CHAPTER-VI

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It is of course for my reader to say whether or no what I have done has meant defeat; yet even if this should be his judgment I fall back on the interest, at the worst, of certain sorts of failure.

HENRY JAMES

Henry James received a whole lot of criticism on his play-writing. It was fashionable in critical circles to dismiss his play-writing phase as 'disastrous'-a waste of precious time in which the novelist might have been writing fiction instead. Moreover, James himself had been highly secretive about his play-writing. He confined his theatrical plans to a few. He left a sketchy and vague record of the plays in the letters to his intimates, and he scrupulously destroyed the working note books for his dramas. The fear of failure has unmade him to project his plays to the public. But most critics have recognized the high dramatic qualities residing in his plays, as indeed in all the work of James.

The development of his early plays resembles the origin of Greek drama. During the inception, the Greek drama had only the chorus. Slowly a single character from the chorus acted then two and then three characters followed subsequently with a multi character plays.
James might have closely studied the Greek theatre. His first play *Pyramus and Thisbe* had only two characters, the second play *Still waters* has three characters, the fourth one *A Change of Heart* has four characters and *Daisy Miller* is a multi-starrer.

*Pyramus and Thisbe*. James first dramatic composition, is successful in transmitting the events of the chief protagonists. It has a rich symbolism, high philosophy and suspense. Above all it is an epigrammatic comedy. Though it is a simple two character conversation piece it gives an abundant humour and an account of neighbourly inconveniences and compromises paving the way for a permanent wedlock.

James' second play *Still Waters* is about a passive hero who worships the heroine in silence and sacrifices his love for the sake of another person. The play projects the inferiority complex of a person which results in the loss of his beloved. The play can be considered as James' compact masterpiece.

James' third play *A Change of Heart* is the third and last of his early dramatic experiments. It deals successfully with the subject of loving and cheating. The two male characters represent diametrical ideologies; one having sinister designs to deceive and seduce innocent women another a
good Samaritan who always tries to disclose the vileness of the former. The two women characters also represent different mentalities; one being seduced by the villain is a cool and mature woman and the other being underbred, rash and indecisive. It ends with the busting of the villain's malice.

This playlet is an attempt to create a play in French fashion-each entrance and exit marking the occasion for a scenic division after the form in which French plays were cast. As a result this dramatic trifle boasts no less than fifteen scenes. It has more intrigue than its predecessors; nevertheless there is no evidence to show that James, in writing it, intended it for any stage. Its brevity alone would mark it as distinctly experimental.

Daisy Miller is James' first major dramatic composition in which he approached the task of writing which a profound respect for the medium he intended to employ. He brings to the drama conscious artistry, aesthetic refinement, sensuous subtlety and an elaborate perceptiveness.

Thus James' plays offer a fertile field of study to examine the mechanics of presentation by a motion of singular fame. James is a theoretician who practically executed in his novels various theories he proposed.
In plays he followed the French Drama which is a faithful inheritor of the Greek drama. His plays are more than critical artifacts offering live situations for the scrutiny of the public. His timidity to progress as a dramatist is largely owing to his fear of failure. This can not obliterate his worth as a playwright.