THEMES: TREATMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Henry James, primarily known as a major writer of fiction was somewhat an eager student of social and religious thought. He devoted himself to creative writing and produced literary essays, reviews as well as criticism of art and theater. James spent a great deal of his mature life in England and America and his writings reflect his cosmopolitanism. James was an expert on English and European fiction. English editors called him for his expatriate American perspective. All James’ writings evolved as his dignified search for ‘truth’ and ‘life’. Life is ‘all inclusion and confusion’ for Henry James and for him art is ‘all discrimination and selection’. James believed that a novel has merits if -

"-----its foremost claim is its truth....... human life is interesting because we are in it and of it ...... all sorts of curious things are taking place... the real is the most satisfactory thing in the world.”¹

One can say that in order to present naked truths of life Henry James included various themes to keep his readers feel and analyze the existing situation in the novel. This is the art by which James’ novels were discriminated from the writings of the existing authors of
his time. James argues that what a writer produces is contingent on his culture and he writes,

"Art blooms only where the soil is deep. The future of fiction is ultimately bound up with the future of the society that produces it." ²

Few writers have such a highly developed sense of territory as James. Any space, for James, represents a complex construction of invitations and opportunities. One of the great subjects of his writing is the nature of the decisive frontiers that mark the difference between states of being and understanding, between being American and being innocent and being knowledgeable. Same is with America and Europe. The old distances between Europe and America were shrinking and the distinctions dissolving. A new America was emerging over the old one by money, manners and ideas that Europe possesses.

The effect of society in Jamesian novels could be actually felt while analyzing one of his major theme which can be called as Americano European impact or the 'International Theme'. Henry James published a number of fictions that develop the international theme in interesting ways with a refined and sharp focus of ideas. One of James’ most enduring novels of Americano-European culture 'The Portrait of a Lady' depicts another way of serving the 'International Theme'. Henry James has truly outdone with this novel by giving us a clear picture of
how his 'central character' i.e. Isabel Archer is influenced by the freedom and sophistication of European culture and in order to find a suitable place there faces a crushingly exploited life. 'The Portrait of a Lady' is the story of a typical young American girl, Isabel Archer full of enthusiasm and great desire for life, she was left parentless and penniless, being discovered by her aunt, Mrs. Touchett, who resided in Europe. As it was Isabel’s wish to visit Europe once, she eagerly agrees to Mrs. Touchett’s invitation to accompany her to Europe and meet her son Ralph Touchett. There she enjoyed Ralph’s company but at the same time, a handsome English nobleman, Lord Warburton, fell in love with innocent Isabel and proposed to marry her. Despite aunts urge, she rejects his proposal in desire to wait for something better, and enjoy her life, her individuality. Meanwhile her uncle Mr. Touchett died and left huge sum of money for her and this was the time when she was financially stable and started exploring European culture and came in close contact with the European freedom and sophistication. The American girl used the European freedom and decided to marry Gilbert Osmond, inspite of Ralph’s warnings. Thus she fell a prey to the seductive manipulation of sleazy and impoverished Osmond and his mistress Madam Merle. Then, she was made to accept, by the novelist about the illegitimate child of Osmond and Merle; Pansy, whom she found innocent and a victim in the hands of Osmond. Henry James
used this situation to bring forth the ‘International Theme’ when Isabel’s American innocence and good heartedness blooms and like a die-hard American, Isabel stands up to face life as it came to her, for she thought that Pansy needs her and that she cannot forsake the sacred bonds of marriage. In this fiction Henry James brought the ‘International Theme’ by presenting cunning people in the sophisticated European culture being overpowered by American ethics and moral spontaneity.

Through this ‘International Theme’ James wanted to clarify the terms of polarity he had set up for Europe and America. For this purpose he introduced the characters in his fiction is such a way that the readers may understand this clarification and at the same time evaluate it. In both the above mentioned fiction of James, one finds that he considered the innocence of his American hero or heroine, a state created by the youth of the country as it is lack of tradition and a rich culture in America’s religious and moral tone. In a way by the use of this theme James questioned the sufficiency for effective civilized life of a good hearted and innocent American. At the same time he weighed the merits and weaknesses of representatives of European tradition, strictly mannered society into the midst of which the inexperienced hero is set to perform and against which the peculiar qualities of Americans are tested. In this context, James also published
an article in 'The Nation' titled 'Americans Abroad', in which he specifically addressed the matter that he was dealing with in his international fiction.

"The question of Americans appearing to advantage in Europe." 3

This article explains why Europeans have difficulty in understanding the Americans abroad and in appreciating the democracy there and at the same time why the Europeans doubt that America is not as agreeable, as comfortable, as civilized and as desirable as Europe is. In order to balance his article he also explains why on the other hand the Americans fail to make their country and their mannerisms to be understood by the Europeans in a better way. As it is well written by James in his article-

"The great innocence of the usual American tourist is perhaps his most general quality....... and it is probably unfair to say that by sophisticated Europeans, it is harshly interpreted ....Their merits, whatever they are, are not of a soot that strike the eye-still less the ear. They are ill-made ill mannered, ill-dressed." 4

The essence of the last two lines of James' article is in a way at the heart of all of James’ stories on the 'International Theme'. In the
opening years of the 20th century James published three Important novels on this international theme- ‘The Wings of the Dove’, ‘The Ambassadors’ and ‘The Golden Bowl’. All the three novels are the outcome of his major phase of writing when he gave a second thought to his international theme after a gap of twenty years. Thus these are considered to be his technically advanced and a concept of matured attitude, as these fictions were written after the theatrical experimentations when he faced the crushing failure of ‘Guy Domville’ in theatre. After this failure when James restarted with fiction writing, he used the characters in terms of theatrical and dramatic terms in order to express his narrative technique and came up, with a saner attitude in expressing the’ International Theme.’

