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Henry James: The Achievement of Selfhood in the Transitional Phase, 1890-1900, as Related to His Later Work

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HENRY JAMES: THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SELFHOOD
IN THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE, 1890-1900,
AS RELATED TO HIS LATER WORK

By

Phyllis J. Brown

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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Phyllis J. Brown was born in Jackson, Minnesota, February 17, 1933. She was graduated from St. Mary's Academy, Portland, Oregon, June, 1950, and from Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon, June, 1954, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

During the academic year 1954-1955, the author taught English and Spanish at Seaside Union High School, Seaside, Oregon. In September, 1955, she began her graduate studies at Loyola University, Chicago, as a graduate assistant. In September, 1956, she spent one semester as a part time lecturer in English at Loyola University.
PREFACE

Since the revival of study in Henry James in the 1930's and a renewed upsurge of interest in the mid-40's, there has been much concern expressed about the "obscenity," the "verbosity," the "intolerable difficulty" of his later novels, as contrasted with the relative simplicity and straightforwardness of his early novels. Little consideration has been given to the period of years intervening between the early and the later work—or the middle period, as we shall call it, of 1890-1900—to discover any clue to the development of this later work. The purpose, then, in preparing this thesis is to investigate the distinctive, "transitional" activities of the middle period of Henry James's writing career in the hope that they might shed some light on possible causes of the artistic development manifested in his later work.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE VARIOUS PHASES IN HENRY JAMES'S CAREER

In the consideration of the career of any artist, attention must be given to the historical growth and development of the powers that fashioned the career. Whether it be in the art of music, painting, or writing, it is always necessary to trace the continuous or periodic line of production of an artist, to seek the relations of part to part, to determine influences that account for changes in his work, in order to understand fully the artist and the art. The efforts of some artists constitute a rather flowing progression of the whole. This is instanced in the field of poetry by Walt Whitman, whose Leaves of Grass properly illustrates an accumulative, "organic" development; or in the field of painting by Vincent Van Gogh with his singular, but gradually increasing, insistence on color; or in musical composition by Maurice Ravel's unvarying development of rich harmonics and tonal patterns. It is necessary to observe this type of growth and development in order to appreciate fully the mature artistry. To witness the simple ripening of a talent is to penetrate more easily the essence of the full-blown beauty.

On the other hand, the work of many more artists falls into phases, styles, or well-defined periods that seem set apart, but are, nevertheless, united in a definite pattern of development. To consider the true Pablo Picasso is to consider his shift from a contemporary "impressionism" through
"expressionism" to his own "cubistic" revolt. Even a casual student will likewise note the essential groupings of the poetical works of Geoffrey Chaucer into "phases"—Italian, French, English, with the specific subject matter and manner of each—or the essential groups of William Shakespeare's dramatic works according to subject matter, which also display equally distinguishing qualities of literary craftmanship. Each different part or phase of an artist's career, then, provides insight into the complete whole and helps to explain it, measures the absorption and expression of the influences surrounding the artist, and displays the peculiar versatility of each genius. From the parts comes a pattern of action and interaction in the development of an artist's expression.

It is with this concern in mind—the concern with the evolutions and revolutions in the career of an artist—that we approach Henry James. For with this prolific writer we are particularly bound to be concerned with such terms as "early work," his "middle years," "transitional phase," the manner of his "later works." It is the exceptional commentator who has not referred to the various periods or different styles of James. "The change that divides the general tone and accent of his younger... from that of his

1Elizabeth Stevenson in her Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James (New York, 1949), page 20, has compiled the following impressive statistics of James's whole half century of writing: novels, seventeen finished, two unfinished; stories, ninety-six counted and collected; memoirs, three volumes; travel sketches, volumes on England, France, America, and many scattered essays; biography, two volumes; plays, six, at least, printed as plays, a number converted to story form; criticisms, the great collection of the Prefaces, as well as several volumes of essays on novelists, poets, places, and ideas; letters, two volumes of general correspondence and several of particular.
later years is too striking to be overlooked. 2 What were the beginnings of Henry James's art, from which many critics claim he so radically departed later? The first main period of production covered a decade and a half. James's first novel, *Roderick Hudson*, was published in 1875, followed in 1877 by *The American*, the first major treatment of the international theme with which James came to be so closely associated and from which he gained popular recognition. Two years later, in 1881, James published *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, the latter considered by Beach to be the "first masterpiece of James." 3 His early novels were warmly welcomed. The next books, *The Bostonians*—"the unhappy Bostonians born under an evil star" 4—and *The Princess Casamassima*, were less well received by the public. "They have reduced," wrote James to Howells, "the desire and the demand for my productions to zero." 5 A note of finality was sounded to this period by James when he explained in 1900 about *The Tragic Muse* that "I have lately finished the longest and most careful novel I have ever written... and the last in that form I shall ever do." 6 He repeated in a letter to his brother William that "The Tragic Muse is to be my last long novel. For the rest of my life I hope

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5 Letters, I, 135.

6 Ibid., p. 161.
to do lots of short things." Still James did not recapture his reading audience with The Tragic Muse, and William gave his opinion for this failure:

"It is a most original, wonderful, delightful and admirable production. . . . The whole thing is an exquisite mirage which remains afloat, in the air of one's mind. . . . As for the question of the size of your public, I tremble. The work is too refined, too elaborate and minute, and requires to be read with too much leisure to appeal to any but the select few."

During this fifteen-year period, James also published many stories, including "A Passionate Pilgrim," "The Madonna of the Future," "The Aspern Papers," "Four Meetings," "The Liar," and "Daisy Miller," the last of which was the most popular piece that James wrote; several series of travel sketches, "Transatlantic Sketches," "Portraits of Places," "A Little Tour of France"; and works of criticism such as "French Poets and Novelists," "Hawthorne," "Partial Portraits," and the important "Art of Fiction" in 1884, one of the writings in which he set the house of fiction in order and by which he became "the first great theorist and scholar in the art which he himself practiced with such distinction."

The first division of James's career from 1875 to 1900, then, was a productive one in both fiction and non-fiction. In this period he wrote deliberately and directly; his ideas were clearly conceived. While his art may be considered somewhat subtle, more than was probably ordinary during

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7Ibid., p. 162.

8William James, cited in F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James Family, Including Selections from the Writings of Henry James, Senior, William, Henry, and Alice James (New York, 1947), p. 332. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as The James Family.

9Leon Edel, Henry James, 1843-1870, The Untried Years (New York, 1953), p. 11. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as The Untried Years.
James's time, he was still quite overt about the development of each story and plot. He gave many hints to the reader of the significance of the action as it progressed. Lewis considered that the art of this period, especially as exemplified in *The Portrait of a Lady*, was at its "most concrete and least subject to the weakness attendant on its subtlety." The characters of his novels exhibit a great deal of variety and express themselves with emotion in word and action. His themes—Europe and America, innocence vs. experience, the artist and his work—are few. Though the range and experience which James knew and placed in his writing was narrow in one sense, to this area of observation he applied his imagination without reservation.

What were the culminations of Henry James's art in the "later years" from 1901 to his death in 1916, the period that has provoked sharp contention among the critics in their estimation of it? We have either Thomas Hardy commenting that James "had a ponderously warm manner of saying nothing in infinite sentences," or much later, we have Stephen Spender writing in reference to *The Golden Bowl*: "His technical mastery has the perfection of frightful balance and frightful tension." Was this period the fulfillment of James's powers as an artist, or was it rather a witness to his deterioration? Though Lewis rated James as one of the four great English novelists and claimed

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11 Stevenson, p. 22.


that "his registration of sophisticated human consciousness...parallel classical creative achievement...added something as only genius can," he also claimed that his "vital subtlety" later turned into "something else."\textsuperscript{11} In fact, Lewis simply stated that something "went wrong" with the development of Henry James.\textsuperscript{15} Matthiessen, on the other hand, ranked the later period of Henry James as his "major phase,"\textsuperscript{16} and Short called it the "greatest period."\textsuperscript{17} All agree, however, that it is the one most closely linked with the distinctive "Jamesian manner" and most often associated with the mere mention of the name Henry James.

The two notable literary accomplishments in the final period of Henry James's career that most concern this paper were the unique critical prefaces, published in 1907-1909, a trio of two-volume novels, \textit{The Kings of the Dust}, 1902, \textit{The Ambassadors}, 1903, and \textit{The Golden Bowl}, 1904—all of which are witness to the ultimate development of James's themes and techniques. The prefaces were written by James to accompany the twenty-four volume New York Edition of his work, which he himself prepared for publication in 1907-1909.

In these prefaces James stressed the individuality of each writer's viewpoint:

\begin{quote}

The house of fiction has...not one window, but a million...every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual and by the pressure of the individual...

At each of the windows stands a figure with a pair of eyes or at least a field glass which forms, again and again, for observation, a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11}Lewis, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 161.

\textsuperscript{16}Matthiessen, \textit{The Major Phase} (New York, 1944), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{17}R. W. Short, "The Sentence Structure of Henry James," \textit{American Literature}, XVIII (May, 1945), p. 73.
unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.18

And he endeavored to describe his own individual "window" of fiction from which he had viewed "the spreading field, the human scene." He expressed, in a most articulate if somewhat difficult fashion, the purposes and processes involved in the composition of each of the stories and novels contained in the Edition. Each preface was simply the "story of a story."19 James discussed not only the subject matter and methods, but "qualities" of experience, "intensities" of feeling, "enlargement," the "story," an author's "appreciation," the "consciousness" of the artist as well as of the characters, the "picture," the "scene." The critical prefaces represent James's highly developed sense of the technical aspects of his art of fiction.

For the Edition that these prefaces accompanied, James revised many of his earlier works; these revisions give ample opportunity to see actually some of the changes in James's style. For example, this one line from "Daisy Miller," which read when first published, "'Oh, blazes; it's har-rd!' he exclaimed, pronouncing the adjective in a peculiar manner," was later revised to a precise, detailed description, "'Oh, blazes; it's har-rd!' he exclaimed, divesting vowel and consonant, pertinently enough, of any taint of softness." James wrote that he had "nowhere scrupled to rewrite a sentence or a passage on judging it susceptible of a better turn."20

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18Preface, The Portrait of a Lady, III, x. Unless otherwise noted, all references made to the works of Henry James are from the twenty-four volume New York Edition of The Novels and Tales of Henry James and will include the title of the story or novel, the volume number, and the page number.


20Preface, Roderick Hudson, I, xiii.
the "corrections" in Roderick Hudson with Edmund Gosse, who had "exclaimed against such dribbling of new wine into old bottles." James explained why he felt it was necessary to undertake the revisions:

My brain was tortured with all the cruel and—to put it plainly to you—monstrous insinuations which you had brought forward against my proper, my necessary, my absolutely inevitable corrections of this disgraceful, disreputable style of Roderick Hudson. 21

Some examples of this particular revision include:

First Edition

II, p. 60:
Roderick was peculiarly inscrutable.

II, p. 31:
"I regard you as a sick man," Rowland continued. "In such a case Miss Garland would say that her place is at your side."

I, p. 192:
Rowland went very often to the Coliseum; he was never tired of inspecting this monument.

II, p. 72:
They're a precious pair! This is what I think. You by no means exhaust the subject when you say that Christina is dramatic.

Revised Edition

p. 310:
Roderick's reflecting surface exhibited for the time, something of a blur.

p. 279:
"I should, in the light of that speech, even if I hadn't already, as it seems to me, other lights, regard you as a very sick man. I can't imagine that if Miss Garland knew how sick she shouldn't at once feel that her place is at your side."

p. 225:
Rowland went very often to the Coliseum; he had established with this monument and with its eminence of ruin, in those days all untrimmed, a relation of the tenderest intimacy.

p. 324:
I think they're a precious pair—and yet that one hasn't said all when one says, as I have so often done, that she likes drama, likes theatricals—that do you call them?--histri-onics, for their own sweet sake.

In a thorough study of the revisions made in Roderick Hudson, Hélène Harvitt concluded:

In revising Roderick Hudson, Henry James made very

few radical changes... he in no way altered the story... he made a most minute revision of his style. The result of the revision is, barring very few exceptions, the introduction of an element, some of which were to be found in the first version—that is a great tendency to analyze; that in the final version this tendency became a habit, an affection if you will. The effect of that introspective analytical trait is an obscuring of spontaneous, natural passages, making them laborious, heavy, ambiguous, and sometimes almost impenetrable.  

Another commentator referred to James's "famous verbosity."  

