

The Literary Significance of “The Jolly Corner” in Henry James’s Oeuvre

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Abstract: Henry James is one of the authors who made a significant contribution to the development of American Realism, which has not lost its importance in American literature since the 19th century, and is crucial even in the 20th century and serves as the foundation stone of Psychological Realism. “The Jolly Corner” was released in 1908 and the story tells the event of a man who sees the ghost of what he may have been. The short story is well-known for its psychological themes and complex narrative structure. “The Jolly Corner” contains aspects of psychological realism, with an emphasis on the representation of characters’ inner experiences and motivations. The following paper discusses how well Henry James goes into the subtleties of human psychology, portraying the protagonist’s inner thoughts and emotions with tremendous clarity and detail.

Keywords: Henry James, “The Jolly Corner”, main character, theme, structure, psyche, psychological realism, inner, portray.

I. Introduction

Literature as an art of words continues influencing the human heart for several centuries. These masterpieces leave a significant mark on the history of literary development and play an important role in the creation of new genres for the next generation. Henry James is one of the authors who made a significant contribution to the development of American Realism, which has not lost its importance in American literature since the 19th century and is crucial even in the 20th century and serves as the foundation stone of Psychological Realism.

Henry James is a writer who managed to show his style in realistic literature of the USA, as one of the skilled novelists who created stories and novels as “Daisy Miller” (1879), “Portrait of a Lady” (1881), “The Bostonians” (1886), “The Ambassadors” (1903) in the last two decades of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century. His name was given in honor of his father, and his father was a mature public figure and theorist of his time. As a result, both children of the family became successful, and his brother William James, the founder of the "stream of consciousness" in the field of psychology, and Henry James, a literary figure, left an indelible mark on history of USA. Henry, a lover of books from childhood, was educated and trained by his family background in the leading schools and teachers of his day. Additionally, through travel to famous European capitals such as Geneva, Paris, and London, young people grew up able to communicate in multiple languages such as French, German, English and Spanish. Although at nineteen he was a student at Harvard Law School, Henry’s love for books introduced him to the artistic world of Onore de Balzac, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ivan Turgenev so much that, without completing his second year of study, he anonymously published his first story. In particular, his friendship with the leader of the time William Dean Howells became the basis of his success as a writer.

II. Literature Review

Henry James’s work was not warmly received by literary critics during his lifetime, but thanks to the development of modernism in US literature, his works were able to penetrate deeply into the human psyche and attracted the attention of literary critics for their unique approach to psychological prose

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works. D. M. Scura carefully studied scientific sources devoted to the author's work and, based on the results of his research, developed a reference manual. In the preface to his book, expressing his thoughts about the author's work, he notes that between 1960 and 1974 about two thousand books, articles, and dissertations were written [16; VII]. L. Edel, D. W. Jefferson, F. Dupee, B. McElderry, D. Abel, G. Patt, L. Powers, and O. Cargill are among the literary scholars who have explained their conclusions and provided in-depth scientific analysis of the interpretation. artistic and genre features of the works of Henry James, including the names of famous critics. Naturally, our attention was drawn to the fact that the author's work has become the subject of so many studies. As a result of research, we have witnessed that the author's novellas and novels have been studied from different aspects, but there is no systematic research. Therefore, in this article, we have tried to analyze Henry James's individual style comprehensively based on the short story "The Jolly Corner", the artistic features of this short story, and the peculiar features in the style of depicting the human psyche.

III. Results and Discussion

When Henry James returned to the United States in 1904, it had already been 20 years to his absence to the country. The writer was surprised from the sweeping changes that took place in the city, because New York had altered tremendously. New York was no longer a sleepy small town, but a metropolis, a great metropolis, supported by vast entrepreneurial prosperity. The short story "The Jolly Corner" was the result of that period. As "The Jolly Corner" was released in 1908, it tells the narrative of a man who sees the ghost of what he may have been. According to Harold Bloom "The Jolly Corner" is "*another Jamesian tale about the missed opportunity or the life unlived*" [3; 57]. "The Jolly Corner" narrates how Spencer Brydon, the main character encounters an apparitional creature that lives in his family's abandoned house. Actually this creature is the the main character's American self. The short story is well-known for its psychological themes and complex narrative structure.

First and foremost literary peculiarity of the short story is the author's skill in psychological exploration of the person's psyche. Henry James delves into the inner workings of the protagonist's mind, focusing on his internal conflicts, repressed desires, and psychological transformations. The narrative examines the themes of identity, self-discovery, and the duality of human nature. The main character Spencer Brydon is described as the man of almost fifty years old, who has been away from his hometown for more than 20 years and for the people around him he is the person who lived useless life. Here starts all problems of the main character, his sufferings, his hesitations, disappointments. When he meets his alter ego, the ghost in the old house that he visits, he describes this place as 'jolly corner'. It is visible that the author narrates the frustrations of any person who can face in real life. The author analyzes the human psyche and through the main character's thoughts' analysis he states the following: "*This was human actual social; this was of the world he had lived in, and he was more at his ease certainly for the countenance, coldly general and impersonal, that all the while and in spite of his detachment it seemed to give him*" [17]. In the extract Henry James deals with both direct and indirect characterization. In the phrase "human actual social" the author points out that Spencer Brydon is a typical person who is a part of society and at the same time he depicts the way of life he lives with his behavior. The people around him accept him according to his facial expression he has and Spencer knows this well, actually this makes him calm. Henry James here hints to his character's way of life, and how he pretends among people. But through indirect characterization he delves into Spencer Brydon's inner world and the words "coldly general, and impersonal" illustrates who actually resides in his inside.

"The Jolly Corner" contains aspects of psychological realism, with an emphasis on the representation of characters' inner experiences and motivations. Henry James goes into the subtleties of human psychology, portraying the protagonist's inner thoughts and emotions with tremendous clarity and detail. As the example of psychological realism elements that can be noticed in "The Jolly Corner" are internal monologues, unconscious desires and repressed emotions, psychological transformations, self-reflection and introspection, ambiguity and uncertainty in perception, conflicts between conscious and unconscious mind. Alice Staverton is another character of the story and she is Spencer Brydon's old American friend. She is one of the few people who believes in her friend's other self and even has



dreamed him herself. She thinks of her comrade's the other self as a hideous, rough and brutal person. In the story Henry James juxtaposes goodness with evil. It is not only noticed in the characterization of the main character but also between the characters as well. If in the personality of the main character there are two selves, Alice Staverton is a pure description of wellness. "*She listened to everything; she was a woman who answered intimately but who utterly didn't chatter. She scattered abroad therefore no cloud of words; she could assent, she could agree, above all she could encourage, without doing that*" [17]. This extract shows that Alice is a compassionate and understanding, supportive, loyal and overall emphatic friend to the main character. When the main character struggles to overcome some difficulties, Alice psychologically supports and provides that help that Spencer needs. In the story Henry James describes how *she could encourage, without doing that*. While Alice's influence on Spencer's psychology is not explicitly explored, her presence and interactions contribute to his self-reflection and internal struggles. Through their conversations, Alice prompts Spencer to confront his past choices and provides a sounding board for his introspections. Her understanding and supportive nature likely have an impact on his psychological state.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion it should be stated that "The Jolly Corner" demonstrates Henry James's mastery in grasping characters' psychological depth, beautiful prose, and intricate narrative structure frameworks. Through its investigation of identity and self-discovery, the short story provides readers with a thought-provoking and psychologically complex reading experience. Through portraying characters' inner thoughts, conflicts, and transformations with psychological realism the short story offers a nuanced and introspective exploration of the human psyche.

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