The first novel of his major phase of writing, ‘The Wings of the Dove’ was published in 1902. The centre of attention in this novel is, Milly Theale. She is the young American heroine of whom James was very fond of for she was the reflection of James’ beloved Cousin, Minny Temple’, who faced the tragic nature of early death when she was so eager to live. James recalls:

"I was in the far-off aftertime to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it, a particular occasion aiding, in the beauty and dignity of art. “
Thus Minny Temple became Milly Theale in 'The wings of the Dove'.

Milly Theale, besides being typically innocent and naive and eager to live, she is a gentle and attractive character. Furthermore, she is fabulously wealthy, starkly independent and without a family. The combination of all these features of her character makes her a prey to the predators with whom she comes into contact in Europe. If she is a 'princess', as the novel calls her- to emphasize her personal value as well as her wealth-she is also the dove of the fiction's title, as the story reminds us repeatedly- to suggest her softness, gentleness and purity. The 'International Theme' in this novel is quite similar to that of 'The Portrait of a Lady' where the insufficiency of the American naive is pictured, in her confrontation with the heavily civilized world of Europe. In this novel, the European society is represented by Aunt Maud Lowder. This character represents the meanly mercantile standard of value. Aunt Maud is thus a threatening figure as James correctly puts in,

"Mrs. Lowder was London, was life- the roar of the seize and the thick of the fray."

The fabulously rich and innocent Milly Theale, flutters into this type of situation and is eager for life but is threatened by early death. Meanwhile James introduces two more characters, Kate and Merton,
who tried to make use of Milly Theale along with aunt Maud. Merton longs for Kate’s love, but Kate decides to marry Merton to Milly just to earn the value, the rich Milly has. Here Milly’s tragedy is that, with all the values Milly is unprepared to cope with the European world, she not only had to die finally but also suffer in her true love for Merton.

During this time Milly gets a little bit care and attention from Lord Mark and he thus unfolds the scheme of Merton and Kate against Milly. And finally Milly finds herself as a living body unaccompanied by joy, she was dead. As Milly herself comments, ‘dead’ in the sense;

"I shall never be better than this."

Poor Milly, attempts many times to make Lord Mark and all others realize that she is not only a portrait, not only a representative surface, not dead but an alive and a lively person. This is the type of European world one recognizes with Milly, where every lovely and high priced living creature is merely treated as valuable non living things.

In the second half of the novel the centre of interest shifts to a considerable extent from Milly to Merton. The readers continue to be concerned with Milly’s welfare and what the world has done to her but at the same time becomes increasingly concerned with Merton’s concern over her fate and his role in determining it. Thus, his realization of the truth that was very true about Milly, actually marks a climactic moment in the novel. This realization of truth by Merton
again gains Milly’s favour for he was always in her memory. In spite of his stated willingness to return to Kate, after Milly’s death, and resume relations as they were before, Kate sees quite clearly the impossibility of that as she feels everything is now changed. Although Merton denies his love for Milly, Kate again contradicts him with the truth:

"Her memory is your love. You want no other." 8

If one view this fiction with the aim of monitoring James’ ‘International Theme’ one will feel the same as James writes,

"She was a breathing protect against English grossness, English compromises and conventions a plant of pure American growth." 9

Thus the American figure of innocent purity embodies its familiar virtues and exposes its insufficiencies for existence in this world. The polarity of the ‘International Theme’ is nicely expressed by James in ‘The Wings of the Dove’, as one feels the novel’s yearning for compromise, for resolution of the opposites. This Jamesian story achieves the successful union of the American and European figures through the medium of marriage, as Merton is torn in between love for Kate and love for Milly but this story differs from other fiction of Henry James in terms of the change shown in the moral attitude of Merton by the realization of the trick played on the innocent Milly. The
‘International theme’ again used in this novel is to predict that American Innocence is something like positive evil in European society.

If the same theme is considered in another such fiction of Henry James, that is, ‘The Ambassadors’ published in 1903 which he regards as -

“frankly, quite the best, all round of my production”.

‘The Ambassadors’ maintains a thick envelope of realism intact. The subject of the novel is Strether and what happens in the novel matters according to the extent of its effect on Strether.

Strether is like the other heroes of James’ international stories where he appears to be a naïve despite of his age. Though he had some modest success at home in Woollett, but is a wide eyed lamb in the great world of Europe. As American ambassador to Europe, Strether suffers from two American diseases i.e. the American conscience imposed on him in Europe and the passion for the picturesque at Europe. Thus his great good will buoys him up for the splendid experience of Europe; but does not qualify him as the best of ambassadors. Strether himself is quite aware of the fact that he embodies within himself the polar terms of the aesthetic and the moralistic views and is sensitive to the nearly matching polarity of appearance and reality. The tension going on in his mind is
dramatically shown in the European world. Strether's problem has been a failure to see both sides of the situation, an inability to understand that people and situations can have more than one side. Thus once again Henry James became successful in presenting the societies confronting each other and revealing astonishing but subtle truths. In other words in 'The Ambassadors' Henry James refined his 'International theme' in the form of the collision of American innocence with European experience.

