CHAPTER 1
HENRY JAMES: LIFE AND TIMES

Henry James was the largest literary figure of America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His largeness stemmed from the literary territories he annexed and the career he shaped in two hemispheres of Europe and America. Henry James was placed beside George Eliot and Turgenev when the budding talents of American literature were still young.

Henry James was born in New York in 1843 as an American citizen and died in London in 1916 as a European citizen. His career largely speaks about this fact. One can say that James’ mind was nourished on the antitheses of past and present, power and innocence, experience and vision, freedom and responsibility, Europe and America. He lived long, wrote much, traveled extensively, enjoyed as large an acquaintance as any writer of his time and responded to the literary currents of two nations. Henry James wrote for fifty years with a literary career of 20 novels, 112 stories, 12 plays and a number of literary criticisms. He was a prolific writer and several times flooded his own market. He was never known as a ‘best seller’ as in the modern sense of the best sellers but still he earned an honorable living by his pen.
He was born in an affluent family; but from his early twenties he started earning on his own writings. He was devoted to his art and may be this is the reason why he never tried to seek any other employment. Literature for him was the great store house of life and he believed that if the novels are mirror of society, it reflects not only the landscape of existence but also the efficiency of the artist in the act of experiencing the world around him. James’ reputation in terms of his style, themes, techniques, innovations and the rate by which he wrote has placed him to his proper place among the world’s largest literary figures and established him among the greatest novelists.

In James’ fiction Americans are often treated as innocent creatures. In their unawareness of evil they are shown as highly at risk, as they step outside their American paradise. To make his reader aware of this fact he made a perfect blend of characters and technique to introduce them. A series of experimentation in his novels were done in order to reflect this fact in words. To carve the complete process he did the psychological analysis of the characters, quite often in his novels. It is evident that the twenty-first century writers like Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson derived this technique from Henry James. Even during his life time some of his fellow novelists addressed him in their midst as "Master" only because of his artistic use of the techniques.
The literary career of Henry James extended from the last days of the American civil war to the middle of the First World War. He was born amidst America’s literary environment with two other writers of Manhattan; Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. James generally wrote about the double landscapes of Europe and America. He was able to do so because—

“He opened his eyes of childhood upon European lawns and gardens...He returned back to Manhattan when he was just learning to walk.”

James was taken abroad when he was less than six months old and he returned to Manhattan when he was just learning to walk. If his eyes had first observed Europe, his feet planted themselves firmly upon American soil. He spent a boyhood in the streets of America with trips to Hudson and the muddy streets of New York. He was thus exposed to both the European and American culture since his childhood.

James’ grandfather was an Irish immigrant and owned a large fortune in Albany. His father, Henry James Senior, was a religious visionary with a friend circle of literary background including Hawthorne and Thoreau. His elder brother, William James who found the first psychological laboratory at Harvard in America, became America’s philosopher after writing a book on ‘Principles of
Psychology’. The senior Henry James had a comfortable income and was a restless wanderer. Twice during his adolescence Henry was taken to Europe, from twelve until sixteen, and again during his seventeenth year. Thus Henry James was quite often exposed to the European culture. The father gave his son tutors and governesses and Henry attended the schools with an erratic education at Europe and America that was carried on in museums, galleries, and parks. From the very beginning of his life Henry James witnessed the two worlds, the early forming America with all of its native rawness and European borrowings and at the same time the European scene in the cities of Geneva, Paris and London.

The young Henry was a sensitive and shy boy and played the role of a quiet observer. He learned French in his childhood and read almost complete European, American and French fictions. His father spoke of him as a "devourer of libraries". He was later sent to the schools of engineering and law but he resisted all these experiences and simply wanted to be "literary".

The life of Henry James can be broadly divided into eight stages that are 'The Untried Years', 'The Years of Saturation', 'The Conquest of London', 'The Middle Years', 'The Dramatic Years', 'The Treacherous Years', 'The Illusion of Freedom' and 'The Master'. These stages are very well demarcated right from his birth till the last day of his life.
including most of the important details that directly or indirectly affected his life and career.

