

The Axiology of Henry James

Freedom, Love, and Life

By

Rong Liu

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Abstract

This book centers on Henry James's six literary works, *The American* (1877), *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), "The Real Thing" (1892), and "The Lesson of the Master" (1888)," to explore his axiology; that is, the integration of ethics and aesthetics in the thematic matters and narrative devices to show the alignment and appropriateness between idea and form.

In these literary texts, the axiological integration finds expression in molding idea into form to moralize aesthetics and turning form into idea to aestheticize morality. This axiological exploration shows that the very sense of appropriateness, the harmony of techniques and specific ethical ideas in James's works, has a significant aesthetic effect in its own right.

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Introduction

Adapted from my PhD dissertation completed at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel in 2023, this book explores Henry James's axiology through the alignment of idea and form. It focuses on Henry James's six literary works: *The American* (1877), *Roderick Hudson* (1876), *The Golden Bowl* (1904), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), "The Real Thing" (1892), and "The Lesson of the Master" (1888).¹

Axiology, as a value theory, prominently includes the integration of aesthetics and ethics: In the works of Henry James there is ethics in aesthetic concerns and vice versa. My inquiry into Henry James's axiology combines issues of ethics and aesthetics with narratological analysis. Before I clarify the axiological integration of idea and form in Henry James, I shall offer two examples of the workings of my analysis. Besides exploring the ethical issues involved in Henry James's subject matter, I will demonstrate that narration is an ethical performance because the writer's narrative techniques display their own "moral propositionality" (Newton, 1995: 5).

My first example is "stage-direction tags" employed in Henry James's novella "The Real Thing" (1892). As this story is a first-person narrative and everything in it is filtered through the perspective of the protagonist-narrator, the dialogues punctuated by the protagonist-narrator's descriptions and accompanied by his stage-direction tags not only evoke the scenes represented but also convey the narrator's subjectivity, which is ethically significant. The tag identifying the speaker of the utterance "Should we have often to – a – put on special clothes?" is "Mrs. Monarch timidly demanded" (James, 1956: 153). The word "timidly" in the tag suggests not only that Mrs. Monarch is fearful of putting on some special costumes for her work as a model

but also that she voices her anxiety discreetly because she wants to be hired by the artist. It also shows that she is aware that the worry about costumes may endanger her job. Yet this word also implies that the artist recognizes and enjoys his dominance over the Monarch couple. The choice of the adverb in the tag is thus not just a neutral diagnosis of the speaker's (Mrs. Monarch's) situation but also an implicit critique of the narrator's (the artist's) ethical attitude.

While shaping some of the tags almost as stage directions, the narrator sometimes elides other tags, e. g.:

"We'll put on anything that fits," said the Major.

"Oh I arrange that – they fit in the pictures."

"I'm afraid I should do better for the modern books. I'd come as you like," said Mrs. Monarch (James, 1956:153)

In this passage the tags "said the Major" and "said Mrs. Monarch" indicate the speakers. Yet since the narrative perspective is the artist's, it is, as it were, unnecessary for him to indicate his own turn (the second utterance). However, the artist's utterances are not always represented without tags. For example, in "'Of course I should want a certain amount of expression,' I rejoined" (149), the tag "I rejoined" enhances the artist's self-identification, conveying a sense of his self-righteousness. Thus, the artist's tagged speeches are a direct way to highlight his subjectivity, and on some occasions they convey his ethical sensibilities (or lack of them) and betray his character that he is not himself conscious of.

My other example is narrative "acceleration" (see Rimmon-Kenan, 2002: 53-56) in this story. At the end of the story, for instance, a series of events are summed up in just a few lines:

Then I gave them a sum of money to go away; and I never saw them again. I obtained the remaining books, but my friend Hawley repeats that Major and Mrs. Monarch did me a permanent harm, got me into a second-rate trick. (James, 1956: 175)

The effect of the narrative thrift here, a brief summary of the ending, eliding the conversations at parting, is ethically significant. The narrative rhythm speeds up with the account of a series of actions that stand for the artist's eagerness to end his problematic situation as he is stuck in the ethical dilemma between choosing the proper illustration models and uneasiness about depriving the Monarchs of their meager income. The story shows that his focus on honoraria and worldly fame takes the upper hand of his compassion for the couple. Initially, he is moved by the Monarchs' ideal upper-class form combined with their destitution. He hires them out of compassion, but his artistic achievement suffers as a result. Still, he feels a moral uneasiness when he dismisses them. Paradoxically, therefore, this acceleration effectively reveals his remorse though he clearly hastens the account of the event as if to get it out of the way. Thus the ethical features of the situations represented are conveyed not just in a discursive manner but also through meaning-suffused narrative techniques.