The 'International theme' till now revealed clashing impulses between America and Europe but the same theme in 'The Golden Bowl' was treated as a promise of a happy and successful union of the American and the European. In this novel, James came up with this theme by making Maggie to marry Amerigo. Maggie is typically naïve and innocent and keeps an unselfish love for Amerigo, her husband. At the same time Amerigo is sophisticated and experienced. Maggie cared a lot for her father so that he should not feel lonely and neglected and this was the reason why Amerigo entered into an adulterous relationship with Charlotte. As Charlotte explains, during their weekend at Matcham, Maggie has virtually thrown them together by her obsessive attention to her father and consequent neglect of her husband. Maggie realized the fact and the consciousness came into her that she is loosing her husband. Maggie sacrificed her innocence, her
excessive virtue and her father; and selfishly desired her husband, Amerigo. Maggie’s intelligence during this time led Charlotte and Adam to depart for America. Meanwhile Amerigo becomes fully conscious of Maggie’s endeavors and her worth, sees and appreciates her refusal to express recriminations, her refusal to entertain explanations regarding the relationship of Charlotte and Amerigo, finally, he says to Maggie:

“see? I see nothing but you!”

And with that all is said. Thus we find that in ‘The Golden Bowl’ the moral spontaneity of the innocent American finds meaningful experience in the conventional manners of experienced Europe. The moralistic attitude of the American is broadened and more pliable by the humane inference of European culture. Here the international theme becomes somewhat striving, for an American was successfully wedded to a European and their child Principino becomes the pledge for their union.

The international theme showing emotional battles between gullible young woman and clever older man, between foolish Americans and dishonest Europeans, between the spiritual ideals and impulses of every common person was expressed very clearly in most of the novels of Henry James.

The same theme i.e. ‘The International Theme’ helps us to analyze various other themes hidden in its core. All the relevant
themes are best embedded in ‘Daisy Miller’, a masterpiece by Henry James with which he cherished high hopes. The theme that floats high up in ‘Daisy Miller’ is the incongruity between reality and appearance. It is all about the manner in which the European-American social circle in Europe misunderstands the true character of ‘Daisy Miller’. She is innocent and uncultured but the circle sees only the surface of her character and the actions that the character takes. They imagine her to be a member of their social circle, thus someone who has the experience and knowledge to understand and exaggerate the mores and codes of the European culture. They do not take the time to look beneath this trickery to find that she is naturally innocent, acting on impulse instead of caution and convention, she rebels not by having a great knowledge of the rules which bind the society and consciously deciding to throw them out of the window, but by being limited in her scope of experience and by refusing to change her natural ways in order to please a culture to which she does not belong. The theme of disparity between reality and appearance is at its greatest strength in the relationship between Winterbourne and Daisy because of the conflict which roars inside Winterbourne regarding the appearance he cannot overcome and the reality he cannot accept. He constantly asks himself, should she know better? Yet he does not realize that she does not know better and will ruin herself because of it.
Another such theme comes up in the form of knowledge as evil versus inexperience as innocence. In 'Daisy Miller' James explores the type of an American girl, Daisy, who is innocent of knowledge of evil and immorality. However, she is immersed in an environment of an elusive evil in Rome that finally shadowed Daisy's ruin. The gossip made for Daisy about her not taking things seriously, her abrupt but genuine reaction in various situations are symbolic of the evil of the European experience and knowledge. Daisy's innocence and lack of immorality let Winterbourne feel that he is being deceived by Daisy for he was unable to see life through the lens of innocence and morality. He thus fails to understand her inexperience as innocence and finally Winterbourne's knowledge in the form of evil overshadowed Daisy’s innocence and ultimately ruined their life.

Another theme in 'Daisy Miller' is quite often noticed in the fiction with the context of 'The International Theme' that is "Outward action versus inward meditation" that focuses on the problems of communication, especially in regards to the relationship between Daisy and Winterbourne and the differences in their behaviour. Daisy is a character who reacts on the impulses of the world around her and will say something or act without hesitation. Winterbourne on the other hand will often contain his feelings inwardly. He meditates on Daisy's character repeatedly, trying to decide how to view her, but usually
over thinks the situation. Winterbourne attempts to apply the conventional rules he has accepted since leaving America, to Daisy without realizing that she is not dissecting the world with the same meditating process that he undertakes. Thus the inward meditation of Winterbourne misunderstands the instant outward reaction of Daisy and lead to various dilemmas in their minds. When one studies for the theme, one finds that quite often in the fiction, a miscommunication occurs and this miscommunication makes twists and turns in the story and makes it still interesting. Thus it is observed that while making a thematic study of 'Daisy Miller', though the main theme remain 'The Euro-American' still there are many other themes to support the major one. Thus, “Outward action versus inward meditation” is one of the supporting theme in this novel.

