

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR AND HIS WORKS

Understanding the life of the authors would be very helpful in interpreting their works for it is believed that works of art are reflection of the artists as the medium of conveying their ideas. In accordance, this sub chapter presents a brief biography of Henry James in which the data is taken from various sources as cited by the name of the author or general editor.

III.1. HENRY JAMES, HIS BIOGRAPHY

Henry James is one of the authors with a remarkable dedication to his profession, art. Eventhough he was fortunate in being born into an affluent family, but from his early twenties he began to earn his own way and wholly by literary work. It is noted that he was alone among major American writers in never seeking any other employment. He was devoted to his art, and his productivity did not influence his meticulous style by which he believed a writer gains his passport to prosperity. (Edel, 1960, p.8)

Henry James was born at 21. Washington Place - between the quiet square and noisy broadway - New York City, on April 15, 1843. Though his earliest recollection had taken Europe as the basic inspiration, but his consciousness

then developed on the native American ground in Old New York for it remained a genuine point of reference for him as found in many of his works such as "Daisy Miller".

His father, Henry James Sr, who is known as a theologian and philosopher had inherited a considerable sum of money from the grandfather, The First William James, an emigrant aristocratic tycoon from Ireland. And for this reason, the James family were materially in quite comfortable circumstances that sufficed all the needs of their children and enable them to travel abroad in a considerable frequencies, and also provided their educational as the father, Henry James Sr, obliged them.

It is on the account of the father that all his children were provided with sufficient education for as a father he desired many things for the children, but two things first: Spiritual decency, as Henry James says it and "a sensuous education". (Dupee, 1956, p. 34)

Compared to his brothers, Henry seemed to be sunk in his devotion of reading. William James, his elder brother, had the quicker mind, the more competitive nature, the larger capacity to associate with people. He had more interests than his younger brother. In fact, their father gave all the opportunities to widen their knowledge equally to his children. William and Henry showed their interests more than others. Though, William, of all the children, seemed to be the only one who acquire a real, formal

university education. While Henry got his, in spite of a dozen schools, in his own time and in his own way, in the streets, in theatres, at picture galleries, at parties, on boats, in hotels, beaches, at the family reunion by listening, by gazing, dawdling, gaping, wondering and soaking in impressions and sensations at every pore, through every hair. (Wegelin, ed. 1984, p.399)

It was first in Albany and then in New York that Henry and William began to attend schools. Their father agreed that some sort of formal training was necessary for them, even at the risk of its somewhat standardizing them, which in his opinion was the reverse of what an education ought to do. By constantly uprooting them, however he could at least prevent any one teacher or institution from getting too exclusive a hold, and at the same time indulge his own taste for change. In New York they went from tutor to tutor, from private school to private school. In 1855 the entire family travelled to Europe, where they lived off and on for some five years. By turns in London, Paris, Geneva, Boulogne, and Bonn they set up temporary residences and engaged once more in fleeting educational ventures. In the hope of correcting what his father regarded as his onesidedness, Henry was even exposed briefly to scientific training at a Swiss school.

"Harry is not so fond of study, properly so called as of reading" observed his father when the boy was 14. "He is a devourer of libraries, and an



immense writer of novels and dramas. He has considerable talents as a writer, but I am at a loss to know whether he will ever accomplish much." (Dupee, 1956, p.18)

The Swiss experiment promptly failed; Henry's intellectual sloth yielded to no formal discipline. Henry was a sensitive and shy boy, he tended to assume a quiet observer's role beside his active elder brother. He was an inveterate reader of novels, indeed it might be said that no novelist before James had had so thorough saturation in the fiction both sides of the atlantic. Having learned French in his childhood, he read through shelvesful of French novels as well as the great English novelists from Richardson to the then-serialized Dickens and Thackeray. His father spoke of him as a devourer of libraries. For a while the parent worried about this and attempted to make his son attend a preparatory school for engineers. Henry resisted this experience as he was to resist the study of law two or three years later. He wanted to be simply "literary" and he realized this goal more rapidly than might have been expected.