In Henry James's works the axiological integration finds expression in molding idea into form to moralize aesthetics and turning form into idea to aestheticize morality. Such integration may be traced back to Plato's Eidos as either absolute Idea or absolute Form. In modern times the two are conventionally held to be distinct in that idea is roughly identified as content and form as technique. As I view the two with the help of Hjelmslev's net,² they can be, at least artificially, separated – in that idea is part of the narrative's "repertoire" and is involved in Henry James's moral philosophy, while form is associated with his style, choice of words, and narrative structure. Since idea

relates to ethics and form pertains to aesthetics, the two are connected in the axiological sense. Narratology, ethics, and aesthetics converge axiologically in the issue of technique in its relationship to the philosophical stance and the thematic repertoire of the narrative.

This research is part of my agenda of contributing to the ethical turn in literary studies – by showing, on specific literary material, how ethics and aesthetics can be interconnected in a form of ideology. Ethics and aesthetics converge in various philosophical perspectives. In Western intellectual history, besides Plato's Eidos, there is Aristotle's view of the function of the tragic plot as the arousal of pity and fear. The three parts of the plot – pathos, recognition, and reversal, the most important universal elements in the formal structure (Belfiore, 1992: 366-367), also constitute the moral force of the play or the narrative. The unity of the aesthetic and the ethical is also highlighted in Kant's assertion that "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good" (Kant, 2012: Section 59). This Kantian proposition is taken up by Wittgenstein who claims, in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, that "ethics is transcendental (ethics and aesthetics are one and the same)" (Wittgenstein, 2001: 86). From a different platform, Terry Eagleton's "The Ideology of the Aesthetic" argues that the aesthetic "mediates between the generalities of reason and the particulars of sense" (Eagleton, 1988: 328), while "moral ideological imperatives . . . infiltrate the very textures of lived experience as tact and know-how, intuitive good sense or inbred decorum" (Eagleton, 1988: 329). Moral ideology as incorporating aesthetics appears as a principle in a spontaneous consensus.

The integration of aesthetic creativity and ethical functioning is fundamental for the way in which literature functions ideologically. Literary works are created from and interpenetrate with historical, cultural, and social contexts to the extent, some theorists believe, that "there is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is

made" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 4). The aesthetic and ethical ingredients are not only what literature absorbs from the historical, cultural, and social fields but also what enables it to nourish these fields. Thus, literature is itself potentially axiological, with its two facets – the ethical (idea) and the aesthetic (form) interconnecting. Because of this axiological trait literature infiltrates human life and takes part in the shaping of values: "the aesthetic," including literary works,³ can be seen "not as something that expresses the world but as something that enables social, cultural, and ethical intervention" (Achilles, 2012: 1). This position challenges Kant's principle of aesthetic disinterestedness⁴ while supporting the broad intuition concerning the integration of the ethical and the aesthetic in a literary work.⁵ Because of this axiological potential, literature is "an important source of human understanding" (Graham, 2005: 135),⁶ and "[p]oetry today might have more to teach us than economic science, the human sciences and psychoanalysis combined" (Guattari, 1996: 21).

The ethical turn in literary studies

In his essay "Introduction: The Double 'Turn' to Ethics and Literature?" Michael Eskin discusses the "turn to ethics" in literary studies and the "turn to literature" in (moral) philosophy. His research reflects the overlap between literature and moral philosophy, which corresponds to Leona Toker's "[i]ntertextual study of literature and moral philosophy" as a branch of ethical criticism (Toker, 1994: xi). In fact, what Eskin means by the "turn to ethics in literature" is what Toker sees as a "comeback of the ethical criticism" after its eclipse in the second half of the twentieth century (Toker, 1994: xi). The shift in question was largely initiated by the special issue of *New Literary History*, "Literature and/as Moral Philosophy," in 1983.⁷ This issue signaled a revival of the ethical studies of literature through and beyond the cultural, historical, political, ethnic, and anthropological

perspectives. Indeed, such perspectives are involved with ethics, sometimes obviously and sometimes inconspicuously. Their emphasis on diversity and identity irradiates upon, for example, Holocaust-literature studies such as James Edward Young's *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1988), feminist criticism such as Barbara Johnson's *A World of Difference* (1987) or Rita Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989), and post-colonial studies such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) and *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (2024) edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. Besides blazing the trail for such indirectly ethical studies, this issue of *New Literary History* redirected some critical interests from formalist and structuralist research to the metaphysically and epistemologically-oriented ethical studies of literature, such as Martha Nussbaum's "Flawed Crystals" (part of the 1983 *NLH* issue reprinted in *Love's Knowledge*), J. Hillis Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), Wayne C. Booth's *The Company We Keep* (1988), and Tobin Siebers's *The Ethics of Criticism* (1988).