A rather broad theme which acts as a vehicle to illustrate the conflicts between natural response, convention and social custom is, 'Nature versus Urbanity'. It is all about how man’s innocence and purity is destroyed by the rigid rules of formalized civil society. In other words nature ruins at the hands of civilization. Daisy’s basic nature is of innocence and goodness, not something to be insulted and ridiculed by the characters like Mrs. Costello. Daisy on one hand retains her natural entity but her companion Mr. Winterbourne is a gentleman who is urbane and artificial. The urbanity symbolized in the
formal civilized setting overwhelms the natural innocence of Daisy and she succumbs to harsh condemnation and lack of love. Nature overcomes urbanity in the end as Giovanelli confesses Daisy's innocence to Winterbourne.

Thus it is observed that most of the Jamesian novel reveals the 'International theme, in one or the other way. And in most of the cases this theme highlights the plight of Americans in Europe. If we focus our attention on this particular topic, it can emerge as yet another topic for thematic study. While discussing the details of 'the international theme' the plight of Americans is automatically reflected in one or the other way and is thus not analyzed as a different theme.

James' another masterpiece that is 'Washington Square' is also a novel that reflects so many themes other than the 'International theme' discussed above. Though the continental influence of James does not die off in this novel but other issues seem to overshadow his continental ness and holds its place as prime theme. One such theme noticed in the 'Washington Square' is 'Family and betrayal'. Betrayal is perhaps the most dominating theme of the fiction. Some characters fear betrayal; others astonish to find themselves betrayed. If one looks at the four major characters of the novel, one is shocked by the betrayals ranging from failed expectations to deliberately broken promises. In some cases, the over sensitive individual perceives a
betrayal when no true betrayal has actually occurred. Dr. Sloper feels betrayed by Catherine because she is unwilling to follow his advice regarding her engagement to Morris. Dr. Sloper uses harsh language and vows to disown Catherine for breaking his heart. Dr. Sloper's efforts to circumvent Catherine are perceived betrayal and it actually push Catherine to limit the respect she gives her father. Dr. Sloper is also betrayed by his family. His wife and son have died and left him thus he felt a betrayal of emotions. On the other hand Catherine was so plain and simple that she could not fit herself according to her father's imagination; thus another sort of betrayal came up unknowingly. Despite his cruelty, Dr. Sloper is correct in predicting that Morris will prove himself a man of low character and low means.

The most dramatic betrayal of the fiction is Morris' abandonment of Catherine, after Catherine has sacrificed so much for Morris' sake. Catherine is also somewhat betrayed by Lavinia. In a sense, Aunt Lavinia has painted the picture of romance and led Catherine into a pit of thorns. Lavinia has created a fictitious family with Morris and to be honest Lavinia looks out for Morris' interests more than she looks out for Catherine's, thus directly betrayed Catherine. Not only Catherine but even Morris feels betrayed by Lavinia. Towards the end of the novel Dr. Sloper came to know about the plans of Lavinia and warns her and just as Lavinia has pushed Catherine into a romantic
engagement, Lavinia has lured Morris into a financial prospect that has soured. Thus all the characters in this fiction, in one or the other walk of life faced betrayal from each other. Along with betrayal, deception by the different characters throughout the novel also keeps a thematic importance. The characters feel deceived because of a good deal of truth unsaid as did Morris and Lavinia. Though Morris did not have good intentions, he did not intend to hurt Catherine. He lied with the expectation of gaining money, without causing any harm to Catherine. When Morris decides to end his engagement, he feels guilty about the pain he will cause to Catherine. He does not look forward to speak this truth to Catherine. Meanwhile Dr. Sloper relishes this opportunity to the truth to Catherine and to make her feel deceived. Lavinia Penniman on the other hand felt deceived because it was her intention to make Morris and Catherine fall in love and finally direct the whole story according to her own sweet will. Her intentions were to part the lovers ultimately with deep sores in their heart. She could not make her plans successful at the end of the novel because she felt deceived and disappointed to know that Catherine has dispensed with Morris permanently and without fanfare.

Thus the international theme in James is not only a contrast between European and American Society but also depicts so many other themes embedded in its core. All these themes associate itself to
the 'International theme' in some or the other context. By this time, James felt tired of writing so many novels on the theme of American European contrast so he was looking for another centre of interest:

“For myself, at any rate, I am deadly weary of the whole 'international state of mind-so that I ache, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon me as a sort of virtue or obligation.”

But what he needed was a new theme or at least a new point of concentration which would offer an equally dramatic means of presenting the fascinating complexities of the human state. After working on the international theme, James was now to shift his emphasis, although by no means entirely, to the more nearly universal moral elements of an individual. The new theme which he chose for this particular setting found its dramatization in the problem of moral decision by the individual. The moral decision is however a matter of an ethical choice between right and wrong but more often involves a choice between two ways of life, one offering some opportunity for a greater fulfillment of the possibilities of the human spirit and the other offering eventual frustration. Thus the theme of moral aesthetic conflict started taking shape in James’ novel. James thus came up with his novel ‘The Princess Cassamassima’ that starts with the young sensitive Hyacinth, convinced of vague aristocratic birth trapped in a
dull life of poverty and banality. An early concern with anarchism is simply his first gesture toward some better life for himself and for others. As Hyacinth matures it becomes increasingly apparent that the better life which he desires is the life of means and beauty, the life represented in his own observation and experience by the arts. Thus he makes a parallel discovery that the anarchism he had espoused is not only futile but a danger to the life which he has defined for his wishes. He discovered this so late that he was trapped in his own confusions, deeply disappointed by the casual betrayals and shallow morality of the friends around him, he finds no solution but to turn the postal, supposedly devoted to the anarchic cause, against his own head. He felt that he cannot live in the poor, dull, ugly, working world of Lomax place and he cannot reach permanently the beautiful world of Paris or the country house, the life represented by the arts. When Hyacinth first visited the country house of the Italian Princess a sense of comparisons and contrast came to his mind and now at this point he can never again accept Lomax place and always dream of another world. As his observation and experience grew, Hyacinth quickly learns to discriminate between the two worlds by the aesthetic quality of their physical appearance. While in Paris-