As a self taught man, however, and one whose reading, together with his observation, was far and away his most vital form of experience-almost, as we shall see, a matter of his personal survival - he was in exceptionally intimate possession of his learning. And such was his "mastery over, his baffling escape from ideas"

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(Elliot), that no one could possibly wish he had really gone to school - which can not be said of all literary autodidacts. (Dupee, 1956, p.19)

As a boy, Henry James, was so fortunate to grow up in the surrounding of the family who provided him the needs and understood the wants of their children. Sufficient education and affectionate attention in raising the children in the sense of knowledge and religion had influenced Henry's view toward life.

This worldly knowledge, then, was the end product of that unwordly education which began with the inward life, the early inculcated love of virtue for its own sake, a belief in human affections and natural goodness, a childhood of extraordinary freedom and privilege, passed in a small warm world of fostering love. This world for him was never a landscape with figures, but a succession of rather a small group of persons intensely near to him, for whom the landscape was the setting, the house they lived in the appropriate background. The whole scene of his childhood existed in his memory in terms of the lives lived in it, with his own growing mind working away at it, storing it, transmuting it and reclaiming it. (Wegelin, 1984, p.402)

The father's habit of travelling in Europe had made the family familiar to each American and European condition and its situation. Since Henry James was still an infant, he already began his trip to Europe that introduced

him the first impression of the continent. After then, the family arranged many trips around Europe.

During 1869 and 1870 Henry James went abroad on his first adult journey. He was 26 and the experience was unforgettable. As he travelled, he became gradually aware of the theme that was to be central to his famous writings. This journey then resulted in the appearance of many European scenes in his works.

Unpredictably, in 1880, Henry James' international American European theme had provoked debates in which the press fiercely attacked James and permanently fixed his image in the American mind as an absentee writer who abused his own land. Then the more surprising progress arose, that was James' decision to become a British citizen. It was on July 26, 1915, sponsored by the Prime Minister among others, he was naturalized as a British subject. It was because his eagerness to do the thing that would best express his devotion to England, then he renounced his American citizenship. Besides he could live more cheaply in Europe and make money by his travel articles, he would find the material for his fiction and have the leisure in which to write it. (Dupee, 1956, p.250)

His dedication upon art was remarkable eventhough he found many failures in it. His first impression of art, painting, didn't suffice his satisfaction in expressing his ideas and beliefs and moreover his effort in dramatizing

his fiction into plays was doomed into failure for his language was too literary for the stage (G.B. Shaw). However James' insistence of art devotion was a really remarkable career.

In the Autumn of 1875 he settled in Paris and one of his first acts was to call upon the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev. James had greatly admired his work and he found in this older writer a congenial mentor. If from Balzac James had learned how to set a scene and launch a drama, and from Hawthorne how to suffuse the drama with charm, and from George Eliot the values of endowing his story with intellectual illumination, he learned his most important lesson of all from Turgenev. This was to make his novel flow from his personages. The Russian writer provided James with the concept of "organic" novel. He helped James to see that the novel need not be a haphazard story, but one in which characters live out their natures, This might be called "psychological determinism" and James was to become perhaps the greatest exponent of it in his work. He was one of the rare writers of fiction to grasp the psychological truth that an action properly derives from a character, that a novel creates the greatest illusion of truth when it grows out of a personage's observations and perceptions.

In his old days, although he wrote no more novels, James' productivity during his final years was remarkable. Following the pattern of the New York edition, he revised



his travel writings and consolidated them; thus English hours appeared, and then Italian hours which, with his Little Tour in France, commemorated the pathways James had taken during his life time on the continent.

The English-speaking world honored him on his seventieth birthday; and while efforts to obtain the nobel prize for him failed, James was given a golden bowl by 250 friends and admirers. (Edel, 1960, p.39)

With the outbreak of the war James threw himself into various activities; he visited hospitals, aided refugees, and wrote on behalf of the American volunteer motor ambulance corps in France. Being ill and suffering, he decided in 1915 to yield the American citizenship he had retained during his forty years' residence in England, and throw in his lot with the British cause. A stroke three or four months later was followed by pneumonia, and although he survived into 1916, and was given the Order of Merit by King George V, it was clear that there would be no recovery. He died on February 28. His ashes were brought to America and interred in the family plot in Cambridge. An inscription on his grave describes him as the interpreter of his generation on both sides of the sea.