In "Having a Rough Story about What Moral Philosophy Is," her response to Martha Nussbaum's reading of James's *The Golden Bowl*, Cora Diamond claims that

any specification of the sphere of morality, of the phenomena of interest to moral philosophy, in terms of action and choice is a limited and limiting one. How we define the sphere of the moral bears in several different ways on the relation of literature to moral philosophy. (Diamond, 1983: 164)

Diamond means that the sphere of the moral may be demarcated and the way we define it depends on how literature is seen to relate to moral philosophy. Diamond points out not only the closeness of literature and moral philosophy on the moral axis but also the

respective independence of the two – for her it is Literature *and* rather than *as* Moral Philosophy. The view of Literature *as* Moral Philosophy is held by Nussbaum, who champions Aristotle’s conception of ethics as the specification of good human life and, by examining James’s intimate connection with the Aristotelian enterprise, suggests that literature is capable of teaching us something about what moral philosophy can be (Nussbaum, 1983: 40). Nussbaum maintains that “there are candidates for moral truth which the plainness of traditional moral philosophy lacks the power to express, and which [literature] expresses wonderfully” (Nussbaum, 1983: 44) – that is, literature deals with what falls through the cracks between philosophical concepts.

The recent decades saw the emergence of two directions in the development of the interdisciplinary field of ethics and literary studies: ethical literary criticism and narrative ethics (or the axiological perspective), both of which involve theoretical construction and critical practices, in different ways. Ethical literary criticism practices cultural and historical approaches in ethically oriented literary studies. One of the founders of The International Association for Ethical Literary Criticism (IAELC),⁸ Zhenzhao Nie, defines ethical literary criticism as “a critical theory for reading, analyzing, and interpreting the ethical nature and function of literary works from the perspective of ethics.” (Nie, 2015: 84).⁹ Ethical literary criticism as an independent systematic research approach is distinct from the earlier “indirect” ethical criticism in that it enlists both traditional ethical concepts and those derived from historical, cultural, and anthropological contexts.

While ethical literary criticism foregrounds the cultural and historical contexts of literary works, *narrative ethics* anchors itself in narrative and its techniques, foregrounding their ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological ramifications. It is narrative ethics against the

backdrop of postclassical narratologies that is the key field of my study. Although the ethical dilemmas are the recurring thematic concerns of the literary texts throughout history, the research on how these issues are explored through narrative techniques is a relatively new type of inquiry.

There are several notable studies of narrative ethics in Chinese scholarship. For example, Xiaofeng Liu's *Unbearable Body: The Narrative Dimensions of Modern Ethics* (2007) is a remarkable work though his concerns are mainly metaphysical, without narratological analysis. The author defines the ethical as a life feeling based on specific values¹⁰; he also distinguishes between rational ethics and narrative ethics. In contrast to rational ethics, which proposes general laws and basic moral values, narrative ethics means narrating personal experience in a way that gives the readers the sense of life and invites them to work out their ethical views. Individual moral philosophy is thus distinguished from the public moral norms. In this sense, Martha Nussbaum's argument that literature can be read as moral philosophy resonates with Xiaofeng Liu's position. In Nussbaum's view, indeed, "the particular is in some sense prior to general rules and principles" (Larson, 2004: 4); and the novel is "a paradigm of moral activity" (Nussbaum, 1985: 516) because "long narratives, by definition, unfold stories rich in complicated details" (Larson, 2004: 4). Besides, Liu's particular focus on readers' ethical responses recaps the contemporary neo-Aristotelian camp's¹¹ agenda: How readers' interaction with texts, in the process of reading, can enhance ethical consciousness, thereby promoting personal virtue and ultimately human flourishing. (Zhang, 2024).

Ethical narratology

Unlike Xiaofeng Liu, whose discussion stresses the domain of ethics (of the two reciprocal turns in humanities distinguished in Eskin 2004,

his work corresponds to “turn to literature” in moral philosophy), Gang Gong’s *Study of Modern Ethical Narrative* (2013) maps out the theoretical lines of the narrative-ethical criticism, or ethical narratology. This book discusses the purpose, significance, and methodology of this new field, further promoting the ethical turn¹² in postclassical narratology, and develops ethical-narrative criticism as an autonomous systematic approach. Other Chinese researchers explore the ethical as represented in narration in specific works. Some of them employ Wayne Booth’s notion of unreliable narrative and James Phelan’s conception of the unreliable narrator along three axes – facts/events, ethics/evaluations and knowledge/perception (Phelan and Martin, 1999: 88) – to explore the ethics of narrative devices. Biwu Shang is a prominent representative of this method. For example, his article “A Maternal Love Misread: Narrative Judgments in Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy*” (2010) discusses three kinds of judgment: interpretative judgment, ethical judgment, and aesthetic judgment. He stresses that “the interaction of the three types of judgment shapes the novel into an organic whole in terms of narrative form, narrative ethics and narrative aesthetics” (Shang, 2010: 60).¹³ Largely in tune with this line of thought, the present study attempts to demonstrate what insights can be yielded by ethical narrative criticism.