"..........he haunted the museum during all the first days, couldn’t looked enough at certain pictures, not
sufficiently admire the high polish of the great floors in which the golden, frescoed ceiling repeated themselves. All Paris struck him as tremendously artistic and decorative; he felt as if hitherto he has lived in a dusky, frowsy, philistine world, in which the taste was the taste of little Peddlington and the idea of beautiful arrangement had never had an influence.”

After the treasures of the continent he realized that the real possibilities of life, the finer existence, lie in that world represented by taste and is based upon wealth and leisure. Upon his return to London, Hyacinth starts thinking for the masses over there;

“He saw the immeasurable misery of the people, and yet he saw all that had been, as it were, rescued and redeemed from it; the treasures, the felicities, the splendors, the successes of the world.”

The conflict in his mind has resolved itself to that of aesthetics or economics, the finer life of the spirit and Hyacinth, without learning or experience, surrounded by treachery, and indifference, can only resolve the conflict with a bullet thus in ‘The Princess Cassamasima’ James stresses not on the real but on the dream, that is, not on the
world as it is but on the world as it should be. This is put forward by James by the private discovery that Hyacinth does for himself. Hyacinth finds that although the relationship of esthetics to the greater morality, the greater potentialities of life, is no simple one, yet for him it is at the centre and is the basis of life itself.

If one considers ‘The Tragic Muse’, James says;

“To do something about art-art, that is, as must have been for me early a good deal of a nursed intention, the conflict between art and the world striking me thus betimes as one of the half dozen great primary motives.”  

Here the conflict of art and the world is so explicitly defined and the various ramifications of the problem so carefully and directly explored, that F.W. Dupee can speak of

“The rational, four square, patiently documented day-light world of ‘The Tragic Muse; in which the theme of art versus politics is explored with almost the consistency of a formal debate.”

James in ‘The Tragic Muse’ attacks the theme of the fiction with full vigor. The first half the novel is given to the struggle of Nick Dormer to win the muse and to overcome his materially successful life, represented in part by Mrs. Dalloway, the woman whom he loves but
who represents all the forces opposed to his desire for a life devoted to art. The other half of the novel is given to the related story of Miriam Rooth, the sacrifices to her particular art her lover and the possibilities of the materially successful life so desired by her mother. Though both plots run the continual conversation of Gabriel Nash, in so many ways a caricature of an aesthete, whose life and whose talk is devoted only to the appreciation of the beautiful. At this juncture James makes Nick meet Miriam and he wants to paint her, and the wish sums up his desire for the life of art. After abandoning the life of material promise, hers is the first portrait he paints, and so in a concrete way it represents the achievement of his desire. As a result Mrs. Dalloway breaks her engagement with Nick. For Mrs. Dalloway, the portrait of Miriam represents all the lost political and social hopes and for Nick it symbolizes his refusal to either the powerful and fashionable world which she wants for both of them.

The portrait is like a central point at which all characters meet. But more important to the central theme, the portrait also serve to stress certain characteristics of Nick himself. If they represent his choice of the potentialities of a life in which art is more important than money or position, in the last chapters of the novel they also suggest an ironic tone to the previous attitude. Gabriel Nash has warned Nick that Mrs. Dalloway will win him back by asking him to paint her
portrait, and at the end of the story, set in future, just such a portrait is mentioned, whether it is Nick or Mrs. Dalloway who has by that time come around is left in doubt. This is thus a direct attempt to present the importance of art in the life of a man. Gabriel Nash may be a comic figure, but he does express the central theme of the fiction;

"Gabriel maintained precisely that there were more ideas, more of those that man lived by, in a single room of the National Gallery than in all the statutes of Parliament. " 17

Again and Again in the novel one feels the emotional intensity of life and art are inseparable and together create a higher morality to which man must confirm if he is to find his greatest potentialities. But the choice is not easy, and often demands a high price like for Nick Dormer it costs all peace of mind and for Hyacinth Robinson it costs his life.

