distinction is made explicitly in "The Art of Fiction": "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donée: [sic] our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it."[20] In the preface to Roderick Hudson James states: "My mistake on Roderick's behalf--and not in the least of conception, but of composition and expression--is that, at the rate at which he fails to pieces, he seems to place himself beyond our understanding and our sympathy."[21] And in the preface to Portrait of a Lady: "It is a familiar truth to the novelist . . . that . . . this or that disposition of the material, belongs to the subject directly, so to speak, while this or that other belongs to it but indirectly--belongs intimately to the treatment."[22]

Thus we have another aspect which James first discovered in his analysis of painting, seriously affecting his novel-writing theory. At this point, too, it is good to remind ourselves, that Wells still seems to be correct in everything he said, with one very important exception, of which we will have much to say later on--he does not grant to James his right of choosing his own subject.

Just as surface was treated briefly in the chapter on painting, so it will be considered only lightly in this chapter on novel theory. James seemed to recognise two distinct aspects of the surface of a novel: the word style, and the imagery. Because of his peculiar aims in writing a novel and his peculiar demands for unity, his style became a deliberate, involved, and often confusing

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[20]Ibid., p. 88.

[21]James, Art of Novel, p. 12.

[22]Ibid., p. 53; see also pp. 8-9, 42, 48-49, 101, 141, 145, 182-183, 201, 239-240, 277, and 348.

use of words. But for James this was a necessity, and he thought all the while that his style was the perfect style to fit his subject matter. He realized that "there is . . . nothing at all so dramatic, so chargeable with meaning and picture, as speech of whatever sort, made perfect,"[23] and we may be sure that he was always doing his best to charge his surface of words with all the drama and picture that his subject would allow.

As regards the imagery drawn from painting which James used in his novels, Mr. Robert Gale has done significant research, and reports that "painting" accounts for "well over four hundred" of the two thousand art images in the works. Non-dramatic literature accounts for six hundred, drama slightly over four hundred, music over three hundred, sculpture less than two hundred, and dancing and architecture only fifty together.[24] And Mr. Gale also reports that art imagery is the largest single category of simile and metaphor in James's fiction.

It is clear from these two brief paragraphs that James gave attention to surface considerations in his novels, just as he was alert to line, color, and brush strokes in his painting theory.

The next point to be considered is tone, the atmosphere which pervades a work. It was found that this aspect of the form level of aesthetic experience was not ignored by James in his treatment of painting. The same is true when he approaches novel writing. Note how the atmosphere of the place affects his grasp of subject in this quotation: "It was all charmingly simple, this concep-

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[23]James, Notes of Son and Brother, pp. 40-41.

[24]Robert L. Gale, "Art Imagery in Henry James's Fiction," AL, XXIX (March, 1957), p. 47.

tion, and the current must have gushed, full and clear, to my imagination, from the moment Christopher Newman [hero of The Americans] rose before me, on a perfect day of the divine Paris spring, in the great gilded Salon Carre of the Louvre. Under this strong contagion of the place he would, by the happiest of hazards, meet his old comrade, now initiated and domiciled; after which the rest would go of itself."[25] Then again, speaking of himself in the third person, he says that "he incurs the stigma of labouring uncannily for a certain fulness of truth--truth diffused, distributed and, as it were, atmospheric."[26]

And finally, it is under this category of atmosphere and tone that another important aspect of James's novel writing theory belongs. He speaks much of taste, of knowing what is appropriate for the audience, and what is not. He says, with great force, in "Emile Zola": "There is simply no limit, in fine, to the misfortune of being tasteless; it does not merely disfigure the surface and the fringe of your performance--it eats back into the very heart and enfeebles the sources of life. When you have no taste you have no discretion, which is the conscience of taste, and when you have no discretion you perpetrate books . . . . which are without intellectual modesty . . . which are without a sense of the ridiculous . . . which are without the finer vision of human experience."[27] It is true that this discretion and taste come from the side of the author, and that they differ formally from the atmosphere which the descriptions and the style of a novel put forth, but still there is something about James's descrip-

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[25]James, Art of Novel, pp. 23-24.

[26]Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[27]Henry James, "Emile Zola," in James, ed. Lyon N. Richardson (New York, 1914), p. 157.

tion of taste which forces the author to put it under the category of atmosphere. It is a tone which should exist in *every* novel; an atmosphere that should pervade all of a novelist's writing. The specific tones of mood, style, etc., may differ with each novel, but there should always be this tone of taste.

We near now the heart of the matter. The next point that will be taken up is life-value. It will be remembered that it was on this level of aesthetic experience that James placed the most emphasis in his painting theory. The writer believes that the same is true in James's novel theory, in spite of everything that Wells and critics like him may say. Explicitly, it is true, there is much more space given to a development of the *treatment* of the subject matter, than there is given to the subject matter itself. But the important point to note is that subject matter is not at all ignored. It is presumed in all of James's discussion of form and execution. In "The Art of Fiction" James states: "It is here [in attempting to portray reality] that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the color, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle."[28] If Henry James is not looking for meaning and human experience to write about, then no one is. In speaking of George Eliot's *Romola*, he says that it's one great defect is that "it does not seem positively to live."[29] [illegible]is notebooks he describes his growing awareness of the beauty of the sub-

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[28]James, "Art of Fiction," *James*, p. 85.

[29]Henry James, "The Life of George Eliot," in *James*, ed. Lyon N. Richardson (New York, 1914), p. 110.

ject matter for The Tragic Muse in terms of life: "It is there--it lives--it waits; the picture blooms again so soon as I really fix my eyes on it. It is this time really a good subject, I think."[30] And why is it a good subject? He answers the question himself: because "it lives." James's whole treatment of morality in his novels is dependent on the amount of life which the author conveys in his book. "There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it."[31] Thus for James a perception of things which is habitually low or narrow is as fatal to art as it is to conduct. If a man's impression of life is ruined by his own narrowness and depravity, his expression of that experience will also be narrow and depraved, and, therefore, worthless as art.

