2

THEORY OF THE NOVEL: HENRY JAMES

SÉRGIO LUIZ PRADO BELLEI

James's critical writings, although usually viewed by critics as a formidable contribution to the theory of the novel in the 19th Century, have remained to this day a source of controversy for a critical enterprise marked by the attempt to define its object of study in terms of a *consistent* body of theory. James has unsuccessfully been defined as a critic concerned with form, with mimesis, with organicism, and, less frequently, as simply inconsistent in his theoretical views. Difficult as it is to deny the many inconsistencies in his theories, it is equally problematic to reduce them to a formula or to dismiss them as incoherent and irrelevant. As we have often been reminded by recent developments in literary theory, the use of narrow and totalizing critical procedures for the comprehension of discourses is only one way to approach them, the other being precisely the acceptance of inconsistencies, fragmentation, and resistance to closure. The present study argues that James's theoretical writings are important today precisely because they are incoherent and incomplete. His inconsistencies might very well be the adequate way to approach a genre (the novel) in which Bakhtinian heteroglossia in the form of a multiplicity of conflicting voices and languages seems to predominate. A critic writing in Victorian England and responding to this complex discursive form, James antecipated theoretical approaches to the genre that would only be developed by twentieth century critics such as Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, and Scholes and Kellog.

ADVANCED RESEARCH IN ENGLISH SERIES

ARES

SÉRGIO LUIZ PRADO BELLEI

THEORY OF THE NOVEL: HENRY JAMES

For my daughter,
Maria Helena,
my past present in my future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. James's criticism and the critics

Henry James's reputation as a literary critic is usually associated with the prefaces he wrote to The New York Edition of his works (1906-1909) and with "The Art of Fiction" (1884). These two critical works, however, represent only that part of James's contribution to criticism that was made relevant largely as a result of the work of Percy Lubbock and Richard P. Blackmur. James the critic, as invented by these two influential critics, became the supreme master of fictional form and technique in the novel as a genre. In *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), Percy Lubbock borrows a number of Jamesian key concepts as expressed chiefly in the prefaces and in his essays on the art of fiction and transforms them into a coherent method for describing as precisely as possible the nature of craftsmanship in fiction. The craft of fiction, as defined by Lubbock in the role of James's disciple, is associated with concepts like "picture," "scene," "dramatic method," "showing" as opposed to "telling, "center of consciousness." Lubbock turns these principles into rules and applies them to novels such as *Madame Bovary* in order to identify the basic qualities of the novel as art. *The Craft of Fiction* is the first major effort to reduce James to the master of craftsmanship in the novel, followed in 1934 by *The Art of the Novel*, a book in which Richard P. Blackmur collects all the prefaces of the New York Edition and praises them as "the most sustained. . . , the most eloquent and original piece of literary criticism in existence."[1]

The importance of these studies can hardly be underestimated. Lubbock's book remained influential as a method for teaching fiction as literature and art for at least three

decades after the book was published, providing professors of literature with a new critical vocabulary to replace such vague terms as "plot," "character," "description," "story," and the like. And Blackmur's "Introduction" would prove instrumental in shifting the attention of the New Critics from poetry to fiction after World War II. But as these critical efforts emphasize one side of James at the expense of the rest of his critical work, they can hardly do justice to the complexity involved in half a century of continuous critical production. In addition to the two major pieces of criticism, James published during his lifetime five volumes of criticism—*French Poets and Novelists* (1878), *Hawthorne* (1879), *Partial Portraits* (1888), *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (1893), and *Notes on Novelists* (1914)—and more than 150 essays and reviews dealing with European, English, and American major and minor authors, as well as with theoretical issues. What emerges from this massive body of texts—now collected by Leon Edel in two volumes of the *Library of America*—is a critical discourse in which the difficulty and complexity of the problems treated in the prefaces and in "The Art of Fiction" increase significantly.

Critical and scholarly response to James's critical work constantly suggests this overwhelming complexity. Except for the general agreement that James's critical contributions to the study of fiction are nothing short of formidable, there is little critical consensus as to the kind of criticism he practices and even as to the possibility of establishing the nature of his critical effort. The totality of James's critical work is such complex material that the analyst is more often than not at a loss in his attempt to determine the precise contours of his object of analysis. In despair, critics will often give a label to James's criticism only to be immediately confronted with evidence that either disqualifies the label or suggests its limitations. In this turbulent context, some will find in James's critical work the dominant voice of the formalist; others the voice of the mimetic critic, in the tradition of Matthew Arnold;

others the organicist; and others, finally, a critic that fell short of producing a consistent critical theory.

Percy Lubbock's work is probably the best instance of a formalist reading of James's critical work. Seeing art as an end in itself rather than a means to some ends, the formalist or aesthetic critic tends to deal with the work of art on its own terms. In *The Craft of Fiction*, Lubbock explicitly endorses this position: "we are haunted," he complains, "by a sense that a novel is a piece of life, and that to take it to pieces would be to destroy it.... We scarcely need to be thus considerate.... [It] is not a piece of life, it is a piece of art like another." This view of the novel as craftsmanship determines the behavior of the reader in his encounter with the text. Reading, for such a reader, implies formal analysis and aesthetic distance. "So far from losing ourselves in the world of the novel," Lubbock claims, "we must hold it away from us, see it in all detachment, and use the whole of it to make the image we seek, the book itself."[2] In "the book itself," to be taken on its own terms, the presence of the author is undesirable. Lubbock accordingly decides against all forms of omniscience and of "telling" in fiction by making the absence of the author, which in James is only a relative absence, an imperative need. A novelist like Thackeray, who uses omniscience in novels like *Vanity Fair* and intrudes in the text with his comments, should, in Lubbock's view, be disqualified as a craftsman of the novel:

> By convention, the author is allowed his universal knowledge of the story and the people in it. But still it is a convention, and a prudent novelist does not strain it unnecessarily. Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* is not at all prudent. . . . He flourishes the fact that the point of view is his own, not to be confounded with that of anybody in the book. And so his book, as one may say, is not complete in itself; it does not meet and satisfy all the issues that it suggests. . . . There is felt to be an unsatisfactory want of finish in leaving a question hanging out of the book, like a loose end, without some kind of attempt to pull it back and make it part of an integral design. . . . When the point of view is definitely included in the book, when

it can be recognized and verified there, then every side of the book is equally wrought and fashioned. Otherwise it may seem like a thing meant to stand against a wall. . . and there is no wall for a novel to stand against.[3]

The prudence that Lubbock finds missing in Thackeray, because Thackerey is less concerned with the novel as artifact than with the novel as expression of the artist's experience, exists abundantly in James, especially in the later phase. Lubbock praises *The Awkward Age* (1890) because, as the most dramatic of James's works, it requires no narrator; and he approves of James's treatment of Strether in *The Ambassadors* (1903), as he feels that the novel renders only Strether's sense of things, without the interference of any omniscient author.

A cursory glance at James's critical work would show that James's concern with form is only a part of his interests, as he was equally interested in the novel as representation and mimesis. In "The Art of Fiction," the essay in which James gives particular emphasis to the novel as art, his interest in life and mimesis is so intense that at times he seems to forget that a novel involves any artifice at all. For example, he says at one point in the essay that, in the attempt to keep "fiction upon her feet," the novelist must catch "the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life. . . . In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and a convention."[4] The emphasis on the representation of "life without rearrangement" suggests not only a strong mimetic bias but also the need to reduce art to a minimum, as art always implies some sort of formal rearrangement of raw material that can hardly fail to attract attention to itself. Lubbock is then reading James reductively when he insists on the Jamesian lesson of the novel as artifact. But he is also reducing James in his claim that, in *The Ambassadors*, James rendered only Strether's sense of things.

As John E. Tilford, Jr. has shown, there is in the novel an omniscient narrator that often refers to himself and characterizes his hero as "poor Strether" in contexts in which Strether cannot possibly be indulging in self-pity. The same narrator will occasionally inform his reader of events in the future, in phrases like "Strether was to remember afterwards."[5]

Lubbock's poetics was not, as Wellek and Warren affirmed in their celebrated *Theory of Literature*, a poetics of the novel "based on the theory and practice of Henry James."[6] It was rather an appropriation of a part of James's theoretical writings used for the construction of a formalist poetics. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth warns readers and critics of James that "James's own methods were extremely varied" and that therefore reductive procedures would inevitably produce distortions:

> James's Prefaces . . . , those shrewd and indispensable explorations into the writer's craft, offer no easy reduction of technique to a simple dichotomy of telling versus showing. . . . It is true that he found himself more and more interested in exploring what could be done with the "scenic art" and less and less satisfied with narrating in his own voice. And he was convinced that he had found a way to perform the traditional rhetorical tasks in an essentially dramatic way, by employing a "center of consciousness" through whom everything could be seen and felt. . . . But his general emphasis is on the fact that the house of fiction has "not one window, but a million," that there are, in fact, "five million ways" to tell a story, each of them justified if it provides a "center" for the work."[7]

Booth's criticism is not directed specifically to Lubbock, but he was of course aware of the importance of *The Craft of Fiction*. He feels, therefore, that particular comments on Lubbock's work cannot be dispensed with. I quote these comments in full because they reveal an unusual perception of the complexity of James's critical work and because, as I will show later, some critics who commented on James after the publication of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) apparently chose

to disregard Booth's warning and repeated Lubbock's erroneous reading in different ways. I will return to the problem, but let me continue, for the moment, with Booth's criticism of Lubbock:

> Even in the works of the first critics who attempted to do justice to James, we find the process of reduction already under way. In Percy Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction* (1921), James's treatment of dozens of literary problems—of the author's character, of his method of finding a subject, of the superiority of some subjects over other subjects, of the difficulties in finding credible centers of consciousness, of the methods for disguising one's rhetorical ruses—is reduced to one thing needful: a novel should be made dramatic. Lubbock's account is clearer and more systematic than James's; he gives us a neat and helpful scheme of relationships among the terms *panorama, picture, drama*, and *scene*. It is a scheme that James can be made to support, but in James's account it is surrounded with important qualifications which in Lubbock are already beginning to be slighted.[8]

Lubbock extracts a single method from a critical corpus characterized by a variety of methods and is, accordingly, criticized in Booth's more accurate perception. Critics following Booth and Lubbock, however, persisted in the attempt to find appropriate labels for James. Thus, Timothy P. Martin uses the many passages in which James affirms his interest in life, representation, and morality to define his critical work as characterized by mimesis rather than formalism. He begins with a distinction proposed by Robert Murray Davis in the introduction to his 1969 collection, *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism*. Davis sees in modern criticism of the novel a theoretical split which defines, on the one hand, "the conception of the novel as an autonomous artifact, a created object whose form is its content, which appeals primarily to the aesthetic sense of the reader," and on the other "the mimetic view of the novel as a presentation of life, a product of the author's vision of the outer world rather than his technique, which appeals to the ethical and emotional perceptions of the reader—or to the whole man, the aesthetic

sense being subordinated or denied."[9] Accepting the validity of the proposal without qualifications, Martin argues that James could not possibly be, as Lubbock wants him to be, a formalist critic. He was rather a mimetic critic, interested not only in the representation of life but also in the possible ethical and moral effects of fiction on the reader. As in the case of Lubbock, Martin's argument can be easily "proven" by selecting, in the vast body of James's critical writings, the passages in which he strongly emphasizes the notions of representation and morality. Writing about Turgénieff, James praises his novels because his "living, moving narrative has so effectually put us in the way of feeling with him that we can be depended upon.... We close the book for a moment and pause, with a sense of personal excitement." Martin quotes the passage to show that, far from being a defender of aesthetic appreciation and analysis, James wants the reader to identify with the work and make the book his own through "personal excitement." As for the question of authorial presence in fiction, Martin claims that "James's attack on the garrulous author is made on mimetic rather than aesthetic grounds. For James, authorial intrusion interferes with the illusion created by the book and prevents the reader from immersing himself in it." As evidence for his view, Martin refers to James's argument, presented in "The Art of Fiction," that Trollope had betrayed the sacred office of the novelist because he had implied that "the novelist is less occupied in looking for truth . . . than the historian." James was here treating the novelist "as an historian rather than a storyteller." Authorial intrusion, therefore, "does its damage to the novel's illusion of 'history' (or reality), not the novel's form." Martin concludes that, "for all his interest in the formal aspects of fiction, James was ultimately a mimetic critic."[10]

Although pointing to the different direction of mimesis and representation, Martin is as reductive in his reading of James's critical writings as Lubbock had been fifty years before. In fact, Martin's reductive procedure constitutes perhaps a more serious

problem than Lubbock's, as he writes in 1980, a decade after the authoritative voice of René Wellek had proclaimed, in an important study of the entire body of Jamesian criticism, that James was "neither a 'realist,' the label pinned on him in most histories of literature, nor a 'formalist,' a devotee of art for art's sake for which he is often dismissed."[11]

Wellek's study is one of the best evaluations of James to date and deserves closer attention. He stresses the need "to take James's critical work as a whole, from his first reviews in 1864 to the articles on "The New Novel" in 1914, fifty years later." To take the "critical work as a whole" implies the need to come to grips with the variety and complexity of the critical discourse and to avoid labels and easy generalizations based on isolated texts. Thus, it is also necessary to consider the critical work "as a unity in which the criticism of his own novels takes only a minor place." Wellek might be here underestimating the significance of the prefaces, in an attempt to counter Blackmur's previous excessive emphasis on James's writings on the art of the novel. "The *Prefaces*," Wellek continues, "as a totality, judged as criticism, are disappointing. . . [they] are primarily reminiscences and commentaries and not criticism. They tell us where and when a book was written, what was the "germ" of the story—a remembered figure, an anecdote told at dinner, a mood recaptured—or they explain, expand, and develop the theme of the novel or indulge in general reflections on manners and life. Actual criticism is rare in the *Prefaces*." Again, Wellek is here minimizing the significance of James's many references, especially in the first five prefaces, to the problems of rendering and "doing" a particular subject. Here, as before, however, one must bear in mind that Wellek is also writing in response to critics like Blackmur and Lubbock.[12]

By taking James's criticism "as a whole" and by attempting to come to grips with its variety, Wellek succeeds in avoiding some of the previous reductive procedures. And yet, as he feels

that there must be an underlying unity and a system in James's criticism, he finally chooses to give it a name which ultimately tends to be reductive despite his effort to do justice to James's complexity. Wellek is certainly aware that, given the variety of the Jamesian critical views, the work as a whole could scarcely be accurately defined. Thus, while affirming that there is a unity underlying James's critical work and that "his views are remarkably coherent and consistent," Wellek admits that "there are some shifts of doctrine and marked changes of style" during the fifty years in which James wrote criticism. But he tends to dismiss these shifts and changes as irrelevant. He concludes that "James's critical views . . . show, at most, changes of emphasis due to a difference of audience or the changed atmosphere of the time."[13]

If James is neither a formalist nor a realist, what then is he as a critic? Wellek answers that the key concept to understand James's criticism is the notion of "organic form." The solution is ingenious in the sense that the idea of organic form, as discussed by the Romantics, especially Coleridge, and as appropriated by modern criticism, particularly by the New Critics, serves the purpose of dissolving contradictions and imposing unity upon variety. The metaphor of "organic form" appeals to a biological analogy (a poem is an organism; a poem is like a plant) to characterize the work of art with specific emphases: the importance of the overall structure of the work and of the relationship of the parts to each other and to the whole, which is thought of as being more than the sum of its parts. The interaction of the parts, moreover, should be understood as living and natural, as opposed to the interaction of parts in inorganic, mechanical or artificial forms. In organic forms of art, therefore, there should be no distinction between form and content, or structure and meaning, because forms grow naturally from the meaning and embody it, whereas in inorganic form the structure precedes the meaning and is imposed upon it.

The advantage of using the notion of organicism for James is obvious. If James believed in organic rather than in mechanical or inorganic form, then it would make no sense to see a formalist James against a realist James: he would, instead, be a formal realist. "James," Wellek argues, "was perfectly aware of the unity of content and form. He complains of 'the perpetual clumsy assumption that subject and style are—aesthetically speaking, or in the living work—different and separable things.' He often argues that 'the grave distinction between substance and form in a really wrought work of art signally breaks down,' that it is impossible 'to mark any joint or seam,' or to 'disintegrate a synthesis' such as his own novel *The Awkward Age*." James, moreover, is theoretically aware of the concept of organic form. As Wellek observes, "he tells us that he delights 'in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form,' refers complacently to his own 'organic form' and writes criticism from the very beginning of his career with the concept and metaphor in mind. 'A genuine poem is a tree that breaks into blossom and shakes in the wind,' while George Eliot's *The Spanish Gipsy* is rather 'like a vast mural design in mosaic-work.' 'A novel,' he elaborates the metaphor, 'is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of the other parts.'" Wellek concludes that "James alone in his time and place in the English-speaking world holds fast to the insights of organicist aesthetics and thus constitutes a bridge from the early nineteenth century to modern criticism." [14]

Although Wellek's view of James the critic is less reductive than either Lubbock's or Martin's, his insistence that James has a well-defined theory is problematic. In an article published in 1969, Walter R. McDonald convincingly challenged Wellek's assumption that a well-defined theory could indeed be found in James. McDonald's purpose, as he puts it, is "to demonstrate by a series of inconsistencies and contradictions in James's

criticism that he did not adequately come to grips with the diverse presuppositions of his critical remarks and therefore did not compose a consistent aesthetics."[15] Wellek, as noted above, had tried to use the all-encompassing concept of organic form to resolve some of the Jamesian contradictory allegiances, such as the double allegiance to realism and formalism, life and art. McDonald takes a closer look at this and other problematic double allegiances and suggests that no amount of organicist theorization can offer a final, harmonious solution to the contradictions.

McDonald's discussion of contradictory views in "The Art of Fiction" and in *The Art of the Novel* is a good illustration of the method he uses to demolish Wellek's argument. In the earlier essay, James had stated the famous mimetic claim I have already quoted: "Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it with rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention." In the later work, James declares that "anything more than the "merest grain . . . of reality" "spoils the operation." His reason is that "life being all inclusion and confusion, and art being all discrimination and selection, the latter" must be left alone with its "virus of suggestion," since "life persistently blunders and deviates, loses herself in the sand." McDonald comments:

> This idea of the "virus of suggestion" is contrary to the earlier claim that Fiction must offer "life without rearrangement. For when art breeds its virus of suggestion, the results are quite different from what life would have produced, since life always "blunders and deviates." Here in *The Art of the Novel* the artificial is more valuable to James than the real; yet in the earlier essay, fiction that alters or rearranges life is cheap, "a compromise and convention"— or, one might say, artificial.
>
> Furthermore, there is in this earlier essay the idea of the virus of suggestion, but inconsistent with the same concept developed in

the prefaces. For in the "Art of Fiction" the artist uses the virus of suggestion to reproduce life, *not*, as James will hold in the prefaces, to create an artifact which fulfills its intent, as opposed to life's blundering[16]

One important difference between Wellek's and McDonald's readings of James's lies in the different emphases they give to specific parts of James's work. Wellek dismisses the *Prefaces* as less relevant; McDonald sees them as an essential document, perhaps as *the* essential document, of Jamesian poetics. James himself, as McDonald observes, "considered his most ambitions critical work, the prefaces, as a consistent and comprehensive whole." And he quotes, as evidence, the letter James wrote to W.D. Howells (August 17, 1908): "They ought, collected together, none the less, to form a sort of comprehensive manual or *vademecum* [sic] for aspirants in our arduous profession."[17] This shift of emphasis is probably inevitable in all criticism: powerless to dominate the totality of any complex discursive area, every critic focuses his attention on certain areas of the text to be analyzed. More often than not, these areas will coincide with the main interests of the critic and be used to confirm his original hypotheses and horizons of expectations. A critic interested in the concept of organicism will eventually find that the text he analyses confirms his interest; a formalist critic will eventually find the presence of forms everywhere. By focusing his attention on an alternative area of discourse, McDonald suggests that Wellek only succeeded in seeing organicism as the overall metaphor governing Jamesian criticism because he included particular areas of the Jamesian critical discourse and excluded others. Once the repressed areas were made visible, conflicting areas of meaning compromised the validity of the organic hypothesis.