Not only did the critical prefaces and the revisions of the earlier works for the New York Edition show James's ultimate artistic development, but so did the three major novels. One remarkable feature about these novels was the close succession in which they were written and published. For any author to produce such a major series of consistent literary works in three or four years is substantial evidence of his sustained labor and determination and direction. Other features of these three novels were the preoccupations with certain technical aspects such as the well-defined point of view, the refined imagery, the complex sentence structure, all of which gave rise to the often repeated critical complaint of "general obscurity." Regarding the point of view, James admitted that his later preference for dealing with his subject matter—for seeing his story—"through the opportunity and sensibility of some... thoroughly interested and intelligent witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it" was an accepted habit... even to the extravagance


James praised the two points of view in The Golden Bowl:

The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us—very nearly (though he doesn’t speak in the first person) after the fashion of other reporters and critics of other situations.25

And he especially stressed the suitability of the Prince as a "point of view" because he had a "consciousness highly susceptible of registration." He added that "the function of the Princes in the remainder matches exactly with his."26 The most accomplished presentation of action through a restricted point of view occurred in The Ambassadors through the consciousness of Lambert Strether. James "rejoiced in the promise of a hero so mature... a man of imagination."27 William James criticized Henry for using this particular technique, echoing the sentiments of other reviewers:

You've reversed every traditional canon of story telling (especially the fundamental one of telling the story, which you carefully avoid)... which I can't help thinking perverse, but in which you nevertheless succeed... It's very distingué in its way, there are touches unique and imitable, but it's a 'run' way... 28

Hartman complained that the "characters in The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl seem isolated in a Crookes tube for our inspection."29

Another distinctive element of James's later work was the abstract quality of his imagery. He wrote that the "essence of any representational work is to

25Ibid., p. vi.
26Ibid., p. vii.
29Hartman, p. 190.
Mr. Whit with images. Several fine studies have been published commenting on this aspect of the later work of James. "Among the major works," according to Short, "The Golden Bowl and The Wings of the Dove are richest in imagery." He observed that the changes from the early to the later image-making in James represented "movement... toward a conceptualized observation, toward wit, implication, suggestion, and multi-dimensionality," and suggested further that the images, especially in The Golden Bowl, created meaning that grew with the action, and became the action. Gibson also made special note of the metaphors and imagery of the later work in their functioning to reveal action, while Sandeen remarked on the "sustained metaphor in the later novels." This "multi-dimensionality" and "conceptualized observation" led, of course, to difficulties in reading and interpretation.

However, the occasion of perhaps the most complaint against Henry James's later work is in the very structure of his sentences. His tendency to analyze, as previously mentioned by Harvitt, and to probe, as described by James himself, "to play the small handful of values really for all they were worth--and to work my... particular degree of pressure on the spring of interest," was undoubtedly one cause for the "somewhat labyrinthine construction of

34Preface, The Golden Bowl, XXII, viii.
Mr. James's later sentences.35 James wished to express every facet, every
arch-refinement, every minute particle of a situation and his sentences re-
fect this ponderous burden. One commentator lamented the "adverbs piling
up."36 William considered that Henry was merely being ostentatious: "This
recent manner of yours of using such an excessively small bit of matter, and
that so fanciful to show a great deal of art by, seems to be full of
peril. . . ."37 McIntyre did not think highly of James for having "so much
talk about so little" and using language that was, at times, "so hesitating
and elusive. . . . Of two forms possible, he deliberately chooses the less
natural and the more awkward. . . ."38 It cannot be denied that the later
James did present some challenge to the reader's powers of attention and con-
centration with such sentences as these, first from The Wings of the Dove:

It might, the monster, Kate conceded, loom large for
those born amid forms less developed and therefore
no doubt less amusing; it might on some sides be a
strange and dreadful monster, calculated to devour
the unwary, to abase the proud, to scandalize the
good; but if one had to live with it one must, not
to be for ever sitting up, learn how; which was
virtually in short tonight that the handsome girl
showed herself as teaching.39

Or from The Ambassadors:

He might have been, by his attitude, in for some-
thing of a march so broad that the want of ceremony
with which he had just been used could fall into its
place as but a mirror incident of the procession.40

36Clara McIntyre, "The Later Hammer of Henry James," MLA, XXVII
(September, 1912), p. 366.
37William James, cited in The James Family, p. 337.
38McIntyre, p. 369.
39XIX, 277.
40XXI, 215.
Her opportunity had accordingly, after a few minutes
of Mrs. Assingham's almost imprudently interested
expression of face, positively acquired such a price
for her that she may for ourselves, while the inten-
sity lasted, rather resemble a person holding out a
small mirror at arm's length and consulting it with
a special turn of the head.\textsuperscript{11}

James "thinned a passage," according to McIntyre, by packing in "more ex-
pression rather than more thought,"\textsuperscript{12} with the result that he became "vague."

As early as 1907, an article in The Nation noted a certain "proverbial
obscenity" in James.\textsuperscript{13} A review in 1954 agreed that it is "commonly accepted"
that it is an "exacting task to read the later work" of Henry James.\textsuperscript{14} "But
since his later, his preponderant and what we must consider his true, manner
has been established," wrote Brownell in 1909, "no one needs to be reminded
that obscurity has been one of his main traits."\textsuperscript{15}

Besides these technical preoccupations, which Leavis ascribed to James's
being "too much a professional novelist—that is, he did not live enough—"\textsuperscript{16}
another hallmark of James's later fiction was his concern with "speculation...
shades of feelings... journeying through psychology"\textsuperscript{17} of his characters in

\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{11}] XXIII, 255.
\item[\textsuperscript{12}] McIntyre, p. 368.
\item[\textsuperscript{13}] The Nation, LXXXV (October 17, 1907), p. 313.
\item[\textsuperscript{14}] Dorothea Krock, "The Method of the Later Works of Henry James," London
\item[\textsuperscript{15}] C. Brownell, American Prose Masters (New York, 1909), p. 397.
\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Leavis, p. 163.
\item[\textsuperscript{17}] Heidi Specker, "The Change in Emphasis in the Criticism of Henry James,"
\end{enumerate}
their story situations. He expressed barely perceptible shifts in mood, faint suggestions of feeling. James penetrated far into the recesses of the minds of his rather urbane, courteous, cultivated characters, purposely, in order to seek and to find and to express their more involved, sensitive, perhaps less overt, deliberations. The question arose regarding the "reality" of James's efforts here. Many deny that James's characters were true or "lifelike." Van Wyck Brooks was of the opinion that while James himself emerged as an "impassioned geometer," his people "grew dimmer and dimmer. . . . The James of these later books is reduced to presenting them in the act of discovering one another. . . . Reading ∫his work∫ was like watching Henry James watching through a knot hole somebody who was watching someone else through a knot hole.48 According to Edith Wharton, it was James's "experiments" with characters and situations that quenched the "spontaneity" of his fiction. "His latest novels," she wrote, "for all their profound and moral beauty, seemed to me more and more lacking in atmosphere, more and more severed from the thick, nourishing human air in which we all live and move.49 William James again wrote to Henry upon the publication of The Golden Bowl:

"It put me, as most of your recent long stories have put me, in a very puzzled state of mind. . . .and the method of narration by interminable elaboration of suggestive reference. . . . goes again ∫sic∫ the grain of all my impulses in writing." Finally William pleaded:

Why won't you, just to please Brother, sit down and write a new book with no twilight or rustiness in the plot, with great vigor and decisiveness in the

49 Wharton, p. 190.
Curiosity provokes the question: What prompted these harshly received changes in the style of James? What spark engendered the development of his theories and techniques to such demanding extremes? William declared that "the worst of it is that I don't know whether it's fatal and inevitable with you, or deliberate and possible to put off and on." Have the critics of Henry James endeavored to determine why James employed his particular later style, for he did so consciously, being one of the most artistically conscious of all writers? Is it possible to find an answer to the problem of the difficulty of the theories and techniques of James's later work? What answer is there to the "arch-refinements," the "super-subtleties"—the imagery, the subject matter, the point of view, the diction, the sentence complexities, the "obscurity"?

Observers such as Leavis, McIntyre, or Haish explained the later development of James in terms of deracination. Many others simply looked at the final period with no concern for its relations to any other period. They have failed to look at the years intervening between the early and later periods. Of course, many others such as Brooks, Brownell, or Lubbock have purposely dismissed the intervening years from 1890-1900 as of no consequence, purposely neglecting them as the unproductive years not requiring serious consideration

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50 William James, cited in The James Family, p. 312.
51 Ibid., p. 338.
in the course of Henry James's true career as an artist. They were, indeed, a disruptive span of years, bordered on either side by a novel of major length (The Tragic Muse in 1890—the "last one" as James avowed—and The Sacred Fount in 1901), but containing no comparable work within the ten-year span. There were also other features or activities which set this period apart and which presented it as an unavoidable demarcation between an early and a late period. These other distinguishing activities included fuller and more informative entries in his notebooks; more personally revealing letters, especially those to his brother William; an emphasized, concentrated effort at writing plays for the theatre; the publication of several of what James described then as nouvelles; and short stories with specialized themes.

Taken together, these activities represented a period like no other in the James career. It was a time of intense, unequaled crisis; revealing moments of crisis; and since this period did present distinguishing activities and events in the life of Henry James, perhaps it might serve as a transitional phase between the "first" and the "last," and in that service might very well shed some light on the possible causes of the development of the later work of Henry James.
CHAPTER II

THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE: JAMES'S SELFHOOD IN THE ROLE OF AN ARTIST

William Dean Howells wrote in 1903:

For my own part I take it that a master of Mr. James's quality does not set out with a design whose significance is not clear to himself, and if others do not make it clear to themselves, I suspect them rather than him of the fault. . . . I do not believe he is going to play me the shabby trick of abandoning me in the dark. . . .

And perhaps we can "make. . . clear" for ourselves the later literary efforts of Henry James from the activities and events of the ten years from 1890 to 1900, the "transitional" or middle period of his career. This was the period of the plays, the short stories, the dramatic nouvelles, the notebooks and letters, and the move to Rye from London. The first five years were mainly occupied with play writing, which venture Henry James had long considered and desired. As early as 1881, he confided in his notebooks:

My mind is full of plans, of ambitions, they crowd upon me for these are the productive years of life. I have taken aboard by this time a tremendous quantity of material; I really have never taken stock of my cargo. After long years of waiting, of obstructions, I find myself able to put into execution the most cherished of all my projects—that of beginning to work for the stage [italics mine]. It was one of my earliest—I had it from the first. None has given me brighter hopes, none has given me sweeter emotions. It is strange, nevertheless, that I should never have

---

1 Howells, p. 16.
done anything—and to a certain extent ominous. . . .
I ache with longing to settle down at last to a sus-
tained attempt in this direction. . . . Looked at as.
I looked at it; the drama is the ripost of all arts,
the one to which one must bring most of the acquired
as well as most of the natural, and that while I was
waiting I was studying the art, and clearing off my
field. 2

He did not, however, "settle down. . . to a sustained attempt in this direc-
tion" until some ten years later. Previous to the middle period, James was
beginning to feel the indifference of the public to his work, as mentioned
above; this affected him greatly, and, according to Brooks, influenced his
decision finally to work for the stage:

The sense of solitude that began to weigh upon him
was perhaps more of temperament than of fact. . . .
As he looked forward, he saw the undoubted decline
of his popularity carrying him further and further
away from recognition and its rewards. . . . All
would be righted, he felt, by the successful con-
quest of the theatre; there lay the way, not only
to solid gains, but to the reassurance of vague,
less formulated anxieties. 3

Unfortunately, James was not reassured for he made no "successful conquest
of the theatre"; rather, the results fulfilled the "ominous" feelings which
he had previously expressed. The adaptation of The American for the stage
was moderately successful, but his original play, Guy Domville, met with
failure and rejection. Four comedies, the two series of Theatricals, were
written during this period but never reached the stage; the one-act play
Summertown was converted into the short story "The Covering End"; a scenario
was converted into the novel The Other House. Thus remains the total result

2 Notebooks, p. 37.
3 Brooks, p. 114.
of Henry James's "most cherished... project" during the 1890s.\(^4\)


The "six immortal short"\(^5\) novels which James projected in 1899 actually totaled three: The Spoils of Poynton, that Inside Know, both in 1897, and The Ashward Age, in 1899, which ended this phase of his career.