Surely after quotations like the four just presented, there should be no question about the fact that James was interested in presenting in his novels humanity, humanity felt, humanity expressed. The question arises: what, then, was Wells talking about? Surely Wells read the quotations that have been mentioned here.

The answer to this question, it is believed, is the answer to the problem indicated in the first pages of this chapter. It is an answer overlooked, the author believes, by Wells, and by many others who accuse James of a lack of life-value. And the point the author would like to make is that this answer

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[30] James, Notebooks, p. 92.

[31] James, Art of Novel, p. 45.

could be found in germ back in the painting theory of Henry James.

It will be remembered that the question was asked in the second chapter; what constitutes life-value for James? The answer was given in terms of intelligence, in terms of the mind. For James, a painting was a great one in as much as it conveyed to the viewer intellectual meaning. To present this intellectual meaning, James presented intellectual characters, characters who were to receive the charge of being impossibly intelligent, unreal. James was just the opposite of his contemporaries in his desires for the novel. He wrote in a letter to Edmund Gosse as early as 1900: "I so hunger and thirst, in this deluge of cheap romanticism and chromolithographic archaics (babyish, puppyish, as evocation, all, it seems to me,) for a note, a gleam of reflection of the life we live, of artistic or plastic intelligence of it, something one can say yes or no to, as discrimination, perception, observation, rendering--that I am really not a judge of the particular commodity at all: I am out of patience with it and have it par dessus les oreilles."[32] In speaking of his heroine in the Spoils of Poynton, Fleda Vetch, he thrilled to her intelligence. "Her ingratiating stroke [that which ingratiated her to himself] , for importance, on the threshold, had been that she would understand: and positively, from that moment, the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her understanding."[33] And he revelled in the contrast that Fleda afforded him, for: "Fleda almost demonically both sees [understands] and feels, while the others

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[32]James, Letters, I, 345.

[33]James, Art of Novel, p. 128.

but feel without seeing."[34] Fleda could well be Henry James, and the others, his contemporaries.

For James, the more intelligent the person who tells the story, or through whom the story is told, the better the novel, the more interesting. And we must remember that the reason for this conviction is that for James life-value is constituted by the intellectual (as was seen also in his painting theory). He states, in the preface to Princess Casamassima: "By so much as the affair matters *for* some individual, by so much do we get the best there is of it, and by so much as it falls within the scope of a denser and duller, a more vulgar and more shallow capacity, do we get a picture dim and meagre."[35]

James was fully aware of the criticism that his characters brought upon him, and in his prefaces he pleads his case eloquently and brilliantly. Therefore, though the following passage is lengthy, it is given in whole because of its importance. We are now answering the problem presented in the beginning of the chapter. This quotation is precisely how James would respond to Wells; it is, so to speak, his *apologia*:

> If the life about us for the last thirty years refuses warrant for these examples [his so intelligent characters], then so much the worse for that life. The *constatation* would be so deplorable that instead of making it we must dodge it: there are docencies that in the name of the general self-respect we must take for granted, there's a kind of rudimentary intellectual honour to which we must, in the interest of civilisation, at least pretend . . . .
>
> What does your contention of non-existent *exposures*, in the midst of all the stupidity and vulgarity and hypocrisy, imply but that we have been, nationally, so to speak, graced with no instance of recorded sensibility fine enough to react against these things?—an ad-

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[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

> mission too distressing. What one would accordingly fain do is to baffle any such calamity, to create the record, in default of any other enjoyment of it; to imagine, in a word, the honourable, the producible case. What better example than this of the high and helpful public and, as it were, civic use of the imagination?--a faculty for the possible fine employments of which in the interest of morality my esteem grows every hour I live. How can one consent to make a picture of the preponderant futilities and vulgarities and miseries of life without the impulse to exhibit as well from time to time, in its place, some fine example of the reaction, the opposition or the escape? One does, thank heaven, encounter here and there symptoms of immunity from the general infection; one recognises with rapture, on occasion, signs of a protest against the rule of the cheap and easy; and one sees thus that the tradition of a high aesthetic temper needn't, after all, helplessly and ignobly perish. These reassurances are one's warrant, accordingly, for so many recognitions of the apparent doom and the bruised and finally broken in the fray, or privileged but to gain from it a finer and more militant edge. I have had, I admit, to project signal specimens--have had, naturally, to make and to keep my cases interesting; the only way to achieve which was to suppose and represent them eminent. In other words I was inevitably committed, always, to the superior case; so that if this is what you reprehensively mean, that I have been thus beguiled into citing celebrities without analogues and painting portraits without models, I plead guilty to the critical charge. Only what I myself mean is that I carry my guilt lightly and have really in face of each perpetrated licence scarce patience to defend myself.[36]

The author immediately asks the reader one question. Was there the smallest mention in that entire quotation of painting? The answer, of course, is no. And it is precisely on this point that Wells falls. James chose the characters he did, not because of his painting theory applied to the novel. He chose his characters for the reasons he gave. His theory did not dictate his subject matter to him. His selections were not only made for the sake of unity, etc., but they were made to conform to this high intellectual level which he demanded of his characters. The point is of utmost importance for the theory of the novel in general. As long as people identify the type of characters that James

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[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

used with his theory, the excellent points James brings out in his theory of novel writing will never be sufficiently appreciated. Henry James was an unusual man, a genius. He had his own view of life, and he had his own theory of the novel. The fact that his view of life is different from the usual one, must not cause critics to discount his novel theory. There must always, in James, be careful distinctions made between what is the result of his peculiar view of life, and what is practice of his novel theory.

