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“The Portrait”, “The Wings” and James’s Theory

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The article deals with the relationship between James’s early and later phase of writing and with the relationship between his aesthetic theory and his literary practice. By contrasting the different narrative techniques employed in *The Portrait of a Lady* and in *The Wings of the Dove* the article aims at establishing which of these two novels is a “better” novel. The examination is accomplished through a brief analysis of the point-of-view, narrative persona, plotting, sentence structure and symbolic texture of both novels. The evidence supplied by the analysis is compared to James’s own critical criteria in order to establish to what extent his technique relates to his aesthetic theory and to what extent it corresponds to his own standards. This way one could determine whether there were any deductions from the primary principles which became more important to James in his “major phase” of writing.

The results of the analysis and the comparison demonstrate that *The Wings of the Dove* is a greater literary achievement, but that the aesthetic criteria implicit in that choice were not the ones James valued the most. The differences in technique and in the resulting quality stem out of James’s willingness to experiment and out of his endless battle against limitations in presenting experience.

“I don’t know about the novels,” Mr. Touchett says to Isabel Archer early in *The Portrait of a Lady*. “I believe the novels have a great deal of ability, but I don’t suppose they’re very accurate.”¹ Old Touchett’s speech is a comic one, reaching almost to the proportions of burlesque as he rails against a female novelist who has attempted to portray him. “I don’t

¹ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, Leon Edel, ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1963, p. 58.

like the old gentleman in that lady's novel,"² he snaps, a bit of mild ridicule by James of his Puritan forebears and their obliquity to the influences of Art.³

Old Touchett's rantings are not however, as the post-Nabokovian reader might suspect, meant to tease him, for Henry James held his reader in the highest regard, asking from him acuteness in pursuit of a truth that James believed was present. The ironic element is that, despite the comedy, Mr. Touchett's speech is intelligent, if cantankerous, the reasonable expression of a good old man who rightly demands accuracy in Art and who understands that representation must bear a perceptible resemblance to the model. He speaks as many characters in *The Portrait of a Lady* do, according to his notions of what is commendable in Art, what should be strived for.

The discussion of aesthetics, and aestheticism as a theme, dominate this novel to the end. Most of Isabel's misfortunes are caused by her inability to detect the reality behind the artifice, the illusory from the genuine. She is possessed by a keen but romantic intelligence that glorifies art in itself, takes to notions of her own life as a drama or a portrait and forgets with sad result the roots of her intelligence in experience. It is only the "hard presence" of sexuality and death that reacquaints her with reality, humbles her, removes her from the battle of disconnected egocentric imaginations in which she is engaged with her husband, and frees her to return without illusion of escape to the life she has made.

Isabel's final departure from Gardencourt amounts to a statement by James that is not wholly unlike Mr. Touchett's: Art, we should never forget, is based on life; there is a reality, perhaps unpretty, even unappealing, but unavoidable which must be discerned. Neither the role of the jaded, rootless connoisseur, nor the idyllic faith in the wondrousness of the sake of Art will protect one from that troublesome knowledge.

That sense that Art must draw from life, not simply to delight the senses, but to offer up the real thing for the inspection of the mind, stood at the root of James's work as

² *ibid.*

³ e.g.: "'Art', in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration... Literature should be either instructive or amusing and there is... an impression that... the search for form contributes to neither end". From "The Art of Fiction" in *The American Tradition in Literature*, Sculley Bradley, R.C. Beatty, E. Hudson Long, ed., Vol. 2., 1962, p. 658.

a novelist. "The only reason for the existence of the novel," he wrote in *The Art of Fiction*, "is that it does attempt to represent life."⁴ James's novels were not intended primarily to amuse, or to instruct; they were, for the sake of intelligence, to be as old Touchett wanted, accurate, faithful to the maxim that "impressions are experience"⁵ and scrupulous in rendering those impressions.

In order to adhere to the task James was willing to declaim on the aesthetic theory directing his efforts. "There has certainly never been an author who better saw the need and had the ability to criticize specifically and at length his own work,"⁶ R. P. Blackmur has said of James. Nor was there before, or probably after, an author who set out more complete standards for criticism, who, in essays and reviews, made more clear his aspirations for his art. In his books coincidences were not to move the story; it was the character's mind, ambiguous, always in the process of becoming, that was the element to be studied and revealed, the channel for transmission of impressions to the reader. But James attempted to set no limitations on how this was to be done. Young novelists he advised:

All life belongs to you, and do not listen to either those who would tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air, and turning away her head from the truth of things. There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place.⁷

It is James's technique, his method of "seeing" and "feeling", and two of these superfine messengers, Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove*, to which I wish to draw attention. Two of his greatest novels, books similar in plot, each with a heroine derived from James's deceased cousin Mary (Minnie) Temple, they were separated in date of publication by twenty-one years, and by very different approaches to the method of story-telling.