Wellek, in other words, discovered organicism in James by concentrating his attention on reviews and early essays in which James was more interested in life than in art, conventions, and

the artificial. The James of the prefaces, on the other hand, was very much interested in minimizing the significance of art and technique at the expense of life. Life, as McDonald observes, should be reduced to a minimum, "the merest grain of reality." The organic metaphor thus applies more to the early than to the late James. The implication is that the progression of James's criticism in the course of half a century is analogous to the evolution of his early novels and style, less complex and more direct in terms of expression (more "mimetic" and interested in life), to the complexity of style and form in the late novels.

McDonald is not the first critic to call attention to James's interest in form, particularly in the prefaces. The tendency, as I have suggested before, goes from Lubbock through Blackmur to the present. In an essay published in 1969, Leo Bersani sees the prefaces as a critical text that resembles the kind of structuralist criticism practiced in the l960s. He quotes with approval Van Wick Brooks's observations that the later James was "an impassioned geometer" and that what interested him was not the figures but their relations, the relations which alone make pawns significant." Bersani sees James's prefaces as often marked by "an anti-interpretive purity which makes some of our own austere defenses against interpretation seem almost embarrassingly rich with psychological meanings. They offer, with a kind of brazen unself-consciousness, an astonishingly artificial, even mechanical view of novelistic invention." If Bersani is right—and of course the prefaces would provide him with plenty of evidence to support his view—then James's later criticism should by no means be viewed as governed by the theory of organic forms, as it fosters mechanism rather than organicism. Bersani concludes:

> It is not merely that James asserts the importance of technique in the Prefaces; more radically, he tends to discuss character and situation almost entirely as functions of technical ingenuities. The very elements of a Jamesian story which may strike us as requiring the most explanation are presented by James either as a *solution* to

a problem of compositional harmony or else as the *donnée* about which it would be irrelevant to ask any questions at all.

James should constantly be referred to as a model of structuralist criticism. For the Prefaces are the best example I know of a criticism which consistently redirects our attention from the referential aspect of a work of art (its extensions into "reality") to its own structural coherence as the principal source of inspiration.[18]

McDonald's and Bersani's comments suggest that the organic metaphor, although certainly a more comprehensive concept than the labels "formalist" and "realist," finally fails to produce a consistent definition of the totality of James's critical work. McDonald might well be right in his assertion that total consistency cannot, finally, be imposed on James's criticism because of the contradiction between life and art (not to mention many other examples of inconsistency, such as the manner in which James uses, contradictorily, the concepts of novel and romance, or the habit he has of defining, at different times, the essence of the novel as being "interesting," or "sincere," or "complete") and because, *as a rule*, James's critical statements seem to "collide with each other without James's cognizance."

Granted James's inconsistency as a critic, we are still in the dark as to what might explain it. Taking the chances of joining a minority voice in Jamesian criticism, McDonald finally suggests that James was a poor critic, that he had "a mind unaware of its contradictory presuppositions," and that "perhaps he spoke his criticism ex cathedra, without weighing it carefully as he did his fiction."[19] Although I agree with McDonald's view that James was inconsistent as a critic, I do not think inconsistency in this case necessarily implies a negative view of his critical work. In fact, as I shall argue, his inconsistencies might well be a sign of his greatness as a critic.

2. James's critical inconsistencies and the nature of the critical enterprise

Critical inconsistencies in James might very well result from the kind of criticism he chose to practice in a particular historical period in which criticism could not possibly be identified with most of the critical practices we have today. According to Edward Said, literary criticism "is practiced today in four major forms":

> One is the practical criticism to be found in book reviewing and literary journalism. Second is academic literary history, which is a descendant of such nineteenth-century specialties as classical scholarship, philology, and cultural history. Third is literary appreciation and interpretation, principally academic but, unlike the other two, not confined to professional and regularly appearing authors. Appreciation is what is taught and performed by teachers of literature in the university and its beneficiaries in a literal sense are all these millions of people who have learned in a classroom how to read a poem, how to enjoy the complexity of a metaphysical conceit, how to think of literature and figurative language as having characteristics that are unique and not reducible to a simple moral or political message. And the fourth form is literary theory, a relatively new subject. It appeared as an eye-catching topic for academic and popular discussion in the United States later than it did in Europe: people like Walter Benjamin and the young Georg Lukács, for instance, did their theoretical work in the early years of this century, and they wrote in a known, if not universally uncontested, idiom. American literary theory, despite the pioneering studies of Kenneth Burke well before World War Two, came of age only in the 1970s, and that because of the observably deliberate attention to prior European models (structuralism, semiotics, deconstruction).[20]

Although James's critical practices could arguably be (and indeed have been) associated with three out of the four kinds of criticism defined by Said, the significant differences between any Jamesian piece and a modern piece can hardly be ignored. Thus, if it is true that a significant body of James's criticism consists of reviewing and literary journalism, it is equally true that his reviews cannot be compared to the reviews published, for example, in

The New York Review of Books. These are usually informed by theoretical systems and by rigorous scholarship. James's literary journalism, if compared to the institutionalized discourse of the *Review*, would probably look like casual, informal conversation pervaded by what T. S. Eliot called "charming talk" and "gentle commendation."[21] James also practiced what Said calls "literary appreciation" in the sense that, particularly in the prefaces, he gave valuable lessons on how to read fiction. But here again the prefaces cannot be compared to the rigorous set of techniques developed later by, for example, the New Critics, even though they would see James as an important early precursor of discussions on the art of fiction. And the James of the prefaces could even, as Bersani suggested, be associated with theories of structuralism produced in the 1960s, but again with a difference: no reader of James will find in the prefaces a structural theory or a grammar of narrative as consistently proposed, for example, by Tzvetan Todorov.

Writing in the second half of the nineteenth century, James could not produce the criticism of later periods and should not therefore be called inconsistent according to the standards of modern criticism. In a sense, critics like McDonald require of James that his work should evince the kind of critical rigor that only became part of the critical enterprise after James's death, in part as a result of his pioneering work in the study of fiction. James could not, historically, have produced this critical rigor, as he could not have produced the coherent theoretical systems he is often associated with, whether we call these systems formalism, organicism, or realism. James the critic was a man of his time: an occasional critic and a Victorian gentleman writing in the language of his time and place. Critical standards developed in the twentieth century can scarcely be applicable to such criticism.

If James's inconsistencies as a critic can in part be viewed as historically determined, they can also be explained by the pervasive metaphorical style in which he chose to express himself, especially

in his later phase. Thus, of George Sand, James says that "she wrote as a bird sings," and that "her language had to the end an odor of the hawthorn and the wild honeysuckle"; of Guy de Maupassant, that he was "a lion in the path"; of Flaubert, that he had the "life of a pearl diver"; of Balzac, that he was "the gardener of the garden of France" and a "Benedictine of the actual".[22] In many cases, and especially in his later writings, James not only uses metaphors but also tends to transform them into extended metaphors and finally into full similes. A good example is James's treatment of what he thinks is the threat to culture posed by the mechanical and commercial proliferation of superficial book reviews in the journals of the last decades of the nineteenth century. This kind of useless criticism is first described as flowing "through the periodical press like a river that has burst its dikes." But immediately after the metaphor of the river, James seems to feel that it is insufficient to account for the mechanistic aberration of this kind of false criticism and he accordingly moves quickly to a second, more precise metaphor. "Periodical literature," he continues, "is a huge, open mouth which has to be fed—a vessel of immense capacity which has to be filled." But "vessel" does not yet seem to be the most adequate word. The final and most precise metaphor is presented in the image of a train:

> It [periodical criticism] is like a regular train which starts at an advertised hour, but which is free to start only if every seat be occupied. The seats are many, the train is ponderously long, and hence the manufacture of dummies for the seasons when there are not passengers enough. A stuffed mannikin is thrust into the empty seat, where it makes a creditable figure till the end of the journey. It looks sufficiently like a passenger, and you know it is not one only when you perceive that it neither says anything nor gets out. The guard attends to it when the train is shunted, blows the cinders from its wooden face and gives a different crook to its elbow, so that it may serve for another run. In this way, in a well-conducted periodical, the blocks of *remplissage* are the dummies of criticism— the recurrent, regulated breakers in the tide of talk.[23]

I have previously described this extended chain of metaphors as a progression from less adequate to more adequate imagery. But it is important to notice that no part of this chain is ever to be actually replaced by a more significant one and then forgotten. James requires of his reader attention to a chain of meanings which must be simultaneously kept in mind as one image is added to rather than replaced by another. Thus, the image of a flood to describe journalistic trash is never discarded. Indeed, James returns to it in the last line of the passage quoted by referring to the word "tide." The suggestion is that journalist trash has both the watery volume of a river and the mechanical qualities of stuffed mannikins occupying the seats of a train. This last reference to the railroad, moreover, which points to the process of the industrialization of Britain in the late nineteenth century, becomes a pretext for further metaphoric expansion, as James will later in the article refer to the "great business of reviewing" as "a new and flourishing industry, a fine economy of production."[24] Possible metaphoric expansion, it seems, could continue endlessly were it not for the need to limit the article at hand in terms of the convenient size demanded for publication.

This is one example among many of James's metaphorical style of criticism. The prefaces would, of course, provide us with other well-known examples, as the case, in the preface to *The Americans*, of the exposition of the theory of romance by means of the metaphor of the "balloon of experience" and its tethering rope, or the case, in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, of the theory of "the house of fiction" with its many windows. This insistence on the use of image as a substitute for argument can certainly be viewed as a double-edged critical weapon. If, on the one hand, it provides James's critical discourse with wit, urbanity, and entertainment, it also produces, as a result of the tendency to avoid clear assertions and definitions, a certain vagueness which might easily be associated with a lack of clear and consistent critical perspectives. Criticism in the metaphorical

mode, even if it is praised by critics interested in ignoring the frontier between critical and literary discourses, is bound to become a problem and to be regarded as inadequate if these two discourses (the discourse of literature and the discourse of criticism) are to be distinguished as diverse modes of writing. Insistence on this distinction might eventually lead to the view that James was an inconsistent critic because of the inadequacy of the language he chose for his critical pieces.

James's inconsistencies as a critic might, then, be explained as resulting either from the fact that he was an occasional critic or from the choice of an inadequate register for his critical discourse. In both cases, the inconsistencies would remain as a problem to be explained and as a minor or major flaw in a writer that would otherwise be a more formidable critic, perhaps even a critic as great as he was a novelist. The particular kind of criticism limited, on the one hand, by the historical period in which it was practiced, and, on the other, by a particular choice of a style, would then answer for the presence, in a major critic, of inconsistencies and contradictions.

What remains unexamined, if we accept these ideas, is the possibility of viewing these inconsistencies and contradictions as resulting from possible complications in the object to which James dedicated his critical efforts. James's chief object of study was the novel as a genre. Is it possible, in other words, for a writer like James, to treat the problematic genre of the novel with full consistency? Can the genre be treated with consistency at all? What follows is an attempt to pursue these questions by advancing the hypothesis that, far from being an index of his weakness as a critic, James's critical inconsistencies might well be an index to his greatness. Failure, in this case, paradoxically means success. Considered as a theoretical genre, as I hope to show, there seems to be scarcely a chance that the novel will ever be consistently defined even by the best of critics. Its complexity seems, indeed, to defy critical reduction, as most attempts to define the novel in

the twentieth century seem to indicate. As James was aware of this complexity, his effort to define it as a genre had to be inconsistent. His failure then amounts to an heroic effort to define the undefinable without reducing it to a simplified model.

3. Henry James's criticism of the novel

Although the kind of criticism that James practices seems to resist reductive definitions in terms of formalism, or mimesis, or even organicism, the principal object of his critical attention can certainly be defined with precision. James was, first and foremost, a critic of the novel. Acknowledgment of this fact is, of course, suggested by what I have discussed above as the tendency to overvalue that part of James's criticism that is basically concerned with the theory of the novel (the Prefaces and "The Art of Fiction") as the most representative of his critical writings. But even if we consider James's criticism as a whole, the attention he devoted to the novel as a genre remains pervasive. His treatment of genres like poetry or drama is so infrequent that they clearly strike the reader as exceptional. Most of the time he seems to be so concerned with defining and defending the relatively modern genre of the novel that he devotes hardly any time at all to the more conventionally reputable forms. As Roger Gard has pointed out, this emphasis on the novel "shows as it were statistically: at a rough count James published 149 pieces on novels against 22 mostly marginal ones on poetry."[25] But the quantitative emphasis is not so important as the qualitative value of his writings on the novel. What James has to say about fiction is, simply, more brilliant and original than what he has to say about Walt Whitman or William Shakespeare.

In dealing with the novel, James had to come to grips with a genre that was problematic in a way that the more conventional genres were not. The novel is problematic in the sense that it is simultaneously a genre, that is, it must be defined in terms of a

certain class of discourse with more or less clearly defined frontiers, and a non-genre in the sense that these frontiers can never be defined precisely. As the work of Bakhtin has shown with particular force, the variety and multiplicity of voices in novelistic discourse cannot be unified in terms of a homogeneous discursive category. The novel is essentially the (non) genre of paradox because of its nature as a discourse in which the dispersion of meaning that results from the extensive appropriation of many different genres tend constantly to escape the control produced by the presence of a unifying voice.[26]

James's criticism of the novel amounts to an attempt to come to grips with this problematic genre in a historical period in which the discourse of the novel was increasingly being defined as an art form characterized by artistic control. Defined in this context, the novel was set apart from its origins as a popular art form. In the case of the novel, however, artistic control of the material would necessarily be problematic, because any attempt to impose unity on the multiplicity of voices and meanings that are of the very essence of the genre would never be entirely successful. This attempt to control what cannot be fully controlled is perhaps as good a definition as one might wish of the basic achievement of James as a critic of the novel. Again and again, in the prefaces or elsewhere, James finds himself in the uncomfortable situation of asking a question that cannot be answered, or at least not answered consistently. Thus, he returns insistently to the question "What is the novel?" only to suggest, in various ways, that there might be something wrong with the introductory "what." Whereas the word presupposes, even before the full question is asked, that one is dealing with an object to be defined in terms of its "whatness", in the case of the novel, the final definition of this "whatness" must be postponed forever.

James's criticism of the novel reveals an intense awareness of the genre in its elasticity as a medium employed for the comprehensive and complex representation of social reality. "The

novel," he says, "is of all pictures the most comprehensive and the most elastic. It will stretch anywhere—it will take in absolutely anything. All it needs is a subject and a painter. But for its subject, magnificently, it has the whole human consciousness." Artistic control of this vast reality, without significant distortion and reduction, is the problem presented to the novelist as craftsman. The artist knows, as James put it in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*, that "really, universally, relations stop nowhere." By using his craft, however, he should be able "to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they [the relations] shall appear to do so." If the power of his craft fails, as James felt that it had failed in Tolstoy, the result will be the novels resembling "large loose baggy monsters." The discourse of the novel thus requires of the artist both the representation of a vastness without boundaries and the controlled drawing of frontiers.[27]

A problem for the novelist, the discourse of the novel is also a problem for the critic trying to define a genre which is both inclusive and selective. The novel has to be defined sometimes in terms of its inclusiveness as representation, sometimes in terms of its craft. Given the paradoxical nature of the genre, it is hardly surprising that such definitions will appear to be inconsistent. The nature of this paradox can, I believe, be better understood when one takes first a closer look at generic studies of the novel, which imply treating it in terms of the tension between a theoretical (uncontrollable) genre and a historical (relatively controllable) one, and then a look at James's own treatment of the art of fiction.

NOTES

1   Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: The Viking Press, 1957; R. P. Blackmur, "Introduction" to *The Art of the Novel* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), xvi.

2 Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, 22, 6.

3 Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, 115-16.

4 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 200.

5 John E. Tilford, Jr., "James the Old Intruder," *Modern Fiction Studies*, IV (Summer, 1958), 157-164.

6 René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), 223.

7 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 23-24.

8 *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 24-25.

9 Robert Murray Davis, "Introduction", in *The Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-hall, Inc., 1969), xi.

10 Timothy P. Martin, "Henry James and Percy Lubbock: From Mimesis to Formalism," *Novel: A Forum of Fiction* 14, number 1 (Fall 1980), 22-23.

11 René Wellek, "Henry James Literary Theory and Criticism," *American Literature* XXX (November 1958), 299.

12 René Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," 293-294.

13 Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," 294-295.

14 Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," 316-318, 321.

15 Walter R. McDonald, "The Inconsistencies in Henry James's Aesthetics," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* X (Winter 1969), 585.

16 McDonald, "The Inconsistencies in Henry James Aesthetics, 586-587.

17 McDonald, 585-586.

18 Leo Bersani, "The Jamesian Lie," *Partisan Review* xxxvi, number 1 (Winter 1969), 53.

19 McDonald, p. 597. Although the view that James is not a great literary critic constitutes a minority opinion, it is nonetheless an important opinion if we consider that it was held, among others, by writers such as T. S. Eliot, for whom Henry James was "emphatically not a successful literary critic." See T. S. Eliot, "On Henry James," *The Question of Henry James*, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1945), 109.

20 Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,1983), 1.

21 T. S. Eliot, "The Hawthorne Aspect" in *Critics on Henry James*, ed. J. Don Van (Coral Cables: University of Miami Press, 1972), 31.

22 Henry James, *French Writers and Other European Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 717-718; Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 237, 309, 351, 352.

23 Henry James, "The Science of Criticism," in *Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 95.

24 Henry James, "The Science of Criticism," 96.

25 Roger Gard, "Introduction," in Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 5.

26 M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 321.

27 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 337-338, 452, 515.

II. THEORIES OF THE NOVEL AS GENRE

1. The novel as genre: historical and theoretical definitions

Generic criticism involves the attempt to describe a particular text in terms of class by pointing to the common features it shares with a number of other texts. Distinguished by similarities and contrasts, these texts become extended individuals to be read in specific ways and studied in terms of their change or evolution in time. Henry James is thus practicing generic criticism when he says in "The Art of Fiction" that "the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it attempts to represent life" and that "in its broadest definition," the novel is "a personal, a direct impression of life."[1] So are Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog when they define the novel, in *The Nature of Narrative*, as a synthesis of two antithetical narrative modes: the empirical, which pleads allegiance to the real, and the fictional, which pleads allegiance to the ideal.[2] Of course, these two definitions differ significantly: if he had been pressed to produce examples of his definition, James would probably have referred to contemporary novelists he was reading and competing with, such as Flaubert, George Eliot, Balzac or Zola; Kellog and Scholes would refer to those novelists but, more importantly, to Cervantes and even to Boccacio. The latter definition is thus more historically comprehensive and relies more heavily on *a priori*, well-defined categories (empiricism, fiction). The former appeals to concepts which are only vaguely presented or unclarified (life, impression of life, representation). With a cautious use of Todorov's discussion of genre in his *Introduction à la littérature*

fantastique, the two definitions might be more sharply distinguished by being labeled predominantly theoretical or predominantly historical.[3]

For Todorov, there are historical and theoretical genres, the former being the result of an observation of literary facts, the latter derived from a theory of literature. This somewhat rigid distinction has been criticized by ultimately viewing the concept of genre as formed either inductively, starting with the observation of a limited number of specific historical cases to arrive at a general hypothesis, or deductively, starting with a theory of genre which is then applied to specific cases. As the classical method of Baconian induction can barely be divorced from deduction, since facts do not really exist previous to a non-inductive, theoretical step which defines them as relevant in the first place, the distinction is clearly untenable. Todorov is really talking about two theoretical ways of defining genre, one openly deductive or theoretical, and the other some sort of deduction in disguise. Thus, his method of defining the fantastic, which he assumes is historical, cannot finally be distinguished from the method used in Frye's *Anatomy*, which is openly theoretical and does not conceal the *a priori* nature of its criteria for classifying literature. This does not mean, however, that the distinction is useless for genologists. Gustavo Pérez Firmat finds the concepts of historical and theoretical genres useful once they are appropriately redefined.