Thus, to sum up this paramount point: it was not James's theory that the novel must conform to painting theory, that caused the peculiar lifelessness in his works. He explicitly states that for him novel writing was a chance to create intelligences and their reactions to the everyday happenings; intelligences, which, if they did not in reality exist, should exist. And the author would like to point out, that the very fact that James could react to the world in the way he did, indicates that at least there was one such intelligence that really did exist.

There is one more point to be mentioned about this intelligence-aspect of James's work. Since it is at the center of his view of the novel, it is worth the time that we give to it.

Just how esoteric is James's ideal of the intelligence? How far removed from life is it? Do his characters exist only in a fairy land, or do they, or perhaps better, should they, exist also in our own land of the living?

We must return to James's notion of the novel. A novel is an impression of life; the more intense the impression the better the novel. For a man like James, there was no rest until he had the truth about life, and until he had expressed that truth, expressed it not abstractly, but vividly, imposing on it

the form of the imagination, the sensibility which felt it. Life, James saw, was bewildering, full of the cheap, the easy, the vulgar, the unintelligible. It was the job of art, of the novel, to give life meaning, to make life intelligible, by sorting out the cheap and the vulgar, by removing the obscurities of unintelligibility, and by presenting life anew to the reader as intelligible and ideal. For this reason James emphasized the intelligence. It was the job of the intelligence to sort out the truth from the obscurity. For this reason James put intelligent characters at the center of his stories, characters who would embody for the readers, those thirsty for truth, the truth of art, characters who would embody the intelligent reaction to life, i.e., the artist's reaction to life. As Richard P. Blackmur says: "By insisting on intelligence and lucidity something like an ideal vision was secured; not an ideal in the air but an ideal in the informed imagination, an ideal, in fact, actually of life, limited only by the depth of the artist's sensibility of it."[37]

It will be remembered that earlier in the chapter the author said that he thought it would be over-simplifying the matter to convict James of lifelessness. The author feels, now, that the reader understands why he could make that statement. The author of this thesis agrees wholeheartedly with Richard Blackmur: "The characters which he [James] created to dramatise his feelings have sometimes a quality of intelligence which enables them to experience matters which are unknown and seem almost perverse to the average reader . . . . His intentions and all his labour was to represent dramatically intelligence at its most difficult, its most lucid, its most beautiful point. This is the sum of

[37]Richard P. Blackmur, from introduction to James's Art of the Novel (New York, 1934) p. xv. Italics not in original.

his idiosyncrasy; and the reader had better make sure he knows what it is before he rejects it."[38]

In summary, then, and in answer to Wells, it may be said that for James the novel was a picture. But we must add immediately that the novel was a picture of a specific thing: an intelligence reacting to life. It is this aspect of the intelligence which is peculiar to James, which dictates his subject matter. His theory, influenced so much by painting principles, dictates his method. For James the subject matter was always to be the same: some intelligence reacting to something in life. The treatment, because James felt that a novel was a picture, would then come to the aid of the subject matter with the various unities and harmonies of painting, all aimed at intensifying the picture of the intelligence. Selection would be practiced, not for its own sake, as Wells seems to indicate, but to intensify the impression that this intelligence conveyed. It is to this treatment, this form-level of the novel that we now turn, to see how it was subordinated to, and an expression of, the subject matter.

Two aspects of the form-level of aesthetic experience remain to be treated; unity and composition.

It will be recalled that unity was of great importance for James in his painting theory. The same is true of his novel theory. Of all the points that he emphasizes in his prefaces, this point of unity seems to get the most space. He constantly speaks of the great danger of being led away from his subject matter by all the concrete images which call for expression, but which are not immediately pertinent to the purpose, the portraying of the fine intelligence's

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[38] Ibid., p. xiii.

reaction to life. He speaks of "confining his necessary picture,"[39] working always to the "economy of picture."[40] Nothing must be out of place, for any overemphasized detail will distract from the subject at hand. Rather than tire the reader with quotation after quotation on this point of unity, I will mention but one more, and relegate the rest to a footnote. In his preface to *The Americans* he states: "Its [a novel's] value is most discussable when that economy has most operated; the content and the 'importance' of a work of art are in fine wholly dependent on its *being* one: outside of which all prate of its representative character, its meaning and its bearing, its morality and humanity, are an impudent thing."[41]

The author reminds the reader again of the fact that all these points mentioned in this chapter, have also been emphasized in the last chapter on James's painting theory. The point of the thesis that it was in terms of painting that James approached his novel writing theory, the author feels, is secure.

One more important point remains to be treated; the composition of a novel. Two considerations are already given: 1. the subject matter is an intelligence receiving an impression of life; 2. the novel must be *one* if the impression of life is to be intense.

The purpose of composition then becomes: to construct *one* impression of life by an intelligence. For James, there were immediate consequences of this

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[39] James, *Art of Novel*, p. 14.

[40] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38; see also pages 4-5, 6, 15, 62, 65, 65-66, 69, 87-88, 97, 109, 120, 147, 169, 172, 224, 231, 237, 254, 262-263, 277-278, 292-293, and 305.

purpose. Any intrusion by the author, especially of direct address to his reader, was strictly forbidden. Any details which did not compose with this intelligence were to be avoided. Selection was paramount.

In his early novels, picture, description by the author, had a great place. But the more James studied novel theory, the more he became convinced that even this description was in a sense an intrusion by the author, for unless it were seen through the eyes of the characters themselves, it was coming directly from the author, and hence was a discordant note in the unity, a fault in composition.