By examining the differing methods it can be demonstrated how James's technique related to his conceptions of the aesthetics of the novel and which elements of that aesthetic

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 656.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 662.

⁶ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, Robert P. Blackmur, ed., Charles Scribner's Sons, New York and London, 1937, p. vii.

⁷ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 672.

theory were most important to him in his vision of himself as a novelist. By contrasting early and later methods one could determine whether there were secondary deductions from the primary principles which became more important to James in his final cycle of writings.

For instance, the treatment of Isabel Archer, a long, detailed representation of the changing consciousness of a young woman, is carried out by demonstrating her altered perception of the people around her. Milly Theale is revealed by being held at a distance with the focus on the developing perception of her by the other characters. One would assume that James preferred the latter treatment, that, in the full bloom of a prodigious talent, he had written in a strikingly different manner in order to achieve an effect more in keeping with the postulates of his aesthetic theory. This view is encouraged by the work of many critics, including Joseph Warren Beach and F. O. Matthiessen, to name two of the most estimable, who have held that James had a "major phase", a period of greatest achievement in which he wrote *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*. Yet in *The Art of Fiction* James says, "I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks",⁸ a method which he admits in his Preface to *The Wings of the Dove* was employed in the novel: "The successive centers . . . constitute so to speak, sufficiently solid *blocks* of wrought material . . ."⁹ *The Wings* is indeed composed in blocks, each of the first four «books» describing a different character's point-of-view. The novel first follows the consciousness of Kate Croy, then Merton Densher, Susie Stringham and, finally, Milly Theale in books Four and Five before James reverts to a mix with Densher's mind at the center.

It was that blockishness which most disconcerted James as he prefaced *The Wings* for the New York edition. He was sharp and wide-ranging in his complaints about his work: he left too much said once and never developed — the pernicious influence of Lionel Croy on Kate, for example; he found the detachment from Milly's point of view at times "extravagant",¹⁰ but he was most dismayed by the discontinuity created by the point-of-view blocks:

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 663.

⁹ Henry James, "Preface" to *The Wings of the Dove*. In *The New York Edition of Henry James*, Vol. 19, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937, p. xii.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. xxii.

... the process of the general attempt is described from the moment the 'blocks' are numbered, and that would be true enough picture of my plan. Yet one's plan alas is one thing and one's result another... as I renew acquaintance, I mourn for them all as I remount the streams, the absent values, the palpable voids, the missing links, the mocking shadows, that reflect taken together, the early bloom of one's good faith.¹¹

James apparently had imagined at the time of writing more continuity than he later found on re-reading. The blocks are faulted for being too discrete, too complete in themselves to be welded into what was for him a pleasing whole.

On the other hand, James's final evaluation of *The Portrait* was made with delight. He painstakingly amended the text of previous editions of the novel and the revised book, and his methods of accomplishing it were of great pleasure to him:

'Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and beautiful a difficulty as you could wish. Stick to that... What better field could there be for a due ingenuity...?'

So far I reasoned, and it took nothing less than that technical rigour, I now easily see, to inspire me with the right confidence for erecting... a literary monument. Such is the aspect that today *The Portrait* wears for me: a structure reared with an 'architectural' competence... that makes it, to the author's own sense, the most proportioned of his productions after *The Ambassadors*...¹²

In *The Ambassadors* the process of developing all through one consciousness, that of Lambert Strether, is refined even beyond *The Portrait* where the narrative occasionally moves away from Isabel. His preference of *The Ambassadors* seems due, in part, to that procedure, to his way of rendering all through Strether's impressions. Nevertheless he was clearly charmed by the second-best attempt at that. "The best thing in the book" to his mind, the most "consistent application of that ideal," presenting the "'exciting' inward life",¹³ took place in Chapter 42, the lengthiest passage of indirect monologue in which Isabel, sitting by a dying fire, thinks long into the night of her decision to marry Osmond.