Several further items enter into the consideration of James's middle or transitional period: his notebooks and his letters. James wrote in his notebooks most frequently in the mid-eighteen nineties, which means that they throw most light on his fiction at the period when he was just finishing his experiment of writing plays, and was looking for fresh horizons.\(^6\) And in James's letters survives a great part of his life within—a "cycle of vivid and incessant adventure,"\(^7\) especially during the crises of the middle period. "James's letters," wrote Zabel, "are the documents of a mind and personality in a continuous process of realization."\(^8\)

\(^4\) Leon Edel has a detailed study of the entire theatrical episode in his Los Anes Dramatiques, Paris, 1933.
\(^5\) Letters, I, 231.
\(^6\) Matthiessen, ed. Notebooks, p. xvii.
\(^7\) Lubbock, ed. Letters, p. xiv.
Thus we approach this middle or transitional period through the activities outlined above. The concept of the artist held by Henry James, as we find it expressed in his writings of this period, was bound by truth and reality on one side and by perfection on the other, with the aim of communicating these to his public, despite their inability to grasp them or their indifferent acceptance of them. There is a group of "artist" stories within the middle period that illustrate the ideas associated with the development of what may rightly be termed James's selfhood in the role of an artist.

Between the earlier characters in James's work who master life by submitting to its conditions and the later persons who master what lies under its conditions by achieving a conviction of self [italics mine]. . . comes the "race of the artists." 9

In this group of stories we know James was expressing his own convictions about the selfhood—emerging or achieved—of these artists because he confessed that the material for the stories was "drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's mind." 10 And once discovered, this artistic—this literary—self-realization demanded loyalty from the artist, for in it he was being true to life: "Literature was a game of skill, and skill meant courage, and courage meant honor, and honor meant passion, meant life." 11 Repeated evidence of Henry James's "honor" and "courage"—his complete dedication to truth—is given in the writings of the middle period. From a notebook entry in 1891, we read that he was driven to discover the reality of

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10Preface, XV, ix.

11"The Figure in the Carpet," XV, 250.
life—all of life, any of life:

Ah, the terrible law of the artist—the law of fructification, of fertilisation, the law by which everything is grist to his mill—the law, in short, of the acceptance of all experience, of all suffering, of all life, of all suggestion and sensation and illumination. 12

James's "mill" could take any incident, any relationship and perceive the grain of meaningfulness. Often in the notebooks of this period, he recalled incidents which provided ideas for stories:

Frankly, however, is this contrast enough of a story by itself? It seems to me Yes—for it's an IDEA—13

Last night as I worried through some wakeful hours I seemed to myself to catch hold of the tail of an idea that may serve as the subject of the little tale. 14

It occurs to me that there may also be a situation, a small drama, in the conception. . . . 15

As I rolled along there came to me, I know not why, the idea of the possible little drama residing in the existence of a peculiar and intense, interesting affection between a brother and a sister. 16

. . . and the wasting of life is the implication of death. There may be the germ of a situation in this. . . . 17

  12 Notebooks, p. 111.
  13 Ibid., p. 101, 1891.
  14 Ibid., p. 113, 1894.
  15 Ibid., p. 171, 1895.
  16 Ibid., p. 181, 1895.
  17 Ibid., p. 183, 1895.
Another little possibility dances before me—I only just catch the tip of its tail—in the fancy of something suggested by Miss Terry's happening to have said. . . . 18

The idea, for a scrap of a tale, on a scrap of a fantasy, of two persons who have constantly heard of each other, constantly been near each other, constantly missed each other. 19

Even in some of the last entries of this period, James continued to note provocative incidents, such as, "Two or three small things have lately struck me as possibilities for a tale," 20 which made it clear how committed James was to the truth of life in all its aspects and to the artistic stimulation of that truth.

I have my head, thank God, full of visions. One has never too many—one has never enough. 21

Immediately, of course—as everything, thank God, does—it suggests a little situation. 22

James, indeed, had a fertile mind. Not only was he sensitive to the significance in many little things, not only did he probe the deepest tissues of each germ of an idea, but he constantly was aware of all sides of a situation—the lateral development of his idea. "I confess," James noted, "that as I roughly write it out, this way, there seems to me to be more in it—in fact, its possibilities open out." 23 In his dedication to truth, James felt that

18 Ibid., p. 184, 1895.
19 Ibid., p. 231, 1895.
20 Ibid., p. 302, 1900.
21 Ibid., p. 181, 1895.
22 Ibid., p. 226, 1905.
23 Ibid., p. 116.
he must examine every aspect, every shadow, every nuance of an action or situation. Writing in a letter in 1898, he remarked of What Maisie Knew: "It is a volume, the merit of which is that the subject—and there is a subject—is, I think, exhaustively treated." In the preface to this work he used the phrase "the law of entire expression" which perhaps accounted for the "looming large" of some of his work:

I recognize again, another instance of the growth of the "great oak" from the little acorn; since What Maisie Knew is at least a tree that spreads beyond any provision its small germ might on a first handling have appeared likely to make for it.

He seemed compelled to render the whole and entire meaning—the whole and entire truth—of any idea. James was "overmastered by the need to speak the truth and the whole truth," agreed Wharton, "about everything connected with the art which was sacred to him." "Success," observed a character in "The Next Time" (the story of an "exquisite failure" who couldn't write poorly), is achieved by the "man of his craft...when of a beautiful subject his expression was complete." Referring to "The Coxon Fund!" in his notebooks, James recognized "that the theme is far too fine and brave to be spoiled by mutilation—compression into...20,000 words." We can see, then, how James's later works displayed such length, in that they are witness to his

24Letters, I, 293.
26Id., p. v.
27Marton, p. 180.
28XV, 183.
29Notebooks, p. 151.
unrelenting desire to express the entire truth, no matter to what lengths it carried him. He explained in the preface to The Awkward Age that this work placed itself for me thus in a group of small productions exhibiting this perversity, representations of conceived cases, in which my process has been to pump the vast gaspingly dry, dry not only of superfluous moisture, but absolutely (for I have encountered the charge) of breathable air.

In truth, James did encounter the charge of excessive length from his public and his publishers; but we should see from these developments in the transitional period why James persisted in the full development of each story: he was remaining faithful to the truth of the story. He explained while recalling the process of writing The Spoils of Poynton that this was the duty of the artist: "There can be for him, evidently, only one logic... there can be for him one truth and one direction—the quarter in which his subject most completely expressed itself." Indeed, the later James could never leave a sight or sound of any kind until it had been looked at and listened to with an absorbed attention, pondered in thought, and linked with its associations. Not long before his death, James confessed that he found himself too much exhausted for the "wear and tear of discrimination." Those who criticized James's work for lacking life or feeling have perhaps failed to stop and consider to what depths James did penetrate and the style required for this penetration. The most intense heat sometimes seems cold on first contact.

30 Preface, The Awkward Age, IX, xxi.
The picture of the exposed and entangled state is what is required, and there are certainly plenty of grounds for keeping down the complexities of a picture. A picture it still has to be, however, and by that condition has to deal effectually with its subject, so that the simple device of more and more keeping it down may well not see us quite to our end or even quite to our middle.33

It is not the easily discerned, the overt, the brilliant flash of movement and emotion that James pictured; but it is the inner quality or reality of experience, the sensitive, palpable essence of living itself.

The writings of the middle period also gave repeated evidence of Henry James's concept of the artist in his pursuit of perfection—the artist's "courage" to express his truth in the finest possible manner. "Ah, perfection, perfection—how one ought to go in for it!" is the advice given to Paul Overt, the young writer in "The Lesson of the Masjar."34 James revealed in the letters and notebooks of this period that he was "going in for" perfection. In 1895 he proposed to Howells "to do far better work than I have ever done. I have, potentially, improved immensely and am bursting with ideas and subjects."35 Previously, in 1892, Henry had written to his brother William:

As for the form itself [the play], its honor and inspiration are...its difficulty. If it were easy to write a good play, I couldn't and wouldn't think of it; but it is in fact damnably hard...and that constitutes a solid respectability—guarantees one's intellectual self-respect.36

33Preface, The Princess Casamassima, V, x.
34Ivy, 53.
35Letters, I, 231.
36Ibid., p. 179.
And in 1893 he referred again to playwriting as a challenge to be met: ". . . a trade supremely dangerous and heroically difficult—that credit at least belongs to it." 37 James took delight in subjecting his artistry to the utmost demands of invention and technique; he sought challenges more and more: "To work successfully beneath a few, grave rigid laws is always a strong man’s highest ideal of success." 38 He wished to sharpen and refine his expression to its keenest edge. The great thing, said Henry St. George in "The Lesson of the Master," was "the sense of having done the best—the sense which is the real life of the artist and the absence of which is his death, of having drawn from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it, of having played it as it should be played." 39 Constant effort was expended by James on improving his art—his "real life"; constant concern was expressed during this middle period with the further refinement of his method, with his subject matter, and with his approach to it—of drawing "from his intellectual instrument the finest music that nature had hidden in it." As he grew older, only the "most restrictive possible forms" could stamp his vision of life as recognizable truth and transform the fine conscience of his imagination into recognizable art. 40 James could write in 1907, "I have ever failed to see how a coherent picture of anything is pro-

37 Ibid., p. 206.

38 Henry James, "Review of Tennyson's Queen Mab," cited by Leon Edel, ed. Complete Plays, p. 34.

39 XV, 69.

ducible save by a complex of fine measurements. Blackmur agreed that Henry James "wanted to represent that truth about the important aspect of life as it was experienced" with the greatest possible lucidity, beauty, and fineness, not abstractly or in mere statement, but vividly, imposing on it the form of the imagination, the acutest relevant sensibility which felt it. From James's notebooks of the middle or transitional period we see that he was determined

to keep at it--to strive toward the perfect, the ripe, the only best; to go on, by one's clear light, with patience, courage and continuity, to live with the high vision and effort to justify one's self--and oh, so greatly—all in time.

And "all in time" James did justify himself. He did achieve another of the aspects of selfhood in the role of an artist: he was perfecting his artistry. James was criticized for becoming too theoretical in his later work. However, it was only that he was continually developing more exacting, well-defined principles of his art of fiction. He developed the novel to a point which no one else had attained, simply because he considered that an artist ought "to go in for," ought to be "enamoured of" perfection. One must learn to appreciate the perfection of design and expression ultimately achieved by James the "artist enamoured of perfection, ridden by his ideas, or paying for his sincerity," as he, in turn, described the artists in his stories.

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1 Preface, The Ambassadors, XXI, xv.
3 Notebooks, p. 111.
4 Preface, XV, viii.
Henry James was dedicated to truth and enamoured of perfection. What
of the accusation that he was "too much a professional novelist," that he
did not live enough, that he was too detached, too withdrawn from the current
of life to know or express real feelings or real people? Now, then, could
he have fulfilled his pursuit of truth and perfection in his work? His
brother William specifically ascribed James's failure as a dramatist to his
having "been weaned" from the "vital facts of human character...for fifteen
years at least."\(^4^5\)

However, from the writings and events of the middle period, we see that
James avowedly and purposely removed himself from the hubbub of worldly affairs
in order to observe them more accurately, to see the truth and reality of
them more perfectly. He said he lived "as an artist...as one who has the
passion of observation and whose business is the study of human life."\(^4^6\) It
was away from the world and with his art that he was refreshed:

\[\ldots\text{discouragements and lapses, depressions and darkness come to one only as one stands without—I mean the}^{4^7}\]
\[\ldots\text{luminous paradise of art. As soon as I re-enter it—cross the lovely threshold—stand in the high chamber,}^{4^7}\]
\[\ldots\text{and the gardens divine—the whole realm widens out again before me and around me—the air of life fills my lungs—}^{4^7}\]
\[\ldots\text{the light of achievement flushes over all the place, and I believe, I see, I do.}^{4^7}\]

For James truth was something to be absorbed. Matthiessen wrote, "His novels
are the great monument in American fiction to the skills of detachment and

\(^{4^5}\text{William James, cited in The James Family, p. 377.}\)

\(^{4^6}\text{Henry James, cited in The James Family, p. 296.}\)

\(^{4^7}\text{Henry James, Notebooks, p. 111.}\)
What James remarked of the writer Paul Overt in "The Lesson of the Master" can, as well, be remarked of James: "Nature had dedicated him to intellectual, not to personal passion." In another section of this "artist story," James expressed the reason for an artist's "detachment," which reason also accounted for the theme of renunciation appearing in many of his stories and novels: the artist can produce his effect only by giving up personal happiness. James sought this detachment, then, to better fulfill his life as an artist; it was self-imposed. To quote from Matthew Arnold's "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obernam':"

He who hath watch'd, not shared, the strife,
Knows how the day hath gone,
He only lives with the world's life
Who hath renounced his own.