In 'The Spoils of Poynton' the immediate struggle is between the widowed Mrs. Gereth and the fiancée of her son for possession of the beautiful furnishings of Poynton, the Gereth house, willed by Mrs. Gereth entirely to his son. Caught in this struggle is Fleda Vetch, a sensitive and attractive young girl, one of James' "free natures," who falls in love with Owen Gereth and finds herself trapped by the moral problems involved. As a final denouement, Fleda gives up Owen to
Mona Brigstock, his fiancée and sees poynton and all its 'Spoils', the original source of contention. burnt to the ground. James feels:

"Yes it is a story of cabinets and chairs and tables they formed the bone of contention, but what would merely 'become' of them, magnificently passive, seemed to represent a comparatively vulgar issue. The passions, the faculties, the forces their beauty would, like that of antique Helen of Troy, set in motion, was what, as a painter, one had really wanted of them, was the power in them that one had from the first appreciated. Emphatically, by that truth, there would have to be moral developments." 18

Between the passions of selfishness and self sacrifice, love of possessions and love of beauty, the moral developments are extended. In keeping with the theme the four principle persons of the novel are differentiated by their relation to the arts. Fleda Vetch was brought up a midst the tasteless collections of her father, she still has a passion for beauty and has even spent a year in Paris,

"arming herself for the battle of life by a course with an impressionist painter." 19
Her natural taste is even good to satisfy the creator of Poynton. To Mrs. Gereth the arts of Poynton have nothing to do with common and accepted codes of morality. When it becomes obvious that she will be unable to stop Owen and hated Mona from taking possession of the house, she secretly removes all its treasures to Ricks, her own little house, for proper safe keeping and appreciation, even though, ironically enough, it means destroying the spacious unity which made Poynton so matchless. After the first shock of discovery, Fleda finds that Mrs. Gereth not only sees nothing immoral in the theft, but even thinks it a praiseworthy move. The moral question involved in the undeniable theft is as important to Fleda as the appreciation and enjoyments of the objects themselves, when she finds on her first visit to the now resplendent Ricks that Mrs. Gereth has given her a room furnished with the spoils, she can no longer enjoy them as she formerly did at Poynton. It becomes increasingly clear to her, that aesthetic enjoyment divorced from morality is not enough:

"The girl had hours, now, of somber wishing that she might never see anything good again: that kind of experience was evidently not an infallible source of peace." 20

The immediate problem involved in this moral recognition quickly becomes apparent and Fleda’s aesthetic sensibilities deny to force the
return of the spoils. When she learns that Mona too is making the
return a preliminary condition to her marriage to Owen, the problem
becomes hopelessly involved. For Fleda was in love with Owen, and
knows that he is at least partially in love with her, yet she cannot
accept it in her conscience to separate him from his fiancée by any
deliberate act. This new conflict of love and morality is Inseparably
bound to the continued conflict of aesthetics and morality. Mrs. Gereth
partly understands the situation, and Fleda, refusing as much as
possible to make any decision at all, can only return to her shabby
home, leaving Owen to settle matters without advice or influence. Mrs.
Gereth now returns the spoils to Poynton because of her unselfish love
for the spoils. By this act she has satisfied the aesthetic sense by
making Poynton again a single splendid object. But more important,
with the struggle to make a thing of beauty of the unpromising little
Ricks she regains the artistic spirit which had enabled her first to
create Poynton. Fleda can at last say again in all honesty,

"Where on earth did you put your hand on such
beautiful things?" 21

Mrs. Gereth’s new art is even a greater one, for it carries in it now the
values of life as well as the values of visual beauty.

Finally the novel ends with the doomed marriage of Mona and
Owen, Mrs. Gereth deprived of her beloved Poynton and Spoils, and
Fleda left to a life of loneliness. Yet Mrs. Gereth and Fleda at last found their strength after this moment, because they now know where true happiness lies. Thus James was quite successful in explaining the theme of moral-aesthetic conflict in all complexity through his novels.

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 the wider freedom of a universal life. 'The Portrait of a Lady' marks James' understanding that any creative relationship between the self and society must be founded on the refinement of the human consciousness. In his three major novels, 'The Ambassadors', 'The Wings of the Dove', and the 'Golden Bowl' Henry James also made a total recall of his earlier paradigms of refinement. The novels illustrate an emergent doctrine of human refinement as constituting itself as the final measure of human readiness and of human ripeness. The theme of refinement is quite dominant in the fiction. 'Roderick Hudson' which is the story of an innocent American brought up in a moral abstraction, is quite of experience in the European art, culture, traditions and manners.

Roderick's tragedy is the tragedy of an artist who fails to comprehend or exercise intellectual refinement as an aesthetic piece.
Commenting on James’ presentation of the successful artist in his fiction, Maurice Beebe remarks that

“the successful artist in James’ fiction is almost always seen with his neck turned, which is a symbol of the detachment required for success.” 22

Roderick has the flair for the simple, sensuous and confident relish of pleasure but he is detached of the intellectual refinement. No artist should be a slave to his passions, but Roderick is. Rowland rightly remarks,

“a man of genius owes as much deference to his passions as any other, but not a particle more.” 23

Roderick is launched into the world by his patron, Rowland and thrown into the midst of temptations in order that he might utilize the opportunities and refine his consciousness and sensibility for artistic excellence. But the opportunities that come his way are wasted, for Roderick is not a master of his passions. Torn between the pulls of art on one side and passion on the other, Roderick allows himself to be swept away and destroyed by his passion. Roderick is caught in a whirlpool of emotions and passions from which he is unable to escape and therefore ruins although he has genius, he is rendered sterile as an artist due to his negative qualities. His temperament and character are against his becoming a great artist. The realization that he has
been selfish and cruel comes to him when Rowland condemns him as a heartless egoist. He confesses,

"Certainly I have been damnably stupid. Isn’t an artist supposed to be a man of fine perception? I have not, as it, turns out, had one." 24

Roderick has failed as an artist, and as a human being, for want of fine perception and once he is aware of his shortcomings, he decides not to be a stumbling block and a source of suffering and unhappiness to his friends and he commits suicide. The failure of Roderick Hudson is due to the failure of his intellectual sensibility, which is unrefined and undeveloped.