China is a so far rather underestimated power-house of ethical narratology. More internationally influential ethical studies in narratology are Wayne Booth’s and James Phelan’s work in rhetorical narratology and the ethical dimension in narrative, Adam Zachary Newton’s *Narrative Ethics* (1995), Leona Toker’s *Towards the Ethics of Form in Fiction: Narrative of Cultural Remission* (2010), and Ansgar Nünning and Yi-li Tang’s study on the ethical in narrative form, especially in narrative as natural embedding.¹⁴ For Newton, “narrative ethics” implies “simply narrative as ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the

reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process" (Newton, 1995: 11). His quest for the moral dimension of narrative techniques bridges ethics and aesthetics. Toker believes that "the aesthetic experience has an intrinsic ethical effect" (Toker, 2010: 3). Thus, the ethical turn in narratology has gained momentum.¹⁵ One can make a further distinction in its methods. One is rhetorical – to consider narrative ethics as a means to an end: Phelan, for instance, discusses ethical judgments to reveal how narrative rhetoric functions for the purpose of persuasion in narrative communication. The other is non-rhetorical – to regard the ethical significance of narrative traits as an end in itself, a position held by Xiaofeng Liu, Gang Gong, Newton, and Toker. In their works, the study of the ethics of narrative techniques emerges as an independent development of the ethical study of narrative. My research proposes to continue this exploration of non-instrumental ethics in narrative. It adopts narratological methodology and concepts, along with contributions of diverse cultural studies, to analyze the ethics involved both in subject matter (the dimension of story) and in narrative (the dimension of discourse, narrative techniques).

At present, when the ethical turn infiltrates almost every field, with the rise of such disciplines as Medical Ethics, Business Ethics, and AI Ethics, and with ethical examination of politics, science, and ecology, narrative ethics can unite narratology with cultural study, feminist study, post-colonial criticism, and ecocriticism. These fields entail ethically loaded constituents such as beliefs, values, and convictions; and narrative ethics, including the kind represented by the present study, can contribute to exploring texts through their perspectives. Moreover, in so far as narration is a means to construct one's own identity: "the concepts of narrative, intelligibility and accountability presuppose the applicability of the concept of personal identity" (MacIntyre, 2007: 218), and since one's identification is processed in

ethical thinking, the research in the ethics of narrative has a potential of illuminating a wide spectrum of identity issues.

Recent trends in the study of Henry James

In the recent decades, new energy has been infused in the study of Henry James. New explorations of his work have been promoted by “The Henry James Society” (HJS) and by the online resource “The Henry James Scholar’s Guide to Web Sites.” *The Henry James Review* published by HJS and *The Henry James E-Journal* published by “The Henry James Scholar’s Guide to Web Sites” represent a broad range of scholarly and public interest in Henry James. Numerous monographs, journal articles, book reviews and PhD and MA dissertations on this writer present a rich spectrum of critical perspectives: cultural and historicist, feminist, queer-studies, post-colonial, Marxist, psychoanalytic, phenomenological, stylistic, linguistic, and narratological, as well as ethical. Among the most influential publications, Sharon Cameron’s *Thinking in Henry James* (1991) demonstrates the disassociation of consciousness from psychology in his narratives; Jonathan Freedman’s *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (1993) explores the interaction of Henry James and the tradition of British aestheticism; Joseph Hillis Miller’s *Literature as Conduct: Speech Acts in Henry James* (2005) investigates three modes of speech act in James’s novels; Richard A. Hocks’s *Henry James and Pragmatistic Thought: A Study in the Relationship between the Philosophy of William James and the Literary Art of Henry James* (2017) seeks insight into the art of Henry James obtainable from the philosophy of his brother William James; and John Carlos Rowe’s *Our Henry James in Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture* (2023) explores Henry James’s lasting appeal lying in his ambiguity and reliance on popular culture. In scholarly journal essays, John Carlos Rowe (2003) examines three ways in which Henry James relates to globalization; Karen Leibowitz (2008) analyzes James’s

scenes of silent confrontation; Jonathan Arac (2012) discusses the consonances between the perspectives of Henry James and a major postcolonial critic, Edward W. Said; Julian Jimenez Heffernan (2017) explores James's deployments of interest in terms of dialectical logic, figural condition, and thematic structure. Margaret Deli (2021) traces James's shift from aesthetic democracy to aesthetic autocracy through analyzing the connoisseurship represented in his last novel *The Outcry*; and Benjamin Seigle (2026) associates James' late style with Jewishness through analyzing *The Golden Bowl*, in which the aesthetic and the political become inseparable. He also argues Henry James's political-ethical stance as anti-anti-Semitic and his cosmopolitanism as anti-anti-Imperial.

