CHAPTER 5
HENRY JAMES: STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

STYLE-

Henry James was highly talented writer and displayed wonderful craftsmanship of writing during his time. In his boyhood, James was exposed to the tremendous knowledge from his father, Henry James senior, one of the best known intellectuals of his time. As the young James became older and more exposed to his father's vast knowledge, he too became quite learned. During James’ teen years and early twenties, he traveled extensively, mainly back and forth between America and Europe which gave an edge to his understanding and his writing skills. For James' style was one's way of understanding and conducting one’s being and he very successfully proved that language is a way of life that should be strictly followed.

In his fiction James explores human desires, reluctance, motivation and relationships through the minds, words and actions of well developed characters such as Isabel Archer in 'The Portrait of a Lady' and Lambert Strether in 'The Ambassadors'. These two characters represent two of James’ favorite types: the young woman who struggles against social conditions and the older man who observes more vibrant, young persons, seeming to live vicariously through them. James’ fiction also reflects his experience in its frequent
contrasts between ‘America’ where he was born, and ‘Europe’ where he traveled extensively and lived for much of his life. Leon Edel correctly puts in that James traveled-

"partly because he felt that his craft needed the nourishment of older civilizations." ¹

The question of style in Henry James is so central to our understanding of his fiction that one is surprised to see James’ criticism peculiarly evasive and style at times with acute swipes at it. Meyer Shapiro says;

"Investigation of style is often a search for hidden correspondences explained by an organizing principle which determines both the character of the parts and patterning of the whole." ²

When one tries to analyze the development of James’ style we find that it is safer to assume that there can be no thought without words, the peculiar placement or disposition of the words gives a chromatic quality to our thought. In short, in any language other than the one used in scientific literature, the writers’ personality gets refracted through the prism of words. James reared in American affluence and European culture, has come to regard wit, charm, poise and polish as ends in themselves. The style correspondingly reflects the values of ease and elegance, of culture and continuity, of irony and
detachment. The style of 'Watch and Ward', his first fiction, is unfortunately without much distinction or charm. It has a certain dread ness and fatigue about it. It is priggish and pompous and shows James at his weakest ability. For instance, describing Mrs. Keith Roger's first love, he writes:

"This lady had completely rounded the cape of matrimony, and was now buoyantly at anchor in the placid cove of well dowered widowhood." ³

This kind of style has a verbal extravagance that shows a sense of inner emptiness and vacancy. The imagination here has not touched the depth of reality and this remains unengaged. The style of 'Roderick Hudson', however, shows a distinct leap forward. Here James' language becomes luminous and supple. By the time James wrote 'The Bostonians', 'The Portrait of a lady' and 'The Princess Cassamassima', his style had warmth and elegance with a rich glow of moral reality. The impressionistic style in which James portrayed 'Isabel Archer's' romantic hungers and aristocratic dreams is remarkable. It answers the deeply-felt desires of the young woman from Albany reared in a house with drawn blinds and in a country of democratic air. James's love of spacious lawns and gardens, of richly furnished rooms and houses is an aspect of psychological longing for at home with an atmosphere of smooth, and cultivated quality. This is reflected through
the character of Isabel Archer that has developed this rich, varied and multiplying imagery which, in turn reflects her changing fortunes and growing perception. It is thus drawn from gardens and flowers, swift carriages and voyages, cages and caves, water and pools, light and ray and many more such combinations to add to. This could be observed in the sentences where Isabel says:

"A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can’t see-that’s my idea of happiness."  

Thus in Henry James the style becomes the character. One thing that needs to be emphasized in his style is that, the changes in the writing style is not so strikingly different in his printing and weaving from phase to phase. There is always authentic and invariable styles which remain constantly in attention. It features poise and amplitude, eloquence, irony, quips and quibbles, shades and nuances alone which the essential style endures. As his career grew, changes are felt because of his new method of dictation, shift in vision and psychological pressures.

While writing 'The Wings of the Dove' James developed a habit of repeating favorite phrases that is quite relevant in the struggle of Densher and kate to unstitch the tragic web woven by themselves where Densher says:
"I’ll marry you, mind you, in an hour."

"As we were?"