Rowland on the contrary has intellectual refinement and moral passion. Cecilia pays a handsome compliment to Rowland’s refinement and manners. She says that Rowland has-

"a turn for doing nice things and behaving yourself properly. You have it, in the first place in your character. You mean, if you will pardon my putting it so, thoroughly well. Ask Bessie if you don’t hold her more gently and comfortably than any of her other admirers."

And Bessie declares,-
“He holds me more comfortably than Hudson.”

Rowland’s superiority over Hudson lies in his refinement and manners. Rowland is intelligent, well informed and has a discriminating generosity. He is intellectually refined enough to be aware of his own limitations. But Rowland feels that the happiness for him as an artist is ruled out because he could only buy pictures and not paint them. He feels that he would very much have liked to have been born a vigorous young man of genius without a penny, but as it is he is just a young man of wealth and refinement. Thus he envies Roderick for his spiritual in born intellectual. Thus James very well came up with the theme of refinement by making Rowland realize that wealth and manners are not only ingredients to get through the satisfaction in one’s life; talents and emotions are also equally important to present a refined personality and vise-versa in the case of Roderick Hudson. Thus this theme of refinement in some or the other way reflects the American innocence in Roderick and European sophistication in Rowland and James very well assure his readers that to refine one’s attitude one should possess both the American innocence as well as the European manners.
Experimental Themes

James once writing to H.G. Wells in 1902 said that he would never send a copious preliminary statement to an editor and went on to say,

"The relief, and greater intellectual dignity, so to speak of, of working on one's own scale, one's own line of continuity and in one's own absolutely independent tone, is too precious to me to forfeit."  

This remark explains that James write to satisfy his own artistic demands rather than those of an editor. His novels with their honesty of dedication to the artistic problem provide a means of watching James move toward his absolutely independent tone seems momentarily more interested in developing a personal technique of fiction than in achieving a closely integrated and deeply felt presentation of life. So he went with a series of experimental themes. He never bothered about the acceptance of these novels to his readers because he wrote for his own satisfaction. It so happened that many of his novels during the phase of the experimental themes that is of the 'dramatic themes' failed to create a good impression in the readers' mind. ‘The Other House’, ‘The Outcry’, ‘The sacred Fount’ are few to be mentioned. ‘The wings of the Dove’ shows very correctly the value of the period of experimentation. The novel opens with a scene reflected
in the mind of Kate Croy, the girl who is the principal character of the
novel. The scene reflects the room of her tawdry father. The "arm-chair upholstered in a glazed cloth that gave at
once-------- the sense of the slippery and of the sticky--
---the shallow prints on the walls. The small lamp in
coloured glass, the purplish cloth on the principal
table." 27
All these expressions give a sense of dingy poverty and of
ugliness as disagreeable to the readers as to Kate
"what showed was the ugliness - so positive and
palpable that it was somehow sustaining. It was a
medium, a setting, and to that extent after all, a
dreadful sign of life." 28
The sordid background in which Kate Croy sees her family becomes a
motivation for her, when this is contrasted with the house of her aunt
Maud, Kate finds wealth and luxury and a correspondingly massive art
that make the rooms of her father and sister seem even uglier and
more sordid and the contrast increases, to her consciousness, as a
natural characteristic of her mind:
"she saw as she had never seen before how material
things spoke to her. she saw, and she blushed to
see, that if, in contrast with some of its old aspects,
life now affected her as a dress successfully done up, this was exactly by reason of the trimmings and lace, was a matter of ribbons and silk and velvet. She had a dire accessibility to pleasure from such sources.”

Kate did not want to lose the affection and the money of Aunt Maude because of the anguished pleas of her family. This situation makes the role of Kate Croy more subtle and sympathetic in the novel. The vigor with which she drives the reluctant Merton Densher to be kind to Milly Theale and so inherit her fortune, Kate derives not from some overwhelming inherent evil but from the sharp contrast of beauty and ugliness. Thus beauty Vs. Ugliness is one of his experimental themes where he found the moral weakness of his character flourish in between the contrast of wealth & poverty.