Most pertinent to my research is the part of Henry James scholarship which is largely concerned with morality, aesthetics, theory of the novel, and writing techniques. Such researches include Dorothy J. Hale's *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from Henry James to the Present* (1998) arguing that the compatibility of Bakhtin's and James's positions expands James's influence into cultural and literary theory; Robert B. Pippin's *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (2001) exploring James's original thinking on ethical issues; Michele Mendelssohn's *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture* (2007) examining James's and Wilde's intricate relationship that shaped transatlantic aesthetic links¹⁶; Kristin Boudreau's *Henry James's Narrative Technique: Consciousness, Perception, and Cognition* (2010), which discusses Henry James's writing techniques in relation to modern philosophical debates between rationalism and empiricism; Paul B. Armstrong's *The Phenomenology of Henry James* (2017), which traces the relation between James's fascination with consciousness and what is commonly called his "moral vision"; and Elisa Sotgiu's "A Portrait of the Novel: James, Flaubert, and the Quest for Literary Autonomy" (2021), which distinguishes James's rejection of "a conscious moral

purpose" in fiction for the sake of art's autonomy from his expectation of an author's noble mind as a condition of complexity and depth. However, the convergence of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions in Henry James, Henry James's axiology, is still a blank area in Henry James scholarship. This is not because his axiology holds little academic interest but, I believe, because axiology challenges the separation of ethics and aesthetics and shatters the mid-twentieth-century bias against moral inquiry into literary works.

A partial exception to this neglect is Sigi Jöttkandt's *Acting Beautifully: Henry James and the Ethical Aesthetic* (2005), which explores the aesthetic narrative in Henry James with the help of Lacan (she observes that three Jamesian heroines perform the "aesthetic feats" that meet "the conditions of the Lacanian ethical act," (Jöttkandt, 2005: xiii). Jöttkandt's approach is mainly psychoanalytic; she focuses on the characters and subject matter. Another partial exception (as I mentioned above) is Benjamin Seigle's "Bloomsbury Revisited: Empire and Jews in *The Golden Bowl*" (2026). He associates Henry James's anti-antisemitism (one ethical aspect) with this author's late-period style, as represented in *The Golden Bowl*. Yet his exploration is limited to the free indirect discourse, leaving abundant space for the discussion of other narrative techniques. In contrast, my research covers more narrative devices analyses; it proceeds from the narratological perspective to discuss the aesthetic and the ethical as intertwined in the story and the narrative of James's works.

My choice of the works, book structure, and research goals

Since the axiological interconnection of aesthetic creativity and ethical functioning is often thematized in Henry James's fictions and explored in his theory of the novel, his works can be regarded as a representative reflection of the axiological properties of literature.

Indeed, his essay “The Art of Fiction,” his version of narratological theory, suggests that the novel is axiological. For James, literary fiction resembles history¹⁷ and competes with life, presenting an illusion of life. Like painting, it presents direct, personal impressions of life (James, 1958: 398). The association of the novel with history and life helps to access its ethical facet, while its kinship to painting¹⁸ points to its beauty, its form. Further, his view of the novel as “the direct impression of life” (James, 1958: 398) is fairly axiological: it reflects the closeness of life to art and of experience to imagination, implying that the beautiful and the real are bound to each other: for the novelist, the direct impression of life is “the real thing” (to quote the title of James’s programmatic short story). On the one hand “the real thing” is an idea (such as the idea of the moral value centered on love), on the other hand it is form (the aesthetic value focused on verisimilitude). Henry James seeks harmony between idea and form in testing the identification of the real, the beautiful, and the ethical.

The six Henry James’s works (*The American*, *Roderick Hudson*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Wings of the Dove*, “The Real Thing,” and “The Lesson of the Master”), which are discussed in an axiological framework in terms of narratological analysis of stories and discourses, are deployed into three pairs. Each pair is, in a way, an allegory of art in a particular ethical situation: *The American* and *Roderick Hudson* involving art and freedom, *The Wings of Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* representing art and love, and “The Real Thing” and “The Lesson of the Master” reflecting art and life; and Henry James’s tact in handling such allegories in narrative is reflected in every facet of his texts – from plots to characters, from space to time, and from structural devices to diction. My axiological inquiry also combines a close and comparative reading with feminist, political, and cultural concerns.

In Chapter One, “Art and Freedom,” the narratives of *The American* and *Roderick Hudson* exhibit Henry James’s moralized aesthetics,

through the alignment of self-love and love for the other in the protagonists' search for freedom. Although Christopher Newman, the protagonist of *The American*, has failed to marry Claire de Cintré and suffers aesthetic failure in France in his inability to realize his cosmopolitan ideal, he successfully retains freedom through his perspective on beauty as rapport, not only in art but also in cultural and social spheres. By contrast, in *Roderick Hudson*, Roderick Hudson, an egoistic sculptor, and Rowland Mallet, an egoistic connoisseur, claim liberation and seek inspiration from Roman pagan culture. They attempt to drain form of its cultural and historical connotations through a Kantian aesthetic disinterest but in the end meet a tragic failure: Roderick loses his creative power and perishes in a storm.