By the time of his writing of the Prefaces and his reconsideration of the entire body of his work, James felt his finest accomplishment, the richest and most sublime, the

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. xxiii.

¹² Henry James, "Preface" to *The Portrait of a Lady*, Riverside Edition, p. 11.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 14.

portraying of the convolutions and march forward of one mind. It was for that technique, as Joseph Warren Beach said, "Mr. James reserved his extremest expression of satisfaction."¹⁴ Prefacing *The Ambassadors* James wrote rhapsodically of his having shown all movement in the novel through Strether's sense of it:

... full observance of the rich rigour I speak of would give me more of the effect I should be most 'after' than all other possible observances together. It would give me a large unity, and that in turn would crown me with the grace to which the enlightened story-teller will at any time, for his interest, sacrifice... all other graces. I refer of course to the grace of intensity.¹⁵

James was not making in this an aesthetic judgment on all fiction. Rendering experience through the prism of one intelligence was to him simply the best way to write. That method did, as he recognized, create an intensity, a fullness of significance for every thought and action in *The Portrait* that was lost in the discursiveness of a blockish book like *The Wings*.

James's success with this particular manner is due primarily to the narrative mode he adopted. Following the traditions of the English novel, James made use of an identifiable narrative voice, who, speaking as "I" or collectively with the reader as "we", intruded into the novel occasionally. James's motive for doing this was not to make comment, as earlier English novelists had done, although James's first novels are flawed at points by the inability of that voice to refrain from directly telling the reader his judgment of events described. Such commentary was incongruent with James's stated intent of allowing a reader to "guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern."¹⁶ Moreover, the imposition of the narrator's reflections violated James's sense for the flow of a story. "... Only in life *without* rearrangement," he said, "... do we feel we are touching the truth."¹⁷ *The Wings* is virtually without direct narrative commentary, although the voice still, though less frequently, obtrudes itself.

James's motive for retaining the narrator was to assure the readers that there was a verifiable source for everything

¹⁴ Joseph Warren Beach, *The Method of Henry James*, Albert Saifer, Philadelphia, 1954, p. 63.

¹⁵ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 318.

¹⁶ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 662.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 667.

written. He was strongly opposed to the Trollopian narrator who periodically "concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe'."¹⁸ James and his reader were "looking for the truth",¹⁸ a venture which, in James's opinion, required a well-spoken friend to offer the reader assurance that this book was not a worthless fantasy.

Yet such a manner of narration poses two severe difficulties. The first, which is the reason why the identifiable narrative persona has been discarded by more modern writers, is the distance such a narrator places between the reader and the story, the way a reader's ability to participate imaginatively is limited because there is the claim of another imagination interposed. James Joyce's interest in "refining the narrator out of existence" stemmed from a desire to have the reader, as Wallace Stevens put it, "become the book", to have the movement of fiction, its completion and unification take place in the reader's mind.

The second problem created in using an identifiable person as story-teller is far less theoretical: there is a precise limit to the range of tone available to the writer. Thus the problem of establishing more than one consciousness in a novel becomes extreme. In sticking to one character of a particular social class, the language of the Jamesian narrator could be that of the one character's consciousness as well. But when minds were to be differentiated, adherence to one tone forced the narrative to be descriptive, rather than actively that of a character distinguishable from others. It is not the different items to which they are attracted which make the characters of *The Sound and the Fury* or *Ulysses* distinct, but their different vocabulary and different sentence structure which create a different tone of consciousness.

Yet, with that granted, and in spite of James's opinion that his achievements of greatest intensity were accomplished in clinging to the register of one mind, there remain the contentions of critics like Beach and Matthiessen that the works of "the major phase" eclipsed in quality any of the novels produced before. In pointing to a few more of the differences in technique between *The Portrait* and *The Wings* I would like to evaluate them in the terms James established for himself, to see if there was, by his standards, progress from the early work to the late.

Aside from point-of-view, there are three differences of method that seem of importance. First, a refinement in

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 657 (both references).

plotting, an ability to create greater onward movement, to develop tension swiftly without sacrificing credibility of characters or action. Second, lengthier sentences, convoluted, at times almost impenetrable, yet, nonetheless, readier vehicles for the train of images and details James felt necessary. Third, greater dexterity in uniting theme with image, and allowing, through repetition and expansion, the image to rise to the status of symbol — a development which accounts largely for the amendments James made to *The Portrait* for the New York edition.