'The Untried Years'

The first stage in the life of Henry James that is ‘The Untried Years’ lasted from 1843 to 1870. It started from his birth on April 15, 1843 at Washington square in Manhattan as the second son of Henry and Mary James and in the same year James family shifted to Europe, living there for some time James returned back to America in Albany, New York. This year marked the beginning of a 10 years stay in America that was Henry’s longest stay in his native land. During this time Henry’s brothers ‘Garth Wilkinson’ nick named Bob was born. In the year 1848 Henry Junior’s sister, Alice James was born. During the family’s 10 years stay in America, William and Henry were enrolled in various schools and Henry James’ 40 yrs old aunt Kate, who lived with them got married and in the same year of her marriage the couple got separated and aunt kate was back in the Jamesian family. In the year 1855 James’ family moved back to Europe, this time living in Geneva, Paris and finally settling in Newport. Here James befriends "Minny Temple" and he comments about her -

“In a world in which women were predictably conditioned into narrow roles, Minny had managed by sheer force of personality to be the exceptional.” \(^2\)
There after in 1861, at the outbreak of the civil war Bob and Wilky decided to enlist in the union army of the civil war and during this time a severe back injury resisted Henry to join the same. In 1862 James was enrolled in a law school but law did not grip him and he decided to become a full time writer. This was the time when Nathaniel Hawthorne died and Hawthorne’s writings at this time influenced Henry very much and he felt that an American could be an artist, one of the finest, without going outside it. On his twenty-second birthday that is on fifteenth April 1865; James decided to move to Cambridge where he happened to meet William Dean Howells, the assistant editor for ‘The Atlantic Monthly’; and an accomplished prose writer. They developed a lifelong personal and professional bond. James then moved to Europe and there he met George Eliot who was Minny Temple’s favorite writer. By the end of the first phase of his life, Minny Temple died and served as the model for many of Henry’s fictional heroines, most notably Isabel Archer in ‘The Portrait of Lady’ and Milly Theale in ‘The Wings of the Dove’.

‘The Years of Saturation’

This phase ‘The Years of Saturation’ extended from the year 1870 to 1875, when Hawthorne was six years dead and during this time James did a vigorous study of Hawthorne’s writings. This was the
time when his sister Alice, came up as a young charming girl whose character James reflected in his novel ‘Watch and Ward’. During this period Henry also enjoyed his stay at Rome and his social circle there expanded. Henry began to socialize with other American expatriates, including Lizzie Boott, Sarah Butter Wister and actress Fenny Kemble and all these people influenced Henry’s fictional characters. After spending a disappointing summer in Rome, Henry sailed for America in September 1874 and after a short stay in Cambridge, he chose to move to New York, where he can be away from his family and support himself by writing. In New York Henry met Russian expatriate Ivan Turgenev, whom he considered the greatest living novelist of the time. Shortly after this meeting with Turgenev, he met French novelist Gustave Flaubert, whose work influenced James’ writings.

‘The Conquest of London’

The years from 1875 to 1881 marked the third stage of his life ‘The Conquest of London’. Till this time William James, the elder brother of Henry, was married and the prevailing circumstances led Henry to think more on female sensibilities. He started writing about heroines in his novels rather than heroes. ‘Washington Square’, ‘The Ambassadors’ are such novels that expresses James’ sympathy with the female character and he started believing that English American
subjects will be more fruitful for fiction than French American. Thus he was back to London. Henry here had no shortage of social invitations. He also met here writers like Robert Browning and Anthony Trollope. His friendship with John Symonds is also evident who was openly homosexual and he served as the model for characters in two of Henry’s most homoerotic stories, ‘The Author of Bellraffio’ and ‘The Pupil’. In 1887 James returned back to America when ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ was just published.

‘The Middle Years’

Then began ‘The Middle Years’, the fourth stage of his life, that extended from 1881 to 1889. This was not at all a peaceful stage for him because within these years he lost his father as well as mother. Henry became the sole executor of his father’s will and now as Henry was forty he increasingly confronted the discussions related to his bachelorhood and advice on how to end it. But Henry writes,

"I shall never marry; I regard that now as an established fact .......”