And it was precisely this type of reasoning that lead James to his great discovery of the <u>central intelligence</u> through which he could filter the entire novel. If the novel were told, in the third person, it is true, but told only from the aspect of the intelligence of the character or characters involved, would not the novel finally be standing on its own two feet, just as the picture? Would not the novel, then, be as independent of the author as possible? The reader would not have to depend for description or explanation on the author--all would be given in the consciousness of the one intelligence at the center of the novel.

Even this great discovery was the result of James's view that the novel was a picture of life. Because it was a picture, it must be one and it must be independent of the author in the same way that the painting on the wall is independent of the painter. James's method of accomplishing these necessities was through the fine central consciousness or intelligence, truly his own great discovery in the theory of the novel. To this day the central intelligence remains the compositional limit to which any novel theorist has been able to push

dramatization. Today, if a novelist wishes to dramatize his story, he resorts to an intelligence at the center of his story through which the entire tale is told.

Quotations on this point are again myriad. Only a few will be mentioned in the text. The rest will be found in the footnotes.

In Notes on Novelists James states: "To lift our subject out of the sphere of anecdote and place it in the sphere of drama, liberally considered, to give it dignity by extracting its finest importance, causing its parts to flower together into some splendid special sense, we supply it with a large lucid reflector, which we find only, as I have already noted, in that mind and soul concerned in the business that have at once the highest sensibility and the highest capacity, or that are, as we may call it, most admirably agitated."[42] And again in the preface to Roderick Hudson: [speaking of Rowland Mallet's consciousness as center]. It the novel remains in equilibrium by having found its center, the point of command of all the rest. From this center the subject has been treated, from this center the interest has spread, and so, whatever else it may do or may not do, the thing has acknowledged a principle of composition and contrives at least to hang together."[43]

In this discovery Morris Roberts recognizes a double value: "A consciousness of this kind at the center of the story, reflecting all its values, is to James the first law of structural economy, of method. But it is more than this,

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[42]Henry James, Notes on Novelists (New York, 1916), pp. 405-406.

James, Art of Novel, p. 15; see also pages 16, 46-47, 51, 52, 83-84, 143, 144, 147, 157, 294, 296, 300, 328, and 329.

for the lucid reflector is no mere technical device but the very substance of James's art. It is a character who is 'richly responsible' as well as 'finely aware,' the chief person in the story, and by the same stroke a triumph of method and a triumph of value."[44] Richard Blackmur also recognized this dual advantage of the fine central consciousness.[45]

It will be remembered that the three chief elements in James's painting theory were: 1. an intellectually significant life-value; 2. a unified impression of this life-value; 3. this unity accomplished chiefly through means of careful composition.

It is interesting and significant to note, as we close this chapter, that these same three notes summarize James's great work in novel theory, for it is through the compositional device of the fine central consciousness that he unifies the impression of life received by a sensitive and subtle intellect.

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[44]Morris Roberts, Henry James's Criticism (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 100-101.

[45]Blackmur, introduction to Art of Novel, p. xviii.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES'S PAINTING AND NOVEL THEORY IN THE AMBASSADORS

The point of the thesis, the author believes, has now been proved. The purpose of this chapter is merely to make concrete what has been said abstractly in the past chapters.

The Ambassadors is chosen as the novel to act as exemplar. This book is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it is from among his *later* works, novels in which his style and method had reached their maturity. Secondly, it is the novel which he himself calls his best.

First a brief summary of the story will be given. Lambert Strether, a middle-aged New England magazine editor, is sent by his benefactress and intended wife to Paris. He is to bring back Chad Newsome, his future wife's son, for Mrs. Newsome had heard that he had fallen into the clutches of a worldly woman.

Strether, an extremely sensitive and intelligent man, lands in Chester, England, where he meets an old friend, Waymarsh, and a new one, Maria Gostrey. Waymarsh is in complete sympathy with Mrs. Newsome's plan to free Chad. He is the typical New Englander. Miss Gostrey, however, has an odd effect on the New England editor. He immediately feels himself free in her presence and is soon telling her his entire story.

When Strether and Waymarsh finally arrive at Paris, Miss Gostrey is there too, and, to the disgust of Waymarsh, Strether continues the friendship. It is

in Paris that things begin to happen to the ambassador.

He finds that Chad Newsome is a completely different man from the boy that he had known. He meets "the woman," Madame de Vionnet and her daughter Jeanne, and finds them totally charming. When he first meets the women, he suspects that the one for whom Chad is straying is Jeanne.

In this atmosphere too, he discovers that he has never really lived his life freely, and expresses himself to a young artist, Little Bilham. The story then becomes the progress of Strether's intelligence. He feels his way gradually to point after point. More and more he delays. He writes Mrs. Newsome, tactfully trying to hold her off. He is not at all sure that Chad _should_ return.

He soon discovers that it is Madame de Vionnet for whom Chad is staying on, and that it is she who has worked the wonderful change in the young Newsome. About this time, Mrs. Newsome fully out of patience, sends her daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Jim Pocock, and their daughter Mamie, whom Mrs. Newsome would like to see Chad marry, to Paris to bring Chad back and to let Strether know that unless he comes back with Chad immediately, everything is off between them.

The Pococks stir up a little fuss, but Chad, Madame de Vionnet and Strether are really little affected by the visit. Strether had realised all along what his action would entail. Sarah presents Mrs. Newsome's proposition to Chad in appealing terms, snubs Strether, and returns to Woolett, Massachusetts, in a huff.

Strether still will not advise Chad to return. In the country one day, Strether is shocked to discover that Chad and Madame de Vionnet are not merely platonic friends. He had thought all the while that their friendship was not

a carnal one. This surprises and wholly confuses him.