III.2. HENRY JAMES, HIS WORKS

The career of Henry James has been divided, for convenience, by most critics into three periods and these

were once humorously characterized by a British writer as falling into those of "James I, James II, and the Old Pretender". The "Old Pretender" was an allusion to James' elaborate manner in his old age, his involuted sentences, his search for precision of statement at the expense of the patience of his listeners. It is the period of his apprenticeship and his success, his discovery of his cosmopolitan subject and his exploitation of it. It may be said to end with the triumphant writing of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The second period has often been spoken of as the period of James' "social" novels. But it would be more exact to see this period as falling, in itself, into three acts: the abandoning for the time being of the "international" theme and the writing of three long novels in the naturalist mode; then the abandoning of fiction for five years of the writing for the stage; in 1895 the return to the novel, followed by half a dozen years of experimental writing in which James assimilated the techniques derived from the theater. Out of these experiments emerged the third period, which has been more accurately described as "the mayor phase", certainly mayor in terms of its influence upon the twentieth-century novels. During this final phase James wrote the three novels by which he makes his greatest claim on posterity.

In accordance, in this sub chapter the writer would reelaborate Henry James' works periods into another

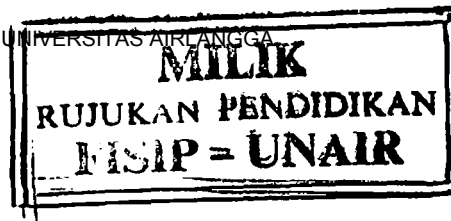
sub divisions. The data are taken from various sources, biographies and critics, but mostly the ones written by "Leon Edel, 1960", "F.W. Dupee, 1956", and "Wegelin, 1984". Besides the work itself James' way of thinking and ideas would be seen as the reflections of his experiences revealed in his writings. As he, himself, stated :

Humanity is immense, and reality has myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it and others have not ... it is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience... Experience is never limited, and it is never complete ... It is the very atmosphere of the mind...

(*American Realism*, Jane Bernadette, p.179)

III.2.1. Henry James, I (1865-1882)

The first period is symbolized by the tale of *Daisy Miller* - "the ultimately most prosperous child of my invention," James called her many years later. During his life time his reputation was to rest largely upon his studies of young American girls encountering Europe, and Daisy become their prototype. His stories of American families touring in the Old World as if it were a painful duty rather than a civilized pleasure were famous and much discussed. These Americans have to discover that the world is not as innocent as it seems, and that behind the smiling facades of castles and picturesque ruins lurk centuries of wrong doing and the dark and evil things of the human



spirit. *Daisy Miller* dramatized this on the level of comedy and pathos. As James himself put it:

The whole idea of the story is the tittle tragedy of a light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed as it were to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head and to which she stood in no measurable relation. To deepen the effect, I have made it go over her mother's head as well"

In *Roderick Hudson* James had portrayed the American artist, going abroad to find the schooling and traditions of art not available to him in his homeland. In *The American* of two years later, his easiest and most romantic novel, he had drawn a picture of a businessman possessing great charm of character and the candor of trusting and innocent nature, seeking to win for himself a wife in the French aristocracy. The novel is a mixture of melodrama and romance, yet it dramatizes most clearly the irony James was seeking to express to his readers.

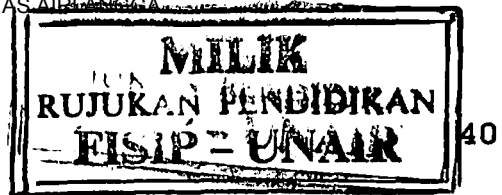
With the success of *Daisy Miller* James promptly recognized that the public liked his Americano-European stories, particularly his tales of international marriages and of bright young American girls discovering Europe. *The Last of The Valerii*, *Madame de Mauves*, *Four Meetings*, and *Daisy Miller* itself has attested to this. And now he began to play his themes in all their variations.

In his late prefaces James spoke of his

Americano-European legend, and showed how clearly he had envisaged his international dramas. What his stories had represented, he said, was a record of the American "state of innocence," that of the Americans being almost incredibly "unaware of life - as the old European order expressed life," and what he had studied was "their more or less stranded helplessness" abroad. As he went on:

"conscious of so few things in the world, these unprecedented creatures were least of all conscious of deficiencies and dangers; so that the grace of youth and innocence and freshness aiding, their negatives were converted and became in certain relations lively positives and values."