"As we were?"

But Kate turned to the door and her head shake was now the end.

"We shall never be again as we were!"

"As we were!" 5

There is a desperate beauty about this exchange. Kate’s last words are spoken from over the edge of an abyss, as it were, and leave her gaping into the void. Its bareness and repetitive pattern make the dialogues so terse and tense. In context of his writing style, if one closely watch his use of language one finds that in ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ Isabel’s exclamations are well above the average use of any author and almost all of them reveal her own momentary state of mind, she does not make any attempt to influence others by emotionalizing her statements. Her scale of exclamatory expression runs the whole range of human emotions, from admiration, surprise and excitement to indignation and disgust, for example-

"You are very odious, sir!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Ah! I protest!" Isabel earnestly cried. 6

The predominant impression is that Isabel is forever exclaiming and crying out. This happens even when no exclamation is indicated in the text. In addition to this James’ instances of emphasis as we better
call it as stress is indicated through special construction and in part, also through repetitions. The emphasis amount to direct underlining of Isabel's point of view in the following example, where Isabel agrees with the surface message of Ralph's statement, misunderstanding Ralph's real intention:

"That's just what I think! said Isabel with a toss of her head. "That is why I like her so much.""

In the above statement Ralph is not an admirer of Madam Merle, about whom they are talking, but Isabel chooses to understand Ralph as she wishes and at the same time makes her point clear to Ralph. This notification gets prominent by Isabel's agreeing to Ralph's views.

The most frequent reason for the occurrence or use of an exclamation is the desire to convey a message and to underline a point. Exclamations are thus commonly used in Henry James' language. Exclamations also appear to express contempt or disgust or they can be used to protest. In James, there is frequent use of exclamatory sign with some markers that are mostly interjection, interrogative words or commenting words like ah!, oh!, how!, what, exclaimed!, cried out! and so on. These exclamations can express the speakers' state of mind and can react to the events or what is said.

With the same context if one reads 'The Ambassadors' one finds that James had achieved a full mastery of language by this time. The
theme of the story is that of an unfulfilled life. The protagonist, Lambert Strether, notices in his middle age that he has not lived and interestingly tries to teach someone else to live. To bring out so many emotions and merge with each other James used many exclamations. 

'The Ambassadors' contains ninety seven exclamations in a sample of 20,000 words. When one compares this with the number of exclamations in the earlier novels, a clear rising curve emerges illustrating the development. In 'The Ambassadors' exclamations show what is Strether's most frequent reaction to what happens and to what others say: he is always surprised, often to the extent of becoming quite speechless. His self confidence does not show much in his reactions, and one cannot, indeed, help wondering about his mental and intellectual powers. He never succeeds sounding like a strong, determined man. Strether's most common reaction to almost anything is an instant 'oh' or 'ah'. What Strether really wants to say with that word cannot be made out. Consequently, one has to assume that it, indeed, means nothing, as illustration below show:

"Dear no. Alive." "Oh!" said Strether.

After which, as his companion laughed:

"How then can it be so good?"

This is Strether's reaction to little Bilham's announcement that Madame de Vionett not a widow, nor divorced, but simply not living
with her husband. The reader knows nothing about Strethers' reactions and gestures but by his words and exclamations we have to guess that he is simply stupefied. Another typical exclamation in Strethers' speech expresses his admiration for whatever may be happening. The subject however may be almost any little thing that could be noticed in the following example-

"It was beautiful, the way Chad said these things, and his plea was now confessedly - of quite flagrantly and publicly interesting"  
"But it's a marvel, 'he exclaimed', how you already get at it!"  

In this fiction the narrator's language differs on some important points from that of the characters. The narration is often difficult to be distinguished from that of Isabel's.

"The narrator seems to be fond of using a character's idiom when he is reporting the conversation or thoughts of that person."  