In the end he tells Chad that if he ever leaves Madame de Vionnet he is a very low man indeed. Strether makes one last visit to the woman and finds that she, as he, suspects that it will not be long before Chad makes off for America and leaves her behind.

The book ends with Strether saying goodbye to Maria Gostrey, who had been his confidant throughout the novel. He leaves Europe and Miss Gostrey, and returns to New England, which really holds nothing promising for him. But he is immeasurably wiser and richer than the Lambert Strether who sailed from New England as the ambassador.

True to form, James considered this novel a picture. In writing to Hugh Walpole he says of it: "The whole thing is of course, to intensity, a picture of relations."[1] And in his notebooks he says: "My subject may be most simply described, then, as the picture of a certain momentous and interesting period, of some six months or so, in the history of a man no longer in the prime of life, yet still able to live with sufficient intensity to be a source of what may be called excitement to himself, not less than to the reader of his story."[2]

The distinction between subject matter and treatment is also easy to find in the novel. The subject was the growth in Strether of the realization that he had not lived. Everything else in the novel is treatment. This is especially evident with regard to the two characters Waymarsh and Maria Gostrey. Of both of them James said in his preface to this novel: "Waymarsh only to a

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[1]James, Letters, II, 245.

[2]James, Notebooks, p. 374.

slighter degree belongs, in the whole business, less to my subject than to my treatment of it; the interesting proof, in these connexions, being that one has but to take one's subject for the stuff of drama to interweave with enthusiasm as many Gostreys as need be."[3] He openly admits in the preface that Strether must have a confidant, a <u>ficelle,</u> if we are to be plunged into his intelligence.[4]

The interesting thing to remember about treatment in all of James's novels is that every least detail of the book is given the most careful attention. As we shall see, style, description, atmosphere, etc., all are so bound to each other as to further illumine the growth of understanding in Strether's intelligence.

Observation too plays an integral part in <u>The Ambassadors</u>. It played an important part, first of all, in the choice of setting for the novel. In his childhood Paris had made a deep impression on him as <u>the</u> home of art and of life.[5] Paris would be the perfect place for Strether to realize that he had never lived and what he had never felt. Chester, too, had made a favourable impression on James during his travels through England, and it is not difficult to understand why he has Strether land in the city he has called "the most picturesque city in the world, if picturesque is measured by its hostility to our modern notions of convenience."[6]

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[3] James, <u>Art of Novel</u>, p. 322.

[4] <u>Ibid</u>.

[5] James, <u>Henry James, Autobiography</u>, see pages 158-159, 160, 190, 191.

[6] James, <u>Transatlantic Sketches</u>, p. 12; see also pages 10, 13, and 16.

Most interesting observation-fact of all about the novel, however, is Strether's own penchant for noticing what goes on about him. While he was in Chester we find that he "liked the sound, under his feet, of the tight, fine gravel, packed with the chronic damp," and that he "had the idlest eye for the deep smoothness of turf and the clean curves of paths."[7] Later in the book we find that "he went to Chartres and cultivated, before the front of the cathedral, a general easy beatitude."[8] We might even think we were dealing with Henry James, the observer of life, himself! (See the footnotes for other references to Strether's acute observational powers and desires.)

It will be remembered that in the second chapter there was mention of the fact that James's attitude toward Impressionism was a developing one. It is interesting to note that in his later novels his own style approaches that of the Impressionists, whom he had once so bitterly attacked. The following passage is a perfect example of what is meant: "How could he wish it to be lucid for others, for any one, that he, for the hour, saw reasons enough in the mere way the bright, clean, ordered water-side life came in at the open window?--the mere way Madame de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their _omelette aux tomates,_ their bottle of straw-coloured Chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the smile of a child, while her grey eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face and their human questions."[9]

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[7]Henry James, _The Ambassadors_ (Garden City, 1958) p. 27.

[8]_Ibid._, p. 261; see also pages 4-5, 12, 31, 60, 184, 331-332, 402, 411.

[9]_Ibid._, p. 227.

F. O. Matthiessen comments on this very passage: "Here he has come to the essence, not of Sargent's effects but of Renoir's, in the wonderful sense of open air; in the sensuous relish of all the surfaces, with exactly the right central spot of color in that _omelette aux tomates_; in the exquisite play of light around his figures."[10]

Speaking of Madame de Vionnet, James mentions: "She was a woman who, between courses, could be graceful with her elbows on the table."[11] And again, speaking of Jeanne de Vionnet: "She stood there quite pink, a little frightened, prettier and prettier and not a bit like her mother."[12]

It is time to turn now to another important aspect of James's painting theory which is found exemplified in _The Ambassadors_. This point is tone and atmosphere.

Throughout the novel there is an enthroning of taste. Miss Gostrey, Strether, the de Vionnets, Little Bilham, Miss Barrace, and Chad are all people for whom taste is second nature. They lend to the book a tone of taste in which everything participates. When the prosaic Pococks barge into this atmosphere, there is immediately a discordant note throughout. And when the Pococks leave, harmony returns.

But over and above the atmosphere and tone of taste, there is Paris itself. Paris, with its atmosphere of art and of life, of taste and of pleasure, is constantly kept before the reader. "The prompt Paris morning struck its cheerful

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[10] F. O. Matthiessen, _Henry James: The Major Phase_ (New York, 1944), p. 34.

[11] James, _Ambassadors_, p. 228.