Chapter Two, "Art and Love," centers on *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* to explore James's aestheticized morality. In their love relationships Maggie Verver in the former novel and Milly Theale in the latter aestheticize love and their respective lovers, Amerigo and Densher. The interaction of the love of art and romantic love in *The Golden Bowl* is reflected in Maggie's and her father's sublimation of their Kantian disinterested attitudes towards art through spiritual plight in their marriage crises; in the end they meet the highest moral criterion of true love as disinterested love – faithful, unconditional, unselfish, and unbiased. The disinterested love is also represented by Milly's benevolence, and her forgiveness of Kate and Densher. In spite of the sad ending – Milly dies and Kate decides not to marry Densher, all the three main characters ultimately choose love above all.

Chapter Three, "Art and Life," focuses on the closeness of art and life as thematized in James's story "The Real Thing," which can be read as revealing his ethicized aesthetics (along the lines of his narrative theory), and in his novella "The Lesson of the Master," which reflects James's aestheticized ethics (involving his moral philosophy). Unlike

Kantian disinterest, which pertains mainly to the perception of beauty, Jamesian disinterest highlights the artist's relinquishing worldly motivations, or motivations tainted by worldly concerns, in favor of devotion to aesthetic achievement involved in artistic creation, the representation of beauty. His disinterest is, to a large extent, moral: aesthetic views combine with moral concerns, approaching sublimity and celebrating the inseparability of art and life. The illustration artist in "The Real Thing" seeks "the real thing;" and Paul Overt and St. George in "The Lesson of the Master" seek what they call "decent perfection" in their work. Yet all of them fail to achieve this axiological goal in artistic creation because of their mishandling the connection between art and life, turning it into disjunction.

By analyzing the six stories through the lens of the three ethical issues involving art, I aim to show that formalism and historicism are aligned and mutually reinforcing. The two, however, "had been at war within literary studies throughout most of the past century" (Currie, 1998: 4). My study focuses on Henry James's shaping his ethical vision, deeply rooted in, yet critical of, the culture of his historical period. Jamesian narrative techniques such as his specific handling of the point of view (narrative perspective), the function of the central intelligence (associated with the discussion of the various relationships between voice and focus), dramatic scenes ("showing" rather than telling), and acceleration and deceleration of narrative pace are discussed as working towards the deployment of this vision, closely associated with psychological realism.¹⁹

By analyzing these two aspects of Henry James's project – his moralizing of narration which involves his narrative theory and aestheticizing of morality which pertains to his construction of a moral philosophy, I expect to show how this axiological integration is realized in his works, how narrative becomes an ethical performance,

and to what extent moral concern may impact the way of narration. I believe that narrative techniques are not a matter of form alone but are informed by the novelist's moral philosophy, especially in the framework of his valorizing freedom and attempts to attain truth in fiction. The aesthetic function of narrative techniques does not compete with their role in ethical exploration. Instead, narrative techniques create a passage to ethical problematics and become an integral part of the narrative's axiology.

The expected contributions of this study

As mentioned above, my research is interdisciplinary. It involves ethics, aesthetics, and narratology. This is not only because the axiological approach itself is, by definition, interdisciplinary, but also because Henry James's works combine narrative complexity with philosophical depth and keen cultural awareness. My refocalization of Henry James's works in light of the ethical turn in literary criticism is expected, as mentioned above, to turn to the study of the ethics of form. In addition to yielding new insights into Henry James's work, my study will be the first sustained analysis of the ethical meaning of Henry James's narrative techniques.

Henry James's narratives are, indeed, to a large extent axiologically programmatic, but the study may be expected to map similar directions for an analysis of the convergence of ethics and aesthetics in the work of other writers, especially those who stage tensions between ethical dilemmas and aesthetic pleasure. Accordingly, this book is recommended for students and researchers of literature, narratologists, and scholars who are interested in interdisciplinary studies integrated with literature and philosophy.

Chapter One

Art and Freedom

The notion of “freedom” can be traced back to an ancient written Sumerian word “amargi,” literally meaning “return to mother” (Radner and Robson, 2011: 208). The etymology of the English word “freedom” is associated with “friend”: “‘free’ meant someone who was joined to a tribe of free people by ties of kinship and rights of belonging” (Basterzi and Bilgili, 2022: 74). Thus, from the perspective of etymology, freedom does not highlight that people can do what they want; rather, it restores people to their original status (Radner and Robson, 2011: 208), to a relationship of being beloved and accepted, which corresponds to the Indo-European roots of the word “free”: “priya or friya or riya, which means dear or beloved” (Basterzi and Bilgili, 2022: 74). Human’s inner need of uniting denoted by freedom (as opposed to “liberty” which emphasizes separation²⁰) is opposite to the external domination of power, and to determinism. In an address at the Harvard Divinity School in 1888 William James, Henry James’s brother, noted that determinism means “that those parts of the universe already laid down absolutely appoint and decree what the other parts shall be” (Westbrook, 2020: ix). This definition stresses the power of the universe (or at least the environment) in which the individual resides. The conflict between a person’s internal need for freedom and the external power is mediated through free will. According to St. Augustine, “free will,” the freedom of choice, “is closely related to love and, accordingly, the locus of moral evaluation” (Tornau, 2020) – of their free will people may choose to love God as well as the other (in God-directed love) or may follow desire and love the self (in self-directed love).