For Firmat, The real distinction in genre criticism is the one between the theoretical genologist who creates his own line of demarcation between texts "by the election of certain a priori criteria," and the historical genologist whose "corpus has already been demarcated by history." The former "sets out to revise our generic thinking. Like Northrop Frye, he invents systems which purport to offer a new and more satisfactory typology of works of literature." The latter "is concerned with the import and ramifications of already existing typologies. . . . He begins not

with works of literature, but with a discourse about those works which will filter his perception of them. Although the terminus of his research is also the generic understanding of literary works, he grounds the terms of his discussion in history." In this context, of course, these two enterprises cannot be unrelated. As Firmat emphasizes, "theoretical genres are doomed to become historical. With the passage of time, hypotheses about the nature of literature change and systems become obsolete. Such has been the fate of classical poetics, which divided the arts according to the manner, medium, and objects of imitation." Conversely, "even the most rigidly codified of literary forms can be handled in a theoretical manner. Nothing prevents one from asking whether a sonnet should have fourteen lines or whether the Petrarchan or Shakespearean version comes nearer to capturing the essence of the genre."[4]

Firmat uses the distinction between theoretical and historical genres only to argue that the novel as a genre should always be defined historically, never theoretically. He wonders, for example, why critics should bother to salvage a term so burdened with incompatible meanings. "Definitions of the novel," he remarks, "run the gamut from psychoanalysis to structuralism. Depending on whom one reads, the novel began in the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth or eighteenth century in Italy, Spain, France or England. In "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" T. S. Eliot declares that the novel ended with Flaubert and James; rumor has it, however, that *Madame Bovary* actually marks the birth of the modern novel—unless we believe those who opt for *Don Quixote* . . . or was it *Lazarillo?*" As confusion reigns in the attempts to define the genre theoretically, critics either declare the futility of the enterprise or adopt the "chameleon theory of the novel: the novel is protean, elastic, amorphous, it is the lawless genre, receptive to every possibility of expression. Like the chameleon, it keeps changing colors to match its surroundings." The historical

perspective, on the other hand, should provide critics with an alternative to the evasive chameleon theory. The novel would then be viewed not as one but as many genres given a vague identity in the book reviews, histories of literature, prefaces, and other writings of a specific age. Based on these sources, the genologist would define the genre as a relatively fixed and discontinuous form of limited duration, as is the case of the Spanish picaresque, which might very well have "existed as a viable genre only between 1599 and 1605 and between 1620 and 1626." In this context of discontinuous isolated genres, evidently, no *total history* of the novel would ever be possible.[5]

For the critic who is, like Firmat, interested in making possible the generic criticism of novels in a specific historical context, since in a broader context the enterprise seems to lead nowhere, the dismissal of theoretical definitions is naturally in order. If, in other words, it is useless to talk about the novel as a genre, one should at least make sure that it is possible to talk about the picaresque or the detective novel. But this does not mean that theoretical definitions may not prove interesting in different contexts. Indeed, the failure to produce a generic definition may be interesting precisely because, as a failure, it suggests the difficulty or impossibility of precise definitions, both in the case of the novel theoretically defined *and* in the case of historically defined texts such as the detective or the picaresque novel. The latter, after all, can hardly fail to share basic characteristics with the genre as a whole. If the genre has the (non) nature of the chameleon, isn't this nature to be found also, even if less visibly, in the realist or detective novels? And if this is true, how precise can one be in defining, for example, the genre of the late nineteenth century realistic novel among so many different kinds of realism? Theoretical definitions of the novel may thus be viewed as a background against which specific historical definitions are produced perhaps in the more or less

successful attempt to domesticate a discourse that is, by nature, as elusive and ungraspable as the protean form of the chameleon. In this context, James's theory and practice of the novel amount to an effort to impose artistic control on a discursive form which constantly resists domestication. An interest in theoretical definitions of the novel leads to a tentative question as to what James could do with the novelistic discourse he received from the past in his attempt to make it into a historical genre. In trying to answer this question, we can perhaps learn both about the novel in general and about the Jamesian novel in particular.

2. The novel as a theoretical (non) genre

Theoretical genre definitions require of objects to be defined a certain identity in a vastly inclusive area of literary discourse that can accommodate books as diverse as Joyce's *Ulysses* or Pynchon's *Gravity Rainbow* on one side and *Tom Jones* and *Don Quixote* on the other. Is it possible to find a fixed identity in such variety? Criticism of the novel has often assumed that such a possibility exists and the quest for the essential identity of the novel has proceeded with the predictable result that, when the genre is defined more or less narrowly, a number of texts are excluded that many readers would include as novels. If, for example, a text like *The Ambassadors* is taken as representative of the genre, a text like *The Pioneers* would hardly deserve to be called a "real" novel and should then be dismissed as "romance." On the other hand, attempts to define the genre as broadly as possible have tended to produce definitions that beg the question rather than answer it, as in the case of the often repeated formula that presents the novel as a fiction in prose of a certain length.[6]

Critics who advance narrow definitions of the novel often succeed in defining the essential nature of the genre at the cost of ignoring the protean qualities of an inherently mixed and impure

discourse. Maurice Z. Shroder, for example, boldly attempts one such definition. Shroder begins by dismissing the handbook definition of the novel as "a fictional narrative in prose, of substantial length" because it is too inclusive: it could be applied both to texts like *Don Quixote* or *Madame Bovary, The Egoist* or *The Ambassadors,* which he believes "are unquestionably novels and nothing else," and to texts like *Lancelot, The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ballanche's *Orphée*, and *Finnegans Wake*, "none of which could qualify as novels" when compared to the truly representative works of the genre. The critic, Shroder continues, "must really face the facts of critical responsibility, and . . . either drop such general categories as "the novel," "the romance," and so on, or be prepared to offer justifications for such terms, in the form of more extensive descriptions and discussions." He then proceeds to define the novel in terms of "a typical action, with thematic value, which is peculiarly its own." The typical action of the novel "records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from that ignorance which is a bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world." It deals with the distinction between appearance and the historical reality "of bourgeois life, of business, and of the modern city." In the novel, moreover, the protagonist that moves from ignorance and innocence to experience and resigned wisdom repeats the quest of the mythical hero of romance in search of his own nature and identity. The important difference is that, in the novel, there is no hero, but only ordinary man discovering that there is no future for heroism.[7]

The advantage of Shroder's definition is that, while it narrowly isolates the essential subject of the novel and thus provides the reader with a typology which may be useful as a horizon of expectation for the reading of a number of texts, it is also flexible enough to cover as much historical ground as possible. The novel, one might say, is the narrative form which defines

with precision a certain dominant way to tell the truth in narrative in a specific historical period, roughly from *Don Quixote* (Part I, 1605; Part II, 1615) to *Ulysses* (1922). *Finnegans Wake* (1939) would be a "fiction" unqualified to be called a novel, if for no other reason, at least because of its emphasis on mythical patterns and the dismissal of the realism which still characterizes Leopold Bloom, the ordinary man who is also a modern version of the Greek hero. This dominant way to tell the truth in narrative deals realistically with modern, ordinary man and bourgeois life in the present, as opposed to previous narrative ways of telling the truth which emphasized the romantic treatment of mythical heroes. Its aim is to lead the reader back to human, everyday reality by ironically questioning and demystifying the escapist literature of romance with its overactive imagination. In different ways, both Cervantes and Flaubert deal with this process of disenchantment, the former by having Sancho ask the Don "What giants?" when he encounters the enchanted windmills, the latter by portraying Emma as affected by *bovaryisme.* Emma's is the nineteenth century version of Don Quixote's mental disorder, in this case the divorce from reality that makes her incapable of accepting the unromantic life of the provincial town in which she lives. As he ironically leads his characters and his readers back to reality, the nineteenth century novelist also produces the great realist novels by developing ways of representing the real. He thus prepares the way for the modern novel, which evolves from the concern for point of view in James to stream of consciousness in Virginia Woolf and the analyses of the conscious and unconscious mind in Gide and Proust. With Virginia Woolf and the modern writers, however, the realist novel begins to show signs of exhaustion and gives way to a curious return to mythical patterns which function ironically in relation to the celebration of reality launched by Cervantes. "The pattern that becomes increasingly obvious after 1900," Shroder remarks, "is a curious

reversal of Cervantes's paradigm: Joyce and Mann, for example, begin in realism and end in mythopoeia. As realism had burlesqued romance, so the authors of the new fiction turned the processes of realistic novels themselves into objects of ridicule. Proust's pastiches of his predecessors, his caricature of the realistic novelist—that detached *poseur* who, when questioned on his cold aloofness, responds, "J'observe!"—are exemplary, as is Joyce's burlesque of catalogue realism in the "Ithaca" chapter of *Ulysses*."[8]

In Shroder's proposal, however, the price to be paid for the establishment of precise frontiers of the novel as a theoretical genre is the exclusion of too much, not only from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, but also before its assumed birth and death. *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-64) would probably be dismissed as a too fantastic satire which happens to be partly similar to Cervantes's burlesque of chivalric romance. The *Satyricon* of Petronius (c. A. D. 50) and *The Golden Ass* (c. A.D. 150) would be discounted as romances on the ground that loosely connected series of episodes related to the general theme of love upset by pirates, shipwreck, and kidnappings would barely qualify as novels meant to attract the reader's attention to reality. Cooper's novels would be disqualified for similar reasons, and so would a contemporary novel as *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966) for its treatment of a modern mythical hero conceived through the impregnation of a virgin by a computer. Exclusions such as these suggest the need for less restrictive views of the novel. In different ways critics like Kellog and Scholes, Northrop Frye and, more radically, M. Bakhtin, have developed more inclusive theoretical proposals. The development of a more inclusive theoretical definition of the novel depends largely on the possibility of viewing the form not as a continuation of a particular genre of the past, such as the epic or the romance, but as a mixed and impure discourse with a vast capacity for synthesizing pre-existing

narrative traditions. The novel may thus be thought of as capable of absorbing the genres of letter writing, of autobiography, of history, of biography, of science, and become, accordingly, epistolary, autobiographical, historical, biographical, and science fiction. Or it may combine two or more of these discourses in a single work. Kellog and Scholes account for this synthesizing capacity of the novel by viewing it as a particular blending of two major and antithetical narrative modes developed out of the primitive mythic impulse to tell a story with a traditional plot: the empirical, whose primary allegiance is to the real, and the fictional, whose primary allegiance is to the ideal. These two modes are in turn subdivided into two further components: fictional narratives aiming either at beauty or instruction and becoming, accordingly, romances and allegories; empirical narratives aiming either at truth of fact and the actual past (as opposed to the traditional version of the past in myth) or at truth of sensation and environment in the present, becoming, accordingly, historical and mimetic narratives. Since for Kellog and Scholes these narrative modes change in the course of history from synthesis to fragmentation, the novel can be defined as the new synthesis of the empirical and fictional modes which began in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance and achieved its final form in the realist novel of the 19th century. The realist novel thus recovers the unity of empiricism and fiction that had characterized the primitive oral epic and that had been lost when the transition from oral to written forms of communication gave rise to late classical literature.[9]

Viewed as a new synthesis of narrative modes, the novel is no longer a genre detached from the romance. The empirical or, more specifically, the mimetic impulse, may be dominant in a historical moment but does not exist in isolation. "The novel," Kellog and Scholes remark, "dominated by its growing realistic conception of the individual in an actual society, nevertheless has drawn upon mythic, historical, and romantic patterns for its

narrative articulation. . . . Romance turns to didactic allegory or mimetic characterization in order to enrich itself. History turns to mythic plotting or romantic adventure in order to captivate and move its audience. Myth, mimesis, history, romance and fable all function so as to enhance one another and reward the narrative artist whose mind and art are so powerful that he can contain and control the richest combination of narrative possibilities."[10]

As the novel in its broadest sense is here subdued to narrative and explained in terms of the blending of narrative modes, any specific historical stage of the evolution of the genre must be qualified in terms of a particular rearrangement of trends. There is then the "classical" form of the novel "in the period from Stendhal to Tolstoy," the novel as representative of "the great realistic fiction on the European continent—*The Red and the Black*, *Madame Bovary*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Anna Karenina*, *Fathers and Sons*." But this form of realism is also a mixed form which combines mimetic and mythic characteristics: "The characters are highly individualized versions of recognizable social types, and the patterns through which they move are woven out of the *mythos* of the tragic drama. The actions are heroic, but the characters themselves are more intimately revealed to us than the monolithic creatures we associate with heroic narratives; they are more penetrable than even the carefully sculptured characters of Euripidean drama."[11] It is also a form of realism which must eventually be exhausted and give way to new possibilities of combination, as those operative in "Joyce, Faulkner, and Beckett, who twisted and strained the realistic norm to the breaking point," and those operative in the contemporary narratives that return to picaresque narration, romance and primitive myth.[12] The classical novel defined in this context can scarcely be taken as the basic form excluding other possible combinations. It is one type of novel among others, the type in

which a particular form of realism predominates, as opposed to types dominated by myth, romance, autobiography or biography.

Like Kellog and Scholes, Northrop Frye also sees the novel as a blending of forms. He defines this blending, however, not in terms of narrative modes but as a particular form of "fiction," a more or less impure discourse which usually appears in combinations with the three other fictional forms of the confession, the anatomy, and the romance. The novel is the form of fiction that deals with "real people" against the background of a stable society, preferably characterized by bourgeois rather than by aristocratic values. As its aim is either the exhaustive analysis of human relationships or of social phenomena, it tends to be associated with the work of Henry James, Tolstoy, or Jane Austen rather than with the fictions of Herman Melville or Emily Brontë, which are romances rather than novels. Unlike the novelist, the romancer has social affinities with aristocratic rather than bourgeois values and usually deals with stylized figures or psychological archetypes against a background which tends to be ideal or supernatural rather than real and natural. The confession, best represented by St. Augustine or Rousseau, is the fictional attempt to create a pattern out of selected events and experiences in the writer's life. The anatomy or Menippean satire, a form found in works like Rousseau's *Émile*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes, abstract ideas and theories typified in characters whose main function seems to be as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent. As the emphasis here is on the intellectual pattern, narrative logic admits of violent dislocations which would hardly be acceptable in the more rigorous novel form.[13]

"The forms of prose fiction," Fry observes, "are mixed, like racial strains in human beings, not separable like the sexes." The novel thus combines more obviously with the romance, but also

with the two other fictional forms. In the case of the novel and the romance, "pure examples of either form are never found; there is hardly any modern romance that could not be made out to be a novel, and vice versa. . . . In fact the popular demand in fiction is always for a mixed form, a romantic novel just romantic enough for the reader to project his libido on the hero and his anima on the heroine, and just novel enough to keep these projections in a familiar world." But particularly after Rousseau, the confession also flows into the novel, producing the autobiography and the *Künstler-roman,* and the anatomy can be found in works like *Tristram Shandy* and Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pecuchet.* A precise distinction between the fictional forms is therefore impossible and undesirable except as a critical tool for a more precise evaluation of a writer in terms of the convention he chose for his writing, as in the case of Hawthorne's definitions of his fictions as romances, which should alert the critic to look for his merits as a romancer and not as a novelist. The blurring of distinctions, moreover, allows Frye to explain sympathetically problematic "novels" like *Moby Dick* or *Tristram Shandy*, which he feels have baffled critics who have failed to recognize in them an excessive emphasis on the fictional form of the anatomy.[14]

It is in the work of M. Bakhtin, however, that the treatment of the novel as a blending of discourses is most radically presented. By defining the novel as a system of languages and as the maximally complete register of all social voices of a period, Bakhtin goes as far as one could possibly wish in stressing the forces of dispersion in novelistic discourse. The multiplicity of heteroglossia (languages as existing in their own individual context) rather than unitary discourse is what characterizes the novel. The diversity of voices in characters is one source of this multiplicity, the incorporation of genres, another. "The novel," Bakhtin says, "permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and

extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others). In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel, and in fact it is difficult to find any genres that have not at some point been incorporated into a novel by someone."[15] These voices and genres, moreover, do not lose their autonomy in becoming a part of novelistic discourse. "The language used by characters in the novel, how they speak, is verbally and semantically autonomous; each character's speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another's language" (*DI*, p. 315). The incorporated genres, likewise, "usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities" (*DI*, p. 321). Bakhtin's insistence on the autonomy of the individual languages in the novel strongly suggests here and elsewhere in his work that novelistic discourse might well be no more than an aggregate of separate discourses in which dispersion is the only structural principle. But as his writings often also stress the artistic unity of the work, it would perhaps be wise to read the insistence on autonomy as a strategic emphasis on the open form of novelistic discourse that denies to the utmost degree the possibility of a dominant language of truth. Its main function is to render the representation of authoritative discourse impossible, to deny as strongly as possible all forms of centralization. The true novel, Bakhtin eloquently proclaims, is a "Galilean language consciousness" capable of adequately responding to "the era of the Renaissance and Protestantism, which destroyed the verbal and ideological centralization of the Middle Ages." This "was an era of great astronomical, mathematical and geographical discoveries, an era that destroyed the finitude and enclosed quality of the old universe, the finitude of mathematical quantity, which shifted the boundaries of the old geographical world" (*DI,* 415). The "Galilean language consciousness," as he explains elsewhere, is "one that denies the

absolutism of a single and unitary language.... It is a perception that has been made conscious of the vast plenitude of national and, more to the point, social languages—all of which are equally capable of being "languages of truth," but, since such is the case, all of which are equally relative, reified and limited, as they are merely the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life. The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought. . ." (*DI,* 366-367).

But the emphasis on dispersion in a discourse that, unlike the epic, addresses itself to the many voices of the living present and not to the fixed and lifeless conventional meanings of the past, is only one side of the Bakhtinian definition of the novel. The other is the definition of a form for this dispersion by insisting on the novel as a system of *images* of languages organized by the principle of the dialogic imagination. The novel is thus an artistic hybrid formed not by "an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages (more precisely, a mixture of the brute elements of language)," but a "conscious hybrid, one artistically organized," in which each autonomous language should rather be understood as an "*artistic image of a language.*" For this reason, "the novelist makes no effort at all to achieve a linguistically (dialectologically) exact and complete reproduction of the empirical data of those alien languages he incorporates into his texts—he attempts merely to achieve an artistic consistency among the *images* of these languages" (*DI*, p. 366). The artist thus organizes and unifies into a significant whole a plurality of autonomous images of languages that coexist in novelistic discourse as shaped by a particular form that defeats centralization. This is the form of the dialogue: "In the novel . . . languages are dialogically implicated *in* each other and begin to

exist *for* each other (similar to exchanges in a dialogue). It is precisely thanks to the novel that languages are able to illuminate each other mutually; literary language becomes a dialogue of languages that both know about and understand each other" (*DI,* p. 400).

