

## Narrative distance in Henry James' *The portrait of a lady*

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### ABSTRACT

This study sought to study narrative distance in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady*. It analyzed the narrative to show how information is dramatically presented to minimize authorial intrusion. The study used Gerard Genette's Narrative Discourse on the narrative as the instrument for determining how the narrative achieved narrator distance. The analysis focused on the narration of events and narration of speech to determine the range of distance between the narrator and the fictive elements in the narrative. The study revealed through the analysis that narrator distance increases when the narrator presents information from the perspective of the characters themselves, and there is a scenic, experiential approach to characterization and events that provide maximum information to the reader. Consequently, *The Portrait of a Lady* is an exemplar of the modernist narrative that tried to produce the novel like drama.

### INTRODUCTION

The English novel, as a prototype of prose fiction has over the years undergone metamorphosis. The changes resulted in changes in narrative techniques. The classical narratives, such as Homer's *Odyssey* are typically epic, presenting series of events characterized by adventure and struggles of heroes. Those written before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like those of the Victorian era (1830—1901) have similar characteristics. They had no theoretical basis. Henry James describes them as “unselfconscious”, “pre-theoretical”, and “naive”. Accordingly, he says their claims are modest, and do not set themselves any purposive ideals. They were assumed to be “make-believe”, fiction unable to represent the complexity of life (James, 1884). These novels were premised on the assumption that since nature is essentially complete and unchanging, its records, whether scriptural, legendary or historical, constitute a definite repertoire of human experience. Watts (1963) observes that the plots of classical and renaissance epic, are based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment are judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the acceptable models in the genre.

Narrative techniques in this era of the English novel were primarily episodic and the primary candidate for the narrative's perspectival orientation was the omniscient narrator who presented incidents in chronological order, with limited characters, dialogues and setting to showcase historical landmarks from the real world. The modern novel however, strongly challenges the validity of this literary traditionalism. Its primary focus is truth to individual experience.

In *The Art of Fiction* Henry James agrees with Besant that “the novelist must write from his experience, and that his characters must be real and such as might be met with actual life...”

(cited in Blair W., Hornberger T., Stewart R., Miller J., 1966, p. 658). Moreover, James maintains that the reality and real life experience has a myriad forms, and it is 'suspended in the chamber of consciousness, the very atmosphere of the mind' (Blair et al, p. 659). Since the location of the inner depths of the unsearchable experience of life and of man is 'suspended in the chamber of consciousness', and is 'the very atmosphere of the mind', the modern novelist, in an attempt to represent realistic human experience, tries to reach the mind of characters—exposing their thoughts and feelings.

### **DRAMATIC THEORIES OF THE NOVEL**

The novel, like drama can reveal the inner life of characters, and this is the essence of the genre, which accordingly must follow, in James' opinion, a 'dramatic ideal of concentration'. Samuel Richardson, a contemporary of James explains dramatic presentation of real life of characters:

*The dramatic mode, using the characters own words...all good writers therefore have thrown as much as possible of the dramatic mode into their narrative (cited in Allott (1959, p. 258).*

This form of dramatic presentation of information, one that presents the speech of the characters through dialogues and indirect speech is the kind of narrative orientation urged by theorists of art fiction. The form of this dramatic narration in the 19th century was the *epistolary technique* which Richardson himself used in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*; and by the 20th century, the term metamorphosed into the *interior monologue*. Booth (1961), similarly emphasizes the dramatic presentation of information:

*To show characters dramatically engaged with each other...To give the impression that the story is taking place by itself, with the characters existing in a dramatic relationship vis-à-vis the spectator, unmediated by a narrator.*

It is on the wings of this assertion that Besant notes in *The Art of Fiction*, that all episode of whatever kind, all conversation which does not either advance the story or illustrate the characters, ought to be rigidly suppressed...(pp. 15, 24). Clearly, Besant points to the suppression of authorial mediation, the hushing of the narrator's voice in order to assert important details of the actions. For this reason, he describes the novelist as 'dramatist', and the novel as 'drama, divided into scenes and acts and tableaux' (ibid). In effect the depiction of character deserves special mention because it is the test for the dramatic ability of the writer, and according to Besant, 'clumsy writers' tell us about their characters, without allowing us the direct experience of their personality. In good dramatic characterization therefore, Besant says, even though there is not a single word to emphasize or explain the attitude, manner, and look of the speakers, yet they are as intelligible as if they were written down and described (ibid, pp. 27-28).