Free will is highly valued in American society, and the spirit of freedom is part of the American tradition:

Americans now live in a time and a place in which freedom and autonomy are valued above all else and in which expanded opportunities for self-determination are regarded as a sign of the psychological well-being of individuals and the moral well-being of the culture. (Schwartz, 2000: 79)

I believe that self-determination as a major constituent of American individual freedom is explored in Henry James's first two novels – *Roderick Hudson* (1876) and *The American* (1877). Both the novels deal with the alignment between self-love and love for the other. The convergence of the two directions of love involves two ethical corollaries: the extroversive claim for space and the introversive need for self-identification. In both novels, the concern with freedom is closely associated with the theme of art and its place in human life.

Individual freedom is explored through the American expatriates' aesthetic experiences of Europe. Its significance is axiological: the protagonists' pursuit of freedom is both an ethical activity and an aesthetical experience. In *The American*, Christopher Newman, the protagonist, is, in a sense, a businessman in art, whereas in *Roderick Hudson* the eponymous protagonist is an artist indulging in aesthetic narcissism. Although Newman is a businessman, his spirit of freedom suggests an artistic temperament. When he encounters European sophistication and corruption, his artistic temperament enhances his freedom. By contrast, Roderick chooses the path of an artist but fails to develop his natural talent and abuses individual freedom. A person of juvenile vigor and exuberance, he claims independence. By contrast to Newman, who exemplifies the wish for *freedom* that involves uniting his American culture with European culture, Roderick seeks *liberty*, unrestricted separateness, which is expressed, among other

things, in his tendency of separating himself from American tradition and embracing Roman-Greek culture, both in life and art. As a result, his talent is drained and he fails to establish himself as a professional artist.

The American: A businessman in art

In *The American*, Christopher Newman is a businessman who is “shrewd and capable” and “practical” (James, 1995: 5), yet he seems to have an artist’s interests and perception: “the idea in his case, has undefined and mysterious boundaries, which invite the imagination to bestir itself on his behalf” (James, 1995: 7). His “idea,” along with its “undefined and mysterious boundaries,” refers to his curiosity about the aesthetic world, which remains a virgin land for him to explore. The word “boundaries,” as I shall demonstrate, implies that the freedom he might attain is within his aesthetic imagination of Europe.

A follower of Diderot

Newman has aesthetic expectations of Europe; he perceives France in aesthetic terms as outlined, whether he knows it or not, by Denis Diderot.²¹ Diderot believes that beauty “always consists in rapports” and “[a] *rapport* in general is an operation of the understanding, which considers either a being, or a quality, as this being or quality supposes the existence of another being or another quality” (Diderot, 2006 np). France for Newman resembles an artwork whose attraction, or beauty, lies in both its internal rapports – cultural forms, order, and symmetries illustrated by etiquette, social manners, splendid architecture, religious institutions, paintings, graceful costumes, magnificent decorations, etc., – and its external rapport with its Other (here, with American culture). For him as an American, to explore France is to study its civilization and distinctive cultural forms, and to

seek an understanding of its culture's relation and its traditions' relevance to the New World, to American individual freedom and American individuals' self-identification. His name, Christopher Newman, implies both his claim to space and his need for self-identification as freedom. He admits that his parents named him after the historical explorer and navigator Christopher Columbus (James, 1995: 9), who discovered what would later be called America, highlighting the spatial appeal of independence; and his last name, "Newman," suggests abandoning old life and updating one's identity for a new life.

Newman quits his business to pursue aesthetic interests in France: "I have come abroad to amuse myself," he says; he wishes to indulge his tastes in "music and pictures" (James, 1995: 22). His plan of modifying his identity, turning from a businessman to an aesthete, coincides with his desire for a wife: she should be a magnificent, amiable woman, "beautiful in mind and in manners, as well as in person" (James, 1995: 35). In his mind, "[s]he must be as good as she is beautiful, and as clever as she is good" (James, 1995: 35). This axiological prospect regarding his future wife reflects his anticipation and imagination of his life in Europe. His comments that he will "only be the better pleased" with his future wife's "being too good," as well as "cleverer and wiser" than he can understand (James, 1995: 35), show that he expects his future European life to be like a disinterested selfless aesthetic experience, though his occasional thought of "art-patronage as a fascinating pursuit" (James, 1995: 15) represents residual self-centeredness. In the sphere of art, he "feels as simple as a little child" (James, 1995: 22), and he confesses to Mr. Tristram that his remarkable talents (of making money) seem to be of no use there (James, 1995: 22). Moreover, being rich, he no longer cares for money and is ready to spend money on his future wife: "she shall have everything a woman can desire" (James, 1995: 35). Money seems to support his spirit of

freedom. On the other hand, his thoughts about marriage suggest self-love – he believes that he deserves the best: he wants “a first-class wife” (James, 1995: 69), just as on another occasion he declares that he wants the best of everything: “I want the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get. People, places, art, nature, everything! I want to see the tallest mountains, and the bluest lakes, and the finest pictures and the handsomest churches, and the most celebrated men, and the most beautiful women” (James, 1995: 25). He also expects his future wife to represent the European culture and tradition.