It is not always easy for an artist to remove himself from the company of society—to become detached. All of James's friends, Lubbock commented, must have felt that at heart he lived in solitude and that few were ever admitted into the inner shrine—there it was he lived most intensely and serenely—of his labors. James himself admitted to Howells in 1893:

I am so utterly lonely here—on the "literary plains"—that it is the strangest as well as the sweetest sensation to be conscious in the boundless void—the dim desert sands—of any human approach at all or any kindly speech.

The artist must, in the act of creating, detach himself from life in order to

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189. xv, 96.
51Letters, I, 190.
see it clearly and wholly and to give his work the stamp of individuality. It was certainly during the transitional years of his career that Henry James learned to make the most of his observations as well as to observe better, to achieve concentration and detachment better, and, by so doing, took another step toward the achievement of selfhood in the role of an artist. And that is perhaps the reason for the stress on many seemingly "little" things in the later work of Henry James; these things were important to him because he had observed the deeper significance of them and strove to express it. James could write in 1907, "Without intensity, where is vividness, and without vividness, where is presentability?" 52

Henry James emphatically approached his selfhood as an artist in a dedication to truth, in pursuit of perfection, and in a self-imposed detachment. Is not the full role of the artist, however, to write to be read? He seeks acceptance of what he writes. This question constituted a crisis during these middle years of James's career. Previous to this period, with the indifferent reception given to his two novels The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima, James became concerned with "selling." When The Tragic Muse was published in 1890, he grew more sensitive about his acceptance, though at the time he insisted to William:

I have no illusions of any kind about the book, and least of all about its circulation and "popularity." From these things I am quite divorced. ... One always has "public" enough if one has an audible vibration—even if it should only come from one's self. I shall never make a fortune—nor anything like it; but—I know what I shall do, and it won't be bad. 53

52 Preface, The Princess Casamassima, V, xi.
53 Letters, I, 170.
However, early in 1891, after the opening of his play The American, James wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson that

simplifying and chastening necessity has laid its brutal hand on me and I have had to try to make somehow or other the money I don't make by literature. My books don't sell and it looks as if my plays might. 54

He did wish to find acceptance as any other artist might (though he many times cloaked the wish with references to economic necessity 55), even perhaps as Raw Limbert in "The Next Time" expressed the wish: "I want to sell... I haven't been obvious—I must be obvious. I haven't been popular—I must be popular." 56 James once said to W. W. Jacobs, "You are popular. Your work is appreciated. . . I should so much have loved to be popular." 57 Disappointingly enough, though, Limbert couldn't produce a work that sold, and his friends remarked: "he got again the irrepressible work of art, but what did he get, poor man, who wanted something so different?" 58 Likewise, James failed to get that "something" he wanted; his plays failed to capture the public fancy. He wrote to William:

The little play Guy Domville which I strove to make as broad, as simple, as clear, as British in a

54Ibid., p. 176.

55Graham Greene agreed that James "would not have altered a sentence of a novel or story for the sake of popularity or monetary reward, but the craving was there, disguised by references to financial problems that did not really exist" in Lost Childhood and Other Essays (New York, 1952), p. 45.

56XV, 188.

57Henry James, cited in Newell-Smith, ed. The Lesson of the Master, p.135.

word, as possible, is over the head of the usual theatre-going London public. . . . The thing fills one with horror for the abysmal vulgarity and brutality of the theatre and its regular public.

. . . If the play has no life on the stage, I shall publish it; it's altogether the best thing I've done. 59

Meanwhile, James was also engaged in the writing of fiction. He had a "plan of writing some very short tales—things of from 7,000 to 10,000 words . . . the easiest length to 'place.' " 60

Thus I come back inveterately—or at any rate necessarily—to the little question of the really short thing: come back by economic necessity. 61

He was also concerned with the short fiction for other reasons:

I must absolutely not tie my hands with promised novels if I wish to keep them free for a genuine, sustained attack on the theatre. 62

He simply wished also to write a number of "fine, rare, strong, wise. . . perfect short things" 63 as mentioned above in discussing James's pursuit of perfection.

I must hammer away at the effort to do successfully and triumphantly a large number of very short things. 64

James had constant trouble, however, in keeping down the limit of his stories. "I have done my best," he noted in 1891, "for the. . . little subject, but it ["The Chaperone"] insists—it has insisted—on getting itself treated at

59 Letters, I, 228.
60 Notebooks, p. 102.
61 Ibid., p. 231.
62 Ibid., p. 44.
63 Ibid., p. 101.
64 Ibid., p. 105.
somewhat greater length than I intended."

And again he told himself: "Make it "The Real Thing" tremendously succinct... summarize intensely...."

But in how tremendously few words I must do it." He did persevere to "do it" but only in order to find publishers for his work—to find "acceptance."

And this was a constant concern with James in the first half of the middle period. He admitted to William that he wanted success on the stage:

I mean to wage this war ferociously for one year more—1894—and then (unless the victory and the spoils have by that time become more proportionate than hitherto to the humiliation and vulgarity and disgusts, all the dishonor and chronic insult incurred) to "chuck" the whole intolerable experiment ... But meanwhile I am working heroically, though it every month becomes more difficult to give time to things of which the pecuniary fruit is remote.... I have come to hate the whole theatrical subject."

It is important to clarify that James's personally confessed preference for the drama and for things dramatic is in no way contradictory to his expressed distaste for "the whole theatrical subject," for James held that the two were entirely separate:

The one [drama] is admirable in its interest and difficulty, the other [theatre] loathsome in its conditions. If the drama could only be theoretically or hypothetically acted, the fascination resident in its all but unconquerable form would be unimpaired, and one would be able to have the exquisite exercise without the horrid sacrifice.

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65 Tid., p. 103.

66 Tid., p. 104.

67 Letters, I, 189.

Though James had an instinctive leaning toward the dramatic, he was no playwright. Brooks stated that James was "naturally drawn to the theatre...of this we can be sure. We can only object that it would be rather singular for a born playwright to wait until he was nearly fifty before so much as attempting to write a play." Edel agreed, in his brilliant introductory chapter to The Complete Plays of Henry James, that if James "could have become a dramatist as he had become a man of letters, he would have long before turned to play-writing. As it was he found himself in a state of conflict that became increasingly acute with the passage of years." Is it any wonder, then, that such a writer—a writer who approached the theatre "with faltering footsteps...who wanted its success and rewards and yet was afraid to chance its pitfalls"—should have met with disappointment and failure?

James's efforts to find acceptance for his work reached a climax midway through the middle period. In January of 1895 the production of James's original play, Guy Domville, brought his active career in the theatre to a close. It also brought his anxious search for public acceptance to an end; and it brought his feelings of rejection to a crucial point. Henry himself described how "the delicate, picturesque, extremely human and extremely artistic little play was taken profanely by a brutal and ill-disposed gallery." Though James later admitted that his theatrical episode amounted to

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70 Brooks, p. 112.
71 Edel, p. 43.
72 Ibid.
73 Letters, 1, 227.
his "infinite little loss," he had the courage and fortitude to convert the
loss into an "almost infinite little gain."74 (The effect that this experience
as a professional dramatist had on the technical artistry of James will be
discussed later. Only the effect that this theatrical experiment had on the
artist himself is treated here.) Shortly after the "disastrous opening
night"75 of Guy Bonville, James simply noted: "I take up my own old pen again—
the pen of all my old unforgettable efforts and sacred struggles. To myself—
today—I need say no more."76 Instead of being crushed, James displayed a
confidence that can only be reckoned in terms of a completely emerged selfhood
as an artist: "Large and full and high the future still opens. It is now
indeed that I may do the work of my life. And I will. I have only to face
my problems. . . ."77 This is not to say, however, that James erased irrever-
cably from his memory the public rejection he suffered. Edith Wharton ven-
tured to say that James nursed a "life-long disappointment at his lack of
popular recognition." She analyzed the predicament even further:

I am not sure that Henry James had not secretly
dreamed of being a "best seller" in the days when
that old form of literary fame was at its height;
at any rate he certainly suffered all his life—
and more and more as time went on—from lack of
recognition among the very people who had most
warmly welcomed his early novels.78

74Notebooks, p. 198.
75Jubbock, ed. Letters, p. xvii.
76Notebooks, p. 179.
77Ibid.
78Wharton, p. 190.
True or not, as the full implications of Wharton’s opinion may be, we do have James himself acknowledging to W. E. Norris in 1896—one year after the fatal Gay Donville—that though he had experienced a “gain of private quiet,” he had “suffered acutely by my loss of public.” Nevertheless, James returned to his work, confident in the future—“large and full and high.” He returned to his work highly conscious also of the tremendous odds against his “acceptance.” He might have said, as the author Paraday in “The Death of the Idon” said, “No one has the faintest conception of what I am trying for.”

Yet return he did, though not immediately, to his major work—the “work of my life.” Rather he continued with his short stories and worked with his “beautiful and blest” 31 nouvelles, although they, too, met with rejection. James quoted his publisher as saying: “I’m sorry to say the book The Awkward Age has done nothing to speak of; I’ve never in all my experience seen one treated with more general and complete disrespect.” In the short stories it is interesting to discover almost exact parallels and predictions of the James “to come.” In “The Next Time,” after attempting and failing to capture the public fancy, the author Ray Limbert

had come back at the last, as people so often do, to one of the moods, the sincerities of his prime. Was he really, with a blurred sense of the urgent, doing something now only for himself? Italicize nine

He had merely waked up one morning again in the country of the blue and had stayed there with a good conscience and a great idea. 83

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80 XV, 122.
81 Preface, XX, viii.
82 Preface, The Awkward Age, IX, xvii.
83 XV, 216.
In another story, an admirer—disdaining the "voice" of popularity as something smacking of mediocrity—confided to the writer Neil Parady, "Thank God, too, you’re not...successful." If you weren’t a failure, what would be the use of trying? So, too, James as a "failure" had to find himself solely in himself. We read that Ray Limbert, after an "upheaval," decided to move to a country house—"as good a place as any to play his new game. He had found a quieter corner than any corner of the great world." In 1897, James decided likewise to move to Rye and signed a lease for Lamb House. London had given him all it could, and his great desire was for peace and quiet and freedom from interruption. One commentator concluded that James used the "turned back of the artist to symbolize the artist in triumph." He was to enter another span of life—a "timeless and transcendent realm of a second consciousness"—in which to produce, as the writer in "The Middle Years" (1893) wished to produce, "a certain splendid 'last manner,' the very citadel, as it would prove, of his reputation, the stronghold into which his real treasure would be gathered." Again in another of the artist stories, the writer was described: "You think of more and more all the while... At a time when so many people are spent, you come into your second wind." James wrote more prophetically than, perhaps, he realized. For we know that James, too, came

81 "The Death of the Lion," XV, 108.
83 Inbock, ed. Letters I, 150.
85 Notebooks, p. 122.
86 "The Death of the Lion," XV, 76.
into a second wind and reached a later manner, upon which his final reputation may very well rest. So James, in a sense, became entirely withdrawn, because, as he wrote, he felt that artists "are doomed either because they cannot meet the conditions of life imposed upon them by society or because society will have none of them no matter how hard they try." 90 And for James it was both. He wrote in 1907: "I am well aware ninety-nine readers have no use whatsoever for... those intimate appreciations." 91 And he could speak of the happiness of learning to ignore the imperceptive readers as a "peace worth having lived long and wearily to have attained." 92 He was once recorded giving this advice to a young writer, Logan Pearsall-Smith: "There is one word—let me impress upon you—which you must inscribe on your banner and that,' he added after an impressive pause, 'that word is Loneliness." 93

During the transitional activities and events of the middle years, Henry James had learned that "the writer does not fit into society as a necessary cog. The artist is always a special case. . .[and] must make his own place." 94 This "place" for Henry James was the actual achievement of confidence in his role as an artist—the achievement of selfhood. He did "justify" himself "Oh, so greatly—all in time." He attained a full view of his role as an artist, dedicated to truth, despite criticisms of length and obscurity; pursuing perfection, despite depreciation and misunderstanding of his high

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90 "The Lesson of the Master," XV, 108.
91 Preface, The American, II, xv.
92 Letters, I I, 243.
93 Howell-Smith, ed. The Lesson of the Master, p. 126.
94 Stevenson, p. 31.
aims; sacrificing his own "personal" happiness in his detachment and exacting
observation; and finally, making a decisive withdrawal from any further effort
"to take the measure of the huge, flat foot of the public."95 Thereafter, he
proceeded calmly but surely, self-possessed, and loyal to the new found
realization that he must do what he must do. At the close of this transi-
tional phase, Henry James inscribed in his notebook:

How, through all the hesitation and conflicts and
worries, the thing, the desire to get back to the
big (scene, constructive, 'architectural effects')
seizes me and carries me off my feet. . . . Ah once
more to let myself go! The very thought of it soothes
and sustains, lays a divine hand on my nerves, and
lights, so beneficently, my uncertainties and obscu-
rities. Begin it—and it will grow.96

Henry James soon began it. And it did grow. "In his new solitude," wrote
Tharton, "he had come to grips with his genius."97 As an artist, he emerged
from the middle period, so well exemplifying the most recurrent theme in his
works—that of inner victory in the face of outer defeat.98

95 Notebooks, p. 180.
96 Ibid., p. 269.
97 Tharton, p. 174.
CHAPTER III

THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE: JAMES'S SELFHOOD IN HIS ARTISTRY

Henry James not only came to the realization of his ideas as an artist during the transitional years of his middle period, as previously discussed, but he also was working out these ideas through his artistry. The dominant note in the technical score of James's work at this time was that of structure. We find the note sounded in his plays, short stories, and nouvelles; and it was further reiterated or confirmed in his notebooks and letters. This growing concern for the formation, arrangement, and articulation of the elements of his art found either nurture or expression in the writings and activities of the 1890's. There was, of course, a kindred relationship between the technical development to be discussed here and the advancement in theories or ideas discussed in the last chapter. It is obvious that James's concern for truth and perfection naturally influenced the techniques he finally came to use, or that his maturing powers of observation and detachment disposed him towards an equally refined idiom, or that his triumph over public indifference left him free to pursue his techniques to their furthest reaches, unfettered by compliance with others' dictates. As Leavis wrote, "James's technical preoccupations, the development of his style and method, are obviously bound up with his essential genius."¹ We are separating them

¹Leavis, p. 158.
only for the purpose of close, clearer analysis in establishing their own, quite distinct relationships to the activities of the middle period.