To add further.-

"There are, indeed, always at least three minds at work in Henry James' fiction, James', the narrator's and the characters."
Thus James is deliberately trying to keep himself in the background as much as he can. In the following narration, the reporter is quite clearly someone else, not Isabel, as she could not even know about the events mentioned:

"Mrs. Touchett rarely changed her plans, and having intended before her husband's death to spend a part of the winter in Paris, saw no reason to deprive herself – still less to deprive her companion–of this advantage." 13

The emphasis without any markers and repetition with changes in word-order makes this sort of narration quite evident. There is another evident example of a situation where Isabel is unaware of the meeting between Osmond and his former mistress. Whoever is telling the story is interpreting the relationship between the two characters and Isabel would hardly be in that position even at the end of the story. James gave this effect in the fiction by the frequent repetition of words and the stress on few points:

"They stood there knowing each other well and each on the whole willing to accept the satisfaction of knowing as a compensation for the inconvenience–whatever it might be–or being known." 14
One also finds the increase in the occurrence of emphasis when one reads ‘The Ambassadors’. The most remarkable and the most interesting individual occurrence of emphasis are found in Strether’s speech. Strether’s emphasis, like the emphasis shown in other fiction, underlines or draws out a word or a phrase which the speaker or the narrator wants to be noticed as most important. It juxtaposes and contrasts matters, states or persons or specifies which one of a larger group is meant, for instance—

“Well, about you, Madame de Vionnet, I’ve heard, I’m bound to say, almost nothing.”  

In one instance, Strethers’ emphasis shows that he has noticed a mistake that Madame de Vionnet has made, when Madame de Vionnet calls Chad’s friend a ‘woman’ at the time when he still believes that the woman in question is the very young Madam de Vionnet, Strether gets puzzled:

“Ah his idea was simply what a man’s idea always is to put every effort off on the woman. ‘The ‘woman’-----------?’ Strether slowly echoed. This time Madame de Vionnet notices her mistake and tries to explain it away:
"The woman he likes-and just in proportion as he likes her. In proportion too- for shifting the trouble-as she likes him." 17

Thus one finds that any description of a state of affair is best told by the use of the language used and language by its very nature is a vehicle for abstraction and differentiation.

James’ later style has been compared to the expressionistic style that emphasizes the subjective side of reality and seeks to capture the tangled and confused world of fantasy, dream and thought which the other objects and stimuli set into motion. The style was thus bound to become involved, distorted and fanciful in its efforts to paint the wanderings of the mind. The classical style failed to do justice to such distortions and flights of mind. But whatever be the case, his style builds in complexity then assumes a compulsive quality. This was his style that translated for him the huge and vague continents of dreams and desires, the stinging doubts about the nature of reality, and the dark mystery of evil in the world.

Henry James also focuses on two specific issues firstly, that women are expected to confirm to a certain number of predetermined roles and secondly that they have largely been transformed into passive objects for male pleasure. For instance in ‘Daisy Miller’ one finds that Daisy’s opportunities for self expression as limited by her
social circle who expected her to observe certain lady-like standards of behavior and by Winterbourne who continually treats her as an object of his gaze. On the other hand Daisy resists such attempts to constrain her through sheer vitality and a determination to find new means of self-expression. The contrast between Daisy and Winterbourne is re-emphasized later on when Daisy asks winterbourne his full name. He replies 'Frederick Forsyth winterbourne', which prompts Daisy to exclaim "I can't say all that!" By speaking such a bold statement Daisy quite literally breaks the tradition as she resists any attempt on winterbourne's part to constrain her. It has Daisy's self expression that made Daisy refuse winterbourne’s protection, and left her as an American breathing a new life into a stale Euro-American society. After reading the fiction one feels that James at times wanted to say that it was her stubbornness that led her to take such decisions and left her with no assets at all. Most of the description depicts Daisy as a victim either of her own self-will, or of her inability to adjust to Euro-American society. For a male observer like winterbourne, Daisy's character was a baffling mixture of innocence and seductiveness. Winterbourne yearns for an ideal world, free of ambiguity, where love was perfectly innocent and sex benign; because Daisy does not fit the roles he prescribed for her, he literally kills her in an effort to purify her. Thus on one hand James says that women are bound to follow
certain rules and regulations in a society and if they go beyond that and entertain their freedom, their downfall is sure and finally they have to behave the way males want them to be like.