What characterizes the dialogic form of the novel is then the presence of autonomous images of voices, related by tension rather than by domination, in a system of pervasive decentering. As a result, authoritative discourses of all sorts have scarcely a role to play in novelistic discourse: "images of official-authoritative truth, images of virtue (of any sort: monastic, spiritual, bureaucratic, moral, etc.) have never been successful in the novel. . . . The authoritative text always remains, in the novel, a dead quotation, something that falls out of the artistic context" (*DI,* p. 344). Dialogue subverts authority also in the case of the authorial voice, which far from being dominant is only one more voice interacting with others, a voice that becomes gradually sensed against the background of the other voices coexisting in dialogue. Thus, we sense the presence of authorial intentions "at every point in the work" but "the author is not to be found in the language of the narrator, not in the normal literary language to which the story opposes itself (although a given story may be closer to a given language)—but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he might be a *biased* third party)" (*DI,* 278, 314).

Bakhtin's definition of the novel as a system of languages presented in dialogic form makes the genre capable of including more texts than either Frye or Kellog and Scholes and even questions the notion of "genre" as an adequate label for novelistic

discourse. The fact that, in the essay "Epic and Novel," Bakhtin comes very close to calling the dialogues of Socrates the first novel (*DI*, 22) clearly indicates that his definition does not confine itself to the list of canonic works from Fielding and Cervantes to Joyce. As Michael Holquist points out, in his introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, the novel genre Bakhtin has in mind is rather a "supergenre" that, far from being simply a pre-existing set of formal features determining specific utterances, would be better defined as a discursive force that shapes itself to languages and that is capable of engulfing not only all other genres but other stylized forms of language as well. In relation to other genres, this discursive force can only be subversive, as it works within a given literary system only to "reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system" (*DI*, xxix-xxxi). It is also transhistorical: it can be activated whenever a canonic system proves too confining, as in the case of the Socratic dialogues or of *Don Quixote*.

Such efforts to theoretically define the novel genre, as illustrated by Schroder, Scholes and Kellog, Frye, and Bakhtin, show that precise definitions are problematic, if not impossible. Especially in the last three theoretical proposals, the novel appears as this more or less long narrative which can scarcely be classified as a form because of its protean discursive nature and its limitless capacity for absorbing other discourses. Whether formed by blendings of fact and fiction, of confession, anatomy, novel and romance, or of the totality of social voices of a period, the novel always appears as a hybrid suffering from a crisis of identity. It is, then, not a genre but an anti-genre apt to be described with images in which identity is self defeating: the novel has a protean and amorphous nature or it is like a chameleon always changing colors to match its environment.

No doubt, one can try to be more precise and proceed to the enumeration of shared features in a more or less

comprehensive number of novels. Thus Philip Stevick, after acknowledging the "lack of basic definitions, terminologies, and classic descriptions" in the case of the novel, proposes "some of the criteria by which the province of the novel has been established." These are perceptual, structural, sociological, mythic, typographic, philosophical, subjective and cultural. Novelists thus write texts whose sensory texture, especially vision and hearing, are denser than in narrative prose previous to the novel; they produce prose narrative tightly unified by a coherent structure of beginning, middle and end; they tend to write in response to a middle class audience that is "literate, self-conscious in regard to manners and morals, leisured but commercial, aware of itself as a class distinct from the apparent crudities below and the apparent effeteness above"; they deal with no hero of epic proportions, but only with men as they appear in everyday life; their writing conforms to printed rather than to oral formulaic standards; as the product of an intellectual milieu shaped by Descartes and Locke, they insist upon the "importance of individual experience, a distrust of universals, and an elevation of the data of the senses as the necessary means by which ideas are formed" while at the same time ironically producing a work that expresses a philosophical view of experience; they tend to emphasize specific subjects, such as the contrast between appearance and reality or the experience of reality as process rather than as a fixed set of beliefs; they insist upon the cultural relevance of the novel as it reflects, shapes, enlarges and criticizes particular aspects of a given culture.[16]

Of course, these characteristics have only a vague descriptive validity and can hardly be sufficient to define the novel as a genre. In merely describing in a number of novels shared features which are not common to all members of the class, and to them only, the critic is not isolating and defining a class or a genre. Generic studies, as Firmat insists, "are by nature definitive"

and not merely descriptive.[17] To say that a novel differs from other narrative prose by the density of its general sensory texture is to point to a characteristic that has descriptive, not definitive, validity, as narrative forms belonging to other genres will also show that characteristic. As Stevick himself observes, there is an extraordinary range of sensory detail in Chaucer.

If the critic then attempts to be more precise in his definitions of the novel, he would be wise to follow Firmat's advice and replace theoretical descriptions by historical definitions and deal only with the specific genres of epistolary, picaresque, Gothic, utopian, sociological, realistic, or surrealistic novels. Viewed against the background of the novel theoretically defined as a (non) genre, these historical genres would represent reductive attempts in any historical period to impose conventional boundaries on a radically protean form by giving it a more precise identity and a name while at the same time acknowledging its flexibility. In this context, the second half of the nineteenth century re-invents the novel as genre by emphasizing certain specific qualities as typical. Henry James's novels and criticism, for example, constitute a significant contribution to defining and exemplifying these qualities against a background of fluidity to be more or less successfully controlled. He thus insists on both the nature of the form as related to the concepts of "representation" and "impression" and on the flexibility and freedom that allows it to render reality as completely and exhaustively as possible.

3. The novel as realism, art and morality in the 19th century: French and English novelist

Erich Auerbach saw the realistic representation or verbal imitation of an action as the principal achievement of Western literature from its origins in the limited explanatory power of mythical thought to its full development in nineteenth century

realism. Literature since Homer has resulted from the continuous effort to apply different stylistic fictions to reality in order to produce fictional representations as accurately and as completely as possible. The result of this collective enterprise has been the production, in successive generations of artists, of a more precise understanding of the true nature of the world in which man gradually discovers he lives as a historical and not as a mythical being. Literature has thus moved from the separation between the tragic concern for a few superhuman individuals and the comic concern for human beings in society to a synthesis in which the everyday and the low is no longer kept apart from the sublime and the serious. Gradually, all forms of the social and psychological life of man as an active participant in history are treated seriously and problematically. This fuller, realistic treatment of reality, Auerbach feels, is an achievement of the later nineteenth century realism and especially of French novelists such as Sthendal, Zola, Balzac and Flaubert. Stendhal initiates modern tragic realism based on contemporary life with his treatment of Julien Sorel, in *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, as a man problematically embedded in a political, social and economic reality. In Balzac's *Comédie Humaine,* characters of any station of social life with the practical complications of their lives become the subject of serious literary treatment. Like Balzac, but more methodically and painstakingly, Zola tries to contain within his novels the whole life of the Second Empire in France and treats knowingly the psychology of the various social classes. In Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, finally, the criticism of a mediocre world of illusions and vain stupidity implies the possibility of a more satisfying social reality.[18]

The triumph of realism in the late nineteenth century novels makes the genre of the novel as historically defined so closely associated with the effort to represent accurately the truth of contemporary life in society that to think of the novel as unrealistic

becomes all but impossible. "If not invented by the eighteenth century novelists and their nineteenth-century successors," David Lodge argues, the "realism of presentation" which "treats fictional events as if they were a kind of history" was at least "developed and exploited by them on a scale unprecedented in earlier literature." Realism becomes thus the dominant mode of the novel, the synthesizing element capable of absorbing all other peripheral modes occasionally present in novelistic discourse. Gothic or romantic trends may at times pose a threat to the centrality of realism but are eventually either absorbed by the dominant mode or rejected altogether. David Lodge sees the Gothic novel as one such unsuccessful revolt against realism, as the Gothic was either "ridiculed out of countenance" by major novelists like Jane Austen or then "tamed, domesticated and assimilated into a more realistic account of experience" in writers like the Brontës. Myth, history, allegory, and romance were likewise absorbed by realism even in authors like Hawthorne, Melville or Mark Twain. The first two writers feel the attraction of history, allegory, and romance but are nonetheless strongly influenced by realism, and in *Huckleberry Finn* the "mythic and thematic interests [are] controlled and expressed through the realistic rendering of particular experience."[19]

Realism as the very essence of the novel historically defined as a genre in the nineteenth century is often associated, particularly as a result of Flaubert's influence, with the question of the novel as art. The association is often viewed as problematic, if only because the discourse of realism and the discourse of art are at least intentionally aimed at different, if not contradictory, objects: realism is primarily centrifugal and aimed at whatever is "out there" and art is centripetal and primarily aimed at its own processes of construction. The difference may well be only one of intention, as we are reminded perhaps too often today that linguistic reference to whatever may be out there means hardly

anything but linguistic self-reference; that language, while being always self-referent, can refer to anything outside itself only insofar as whatever is outside is already presented as a text; and that realism is therefore an illusion.[20] Illusory as it may be, however, awareness of the distinction, as well as of the resulting complications involved, is necessary if we are to make sense of historical definitions of realism advanced previous to the modern emphasis on the self-referentiality of texts. This is the case, for example, of Auerbach's treatment of Flaubert as a realist and as an artist.

Since Auerbach is chiefly interested in realism as a fundamental value in Western literature, and since the centripetal discursive force of art, when valued in itself, and not as a stylistic means to represent reality, seems to him to imply a necessary disregard for the accurate mapping of reality, he praises Flaubert for his realism but distrusts his dedication to art. As in Stendhal and Balzac, in Flaubert "the two distinguishing characteristics of modern realism are to be found" as well: "here too real everyday occurrences in a low social stratum, the provincial petty bourgeoisie, are taken very seriously . . . ; here too everyday occurrences are accurately and profoundly set in a definite period of contemporary history (the period of the bourgeois monarchy)—less obviously than in Stendhal or Balzac, but unmistakably." Unlike these two writers, however, Flaubert promotes in his novel the disappearance of the author by introducing in his narrative a distance between what is told and the narrative voice. Thus, whereas in Stendhal and Balzac "we frequently and indeed almost constantly hear what the writer thinks of his characters and events," in Flaubert the writer "expresses no opinion and makes no comment. His role is limited to selecting and translating them into language." What characterizes Flaubert is an artistic practice that favors the objective rather than the personal and subjective treatment of reality. But as Flaubert

was also a writer who hated his period, he finally adopted a fanatical mysticism of art almost as a substitute religion. Flaubert's objective realism, with its excessive emphasis on art, begins to lose its redemptive mission of mapping to encourage social change. Whereas Balzac still has a sense of responsibility in the face of the problems of society, Flaubert belongs to the generation of the fifties, the generation of Lecont de Lisle, Baudelaire, and the Goncourts. With them "arose the conception and the ideal of a literary art which in no way intrudes into the practical events of the present, which avoids every tendency to affect the lives of men morally, politically, or otherwise practically, and whose sole duty is to fulfill the requirements of style." In his career as a writer, Flaubert increasingly adheres to the cult of art and loses as a result his early mimetic power. In his best years, he had been able to make manifest the problems of the age even though taking no stand in regard to them. Ultimately, "his aesthetic isolation and the treatment of reality exclusively as an object of literary representation proved . . . no more of a boon to him than it did to most of his like-minded contemporaries." The world presented in his later writings, when compared with those of Stendhal or even Balzac, seems "strangely narrow and petty despite its wealth of impressions."[21]

There is, then, for Auerbach, a contradiction between realism and the excess of form (form that is not subordinated to the requirements of representation) because language tends to become in the latter self-centered. Realism seems to require language to be as (conventionally) transparent as possible so that the linguistic function of pointing to an outside is preserved. From the perspective of realism, writers who play excessively with language court disaster because the result of language games is an art-novel rather than a life-novel, a rhetorical rather than a representational text. Ideally, a life-novel should avoid the eloquent and figurative language that advertises its own fictionality

and produce a discourse as close as possible to the discourse of reportage. This might be achieved by emphasis on mimetic assumptions, such as linear plot, description, clear characterization. The result would be novels closer to Theodore Dreiser's than to James's or Flaubert's. Art novels, on the other hand, should be conceived as imaginative creations rather than as imitations, in the sense that they would openly advertise their own fictionality by emphasizing linguistic and narrative complexity of structure and symbolic patterns. The result would be a text in which the means of presentation, such as point of view, symbol, and tension would be pervasive.

The distinction cannot, of course, be absolute and novelists in the nineteenth century, in France or in England, did not see themselves as committed to one single trend. James, for example, was obviously committed to realism and to art and even perhaps to a synthesis of both. What makes a double allegiance problematic but possible is the fact that, as language can never be a neutral instrument of representation, artifice must always be present. The difference is then between more and less conventional artifice to be used in novelistic language to make it more or less realistic. Nor is it impossible to argue that, as represented reality is always produced by art, the more artifice the writer uses in his discourse, the more he succeeds in producing the effect of realism. Technique, as Mark Schorer has argued, may very well be essential to the discovery of reality.[22]

The discussion of the problematic relationship between art and reality in the nineteenth century novel is an international phenomenon. Auerbach insists on the centrality of France in this discussion because there the question of realism can be neatly isolated in a particular period (1830-1870) in which its fundamental aspects became more intensely visible than elsewhere and because the question of realism made problematic by art is

nowhere more precisely illustrated than in Flaubert.[23] "In England," Auerbach explains, "though the development was basically the same as in France, it came about more quietly and more gradually . . .; it began much earlier and carried on traditional forms and viewpoints much longer, until far into the Victorian period." He sees in *Tom Jones* "a far more energetic contemporary realism of life" than in the French novels of the same period. "But the whole," he adds, "is conceived more moralistically and sheers away from any problematic and existential seriousness." In Dickens there is social feeling and "the density of his milieux," but "almost no trace of the fluidity of the political and historical background." Thackeray, finally, places *Vanity Fair* in contemporary history but "on the whole preserves the moralistic, half-satirical, half-sentimental viewpoint very much as it was handed down by the eighteenth century."[24]

In England, the question of realism and art in the novel becomes more problematic by the emphasis on the third dimension of morality and the tendency to assume that the real is meaningful and good rather than indifferent. As early as 1838, Edward Bulwer Lytton's treatment of the question of art in fiction anticipates many of the questions treated by James in his 1884 essay on "The Art of Fiction." Lytton believes that fiction should be viewed as a serious art form and tries to define the peculiarity of the novel form as opposed to drama. The novelist expressing himself in this respectable art form should avoid writing loosely from chapter to chapter and plan carefully the overall design of his text until "he sees distinctly the highest end for which his materials can be used, and the best process by which they can be reduced to harmony and order." He should follow the example of Shakespeare's well designed plots rather than the mechanical succession of picturesque scenes in Walter Scott. Moreover, he should be aware of the novel as a form addressed not, as in drama, to a crowd craving for popular sentiments and a

condensed grasp of universal passions, but to the individual reader in isolation, prepared to respond to more delicate and subtle emotions and to the diffuse treatment of human nature on a larger scale than would be the case in drama. As what we like best to hear in an audience is not always what we like best to read in isolation, stage effect will be as much a vice in novels as diffuse description in drama. Litton's emphasis on the novel as a specific art form to be addressed to a specific audience, however, can barely be separated from an intense concern with the representation of the real as sublime rather than vulgar and commonplace. Good novels may give the reader "the consummate knowledge of actual life" that "fascinates the eye to the page" but this knowledge can hardly fail to respect the boundaries of good taste because "true art never disgusts." In Sophocles, according to Litton, "we are not allowed time to suffer our thoughts to dwell upon the incest and self-assault of Oedipus, or upon the suicide of Jocasta" because, as a result of the previous introduction of the children, "terror melts into pity, and the parricide son assumes the new aspect of the broken-hearted father." French writers, on the other hand, would certainly fail to appreciate Sophocles's example in their effort to sicken and revolt their audiences. "A modern French writer," he remarks, "if he had taken this subject, would have disgusted us by details of the incest itself, or forced us from the riven heart to gaze on the bloody and eyeless sockets of the blind king; and the more he disgusted us the more he would have thought that he excelled the tragedian of Colonos."[25]

The discussion of the novel in its relation to art, reality, and morals as represented by Litton repeats itself with variations in other writers and critics of the period. Critical discourses then appear as a collective effort to gradually define the essential characteristics of the novel as a historical genre by carefully pointing to the virtues to be enhanced and the vices to be avoided or

controlled. In his article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1842, George Moir carefully distinguishes between the romance, "in which the interest of the narrative turns chiefly on marvellous and uncommon incidents," and the novel, "in which the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society." He then wonders if novels would not fare better when unblemished or at least not overburdened by spurious elements of romance such as passion, mystery or the supernatural. "It has been doubted," he remarks, "whether [the] union of the common-place with the extraordinary . . . be most favorable to the effect of a narrative as a work of art; and whether the attempt to blend them, does not produce in fiction, something of that illegitimate effect which is the result of the melodrama on the stage." Some elements of romance might be admitted in a novel, provided that they are integrated in the overall realistic pattern of the work. What is inadmissible, however, is the disregard for morality in writers like Sterne, whose unchecked imagination "goes coldly and deliberately in search of impurity." Realism must then be purified from romantic elements while at the same time remaining moral by being restricted to areas of reality that are free from the indecencies portrayed by Sterne. As an anonymous critic writing for the *Prospective Review* (30 April 1853) remarks, "literature . . . must be based upon reality; there is, however, a high and generous, as well as a low and grovelling, reality; and the true artist, in embodying the spirit of the age instead of introducing us to a region of sordid and vulgar fact, depicted with revolting minuteness, gives prominence to its ennobling elements, and though not ignoring the existence of evil, yet veils it in a poetic form."[26]

Protected as a realist discourse from immorality and from the excesses of romance, the novel as an artistic and respectable discourse should also succeed in resisting the temptation of becoming no more than facile entertainment offered to uneducated

readers. James Fitzjames Stephen notices in 1855 the increasing popularity and influence of novels as a result of the expansion of the reading public. "The majority of those who read for amusement," he continues, "read novels," from which many young people take most of their notions of life. Novels "are widely used for the diffusion of opinions" and "in one shape or another, they enter into the education of us all. They constitute very nearly the whole of the book-education of the unenergetic and listless." Stephen, however, is not so much concerned with the problem of an art made popular and easy for the crowd as he is with an art that, in its attempt to be interesting and amusing, disregards all truly meaningful relation to life and provides the uneducated reading public with no true education at all. For George Eliot, on the other hand, the connection between irresponsible amusement and bad art is the fundamental problem to be faced by the serious novelist. In "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856), she sees the book market flooded with foolish dilettante novels produced largely by lady novelists writing in elegant boudoirs and unacquainted with anything but the aristocratic society in which they live. Ignorant of society at large and "inexperienced in every form of poverty except poverty of brains," their novels lack verisimilitude even in the representation of their own aristocratic society. But verisimilitude here is clearly related to the novelist's rigid requirements in terms of art. The art of the novel must be mastered before novels are written in the same way, as the difficulties of musical execution must be learned before one plays the piano. As "lady novelists" foolishly mistake facility for mastery, they end up by writing silly novels. Like all other arts, she concludes, the novel "has its absolute *technique*" and must be "guarded from the intrusions of mere left-handed imbecility."[27]

Like George Eliot, George Henry Lewes in his "Criticism in Relation to Novels" (1865) does not accept the dismissal of

the genre as light literature. But as Lewes is concerned with the responsibility of criticism in helping to shape novelistic discourse, his critical observations reveal more clearly than Eliot's their nature as an effort to define historically the novel as genre. Critics who refuse to condemn lower standards of performance in novels contribute to the production of mediocrity in what could be a respectable literary genre. Responsible criticism, on the other hand, should determine as clearly as possible the basic criteria for the judgment of novels and apply them with rigor, especially because, as they are often thought of as a popular and facile art, novels tend to attract the attention of unqualified scribblers. Unable to exercise their meagre talents on anything else, these writers are eager to try their hand at a genre at which anybody can apparently succeed. For Lewes, the art of the novel is the art of representing reality truthfully. Writers should endeavor to engage the reader's sympathy "by pictures of concrete realities, and not by *abstractions* of passion and incident." He is impatient with characters whose language is "deprived of that nice dramatic propriety which seems as if it could only come from . . . persons" and with writers who describe rather than vividly and dramatically paint their representations of life. Incidents in a novel, he feels, should be arranged symmetrically "in culminating progression," and the story should carry "with it in every phase of its evolution a justification of what is felt, said, and done, so that the reader seems, as it were, to be the spectator of an actual drama." And criticism should carefully distinguish between literary works in which these virtues are exemplarily shown and those in which they are not, because only by doing so novels would finally be treated as serious works of literature "in all respects conformable to sense and artistic truth."[28]

The collective critical effort to define historically the nature of the novel, exemplified here with different emphases in writers like George Eliot or Flaubert and critics like Lewes or Moir,

gradually determines more or less precisely the acceptable conventions for the novelistic discourse in which Henry James would eventually exercise his craft. Much of what James has to say in "The Art of Fiction" in 1884 is, of course, a repetition of what had been previously discussed. James, one must add, scarcely does justice to his predecessors when he says, in the eighties, that "only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French called *discutable*."[29] But there is some truth in his claims for originality in the sense that, if he was repeating much of what had been said, he was repeating with a difference. He was also choosing to repeat with a difference theories of contemporary European writers and critics rather than theories of his fellow American writers (even though he might well have more in common with them than he was willing to admit). Having decided to become a novelist, he found abroad rather than at home the adequate context to become a novelist and a critic.