Technically speaking, then, James's expanding awareness of the design and structure of his work was paramount during the transitional phase. This was not a sudden development, for James had always been sensitive to the order in art—"being all discrimination and selection," as opposed to life's "being all inclusion and confusion." But he expressed much more concern with it during these years; and he experimented more. In a notebook entry of 1895, concerning his project for The Spoils of Poynton (1896), James concluded:

What I have gathered from it. 

On yes—the weary, woeful time has done something for me, has had in the depths of all its wasted piety and passion, an intense little lesson and direction.

Referring to The Awkward Age (1899), a transitional experiment with his ideas of rigidly-designed structure, James wrote:

I was thus to have here an envious glimpse, in carrying my design through, of that artistic rage and that artistic felicity, which I have ever supposed to be intensest and highest, the confidence of the dramatist strong in the sense of his postulate. The dramatist has verily to build, is committed to architecture, to construction at any cost, to driving deep his vertical supports and laying across and firmly fixing his horizontal.

It is readily apparent that his playwriting experience affected James's

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²Preface, X, v.

³Notebooks, p. 208.

⁴Preface, IX, xvii.
technical development, even to the particular terminology he employed in referring to his fiction. However, the mistake of proposing this experience as the only important technical influence of the period should not be made. Each of the other activities also gave its "little lesson and direction" to the "acute constructional, endless expressional question," as James termed it. Some of his contemporaries were not wholly sympathetic with this new emphasis on structure or form, as, for instance, Edith Wharton:

Though I greatly admired some of the principles he had formulated, such as that of letting the tale, as it unfolded, be seen through the mind most capable of reading to its periphery, I think it was paying too dear even for such a principle to subordinate to it the irregular and irrelevant movements of life.6

However, the emerging selfhood of Henry James as an artist supported his efforts to follow his technical dictates. In 1900 he wrote to an aspiring writer that a book must have "a little line—bony structure and palpable, as it were, tense cord—" on which "to string the pearls of detail..."7

James became conscious of the "architecture" or "construction" of his work during the middle period through such specialized techniques as the "single situation," the scenic presentation, emphasis on dialogue, reduced explanation and descriptions ("no going behind"), and the restrictive point of view. These, in turn, affected the presentation of James's characters, his "economy," his sentence structure, and his imagery.

As previously noted, James showed repeated emphasis on the "idea" in the notebooks of this period. All his stories are conceived as an "idea." 8

5Preface, XI, xi.
6Wharton, p. 190.
7Letters, I, 347.
Spoils of Poynton," James wrote, "rests on an idea—and it's only the idea that can give me the situation." And it was upon the situation, or from the situation, that James created his stories. The situation was his "germ," his subject. Moreover, he believed in the "necessary smallness, necessary singleness of the subject." 

The germ, wherever gathered, has ever been for me the germ of a "story." And most of the stories straining to shape under my hand have sprung from a single small seed. ... 

This transitional phase stands as a testimony to his constant effort to do the simple, short thing. He felt economic pressures to produce saleable short works, on the one hand, which certainly could not have contained more than single situations—or even more than single incidents; while, on the other hand, he also wanted to write short stories if only to do something "perfect" in this form. Therefore, he was trained in seeking simple, "single situations" from these pressures.

I must try it, I say, on the basis of rigid limitation of subject. That is, I must take, and take only, the single incident. I know what I mean by the single incident. "The Real Thing," "The Middle Years," "Brooke-Smith," even "The Private Life," and "Owen Wingrave," are what I call single incidents. ... Try to make use, for the brief treatment, of nothing, absolutely nothing, that isn't ONE, as it were—that doesn't begin and end in its little self.

Other ideas also gave rise to fictions that grew somewhat longer than James's

8 Notebooks, p. 299.
9 Ibid., p. 211.
11 Notebooks, p. 212.
"short" stories, but were, nevertheless, derived from single situations: the nouvelles of the middle period. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, there was "one thing in it... and one thing only," James wrote. He described his first meeting with the "idea" for *The Spoils*: it took "but ten words... I instantly became aware with my 'sense for the subject,' of the prick of inoculation; the whole of the virus, as I have called it, being infused by that single touch." There is also a singleness in the situation of *The Awkward Age*, conceived as a "scant... germ." A "quite charmingly thin" work was originally planned, under this title, from the "little idea," but James confessed that some of his short subjects "had underhandedly plotted to be long," including *What Maisie Knew*, another "instance of the growth of the 'great oak' from the little acorn; since [it]... spreads beyond any provision its small germ... might have appeared to make for it." James's strong preference for the single situation somehow caused this growth of his nouvelles: "In this particular thing [*The Spoils of Poynton*] the very simplicity of my action forces me, I feel, to get everything out of it that it can give—as the real way, and the best way, to be interesting."

This concern for a single or restricted approach was also fostered by his work in the theatre, where the natural discipline of the form allowed no

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12 Preface, X, ix.
13 Ibid., vii.
14 Preface, IX, vi.
15 Ibid., vii.
17 Henry James, cited in *Notebooks*, p. 251.
more. He tried to make his plays "as broad, as simple, as clear...as possible."

The continued pressure to use, and to emphasize, the simple, single situations during this period resulted in a minimum of actual subject matter. This helps to explain why we find very little "plot" in his later works. Even *The Golden Bowl*, conceived early in the transitional period, started as a single situation. "I see a little tale," wrote James, "...suggested by something lately told me about a simultaneous marriage in Paris...of a father and daughter—an only daughter..." And simply stated by James, "the subject is really the pathetic simplicity and good faith of the father and daughter in their abandonment." 18 There is a minimum of subject matter, very little plot in the accepted sense of action, but James did a great deal with the situation, enriching it with his most mature technical resources, as the completed novel attested.

One of these mature technical resources that James used in his later works, and one which we will now discuss as a contribution to the mastery of his artistry during the middle period, was that of "scenic presentation." The relation of this technique to James's theatrical experience immediately presents itself, and rightly so, for the actual practice of constructing successive scenes for his plays influenced his later scenic presentation of "ideas." But the fact must be kept in mind that James had, from his earliest days, been drawn to the drama and to the dramatic. His playwriting of the

18 *Notebooks*, p. 130.
1890's rather nurtured his propensity for drama—for scenic presentation. James told in A Small Boy and Others of his youthful experience in theatre-going and even in playwriting. "I was so often engaged at this point...in literary—or to be more precise in dramatic, accompanied by pictorial composition." And he recalled that "I cherished the 'scene'...." In the very first novel that he reviewed, when he was twenty-two, he had written that there is "no essential difference between the painting of a picture and the writing of a novel," and he had held up Balsac as a writer who "lays his stage, sets his scenes,..." Throughout his life, Henry James used the word "drama" to denote his "story" and was influenced by the dramatic form. It delighted and tormented him with its difficulty. "The artistic riddle of lucidity in extreme compression...appealed to him." James himself wrote: "As for the form itself, its honor and inspiration are...in its difficulty." It was during his own "smudged and orange peel" phase that the full rigors of the scenic discipline were impressed upon him.

...I feel at last as if I had found my real form, which I am capable of carrying far, and for which the pale little art of fiction, as I have practiced it, has been for me, but a limited and restricted substitute. The strange thing is that I always, universally, knew this was my more characteristic form, but was kept away from it by a half modest, half-exaggerated sense of the difficulty. ...

And that is one reason why after this transitional, experimental phase, his

20 Henry James, cited in Edel, ed., Complete Plays, p. 29.
22 Letters, I, 179.
23 Ibid.
fiction as he had "practiced it" became transformed. The "sacred mystery of structure" was revealed to him, as we noted previously, and he became, henceforth, intensely dedicated to the firm "architecture, to construction" in all his fiction. He became more reassuringly convinced of the truth and the beauty of this method after his experience in actual playwriting. For it was with the method that James felt he had triumphed in his plays, while it was with "choosing the subject" that he "stumbled." He tried to convey too much meaning and the stage could not carry the weight. The subjects that appealed to James were more properly fitted for the novel. But from his sense of painful defeats, James brought away a solid conviction:

Has a part of all this wasted passion and squandered time, . . . been simply the precious lesson, taught me in that roundabout and devious, that cruelly expensive way, of the singular value for a narrative plan too of the . . . divine principle of the Scenario? If that has been one side of the moral of the whole unspeakable, the whole tragic experience, I almost bless the pangs and the pains and the miseries of it. If there has lurked in the central core of it this exquisite truth— I almost hold my breath with suspense as I try to formulate it; so much, so much, hangs radiantly there as depending on it—this exquisite truth that what I call the divine principle in question is a key that, working in the same general way fits the complicated chambers of both the dramatic and narrative looks. 24

So James employed fiction to carry his subject matter but imposed on it the discipline of certain dramatic forms. He transferred his "scenes" to his fiction and experimented with the development of scenic presentation in the nouvelles of the transitional phase. In discussing The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew, James showed how his experience of writing for the theatre

24 Notebooks, p. 138.
had led him to think more and more interchangeably of narrative and dramatic structures. But especially did the dramatic structure dominate in The Awkward Age. Each of its twelve chapters was a "lamp" lighting a single "social occasion in the history and intercourse of the characters concerned, and would bring out to the full the latent colour of the scene in question." James further wrote:

I revelled in this notion of the Occasion as a thing by itself, really and completely a scenic thing. . . . The beauty of the conception was in this approximation of the respective divisions of my form to the successive Acts of a Play. . . .

Repliesing to a letter expressing bewilderment over this work, James explained:

Your bewilderment, . . . doesn't on the whole surprise me—for this ingenious volume appears to have excited little but bewilderment. . . . The form, doubtless, of my picture is against it—a form all dramatic and scenic—of presented episodes architecturally combined and each making a piece of the building. . . .

James was fascinated with the technical excitement of combining "importance of subject"—rich and complex—with the "high firm logic" of the structure of a play. "I have been positively struck by the quantity of meaning and the number of intentions, the extent of ground for interest. . . .that I have been able to work scenically." This explains the scenic movement in his last three major novels, a scenic movement or presentation that is lacking in all of James's earlier work, including The Portrait of a Lady or The American or the shorter "Daisy Miller" or "Washington Square," The Ambassadors, on the

26Letters, I, 333.
other hand, as described by James himself, "sharply divides itself...into the parts that prepare...for scenes, and the parts, or otherwise into the scenes, that justify and crown the preparation." The "action" proceeded in repeated rise-climax-fall rhythms. Each chapter was geared to a tempo of what we may term as "occasion" and must be viewed in that manner to be fully appreciated. As James wrote early in the middle period, "one must put a little action, not a stupid mechanical, arbitrary action, but something that is of the real essence of the subject." He felt justified in the "logic and passion" of handling the "whole artistic question" in this way:

I mean I come back, I come back yet again and again, to my only seeing it in the dramatic way—as I can only see everything and anything now. ... I come back, as I say, all throbbing and yearningly and passionately, oh mon bon, come back to this way that is clearly the only one in which I can do anything now, and that will open out to me more and more and that has overwhelming reasons pleasing all beautiful in its breast.