These earlier theorists urged a narrative form that diminishes the narrative voice of the narrator and presents the raw unmediated information on characters and events. These arguments subsequently became the basis of narrative theories that are geared towards asserting the componential features of the narrative as the basis for its composition, comprehension, and interpretation or analysis.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Genette's Theory of the Narrative**

Gerard Genette, a French structuralist and rhetorician, whose criticism on Proustian narrative is put into three volumes: I, II, III, theorizes the art of fiction, the narrative to be precise. His study on the art of the novel is what culminates into a book entitled *Discourse du Récit*

(1983)—*Narrative Discourse*. In his studied search for the fundamental constituents and techniques of the novel, Genette comes out with a broadly based theory that expounds with clarity the structures of fiction and the problems of discourse analysis in general. According to Guillemette and Lévesque (2006), Genette's theory of narratology is regarded by many specialists in the field as a reading method that marks an important milestone in the development of literary theory and discourse analysis. His work serves as a manual for the study of the narrative because in its attempt to discuss all the complexities of Proustian narrative, it lays bare the internal mechanisms of the narrative in general. Guillemette and Lévesque observe: "Genette has developed a theory of narratological poetics that may be used to address the entire inventory of narrative processes in use" (ibid).

The distinction between the three fundamental entities of the narrative in narratology: story, narrative and narration should not be underemphasized. (The story) generally corresponds to a series of events and actions that are told by someone—the narrator, who presents the act of telling (narration), and the final representation of the story becomes a (narrative). In the field of narrative discourse, there is an attempt to identify the common, near-universal principles of text composition. Attempt is made to discern the relationships that exist between the elements of the narrative/story/narration triad. These relations operate within three analytical categories according to Genette's narrative structure: *Mood, Voice* and *Time*.

In the *Narrative Discourse*, divides the narrative into two: the *Histoire* and the *Recit*. The former and the latter are the equivalents of the Formalists' *Fabula* and *Sjuzet* respectively. According to Genette, the *Histoire* is the deep structure, the raw story which is not affected by the stylistic choices of the author. It is nonconcrete and hypothetical, thereby requiring some level of abstraction on the part of the reader to extract it. On the other hand, the *Recit* is the surface structure, that is, how the story is organized. It may be described as the representation of the *Histoire* in a discourse and hence can be used to interpret it. Genette further divides the *Recit* into two other levels: the *Microtext* and the *Macrotext*. The *Microtext* deals with the use of words and the author's style of language and devices. This is the verbal construction of the text. But the *Macrotext* deals with the ordering of events in the narrative, thus—the structural construction of the text. These three levels: The *Histoire*, the *Macrotext* and the *Microtext* of the *Recit*, form the three major categories or structures of the narrative; and each category has its own sub-categories within them combining together to complete the complex strata of the narrative structure.

Under the *Macrotext* of the *Recit*, Genette establishes three sub-divisions: *Time, Mood*, and *Voice*. He defines *Mood* under two main sub-categories: *Distance* and *Perspective*. The specific dimension of this paper is *Distance*, as *Perspective* has been treated below.

### Relevant Studies in Henry James

Hatice (2003) examines Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and discusses the aspect of *Mood* dealing with the narrative perspective. The study reveals evidence of narrative perspective, that is, the point of view through which what is narrated is seen. Notwithstanding the external focalizer whose vision principally orients the narrative's information, there are also internal characters (internal focalizers) from whose points of view the narrator presents information. An example is when Isabel meets with Mr. Goodwood to announce her engagement:

*Caspar Goodwood stood there—stood and received a moment, from head to foot, the bright, dry gaze with which she rather withheld than offered a greeting. Whether on this side Mr. Goodwood felt himself older than on the first occasion of our meeting him, is a point which we shall perhaps presently ascertain; let me say meanwhile that to Isabel's critical glance he showed nothing of the injury of time. Straight, strong, fresh,*

*there was nothing in his appearance that spoke positively either of youth or of age; he looked too deliberate, too serious to be young, and too eager, too active to be old... Isabel perceived that his jaw had quite the same voluntary look that it had worn in earlier days... He had the air of a man who had traveled hard...(Chap. 32).*

