CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Henry James was not a born storyteller but also attained classical standing in criticism. He even figures academically as prescribed reading for students of English in various Universities, who opt for papers on literary Criticism. This acceptance of course doesn’t speak of his strength and limitation as a critic but this has surely developed genuine admirers of Henry James’ criticism. But there is again a divergence of opinion, even among critics, about the stature of Henry James as a critic. T.S Eliot considers Henry James

"emphatically not a successful literary critic. His criticism of books and writers is feeble....... Henry was not a literary critic."

Eliot also comments,

"he had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it."¹

On the other hand Percy Lubbock considers James as -

"the novelist who carried his research into the theory of the art further than any other—the only real scholar in the art."²

Though these two views seem to be quite different from each other but one thing most of the literary genius agrees is that Henry
James is brimful of ideas and critical concepts and has a well defined theory and a point of view which allow him to characterize sensitively.

He had a keen intelligence and great ambition and he made himself a great writer of fiction. The whole process took him many years to be so. His early stories and reviews reveal his indebtedness to the authors whose books he read and reviewed like Goethe, George Eliot, Balzac, George Sand and various others. James was indebted also to the novelists whom he came to know while living in Paris, that is, Flaubert, Daudet, Zola and Turgenev. It was, however, the example of Hawthorne that had convinced him that an American could be an artist. He owed much also to William Dean Howells, with whom he spent long hours discussing "The True Principles of Literary Art". Howells printed a number of James' early stories in the "Atlantic Monthly". James' early novels found readers both in book form and in the magazines. Americans did not like his obvious preference for England as a place where he lived and wrote for many years. James, who was by no means lacking in patriotic feeling, was disturbed when he discovered that he could not write his best fiction on American themes while living in America and thus he strongly felt that to write well and worthily of America one need to be a master elsewhere. The England that attracted him, however, was not the great industrial nation of the nineteenth century but the England of leisure-class men
and women, of country houses, of artists and writers; it was also the
England of English literature which had attracted Hawthorne before
him. James in his initial career felt that America was a cultural desert
but in his old age James was not sure that his decision to live in
Europe was a right one. Roman Garland in 1930 stated that James
said to him at his home in Rye in 1906 that:

"If I were to live my life over again, I would be an
American. I would steep myself in America; I would
know no other land. I would study its beautiful
side. The mixture of Europe and America which you
see in me has proved disastrous."

Thus James himself in later life felt that it was better that
American writer of fiction should remain in America. James' reputation
held up fairly well in the years immediately following his death in
1916. With the Anglo-American-French-Italian alliance at its peak,
James' presence as a friend of all four national cultures was still felt.
James the "character" was vividly remembered. Percy Lubbock's two-
volume selection of the letters concentrated for much of its bulk on the
period when James had ceased to publish novels. Even after 1916
James' personality was still a living force. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot
praised him in terms which went beyond respect for a distinguished
predecessor. Eliot pronounced James, the most intelligent man of his generation. He insisted that,

"Despite the successful realism of many of the characters, James' focus was not an character, plot or ideas, but the focus is a situation, a relation, an atmosphere, a formulation which may have discouraged attempts to classify James' subtlety and elusiveness, but which certainly drew attention to his originality." 4

Pound's remarks were more downright, conveying a clear sense of James' moral grip. James's cosmopolitanism left him flavorless and aloof from homely realities:

"From the external world of action he withdrew to the inner world of questioning and probing, yet even in his subtle psychological inquiries he remained shut up within his own skull-pan. His characters are only projections of his own brooding fancy, externalizations of hypothetical subtleties." 5

Thus freedom and difficulty: the thick and the clear: multitude and unity: anarchy and autocracy are the autonomies where James' imaginations are in perpetual motion. James had experience of many
cities, from many different points of view. But there were four around which his imagination primarily revolved: London, New York, Paris and Rome. There were others that were important to him and that he put to significant use: Florence and Venice, Boston and Washington. He did travel a great deal and live for significant periods in, for instance, Florence: and his mind and imagination constantly move between cities, as many of his novels do, as "The Bostonians" moves between Boston and New York, "The Tragic Muse" moves between Paris and London, "The Wings of the Dove" between London and Venice. Location and locomotion are not casual matters in James, but always conspire with the stories they help to ground and to drive forward.