If one keeps this fact apart and enter James' fictional world, one enters into a sphere which keeps itself peculiarly innocent of ritual, ideology or any tendency towards a collective or transpersonal definition of the self. T.S. Eliot correctly puts in that

"James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it". 19

Due to this Eliot considered James as the most intelligent man in his generation. James' idea of feminity is in fact a refusal of ritual or any transpersonal way of life. It is the feminine sensibility in James that keeps relationships alive by disturbing ritual. It one goes far back to the fairy tale of Cinderella one finds that they provide us with a significant counterpart for James' principal heroine in the Cinderella figure. Many of the James' critics have noted that the Cinderella theme runs through his work. The Cinderella variant contains all the aspects of the rich-little-poor-girl story, the outcast child with burnt face who because of and through her sufferings seems to merit some kind of magical reward which will mean her transformation. Cinderalla, like the major Jamesian heroines, is essentially free to choose a course of action which will consolidate her integrity of person. Like Maggie
Verver James’ most fully worked out Cinderella prototype met the challenge of winning over her prince Amerigo. The point that is emphasized and concretized in this Cinderella variant is the domination of the inner world, of the female figure that is the Inwardness of the character which is known to be the prime feminine property. The feminine aspect in James is also attracted by the innocence of the Cinderella figure. Most of James’ heroines show innocence, a freshness and a child like imaginative freedom, which she never looses even in the attainment of maturity. The same feministic attire is worn by Catherine Sloper of Washington Square where the plain, dull, simple child with no outward talents, no worldly cleverness or glitter is victimized by all those around her: her father who recognizes her potential as a victim, her ruthless fiancé and even her aunt Penniman. Catherine, however, with her fund of acknowledged sensitivity- her liking for music in a land devoid of that particular sensibility, her thoughts of Morris Townsend and her esteem for a good conscience- is never touched by the magic wand. Her fairy godmother, Aunt Penniman, with her buckles, bugles and pins is totally ineffectual; and her prince charming dissolves in the sterility of the American manners. James thus presented a world dominated by masculine factuality when a poor girl wearing feminine attire becomes a fruit rotten before it is ripe. Here along with James’ feminine aspects, realism also peeps in
where the fairy tale world dies before the hard world of fact. An extension of James vision of feminine orientation with the shade of realism is presented in 'The Portrait of a Lady' where Isabel Archer is not produced as a pitiable character through out the story but a character that is not brought to its ultimate development. Isabel succumbs to the bounds of her portrait and returns to the ritual and form of marriage with Osmond. Here she suffers her fate when she says to Osmond:

"You've not only dried up my tears: you've dried up my soul.... I don't believe at all that it's an immortal principle. I believe it can perfectly be destroyed. That's what has happened to mine, which was a very good one to start with; and its you I have to thank for it. You are very bad."  

James made Isabel live in imagination and wake up in reality. Thus though James' orientation in this period may be feminine yet what he essentially justifies is the extra-personal definition of the self rather than the flexibility and openness of personals.

TECHNIQUE

Henry James is one of the major figures in American literary realism, he is significantly different from some of the other realists of
the time. Unlike William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, James did not focus on the plight of low-or middle class characters or try to deflate the romantic fancies. Instead he attempted a realistic portrait of his characters, conflicts and motivations. Leon Edel quotes that James-

"Believed that each human consciousness carries its own reality' and that this is what art captures and preserves.” 21

At the same time he strongly believed that-

“A novel it, is 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.” 22

In this treatment of subject matter, James felt that no aspect of life should be excluded. And thus developed the concept of realism in his fictions. Henry James wanted his fiction to be as stylistically perfect as Turgenev, as socially terse as Balzac and as humanely invested in the moral life as Eliot. But he was not concerned with all aspects of life. There is nothing of the ugly or the vulgar in James. He was not concerned with poverty or with the middle class who had to struggle for a living .Instead; he was interested in depicting a class of people
who could afford to devote themselves to the refinements, of life. James' realism, in the truest sense means, being faithful to his characters. In other words, the acts of the Jamesian character are always in understandable terms of that characters' true nature. In this context, James praises the factual solidity of Walter Scott's creations:

"Scott sets before us 'men and women' ......in their habits as they lived."\(^{23}\)

The phrase with mild variation keeps popping up on such occasions throughout James' writings to unveil reality. The most memorable statement of James' insistence' on realistic presentation appears in his important essay of 1884, "The Art of fiction":

"................. The air of reality seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel- the merit on which all its other merits..... Helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion on life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, forms the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist."\(^{24}\)
James there strongly believed that good fiction undertakes to prove nothing but facts—and by facts he means the realistic approach of expression.

