

Henry James's Art of Employing Imagery

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Abstract

The Present study entitled "Henry James's Art of Employing Imagery: A Study" is to explore Henry James' use of art objects and art imagery in the delineation of characters. This research also examines how Henry James finds analogy between the art of the Painter and the art of the novelist in his attempt to represent life. The purpose of this study is to delineate how James' use of images and his art of technique is presented in his works. James uses art imagery and art objects to underline his themes. In his works the sight of art and its insight merge as an organic unity of his works. This paper also elucidates how James establishes a balance between real and "romantic".

Keywords: Henry James, Impressionism, Impressionist Movement, expressionism, Picturesque narration, device, sight and insight, real and romantic.

Painter and the Novelist

Henry James states that the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is complete, as both "attempt to represent life" The imagination of the artist gives it an added dimension, an intensity, an individuality which cause to exclaim: "It is life itself. It was this intensity of "felt life", that James admired in the paintings of Tintoretto, the dramas of Shakespeare, the novels of Turgenev which he strove to achieve in his own work. James, like the painter and the sculptor, concerns himself in each of his works with relations and strives to achieve balance, rhythm and harmony to realize the ideal in the real. The characters, he paints on his canvas are seldom and symmetrical.

Perfect Balance

James sought from the beginning to strike a perfect balance, his attitude toward the real and the romantic underwent a marked change between his early and his mature work, as it is seen by a brief study of his literary and art criticism and certain of his tales and novels. James asserts, that the successful artist, regardless of his medium, will have to give to his subject a lucid, and intelligible form. To do this, he feels, that artist must possess the sense of reality. James's art reviews reflect essentially the same change in attitude toward the real and the romantic as does his literary criticism. This change of opinion concerning the real can be clearly traced in his comments on the paintings of a single artist. James associates his paintings with the Impressionist Movement. James Critic John L. Sweeney declares that, Henry James's initial attitude toward Impressionism was "dislike at first sight."

James' Critic Sweeney believes that, "the Impressionists raised for him a 'moral' question of subject and treatment, which blurred his view of their technical experiment and pictorial accomplishment."⁽²⁵⁾. In his review of the 1876 exhibition of Impressionist paintings at Durand Ruel's James referred to the contributors as "partisans of unadorned reality and

absolute foes to arrangement. He declared that, "The 'Impressionist' doctrines strike me as incompatible, in an artist's mind, with the existence of first-rate talent. James further insisted: "The Impressionists abjure virtue altogether and declare that a subject which has been crudely chosen shall be loosely treated." (26). The Impressionists confined themselves to exact visual experience and attempted to record each impression instantly and dispassionately without arrangement or selection. Reality was experienced as a "state of constant flux and transition."

Impressionism

Impressionism was an art based strictly on personal experience without reference to history or tradition a photographic record of nature influenced perhaps by the new discoveries in optics. It is not difficult to see why James would be repelled by an "art" which eschewed selection and arrangement, refused to submit impressions to the "crucible of the imagination." (28). Reduced reality to two dimensions, ignored "form" as James conceived it, showed complete indifference to the quality of subject, lacked a "sense of the past," and offered the observer a mere camera eye-view of life. The best of the Impressionists did, in fact, continue to select and arrange and compose. James's assertion that: "A painting is not an 'Impression' but an expression just as a poem or a piece of music is." (29). It was this concern with impression verses expression, the relation of art to life, the problem of the real and the ideal, which drew forth James's comments.

James eventually himself employed certain of their techniques, he never modified his opinion of the Impressionist theory. James feels that picture is immoral because it is both insincere and ugly. The artist is clever, but superficial intent solely on displaying his skill, and not on rendering humanity. It was this ideal rendering of "the great, beautiful, terrible spectacle of human life. Which, James strove to achieve in his own tales and novels. But between his early and his mature work, there is the same change in attitude toward the real and the romantic, which is observed in his literary and art criticism. It is "picturesque," "charming" words, James frequently used to describe the works of Hawthorne, but it does not "live and breathe." it is an "idea" rather than the delineation of character with which James is concerned, his tales and novels tend to become more symbolic and less realistic.