In the first sentence there are two focalizers: the narrator and Caspar. The narrator focalizer tells the readers about the movements of the characters: "Caspar Goodwood stood there—stood and received a moment, from head to foot..." and Isabel rather "withheld" a look "than offered a greeting". In this narration, there are two focalized subjects: Caspar and Isabel, both seen from without. However, the adjectives "bright" and "dry" describing Isabel's gaze gives idea that Caspar is also a focalizer, although internal; and Isabel is focalized from without by Caspar. In the second sentence, the narrator tells his readers that Caspar felt himself older compared to the first time he was introduced to the readers, thus the narrator is again the focalizer and Caspar, the focalized, is seen from within. In the rest of the sentence—"to Isabel's critical glance he showed nothing of the injury of time", Isabel is the focalizer and the focalized is Caspar from without. Isabel is the limited observer since she does not know that Caspar feels older now while the narrator-focalizer has a bird's eye view, being able to read through Caspar's feelings. The third sentence is a narration of Isabel's focalization of Caspar from without, since his appearance is described. The remainder of the extract is still Isabel's focalization by an internal focalizer, and Caspar is the focalized from without.

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the focalizer does not remain fixed, it is sometimes external, sometimes internal and there could be shifts among several focalizers even in a one-paragraph narration. The narrator is the external focalizer, and maintains the limited point of view except for few instances where the characters's thoughts and feelings are narrated. It is therefore imperative to examine the nature of the presentation of characters thoughts and words so as to ascertain the narrator's relationship to the objects of his narration, whether the overall narrative tone reveals the narrator or whether the characters reveal themselves.

### **Gerard's Schema of Mood—Distance**

When a text is written, technical choices are made with a view to producing a particular result in the story's verbal representation. In this way, the narrative employs distancing and other effects to create a particular narrative mood that governs "the regulation of narrative information" provided to the reader (Genette, 1980, p. 41). Gerard's idea of Mood is connected with the indicative mood of verbs in English Language grammar—of affirming, persuading, commanding or wishing etc. In Genette's terms of Mood, he extends it to mean also the varying degrees of affirmation. He defines Mood in the following words:

*A name given to the different forms of the verb that are used to affirm more or less the thing in question, and to express...the different points of view from which the life or action is looked at. (Genette, 1983, p. 161).*

He says that it is the 'regulation of narrative information' (ibid, p. 162); and Distance and Perspective are the two main modalities of expressing or regulating the narrative information. In his metalanguage, Distance represents the degrees of narrative information given. According to Genette, the narrative can furnish the reader with more or few details, and in a more or less direct way... to keep greater or less distance from what it tells.

Thus Mood centers on the interplay between reflector or point of view character and narrator, or how independent the narrator is from the focalizer or point of view character(s). Distance has two sub-divisions: *Narration of Events* and *Narration of Speech*. *Narration of Events*, Genette describes as 'the transcription of the non-verbal into the verbal' (ibid). This, Genette

further divides into two sub-categories: Diegesis and Mimesis. The two terms originate from Plato's contrasting of two narrative modes. The first is where the poet "himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking" (Genette, p. 162). Plato calls this 'haplé digésis' or 'pure narrative'. The second is where the poet 'delivers a speech as if it were someone else', and Plato describes this as 'imitation' or 'representation' or 'Mimesis' (Genette, p. 162). In Genette's view, mimesis is where the narrative material or object is handled in such a way that it literally tells itself. He describes Mimesis and Diegesis further: the former is 'the maximum of information and the minimum of narrator', while the latter is the maximum presence of the informer and the minimum of information.

In the narration of events, the emphasis is on telling—presenting the act of telling more than what is told. It is diegesis in terms of narration of events. On the other hand, narration of speech is absolute mimesis or imitation of speech in terms of reported or indirect speech. The study focuses on *Free Indirect Speech* of Transposed Discourse, which according to Genette is of two types: *indirect style* and *free indirect style*. In the indirect style, the character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, who presents them with his interpretation. Example: *He confided to his friend that his mother had passed away*. In the *free indirect style*, the character's words or actions are reported by the narrator, but without using a subordinating conjunction. Example: *He confided to his friend: his mother had passed away*.