James's writing draws on the complex traffic between two contradictory attitudes towards mobility and settlement. The idea of a perpetual displacement is at one fearful and highly desirable; it promises and menaces an endless freedom. The idea of a permanent settlement arouses a complementary ambivalence; the desire for finality is scarred by the anxiety that to attain it can only mean death. These restlessly conflicting feelings find a recurrent focus in the material structures to which his writing gives such close attention. James was to make famous the image of the house of fiction, and his own writing is ingeniously thick with images of houses, rooms, doors, windows and balconies. James' writing thrills with the very
provocation of doors and windows, and the struggle for power they necessitate. Near the climax of "The Turn of The Screw" the governess finds herself metonymising her fearful visions into the wonderful figure of the haunted pane. However thick or thin those dividing membranes, they offer such intriguing resistance that the imagination becomes more attached to them. Two alternating ways of imagining power pursue each other through the length of James' work: the idea of it as an inexhaustible source and the idea of it as a strictly limited structure. The two ideas are strictly incompatible but they coexist quite happily in James' earlier writing; later on their incompatibility becomes itself a source of debate. One might associate the idea of infinity with the role played by "romance" and "America" in James, and the idea of limitation with the role played by "realism" and "Europe". And one might see the strife between such romance and realism producing the dramatic conflicts between the dreams of an Isabel Archer or a Milly Theale and their predators. But James' writing also suggests that the mutual enmity of these visions derives from their need of each other. The dream of limitless American wealth produces the corresponding closed systems of Europe and vice-versa. The closed European structures of masters and slaves produce the corresponding dream of ideality. And the same formula holds true if one substitutes poverty for wealth. America's infinite vacancy produces
Europe's limited plenitude and vice versa. James' writing gives substance to all these ways of seeing and imagining. Few writers have such a highly developed sense of territory as James. He has the keenest of eyes for the ways in which mere space is divided up and blazoned. Any space for James represents a complex construction of irritations and opportunities. He delights in the desires and fears inspired by the prospect of passing from one dominion to another. Thus one of the great subject of his writing is the nature of the decisive frontiers that marks the difference between states of being and understanding, between being American and being English, being an alien and being an occupant, being innocent and knowing all. So the old distances between Europe and America were shrinking and the distinctions dissolving.

James has not only mastered Europeanized-American attitude but James also liked looking at the role, a woman, can play in giving a twist to the fiction. There are some interesting terms here for the ways in which James thinks of looking at women. On the one hand there are all the circumstances which shape the spectacle she makes, all the pressures towards a kind of conformity. She fills a position and she has entered a particularly luxurious form of matrimony. There is the costume; there are the exits at least partly in the mind of the observer: a mind already well-stocked with images from Shakespeare.
James gives many forms to his female characters like beauty, girl, child, creature, woman, matron; lady as if she were an empty vessel or blank sheet on which words could be simply off loaded. But the mystery is the product of the male gaze. The gaze seeks to fix some irreducible essence of "the girlish" that persists through time. But the gaze is also puzzled, at once rebuffed and intrigued by the hidden history of this girlishness, its secret vicissitudes. There is then, a crucial division in the quality of the gaze, and the gaze is further divided by its double direction, not only towards the girl-woman but towards the other figure in the verbal frame: the husband. All his stories look as though it is one of dominance and submission. The relations between the man and the woman look suspiciously like those of master and slave - the most willing and obliging and happy of slaves. There are indeed elements of mastery and submission in all his most important relations, but they are subtly, bewilderingly mixed up. Most significant Jamesian characters are radically divided, at odds with themselves and their powers. If the general and typical position of women is "weak" they discover all sorts of compensatory strengths, and if the typical position of men is "strong" they turn but to be curiously weak and incomplete.

Not only the peeping difference of sex teem in James' novels but also his disapproval for art for arts sake is quite evident, but James
cannot be simply described as a moralist or realist. Certainly there are many passages in James' writings which, in general, indicate approval of realism and for Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant, Baudet, George Eliot and Turgenev. Over and over James repeats that the only reason for the existence of a novel is that, it does attempt to represent life, that it has the large free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life. According to James art plucks its materials in the garden of life, the material if elsewhere grown becomes stale and uneatable. But this insistence upon the reference of art to reality does not, in James, mean the difference between life and art; art is not a mirror, art cannot be an amorphous slice of life nor can real people be transformed into a novel. The original gives hints but the writer does what he likes with them. The art of the novel is not copying, not imitation but a selection from life, a transformation, a creation, that is, life being all inclusion and confusion and art being all discrimination and selection. Art is a chemical process from which things emerge with a new function. Art actually can only achieve the illusion of life and can achieve it only by the authority of the writer, inducing conviction, belief, and acceptance in the reader. James accepted art in the way it is mentioned above but at the same time always gave importance to the strong internal evidence of truthfulness.
James strictly also believed that vision and opportunity reside in a personal sense and a personal history and no shortcut of them could bring out a good fiction. James means by "personal" something individualistic which may be hidden, concealed and implied and he actually disapproved it from biography. This personal touch should come both in theory and in a writer's novelistic practice. James emphasized more and more on a single focus of view in James is not, however, just a technical device serving the economy of treatment or permitting record consistency. It serves to heighten the consciousness of the character and hence to increase the reader's identification with him. Ultimately it is another device to achieve the general effect of illusion.