Henry further witnessed disappointment in this period when his brother Wilky died of Brights disease and his sister Alice suffered numerous breakdowns. To add to this bereavement Henry’s mentor, Ivan Turgenev also died in 1883. During the years of melancholy
Henry received the news of Lizzie Boott’s death whom Henry had known for twenty four years, since his days in Newport.

He also got the news of the death of his friend, Robert Browning and his beloved aunt, Catherine Walsh. Thus this period was a period of fatigue and depression for him which resulted to end up with his most loosely written novel ‘The Princess Cassamassima’.

'The Dramatic Years'

Then came ‘The Dramatic Years’, the fifth stage of Henry’s life that extended from 1890 to 1895. During this time William James completed ‘The Principles of Psychology’ in which he described ‘The Stream of consciousness Technique’ that was used by him in his later novels. At the same time Alice dies after a year long struggle with breast cancer. During these years, he tried his luck in theatre, and was greatly influenced by Henrik Ibsen and also came up with a vast collection of short stories.

'The Treacherous Years'

The years from 1895 to 1900 is described as the sixth stage in the life of the great Henry James and was named as ‘The Treacherous Years’. He returned back to the Lamb House in Rye, England and here Henry greatly appreciated the literary community that he found. It
consisted of members like H.G.Wells, Stephen Crane and Joseph Conrad. This was the time when he faced the failure of ‘Guy Domville’ and at the same time learnt the play-writing techniques. Early in 1896 he started facing various health problems and was forced to hire a typist who worked for him regularly. Henry James, despite his ill health presented remarkable sequence of his writings dealing with female, children, juvenile and adolescents. William James during his visit to James’ place, found no change in Henry’s inner world; what had changed was his adult power of fantasy. He found Jamesian tales now more jewel-encrusted.

‘The Illusion of Freedom’

Leon Edel describes that along with so many health problems, Henry James entered the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and thus this new century marked the seventh stage of his life that extended from 1900-1905 and was named as ‘The Illusion of Freedom’. He met H.G.Wells and Stephen Crane and became good friends. James’ image during this time was that of a man who was eccentric and uncompromising, a formed figure shaped by two continents and many journeys all over the world, a tireless observer with ability behind the frail and a man doubting the conflicted and ambiguous front of humanity.
‘The Master’

‘The Master’ was the eighth and the final stage of his life that extended from 1905 to 1916. By this time though he got European citizenship yet he realized that even when America laughed at him; it loved him. During this time Henry was busy with ‘New York Edition’ and amidst this, he encountered the tragedy of Williams’ death in 1910, after which he took the responsibilities of Mrs. William and William’s daughter Peggy. James continued with his writings but his age did not permit the same for long and he died on February twenty eight 1916. Mrs. William James stated,

“He was gone, not a shadow on his face, nor the contraction of a muscle.”

Thus the life of the master ended. The obituaries in newspapers were of great length and filled pages. He had great ambitions; he had sought power in craft of writing and had found it, he had shown how artists take the chaos of life and shapes it into forms that endure.

He thus created a world full of works of art and learning and intelligence, a world infinitely refined and perfectly civilized. He left people accepting the truth that everything in life fades away; it is only the simpler manners of men which live forever and so is Henry James
living with us forever. And it is these simpler manners and highly meaningful thoughts that lead us to explore the rich literary world that he left behind him. If one can go through the literary career of Henry James, one can find that not only his life but his career is also so vast that it could be divided into various stages. This division was correctly done by Leon Edel that is discussed below in detail.

‘Career of Henry James’

Henry James’ literary career extended from 1865 to 1914. During these years he wrote a varied range of literature that includes novels, short stories, novellas, number of criticisms and a wide range of letters. The career of Henry James has been divided and named like a dynastic arrangement as James I, James II and the Old Pretender. A proper focus of all the three stages separately presents a lot of facts and figures in front of us that are related to his literary career.