If James was repeating, with a difference, European theories of the novel as a historical genre in the nineteenth century, what specifically is the nature of this difference? I believe that one way of answering this question is to say that, for James, the novel as a historically defined literary genre represents a limitation he can never fully accept, because in his view the elasticity of novelistic discourse could not be contained by fixed rules and definitions produced in specific cultural and historical contexts. These rules should be used with flexibility because, as James himself put it in "The Future of the Novel" (1899),

> the more we consider it the more we feel that the prose picture can never be at the end of its tether until it loses the sense of what it can do. It can do simply everything, and that is its strength and its life. Its plasticity, its elasticity are infinite; there is no color, no extension it may not take from the nature of its subject or the temper of its craftsman. It has the extraordinary advantage—a piece of luck scarcely credible—that, while capable of giving an impression of

the highest perfection and the rarest finish, it moves in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions.[30]

This extraordinary passage echoes, on the one hand, views of the theoretical (non) genre of the novel as expressed, for example, by Bakhtin. What Bakhtin would call, referring to the novel, the maximally complete register of all social voices of the period and the multiplicity of heteroglossia resembles James's view of a "picture" of such elasticity and plasticity that it can "do simply everything" and indeed loses "the sense of what it can do." On the other hand, the passage echoes concepts that are analogous to the notion of the novel as a historical genre. One can hardly miss the veiled reference to writers (Flaubert is only the best known example) concerned with the novel as a serious art form in the statement that the novel can give an impression "of the highest perfection and the rarest finish." James, in other words, is expressing here a view of the novel that implies a double allegiance to theoretical and historical definitions of the novel as genre. As I have shown above, this double allegiance has been interpreted as inconsistent in James the critic. But can any non-reductive definition of the problematic genre of the novel ever be expressed consistently?

NOTES

1   Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 188, 192.

2   Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 15.

3   Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

4   Gustavo Pérez Firmat, "The Novel as Genres," *Genre* xii, number 3 (Fall 1979), 279-281.

5   "The Novel as Genres," 272-288.

6   Frank Kermode observes in "Novel and Narrative" that "we could save ourselves much trouble by agreeing that a novel is a fictional prose narrative of a certain length, which allows for a great deal of variation between novels." And Anthony Burgess suggests that fifty thousand words might very well be a good round number to define the minimum length of a novel: "we're unwilling to dignify books of, say, fifty thousand words and under with the title of novel, preferring to use the Italian term *novella*." See Frank Kermode, "Novel and Narrative," in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 155, and Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now* (New York: Norton, 1967), 15-16.

7   Maurice Z. Shroder, *The Novel as Genre*, in *Theory of the Novel*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 13-16.

8   Shroder, 27-28.

9   Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

10 Kellog and Scholes, 232-233.

11 Kellog and Scholes, 234.

12 Kellog and Scholes, 233. In *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), a polemical sequel to *The Nature of Narrative*, Robert Scholes argues that contemporary narrative writers, having recognized the obsolescence of realism and of the traditional novel, have turned to "fabulation" in the attempt to explore the purely fictional modes of allegory and romance.

13 Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 303-326.

14   See *The Anatomy of Criticism,* 305-314.

15 M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 321. Further quotations from Bakhtin are taken from this edition and identified by initials followed by page number.

16 See Philip Stevick, "Introduction," in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. Philip Stevick (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 3-9.

17 "The Novel as Genres," 271.

18 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, transl. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

19 David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads," in David Lodge, *The*

Novelist at the Crossroads and other Essays on Fiction and Criticism (London: Routlege & Kegan Paul, 1971), 4-5.

20 As realism relies heavily on the commonsense expectation that words and things are directly connected, it must necessarily be threatened today by the proliferation of knowledge devoted to the dissolution of the bond between language and referent. Since the work of Saussure, the sign has increasingly been viewed in its relation to other signs as a system rather than in its relation to the referent, especially in the work of writers like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. As a response to this threat to realism, critics interested in preserving a serious discussion of the convention have developed alternative definitions. For David Lodge, realism is "the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to description of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture;" and, for George Levine, "realism, as a literary method, can . . . be defined as a self-conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy, to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself (whatever that may be taken to be)." See David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 25, and George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 8.

21 *Mimesis*, 485, 486, 503, 505.

22 Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," in *The World we Imagine: Selected Essays by Mark Schorer* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 3-23.

23 Flaubert's letters are justly celebrated for their insistence on the figure of the novelist's agonizing efforts to produce "le mot juste" and his ideal of writing "a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style" (January 16, 1852). "A transition of eight lines," he says in a letter of January 2, 1854, "took me three days; it doesn't contain a superfluous word, yet I must do it over once again because it is too slow. . . . After this I shall still have three or four other infinitesimal corrections, which will take me one more entire week. How slow I am!" See *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert,* ed. by Francis Steegmuller (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1953).

24 Auerbach, *Mimesis,* 491-492.

25 Edward Bulwer Lytton, "On Art in Fiction," in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, ed. Edwin M. Eigner and George J. Worth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 27-28.

26 George Moir, "Modern Romance and Novel," in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, ed. Edwin M Eigner and George J. Worth, 42-43, 54; "Recent Works of Fiction," in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, 88.

27 James Fitzjames Stephen, "The Relation of Novels to Life," in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, 94; George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, l62, 180.

28 George Henry Lewes, "Criticism in Relation to Novels," *in Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, 186-192.

29 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," 186.

30 Henry James, in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 339-340.

III. JAMES'S THEORY OF THE NOVEL

1. The theoretical double allegiance

The study of the novel as a genre discloses the difficulties involved in attempts at historical or theoretical explanations. Theoretical views are problematic because they have to account for a mixed and impure discourse with a too vast capacity for synthesizing voices, genres, and narrative traditions. These theoretical proposals tend to be so inclusive that ultimately no final boundaries can be established for novelistic discourse and the "genre" must finally be dissolved into a non-genre. Conversely, historical definitions fail because they tend to exclude too many texts one would like to see included as novels. As I have indicated in my previous chapter, awareness of these difficulties has led some critics to give up any attempt at a precise definition by simply proclaiming that the novel is a piece of prose of a certain length. The novel seems then to be this paradoxical discourse in which the presence of what Raymond Williams called "the multiplicity of writing" is so intensely visible that any attempt at precise control will appear to be an arbitrary distortion.[1] Viewed in terms of Williams's notion of "multiplicity," the novel is a form of discourse in which a pervasive plurality of voices would be historically appropriated and domesticated by reductive ideologies capable of determining the inclusion of certain elements and the exclusion of others. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the ideology of realism and aestheticism contributed to the formation of a consensus defining the more or less successfully achieved novel in terms of its proximity or distance in relation to a model of formal rigour such as *Madame Bovary*.

In his practice as a novelist and a critic, James was always suspicious of these controlling procedures in a discourse that he

thought should move "in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions." But as a man of his time he also admired Flaubert and respected his aesthetic principles. He was, in short, a divided artist, pleading allegiance to the novel as both freedom and restraint and as a theoretical and a historical genre. This ambivalence, viewed as inconsistent by some critics, pervades his critical theory of fiction. It becomes particularly visible in his treatment of problems that are central for the understanding of the genre, such as the problem of novel versus romance, life versus art, and the problem of point of view.

2. Jame's double allegiances: novel versus romance

As I have shown in my discussion of theories of the novel, Kellog and Scholes see the genre as a synthesis of the empirical and fictional narrative modes. In its evolution from its origin in the Middle Ages to its full maturity in the 19th century, the novel finally achieves the fusion of both the discourse of romance and the discourse of realism. It follows, from this view of the genre as an impure discourse and as a synthesis, that there can be no radical separation of the two generic trends, but only a relative predominance of one of them at specific historical moments. As one trend is emphasized at the expense of its counterpart, the novel is reduced to a historical genre and to a specialized form of discourse in which a more visible foreground (the dominant trend of romance or realism) is set against a less visible background (the repressed trend). Less visible as it may be, the background is never absent. Romance might be more visible in Cooper's *The Pioneers* than in James's *The American*, but is nonetheless present in both. Cooper's novel may be said to be representative of a particular historical genre—the American romance—and thus a specialized form of discourse defined against the background of the novel as a theoretical genre.

The practice of writing romances as a specialized and reductive discursive form of the novel has often been acknowledged as characteristic of American fiction. Indeed, American writers of fiction in the nineteenth century openly admitted that writing romances rather than novels could be a means to give a national identity to fiction written in the New World. Whether used by Brown, Irving, Poe, Melville or Hawthorne, the word "romance" implies a discourse which owed its allegiance to invention (the exercise of the free play of the imagination) rather than to imitation (the imaginative representation of social reality). As Scholes and Kellog convincingly argue, even though precise boundaries between the novel and the romance cannot be precisely defined, the novelist may be thought of as the writer for whom imagination tends to be a means to an end, the romancer the writer for whom imagination tends to be valued in its own right. The romancer, in short, always proposes a larger role to be played by imagination and feels that he must avoid distorting reality only to a certain extent. This attitude of relative disrespect for the true account of the real in narrative was at times a source of discomfort for romance writers. Hawthorne, for example, seems to have felt the need to acknowledge the importance of reality when he advocated, for the writer of romances, the balance between the claims of reality and the claims of the imagination. He accordingly defined the domain of romance as "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other." In his own definition of the genre, James clearly shows less respect for the need to be true to reality. He claims that "the only *general* attribute of projected romance . . . is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals—experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled,

disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it."[2]

In the twentieth century, the idea that American fiction could be given an identity by means of the emphasis on romance has become particularly powerful at least since Lionel Trilling claimed in 1948 that, as the novel deals chiefly with social texture and manners, it never really existed in America. Although more recent criticism has presented relevant objections to Trilling's claims, the concept of the American novelist as a romancer remains a powerful critical tool in American literary criticism. It may be true, as Nicolaus Mills has convincingly argued, that the distinction between English and American fiction in the nineteenth century is not so sharp as its proponents would have us believe. And Richard Poirier might be right when he argues that "it is regrettable that Hawthorne chose to elevate distinctions about environment, which is after all only one aspect of fiction, into distinctions between genres...." For Poirier, genres "have no instrumentality for expression, especially those of 'novel' and 'romance.' These so-called genres have none of the ascertainable conventions of style that can legitimately be associated with such genres as the pastoral or the epic."[3] Questionable as it may be theoretically, the distinction has a tactical value when used to define a national identity in American fiction by emphasizing its difference and discontinuity in relation to the European tradition of the realist novel.

Whereas writers like Hawthorne or Melville define their identity as American romance writers against European novelists, James sees the historical genre of the romance, and particularly of American romance, as a type of discourse that imposes severe limitations on the novelist and that must therefore be either rejected as a privileged genre or used only sparingly. In his book on Hawthorne, James emphasizes the difficulties the American novelist has to face as a result of his insistence on the limiting

practice of romance. By relying too much on imagination, abstractions, allegories, and mythical patterns, the romancer writes in a reductive way and fails to include the multiplicity of social voices and manners. As this social complexity was the necessary condition of life in the New World, the American romancer was, in a sense, doomed to write romances and should not therefore be judged in terms of values that would be applicable only to European novelists. Although he acknowledges this necessary shortcoming affecting the American novelist, James nonetheless insists that American romances fail to achieve the potential complexity and richness of true novels in their capacity to explore the rich soil of social manners.

James's response to Hawthorne as the American novelist doomed to write romances could only be ambivalent. Hawthorne was, on the one hand, "the most eminent representative of a literature" and "the most valuable example of the American genius," but his genius had also to be qualified because, belonging to a culture characterized by the thinness of social life, he was also limited in his writing by the narrow frontiers of the romance as the historical and national genre of the young nation. The major lesson that Hawthorne had to teach as a novelist was the one derived from the limitations of his practice. The "valuable moral" implied by this practice was "that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. American civilization has hitherto had other things to do than to produce flowers, and before giving birth to writers it has wisely occupied itself with providing something for them to write about." The process of "providing something" as the raw material for the art of the novel, however, was still far from being completed. "One might," James continues, "enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left":

> No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools—no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no
>
> political society, no sporting class—no Epsom nor Ascot![4]

This passage is evidently pervaded by the Eurocentric view that accepts uncritically and without qualifications the superiority of the English or European tradition of the novel. But it is also a defense of the view that it is the essence of the genre to treat a social reality in a complex and multifarious manner in order to fill to the brim what James would later in his criticism call the "capacious vessel" of fiction.[5] Romance writers like Hawthorne, even if talented, would then be producing novelistic discourse under unfavorable conditions because it is the essence of romance, as a specialization of the more comprehensive genre of the novel, to abstract and to reduce.

James finds reductive procedures in Hawthorne not only because of the thinness of the American social life he chose to portray but also because of his inclination to use simplifying rhetorical devices such as allegory. "Hawthorne," James says, "in his metaphysical moods, is nothing if not allegorical, and allegory, to may sense, is quite one of the lighter exercises of the imagination." The reason James gives for his evaluation of allegory as a second-rate literary form is that "it is apt to spoil two good things—a story and a moral, a meaning and a form."[6] As he does not care to explain *how*, in this particular context, allegory spoils a story, a moral, and a meaning, the explanation has to be found elsewhere, in critical texts in which he has great deal to say about morality, fiction, and form. In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), for example, he observes somewhat cryptically that "There is

one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence if fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth."[7]

This passage not only suggests that the novel should not be concerned with narrow moralism (allegory, one must recall, has been many times associated with this kind of simplification), but also that morality can almost be identified with the artist's mind and intelligence, that is, with his capacity to artistically understand and represent reality. It is morality and realism, then, that seem to "lie very near together," and as realism in the novel means for James the capacity the genre should ideally have for representing reality as comprehensively as possible, allegory may be said to spoil a moral and a story as a result of its tendency to represent reality mechanically and in a simplified manner.

James often criticizes Hawthorne for his failure as a novelist that chose to dispense with realism in his writing: "Hawthorne . . . was not in the least a realist—he was not to my mind enough of one."[8] The author of *The Scarlet Letter* had chosen instead to devote his career as a writer to the romance, as that historical specialization of the novel derived from the more inclusive theoretical genre. The implication seems to be that, had Hawthorne been a realist, James would have criticized his work more favorably. The statement, as I hope to show later, is only partly true. James's own fiction is marked by the presence of romance and he accepts certain forms and uses of romances in novelists like Balzac. He distinguishes, in other words, between romance and romance, or between realism and realism. In his book on Hawthorne, he clearly indicates his preference for a specific kind of realism, the one more closely related to the theoretical genre of the novel rather than the one related to the historical. He prefers the flexibility and "freedom" of the former

in its capacity for inclusiveness to the narrowness of the latter. In his criticism, this preference becomes evident once one realizes that, in his view, the master of the craft of the novel was Balzac rather than Flaubert. Because of his concern for the perfect form and "le mot juste," Flaubert's realism was for James purer but narrower than the realism of Balzac.

James personally knew Gustave Flaubert as well as his followers—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Émile Zola, and Alphonse Daudet. During his visit to Paris in 1875-76, he met Ivan Turgenev, who took him to the first of several literary meetings he would attend at Flaubert's place. James writes about his impression of Flaubert's meetings in a letter to his friend Perry, in which he refers to them with irony but also with pride as Olympian gods ("je suis lancé en plein Olympe") and, more significantly, in his 1884 essay on Turgenev:

> What was discussed in that little smoke-clouded room was chiefly questions of taste, questions of art and form; and the speakers, for the most part, were in aesthetic matters, radicals of the deepest dye. It would have been late in the day to propose among them any discussion of the relation of art to morality, any question as to the degree in which a novel might or might not concern itself with the teaching of a lesson. They had settled these preliminaries long ago, and it would have been primitive and incongruous to recur to them. . . . The only duty of a novel was to be well written; that merit included every other of which it was capable.[9]

The respectful but also somewhat ironic reference to the meetings as a kind of council of the gods of literary art deciding once and for all that fiction was a question of form reflects James ambivalent attitude towards Flaubert. If, on the one hand, he admired the author of *Madame Bovary* as the supreme artist of the craft of fiction, on the other, he was not entirely satisfied with the limitations this artistic control could impose on the novel as a genre. In James's final estimate of Flaubert, presented in the introduction he wrote to *Madame Bovary* in 1902, this ambivalent attitude pervades the text. "He [Flaubert] is for many of our

tribe at large," James says, "*the* novelist, intent and typical." He is indeed "the novelist's novelist": his "remarkable, his . . . unmatched distinction" is that "he has left works of an extraordinary art even the conception of which failed to help him to think in serenity." A novelist supremely concerned with art and craft, Flaubert "cared immensely for the medium, the task and the triumph involved." His letters "often record that it has taken him three days to arrive at one right sentence, tested by the pitch of his ideal of the right for the suggestion aimed at." And of *Madame Bovary* James says that "it has a perfection that not only stamps it, but that makes it stand almost alone." For James, however, Flaubert's view of art as religion represents in his career as a novelist both a success and a failure: "He is none the less more interesting, I repeat, as a failure however qualified than as a success however explained, and it is as so viewed that the unity of his career attaches and admonishes."[10]

What is, then, the problem with Flaubert the novelist? James suggests that he was too intensely an artist to be a perfect novelist: "It was not indeed perhaps primarily so much that he was born and lived a novelist as that he was born and lived literary, and that to be literary represented for him an almost overwhelming situation." Being literary to the point of writing the work (*Madame Bovary*) that James felt was "the most literary of novels, so literary that it covers us with its mantle," Flaubert missed part of the variety and richness of life and reality. James feels that this loss is particularly visible in Flaubert's use of "limited reflectors and registers," as is the case of Emma Bovary. In a sense, of course, the elder James writing criticism in 1902 is here applying to Flaubert the critical standards he used for writing his own novels, especially novels, as is the case of *The Ambassadors*, representative of the final phase of his career. These novels required a powerful reflector, that is, a character as a center of consciousness capable of perceiving reality as intensely and comprehensively as possible. As this comprehensive view of

reality would scarcely be possible for a limited and mediocre character, the center of consciousness should ideally be endowed with a powerful intelligence and a superior capacity for perception. For the purposes of the present argument, however, it is important to emphasize that James biased criticism also points to his belief that it was the essence of the novel as a genre to represent reality as comprehensively as possible. The powerful reflector was essentially a means to this end. Thus, as Flaubert's concern with art led him to pay less attention to the variety of voices of reality, he did not feel the need to use powerful reflectors. By ignoring this powerful resource of novelistic discourse, he ultimately failed to present a varied picture of life in his formally perfect novel. As a reflector, Emma Bovary has for James "a poverty of consciousness" that ultimately excludes more than it includes from the variety of the real. Emma, he feels,