Realism is of course never the same as reality and is itself no more and no less than an application in art of special conventions and tricks. And the felt presence of a watchful, self-indulgent, highly intelligent and highly involved narrator like James can be precisely one of these effective tricks. If he succeeded in getting the world into his fiction with a new thoroughness and a new personal rootedness, through the 1880s, it was partly by placing himself so interferingly yet so validating inside the fictional poem of representing that world.

Of all the techniques used by Henry James to affect the significant form in fiction, none has that kind of central importance which the celebrated 'Point of view technique' has. The point of view, for James, was an artistic and philosophical question. On technical side, it generally assumed the shape of a rambling departmental store which contained all manner of odds and ends. There was in short, no purity of form or even purpose. The modes of narration that is first person, omniscient author, disengaged narrator, confidant-recorder etc were often employed so that the structural outline of the story could be blurred. James once wrote:
"In every human imbroglio, be it of a comic nature, it is good to think of an observer standing aloof, critic, the idle commentator of it all, taking notes, we may say, in the interest of truth."  

This statement does not fully cover the shades and meanings of the point of view technique but this may serve as the first ray to start the technique. James while preceded toward his career was constantly in search of variations of the narrator technique where he could reflect the drama of life through a central or specific consciousness. This, in his view, ensured veracity of vision, structural unity and economy; It is actually a measure of James’ craftsmanship that is keeping the narrator tied down to the truths that fall within the line of his vision, he still manage to invest him with a wider ambience, unless, of course, he is treating him ironically. Technically speaking, ‘Point of view’ means simply the angle from which a tale is told or recorded. In other words, since no story gets told or written of its own, there must be some one to do the job with the maximum of intensity and truth and the minimum of intrusion. In the omniscient narrator’s method, the point of view is necessarily being voiced through a sympathetic character of the novel. Here the composition becomes secondary but the angle of vision becomes the primary thing. In this case the authors
point of view may be more comprehensive than, or even superior to, a particular characters' point of view but it cannot necessarily be reliable. James felt that the maximum effect of point of view could be achieved, if the events and characters were to be viewed consistently through a single or selected consciousness. What it sees is what we see; no more no less. It is the nearest approximation to reality and the closest way of apprehending it. There is a greater sense of human warmth, involvement and life-likeness, when a story attaches itself to a particular pair of eyes. Once a readers' consciousness is hooked on the consciousness of the governing character, he is, in a manner, committed to the latter's point of view.

In another James' fiction 'The American', it is the hero himself whose, consciousness is employed as a refracting medium. Christopher Newman's discovery of the self through a process of enchantment, betrayal and sacrifice is rendered almost wholly in terms of his agony and awareness. He is not telling his own story; his story is being told by James, but the reader moves away from his area of vision or consciousness. In other words, there is almost identification between the point of view of the main character and the author though the former does not serve as the dominating one. A few intimation in regard to Newman's American ness are admitted, but on the whole, the beauty of his moral energies and soulful exertions at once makes
him a vehicle of James’ view. James in ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ summarizes his own views and comments on Isabel Archer before he puts full wind into her sails’ to enable her to negotiate her stormy passage in life. These build up touches made Isabel’s consciousness a medium that was not fully engaged. The fiction presents a very interesting and comic discussion between Isabel Archer and her aunt Mrs. Touchett on the subject of ‘point of view’

“Now what’s your point of view” she asked of her aunt. “When you criticize everything here you should have a point of view. Yours doesn’t seem to be America— you thought everything there so disagreeable. When I criticize I have mine; it’s thoroughly American!”