Newman’s humble attitude to his own culture foregrounds his appreciation of Europe. Yet although he seems to have a sense of cultural inferiority, he is filled with adventurous spirit, which is a sign of freedom and which encourages him to explore and experience Europe. He would like to expand his own cultural space. In self-love and in respect (bordering on love) for the other, he retains freedom.²² He is willing to limit himself and voluntarily acknowledge the other, in full awareness of his American mind-set. Accordingly, his aestheticized vision of a future wife and of his future life shapes the axiology of freedom as aligned with the claim for space and self-identification.

Buying copies of the artwork in Europe qualifies his aesthetic interests. He spends much more on copies made by Noémie than what they would actually cost in the market because he likes them irrespective of their market value. The fact is that “he ha[s] often admired the copy much more than the original” (James, 1995: 5). There are also moral causes for his buying of the copies. He intends to help Mademoiselle Noémie to earn her dowry: he knows that “Mademoiselle Nioche ha[s] asked too much,” but he bears her “no grudge for doing so” (James, 1995: 15). His charitable deed grants him freedom for here he uses money to transcend its exchange value – he pays, gaining no material equivalent but obtaining contentment. This

contentment, this joy, is valuable because it signifies his freedom from considerations of cost. His good nature inspires him with compassion for the poor, such as Noémie's shabby father:

[T]he old man's decent forlornness appealed to his democratic instincts. The assumption of a fatality in misery always irritated his strong good nature – it was almost the only thing that did so; and he felt the impulse to wipe it out, as it were, with the sponge of his own prosperity. (James, 1995: 43)

His spirit of freedom includes “democratic instincts” (James, 1995: 43) which endow him with an aptitude for understanding and sympathy, facilitating his understanding of self and the other. A person with democratic instincts tends to respect the other and to be aware of the other's situation, and perhaps to take charitable actions, sometimes passionately. For Newman, it seems that democratic instincts become a desire (“impulse”) to be satisfied by charity, “wip[ing]” the misery of the other out “with the sponge of his own prosperity” (James, 1995: 43).²³

Newman's compassion towards the poor is rooted in his self-love because he has experienced misery, hardship, and failure in life as well: four years of anger and bitterness in the army, pennilessness, and the times when “the only capital at his disposal was his dogged resolution and his lively perception of ends and means. Exertion and action were as natural to him as respiration” and “at one time failure seemed inexorably his portion; ill-luck became his bed-fellow, and whatever he touched he turned, not to gold, but to ashes” (James, 1995: 21). In his striving for survival and success, he has accumulated not only wealth but also traumas. Yet charity transforms his self-pity into selfless compassion towards other people, with the bonus of alleviating trauma.

Whereas “James proposes that business logic comes to incorporate, and at times compete with, emerging aesthetic principles” (Zacharias, 2021: 184), in this novel, it seems that Newman’s commercial activity is transformed into an aesthetic experience through buying copies of paintings. When he yearns for his future wife as “the best article in the market,” the commercial language of his thoughts reflects his pragmatism, yet he is concerned not with the commercial value of “the best article” but with its combination of beauty and moral virtues: he seeks someone who is not only beautiful but also good and wise. That copies of paintings attract him also suggests Newman’s Diderotian perspective: this kind of beauty is a matter of relationships: the conformity between the copies and the original artwork.²⁴ Newman’s preference of a copy to the original (James, 1995: 5) suggests his leaning towards alignment between the copies and the original: the conformity relationship (mimesis) shapes Newman’s aesthetic principle. His fascination with opera is the same story. In his “What Do You Think of the Opera?: *Don Giovanni* in Chapter 17 of *The American*,” Pierre A. Walker proves that Newman knows the original final scene of *Don Giovanni* (Walker, 2024: 29) and his curiosity to see how it will end in his intermission conversation with the Bellegarde couple in the theatre indicates that Newman has a high level of European musical culture appreciation that “commentators have resisted acknowledging” (Walker, 2024: 29). I add that he expects to see the original version would be re-performed at the theatre because he is a Diderotianist, who would like to see the alignment between the copy and the original.

Newman’s name also associates with his favoring the copies of artwork. Newman is “in the first place, physically, a fine man” (James, 1995: 6). Man is a copy in the first place: the original, God, created the human after His own image. As a “new” man, Newman is a copy of the copy, at a further remove from God but retaining a relationship to