According to Michael Toolan (2001), the Free Indirect Discourse (FID) is a technique for rendering a character's speech or thought. FID does this 'indirectly' in the sense that it transposes pronouns and tenses into the pronoun/tense system of the narrative's ordinary narrative sentences (for instance, it may shift a first person into a third person, and the present tense into the past). But there are no quotation marks, and often any identification of speaker or thinker (*he said, she thought* etc.) is also dropped. As a consequence, there is often no formal difference between FID (reporting a character's speech or thought) and a plain narratorial statement.

Again, Leech and Short (1981) point out concerning the free indirect discourse:

*The free indirect version differs from that of Direct Thought by virtue of the backshift of the tense and the conversion of the first person to the third person (indirect features) and also by the absence of a reporting clause and the retention of the interrogative form and question mark (direct features)—(cited in The Criterion: An International Journal in English, p. 6).*

It must be noted at this point that the Narration of Events is predominant in the traditional or classical novel because their aim is to inform the reader by narrating events. However, in modernist novel, Narration of Speech is used often because the focus is on discourse, not events.

## ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

### Narration of Events

The opening of the narrative sets the pace for the illustration of events:

*...The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an English country-house, in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dust would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf...The house that rose beyond the lawn was a structure to repay such consideration, and was the most characteristic object in the*

*peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch...The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains; and the place was furnished, like a room, with cushioned seats, with rich-coloured rugs, with the books and papers that lay upon the grass... (chapt. 1, pp. 5-6).*

The above is a presentation of setting. The narrator deliberately throws light on various aspects of the setting: the twilight of the day, the houses around the lawn, the trees around the beech and the furniture of the place. There is vivid depiction of the setting in such detail that provides a panoramic view of the elements therein shown. In the presentation of the characters in the setting, the description is equally in great detail:

*The shadows on the perfect lawn were straight and angular; they were the shadows of an old man sitting in a deep wicker-chair near the low table on which the tea had been served, and of two younger men strolling to and fro, in desultory talk, in front of him. The old man had his cup in his hand; it was an unusually large cup, of a brilliant pattern from the rest of the set, and painted in brilliant colours. He...smoked cigarettes as they continued to stroll...The old gentleman at the tea table...has a narrow clean-shaven face, with evenly distributed features and an expression of placid acuteness... A beautiful collie dog lay upon the grass near his chair, watching the master's face almost as tenderly as the master contemplated the still more magisterial physiognomy of the house; and a little bristling, bustling terrier bestowed a desultory attendance upon the other gentlemen...*

It is clear how the old man is presented with every detail of his physiognomy, including details on the tea cup he holds, as well as the terrier that lay beside him. He also includes details about what the old man does (smoking) while sitting still and gazing at the other gentlemen. These other gentlemen are similarly presented in vivid light:

*One of these was a remarkably well-made man of five and thirty, with a face as English as that of the old gentleman I have just sketched was something else; a noticeably handsome face, fresh-coloured, fair, and frank, with firm, straight features, a lively grey eye, and the rich adornment of a chest-nut beard...He was booted and spurred, as if he had dismounted from a long ride; he wore a white hat, which looked too large for him;...His companion, measuring the length of the lawn beside him, was a person of quite another pattern...Tall, lean, loosely and feebly put together, he had an ugly, sickly, witty charming face—furnished, but by no means decorated, with a straggling moustache and whisker. He looked clever and ill—a combination by no means felicitous; and he wore a brown velvet jacket....His gait had a shambling, wandering quality; he was not very firm on his legs;...and at this moment, with their faces brought into relation, you would easily have seen that they were father and son (chapt. 1, pp. 5-8).*

The information above on the two gentlemen is not limited to their physiognomy but includes details about their stature and height, as well as the clothes worn and the manner of their walking. Being the very beginning of the narrative, the narrator sets the tone for the depiction of pictures. He actually attempts to sketch the elements: 'The house...the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch'; 'the old gentleman I have just sketched'. His words almost produce a synaesthesia of the senses, and anybody listening can perceive with the senses, the concrete elements depicted in the narration: the individual characters with their peculiar characteristics, the lawns, trees, the tea-cup, the river, the house, the fresh breeze—mingled with somewhat dull-brilliant sunshine, provides an atmosphere of serenity, as of twilight (suggested in the words of the narrator)—'what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left

was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dust would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow...’ Colours like red, black, white, brown, velvet, brilliant fresh-coloured, fair; and descriptions like summer, cold, great, luxurious, mellow, dense, rich-coloured, charming, narrow, placid, clean-shaven, rustic, faint, lean, wicker, low, spacious, big, thick embroidered, beautiful, old, bristling, bustling, desultory, noticeably handsome, firm, straight, grey, rich, too large, large, tall, ugly, sickly, witty, charming, straggling, inveterate, shambling, and wandering among other similes such as ‘as dense as’, ‘as tenderly as’, ‘as English as’, ‘as if’—all shown against the green background of the lawns gives the impression of a picture with outstanding features or different portraits with illustrious features; and the feeling or impression of a cool-warm climate, one suitable for ‘the ceremony of afternoon tea’.