“My dear young lady,” said Mrs. Touchett”, there are as many points of view in the world as there People of sense to make them. You may say that doesn’t make them very numerous! America? Never in the world; that’s shockingly narrow. My point of view, thank God, is personal!” 26

In this exchange, it is the heroine, Isabel, who is being shown as a stuck-up New Englander. This serves as a warning that though at a deeper level Isabel speaks for James but at the same time be a
compositional centre and hold the book till the end. Nearly the whole of her betrayed and ruined married life is seen by the reader as a theatre of images set up in her agonized consciousness. James’s words are an extension to this technique when he writes in the preface:

"Place the centre of the subject in the young woman’s own consciousness," I said to myself, "and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that – for the centre; put the heaviest weight into that scale, which will be largely the scale of her relation to herself......" 27

In ‘What Maisie Knew’ there is the most challenging use of the point of view technique of James, for here the novelist has to show the confused and wretched drama of gay adulteries. To keep the story pinned to that precarious centre meant a reduction of the complexities of the situation in such a manner so as to comprehend the story by a little girl and thus it was translated for her by the invisible author. To synchronize the awareness of Maisie with the mature reader was a great problem that James faced while bringing up this fiction. But this is what that made him different because the story of a little girl could be told from her own point of view but James here was not writing a
stream-of-consciousness novel but a fiction that was almost wholly dependent upon authorial analysis, reflection and comment despite the declared ideal of objectivity. In this context F.O. Matthiessen rightly puts in:

“There is a vast difference between James’ methods and that of the novels of ‘the stream of consciousness’... James’ novels are strictly novels of intelligence rather than of full consciousness.”  

Sallie Sears says the same thing in another way:

“In James, we do not have consciousness streaming but focused, attentive and concentrated.”

In ‘The Ambassadors’ the most remarkable aspect of the point of view technique of James is in the creation of Mrs. Newsome’s character. The reader never meets her in person, but she is as vividly realized for us as any other character in the book. Her presence is so engineered as to make her a fully involved and active figure in the drama. James was successful in bringing out this effect by keeping everything stationed in a single consciousness of Strether Lambert. In contrast to his technique in ‘The Wings of the Dove’ James has fined three centers of consciousness Kate Croy, Merton Densher and Milly Theale. Here he took the freedom to go behind and start as far back as possible before introducing us to the central figure. Thus Milly was
superficially absent from chapter one of the book and James intentionally structured it this way because he had to make things see as Kate Croy sees them; her world of love, thwarted by circumstances, is fully worked out according to Kate's view. To reach the central character 'Milly Theale' James made his readers pass through Kate's consciousness that served as one of the successive centers. In third and fourth chapter James made Densher's 'point of view' coincide with that of Kate's and through this associated consciousness of Kate and Densher James shifted to a single consciousness of Milly Theale in chapter 5 that is seen in its full play during this stage. The drama that was played behind her back now shifts to the theater of her mind. James' another fiction 'The Golden Bowl' is another fine dramatic novel of interlocking relationships, involving four characters in mutual, inter-selecting destinies, struggling to tease out the puzzle of marriage. Here James fixes two primary centres of consciousness-Amerigo and Maggie Verver- and the book is divided structurally in two paralleling halves. The issues framed in one's consciousness are tested in the other. In fact, the first half deals with Amerigo's view about Maggie, Adam Verver and Charlotte Stant and the other half deals with Maggie's view about the same persons, situations and entanglements.

Thus for James, his point of view technique was something more than simply a technique. It grows rich in pain and suffering; it
develops moral muscles in combat and conflict. These sorts of worship towards the technique made James exist.

To conclude with one can say that the fiction of Henry James were notable due to their almost unprecedented intensity of concentration on personal relations. As the main characters approach and negotiate major crises in these relations, the analysis of individual experiences reaches new heights of subtlety and the prose flourishes with fine imagery, resonant allusion and precisely chosen vocabulary. The reader is continually aware of the artistic care which has gone into the selection of scenes, for highlighting the choice of characters, the control of information to be released and retained and the pin-pointing of moments of entry, departure and re-entry for the perspective fictional consciousness. All these manipulations are very well done by James by his correct and proper usage of style and technique. It is just the same as a film-director makes correct usage of camera with techniques like cutting, zooming and planning to his visual world. James thus succeeded in presenting the modest patterns of life and society through his tactful use of style and techniques.
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