> is conditioned to such an excess of the specific, and the specific in her case leaves out so many even of the commoner elements of conceivable life in a woman when we are invited to see that life as pathetic, as dramatic agitation, that we challenge . . . the author's . . . scale of importance. The book is a picture of the middling as much as they like, but does Emma attain even *that*? Hers is a narrow middling even for a little imaginative person whose 'social' significance is small. It is greater on the whole than her capacity of consciousness, taking this all round; and so, in a word, we feel her less illustrational than she might have been not only if the world had offered her more points of contact, but if she had had more of these to give it.[11]

Again, James is here using his standards as a novelist to evaluate other writers in the sense that he tended to favor the so-called psychological novel, that is, a novel in which characters are endowed with intense psychological complexity, rather than the novel of plot and incident. Emma, one might argue, is not sufficiently complex for the author of *The Ambassadors*. But of course complexity of character is also an instrument the novelist can use to include variety and multiplicity. Failing to use complex

characters, Flaubert not only failed to address "whole sides of life," but also to suspect they existed "as a field of exercise." James admires Flaubert to the point of hesitating to suggest limitations in the "novelist's novelist." But he finally does point to a limitation, that of the failure to write novels in which the exercise of craft does not impose restrictions on the need to represent reality as fully as possible. "If," James asks, "he [Flaubert] never approached the complicated character in man or woman—Emma Bovary is not the least little bit complicated—or the really furnished, the finely civilized, was this because, surprisingly, he could not? *L'âme française* at all events shows in him but ill."[12]

For James, Flaubert tends to sacrifice the variety and richness of life because of his concern for art, form, and style. The French writer had almost succeeded as a perfect novelist, but not quite, because of an imbalance between his concern for reality and his concern for craft. In Balzac, however, he thought he could find this delicate balance between art and the real. James's admiration for Balzac grows as he progresses in his career as a novelist and as a critic. In his first review of Balzac, published in 1875, he responds negatively to particular aspects of Balzac's fiction, as in the case of a certain artificiality in his characters, but he closes his comments by stating that "our last word about him is that he had incomparable power." In his later writings, his admiration for Balzac is almost without qualifications. "Stronger than ever," he wrote in 1902, "even than under the spell of first acquaintance and of the early time, is the sense . . . that Balzac stands signally apart, that he is the first and foremost member of his craft, and that above all the Balzac-lover is in no position till he has cleared the ground by saying so." And in a text read for the first time before the Contemporary Club of Philadelphia on January 12, 1905, James speaks of himself as "a man of his [Balzac's] own craft, an emulous fellow-worker, who has learned from him more of the lessons of the engaging mystery of fiction than from any one else, and who is conscious of so large a debt to repay that it

has had positively to be discharged in instalments, as if one could never have at once all the required cash in hand."[13]

The reason for this almost unqualified praise is nowhere made so clear as when James defines Balzac's problematic double nature as a novelist:

> Of imagination on one side all compact, he was on the other an insatiable reporter of the immediate, the material, the current combination, and perpetually moved by the historian's impulse to fix, preserve and explain them. One asks one's self as one reads him what concern the poet has with so much arithmetic and so much criticism, so many statistics and documents, what concern the critic and the economist have with so many passions, characters and adventures. The contradiction is always before us; it springs from the inordinate scale of the author's two faces; it explains more than anything else his eccentricities and difficulties.[14]

The artist's double allegiance to the multiplicity of the immediate and to artistic form and imagination is problematic because it involves the need for control of what can hardly be controlled in its variety. Unlike Flaubert, Balzac does not want to sacrifice the multiplicity of life for the sake of art. He wants both. The difficulties involved in the production of this delicate balance between controlling frontiers and unlimited variety can scarcely be underestimated. Balzac's contradictory double allegiance to formal limitations and variety "explains more than anything else his eccentricities and difficulties. It accounts for his want of grace, his want of lightness associated with an amusing literary form, his bristling surface, his closeness of texture, so rough with richness, yet so productive of the effect we have in mind when we speak of not being able to see the wood for the trees." And yet, for James, Balzac somehow succeeds in balancing art and uncontrollable variety. The author of the *Comédie Humaine* goes as far as one might wish in combining these two conflicting tendencies. If this attempt at combination appears to be at times a failure and indeed a catastrophe, this

happens only because of the impossibility of entirely successful results in the task Balzac defined for himself, that of fusing two incompatible "laws." But the critic must always be aware that Balzac went as far as possible in presenting a solution to the problem:

> I stick to our point in putting it, more concisely, that the artist of the *Comédie Humaine* is half smothered by the historian. Yet it belongs as well to the matter also to meet the question of whether the historian himself may not be an artist—in which case Balzac's catastrophe would seem to lose its excuse. The answer of course is that the reporter, however philosophic, has one law, and the originator, however substantially fed, has another; so that the two laws can with no sort of harmony or congruity make, for the finer sense, a common household. Balzac's catastrophe—so to name it once again—was in this perpetual conflict and final impossibility, an impossibility that explains his defeat on the classic side and extends so far at times as to make us think of his work as, from the point of view of beauty, a tragic waste of effort.[15]

Flaubert, of course, would satisfy the reader's need for beauty and art, but at the expense of the variety of life. Balzac on the other hand would succeed better as a novelist because he was an impure novelist, enough of the artist but also enough of the "reporter". Catastrophic as he might at times be in terms of pure artistic achievement, he was nonetheless "the first and foremost member of his craft," and the master from whom James "learned . . . more of the lessons of the engaging mystery of fiction than from any one else." His achievement is then heroic in the sense that he obeys two incompatible laws and writes novels that can be called "realist" only in a specific context. Balzac's "realism" is that of an author that tried to make his novelistic discourse as vastly inclusive of the multiplicity of the real as one might wish, and yet without dispensing with the necessary artistic control that James found missing, for example, in Tolstoy.[16] His practice of novelistic discourse then suggests that his view of the genre is theoretical rather than historical. As such, it must be

evaluated primarily in terms of the vastness of the territory it chooses to transform artistically into fictional discourse. "Balzac," James writes as early as 1875,

> proposed to himself to illustrate by a tale or a group of tales every phase of French life and manners during the first half of the nineteenth century. To be colossally and exhaustively complete— complete not only in the generals but in the particulars—to touch upon every salient point, to illuminate every typical feature, to reproduce every sentiment, every idea, every person, every place, every object, that has played a part, however minute, however obscure, in the life of the French people—nothing less than this was his programme. The undertaking was enormous, but it will not seem at first that Balzac underestimated the needful equipment. He was conscious of the necessary talent and he deemed it possible to acquire the necessary knowledge. This knowledge was almost encyclopedic, and yet, after the vividness of his imagination, Balzac's strongest side is his grasp of actual facts. Behind our contemporary civilization is an immense and complicated machinery—the machinery of government, of police, of the arts, the professions, the trades. Among these things Balzac moved easily and joyously; they form the rough skeleton of his great edifice.[17]

The territory Balzac proposed to cover in his novels is indeed so immense that he cannot with propriety be called exclusively a realist. The point is important because it helps to clarify James's attitude towards Hawthorne as a romancer. James objects to the specialization of the novel as romance but not to the appropriation of the discourse of romance into the novel as still one more element of "reality" or "life" to be included. Thus, Balzac's realism is so inclusive that romance also can be found in the *Comédie Humaine*. As early as 1875 James had already intuited that Balzac was a "realistic romancer." By 1902, he finds himself not only reasserting the validity of this early perception, but also explaining it in detail. "I feel," he remarks in his critical introduction to Balzac's *The Two Young Brides*, "that we never know, even to the end, whether he be here directly

historic or only quite misguidedly romantic. The romantic side of him has the extent of all the others; it represents in the oddest manner his escape from the walled and roofed structure into which he had built himself—his longing for the vaguely-felt outside and as much as might be of the rest of the globe. But it is characteristic of him that the most he could do for this relief was to bring the fantastic into the circle and fit it somehow to his conditions."[18]

James then appreciates Balzac for his immense capacity to absorb into his novelistic discourse the multiplicity of voices that, as theories of the novel such as Scholes's and Kellog's show, is characteristic of the novel as a theoretical genre. James indeed preceded Scholes and Kellog in suggesting, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that Balzac had best exemplified what a novel should be by his practice as a "realistic romancer," that is, as the novelist that had best succeeded, not in an attempt to produce a pure and specialized discursive genre such as the "realistic novel" or the romance, but in fusing these two vast and incompatible areas of discourse into a single one, and yet maintaining as much artistic control of his material as one might wish. Balzac then illustrates James's view of the novel as a double, problematic allegiance to both romance and realism. This double allegiance is closely related to a second double allegiance to which James returns again and again in his criticism: the allegiance to art and life. Of these ambivalences, of course, one might always say that they are contradictory and inconsistent. But could they be otherwise in the context of the novel as a theoretical genre? Can the genre be ever defined by too limited categories? James's criticism shows a particularly intense awareness of such limitations. As he puts it in "the Art of Fiction," again inconsistently and yet appropriately: "the novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character—these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional

queer predicaments, but to have little reality of interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction."[19]

3. Jame's double allegiances: art versus life

The question of art versus life in James cannot be separated from the question of the novel versus the romance in the sense that, here again, one is dealing with two concepts, one of which is related to power and control, the other to resistance to controlling forces. Art in this sense involves an exercise of control and domestication of life, a domestication that could be viewed as analogous to the one imposed by the purely realistic novel, or pure romance, on the theoretical genre. James's view of the relationship between art and life, as I have shown in my discussion of his criticism of Balzac, is that there should be a problematic balance between the two extremes, a balance that he sees as best realized in the author of the *Comédie Humaine*. James's specific discussions of the relationship between art and life, however, expand his views on the subject by making explicit *how* the balance between these contradictory polarities should occur. For James, the creative mind imposes form on the variety of the real and yet somehow avoids procedures of radical domestication and reduction because, when successful, the artistic work of art is both *selective* and *typical*.

The notion of the "typical" allows the writer to be true to both life and art and to both the centralizing power of the imagination and the variety of the real in the production of novelistic discourse. By seeing the creative mind as capable of producing types and simulacra of the real, James could, throughout his career, declare, in apparent contradiction, that the novel was both a reductive representation of life and a true representation of life. His criticism from the 1860s on emphasizes the importance of both the reality to be represented and of representation itself.

"Art," James says in his 1884 essay on the art of fiction, "is selection whose care is to be typical." The notion serves the purpose of paradoxically affirming the power of the creative imagination and the accurate representation of reality. In the same essay James can, therefore, insist that the novel is a form of art dealing with discrimination and selection while at the same time declaring that the business of the novel is not "to alter and arrange the things that surrounds us," and that it must capture "without rearrangement the irregular rhythm of life."[20] What is involved here is the paradoxical power of the simulacrum which represents the essence of the real and, at least in essentialist terms, can be viewed as a representation that is more real than the actual object it represents. By producing a "simulation," that is, a structural or operational pattern that responds to a previous absent pattern, the artist somehow discovers in the simulation the essential properties of whatever is simulated. The paradox lies in the fact that the "reality" thus discovered in the model is the product of an artistic construct, a *re-presentation* that replaces what was present in its complex plenitude by a simulation or counterfeit that cannot but be selective and therefore less complex than the original. This is the paradox of discovering reality in appearances.

The double allegiance to life and art which is made possible by the notion of the typical is not only one of the basic concerns of "The Art of Fiction," but also of James's criticism as a whole. It is nonetheless true that, whereas the early James tended to emphasize life rather than art, the later James, particularly in the prefaces, chose to emphasize art and craft rather than life. But the emphasis on one aspect never implies the complete dismissal of the other. Life and art represent for James polarities to be maintained in tension and without any final resolution, an antithetical pair of opposite trends never to be resolved into a final synthesis or reduced to the dominance of a single aspect. As Balzac had

taught, the novelist should strive to achieve, even at the risk of failure or catastrophe, the delicate balance between the controlling power of art and the uncontrollable multiplicity of the real.

In the 1860s and 1870s, the early James seems to put the importance of representing a subject, no matter how serious or trivial, above all else. As he says in a review of *Azarian: An Episode,* by Harriet Elizabeth Prescott, "when once a work of fiction may be classed as a novel, its foremost claim to merit, and indeed the measure of its merit, is its *truth*—its truth to something, however questionable that thing may be in point of morals or taste. *Azarian* is true to nothing. No one ever looked like Azarian, talked like him, nor, on the whole, acted like him." True representation must then be recognized as a value in Flaubert and Balzac, even though in the former the reader may find "a heroine who is 'naturally depraved'" and in the latter "magnificent rubbish." "The real," James remarks, "is the most satisfactory thing in the world, and if once we fairly get into it, nothing shall frighten us back." Of course, there must be an eye representing reality, but in the early James this eye is far from being so active as the eye in the prefaces. In James's view Flaubert sees reality but his theory of the novel begins nonetheless on the outside: "Human life, he says, is before all things a spectacle, a thing to be looked at, seen, apprehended, enjoyed with the eyes. What our eyes show us is all that we are sure of; so with this we will, at any rate, begin."[21]

Writing about Trollope in 1883, James qualifies significantly this emphasis on the real outside by distinguishing between "two kinds of taste in the appreciation of imaginative literature: the taste for emotions of surprise and the taste for emotions of recognition." In Trollope, the reader should expect to find primarily recognition, as Trollope confines himself to representing accurately his own time. Of the taste for surprise James does not say much in his piece on Trollope. Dealing with Guy De Maupassant's concept of originality a few years later, James

indirectly clarifies the meaning of literary appreciation by surprise with his definition of original representation, which he sees as unconsciously produced by the workings of the imaginative mind. "The best originality," he claims, "is the most unconscious, and the best way to describe a tree is the way in which it has struck us." There is in literary production a difference and a tension between mimesis as familiarization, confined to accurate recording of reality, and mimesis as defamiliarization, produced by a sudden insight, which the artist then transforms into a new, surprising representation. This last form of mimesis evidently implies a view of the artist as concerned with the revealed original form, which, however, does not dispense with conscious craft ("it takes some time and ingenuity, much fasting and prayer") or with the power of imagination.[22]

James tentative emphasis on the shaping power of the imagination to represent reality in the typical prepares the way for the later full assertion of the priority of imaginative construction over reality in his letter to Wells. James would then be able to say that "it is art that *makes* life."[23] But this final emphasis had still to be preceded by a corresponding de-emphasizing of external reality as the raw material for typical representation. If, indeed, typical selection constitutes the very essence of a reality that, in itself, is irregular and chaotic, then the more the artist stresses form, the more realist he is even if reality itself is largely ignored. As James suggests in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton,* most of his stories had "sprung from a small seed, . . . a mere floating particle in the stream of talk . . . reduced to its mere fruitful essence." Anything more than this "merest grain of reality" would "spoil the operation" of the novelist's imagination in its attempt to take from it "the virus of suggestion."[24] This is, of course, the later James of the prefaces, whose views on realism as produced by craft and art differ significantly from the James of the 1860s and 1870s. Realism is here the outcome of formal achievement. To plead allegiance to forms of realism concerned

with the sheer massiveness of reality could only be a way of courting disaster.

In James, then, the tension between (and the double allegiance to) reality and art remains constant throughout his career, even though the emphasis on one of these two polarities may vary from his early to his later phase. But even when, in his later years, he stresses the view that reality must be reduced to "a grain," the emphasis on the novel as a capacious vessel to be filled to the brim with a multiplicity of voices remains central to his theoretical views on novelistic discourse. If reality is reduced to a "grain," this happens only because this grain carries within itself a powerful "virus of suggestion" to be artistically expanded by the writer's imaginative power. The writer must now find in imagination, and not in life, the source of variousness. It is the power of imagination that, reconstructing the "virus"" of reality in terms of the typical, produces fiction in a paradoxical context which allows for both reductive procedures and the representation of multiplicity.

4. Jame's double allegiances: point of view versus point of attention

The notion of point of view in James is closely related, but in a problematic way, to the notion of the typical form to be achieved in the novel. In both cases one is dealing with formal principles to be used by the artist in controlling reality without imposing on it brutal reductions. More significantly, these two formal principles are also closely related in terms of continuity, the formal principle of the typical simulacrum being in fact the result of the shaping eye that sees and selects to produce the typical form to be presented to, and recognized by, the reader. In this context, as a formal principle, the eye that sees and molds exists prior to the typical model eventually produced in the creative process of transforming reality.

The question of point of view is essentially the epistemological question of how the eye or the mind perceives reality and, in the process of reconstructing it, produces the typical. This is also, according to Ian Watt, the central question to be addressed by novelistic discourse as it develops into a historical genre in which realism and art become essential features. For Watt, this epistemological question becomes particularly visible in *Tristram Shandy*, for in this novel Sterne locates his reflections in the mind of his hero and produces a fictional work in which realism of presentation and realism of assessment are combined. The result is a discourse that insistently explores the power of the individual mind to know anything that is external to itself. Treated more ostensibly in Sterne, the question becomes also a fundamental concern of novel writers as the genre gradually comes to define its nature in terms of mimesis. Watt suggests that throughout this process of genre definition the dualism of individual mind and external reality did not lead to any complete rejection of either. As he puts it, "even those [novelists] who, from Richardson onwards, have laid the greatest stress on the subjective and psychological direction, have also made some of the greatest contributions both to the development of the possibilities of formal realism and to the portrayal of society." Proust is one example, Henry James another. Of James, Watt says that "[his] technical triumphs can be seen as the result of an ingenious manipulation of the two dualist extremes: in the later novels the reader is absorbed into the subjective consciousness of one or more of the characters, and from that artfully selected point of disadvantage beholds obliquely and ironically unfolded the vision of the external social facts, the furies of money, class and culture which are the ultimate determinants of subjective experience although hardly glimpsed by their human agents and only fully recognized by the reader when the story is done."[25]

Point of view is for James a strategy the novelist must use as a means for the accurate representation of reality. The notion

of narrative point of view, as described in the prefaces, makes the narrator a novelist in the sense that he is in his own right a pair of eyes framing a picture that the reader must see through him. "Again and again, on review," James writes in the preface to *The Golden Bowl,* "the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it—the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine law to intensification of interest." The "impersonal account" discarded here is the one effected by the traditional authorial (third-person) narrator or by the first-person narrators that present themselves to readers as narrative agents and tell her a story sometimes commenting on it, as in *Don Quixote, Tom Jones,* or *Robinson Crusoe*. The world rendered by the narrator as teller is given shape in the words, comments, anticipations, and recapitulations of a speaker that maintains a certain distance from the reader. In the "account of somebody's impression," on the other hand, the narrator as reflector does not verbalize his perceptions, thoughts and feelings but rather mirrors in his consciousness the world outside or inside himself. He seems to communicate with himself rather than with the reader, the latter being therefore expected to see through him and obtain with him a direct impression of the world and not a conceptualized account of it. Thus, in *The Ambassadors*, what the reader is expected to see is the demonstration of Strether's "process of vision." And, of *The Spoils of Poynton,* James says that "the progress and march of my tale became and remained that of her [Fleda's] understanding."[26]

James's emphasis on point of view should not be underestimated. As many readers of James's criticism have often recognized, point of view tends to become the essential element of his theory of the novel as he matures in his career as a novelist and critic.[27] In the later James, the question becomes something of an obsession. Whereas in the early criticism scant attention is

devoted to the problem of point of view (James addresses as a rule the particular cases of novelists and their works), in the prefaces the problem of defining a structural center of consciousness in each of the novels becomes paramount. What this evolution suggests is a shift never completely achieved between reality and the mind: these two polarities coexist as an unresolved tension in which the emphasis on the mind grows in importance but never achieves complete dominance.