Along with all these themes there is one more theme that is quite prominent in James’ few writings. Though this theme is not as famous as that of neither ‘The International Theme’ nor ‘Experimental Theme’ still is a discussed one and this is the theme of ‘Ambiguity’ that we find in James’ ‘The Turn of the Screw’. ‘The Turn of the Screw’ has been so firmly linked with ambiguity that even people who have not read it know that it is somehow supposed to be ambiguous. The theme of this fiction is not the conflict between art and life, but conflicts
within life itself. It is true that the governess is said to have written her story, but this is also quite evident that she is not a professional novelist, nor she is concerned with the creative imagination. What she is mainly concerned with is the stuff that the life is made of love, fear, good and evil, salvation, pride, possessiveness and a lot of doubts. The ambiguity in this fiction is such that the reader is left in a dilemma of two views, firstly that leaves the laws of the universe unchanged and explains the strange phenomenon realistically by asserting that dream, madness, the influence of drugs, hallucinations can account for them. Secondly that admits to new laws of nature by which the unexpected phenomenon can be explained, new laws which provide for the existence of supernatural beings like devils, fairies and ghosts. With these two views we can define the superhuman element in 'The Turn of the Screw'. The endless debates as to whether the ghost are objective supernatural evil beings which appear to governess and children alike or whether they are hallucinations of the governess's mind can now be classified to some extent. The debates are bound to be endless because it is impossible to choose between the two opposed alternatives. And this is so because 'The Turn of the Screw' is written in the pure fantastic mode, maintaining the ambiguity to the very end. The reader is successively concerned with questions like Does Flora see Miss Jessel across the lake? Why does Miles go out in
the middle of the night? Why do Miles insist on going back to school? Who blows the candle? These questions make this fiction still more ambiguous.

Actually first reading arouses suspense, an anticipation of a grim ghost story. The framework is a Christmas eve fireside social gathering in which people appropriately tell gruesome ghost stories. One of the guests has just finished the story of a boy who saw a ghost and in his fear woke up his mother, who immediately encountered the same apparition and could not soothe her son, being terrified herself. This arouses in the reader as well in the fictional audience, an expectation to hear from Douglas a ghost story about the appearance of supernatural beings. The reality of the ghost in the Griffin's story is confirmed by the fact that it is seen by mother and child alike. It is only after the second reading that one can give a second thought to Douglas' statement "I quite agree- in regard to Griffin's ghost, or whatever it was-" Here 'whatever it was' itself says that it may have been a ghost but it may also have been mere hallucination. This phrase is thus a sort of fuel to justify James' theme of ambiguity. In this fiction, the reader is first faced with conflicting accounts and it is this incompatibility that makes him perceive the central gap. On two occasions the governess sees a terrifying stranger who looks at her intently. In a conversation with Mrs.Grose, it transpires that the
governess's description of the stranger recalls the master's valet, Peter Quint, and that Peter Quint is dead. The figures, then, must be a ghost. Mrs. Grose herself has seen nothing, not a shadow of a shadow, and nobody in the house but the governess was in the governess plight. Then who is right- the governess or everyone else in the house? The reader is likely to ask himself. A similar disagreement occurs when the governess expresses her conviction that Quint was looking for Miles and Mrs. Grose challenges her: "But how do you know?" Thus one finds that the reader is bound to realize that James gives him no independent information on which to base his decision. There is no independent dramatization of an encounter between either of the ghosts with any other member of the household, particularly the children, whom the governess believes to be in constant touch with the evil apparitions. Everything the reader perceives about the ghost comes from the governess, and there is no external sources which could help one to decide whether the communication she attributes to the children are real or merely a fragment of her own imagination. Thus throughout the fiction the theme of ambiguity exists and James is able to bring out the theme in front of his readers in a brilliant way.

To add further to the thematic aspect of Henry James, and looking at the spectrum of Henry James' characters, one is immediately struck by the number and importance of his female
figures. From Daisy Miller and Catherine Sloper to Maggie Verver and Charlotte Stant, the central position in James’ fictional canvas is given over to women. Henry James’ critic Philip Rahv noted-

“Henry James is not fully represented in his novels by any one single character, but of his principal heroine it can be said that she makes the most of his vision and dominates his drama of transatlantic relations. This young woman is his favourite American type, appearing in his work time and again under various names and in various situations.”

James not only limits his focus on the feminine to his American heroine, but also his European heroines like Kate Croy, Miriam Rooth, princess Cassamassima, Maisie Keep an equal important place in his work. In fact, one could easily extent James’ representation of the feminine to include certain aspects of his male figures, for James seems to have been fully aware of the idea that both masculine and feminine properties contribute to the make up of the single individual. James’ feminine bent has been widely acknowledged to the extent that it takes its place in the totality of his artistic approach. Philip Rahv gives social reasons for James’ stress on the feminine.

“The advancement of this heroine takes on historical form against the period background of the American
female’s rise to a position of cultural prestige and authority. She, it was who first reached out for the consummations and amenities of life which male relatives were still engaged in processing its necessities and preparations.”

Along with this social fact, Naomi Lebowitz, one of James’ critic felt that James’ primary concern with the problem of personal relationships made him write of feminism. One of James’ character, Mr. Touchett in the ‘The portrait of a Lady’ says in a joking tone,

“The ladies will save us...... that is the best of them will—for I make a difference between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting.”

This statement gives a clue as to what lies at the core of James’ feminine orientation. James was also perfectly aware of the masculine and feminine constituents of the individual. The masculine has a tendency to push outwards into the sphere of external activity, while the feminine suggests an interiorizing movement toward private sensibility. In James’ later career he focuses on the movement toward self and the feminine with its property of introspective inwardness.

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". 33

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. Cinderella, 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.” 34

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.
Thus all the themes of Henry James' art, one or the other time represent the anguish and the self realization of the character at the end. James had also successfully brought the themes together to give a final twist in all his novels. His artistic presentation of the thematic attitude establishes him as one of the great novelist in English, and furnishes a critical momentum which carries him far in his creative career.
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5 Henry James. *Notes of a Son and Brother* (London: Macmillan, 1913) 544