James's greater finesse in plotting and his awareness of this is reflected in one of the few compliments, grudging at that, which he made *The Wings* in his Preface:

I scarce remember perhaps — I like even the public grossness to insist on it — in which the curiosity of 'beginning far back' as far back as possible, and even of going, to the same tune, far 'behind', that is behind the face of the subject, was to assert itself with less scruple. The free hand, in this connexion, was above all agreeable...¹⁹

James's "beginning far back" was really a function of his shifting points of view, the most acceptable description of that method for him. By "beginning far back" James does not mean developing a history for a character, as he did for Isabel Archer, setting her first at Guardencourt and revealing her through the proposals by Warburton and Goodwood before she ever encounters Gilbert Osmond. He meant the development of a central conflict in the first instants of the novel, creating characters and in them a disposition and situation that calls for resolution. In *The Portrait* the energy of conflict is dissipated over too long a stretch. Until Isabel's marriage to Osmond there is no dramatic embodiment of the clash between her independent nature and "the deepest thing"²⁰ in her soul, her belief that she can submit to a man. When Osmond is introduced, Isabel already has a long history for the reader, a history upon which Osmond has had no effect. The tension between Isabel and her husband is submerged under what has passed before and the dramatic core of the book is dimmed. Joseph Warren Beach claims that James, after 1896, would have presented Isabel's past before Osmond "by reminiscence and dialogue as an integral part of the narrative of present experience."²¹

¹⁹ Henry James, "Preface" to *The Wings of the Dove*, p. xi.

²⁰ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 55.

²¹ Joseph Warren Beach, *The Method of Henry James*, p. 206.

The method of *The Wings* confirms Beach. Rather than involving the reader in the intricate history of Milly Theale, James begins with Kate and Merton and demonstrates the nature of their relationship. It is the puzzling quality of the love of Kate and Merton for each other and their strange regard for themselves which becomes the wellspring of dramatic impetus to the novel, the one force remaining to be revealed to Milly Theale, just as the past affair of Gilbert Osmond and Serena Merle is unknown to Isabel Archer. But Osmond and Madame Merle are "melodramatically evil",²² evil as a function of plot rather than because of perceptible human needs, and are developed that way in baroque scenes, including one with Madame Merle uncharacteristically bemoaning her fate as a "bad" person.²³ In viewing Kate Croy, dynamic, hard and beautiful, a girl submerging under the malign influence of a dishonest father and an ambitious aunt, and Merton Densher, affable, talented, feckless, poor and committed "flesh and spirit"²⁴ to Kate, the reader can acquire more of the "unseen from the seen", have an understanding of the characters that is not defined by their actions, but rather injects into a reader's perception of those actions nuances and ambiguities which allow a more complex vision of human motive.

In *The Wings* James made action an aspect and outgrowth of character, rather than the reverse. It is not until *The Wings* is in its last fifth that Kate's plans for Milly are announced to Densher, which contrasts with *The Portrait*, in which the first meeting between Osmond and Madame Merle observed by the reader ends with her saying, "I of course want you to marry her."²⁵ *The Portrait* is marred at other points by actions which appear suspiciously device-like, such as Isabel's marriage, which is unrevealed in terms of motive until long after the act, until night of fireside ruminations. This scene, that James so admired, is presented only by a lapse in the action in which the narrator intervenes with his, rather than Isabel's, account of her year of travel. Moreover, the disadvantage of such a rearrangement was that rather than suggesting Isabel's motive, leaving some of it "unseen", James had to bring the reader up to it directly: "She would launch his boat for him, she would be his Providence."²⁶ His success

²² *ibid.*, p. 208.

²³ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, Dell, New York, 1958, p. 56.

²⁴ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 48.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 205.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 351.

in *The Wings* is that of keeping the reader only slightly ahead of the character's knowledge of goings-on, which gives the reader a pattern to be traced rather than a line to remember, and is more faithful to James's sense that behavior is rooted in an amalgam of needs and emotions.

The second aspect of the later method that enriched James's art was his elongation of sentences, something accounted for not only by a maturity of talent but by the fact that arthritis forced him to dictate his work rather than write it by hand. The repetitions, insertions, and digressions that resulted have made James's late works seem to many, if not impossible to read, then not granting rewards commensurate with effort expended. James himself remarked that, "nothing . . . will ever take the place of the good old fashion of 'liking' a work of art,"²⁷ so it may be assumed that he was not deliberately trying to alienate his readership. The primary motive for developing a more elaborate sentence structure stemmed probably from his ever greater care for the role of narration. As was discussed above, James relied on the tone established by the narrator also being that of the consciousness of a character. Greater intricacies in his sentences allowed James to accomplish that fusion with increased subtlety, particularly in creating what he would consider a "realistic" reflection of impressions.