Nature and Function of Art

James is preoccupied with the nature and function of art and the artist and the problems involved in achieving a satisfactory balance between the real and the ideal. Here, he suggests that when art is worshipped to the exclusion of humanity, art can become a terrible master, dehumanizing the worshipper and disrupting his relationships with others. In Roderick Hudson (1876), James's first "acknowledged" novel, (42) he implies his distaste for the realist Gloriani who is completely lacking in idealism, the mere clever practical copyist, who paints, with equal indifference, a beautiful subject or an ugly one.

Anti-romantic

James's attitude in this novel is essentially anti-romantic the would-be ideal artist is destroyed by his confrontation with the real. In his career, James is striving to create more fully rounded characters to represent life. But, as he himself realized, he is not completely successful. James's art reviews and points up his belief, that no superior work can come from a superficial mind. James's impressions have passed through "the crucible of the imagination" with a resultant evidence of careful selection and arrangement. He is still more attracted to realism than romance, but his characters are more rounded than those of his earlier tales. They are marked by individual idiosyncrasies without becoming grotesques. He is moving

toward a fusion of the romantic and the real in his rendering of the humour and pathos of life, the "bliss and the bale," the unknown and the unknowable.

James again affirms the necessity for the artist to be in the world but not of it to maintain the necessary detachment in order to preserve his art. He stresses the need to balance genius with application. In his portraiture, James combines the technique of the painter with that of the novelist in the creation of living characters. He learned from the old masters the principles of composition and style, the difference between an illustration, a likeness, and a portrait, between the real and the ideal. With which, he strives to achieve balance, rhythm, and harmony in his own works. But, there are certain specific methods, which James employs.

The Object d'art

The object d'art frequently occupies the central position in James's pictures. It is used in various ways as a plot device, to reinforce theme as a cultural symbol to reveal character. This is particularly true of the use of specific paintings by actual artists. The preference for a certain picture or school of painting may define character or evoke emotion, which gives sudden insight into a person's state of mind, motivation, and possible action. The art object fuses setting with action and characterization. In his later fiction, James uses framing devices and the objet d'art more subtly and suggestively. The precise visual impression is merged with the feeling, this impression evokes. Description becomes more indirect and serves numerous ends, and "point of view" modifies what is seen. When, in moments of sudden recognition, sight and insight merge, the framing device is most effectively employed in James works.

James uses art imagery and art objects to set the tone, underline theme, and reveal character. The technique "Framing" and allusion to specific artists and their work are the principal methods employed. Henry James aspired to the excellence, he found in Turgenev's portraiture figures that live and breathe, the union of "ideal beauty" with "unsparing reality." James sought to render "psychological truth," and he did not fall short of his goal. While many of his early tales show a greater preoccupation with "idea" and "aesthetic" than with the delineation of character. The figures of his mature work are fully rounded, It is exclaimed in the words that, he used Turgenev: "It is life itself." In order to achieve this intensity of "felt life," James combines the technique of the painter with that of the novelist.

The Madonna of the Future

The technique "Framing" and the object d'art are used in a relatively simple and straightforward manner in James's early work, but in his later fiction, they are employed with increasing subtlety and suggestiveness. Thus, in "The Madonna of the Future," the blank canvas merely connotes Theobald's excessive idealism and wasted life and the numerous allusions to specific artists present no difficulty of interpretation. The tale sets forth clearly and directly the problem of the ideal artist. The treatment of art in "The Liar" is more complex and suggestive. Instead of a single concrete art object, there are three literal portraits, a figurative portrait and sketch, and a scene which constitutes a living picture. In contrast to the simple, almost allegorical presentation of the static figures in "The Madonna of the Future," the portraits in this tale delineate character more fully and show development by revealing life.

The Liar

"The Liar" deals not only with the problem of the artist, but also with the nature and function of art. In "The Real Thing," James does not employ a literal art object, but rather four persons based on actual individuals. The artist's attitude to them reflects James's belief in the necessity to "render" not merely "copy" life. Again, it is the "idea" which predominates, and there is consequently less attempt at delineation of character.