[12] _Ibid._, p. 166.

notes,"[13] is but one of many examples. Another example follows: " . . . . so that the far-spreading presence of Paris came up in coolness, dimness, and invitation, in the twinkle of gilt-tipped palings, the crunch of gravel, the click of hooves, the crack of whips, things that suggested some parade of the circus."[14] But most of all, the atmosphere of Paris played on the imagination. Strether had heard so much about Paris, that everything he saw, everything he heard, enticed him to further probings. "Another was that the balcony in question didn't somehow show as a convenience easy to surrender. Poor Strether had at this very moment to recognise the truth that, wherever one paused in Paris, the imagination, before one could stop it, reacted."[15]

But Paris is not the only thing which effects an atmosphere in The Ambassadors. Rooms, decorations, cafes, the air, the weather, etc., all are united, as it were, to bring to the reader the intelligence of Strether clearly and vividly. The reader, as well as Strether, is caught up in the tone of the events. The happenings of the novel seem to grow right out of the tone of the day, or the atmosphere of the location. It is just another example of the perfection of unity to which James devoted himself. Atmosphere is just another tool in the treatment; just another means of presenting a unified impression of life received in a sensitive mind.[16]

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[13] Ibid., p. 59.

[14] Ibid., p. 288; see also pages 84, 130, 183, 388-389, 405, and 427.

[15] Ibid., p. 71.

[16] Other references to pages on which tone and atmosphere appear are: 7, 37-38, 64, 78, 146-147, 170-171, 176, 185, 220, 260, 309, 372, 393, 409, 413-414, 427-428, and 459.

On the level of description and surface, James is also true to his theory. The references to painting, painters, and all the arts are frequent. Speaking of Jeanne de Vionnet, James states: "She was fairly beautiful to him—a faint pastel in an oval frame; he thought of her already as of some lurking image in a long gallery, the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing was known but that she had died young."[17] When trying to describe Waymarsh, Little Bilham calls out that he is "Michelangelesque! He _is_ a success. Moses, on the ceiling, brought down to the floor; overwhelming, colossal, but somehow portable."[18] And to bring out the very important point of how intimately the imagery and surface elements of the novel are united by the style to the subject, this next quotation is presented. "Alas, nothing so little resembled floating as the rigour with which, on the edge of his bed, he [Waymarsh] hugged his posture of prolonged impermanence. It suggested to his comrade something that always, when kept up, worried him—a person established in a railway coach with a forward inclination. It represented the angle at which Waymarsh was to sit throughout the ordeal of Europe."[19] In these two sentences James went from an image of Waymarsh sitting on the edge of his bed, to a man leaning forward in his seat in a railway coach, a man anticipating the time when he can get off. In these images James presents us with the entire story of Waymarsh. We know little more about Waymarsh at the end of the book, than we do after this quotation which occurs in the first few pages. Just another example of the vise-

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[17] _Ibid._, pp. 195-196.

[18] _Ibid._, p. 154.

[19] _Ibid._, p. 20.

like unity and compression of James's style. Each image counts for James. There is nothing superfluous.

In summary then of this point of the surface-level of aesthetic experience in The Ambassadors, this can be said. The imagery of the novel is primarily imagery of art, and from among the arts, painting is used most frequently.[20] Secondly, each and every image James uses in The Ambassadors aids in the purpose of the novel. There isn't a superfluous image in the novel.

The next point to be considered is the life-value of the novel. If the novel does exemplify the points mentioned in the previous chapter, we should find at the core of the book some impression of life which is intellectually suggestive. The author believes that The Ambassadors does fulfil this point as well as the others already presented.

For James, living an active, intelligent, and observing life was of the greatest value. We have seen how his father had taught him to observe and to question. Always Henry was to have problems which he was working on. To keep his children from becoming intellectually stifled by routine, Henry James, Sr., was constantly on the move. New problems, new surroundings, and new friends were bound, he felt, to keep his sons intellectually alert, to keep them really living as men ought to live. For James, then, an active intellectual life, a life in which a man did his own thinking, and did it constantly, was a great life-value.

And this is precisely the theme of the novel with which we are dealing.

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[20] Ibid. For other examples of painting imagery and painting as a surface-value consult pages: 13, 18-19, 26, 56-57, 89-90, 165, 167, 204-205, 324, 365, 402, 403, and 403-404.

The Ambassadors is the story of how a man realized that his environment had stifled him, had prevented him from living his own life.

James describes in his notebooks how the idea of the story came to him. He describes how a friend of his, W. D. Howells, on a bright Sunday afternoon in a Paris garden, suddenly came out with an urge to life. "But think of the place again first--the charming June afternoon in Paris, the tea under the trees, the 'intimate' nook, consecrated to 'artistic and literary' talk, . . . Well, this is what the whole thing, as with a slow rush the sense of it came over him, made him say:--'Oh, you're young, you're blessedly young--be glad of it; be glad of it and live. Live all you can: it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do--but live.'"[21] This is the germ that grew into The Ambassadors. It is certainly not difficult to understand how such a quotation would have a lasting effect on the intensely alive and active James.

It was about this theme of living that James would weave all his treatment. Since a novel is an impression of life, this theme would have to be expressed as an impression. What better way was there of presenting this impression than by presenting the intelligence of a man, as he grows in the realization that he has not lived? The impression of life, i.e., the novel, would be the impression that a particular intellect received.

It is interesting to note that James repeats in the novel the very scene that inspired the book. On a Sunday afternoon in a beautiful garden in Paris, Strether expounds to Little Bilham: "All the same, don't forget that you're young--blessedly young; be glad of it, on the contrary, and live up to it.

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[21]James, Notebooks, pp. 372-373.

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what <u>have</u> you had? . . . I see it now. I haven't done so enough before--and now I'm old; too old at my rate for what I see. Oh, I <u>do</u> see, at least; and more than you'd believe or I can express."[22] This is a perfect expression, it is maintained, of an impression of life. And the impression, the life-value, is: Live!