An example which shows the advantage, as well as the elaborateness, of the later James is the following sentence from *The Wings* — Susie Stringham's recollection of her first meeting with Milly:

Mrs. Stringham was never to forget — for the moment had not faded, nor the infinitely fine vibration it had set up in any degree ceased — her own first sight of the striking apparition, then unheralded and unexplained: the slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably young person, of not more than two and twenty in spite of her marks, whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being, and whose clothes were remarkably black, even for robes of mourning, which was the meaning they expressed.²⁸

The direct narrative statement: "Mrs. Stringham was never to forget" is followed by a transition to a representation of *her* consciousness, accomplished by introducing a particular of Susie's feelings, "the infinitely fine vibration". The sentence

²⁷ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 665.

²⁸ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 93.

recasts Susie's memory in unordered fragments, judged by Susie as they are registered by her. Milly's pallor is inspected first, from that her age deduced; another glance is taken, this time at the hair, and there is a brief musing if it is real, with the conjecture dismissed because of Milly's age; finally there is another look, this time at Milly's clothes, their color registered and from that their meaning.

This gathering of detail, "the solidity of specification" which James equated with the "air of reality",²⁹ is articulated in the narrative voice, but the progression and the implications drawn are clearly those of Susie Stringham. In packing one sentence James avoided the diffusion of the same information over three or four sentences, and more importantly used his imagination of Susie's impressions to represent the order and nature of her mind.

Later period rhythms and extensions, as well as the impressionistic recitation of emotions, are contained in the best-known revision of *The Portrait*, dealing with Caspar Goodwood's kiss of Isabel. The novel's climax in both action and theme, the kiss had been written originally as, "His kiss was like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free."³⁰ James did not alter that sentence in his revisions for the first and second British editions, but his revision twenty-six years later for the New York edition produced a remarkable change:

His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So she had heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when the darkness returned she was free.³¹

Again James employs an accretion of detail to touch off gradual revelations. The impressionistic flood of images in which Isabel feels she might sink, her sense of being swarmed over, so contributes to an understanding of her return to her husband that it is hard to imagine as meaningful a book without this sentence change. Isabel's repulsion by "hard manhood" and her reaction to the kiss as an "act of

²⁹ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 662.

³⁰ Sidney J. Krause, "James's Revisions of the Style of *The Portrait of a Lady*", *American Literature*, vol. XXX, 1958, p. 77.

³¹ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 482.

possession" emphasize to Isabel the irreconcilability of her self-esteem with marriage. Her sense of being "free" is a bitter escape to passionless darkness and a release from the romantic illusion holding her from the start: "if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely."³² With her brief glimpse of that light, she is wholly ready to return.

Most of the changes in *The Portrait*, as this one does to some extent, are aimed at incorporating into the novel the one facet in which it is inferior to *The Wings*: a thematic unity accomplished through symbolism, or, more precisely, through one symbol raised from an image by allowing a texture of meanings to attain to it. Of course, the "portrait" of the earlier book's title is suggestive of the aesthetic theme, but James tried in his revisions to make the tenuous relationship of aesthetic conceptions of life to life as lived more clear by re-writing certain passages. In revising references to painting, architecture, literature, drama and ceramics, James tried to reflect the pervasiveness of aestheticism in Isabel Archer's world. Yet, although the various objects do become symbolic in their reference to and their expansion of James's theme, he could not achieve the wholeness, the many levels of meaning possible, that was wrought with the single image of a dove spreading out its wings. In *The Portrait* many symbols amplified one theme. In *The Wings* one symbol provided a reference for the themes of mercy and innocence, and was finally developed within the novel as an objective symbol to unify the various points of view, reified by each character's reaction to Kate Croy's description of Milly as a dove.