A related facet of this scenic presentation and, indeed, the whole dramatic structure was the accompanying tight enclosure of the "situation." James observed in The Awkward Age:

We are shut up wholly to cross-relations, relations all within the action itself; no part of which is related to anything but some other part—save of course by the relation of the total to life.

The complex "cross-relationships" of his later characters are more understandable in the light of this revelation, and it is superficial to describe his

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29 Notebooks, p. 103.
characters as peaking at each other "through knot holes." This is the why of their intense and perceptive interest in each other: James sought to express the comprehensiveness of the truth, even in a "germ" situation, in a perfectly-designed technical compass of simplicity and beauty. Along with the technique of scenic presentation, this compression of relationships, developed during the middle period, is absent from James's earlier work. The action moved about more loosely over a wider area in, for example, The American or Roderick Hudson. It is true that in the later compressed relationships, though, a character might be defined as the situs at which a given number of relations join. The Prince, for example, is the total of his relations to Mrs. Assingham, Mr. Verster, Charlotte, and Maggie.  

From the evolving technique of scenic presentation partially stemmed the development of another of James's techniques during the middle period—emphasis on dialogue. It was not that there was a superfluity, but that it carried much importance in the "line" of his stories. The "scenic" influence showed here, as did the entire theatrical experience. Dialogue is the only means of furthering a "working out" of the plot in a drama. James was captivated by this restrictive charm. He wished to have in his dramatic pieces


33 Preface, The Ambassadors, XXI, ix.
"action which is never dialogue and dialogue which is always action." 34 This projected dramatic technique was also transferred into his narratives during the very early part of the 1920's. He placed action within the conversation in the stories — within the very conversations of the characters. James wrote dialogue that was quick-moving, yet charged with meaning. Of the dialogue in Gay Dorville, G. B. Shaw said, "Line after line comes with such a delicate turn and fall that I unhesitatingly challenge any of our popular dramatists to write a scene in verse with half the beauty of Mr. James's prose. . . . I am speaking of the delicate inflexions conveyed by the cadence of the lines." 35 Though many critics agreed that the play was ill-motivated and its hero perverse and fickle, there were numerous comments of praise for the "genius of dialogue," 36 for the way it was "beautifully written. . . ." 37 for the exquisite scenes. James experimented by emphasizing the dialogue in his fiction of the middle period. He embodied the movement of plot or situation in his dialogue. The outstanding attempt was in The Awkward Age, in which the action occurred, not only scenically as mentioned above, but almost entirely by dialogue:

"But I know it. He'd like her if he could, but he can't. That," Mrs. Brooks wound up, "is what makes it sure."

There was in Edward's gravity a positive pathos. "Sure he won't propose?"

"Sure Mr. Langdon won't now throw her over."

"Of course if it is sure—"

34 Notebooks, p. 102.
36 H. G. Wells, Ibid.
37 Arnold Bennet, Ibid.
"Well?"
"Why, it is. But of course if it isn't—"
"Well?"
"Why, she won't have anything. Anything but us," he continued to reflect. "Unless, you're working it on a certainty—!"

"That's just what I am working it on. I did nothing till I knew I was safe."

"'Safe'?" he ambiguously echoed while on his their eyes met longer.

"But how did you know Van wouldn't?"

"No matter 'how'—but better still. He hasn't stuck." She said it very simply, but she turned away from him.

His eyes for a little followed her. "We don't know, after all, the old boy's means."

"I don't know what you mean by 'we' don't. Nanda does."38

And so throughout the twelve "scenes" or chapters does James employ straight dialogue to carry the action. "Here is one book," wrote Lubbock, "in which a subject capable of acting itself out from beginning to end is made to do so, one... in which method becomes as consistent and homogeneous as it ever may in fiction."39 In his later work, though he never again used dialogue as he had in The Awkward Age, James came to place more meaning and stress on the dialogue, until it produced a sort of supercharged tension—a dramatic tightening of the movement—and until many readers criticized the dialogue for unintelligibility, for omissions in meaning. However, the only valid answer is simply that there is perhaps too much meaning rather than too little.

But this was as James designed. The closing dialogue between Strether and Maria Gostrey in The Ambassadors told in a few lines the resolution of the

38The Awkward Age, IX, 156.
entire situation. In the last pages, Maria asked Lambert:

"To what do you go home?"
"I don’t know. There will always be something."
"To a great difference," she said as she kept his hand.
"A great difference—no doubt. Yet I shall see what I can make of it."
"Shall you make anything so good—?" But as if remembering what Mrs. Newsome had done, it was as far as she went.
He had sufficiently understood. "So good as this place at this moment? So good as what you make of everything you touch?"

but meanwhile she was going on. "There’s nothing, you know, I wouldn’t do for you."
"Oh yes—I know."
"There’s nothing," she repeated, "in all the world."
"I know, I know. But all the same I must go.
He had got it at last. "To be right."
"To be right?"
She had echoed it in vague deprecation, but he felt it already clear for her. "That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."
She thought. "But with your wonderful impressions, you’ll have got a great deal."
"A great deal"—he agreed. "But nothing like you. It’s you who would make me wrong!"
Honest and fine, she couldn’t pretend she didn’t see it. Still she could pretend just a little. "But why should you be so dreadfully right?"
"That’s the way that—if I must go—you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can’t do anything else."

So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest. "It isn’t so much your being right—it’s your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so."
"Oh but you’re just as bad yourself. You can’t resent me when I point that out."
She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically away. "I can’t indeed resent you."
"Then there we are!" said Strether. 40

40 The Ambassadors, XXII, 324–326.
The dialogue in The Wings of the Dove was equally meaningful. Especially suggestive was the rapid-fire exchange between Densher and Susan Stringingham in Chapter Three of Book Nine. Another sharp passage occurred in The Golden Bowl between Maggie and Mrs. Assingham:

Maggie had waited, but only with a question. "Do you think he does?"
"Know at least something? Oh about him I can't think. He's beyond me," said Fanny Assingham.
"Then you yourself know?"
"How much—?"
"How much."
"How far—?"
"How far."

And between the Prince and Maggie:

"Why do you speak of the unhappiness of your father's wife?"
They exchanged a long look—the time it took her to find her reply. "Because not to—!
"Well, not to—?"
"Would make me have to speak of him. And I can't," said Maggie, "speak of him."
"You 'can't'—?"
"I can't."

In addition to the methods of "single situation," scenic presentation, and emphasis on dialogue, another technique developed by James during the transitional years was that of a certain reduction in explanation and description—a certain "sublimes economy of art." James wrote that there was "no going behind, no telling about the figures save by their own appearance and action and explanations reduced to the explanation of everything by all the

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1. The Golden Bowl, XXIV, 335.
2. Ibid., p. 336.
3. Preface, x, vi.
other things in the picture. He came more and more, during this phase of his career, to feel that "working out economically almost everything is the very life of the art of representation."45

Again his theatrical experience figured in this development; but more than that, James simply had a talent for compelling a maximum of meaning from a minimum of evidence.46 His love of structure and design prompted him—"art being all discrimination and selection"—to further restrict the method of unfolding his narrative, which more and more assumed a dramatic evolution. This showed also in his shorter works which he wanted to be so "succinct":

that I feel more and more that I must arrive at, with these things, is the adequate and regular practice of some such economy of clear summarization as will give me from point to point, each of my steps, stages, tints, shades, every main joint and hinge, in its place, of my subject. . . .47

He strove for definite "economy." He wrote that especially the story "The Coxon Fund" (1895) met his test of preserving economy and yet sacrificing no real value. It was a work whose "main merit and sign was the effort to do the complicated thing with a strong brevity and lucidity—to arrive, on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control."48 In renouncing the "going behind" of characters and scenes, as he called it, in order to

44Letters, I, 333, 1899.
45Preface, XV, xii.
46F. W. Dupee, ed., The Question, p. x.
47Notebooks, p. 200.
48Preface, XV, xviii.
explain the situation, James felt that he was following the "true course":

Something in the very nature, in the fine rigour of this special sacrifice (which is capable of affecting the form-lover, I think, as really more of a projected form than anything) lends it moreover a coercive charm; a charm that grows in proportion as the appeal to it tests and stretches and strains it, puts it powerfully to the touch.\(^9\)

James did just that—tested, stretched, strained the technique—in his nouvelles of the middle period. He worked out a remarkably symmetrical structure—prefiguring in miniature the structure of The Ambassadors—of twelve short chapters of almost equal length in "The Coxon Fund." But the chief device by which he kept this particular story within its prescribed compass was by holding to his formula of a rich subject summarized. Thus, the material that James did give to his reader was tremendously relevant, being so disciplined. This, by the way, helps further to explain the dialogue employed in the later novels which we have just discussed. It is easier to appreciate the demands made upon the reader of James's dialogue in the light of this evolving technique of reduced explanation and description. Each word was significant, especially in the conversations. They must reveal a great deal. The must embody action and convey meaning, by the very reason of this other technique of "reduction." Returning, however, specifically to this "reduction," a reader might well ask that if James stressed "economy" in his art of fiction, how is it that his novels are so long? How can James's undeniable length be compromised with his professed compression or economy? They are, in fact, directly related. This "economy" of "no going behind" placed a burden upon the author by forcing him into complex tracings of

\(^9\) Preface, IX, xviii.
reactions and interactions. The "economy" of "no telling about the figures save by their own appearance and action" necessitated that those appearances and actions be explicitly detailed, or at least significantly detailed. The "explanation of everything by all other things" compelled an intricately inter-related exposition of matter—a long exposition of matter. James's demands for "working out economically almost everything" actually caused the expansion of material being shaped under his hand. This pressure alone, however, did not account for the entire effect of length. It can only be considered in conjunction with the previously discussed compulsion of James to express the most comprehensive truth of a situation—the "law of entire expression" formulated during the middle period—which probably contributed more to the notable length of his novels than any other facet of his art. Nonetheless, it reveals that the tapestry of James's technical art was beautifully rich and interwoven.

A further discipline that James employed in the middle period, and which has since been more associated with his name than, perhaps, any other, was that of a well-defined consistent point of view. This, of course, arose partially from the general demands of "economy." If there was to be "no going behind," the situation must be reflected through the viewpoint of some character. And for the sake of structural unity, this view must remain entirely consistent. Since the author did not intrude, the character must reflect the action not only in his spoken conversation—the meaningful dialogue—but also through his thoughts—his consciousness. And it was with this double-edged technique, that of the highly "susceptible" consciousness
and the increasingly restricted and consistent viewpoint, that James developed the most distinctive mastery of his artistry.

James wrote, in 1894, that a story "hasn't form and value, however, till one determines the manner, the form in which one imagines his 'consciousness,' his observant life, his spectatorship of his own history, standing over and becoming an element in the case."⁵⁰ His notebooks were filled with the deliberations involved in projecting his "critical reflectors."⁵¹ The numerous entries concerning What Maisie Knew and The Spoils of Poynton especially revealed the care that James lavished in providing the proper "register."

James also explained this in the prefaces. Regarding young Maisie, he wrote:

I should invest her with perceptions easily and almost infinitely quickened. So handsomely fitted out, yet not in a manner too grossly to affront probability, she might well see me through the whole course of my design; which design, . . . dignified by the most delightful difficulty, would be to make and to keep her so limited consciousness the very field of my picture, . . . The one presented register of the whole complexity would be the play of the child's confused and obscure notation of it. . . . I would have to stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably saw. . . . So that then I settled—to the question of giving it all, the whole situation surrounding her, but giving it only through the occasions and connections of her proximity and her attention; only as it might pass before her and affect her, for better or worse, for perceptive gain or perceptive loss; so that we fellow witnesses, we no more invited but only more expert critics, should feel in a strong possession of it. This would be, to begin with, a plan of absolutely definite and measurable application—that in itself always a mark of beauty. . . . Nothing could be more "done."⁵²

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⁵⁰Notebooks, p. 111.
⁵¹Ibid., p. 119.
⁵²Preface, XI, ix.
So completely convinced of the necessity of handling any story this way, James wrote to Mrs. Humphrey Ward in 1899 that her forthcoming novel, Eleanor, was inadequately handled on several points. One was that she did not give the reader a "positive sense of dealing with your subject from its logical centre," which James thought should have been the "consciousness of Eleanor—to which all the rest...is presented by life." He urged Mrs. Ward:

"Take that consciousness full, rich, universally prehensible and stick to it—don’t shift...how, otherwise, do you get your unity of subject...?" To which if you say: How then do I get Lucy’s consciousness—I impudently retort: "By that magnificently noble and masterly indirectness which means the only dramatic straightness and intensity. You get it in other words, by Eleanor." "And how does Eleanor get it?" "By Everything! By Lucy, by Marian, by every pulse of action in which she is the fullest—an exquisite register. Go behind her miles and miles; don’t go behind the others, or the subject—i.e., the unity of impression goes to smash."