Out of their experience he fashioned the comedy and pathos and beauty of their state. His long observation of travelling Americans, his thorough knowledge of the American characters, his saturation in European life, had given him his data. He was artist enough to make of it splendid literary capital. But if he treated it in his shorter tales on a level of wit and comedy - and in comic spirit which has never been sufficiently praised - he found in it also larger and more tragic implications. These he embodied in the novel which marked the end of this phase, *The Portrait of a Lady* that was the third in James' group of fictional American expatriations.



III.2.2. Henry James, II (1884-1900)

The novelist now entered upon the second period of his writings. It was marked by his decision to attempt new subjects. He was tired of the International theme and he felt that he had been exhausted. With extraordinary energy he wrote two long novels during the next three years, *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima*. These novels are, in a sense, tales of two cities, Boston and London. They are brilliantly "social" in their painting of certain scenes of urban life and they are a calculated attempt by James to write a "naturalistic" novel.

James made one more attempt to write of the world of art and tried to record the problems confronting a young politician-painter and an actress. *The Tragic Muse* ran for many months in the Atlantic monthly, yet it had small success with its readers for all the brilliancy of its writing. James, with his experimental attitude toward the novel, had done more than switch from his main theme. He had tried naturalism but he was an incomplete naturalist - naturalism relying on literalism and the portrayal of primitive passion and violence. What James created was a series of subtle studies of individuals caught in forces and movements beyond their control, undone by conflicts between their temperaments and their environment. James' determinism was essentially psychological.

In 1889 the income of his writing had been reduced



to a low point. He accordingly sought to revive his fortunes by turning to the theater. During the next five years, from 1890 to 1895, he wrote seven plays. Two of them reached the stage, a dramatization of *The American* which had a modest run, and *Guy Domville*, a carefully written costume play, produced in 1895 by the popular London manager George Alexander. This was booted by an ill-tempered audience. Repudiated once again by his public, James turned his back on the theater and resumed his writing on fiction.

When he was not writing his parables about unsuccessful writers, he wrote ghostly tales, indeed most of his tales in this form belong to this haunted period. And it was between 1895 and 1900 that he set down his series of stories ravaged childhood and adolescence, in reality a reworking of his theme of innocence in a corrupting world. The most celebrated of this group, which combined both the theme of tormented childhood and the ghostly element, is *The Turn of The Screw*. It illustrates James' matured theory of ghostly tale. Awe and mystery, he held, do not honge on the crime and the cadaver, dark castle, chainn blood. He creates his eerie atmosphere by having the unusual occur on the margin of the usual. In this way the horror is greatly intensified. What James added to the ghostly tale, in reality, were a series of accute studies of forms of human human anxiety - the capacity of humans to scare themselves with phantoms of their own creation. Other ghostly tale with

lesser success were *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*.

III.2.3. Henry James, III (1900-1904)

Henry James' final period of his career are those from 1900 to the first world war which are now spoken of his "major phase." The three large novels which he wrote between 1900 and 1904, in which he returned to his "international" subjects and this time on a grandiose scale, can be understood only in the light of the techniques of James' maturity. At the end, form and substance coalesced to give us the psychological drama of James' highest comedy, *The Ambassador*, the brooding tragedy of *The Wings of the Dove*, and what might be called James' supreme novel of manners, *The Golden Bowl*.

The Ambassadors, published in 1903 but written between 1899 and 1901, exemplified both James' use of point of view and his method of alternation of scene. By the "point of view method" James was able to make the reader feel himself at one at the given character, and impart to him only as much of the story as that character perceives at any given moment, by alternating scenic action with his narrative of the reflective and analytic side of his personages. James created novel unique in the history of fiction.

Technique is also the key to *The Wings of the Dove*, published a year before *The Ambassadors* although

written immediately after the novel. It clearly exemplifies the way in which James insisted that his subjects dictate his structure and why he believed he could achieved an organic novel. Wishing to write the story of a doomed girl, he told himself that fiction can not concern itself with dying, but is concerned wholly with the act of living, and so he arranged the scenic structure of the book to keep the picture of Milly Theale's dying state from the readers save at certain moments when she affirms her will to live.

If these two mayor works of the final phase reached back to earlier fictions, James' ultimate novel, *The Golden Bowl*, reveals him breaking new ground and finding a resolution to questions left unresolved in his other novels.