James's final revisions of *The Portrait* show a number of attempts to re-weave the symbolic texture of the novel, which was most probably an expression of satisfaction with his late novels such as *The Wings* or *The Golden Bowl* in which he had made great use of a single, coherent symbol. The concern for symbols in *The Portrait* was certainly not reflected in the revisions made of the *MacMillan's Magazine* text for the first and second British editions. The early alterations seem exclusively connotative: rectification of unintended ambiguities, uncomely tone, poor word choice.³³

Going over *The Portrait* for the New York edition he started from the title, trying to strengthen the primary-level meaning of the word "portrait" used there. Appearing first

³² *ibid.*, p. 55.

³³ Cf. Krause, "James's Revisions...", pp. 67—88.

at Gardencourt, Isabel stands still "in the ample doorway" rather than only "in the doorway" as it had been, which was done so that the motionless Isabel might suggest more the image of a framed portrait. Osmond's perception of Isabel as an *objet d'art*, and her sense of that, were also heightened. In the first editions she was to Osmond "as bright and soft as an April cloud". The revision reads, "as smooth to (Osmond's) general need as handled ivory to the palm,"³⁴ a suggestion of the enamels Osmond collects. In the wake of her world tour, prepared to marry Osmond, Isabel feels "older, ever so much, and as if she were 'worth more' for it, like some curious piece in an antiquary's collection," while the first editions had read only "older".

Making way for the revelation of Caspar's kiss, James altered the descriptions of Caspar, making him more of an aggressive, Puritan sort, powerfully, repressedly sexual. And in order to maintain thematic unity James revealed the sexuality latent in aesthetic sensibility. In Ralph's contemplation of Isabel the phrase "a real passionate little force to see at play"³⁵ was added in the following passage:

'a character like that,' he said to himself, 'a real passionate little force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art...'³⁶

The binding of aestheticism and sexuality is present in Isabel's marriage to Osmond. It is her admiration of his taste and her hoped for chance to enforce her conceptions of him that take the place of sexual attraction. *The Portrait* does of course deal with affairs of the heart, as well as aestheticism, and the conception of female beauty in purely aesthetic terms, and the manner in which Art served as a civilized forum for men and women to meet were emphasized in the first editions of the book. But James strived in his revisions to make the connections between the two themes more apparent, to bring them together so that "lady-ness" and portraiture were of a whole. Caspar's kiss of Isabel could then be meaningful not simply for its sexual value, but for the light it shed on all of her concerns.

Although the amendments served James's purpose well, they could not make "the portrait of the lady" as truly complete an image as that of the winged dove. There is no

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁶ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 63.

primary level of meaning to that portrait, no direct reference to it within the story, no action which imparts value directly to that word. The title of *The Portrait* reflects more of the intrusive, rearranging author than James, when he first wrote it, was. For the reader with the title in mind, the characters seem to always be moving about the author's theme, having always the strange good fortune to speak about Art.

In *The Wings* it is Kate Croy who, within the novel, pronounces Milly a dove, a term which is to Kate mildly derogatory, being herself a most un-dovelike girl. But Milly seizes it immediately as a description of her other-worldly nature, a way to cherish herself and explain her discomforts, and she resolves to act as "a dove *would* act".³⁷

When Kate makes the same reference to Milly to Densher in Venice, he understands that Kate does not use the metaphor wholly admiringly, and sees its source in Kate's envy of Milly: "Kate was under the impression of that element of wealth in her".³⁸ But Densher still senses something right about the appellation, that a dove's "wings could in a given case . . . spread themselves for protection" of those beneath. The manner in which "doveness" can alter those who come in contact with it is perceived finally even by Kate: "I used to call her, in my stupidity . . . a dove. Well, she stretched out her wings . . . they cover us".³⁹

The process of ascribing to the image definite values takes place in the narrative, not intrusively, but by James's erection of a metaphorical structure that pertains to the image. Imagination is characterized consistently as something which flies. Susie Stringham's "secret dreams flutter" within her and "perch" on a "possible link"⁴⁰ with Milly. For Densher adulthood and England are a "descent", his childhood abroad "zones of air that had left their ruffle on his wings".⁴¹ Even Merton's longings for Kate are "troubled fancies" which "fold their wings"⁴² when driven out of mind. Both Densher and Susie are forced by lack of spirit to suppress winged imagination. Only the Dove, Milly, has the financial and spiritual means to risk "the danger of such a perch",⁴³ to risk imagination, to see below her in Switzerland the kingdoms of

³⁷ Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, p. 216.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 382.