Only the setting and the three characters are shown in this narration of events but the details presented on each element is one of panorama, appealing to the sense of sight. This is no wonder because the narrator intends to show. Therefore, in this narration of events the narration is mimetic due to the graphic presentation of the scenes and the quantum of information offered in descriptive pauses.

That is not all; the provision of details is not without the inclusion of historical facts. Isabel, the heroine of the narrative is depicted against the background of her father’s complex building:

*It was an old house at Albany—a large, square, double house, with a notice of sale in the windows of the parlour...They were exactly alive—large white doors, with an arched frame and wide side-lights, perched upon little “stoops” of red stone, which descended sideways to the brick pavement of the street...These rooms, above-stairs, were extremely numerous, and were painted all over exactly alike, in a yellowish-white which had grown sallow with time. On the third floor, there was a sort of arched passage, connecting the sides of the house...which, though it was short and well-lighted, always seemed to the girl to be strange and lonely, especially on winter afternoons...On the other side, opposite, across the street, was an old house that was called the Dutch House—a peculiar structure, dating from the earliest colonial time, composed of bricks that had been painted yellow, crowned with a gable that was pointed out to strangers, defended by a rickety wooden paling, and standing sideways to the street. (chapt. 3, pp. 20-24).*

In his conscious choice of detailing the scenes of the events, the narrative assumes mimetic tone—presenting maximum information, information that is more visually sensible to the reader. As the information saturates the narration, the reader is brought closer to the text to view every detail from his/her own perspective while the narrator is relegated. This distance technique is further enhanced by the inclusion of historical facts: “...an old house that was called the Dutch House—a peculiar structure, dating from the earliest colonial time”. In the depiction of the other house in chapter one, involving Ralph, Lord Warburton and Mr. Touchett, the narrator similarly draws historical connection:

*It stood upon a low hill, above the river—the river being the Thames, as some forty miles from London (...) The house had a name a history; the old gentleman taking his tea would have been delighted to tell you these things: how it had been built under Edward the Sixth, had offered a night’s hospitality to the great Elizabeth...had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell’s wars, and then, under the Restoration, repaired and much enlarged; and how, financially, after having been remodelled, and disfigured in the eighteenth century, it had passed into the careful keeping of a shrewd American banker, who had bought it originally (...) because it was offered at a great bargain...(chapt. 1, p. 6)*

This is additional feather in his cup of techniques to saturate the narrative with information that is veritable. The narratorial relevance of this style is to produce the quality of verisimilitude, as a component of realism. It is the aim of modern fiction to represent life as it truly is, and fiction practitioners—including Henry James in the effort to show what is purportedly a true account of life, uses this style in the narration of events to create narrative distance by way of providing more information to the reader. Henry James' theoretical orientation of the art of fiction sees the narrator as a historian. For this reason, the narrator in *The Portrait of Lady* functions as a historian, representing and illustrating the past, and the actions of men and references that actually exist.

Thus, the narration of events in this narrative is marked with the provision of details to which the reader is disposed to the portrait of events. Setting and character are artfully blended to give a vivid impression of the characters and elements of scenes depicted in the setting. This calculated blend apart from providing more information, also appeals to the senses, especially of the visual acuity since the scenes showed somehow expose graphically the various aspects of the elements such as their size, colour, shape, texture, smell sound, temperature etc. in panorama, as of those shown in the cinema. In this technique the overall emphasis of narration is shifted from the narrator to the events themselves, thus the events narrate themselves and the narrator becomes a distant figure from what he is narrating in the narrative.