The Wings of the Dove

In the novel *The Wings of the Dove*, James's mature phase is seen, art objects and art imagery become richly allusive and serve numerous functions. In this novel, James uses actual paintings by known artists to aid in the delineation of character, and the emotions. The portraits scene evokes even more revelatory than the connotations pertaining to the artists and their work. Description is more indirect, and the characters react to objects d'art with greater subtlety and complexity.

The Golden Bowl

The novel *The Golden Bowl* marks the acme of James's skill in the use of objects d'art to delineate character. In this novel, James draws not only upon the art of painting, but also upon sculpture and architecture for his material. There is an increased wealth of meaning proportionate to the great number and variety of art objects and art images, which range from the golden coin to the golden bowl itself. The characters view each other in terms of works of art extended in the novel *The Wings of the Dove*. Each figure is presented from a number of different perspectives and the composite picture is thus wonderfully rich and complex. The Prince is variously regarded as an old gold coin "embossed with glorious arms," "a great Palladian church," "a pure and perfect crystal," and "the golden bowl." Charlotte is seen as a "long loose silk purse, well filled with gold pieces," and a beautiful Florentine statue in silver or bronze. Maggie calls to mind a work of "the cinquecento at its most golden hour," "some slim draped 'antique of Vatican or Capitoline halls," "an image in worn relief passing round and round a precious vase." Adam Verver the connoisseur strikes his daughter as a great work of art. She equates him with an early Florentine sacred subject. He is also likened to "the solid detached foot" of "the golden bowl". Adam views the Prince and Charlotte in the same light as a Bernardino Luini and Damascene tiles. They also appear as the "garlands" looped around Adam in the largest of three pieces in a baroque objet d'art. Finally, Adam and Maggie see their sposi as "a pair of effigies of the contemporary platforms of Madame Tussaud." Occasions and situations appear as a "huge precious pearl," a tall ivory pagoda, a painting by Decamps, and both Maggie and the Prince view their marriage as the "golden bowl". The connotations are almost endless and reflect the infinite complexity and ambiguity of human nature and life itself.

With the use of art objects and art imagery, James creates characters who are unquestionably human, a curious mixture of strength and weakness, moral beauty and ugliness. They suffer and cause suffering while seeking to protect themselves and others from the harsher aspects of reality. They desire to escape involvement and commitment, which could threaten their security, yet they will not refrain from "manipulating" other people often for their own personal benefit. They deceive both to gain their own ends and to shield others from disquieting knowledge. With the intentions, the innocent and the less intelligent frequently violate the freedom of those they are trying to help and unwittingly bring tragedy into their lives. Those, who appear most reprehensible in their cruel or thoughtless infliction

of suffering are often magnificent in their strength of will, power of endurance, self-control, quiet dignity, poise, taste, and observance of form.

James's attitude toward art and life is revealed in his conviction that both can realize the ideal in the real in the same way by achieving balance, rhythm, and harmony. The artist of life, like the artist of the brush or the pen, must be sincere, intelligent, sufficiently detached. He must possess a sense of reality, a love of beauty, and imagination. If he is to create a true work of art, he must learn to discriminate, select, and compose. He must never forget that "the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, and all vision, it is all experience. Only the artist with the fully developed consciousness can achieve a true fusion of the real and the ideal. Full consciousness, James asserts that it can only be achieved by complete exposure to experience with all its beauty and ugliness, its joy and sorrow, but there must always be a fine detachment if life is to become a work of art. Intense awareness is the final result of the "process of vision" the gradual accumulation of individual moments of insight. The rejection of knowledge, that might prove painful, the refusal to admit ugliness limits the growth of the self and renders the individual ineffective.

The one who is finely perceptive realizes that moral judgment, beauty and ugliness are purely relative. He knows that what one sees depends on what one desires to see and intends to see that ideal beauty can exist only in the mind of the beholder. Thus, he accepts the real and, by the power of the creative imagination transforms it into the ideal.

To Conclude

In this research, it is shown that Henry James has used art as a technique in his works. In this study, it is explored that, James art objects, art images are delineated in his works. There is also a balance between "real" and "romantic" in his works as projected. This paper sums up that James used imagery and arts as a technique in his works.

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