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 511–12.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 106.

the world and to wish to choose. It is Milly who can sustain herself by imagining Merton Densher drawn to her, who can, as an imaginative perceiver appreciate the full relationship between herself and the portrait Lord Mark shows her, Milly who can imagine a romance between Susie and Sir Luke and only Milly who can take to the highest reaches of imagination, perceive fully, the motivations of Densher and forgive. It is imagination which is the source of Milly's animation, her verve. She conceives the idyllic and tries to live it, tries indeed to be a dove, and failing that takes again to imagination to understand the world in which she cannot live in order to make gestures that will effect "real" change. Those who have encountered Milly are not "better" for her passing, but they are changed. The seeking of the Good, if not wholly possible, is not without effect.

The image of the Dove, elaborate in its implications, was as a technical device the consummation of many of the principles described by James in his theoretical works. Creating this all inclusive image he adhered much more fully than in *The Portrait* to an obligation of the artist that he expressed in his Preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*:

Life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and selection, the latter, in search of the hard latent *value* with which alone it is concerned, sniffs round the mass as instinctively and unerringly as a dog suspicious of some buried bone.⁴⁴

The mastery of his selection in *The Wings*, creates if not more *value* than in *The Portrait*, a greater beauty and sublimity in the reader's perception of it. And yet it was not beauty and sublimity in that fashion which was Henry James's highest aspiration. In taking note of that kind of richness in *The Wings* it is not difficult to understand Matthiessen's designation of a major phase. But the aesthetic criteria implicit in making that choice were not the ones James most valued. Intensity was the highest grace, the fullness of achievement in "catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life".⁴⁵ For James a novel was to take hold not only of the mind, to delight the intellect with the perfection of its form, but to haunt the memory as well, to create in the reader a sense of having experienced life in the particular way that James experienced it.

⁴⁴ Henry James, *The Future of the Novel*, Leon Edel, ed., Vintage Books, New York, 1956, p. 522.

⁴⁵ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 667.

Because for the reader that could only ever be a *sense*, because art is artifice and the world it presents imagined, James was willing to experiment from work to work, to seize upon a different element of his aesthetic theory and give it full play, whether it was the central consciousness of a character as in *The Portrait*, or the great forward movement and rich symbolic texture of a book like *The Wings*. "Art", he said, "lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt..."⁴⁶

It is in that variety that the Jamesian ideal is perceptible: "an ideal in the informed imagination... of life, limited only by the depth of the artist's sensibility of it".⁴⁷ As a man who cherished the real, who designed for his most idealistic characters ultimate defeat, death for Milly, disillusionment for Isabel, he could not suppose that the ideal had been in all phases achieved, that the "perfect work... the prize"⁴⁸ was going to be written by him. But it was pursuit of the prize, the luckless, endless battle against limitation, which he demanded in theory and practice from himself and from anyone else who would write.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 655.

⁴⁷ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. xv.

⁴⁸ *The American Tradition in Literature*, p. 672.

HENRY JAMES: ESTETSKA TEORIJA I LITERARNA PRAKSA

Članak se bavi odnosom između Jamesove rane i kasne faze pisanja i odnosom između njegove estetske teorije i literarne prakse. Usporedbom različitih narativnih tehnika u romanima *The Portrait of a Lady* i *The Wings of the Dove* pokušava se odrediti kvalitet tih dvaju romana. Usporedna analiza bavi se raznim aspektima tehnike pisanja: "točkom gledanja", narativnom personom, strukturom rečenice i integracijom simbola. Rezultati analize stalno se uspoređuju s Jamesovim vlastitim kritičkim kriterijima da bi se ustanovilo do koje je mjere tehnika izrasla iz njegove estetske teorije i do koje se mjere ona podudara s njegovim vlastitim standardima. Na taj se način može ustanoviti da li su postojale neke dedukcije koje su proizašle iz njegovih primarnih principa, a koje su za njega možda postale značajnije u njegovoj "velikoj fazi".

Rezultati analize i usporedbe ukazuju na to da su *The Wings of the Dove* snažnije literarno djelo, ali da kod takvog vrednovanja Jamesovi vlastiti kriteriji nisu odlučujući, tj. da elementi kvalitete ne proizlaze direktno iz Jamesove teorije pisanja. Razlike u tehnici i kvaliteti proizlaze prvenstveno iz Jamesove potrebe za eksperimentiranjem i iz njegovog stalnog otpora prema ograničenjima koja se nameću u pokušajima dočaravanja doživljaja.