#### **Narration of Speech—Trnansposed Speech: Free Indirect**

This is the narrator's chief means of showing information in this narrative. As an exemplar of the modern novel—geared towards discourse, the speech of the characters is presented through their thoughts and utterances. It is also the means by which the narrator portrays the portrait of the lady and of other prominent characters in the narrative. Isabel's impression of other characters, and of life, stems from her vision. This is intimated by the narrator:

*Isabel has an immense curiosity about life, and as such she is constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movement of her own heart and the agitations of the world... (Chap. 4, p. 33).*

This statement by the narrator is the basis of the prevailing consciousness of the heroine throughout the narrative. For this reason the free indirect speech is used more than the indirect transposed speech, in presenting the character's consciousness. Speech, especially about Isabel is presented through her own consciousness:

*It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of one's self as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend; one should try to be one's own best friend, and to give one's self, in this manner, distinguished company...she would appear what she was...It was wrong to be mean, to be jealous, to be false, to be cruel...On the whole, reflectively, she was in no uncertainty about the things that were wrong. She had no taste for thinking of them, and she would appear what she was...If one should wait expectantly and trustfully, one would find some happy work to one's hand...What should one do with the misery of the world in the scheme of the agreeable for one's self? (chapt. 6, pp. 46-50).*

“Self-esteem” stands out in Isabel's character from her self-image depicted above. The rhetorical question in the last sentence as well as the past tense forms of the verb used, show how the character's thoughts about herself flow unmediated. The character here reveals herself instead of the narrator. In this way, there is a mimesis of what is told because it becomes the voice of the character herself and the narrator's distance from the narration is thus guaranteed. Being self-conscious, the heroine always muses in retrospect. For instance,



after refusing to accept Warburton's proposal, Isabel sits in pensive mood, her cogitations showing through introspection:

*...She would not marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to correspond to any vision of happiness that she had hitherto entertained, or was now capable of entertaining. She must write this to him, she must convince him, and this duty was comparatively simple...but she did her sex not injustice in believing that nineteen women out of twenty would accommodate themselves to it with extreme zeal. Why then upon her also should it not impose itself? Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than this large occasion? If she would not do this, then she must do great things, she must do something greater... (chapt. 12, pp. 102-103).*

The whole narration is in free indirect discourse. The narrator presents Isabel's reflections over her encounter with Lord Warburton in which the latter proposes to marry her. She is perturbed for refusing to consent to Lord's proposal. She herself recognizes that she has spurned a great opportunity. 'Nineteen women out of twenty' would not spurn an offer such as the one she so blatantly refuses, and she wonders whether she is not a strange person or whether she is not a cold hard girl. But amidst her nervousness and guilty feeling, she, as her nature is rationalizes her action: "She would not marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to correspond to any vision of happiness that she had hitherto entertained, or was now capable of entertaining. She must write this to him, she must convince him".

The free indirect speech discloses Isabel's perception of the other characters who directly and indirectly influence her choices in life. Her attitude towards them is therefore based on her thoughts and perceptions about them.

*...She envied the talents, the accomplishments, the aptitudes, of Madame Merle. She found herself desiring to emulate them, and in this and other ways, Madame Merle presented herself as a model. "I should like to like that" Isabel secretly exclaimed, more than once.... It took no very long time, indeed, for Isabel to feel that she was, as the phrase is, under an influence. "What is the harm", she asked herself, "so long as it is a good one? The more one is under a good influence the better. The only thing is to see our steps as we take them—to understand them as we go. That I think I shall always do. I needn't be afraid of becoming too pliable; it is my fault that I am not pliable enough"...She sometimes wondered what Henrietta Stockpole would say to her..."That is the great thing", Isabel reflected; "that is the supreme good fortune: to be in a better position for appreciating people than they are for appreciating you..." (chapt. 19, pp. 176, 177).*

The extract vividly shows Isabel's thought process, as well as her uttered thoughts in such words as 'She envied, desiring to emulate, she wondered, she secretly exclaimed, Isabel reflected, had a conviction'. The various forms of the verb represent Isabel's attitude towards Madame Merle, while her verbalized thoughts are expressed in quotation marks: "I should like to like that..." "That is the great thing ..." "that is the supreme good fortune: to be in a better position for appreciating people than they are for appreciating you ..." "What is the harm... "so long as it is a good one? The more one is under a good influence the better. The only thing is to see our steps as we take them—to understand them as we go. That I think I shall always do. I needn't be afraid of becoming too pliable; it is my fault that I am not pliable enough..." Isabel is tempted to reproduce in her deportment some of the most graceful characteristics of Madame Merle. Thus it is more credible presenting the character's thoughts rather than narrating them to the reader. Isabel undertakes a kind of memory lane, a retrospective view of her past on the

basis of Osmond's oddities after their marriage, and the narrator presents Isabel's all-night vigil:

*...Was he in love with Gilbert Osmond's wife, and if so, what comfort did he expect to derive from it?...Lord Warburton was as disinterested as need be, and she was no more to him than she need wish. She would rest upon this until the contrary should be proved; proved more effectually than by a cynical intimation of Osmond's...It was not her fault—she had practised no deception; she had only admired and believed...It was her deep distrust for her husband—this was what darkened the world....it was as if Osmond deliberately, almost malignantly, had put the light out one by one...she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now—she saw the whole man...but even then she stopped again in the middle of the room, and stood there gazing at a remembered vision—that of her husband and Merle.... (chapt. 42, pp. 389-401).*

In free indirect discourse, the narrator allows Isabel herself to ponder over her past. The reminiscence of the past by Isabel allows the narrator to present a recapitulation of the events surrounding Isabel's life from her own vision, while he the narrator zooms in and out of her meditations. Although the narrator's voice fuses into Isabel's, there is still an unhindered flow of the latter's voice in the way her thought is narrated, such that the reader sees Isabel's thoughts and not the narrator's voice. It is the summary of the key events of Isabel's life that are captured in her night vigil. The narrator emphasizes this fact in the Preface to the novel:

*...I might show what an "exciting" inward life may do for the person leading it even while it remains perfectly normal...but it throws the action further forward that twenty "incidents" might have done. It was designed to have all the vivacity of incidents and all the economy of picture...It is obviously the best thing in the book, but it is a supreme illustration of the general plan... (p. 12).*

Thus, it is the narrator's masterplan in this narrative to achieve narrative distance by presenting the heroine from her own consciousness in this narrative.

#### **HOW NARRATIVE DISTANCE OCCURS IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY***

In the narration of events, there is vivid presentation of setting. In this regard, he details the scenes graphically in descriptive pauses, with adjectives and complex noun phrases, as well as metaphorical images that are so visually appealing, making the objects presented in the description picturesque. In addition, he concretizes the elements in the description by identifying their geographical and historical relevance. By naming names of people, places, times and seasons of climate, the narrator aims at achieving the quality of verisimilitude. In this way what is presented is pictured in the mind's eye. By blending historical allusion and external focalization, the narrator employs a panorama of viewing the events to show more information to the reader, as the reader almost perceives everything with his senses, particularly with the visual acuity. Since attention is given to the fictive elements presented in the narrative the narrator is de-emphasized, and in this process the narrator is distant from the narration during the narration of events

Similarly, in the presentation of speech, narrative distance occurs when speech is presented from the perspective of the characters themselves. The narrative vehicle by which the ideal of narrator distance is attained is the free indirect speech. It is mostly employed in narrating the chief character's (Isabel Archer) psychological adventures. The free indirect technique of indirect speech act enables the narrator to zoom in and out of the character's strain of thoughts. The narration therefore of the characters' words and thoughts in this narrative is in

mimesis, as opposed to diegesis because speech is presented as though it were the characters themselves speaking and not the narrator. The verbalized as well as unuttered thoughts of the characters are shown without narrator mediation, and the reader is brought closer to the text to both hear and see what characters think and say. Thus, the style of the free indirect discourse therefore only imitates the words and thoughts of the characters, with the narrator acting only as a commentator. The personal narrating voice of the narrator is de-emphasized, and in this process the narrator is distant from the narration during the narration of speech.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is quite clear that by examining the characteristics of a narrative instance and the particulars of the narrative mood, one can clarify the mechanisms used in the narrative act, and identify exactly what methodological choices the author makes in order to render his/her story. The narrator in the modern narrative apparently does not exist, and the reader feels present and invited to add his personal opinion on the basis of his uninterrupted encounter with the text. Thus, the narrator artfully hides himself, creating a distance between himself and the objects of his narration. It is worth-saying that narrative distance is an effect: the result of the whole texture of the narrative and the way it is experienced by the reader. Henry James' masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady*, is an exemplar of the modern novel that is more discourse oriented—focusing more on the various speech acts and how they illustrated the story. To this end, Henry James sets the modus operandi in *The Portrait of a Lady* for dramatic narration.

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