The notion of point of view as continuous with the notion of typical form, however, cannot but be problematic in James. Put simply, the problem is that excessive emphasis on point of view as centered on the consciousness of a character ends up by signalling a form of artistic control that might well be incompatible with the idea of the typical, which is also central to James theory of fiction. In the prefaces, point of view constitutes essentially a displacement of the center and origin of form from the object to the consciousness of a subject. The displacement characterizes both the novelist representing the real and the character as reflector (as opposed to the character as teller) in his novels. James defines the consciousness of form in the novelist with the well-known metaphor of the window. "The house of fiction," he says, "has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will." Had the metaphor concluded here, the theory of representation proposed would not be radically different from the theory of fiction as "a slice of life," nor would it be contradictory with the notion of the typical proposed in "The Art of Fiction." But as James develops the metaphor, what is powerfully stressed is the alternative view of representation as radical difference in relation to the real: "These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness

of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life."

Doors opening upon life would presumably be what was called in the "Art of Fiction" life "without rearrangement"; windows, on the other hand, offer the real mediated by the frame of the literary form produced by the subject. Windows framing the observer's range of vision give the total, original immediacy of the real a context which makes it meaningful. This "meaningfulness" to be produced by the perspective of the viewer at the window implies the possibility of a proliferation of meanings to be derived from the "sameness" of reality as different viewers perceive it differently. The windows, James continues, "have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, ensuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other."[28] But as each individual view can only be distinguished from another by being a reduction or a distortion imposed on the real, the notion of point of view must necessarily imply reduction and control. One must at this point ask whether the notion of a pair of eyes framing a picture would not forcibly imply a partial exclusion of whatever is outside the frame, and whether therefore the resulting picture would not necessarily be reductive.

One answer would be that the notion of the typical discussed above is a form of producing a double allegiance to both reduction and variety. In the case of point of view, however, this answer would only partially be convincing, as the concept suggests too strongly that a centralizing force of control (the eye of the observer) can hardly fail to impose limitations on the object to be represented. Point of view, in other words, must necessarily be, at least in part, idiosyncratic and therefore incompatible with the notion of the typical. The notion of point of view implies an inevitable threat to the possibility of the typical. Had James failed

to treat the question of point of view so insistently, the notion of the typical might perhaps be more acceptable and his work as a critic less inconsistent. But James chooses to emphasize point of view and insists upon the controlling power of the eye. As he puts it, "without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist," both the "pierced aperture" and the "spreading scene" would be "as nothing."[29] By stressing the creative power of consciousness James seems here to have come very close to what was, for Jean-Paul Sartre, the essentially negative power of the imagination as opposed to mere perception. Whereas modes of awareness based on perception posit the object as real, modes of intentional consciousness such as the imagination posit the object as unreal, because "the essential characteristic of the mental image . . . is a certain way an object has of being absent while being present."[30] As in a Jamesian window, the object of consciousness is an absent presence and James seems to be denying the presence of the variety of the real by his excessive emphasis on point of view and consciousness.

In short, James's concern with the "process of vision" in the novelist and his narrators amounts to a concern with form as produced by the shaping power of the imagination in the individual novelist or narrator. Once this primary concern becomes dominant, the interest in reality must be reduced to the raw material to be transformed by "the sublime economy of art."[31] The meaning of "representation" in this context does not emphasize the object to be represented. Nor could the concept of the typical as a strategy to produce accurate representation be, as I suggested before, convincingly invoked here as a solution to the idiosyncratic tendency inherent in the Jamesian notion of point of view. James seems at this point to be decisively favoring idiosyncratic form at the expense of life. Future readers and admirers would not fail to point to the problem. E. M. Forster, for example, felt that the price to be paid for the formal beauty

achieved in *The Ambassadors* is the loss of human life.[32] Ironically, the problem that Forster sees in James is analogous to the problem that James sees in Flaubert.

The contradiction between the control to be imposed on the real by the artist's imagination and the production of the typical seems to be unresolvable until one looks more closely at the Jamesian notion of point of view. The notion then appears as a theoretical view that James himself fails both to explain consistently in his critical writings and to use coherently in his novelistic discourse. Suffice it to say of the latter, since my main concern here is not with the novels but with the criticism, that Jamesian criticism has already shown that, in *The Ambassadors*, James insists that the novel is told from the point of view of Strether and yet a close analysis of the text will demonstrate the presence of other narrative voices.[33] As for James's explanations of point of view in his theoretical writings, they are inconsistent in the sense that they sometimes define point of view both as a controlling center of fictional discourse and as a center that ultimately fails to control dispersion and is deprived of its centralizing powers. In the discourse of the novel, the center is often found displaced and escapes the controlling power of the eye. The eye then becomes the point that rules, and gives a certain equilibrium to, the form of the novel and at the same time a point that tends to vanish as it comes into contact with a multiplicity of points of attention in fictional discourse.

The prefaces to the New York edition that James started writing in 1906 are written after-the-fact. The task of commenting on his creative work takes place at a distance and the commentary constitutes a recollection of the actual process of composition, from the original idea to the difficulties of formal execution. Thus, he begins each preface with a description of the "germ" of the novel, the original seed that would eventually be transformed into the closed form of a fiction characterized by the

existence of a center of consciousness firmly set in its place. Recovering this original seed would make it possible for James the critic to decide, in the act of rereading, whether the original authorial intentions were indeed realized and whether the center could be found in its right place. There are cases, as in *The Tragic Muse*, when James frankly admits that his memory had failed him in his attempt to discover the germ and that, as a result, evaluation of the achieved form of the novel could not but be problematic or impossible. But even when he remembers his original intention, there are times when, in rereading his own novels, he detects that the center is displaced. What emerges from James's criticism in these instances is a sense of a center that does not stay properly in place, a center that proves as often as not to be easily displaced in the process of composition (and in the process of rereading) despite the author's original intentions.

In the Preface to *The Tragic Muse*, James confesses his disappointment with centers that escape control:

> The usual difficulties . . . were those bequeathed as a particular vice of the artistic spirit, against which vigilance had been destined from the first to exert itself in vain*, and the effect of which was that again and again, perversely, incurably, the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself *not*, so to speak, in the middle . . . I urge myself to the candid confession that in very few of my productions, to my eye, *has* the organic centre succeeded in getting into proper position . . . In several of my compositions this displacement has so succeeded, at the crisis, in defying and resisting me, has appeared so fraught with probable dishonour, that I still turn upon them, in spite of the greater or less success of final dissimulation, a rueful and wondering eye. These productions have in fact, if I may be so bold about it, specious and spurious centres altogether, to make up for the failure of the true. As to which in my list they are, however, that is another business, not on any terms to be made known.[34]

Fiction then, for James, needs a controlling center and yet, more often than not, this center seems to resist his original intention

in the process of composition and does not stay in place. Indeed, it tends to degenerate in "specious and spurious centres altogether." Why this tendency of centers to degenerate, as it were, into decentering? James himself seems to be puzzled by this question of formal calculations that tend to deviate from the original intentions to become something else. He admits that the phenomenon might well be incomprehensible for the writer of fiction, as it seems to be a matter for the philosopher rather than for the artist:

> When I think indeed of those of my many false measurements that have resulted, after much anguish, in decent symmetries, I find the whole case, I profess, a theme for the philosopher. The little ideas one wouldn't have treated save for the design of keeping them small, the developed situations that one would never with malice prepense have undertaken, the long stories that had thoroughly meant to be short, the short subjects that had underhandedly plotted to be long, the hypocrisy of modest beginnings, the audacity of misplaced middles, the triumph of intentions never entertained— with these patches, as I look about, I see my experience paved: an experience to which nothing is wanting save, I confess, some grasp of its final lesson.[35]

Whatever the reasons for the loss of control, the process in which the phenomenon takes place can be readily identified. Decentering and loss of control take place in the process of composition from a germ to the final form of the novel, a process in which the original seed seems to produce dissemination without control. "I Shall encounter, I think," James says in the preface to *The Awkward Age*,

> in the course of this copious commentary, no better example, and none on behalf of which I shall venture to invite more interest, of the quite incalculable tendency of a mere grain of subject-matter to expand and develop and cover the ground when conditions happen to favour it . . . "The Awkward Age" was to belong, in the event, to a group of productions, here re-introduced, which have in common, to their author's eyes, the endearing sign that they asserted in each

case an unforeseen principle of growth. They were projected as small things, yet had finally to be provided for as comparative monsters. That is my own title for them, though I should perhaps resent it if applied by another critic.[36]

Despite the author's intentions, in the process of composition textual monsters or "decent symmetries" seem to grow without control out of the original formal design. What happens in the process of composition, one must insist, that finally produces unpredictable monsters? Although, in the quotation above, James dismisses the question by invoking the philosopher's authority in these matters, he gives a clue to a possible answer in the preface to *Roderic Hudson*. This is one of the many passages in which he refers to the difficulties involved in the process of composition:

> Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it. All of which will perhaps pass but for a supersubtle way of pointing the plain moral that a young embroiderer of the canvas of life soon began to work in terror, fairly, of the vast expanse of that surface, of the boundless number of its distinct perforations for the needle, and of the tendency inherent in his many-colored flowers and figures to cover and consume as many as possible of the little holes. The development of the flower, of the figure, involved thus an immense counting of holes and a careful selection among them. That would have been, it seemed to him, a brave enough process, were it not the nature of the holes to invite, to solicit, to persuade, to practice positively a thousand lures and deceits. The prime effect of so sustained a system, so prepared a surface, is to lead on and on; while the fascination of following resides, by the same token, in the presumably *somewhere* of a convenient, of a visibly-appointed stopping-place.[37]

The paragraph is a *tour-de-force* in its attempt to define the problematic plight of the artist in his effort to achieve artistic control of an uncontrollable reality in which relations "stop nowhere." The artist must perpetually move in the tension between the centralizing force of the limited circle that can never contain the endless "continuity of things," and yet must appear to do so; or between the effort to cover with "his many-coloured flowers and figures" as many holes of the vast canvas as possible, while being aware that it is of "the very nature of the holes so to invite, to solicit, to persuade, to practice positively a thousand lures and deceits;" or, finally, between the attempt to find a centralizing stopping place in a system in which the "prime effect" is "to lead on and on."

It is in the problematic context of a tension between centralizing control and the overwhelming pressure of a multiplicity that cannot be controlled and centralized that the question of point of view in James is best understood. His theory of the novel insists on both the need for a center of artistic control and its impossibility. The final result of this double allegiance to centralizing control and the power of the uncontrollable is the appearance, in the actuality of novelistic discourse, of textual monsters that, although necessarily suggesting the idea of defect and deformity, cannot be condemned indiscriminately, except perhaps by the author himself. James, one must recall, would indulge in calling his own uncontrollable creations monsters, but would also resent it if the label were "applied by another critic."

In James, the concept of point of view cannot be understood in isolation, as a fully consistent critical notion defining a centralizing force of control. The fact that the concept is treated with suspicion in his critical work suggests that novels, and in particular his own novels, can never be simply defined in terms of a single point of view. Indeed, the concept of point of view must be complemented by what Earl Miner calls "points of attention." It

would be more accurate to say of James's novels not that they have fixed points of view, but that they have a point of view and, as a result of the pressure exercised on this point of view by the variety of voices that characterize novelistic discourse, several points of attention. In other words, point of view as a centralizing force must always be complemented by a principle of dispersion that resists control.

In *Comparative Poetics*, Miner justifies his decision to return to the much debated question of point of view not only because it is central to the study of narrative, but because he feels that the idea of *one* point of view is, more often than not, misleading. Miner approaches the notion with a "sense of its importance and its multiplicity, in fact its untidiness, even impurity as a literary phenomenon in lengthy examples. It is important as a way of describing the cognitive process from authorial creation to presented expression. Because it is multiple, talk of "point of view" in the singular suggests a cognitive scheme that is simply not honored in long narratives." The notion of *one* point of view is therefore usually illusory, lengthy narratives being more often than not characterized by more voices than can be contained in the unity of a pair of eyes looking at reality through a window frame. And yet the widespread notion of one basic point of view is central to the study of fiction, especially in the period that goes from the early 19th century through modernist fiction. James and his followers, Percy Lubbock in particular, are partly to blame for this excessive emphasis. For Miner, one practical result of this massive attention given to point of view is the dismissal of "a subject of equal importance to narrative but that has gone undiscussed":

> As has been emphasized, the concept of narrative point of view metaphorically concerns the minds real or fictional who are knowing and relating in a narrative. My next concern with narrative is the counterpart of that knowing and relating: what is known, what is related. Given that the phrase "point of view" is so familiar and has

counterparts in other languages, and given also the lack of need for unnecessary multiplication of categories of terms, I shall call the counterpart of narrative points of view the narrative points of attention, or simply point(s) of attention. It has some merit—or limitation—in suggesting an aural metaphor for what the readers "hears" related.[38]

Long narratives, Miner suggests, are too complex to be contained by a basic point of view. From the perspective of the comparatist trained to be familiar with literatures existing beyond the frontiers of the West, Miner sees the excessive emphasis on point of view and the dismissal of points of attention as the result of the dominance of the traditional distinction between mimesis and diegesis that "dates from the Greek Academy" but has only "received sustained attention since Henry James." Like all ideological cultural traditions, the mimetic legacy has developed a poetics in which attention is given to certain aspects to be included as essential to the discourse of literature, and aspects to be excluded as marginal or irrelevant. The reader and his interest in points of attention, as we are reminded by Miner's observations and, in a different context, by Reader-Response critics, have largely been excluded from this tradition. "Aristotle's concern," Miner remarks, "lay with imitating, with mimesis and diegesis, and the *what* of the imitation was the world of which the imitation was a simulacrum enriched with metaphor and based on distinctions between goodness and badness. That concern, however redefined, has remained a mimetic legacy. It presupposes a world, an imitator (or Romantic imagination), and an imitation (currently, representation, *representation*, *Darstellung*) that is counterpart of that world." Textual points of attention that catch the attention of the reader are not really a part of the mimetic ideology and tend thus to be dismissed by a process of alienation that can hardly do justice not only to texts of other cultures, but even to the very classic works of Western Literature. The omission of concern with points of attention is

then "strange within western literature and insupportable in other literatures."[39]

In Homer, for example, Miner finds points of attention as a significant part of the narrative that would be ignored by a purely mimetic approach:

> Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways, who was driven
> far journeys, after ha had sacked Troy's sacred citadel.
> Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of
> . . . .

(Homer,

1975: II. 1-4)

As Miner observes,

> no sooner has Odysseus become our object of attention than it turns out that he has his objects of attention, many people and their minds. No sooner do we accustom ourselves to him as the object of attention with, in turn, his objects of attention, than the gods become the point of attention, with *their* points of attention (I. 19), and it is not long before we make, with Pallas Athene as transition, a shift to Telemachus as point of attention (I. 113 and through Book 4, with various divagations).

For this particular classical text of the Western tradition in literature, then, the notion of point of view and, in particular, of the so-called omniscient point of view, would explain very little. Reading the passage, we would for a moment only dwell on the omniscience of the inspiring muse or of the inspired voice of the epic narrator, and then have our attention shifting from one point of attention to another. In such cases, Miner remarks, "it seems highly desirable to alienate (render foreign, unusual) mimetic assumptions about the imitator, the world imitated, and the imitation of the world. There also will be no harm in doing so cheerfully."[40]

As James was no Homer and as in his theory of the novel and in his practice as a novelist he emphasized with particular

intensity the question of point of view, the question that remains to be asked refers to whether, in his own case and in that of his followers, point of view would not be of such an overwhelming importance that points of attention could be safely ignored. But here again Miner shows that, even in James, the notion of points of attention cannot be dispensed with. In his close reading of a crucial passage of *What Maisie Knew*, he shows that the question of points of attention is at least as important as the question of point of view.

In *What Maisie Knew*, Maisie is the little girl who sees her parents divorce and remarry. As James explains in the preface, she is "the extraordinary ironic centre" of the novel in the sense that she has "the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension." As a child, therefore, she sees less than what is involved in the action, and yet it is what she does not see that, in a sense, is *central* for the comprehension of the novel and must be somehow conveyed. As James put it, his task was to "stretch the matter to what my wondering witness materially and inevitably *saw*," but as "the infant mind would at the best leave great gaps and voids," he had to find a way to both present "the whole situation surrounding her" and to give it "through the occasions and connections of her proximity and her attention." James can barely conceal his pleasure as a novelist faced with such a difficult narrative problem, which is for him a motivation to create a formal "design" that he feels "more and more attractive" and "dignified by the most delightful difficulty." As he explains, the difficulty involves the attempt to keep Maisie's "so limited consciousness the very field" of his picture while "at the same time guarding with care the integrity of the objects represented." James's "delightful difficulty" here is clearly one of dealing not simply with one point of view and one center, but indeed of dealing with one central point of view and many other alternative centers. Or, more precisely, his difficulty involves the attempt

to deal with the centralizing principle of point of view and the equally important principle of decentering, implied by what exceeds the frontiers of Maisie's limited vision.[41]

The narrative problem of *What Maisie Knew* cannot evidently be solved by a first person narrator. James's solution is to have a narrator behind Maisie (a narrator that, therefore, represents a decentering force in relation to Maisie):

> Maisie's terms accordingly play their part—since her simpler conclusions quite depend on them; but our own commentary constantly attends and amplifies. This it is that on occasion, doubtless, seems to represent us as going so "behind" the facts of her spectacle as to exaggerate the activity of her relation to them. The difference here is but of a shade: it is her relation, her activity of spirit, that determines all our own concern—we simply take advantage of these things better than she herself. Only, even though it is her interest that mainly makes matters interesting for us, we inevitably note this in figures that are not yet at her command and that are nevertheless required whenever those aspects about her and those parts of her experience that she understands darken off into others that she rather tormentedly misses.[42]

I quote extensively from James to establish as precisely as possible the contribution represented, in the case of James, by Miner's theory of points of attention. In a sense, Miner labels a phenomenon that is always implied in James's novels and in his theoretical writings. As the passage quoted above clearly shows, his theory insists that the centrality of Maisie's point of view is always relative, as it often points to other possible centers (Miner's points of attention) that escape its limited control. This is why, in Miner's words, "what we mainly feel" in *What Maisie Knew* "is a narratorship that is so-called third-person omniscient, except that omniscience takes out some kind of self-denying ordinance of telling only—in truth only *seeming* to tell—through Maisie's mind. This means of course that she is the narrator's chief point of attention, which is to say that her subsidiary point of view is dominant and that her points of attention shift from one of the

four parents or stepparents to another, and to herself. She in turn becomes the point of their attention as the awareness grows on them that she is coming to know what is going on." Evidently, if the narrator only *seems* to tell through Maisie's mind, then the title of James's novel is utterly ironic. "What Maisie knew" means also "what Maisie did not know." As Miner accurately observes, "the 'what' emphasizes Maisie's points of attention. 'Maisie' declares that she is the author's point of attention and possessor of the main subsidiary point of view. And 'knew' makes clear that these metaphors of "points" involve subjects and objects of cognition, with one knower's objects becoming the subject who knows another as object and so also the reciprocal."[43]

Miner shows the overwhelming presence of points of attention in James in a close reading of a fragment of the novel. The passage, as he remarks, is "quintessentially Jamesian in its irony and, as to points of view, microcosmic of the whole novel." It occurs in chapter 26, immediately after Mrs. Wix has asked Maisie, "Haven't you really and truly *any* moral sense?" Miner quotes the passage, indicating four persons whose minds "may be the focus for a point of attention or of view" and an extra point of attention outside of the text, that of the reader. He describes these points of attention, that usually appear in combination, in terms of the following possibilities:

N = Narrator	M = Maisie	R = reader
W = Mrs. Wix	B = Mrs Beale	

N-W-M = narrator with Mrs Wix as point of attention, and her with Maisie as point of attention.