‘James I’

The first period of Henry James’ career i.e. ‘James I’ extended from 1865 to 1882 and it is initiated by the tale of ‘Daisy Miller’. In his later years, he called this fiction -

"Ultimately the most prosperous child of my invention"
In this phase James restricted his studies to the young American girls encountering unsuitable European conditions. 'Daisy' became the prototype of this type of encounter. This phase was also marked by the novels like 'Roderick Hudson' and 'The American'. He wrote vigorously on Americano-European theme. He published two more novels in the later part of this phase and they are 'The Portrait of a Lady' and 'The Washington Square' in 1880, along with 'The Europeans' in 1878. James had succeeded in selling 'The Portrait of a Lady' to Macmillan's magazine in London as well as to the Atlantic and this brought him a substantial income during this period. When the novel was nearing its end in the magazines, Henry returned back to America where he was received as a successful but a criticized author who had made a reputation for himself in abroad. His mother died during his stay in America, and he had barely returned England when he was called to attend his father who was in the deathbed. After the death of his parents, he inherited a modest amount of money but he was making his way so successfully that he turned this over to his sister. He then moved back to England, this time for twenty years and continued to live by his writings. This period in his career was a period of his apprenticeship, success and discovery of great cosmopolitan subjects.
‘James II’

The second phase of his career that is James II was marked by his decision to attempt new subjects as he was tired of the ‘international’ theme. With extra-ordinary energy he wrote two long novels during the next three years—‘The Bostonians’ and ‘The Princess Casamassima’. These novels were in a sense, tales of two cities—Boston and London. These novels came out in a natural flow by James’ pen in painting the social urban scenes of these cities. This time James failed to impress his readers as they were expecting more tales from him about helpless Americans in Europe and wandering foreigners in America. Instead James offered his readers a realistic and minutely painted picture of Boston and London urban life. James thus alienated his appreciative readers. These novels were flat failures.

He then made another endeavor with his next novel ‘The Tragic Muse’. While the writing of this novel was going on, he wrote remarkable series of tales, some of them were of the short novel length. ‘Aspern Papers’ was one of them.

In 1889 Henry James realized the fact that a decade earlier he was a well known man but now he was a distinguished man with several failures in his hands. Thus as a result of series of
experimentation, he shifted to theatre for the next five years that is from 1890-1895 where he dramatized 'The American' and 'Guy Domville', a carefully written costume play. This was again rejected by the James’ appreciators and this time in an open and violent fashion which made James turn his back to the theatre and return back to fiction writing. Many years later Bernard Shaw concluded that James had failed as a playwright because his language however distinguished, was too literary for the stage.

Between the failure of his play and the writing of the later novels, there was an important transition period during which James wrote a series of short works using techniques derived from his play writing. The works in the period of transition were 'The Spoils of Poynton', 'The Other House', 'What Maisie Knew', 'The Turn of the Screw', 'In the Cage', and 'The Awkward Age', a novel written wholly in dialogue. These works were published from 1895 to 1900. In his next group of tales came 'The Figure in the Carpet' and 'The Next Time’. These tales were self-consolatory to James; they helped soften the injury of his public failure.

'The Old Pretender'

From 1900 to the First World War extended the final period of his career that is the Old Pretender. The three large novels which
Henry James wrote between 1900-1904, made him return back to his international subjects added with James' maturity in terms of his usage of techniques. 'The Ambassadors' published in 1903 exemplified both James' use of 'point of view' that is telling a story through various angles of vision and his method of 'alternation of scene.' The Wings of the Dove' is another such mature novel of James with tremendous use of various techniques.

These two novels of his final phase of writing had some or the other similarity with his earlier novels. But James' new novel 'The Golden Bowl' landed him up in a new platform of thoughts. In this novel he chooses a triangle of husband, wife and mistress, but the twist in this novel is that he marries off the mistress to the father of his wife and makes her the step mother of the betrayed heroine. He sends the father with his young wife to America and let the heroine with her husband stay in Europe to fetch their fortune. As compared to his early novels, this time in James, the marriages are not failures. The alliances between Europeans and Americans are made strong and durable with these later novels. James believed 'The Ambassadors' to be his most perfect novel and it truly has the most perfect plot and gathers up into a powerful design of all his major themes. It seems to have been in the years following 'The Golden Bowl' that his prestige as
a public figure increased so immensely that some of his deepest friendships with Hugh Walpole and Edith Wharton came into being.