In discussing The Spoils of Poynton, James showed his ever-developing dependence on using a "logical centre," in this case, Fleda Vetch:

For something like Fleda Vetch had surely been latent in one’s first apprehension of the theme; it wanted, for treatment, a centre... Fleda’s ingratiating stroke, for importance, on the threshold, had been that she would understand...the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her understanding.

Absolutely, with this, I committed myself to making the affirmation and the penetration of it my action and my "story"; one more, too, with the re-entertained perception that a subject so lighted, a subject residing in somebody’s excited and concentrated feeling about something...has more beauty to give out than under any other style of pressure.

53 Letters, 1, 322.
From the beginning to end, in "The Spoils of Poynton," appreciation, even to that of the very whole, lives in Fleda...54

Also, in the same volume with this nouvelle is "A London Life," in which Laura Wing, like Fleda Vetch, has "acuteness and intensity, reflexion and passion, has above all a contributive and participant view of her situation."55 When James was, thus, so minutely probing the reflective depths of the consciousness of his characters, he was at the same time limiting the number of characters he would handle. No author could be that thorough with a great number of characters. James admitted this when he wrote that he had reduced the number of characters in The Spoils to three or four persons "though indeed—and I cling to that as my plea for simplicity—the main agents...are Mrs. Garret and Fleda."56 This explains in James's later works the relatively few characters, most especially in The Golden Bowl where there are only four principal ones. But in fact, the whole development of this technique of working out a story from the consistent point of view of a keenly-sensitive consciousness accounts for much of the difficulty encountered in James's later work, or as Krook commented: "Refinement is a matter of pursuing a method to its furthest logical limit—a process that always yields uncommon results."57 The ultimate expression of the highly polished reflector is that of Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors. When James

54Preface, The Spoils of Poynton, X, xii.
55Ibid., p. xv.
56Ibid., p. xiii.
57Krook, p. 60.
came to write the preface to this novel, he spoke of it confidently as "the best, 'all around,' of all my productions." He rejoiced particularly that his hero had afforded him the "opportunity to 'do' a man of imagination" and that he had produced thereby his most effective center of consciousness. Lubbock held that the art of dramatizing the picture of somebody's experience touches its limits in this novel. "The author does not tell the story of Strether's mind; he makes it tell itself, he dramatizes it." From the techniques examined above, we have noted some of the consequences in the relationships and number of characters in James's work and in the "economy" of his work, especially in the later period. But what of the effect of these techniques on such aspects of style as the sentence structure, the individual words, and the imagery? The sentence structure reflected, not only James's previously discussed dedication to truth—in his quantity of meaning—but also reflected his probings into complex consciousness and the "cross-relationships" between his characters. The varying intensities and qualities of feeling and action were expressed by numerous phrases of qualification, sometimes themselves further qualified, in order to express the true shade of experience and true relationship. An interesting study of James's sentence structure by R. W. Short revealed that a long sentence by James throws into relationship a number of ideas, each of which may have, within the sentence, its own finite grammatical structure. . . . he habitually and deliberately broke down his

50 Preface, XXI, viii.
60 R. W. Short, American Literature, XVII, 71-88.
complex meanings into small units, as the spectrum breaks down the ray of light.

Short further observed that James "unsettled" his sentences with weak conjunctions, violated sentence order, and parenthetical expressions, but then recombined their "freed elements" in definite patterns which emphasized the "relating expressions." This technique may be paralleled with James's previously noted emphasis on relating and cross-relating characters within a tight compass of action. Sometimes the relation of parts within a sentence was achieved by removing emphasis from the nouns and active verbs and throwing it instead upon humbler words of connection. Other times James chose to relate the entire sentence not just to a previous single word, phrase, or sentence, but more generally to what had been going on for some time past. The meaning expanded in a process of accretion. With each new unit a fresh atom joined the ring of fluid, organic, suspended meaning. Lastly, and vitally important, Short observed that James used this style in his character delineation: "In so far as his characters are like each other, educated, refined, aridly analytical, he did of course use his style, not only to suggest, but to be their personality."

The individual words that James used in the transitional writings of the middle period and in the works of the later period were not, in themselves, unusual or erudite. He did, however, invest his words and expressions with meaning. "For better or for worse," according to Matthiessen, "Henry James carried devotion to the word farther than any... writer of his period in either America or Europe."61 This is completely compatible with his maturing

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concern with the whole truth and the deep truth previously discussed.

The more refined, intellectual imagery of the later novels may be traced to the development of a general refinement in James's style during the transitional period, or more specifically, to an emphatically intellectual approach to his artistry. In a study of the imagery of the later work of James, Gibson noted the direct relationship to certain "dramatic," "scenic," or "consciousness" techniques:

in the exchange of genuine conversation, then, metaphor often function to reveal, in the peculiarly dramatic way of presenting action that the reader witnesses, types of characters as well as dramatically striking descriptions of points of view. Or the exchange of imagery may sometimes develop to a climax, become itself the "scene" which provides further incident. Sometimes metaphor in dialogue foreshadow later action or prove in retrospect to have been instruments of dramatic irony, while always the varying uses of the same images throughout both "picture" and "scene" helps to integrate the novel and to heighten the contrasts between the reversals and paradoxes of its separate stages. In many ways the imagery increases the dramatic intensity, and frequently its varying uses become the drama that we are attending.62

As the structure became more designed during the experimental years, as the exploration of meaning became more intense, as the dialogue became the action, so also the images (and this is also reflected in the later novels) created "meaning without delimiting it, meaning that grew with the action and became the action."63 Another critic paralleled the mature imagery of James to the presentation of "cross-relationships" discussed above. Warren observed that

62Gibson, MLA, LIX, 1084.
63Short, MLA, LXVIII, 915.
"the chief occasions for imaging are perceptions of persons and personal relations." He continued, noting the importance of personal relationships:

And because they are so important the proper interpretation of them becomes important. Yet relationships between civilized (deep and subtle) people involve concealments as well as avowals; the more developed, the more affectionally, socially, ethically complicated the people; the more precarious and elaborate their relations, and the more important the need of a system and persistence in making them out. . . . The relationships most "imagined" are likely to be those which can least be talked out. 64

In the year 1900 Henry James's efforts of the middle period to do the "short" thing, the constant concern to "keep down" his material was abandoned. This was the clue that the period of trial and test was ended; he was finished with experimentation. As early as 1893, James had felt a "desire to escape from the cramp of the too intensely short." 65 But in 1893 James was not fully prepared to do the work of his life; and neither was he prepared in 1895 when he again expressed the feeling that doing the short thing was a "waste of time." He needed more time to grow, to plan to ponder, to predicate a defensible, highly defined scheme of "working out" his "ideas." He needed the full span of the transitional years to achieve a mastery over his artistry. And that is, in fact, what we witness in the years intervening between his early and his later works. Henry James achieved a mastery of his fictional tools that constituted the actual achievement of a selfhood in his artistry. James trained himself in the discipline of the single situation, the scenic presentation which, in turn, influenced the handling of his characters.

64 Warron, Kenyon Review, V, 592.
65 Notebooks, p. 135.
"cross-relationships," in the use of dialogue, in the use of reduced explanations and descriptions which, in turn, influenced his "economy," and in the use of the restrictive viewpoint of a highly "conscious" central figure.

In 1900, however, the entries in Henry James's notebooks virtually stopped; he needed no longer to express a concern with the "working out" of his art. He was ready to indulge his desire for the "big (scenic, constructive, 'architectural effects')." This was to yield in three successive years his three major novels. Henry James emerged from the 1890's to arrive in his "major phase," self-assured in his artistry.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY: THE PLACE OF THE TRANSITIONAL PHASE

IN THE JUDGMENT OF HENRY JAMES'S

FINAL WORK

Now we meet again the question: Was the final period of Henry James's
career the fulfillment of his powers as an artist or was it rather a witness
to his deterioration? Examination of the activities and events of the
period preceding this final one certainly reveals that the later work of
James marked the fulfillment of all his powers as an artist. It was not a
period merely of "experiments," as Wharton judged it; rather, the period
preceding it was the experimental one. When William wrote to Henry about his
later style, "I don't know whether it's fatal and inevitable with you, or
deliberate and possible to put off and on," Henry calmly replied:

One writes as one can—and also as one sees, judges,
feels and thinks, and I feel and think so much on the
ignoble state to which in this age of cheapness I see
the novel as a form reduced that there is doubtless,
greatly, with me the element of what I would as well
as of what 'I can.' At any rate my stuff, such as it
is, is inevitable for me. Of that there is no doubt. 1

If one asks what spark engendered the development of James's theories and
techniques to such demanding extremes, we can point to the transitional
years, 1890-1900, for the answer. We can understand rightly how James came

to write the "inevitable stuff" of his final period only in the light of the transitional activities of the years intervening between his early and his later work. As pointed out in the opening chapter, attention must be given to the development of powers that fashion the artist's career. Each part or phase of an artist's career provides, as we noted, "insight into the whole, helps explain it, measures the absorption and expression of the influences surrounding the artist, and displays the peculiar versatility" of each artist. The activities and events of the ten years of Henry James's middle period, then, shed light essential for the proper illumination of the later work of Henry James by indicating what was to come and thereby offering a help to the understanding and appreciation of it. From a study of the transitional phase, we arrive at these necessary realizations: James was excessively intellectual in his theories and techniques, that his later work must be read with more than ordinary care, that his later work should not be approached in terms of deracination, that he cannot be judged as we would judge others, and that his achievement of selfhood explains his later techniques and themes and also represents the culmination of his life and his art.

It must be agreed that James was "a little reckless of the average mind"2 in his later novels. Brooks referred to them as "those exhalations of intellectual vapor,"3 and Brownell wrote that "you know there is an issue if you are but clever enough to find it. Mr. James gives you no help. He flatters you by assuming that you are sufficiently clever."4 Perhaps James

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2Frank Moore Colby, "In Darkest James," The Question, p. 25.
3Brooks, p. 144.
4Brownell, p. 398.
did flatter his readers too much, for it cannot be denied that there is an extravagantly intellectual tone in the theories and techniques formulated during the middle period. One critic, however, magnified this "intellectuality":

I fancy that his mannerisms, his involutions, (whether in speech or in writing) were due to a settled conviction that, neither in his public nor in his acquaintances, would he ever find anyone who would not need talking down to.  

We do see during the middle period that James’s imagination asserted itself, as Dupee once suggested, "primarily through a profound analytical sense of language and an exceptional power to employ it dramatically." And this development continued until, as McCarthy noted, "the men and women in Henry James's novels...show far subtler powers of perception than such men and women actually have. It was only by exaggerating...that quality in them that he could create a world that satisfied his imagination." However, in an article in The Nation in 1907, some allowances were made for James. "All the newspaper jokes and the afternoon-tea brilliances and the gibes of the critics about 'darkest James' simply prove that superficial people do not catch what was never meant for them." This, too, is confirmed by the evolving, developing difficult theories of the middle period: "Superficial people" will never understand or appreciate James. It is necessary to approach the work of Henry James as he, in his own words approached it, as one "to

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5 Ford Maddox Ford, "The Old Man," The Question, p. 51
6 Dupee, ed., The Question, p. xi.
8 The Nation, p. 344.
whom life at large is easily interesting," and far removed from the superficial
or obvious through "the finer, the shyer, the more anxious small vibrations,
fine and shy and anxious with the passion that precedes knowledge. . . ."9

In the light of this excessive intellectual quality of James's work, we see that it is necessary to read his work with more than ordinary care.
"James has been unfortunate," wrote Daiches, "in that few critics have dis-
covered how to read him," and indicated that a careless reader "will run the
danger either of interpreting the novels in too limited and specific a
manner, or misinterpreting. . . completely and seeing only rather dull and
needlessly involved elaboration."10 In one of the stories of the middle
period, "The Figure in the Carpet," James pictured an artist who held that
readers didn't know his works who didn't know, who hadn't "felt, or guessed,
or perceived this interior thought—this special beauty (that is mainly just
the word)" that pervaded and animated them.11 James certainly believed like-
wise and wished that his readers give themselves completely to his novels.
At a time when he was re-reading his later work, James described his response
(becoming two persons in the description) in terms which would probably
constitute his conception of the "Ideal Reader":

By intelligence of it, as a reader . . . meets him

the author halfway, passive, receptive, ap-

preciative, often even grateful. . . . Into his

very footprints the responsive, the imaginative

steps of the docile reader that I consentingly

become. . . all comfortably sink.12

11Notebooks, p. 220, 1895.
We must also sink into the footprints of James in order to appreciate truly the novels of the later period. The "docile reader" will, no doubt, find less "obscenity," less difficulty, than one impatient with the subtleties in James. Both the novels and the prefaces will become more understandable and appreciable to the "receptive... responsive reader."