This life-value of the importance of leading an active human life, is, the author feels sure, <u>the</u> life-value of the novel. But there are other subsidiary life-values expressed. Madame de Vionnet realizes at the end of the book that "it's not, that it's never, a happiness, any happiness at all, to <u>take</u>. The only safe thing is to give."[23] And Strether himself, as he tells Maria Gostrey that he cannot remain and marry her, enunciates the peculiar Jamesian ironic moral that a "full appreciation of Life is incompatible with the everyday business of living."[24] Strether says: "You see, that is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."[25] Strether has a vision now; he sees that he must live, as much as that is possible for a man of his age. And neither the life with Maria, nor the life back at Woolett, is sufficient to fulfill the <u>life</u> which he now sees he must strive towards. The novel ends with Strether immensely richer, but richer only in the sense that he <u>sees</u> much more clearly what man is about. He has neither Maria nor Mrs. Newsome; he has only a vision. But as Frederick Crews says: "His vision is worth its

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[22]James, <u>Ambassadors</u>, p. 163.

[23]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 433.

[24]Frederick C. Crews, <u>The Tragedy of Manners</u> (New Haven, 1957), p. 56.

[25]James, <u>Ambassadors</u>, p. 464.

price."[26]

The point of the place of the intellect in this novel is most likely already obvious to the reader. Since almost anything that can be said would be superfluous, the author will attempt to be brief.

First of all the whole novel is directed to Strether's understanding, to his seeing that life is worth more to him than he has been taking from it. It is important to note that the novel is directed to the mind of Strether; it is not a matter of his feeling that he has not lived. At the end of the novel he clearly sees, he understands, that his previous life had been insufficient. Strether says to Maria Gostrey, as he is taking his final leave of her, "It [continued life in Paris] wouldn't give me--that would be the trouble--what it will, no doubt, still give you. I'm not . . . in real harmony with what surrounds me. You *are*. I take it too hard. You *don't*. It makes--that's what it comes to in the end--a fool of me."[27] This, the writer feels, is not the expression of an emotion. It is conviction founded upon reflection. And it is another expression of the central insight Strether receives. He knows what the life is that he now seeks; and he knows that Paris will not afford him the occasion to live that life. Such is the basic intellectual element in the life-value that *The Ambassadors* embodies.

But there is another way in which the novel is intellectual. Strether himself is a highly gifted man. James went to much trouble in choosing a life's work for Strether. He wanted his hero to be very intelligent, and yet he had to

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[26] Crews, *Tragedy of Manners*, p. 56.

[27] James, *Ambassadors*, p. 460.

be hemmed in by his environment. He came up with the idea that Strether must be an editor, a man of varied interests, an alert man. And to have his hero hemmed in, he thought up the idea of making Mrs. Newsome responsible for Strether's editorship. He was accountable to her for everything he did. She gave him the job and her eye was on him. As a result his basically alert intellect was thwarted; it was not given much chance to operate. Thus we can see how well James set the stage for Strether's reaction when the atmosphere of Paris should go to work on him. His analysis of Mrs. Newsome's part in the whole story is a good example of his intellect at work. "That's just her difficulty--that she doesn't admit surprises. It's a fact that, I think, describes and represents her; and it falls in with what I tell you--that she's all, as I've called it, fine cold thought. She had, to her own mind, worked the whole thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for herself. Whenever she has done that, you see, there's no room left; no margin, as it were, for any alteration. She's filled as full, packed as tight, as she'll hold, and if you wish to get anything more or different . . . ."[28] No man of ordinary intellect could ever analyse a problem in which he was so intimately involved with the lucidity here manifested. Strether's intellect, sharp and subtle, sets a tone for the entire book. The book is not only a picture of a growing understanding, it is a picture of a growing understanding in a man who has an extraordinary capacity for understanding.[29]

Thus one more aspect of James painting theory which found its way into his

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[28] *Ibid.*, p. 384.

[29] *Ibid.*; for other examples of Strether's acute intellect see pages 38, 164-165, 254, 346, 386, 390-391, 412, 419-420, 431.

novel theory is exemplified by The Ambassadors. As we saw in the second chapter, the life-value which had the most appeal to James was the intellectually suggestive life-value. The painter who really had something to say was the painter who received James's allegiance. When James came to compose The Ambassadors, he made sure that the novel said something. He made the theme itself a process of intellectual vision, and he made that intellect an extraordinary one.

Two points remain to be treated. It was seen both in chapter two and in chapter three that unity through composition was an essential note of James's painting theory and of his novel writing theory. A painting must give one impression; the means to this end was clever and selective composition. A novel must present one impression of life; the means to this end is composition, especially placing a fine consciousness at the center of the story, through which the entire story can be told.

These two points of unity and composition are so intimately connected in The Ambassadors that the author will treat them together, and not separately, as they were discussed in the previous chapters.

A novel must produce one impression. What is James's chief means to this end? Strether's fine central consciousness. Nothing comes to the reader without being filtered through Strether. The reader sees only what Strether sees. The reader grows in knowledge of the other characters in the story only when the hero himself learns more about them. And since there is only one center with which the reader is in contact, he gets but one impression of life, i.e., Strether's. Thus the compositional device of Strether's fine central consciousness is the means James employs for attaining the indispensable unity.

Any paragraph of The Ambassadors that the author quoted would be an example of this central intelligence. But to make the effectiveness of the method obvious, it will be good to compare a paragraph from this book with a paragraph from another James book, The American. The American is one of James's first novels, written before he had perfected the compositionally perfect fine central consciousness.