James had been away from America during all his middle years from his fortieth to his sixtieth year. Now he wishes to go back to his people. America now received him with enthusiasm. After a complete strenuous year of stay in America he returned to Europe with a sigh of relief that he had captured the faith of Americans on his writings again. Although he wrote no more novels, James’ productivity during his final years was remarkable. He revised his travel writings and consolidated all his works that was finally published as ‘The New York Edition’. The making of this edition was an act of self-criticism for him and “to criticize”, he said,

“is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticized thing and make it one’s own.”

During this time James was awarded the official awards. Harvard awarded him a degree in 1911, Oxford one in 1912 and in 1916, shortly before his death, the British government conferred on him the order of ‘Merit’. While his efforts to obtain the Nobel Prize failed, the English speaking world honored him the greatest gift when 270 of his friends raised a fund among themselves and presented him a golden bowl and commissioning sergeant to do his portrait, on his seventieth
birthday in the year 1913. This occasion was a tribute to him in his dual capacity as a writer and a social figure.

"I was drawn to London long years ago as by the sense, felt from still earlier, of all the interest and association I should find here,"

he said in a letter of thanks to the subscribers.

"and I now see how my faith was to sink deeper foundations than could presume ever to measure how my justification was both stoutly to grow and wisely to wait. It is so wonderful indeed to me as I count up your numerous names representing that I permit myself to feel at once highly successful and extremely proud."

Finally the portrait was duly painted and publicly hung in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

In 1914, with the out break of the First World War James threw himself into various activities: he visited hospitals and aided refugees. In 1915 he decided to yield European citizenship that he had retained during his forty years' residence in Europe. In this context he feels that the odd thing is that nothing seems to have happened and he don't feel a bit different. He had not much time left to ponder his new status. He suffered now from a bad heart -made worse, perhaps, by
his wartime exertions. A.C. Benson, who lunched with him in the spring of 1925, noted that,

"he looks ill, he changes colour, he is dark under the eyes—but he was in a cheerful and pontifical mood. He ate a plentiful meal of veal and pudding but spoke to me very gravely of his physical condition and his chronic angina—-

On December 2nd he had another stroke followed by a slow sinking. Gradually he wasted away with little pain throughout and finally on February 28, 1916, he died.

Two memorial services were held in London. But he had asked that his ashes— for the body was cremated— should be returned to the family burial place in his native country. And so they were brought at last to the Cambridge cemetery, where it was buried and James’ life became an everlasting and refreshing history.

The only posthumous works published were the two unfinished novels, ‘The Sense of the Past’, ‘The Ivory Tower’ and the fragment of autobiography, ‘The Middle Years’. James’ other papers were allowed to remain in the trunk in which they had been packed and sent back to America that ultimately passed into the possession of Harvard University. He touched his age largely during his half century in the creative world. He tends increasingly to dominate the literature of
America because the ramifications of his career are considerable and complex beside the simpler lives and simpler works of other American novelists. If there is any 'social message' in his work, it might be that he would have the -

"human animal, less animal and more human." *

He would teach men and women to open themselves to experiences and endow them with greater awareness of the world's beauty and of potential of their imagination.

As far as his fictions are concerned, it is that of the human nerves and the mind; his concern is with intellectual and emotional relations rather than with physical being. His own life compared with that of other American artists, was one of great depth and richness; he drew upon his inner resources to create a work exquisite in feeling, humor and irony. Of his own craft- the craft of fiction- he was a master.

In this chapter covering the life of Henry James from his birth until the threshold of his greatest work, one can say that James was figure of the repressed artist who observed life rather than living it. The major awards that were conferred on him were after the peak of his career. He received an honorary degree from Harvard in 1911 and one from Oxford in 1912. He felt most honored when in his 70th birthday he received a large picture of his and a golden bowl, from his
great number of readers throughout the country. Such was the love and affection he received from his readers and it is rightly put in that -

"James in his novels have applied everything—wit, poignancies, portraiture, landscape, drama and emotions which makes him the great master of fiction." 10
WORKS CITED


6 Henry James, *Notes and Reviews* (Cambridge, Mass: Dunster House, 1921) 12