Next, the activities of the middle period offer the realization that the later work of Henry James should not be approached in terms of "deracination." We come to see the appearance of "new" techniques as necessary, completely rational elements of James's artistic development. Neither does the later work of James represent abrupt or unaccountable changes in style. We see that part of the development observed in this period concerned the evolution of techniques already present in James, though the evolution was remarkably speeded and intensified by transitional catalysts. For example, James's natural inclination for the dramatic was freely indulged in and subsequently amplified during this phase and resulted in an unmistakably dramatic atmosphere in his last novels. Another example, the desire to probe the minds of his characters, evident in some of his earlier works, such as The Portrait of a Lady, became intensified during this period, first, because he himself became more withdrawn especially after his theatrical episode, more introspective, and more sensitively aware of the movements of the consciousness, thus projecting this developed insight into his consequently complex characters; and second, because he developed a peculiar compulsion to represent the full truth or reality of any given situation, including the minds concerned in that situation. "His characters... are all incorrigibly preoccupied with human nature; with watching their own emotions and complex...
shifting relations and intimate dramas around them."13 Finally, James had always been a conscientious artist, but this became a driving desire for perfection. During the transitional period, he felt initially impelled to "justify" himself, to prove his worth as an artist, which gave way, after his first taste of emerging self-identity as an artist, to a simple, intense pursuit of perfect form and technique, not to justify himself, but in justice to his art. And as he developed these rarified, perfected techniques, he was able to call upon his developing self-assurance and confidence to support their use.

We learn next from the middle period that to judge Henry James's final work adequately, we cannot judge him by the standards that we would apply to other writers. The transitional activities showed James developing quite distinctive, sometimes unprecedented, aspirations; and we cannot measure his work with a yardstick belonging to others. "I see nowhere about me, done or dreamed of," wrote James, "the things that alone for me constitute the interest of doing the novel."14 Many of James's critics failed to understand the goals that James set for himself and consequently could not judge his work adequately. Henry felt that even his brother did not appreciate the Jamesian novels because William did not comprehend the aims embodied in them:

You seem so constitutionally unable to "enjoy" it /The Golden Bowl/, and so condemned to look at it from a point of view remotely alien to mine in writing it, and to the conditions out of which, as mine, it has inevitably sprung—so that all the intentions that have been its main reason for being...

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13 McCarthy, p. 82.
14 Letters, II, 43.
(with me) appear never to have reached you at all—
and you appear ever to assume that the life, the
elements forming its subject matter, deviate from
felicity in not having an impossible analogy with
the life of Cambridge. 15

Other readers have also tried to force James's novels into their own preconceived mould—into their own Cambridge—and when they see the misfit, quickly
blame James rather than reassess their measuring devices. The aims and
aspirations of Henry James were openly revealed during the transitional years
of the 1890's. The working out of these aims and aspirations was found, of
course, in the novels and, in a limited sense, in the prefaces of his final
period. And these novels and prefaces can, therefore, be judged only in the
light of these aims and aspirations—from James's dedication to truth in his
role as an artist to his particular use of imagery in his artistry. This
transitional phase gives us an opportunity to see the development of the
methods that are the hallmark of his later work and to see why James chose to
follow them. In the distinctly transitional activities and intense moments
of crisis in this period, James most revealed himself concerning his art and
his artistry. This phase of his career was a peculiarly halting one, fermentative
but assuredly formulative, and we must understand it to appreciate what
was later distilled from it, not only in his fiction, but in his prefaces also,
which in turn offer further enlightenment of the fiction. After observing
the development of James during the transitional years, we can understand how
he came to write the critical prefaces, how he came to have such well-developed
highly articulated theories to express; and we can understand better the

15 Tbid.
the purposes and processes outlined in these prefaces.

Our enjoyment of a novel is increased when we can follow the method of a writer (if they are sometimes difficult reading, it is only because James had to invent his terms; he was the first critic of the novel). There is an undoubted pleasure to be obtained from pictures and music; but few will deny that a subtler pleasure is enjoyed by the educated. The luminous pleasure is not lost if we know a little of the way in which it has been transmitted; a fine stroke by a novelist should be at least as exciting as a fine stroke by a batman.16

Regarding the novels of the later period, we learn such things as that a minimum of subject matter or comparatively few characters were a necessity, and yet that James explored the very deepest recesses of the relationships in each situation and each character to produce significantly "full" works. The perfectly disciplined design, sought by James, and its resulting peculiar way of "telling" the story, including the reduced explanations, the consistent point of view, the consciousness of the central reflector—all these are better judged and accepted in the light of their evolving necessity. The difficult sentence structure and imagery become more appreciated when they are accepted as the results of these refinements of technique as well as of James's expression of truth and beauty.

We have seen how both Henry James's theories and techniques, as observed in the activities of the transitional phase, grew increasingly intricate. His continued and ever-deeper exploration of the consciousness, his insistence on the "law of entire expression," his response to the charm of "architecture," as well as the other developments previously discussed, made for complexity. And complexity made for public as well as critical misunderstanding and con-

16 Greene, p. 50.
fusion. To know the activities of the middle period, however, is to remove the misunderstanding and to penetrate the confusion—it is to know the later James.

In summary, each group of activities in the middle years of his career contributed to the development of James—to the formulation of his mature theories and techniques—as an artist and in his artistry. The work for the theatre strengthened his attraction for the drama and for dramatic tension, and also developed in him a heightened appreciation for design and structure in his fiction. "I blush to confess," wrote James in his later years, "but if one's a dramatist, one's a dramatist, and the latter imbroglio [the story of one's story] is liable on occasion to strike me as really the more objective of the two." 17 From his playwriting, he came to think more and more in terms of the scenic presentation of his story; he came to employ dialogue as a dramatic device in his novels, and be controlled by his desire for that "splendid, particular economy." 18 The theatrical experience also provided James with a blunt, cruel test of his strength to withstand defeat and indifference at the hands of the public. He won by turning back from the theatre to his "old pen" of fiction, determined to fulfill his role as an artist truly and perfectly, depending on no outside encouragement or approval.

From the short stories we find evidence of James's conviction of the sacrifices involved in choosing "art" rather than "the world," of the artist's necessary dedication to truth and the pursuit of perfection at all costs.


18 Ibid., p. xv.
including even the one of public rejection. The short stories also dictated the "single situation" approach to his subject and enforced a certain economy of expression, though they as often reflected the increasing trouble that James had with the unplanned growth of his material, arising in part from his belief in the "law of entire expression."

The longer nouvelles witnessed James's experiments in the rigidly-designed structure, in scenic presentation, in dialogue, in economy of explanations and descriptions, and gave rise to a growing concern with the conscious reflector. They witnessed the reality of his re-dedication to truth and perfection, his maturing powers of observation and sensitive awareness, and corroborated his growing unconcern with public acceptance in the very nature of the unconventional experiments that they were.

The letters, especially those to William James and Howells, revealed Henry's concern for structure and technical perfections, and confirmed his conviction of full dedication to his art.

The notebooks of the period were also revealing. The entries pertaining to the short stories were the most vivid witness to James's growing powers of observation and his increasing concern for the smallest "germ" of a situation in which he inevitably semi-loyal to his search for the whole truth—manifold ramifications and complexities. They were also witness to the counter-struggle to restrict the growth of his material. The notebooks confirmed James's development in the perfecting of such techniques as the restricted point of view and the scenic presentation while in the very process of "thinking out" his last three novels.

In this "dividing" period of the 1890's, then, Henry James developed
not only his distinctive techniques, through deliberation and experimentation, but he also gained the inner composure and courage, through disappointment and defeat, to employ them. He attained both a full view of his role as an artist and a full command of his artistry that constituted an actual achievement of selfhood. James became an artist who knew fully what he wanted to do and that he could do it. In this self-determination he simply came to the full realization of his ideas and to the working out of these ideas, which is vital to see in order to perceive the design of his later work—to avoid being "abandoned in the dark," as Howells put it. We witness this realization of self-assurance in all the activities and events that occurred during the ten years of the transitional phase, not in just some of the activities. It was the whole period of emerging selfhood that sheds light for the proper illumination of the later work of Henry James.

To consider this achievement of selfhood in itself is to become further enlightened about another aspect of the later work of Henry James. This gain in his own life prefigured the theme and pursuit of the characters in his last novels: the ever-urgent desire to "Live!" and the "master of the conditions of life by achieving a conviction of self."19 The struggle towards selfhood in the "artist stories" of the middle period became the achievement of selfhood in the work of the later period. And like Strether, James won through, "by a long and difficult process of vision" to an acceptance of life as it is lived."20 Strether's declaration for life in The Ambassadors was the fullest expression of James's passion for life, or as Matthiessen

19 Blackmur, Kenyon Review, V, 593.
phrased it, its "quintessential expression":

Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't matter so much what you do—but live. This place makes it all come over me. I see it now. I haven't done so—and now I am old. It's too late. It has gone past me—I've lost it.\textsuperscript{21}

For James, to live meant to write, to be an artist. "But what's art but an intense life—if it be real?" was the question in a short story of the transitional phase.\textsuperscript{22} And then the young writer in "The Lesson of the Master," Paul Swart, was asked in what sense he wanted to live, he declared, "In the greatest!"\textsuperscript{23} meaning that he wanted to be fully dedicated to his writing. Therefore, the fullest expression of life for James came with the fullest expression of writing. James had not "lost" his life, as Strether felt that he had, but rather he found it at its fullest value in the self-possessed final period of his career. The characters in James's later novels are "lovers of life, like their creator, enjoying it as if long deprived, committing themselves without reserve with unlimited good faith."\textsuperscript{24} James, indeed, entered the final phase of his life without reserve, with unlimited good faith in the sanctity and sufficiency of his art. One commentator concluded that James's final work was "that of a fine perceptive spirit which endeavored to secure for itself the best the world has to offer: 'Life' at its sharpest point of intensity and awareness."\textsuperscript{25} James satisfied his desire

\textsuperscript{21}Notebooks, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{22}"The Lesson of the Master," XV, 22.
\textsuperscript{23}XV, 78.
\textsuperscript{25}Ferguson, Kenyon Review, V, 504.
to "Live!" and remained always that "obstinate finality" and "inexhaustible sensibility" of the artist. He confirmed again that writing was life even at the age of 71: "appearances, memories, many things go on...with consequences that I note... It all takes doing—and I do. I believe I shall yet do again—it still is an act of life."

From examining the activities and events of the transitional period, we not only came to know and understand Henry James better, but we see that James came to know and understand himself better. The "struggle of the 1890’s" ended with James emerging secure in the selfhood of his role as an artist and in the selfhood of his artistry, ready for some "large and confident action—splendid and supreme creation." In achieving this self-identity, James came to exert that "right persuasion" to make of the novel, as he said, "the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms."

The way to do it—to affirm one's self sur la fin—is to strike as many notes, deep, full, and rapid as one can...be an artist, be distinguished to the last... Strike, strike again and again and again... I have only to live and to work, to look and to feel.

Perhaps if Henry James had not made this declaration in 1891 "to affirm" his selfhood and had not subsequently achieved it during the middle period, he

26 Letters, II, 36.
27 ibid.
28 Edel, ed., Complete Plays, p. 66.
29 Notebooks, p. 157.
30 Preface, The Ambassadors, XXI, xxiii.
31 Notebooks, p. 106.
would never have arrived at the "deep, full, rapid" notes of his final work.

This, then, is the place of the transitional phase in the judgment of Henry
James's final work: It is only in the light of the achievement of selfhood
as an artist and in his artistry during the transitional phase that we can
understand the true goals and achievements of the final works of Henry James
and thereby judge them. The transitional phase is truly the key to the
later work.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Phyllis J. Brown has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 21, 1957

John J. Gerrits
Signature of Adviser