The harmony of form and substance in a fiction is James' constant requirement, as from alone takes and holds and preserves substance and he believed that any claimed independence of form, is the greatest object for fallacies. This is why James considered translating impossible and disliked being translated. He wrote to a prospective translator most discouragingly that he feeds that in a literary work of the least complexity, the very form and texture are the substance itself and that the flesh is indetachable from the bones. Translation for James is thus an effort, exactly speaking, and a most flattering effort to tear the hopeless flesh. Form in James means most
often composition, architecture, that is, the right distribution of conversation, narration and pictorial matter. In a way it is the unity of perspective and tone. James feels that a break of tone is an unpardonable sin for the novelist. Apart from all these things, one remarkable thing that has emerged from the study is that James, inspite of his awareness of evil, preserved an ideal of optimism, of serenity, of trust in nature and human nature that made him a great writer. But this is also very true that James was not concerned with all aspects of life. There is nothing of the ugly, the vulgar, the common or the pornographic 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 things which, sooner or later, in one way or another, everyone will encounter. Placing consciousness as the center of both life and art makes an almost revolutionary break from the conventional realism of his contemporaries and connects James with modernist and phenomenological modes of thought. Internalizing reality, bringing it into the experiencing acts of an individual's consciousness is a radical move that requires a total readjustment of fictional characters and James is always fully aware of this. For James, then, the novel need not be limited to the existing conventions of representation but can discover fresh means to deal with the
immense sensibility of experience. This kind of openness to the novel's formal potentialities for representing the full range of experience, including inner experience, is emphasized in almost all of James' fiction. Perhaps even more original is James' insistence on the relationship between fictional form and morality. James' morality in the novel stems not from consciously implanted ideas but from the whole cast of the artist's informing consciousness. The overall temper of the author's mind, the fineness and openness of his or her perceptions, determines the web of relationships in the text that come to be perceived by the reader as its moral dimension. It is almost, if James sees the moral sense as a kind of unconscious pressure that underlies conscious formal decisions. There is one part at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together, that is, in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer, and so is James'.

James could never understand those who took sides in the debate regarding the supremacy of plot or character in a novel. He argues that the distinction is stupid because character in any sense in which we can get at it, is action and action is plot. Any plot which changes together, even if it pretend to interest us, plays upon. We care what happens to people only in proportion, as we know what
people are. Since it is James who turned the novel inward in terms of his ability to dramatize consciousness, modern fiction owes him a great debt in that regard. James argued that the artist creates a character as a result of inspiration. Character creation for James is thus quite complex. Jamesian characters are subjects of fate, the figure round whom a situation closes. When the readers share their experiences he feels that where fate comes in and just how it gets at them. James argues that a novel always undergoes transmutation in the writer's consciousness under the presence of imagination. James thinks that a character in a novel should not be contrasted with an incident or situation. For James, fiction is less like a dance; more complicated the steps are livelier the dance is similarly more complicated the story of a fiction is, more interesting it becomes. James' major contribution to the modern novel deals with point of view on the relationship of the narrator to the material he writes. He believes that characters are interesting only in terms of their ability to feel their respective situations.

Henry James employs the term "refinement" with an artistic insistence that invites its application as a controlling metaphor for his whole emergent vision of life. Although the idea of refinement is never given an explicit definition in the novels, James continuously places before the reader situations, actions and characters in the texture of
whose felt life refinement runs like embroidery. In the Jamesian universe the notion of refinement reveals itself mainly as that element in human nature and in the structure of society which implicates the individual self in the possibility and fact of human change, growth and transmission.

The entire fictional work of James can be viewed in the major themes of James' novel and major phases of his artistic development, seem to organize themselves meaningfully into a unified field of vision from the perspective provided by the idea of refinement. The international theme, dramatizing the collision of two cultures, and the confrontation of American innocence with European experience, emerges as a parable of human refinement, in which the human personality is liberated into wider freedom of a universal life. The theme of pilgrim in search of society, as well as that of the artist in search of truth may be similarly elaborated as exploration of a human refinement achieved by the individual's transcendence of limited consciousness and his access to a higher awareness. In his first artistic phase, Henry James explores refinement as the process of achieving the truth of selfhood. In the middle period, he presents it in its vulnerable, corruptive and critical aspects. In the major novels he dramatizes it not merely as a process of self-assertive virtue, but also
as a mode of self-transcendence which has destroyed the barriers between the self and the world outside.