N/M-W = narrator and Maisie sharing knowledge of Mrs. Wix.

N/M-M = narrator and Maisie sharing knowledge of Maisie.

N-W-M She had no need now, as to the question itself at least, to be specific; that on the other hand was the eventual result of their quiet conjoined apprehension of the thing that—well, yes, since they must face it—Maisie absolutely and appallingly had so little of. N-M-W This marked more particularly the moment of the child's perceiving that her friend had risen to a level which might—till superseded at all events—pass almost for sublime. Nothing more remarkable had taken place in the first heat of her own departure, no act of perception less to be overtraced by our rough method, than her vision, the rest of that Boulogne day, of the manner in which she figured. N-M/R I so despair of [counting] her noiseless mental footsteps here that I must crudely give you my word for its being from this time forward a picture literally present to her. N-W-M Mrs Wix saw her as a little person knowing so extraordinarily much that, for the account to be taken of it, what she didn't know would be ridiculous if it hadn't been embarrassing. N-W Mrs. Wix was in truth more than ever qualified to meet embarrassment; N-M/R I am not sure that Maisie had not even a dim discernment of the queer law of her own life that made her educate to that sort of proficiency those elders with whom she was concerned.[44]

Miner's careful identification of points of attention in the passage clearly shows that the concepts of point of view and of center of consciousness in James can be viewed as paradoxical centralizing forces always on the verge of expanding into a decentering that can scarcely be controlled. There is a principle of concentration at work, which is nonetheless perpetually giving way to a corresponding principle of dispersion. In James's attempt to show both what Maisie knew and what she did not know, Maisie is the center of consciousness that is paradoxically being permanently displaced by the obtrusion of an "I" and an "eye" that sees Maisie from behind as a point of attention. As an alternative center, this "I/eye" from behind is in a sense more significant as a centralizing force than Maisie, as she is often but not always his object of attention. In the passage quoted by Miner, the sentence "N-W Mrs. Wix was in truth more than ever qualified to meet embarrassment" is clearly an example of the "I's" attention displaced from Maisie to Mrs. Wix.

The obtruding "I" in the passage, one might say, is indeed a central point of view permanently losing himself in a process of dispersion and dissemination of voices as he shifts his attention to each of the characters and to the reader. The precise identity of this point of view cannot be rigorously defined. If one chooses to call him a narrator, then one must also acknowledge that he has at least two voices. As Miner remarks, he is a narrator that "identifies himself as "I" on a few occasions, and another who goes unself-identified." Moreover, he sometimes addresses a "you" ("I must crudely give you my word") that can be also identified in more than one way. "The possibilities," as Miner puts it, "are: nobody, the stylized reader, and the reader." But as "the second really means the third, the reader, who is necessarily stylized by what is known in following the narration," the real choice is one "between believing that a version of the author is addressing a version of the reader" or conversely "that there are multiple narrators and that one of them at least can pretend to address a nonexistent audience."

James's notions of center of consciousness and of point of view are, then, only apparently centralizing principles, as they always involve the opposite principles of decentering and dissemination. James's point of view is indeed a question of a plurality of points of view and points of attention that, as Miner suggests, might very well be more significant than the idea of a central consciousness or a central point of view:

> Clearly, we cannot do without points of view in *What Maisie Knew*, for the obvious reason that there can be no point of attention without point of view, just as points of view cannot exist without points of attention. Also, in a highly psychological, subjective novel like this one, points of attention are really more important for study than are points of view. Or rather, it is the combination of various points of attention and subsidiary points of view in which interest resides.[45]

Miner might be right in stressing *What Maisie Knew* as a novel that, although traditionally celebrated as a clear example of James's skill in handling point of view, is actually more interesting because of its points of attention. But the general question of the dispersive force of points of attention in James's fiction is also a problem in his other novels. John Tilford's study of "James the Old Intruder" does not refer specifically to "points of attention" but the connections with Miner's more precise definition of the problem are obvious. In both cases a narrator concentrates attention in more than he can handle from a certain perspective, and dispersion is inevitable. Likewise, James's frequent references in his prefaces to misplaced middles and loss of control in relation to an original plan seem to point to question of the problematic control to be achieved through point of view. When James rereads his novels before writing the prefaces and frankly declares that, in most of his productions, "again and again, perversely, incurably, the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself *not*, so to speak, in the middle," one can hardly fail to be reminded of his confessed effort, in *What Maisie Knew* and elsewhere, to say more than the center could hold together. The desire in James to define a controlling center had to be permanently defeated by an equally powerful desire to be attentive to a portrayal of reality as varied and as inclusive as possible.

In James, then, the problem of point of view versus points of attention is analogous to the problem of form versus life, or of novel versus romance. These problems result from a complex theory of romance as a genre essentially characterized by its power to respond to the multiplicity of a reality in which relations would stop nowhere and, at the same time, by the necessity to submit to the controlling power of art and craft. A genre, in other words, whose basic requirements should be defined in terms of both control and chaos, reduction and expansion, concentration and dispersion. Pure romance in Hawthorne would then intensify

the need for the novelist to be reductive, Balzac being the necessary counterpart of Hawthorne in the novelist's attempt to achieve his delicate balance between dispersion and control. In an analogous way, unqualified approval of Flaubert as the novelist's novelist, the artist that best represented the capacity for artistic control, would lead the novelist to risk courting disaster in his temptation to sacrifice life for the preservation of form. And, in the case of point of view, the notion could only be of use when adequately counterbalanced by the equally powerful notion of what Miner, giving a name to a problem already discussed by James in the Prefaces, would call "points of attention." In defining for the novel the need for this delicate balance between restraint and expansion, James was in many ways anticipating the discussions of problems of the genre that would not appear until later in the century, in the work of powerfully equipped scholars such as Northrop Frye, Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog, and Mickail Bakhtin.

NOTES

1   Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 148. Williams argues that the range of actual writing as a cultural practice has a multiplicity of styles, genres, and types of discourses that ultimately defies the kinds of categorization proposed, for instance, by theories of Literature. Thus the multiplicity of actual writing surpasses the reductions proposed by the "crippling categorizations and dichotomies of 'fact' and 'fiction', or of 'discursive' and 'imaginative' or 'referential and 'emotive.' It also surpasses specializing and containing categories as those suggested "by the 'forms of literature'—poetry drama, novel—or of forms within these forms—lyric, epic, narrative. . . ." Although Williams implies that "actual writing" in general is marked by the multiplicity of writing, some forms of actual writing (like the sonnet) are evidently less affected by multiplicity than others. I have suggested throughout that the novel is *par excellence* the genre in which this multiplicity occurs and indeed escapes control.

2   Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, vol 3 of the Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1962), 36; Henry James, "Preface" to *The American*, in *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), 474.

3   Trilling's argument as presented in 1948 was later taken up and expanded by Richard Chase. See Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals and the Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1976), 212, and Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957); Nicolaus Mills, *American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973); Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 8, 11.

4   Henry James, *Hawthorne*, in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 127-128, 133.

5   For example, James would in his later critical writings refer to Zola's fiction as a "capacious vessel" that could "carry anything—with art and force in the stowage." See Henry James, "Émile Zola," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 404.

6   Henry James, *Hawthorne*, 138.

7   Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 205.

8   Henry James, *Hawthorne*, 141.

9   See Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 182-203 ("The Siege of Paris"); Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1013-1014.

10 Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 375, 387, 374, 392, 383, 375.

11 Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 374, 390, 386.

12 James, "Gustave Flaubert," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 395.

13 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 68, 90, 121.

14 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces*, 93.

15 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces*, 93-94.

16 James found in Tolstoy's novels an overabundance of material treated without enough artistic control. "A picture without composition" he observes in the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, "slights its most precious chance for beauty, and is moreover not composed at all unless the painter knows *how* that principle of health and safety, working as an absolutely premeditate art, has prevailed. There may in its absence be life, incontestably, . . . as *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, as Tolstoi's *Peace and War* (sic) have it. but what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically mean?" (Henry James, preface to *The Tragic Muse*, in Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed Roger Gard, 515). Here again, of course, James fails to appreciate Tolstoy because his criticism is informed by his own creative preoccupations and his personal views on what the novel should be. The passage reveals nonetheless his view of the novel as a delicate balance between allegiance to art and composition on the one hand, and to the multiplicity of the real on the other.

17 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel, 39-40.

18 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel, 112-113.

19 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 197.

20 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 200.

21 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 25, 99, 92, 97.

22 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, 180, 240, 241.

23 Henry James, *Letters*, excerpted in *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1972), 91.

24 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 529.

25 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1957), 293-296.

26 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 567, 531.

27 As James E. Miller has rightly observed, "perhaps the most signifi-cant single contribution James made to the theory of fiction was to call attention to the transcendent importance of point of view. It is a mistake to cite 'point of view' as the totality of James's theory (as Percy Lubbock tends to do in *The Craft of Fiction*), so it is also misleading to relegate point of view to a list of fictional techniques which it is nice for novelists to know about. It is not the totality of the theory but it is central and vital." See *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. James E. Miller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 15.

28 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 485.

29 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 485.

30 Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), 98.

31 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, 530.

32 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), 228.

33 John E. Tilford's work, briefly discussed in my introductory chapter, has shown that what characterizes *The Ambassadors* is in fact an omniscient narrator that very often refers to himself and defines his hero as "poor Strether" in contexts in which Strether cannot possibly be indulging in self-pity. Despite his theoretical intention to have Strether as a center of consciousness, James the narrator often as-sumes the role of "the old intruder" and interferes with a narrative in which Strether is only one voice among others. See John E. Tilford, Jr., "James the Old Intruder," *Modern Fiction Studies*, IV (Summer 1958), 157-164.

34 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 516-517.

35 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The library of America, 1984), 1122.

36 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel, 1120.

37 Henry James, *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 452.

38 Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 188.

39 Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 181, 188.

40 Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 189.

41 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces*, ed. Leon Edel, 1162, 1160, 1159.

42 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces*, ed. Leon Edel, 1161.

43 Earl Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 202.

44 Quoted from Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 203, 204.

45 Miner, *Comparative Poetics*, 205-206.

IV. CONCLUSION

To say that James anticipates some modern discussions on the definition of the novel as genre implies that he does so with a difference. An American novelist living and writing chiefly in Victorian England and devoting himself to the production of a theory of the novel that was also to some extent a theory of *his* own novels, James can hardly be identified with scholarly critics of the genre like Frye, Scholes and Kellog, or Bakhtin. And yet, once his theory as presented in the Prefaces and reviews is contrasted with theirs, some striking analogies inevitably appear. As these analogies can scarcely be found in other contemporary theories produced in the international context that James was familiar with, his contribution to the theory of the novel is unique among his American and European peers. It points to an awareness of the problematic nature of the genre that would not be systematically discussed until later in the twentieth century. Defined simply, this contribution involves an awareness of the novel as a discourse radically marked by a tension between the constraints imposed on the genre by historical ideologies and the expansive power of the genre in a wider, almost transhistorical context.

Viewed as a theoretical genre in the scholarly work of Frye, Kellog and Scholes, or Bakhtin, the novel tends to present itself as a non-genre rather than a genre. Whether defined by Bakhtin as a "Galilean language consciousness" that "denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language" in the attempt to become conscious "of the vast plenitude of national and . . . social languages"; or by Scholes and Kellog as an all encompassing blending of fact and fiction; or by Frye as the blending of the confession, the anatomy, the novel and the

romance, the genre continually presents itself as this protean, uncontrollable non-genre, a "monstrous" discourse permanently suffering from a crisis of identity. Attempts to control this form of monstrosity by means of reductive historical definitions have ultimately resulted, in extreme cases, in the dismissal of the question by defining the form as a "narrative of a certain extension," or then by the attempt to reduce it to a historical model that, for some critics, represents the only valid strategy for theorizing about the novel. One should then speak of the novel either in specific historical forms such as the detective novel, the picaresque, the novel of art, or not at all.

I have argued that James's achievement as a theorist of the novel is marked throughout by a profound disrespect for this logic of "either/or." James tried to sacrifice narrow consistencies for the sake of a broader perspective that would ideally do justice both to the genre as a "capacious vessel" and to the necessary limitations of historical circumstances. In the second half of the nineteenth century, these circumstances were largely defined by narrow concerns with morality and, more significantly, by narrow concerns with form and realism. In his own practice as a novelist and a critic, James tried to mediate between these narrow concerns and a broader view of the novel as an all-encompassing form. He accordingly chose as his model Balzac rather than Flaubert and, when pressed to answer for moral concerns in "The Art of Fiction," expanded the notion of morality to the point of identifying it with the mind of the novelist, morality being then barely to be distinguished from the novelist's concern with representing reality.

The difficulties involved in this process of double allegiance to both the historical restrictions and the transhistorical decentering tendencies of the novel can hardly be underestimated. As the process clearly involves the attempt to do justice, at the same time, to incompatible tendencies of the genre, perfect

solutions cannot be achieved. Thus, the imperatives of form, when taken to extremes, necessarily imply a certain disregard for inclusiveness, and vice versa. Limited as he is by his historical circumstances, the novelist must necessarily include some acceptable voices and exclude others. A novelist writing for a Victorian audience, James was, of course, aware of these limitations. When, for example, he says of the Victorian novel in England that "there is an immense omission in our fiction," meaning the omission of sex, he is admitting that some voices must be excluded from a historical genre.[1] But exclusions should be accepted by the novelist only when necessary. For James, as we have seen, Flaubert was excluding more than he should for the sake of form. He failed to achieve that delicate balance between the limitations required by a concern for form on the one hand, by the need for inclusiveness on the other. The need for this balance was the great lesson taught by Balzac.

The notion that the novel should be faithful to both its vocation for inclusiveness and the imperatives of form is central for the comprehension of the Jamesian theory of the novel and, in particular, for the understanding of the fundamental questions of romance versus novel, art versus life, and points of view versus points of attention. In all of these, there is for James a principle of reduction and concentration that must be carefully counterbalanced by a principle of expansion and decentering. Thus Hawthorne's partial failure as a novelist is a result not so much of his use of romance and allegory as of the fact that he used them reductively; Balzac succeeded in keeping a balance that was not well kept in Flaubert, who was too much of a formalist, or in Tolstoy, who was not enough of one; and James himself, in his theoretical writings and in his work as a novelist, expressed concern for both a centralizing point of view and for what was beyond its limiting frontiers.

In a sense, James's disrespectful response to historical circumstances that imposed restrictions on the genre of the novel

is consistent with his career as an *expatriate* American novelist and critic. Aware as he was of his American roots, James nevertheless thought of himself as a cosmopolitan rather than as a national writer. His career as a novelist was marked by an attempt to escape local, national, and specific historical restrictions and rules to be applied to the art of the novel for the sake of a broader, less restrictive approach in the attempt to represent reality. James was acquainted with and learned from some of the best representative novelists of America (Hawthorne, Howells), of France (Flaubert, Balzac), and of England (George Eliot). And yet in his practice as a theorist and as a novelist, he affirms his distance in relation to each of them, especially in regard to reductive tendencies in their theories. In this context, the prefaces he wrote for the New York edition of his works are both a theory of the novel *and* a theory of *his* own novels, a theory that is both a representative critical document on the art of novel writing at the turn of the century and an intensely personal poetics that ultimately explains itself as radical difference in relation to other critical languages of the period.

For James, American novelists involved in the creation of a new literature in the New World would do well to cultivate the ability to learn from other writers without becoming their disciples. "When I say that I should like to do as Ste. Beuve has done," he writes in a letter to Thomas S. Perry in 1867,

> I don't mean that I should like to imitate him, or reproduce him in English: but only that I should like to acquire something of his intelligence and his patience and vigour. One feels—I feel at least, that he is a man of the past, of a dead generation; and that we young Americans are (without cant) men of the future. I feel that my only chance for success as a critic is to let all the breezes of the west blow through me at their will. We are Americans born - *il faut en prendre son parti*. I look upon it as a great blessing; and I think that to be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of

them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically etc.) claim our property wherever we find it. To have no national stamp has hitherto been a defect and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen.[2]

Although the passage refers specifically to James's career as a critic, it could also apply to his mission as an American novelist willing to learn from, but without becoming a disciple of, European and English writers. The career and the mission of both the American critic and the American novelist involve the crucial ability to appropriate the best achievements of various cultural and national forms while simultaneously fusing them into a new form endowed with a unique identity. As this new synthesis of forms is made possible by the American cultural and national hollowness, a cultural void adequately prepared to be fertilized by "all the breezes of the west" and the lack of a fossilized "national stamp" are promoted from drawbacks to precious advantages. The historically necessary cultural void becomes a precondition for the production of literature and indeed of novelty in literature, provided that the necessary void is used as an opportunity for appropriation of variety and not, as in Hawthorne and other American writers of a more orthodox tradition, as a motivation for the cultural production of reductive literary forms such as the romance. From Brown and Cooper through Hawthorne and Melville and later, the strategy of writing romances as opposed to the European novel was one of the two possible forms of using cultural hollowness to produce difference and originality in the formative years of a national literature. The American novel would then be different by means of a return to what James thought was a genre of the past (as opposed to French and English realism) that could often involve reductive procedures. Difference would then be produced by ignoring a

genre (the realist novel) that could not flourish in culturally barren America and by consequently doing something else.

Against this cultural mainstream in defining the practice of a genre in America, James defined an alternate form of using the cultural void and producing difference while simultaneously refusing to ignore the European achievement. His theory of the novel implied the production of difference by expansive rather than reductive procedures. The advantage of a choice involving the transcendence of the merely national, by treating the novel as an international or transnational phenomenon, would be the possibility of making the American novel not simply capable of being different from novels of other nationalities, but of making a difference in a broader, international context in which dissimilarities would be creatively absorbed rather than simply rejected.

There is a sense in which James's career as a man and as an artist is marked by the effort of the expatriate American writer to creatively come to grips with otherness, variety, and difference in relation to the local as a supreme value. When James journeyed to Europe in 1869, 1871, and 1875, and when he decided to become a permanent resident in London in 1876, his experience abroad was part of a project that involved a calculated distance from home and a creative encounter with otherness. Other American expatriate writers, such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, would later follow James's footsteps with the equally significant result of creating a kind of literature (modern poetry in this case) that was not simply different because made in America, but that made a difference in a broader, less culturally specific context. In this choice of the expatriate there is always the danger of failure as a result of the loss of the resources available for the writer firmly supported by a national tradition and identity. But because of this loss there is also a potential advantage and gain, the advantage of enjoying the cosmopolitan experience, in life and elsewhere, of being a citizen of the world, or, more precisely, of

being a citizen of literature itself, as opposed to the citizen of a national literature. What characterizes the citizen of literature itself is his capacity to experience variety and diversity, as is the case of the James who wrote novels about the "international theme." This acceptance of variety, of conflicting and even contradictory meanings, is also what primarily distinguishes his theory of the novel from other theories. It is a view in which the transcendence of space, of the limited space of America, involved also a transcendence of time that made James the critic a representative voice of his own time and a voice in which echoes of other times and places would be present as well.

NOTES

1   Henry James, "The Future of the Novel," in *The Critical Muse*, ed. Roger Gard, 342.
2   Henry James, *Selected Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), 15-16.

Theory of the Novel: Henry James is an attempt to assess James's critical writings in the light of recent theories of the novel such as those proposed by Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, and Scholes and Kellog. The author, Sérgio Bellei, currently teaches Literary Theory and American Literature at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

The study was originally developed during a sabbatical year for post-doctoral studies spent in Princeton University and sponsored by CNPq. It was later submitted to the Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina as part of the requirements for the title of Full Professor.