The American opens: "On a brilliant day in May, of the year 1868, a gentleman was reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which at that period occupied the centre of the Salon Carre, in the Museum of the Louvre."[30] Immediately we are aware that "we are to be regularly informed in the novel by the narrator from without of the time and the place and the physical action or attitude of the as yet unnamed individual, whom it will then be the author's business to give us an account of."[31]

Compare the opening sentence of The Ambassadors with the previous opening sentence: "Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted."[32] Immediately we are plunged in medias res. We are starting immediately inside the particular situation, at a particular moment, as it presents itself to the person involved.[33] The Ambassadors then continues throughout on that same note. We become aware immediately that we are not going to be told who this Strether is. We will have to pick up our informa-

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[30]Henry James, The American (New York, 1907), p. 1.

[31]Joseph W. Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York, 1932), p. 195.

[32]James, Ambassadors, p. 3.

[33]Beach, p. 195.

tion as he speaks about himself. There is no narrator glibly supplying all the necessary information for us. There is no duality implied in *The Ambassadors.* In this novel, by the compositional device of the fine central consciousness, James has achieved his desire of presenting a truly *unified* impression of life.

As the chapter comes to an end, it is good to note that once again the three most important elements in James's painting theory, which were also at the center of his novel writing theory, are *the* most important elements in *The Ambassadors.* Through composition James achieves the unified impression in the reader of an intellectually suggestive life-value.

CHAPTER V

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

Now that the points proposed have been discussed, it would be well to consider the relationships existing in the last three chapters. The thesis said much of unity in James; but did the thesis itself have any unity?

The purpose of the second chapter was to see how much painting was a part of Henry James. In a way, the author hoped that the second chapter would enable the reader to put on, as it were, the mind of Henry James. It was in the second chapter, too, that various elements in Henry James's theory of painting were enumerated and explained. The basic elements were: constant and attentive observation; the distinction between subject and treatment; the need that the picture really say something meaningful, something intellectually suggestive; the absolute necessity that the picture give one and only one impression; composition as the chief means to this unity; the atmospheric tone of the painting as another means to unity and, finally, an awareness of the surface elements in painting such as brush strokes, colors, and lines.

This much having been accomplished in the second chapter, we moved into the novel writing theory of James. It was hoped that we would recognise behind this theory the same mind that we had met in the second chapter.

After a brief analysis of "The Art of Fiction" and the prefaces to the New York Edition of James's novels, it was clear that the very same elements which

he emphasized in his painting theory were the central elements in his novel theory. And especially important were the three elements of an intellectually suggestive life-value, unity, and composition. In this chapter, too, we saw a little of James's discovery of the fine central consciousness. It was in this chapter that the chief point of the thesis was made: that it was precisely his looking at novel-writing through the eyes of a painter which led him to his entire theory, and especially to his discovery of the fine central consciousness. It was from his familiarity with painting and his conviction that the arts are "after all, essentially one," that he was convinced that the novel must give one impression. Painting must obviously give one impression. But the arts, among them novel-writing, are essentially one. Therefore, novels must give but one impression too. It is as simple as that.

It was also in this third chapter that the difficulty presented by H. G. Wells was answered. It was shown how Wells attributed the strange tone of intellectuality in Jamesian novels to the fact that James made the novel conform to painting unities, thus cutting all life out of them. But it was also shown that this attribution was not wholly true. It is a fact that James wanted the novel to conform to the unities of painting. But this theoretical conviction was not the cause of the intellectuality, the lifelessness, as Wells called it, of James's novels. This characteristic flowed from a different cause. James felt that he was, as an artist, presenting to the world an ideal. And for him, the ideal man must be much more intellectual than the ordinary man in the street. Therefore he made his characters highly intellectual. He did not give the importance to emotions that the novels up to his time had given. But this was a conscious cutting away on James's part. And it was not because he felt

that the novel must present to its reader an ideal vision of life. And for James, ideal meant intellectual.

The fourth chapter was then inserted to exemplify the theoretical elements mentioned in the previous two chapters. It was to concretize what had been put abstractly earlier. It was seen, in this chapter, that the three most important elements of James's theory were the three most important elements in The Ambassadors.

Thus the thesis is complete. The writer would like to point out as a conclusion, some benefits which he thinks could be the results of his work.

First of all, on a purely scholarly level, the point brought out in the thesis could well be an aid to a deeper understanding of Henry James, the most studied American artist in the present decade. (The New York Times Book Review section has said of him: "At the moment there is probably no writer in the English language more in favour with the critical fraternity than Henry James."[1]) The writer believes that he has discovered a basic view of James. The way a farmer acts in a big city is influenced by the fact that he has spent the first thirty years of his life in the country. The way Kant wrote his philosophy is influenced by the fact that he was trying to put morality beyond the reach of scientific questioning. The way a saint interprets reality is influenced by the fact that he is seeing God in all things. So, it is argued, the literature scholar, if he is to fully understand James's theory and his novels, must take into consideration the fact that James looked upon the arts as essentially one, and the fact that the first art he really met was painting.

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[1]Raymond Walters, "Rebound," New York Times Book Review (March 8, 1959), p. 38.

Secondly, the thesis offers an insight into the statement of James that the arts are essentially one. Is this true? It seems to this writer, after his work with James's novel theory and the influence of painting upon that theory, that there is much to be said for James's dictum. The results of the theory on James's novels were beneficial. The conviction that the arts are one did not hurt James's work--it helped. It was this conviction that led him to his discovery of the fine central consciousness.

And finally, the author feels that this thesis is a step forward in understanding the novel. And if this is true, then the thesis may lead to a greater appreciation in the novel reader. If, as was mentioned in the first chapter, the thesis aids the novel reader to recreate as well as to experience, then it has accomplished its purpose. It has lead the reader to a greater appreciation, and this makes the thesis worthwhile, for, as the author began the thesis, so he will end it: "Literature is a fine art, and, as a fine art, has as its purpose the arousing of appreciation in the reader."

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