Along with refinement, themes, consciousness he gave emphasis to the heroines of his novels, the image of Minny Temple. Henry James' Albany cousin, with whom he renewed his relationship in about her seventeenth year and continued it on an intense emotional plane till she died at the age of twenty-four, is richly and deeply embedded in his memory and consciousness as a man and a creative artist. The image provides the primal clue to the understanding of his American heroines; in its growth it mirrors the evolution of the mind and aesthetic philosophy of Henry James. It is firmly rooted and carries within its orbit the force and sanction of an intensely felt experience, which fertilized in the soil of the artist's prime sensibility, grows into a vision of life. The study of this growth unfolds the process of transmutation of his art. The image thus emanating directly from life is represented as growing into an acquisition enshrined in the imagination, and yet inexorably in progress with increasing volition and vitality of its own, till it claims immortality through the American heroines of "The Portrait of a Lady" and "The Wings of The Dove". Taking all these aspects of his life together in his literary career, he became a person well braced with romantic, realistic and moral
outlook. With a wide range of fiction, short stories, essays and literary criticism in his bag.

James' reputation held up fairly well in the years immediately following his death in 1916 with the Anglo-American-French-Italian alliance at its peak. James' presence as a friend of all four national cultures was still felt. James the character was vividly remembered; anecdotes, tributes and biographical sketches predominated over critical assessments at this stage. James' personality was still a living force evidently.

James was also surrounded by various negative criticisms. James, for Parrington, is a self-deceived romantic and a fore-runner of expressionism. When James is regarded as a total subjectivist, criticism itself seems to have lost touch with objective reality. Perhaps the popularity of work like "The Turn of the Screw" was turning to James' disadvantage. In connection with works replete with irony, like "Daisy Miller" or "Washington Square", where the author's stance is heard to discover, Parrington's accusation is impossible to sustain. It was, in fact, with a revival of interest in such early works that the rehabilitation of James' writings began. American academic interest naturally centered in his native origins and affinities with other nineteenth century writers. The seriousness over James come later in 1930s when people realized the value placed on his treatment of evil.
At this point James' status rose steadily. James' presentation of evil, whether in the form of sexual corruption of manipulation of the weak by the strong or of smug, materialistic unscrupulousness, was now felt as the iron hand in the velvet glove. Hugh Walpole asserted in 1932 that by intellect and temperament James was an explorer, ceaselessly inquisitive, aware of all the darkest and most morbid corners of the human heart. During the second world was, William Troy explained the fact of James; current appeal by the depth of the metaphysical panic and moral despair through which James had passed in order to assert a humanist sense of continuity with the dead:

"At a moment when loss of continuity is our gravest threat, when personality is everywhere at a discount, when all consequent values dissolve in the general terror, it is probably no great wonder that more and more people are turning to Henry James."

James in his shy, circumlocutory way, was genuinely democratic, preserving in his characters all that was human, magnanimous, reviving in the new American spirit. James affected his contact with life, not at close quarter, but through long, infinitely sensitive antennae. James' narrative technique was a form of deep irony. James' moral sense is both vital and satiric; he has a full command of villainy, egoism, brutality and self-righteousness, even
though his observer characters are. Implication is always hopeful and valid, not debilitating and disabled ...... for F. R. Leaves James' registration of sophisticated human consciousness is one of the classical creative achievements producing an ideal civilized sensibility. James' position at the parting of two centuries and the confluence of two literatures, English and American, no doubt ensures his attractiveness. His own critical awareness and contribution to fiction theory also guarantee his prominence.

James' greatness looms larger with distance and time. The density and precision of his prose, the duration of his career and volume of his productions, the clarity of his characters, the mixture of tragic and comic intuitions in his plots, the humanity, wit and independence of his attitudes, together all these features lift him above even his most distinguished contemporaries and compatriots. He sets standards in irony, judgment, restraint and subtlety, especially in the denotation of people's thoughts.

In English literature he is not as well known as the great names like Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Dickens or D.H. Lawrence but he surely stands equal or quite often above them for his varied themes, sharpness of thoughts, a perfect balance between reality and morality and the truthfulness of the story depicted. The writer of twenty fiction, 112 short stories, large number of literary criticisms, letters etc. speak
a lot about his contribution to English Literature. Among the American authors, he stands out as a dominating figure simply for the quantity of excellent work which is a difficult task to achieve in itself. It requires immense hard work, imaginative quality, sense of observation, dedication and a sensitive soul which gleams through his writings.
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