

Projection of Life in Henry James' *The Ambassadors*

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Abstract

The Ambassadors, the first of James' three crowning works to be completed, has proved by far his most popular book with the critics. His subject was well fitted to such treatment, since it consisted in Strether's gradual initiation into a world of new values, and new series of small climaxes could therefore best articulate this hero's successive discoveries. What Strether sees is the entire content, and James thus perfected a device both for framing and for interpreting experience. All art must give the effect of putting a frame around its subject, in the sense that it most select a significant design, by concentrating upon it, thus empower us to share in the essence without being distracted by irrelevant details.

The epistemological relevance of the place is twofold: 1. on a paradigmatic level it provides a type that helps—or provokes—Strether to interpret things in a way different from the Woollett frame of mind, and is, in that respect, the means to lead him 'astray.' 2. On the syntactic level the place provides the dramatic device of staging the recognition as scene. Most obviously, this function is exemplified by being the scene of the chance encounter as in the anagnorisis of melodrama in Brooks's analysis.

*This paper is an attempt to present a consideration of the novelist's views regarding life as it is projected for us through the medium of Strether's consciousness in the course of *The Ambassadors*.*

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