

**NUNNERY AS CLAIRE'S RENOUNCEMENT OF
LIFE IN THE NOVEL OF HENRY JAMES' THE
AMERICAN**



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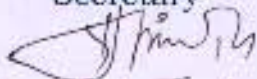
Rottu Madasih
NIM. 970110101041

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FACULTY OF LETTERS
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Approved and received by the examination committee of the English Department of the Faculty of Letters, Jember University.

Secretary

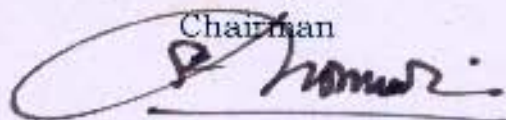


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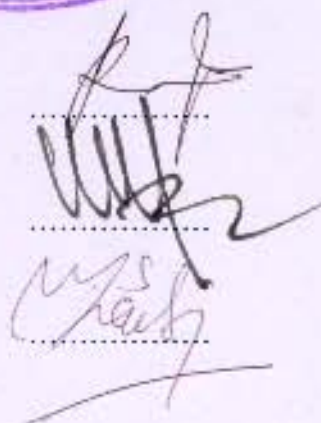
Chairman



DR. Samudji, M.A

The Members:

1. Drs Ridak Yunus
2. Drs. Wisasongko, M.A.
3. Dra. Dina Dyah K., M.A.



I dedicate this thesis to

❧ *My beloved parents, Djarot Setijono and Sri Mero for their pure love, affection and care.*

❧ *My only brother, Yoyon and my dearest younger sisters, Dina and Danik for their care and support. Everything is happy when we are together.*

❧ *My guy, Dodik for his motivation and support.*

❧ *My Alma mater*

Motto :

People should act according to their believes and not to do anything just because it is the accepted thing to do.

(Henry David Thoreau)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Literature is the great repository of life. Permanently in the literary works the artist expresses in words of some thought or idea about life and the world. The poet, novelist and dramatist take human being, society and other aspects of life as the objects of their creative writing, cultivate and express those ideas through language. Wellek and Warren (1956: 22) say that language is the material of literature as stone or bronze is of sculpture, paints of pictures, or sounds of music.

In his writing the artist communicates feelings and also emotion. He tries to share the sudden intense of pleasure that he feels in the beauty of the world, in the beauty of the sky in the night, the strange silence of night and so forth to the readers. He expects to pass on to the readers some feelings or ideas which at once are recognized as being either actually or potentially a part of their experience. He wishes the readers will understand the ideas he transfers. Besides, through his writing he also aims to change their ideas and also tries to persuade, to influence them through the language. Wellek and A Warren (1956: 23) give their comment,

...Moreover literary language is far from merely referential. It has its expressive side; it conveys the tone and attitude of the speaker or writer. And it does not merely state and express what it says; it also wants to influence the attitude of the reader, persuade him, and ultimately change him....

Typically, literature is divided into three forms, narrative fiction or novel, drama or play and poetry. Narrative fiction or novel is a book-length story in prose about either imagery or historical character.

According to conventional aesthetics, fiction aims at the realistic representation of life or at anti realistic representation of artistic process. Narrative fiction or novel is a mirror of the world. It reflects the countenance of the artist in the very act of experiencing the world. In



consideration of the first aim, fiction focuses on the human reality. It helps us toward a better understanding of ourselves and our fellow human being, because in fiction the characters are the reflection of real human being. They also experience many things as human being has, for instance, angry, suffer, happy and so on. So, it may be possible that they can be seen nearly as human being, particularly it is in novel. Doren (1998:578) gives an explanation,

The character we remember best in fiction are those we have encountered in novels. They were seen from many sides, and they developed in our understanding. They may be more real for us.

The American; a novel, is one of Henry James' works that shoots cosmopolitan subjects as the objects of his creative writing. James portrays the innocence American who is traveling to Europe and finally he is trapped in the tricky game of the Bellegarde. In the novel, through the action of the characters he cleverly represents the comparison of the two worlds, America and Europe. He compares the crudity of the New World and confronts with the more mature social forms, the stereotyped ideas and artistic riches of the old.

The American is a mixture of melodrama and romance. This novel shows James' apprenticeship and his discovery of his great cosmopolitan subject. James began work on this novel shortly after reaching Paris at the end of 1875. It was published in June 1877 in Boston. This story had been appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly* from June, in 1876 to May 1877. Soon its readers grew impatient from month to month. Really it was a story, which certainly got more interesting as it went on. Critics said that *The American* is a better novel than *Roderick Hudson*, his first important novel. Tuttleton (1979: 392) states,

It is perfectly manifest that *The American* takes a place in advance of *Roderick Hudson*; it has the same sort of merits and the same sort of faults, yet on the whole it must be rated as more successful than Mr. James's former effort.

Besides that, *The American* is a polished, philosophical and absolutely cold-blooded story. Being said as a cold-blooded story, in fact, the story

of the novel is dominated by suffering, sadness and depression of some characters. One of them is Mme. Claire de Cintré. Mme. Claire de Cintré is the member of aristocrat of Europe. She is under the pressure of what she has been thought to regard as her primary duty to her family. The family keeps her in such tight regulations. They control her. Her weakness is taken as a good advantage. In fact she becomes the subordinate in the family and also the object of marriages. These conditions suffer her. Furthermore she feels life is so unfair. Later on she takes a critical decision. She determines to leave her family, her home, her lover and her life for religion.

1.2 The Problem to Discuss

Character is one of literary elements, which is very interesting to be analyzed. As the imitation of human being, she or he experiences such feelings and also emotion equally as the real person does such as happiness, sadness, suffering, depression and so on.

In this novel one of the interesting topic to discuss is the renouncement of the two main characters, Claire and Newman for the sake of others and also for their life. Claire, the female main character renounces life, worldly things and her ambition for the sake of her family, for her love, and for getting what she thinks as the real happiness. She enters to nunnery, devotes herself as a nun in Carmelite nunnery, whereas Newman renounces his ambition of revenge to the Bellegardes, due to his lover, Claire and his honour. The fact is that he refuses to use the letter, which would hurt the Bellegardes.

1.3 The Scope of the Study

On this chapter the discussion focuses only on Claire's renouncement of life and retires to nunnery, Carmelite nunnery. There she takes a solemn vows and becomes a nun. Furthermore, it also describes the reasons that support Claire to take a critical decision and go to the religious institution.

1.4 The Approach to Use

Usually every scientific study of social life, study of interaction, study of behaviour, and study of literature need an approach, a certain approach that necessarily used to get a clear discussion and detailed explanation. In relation to the reason, in this writing a psychological approach is used for analyzing the female main character. It is in consideration of the fact that all of Claire's suffering and desires are concerned with mental or emotional occurrences, which has close relation with her family's evil treatments. According to W.S. Scott (1962:71-72) there are three kinds of illumination to apply psychological knowledge to art:

In general the application of psychological knowledge to art can generate three kinds of illumination. First, it deals with the creative process, second, the study of life of the author as a means of understanding his art, third, psychological can be used to explain fictitious character

Besides it also applies a sociological study. This study concerns with the interaction among characters. The point is the interaction among Claire, her family, Newman and other characters that support the discussion.

1.5 The Method of Analysis

In the analysis of the novel the deductive method is used, in which reasoning derives from generalization of evidence, matters, facts to discover of particular one. Young (1982:110) describes,

...the students formulated certain single propositions as to the causal factor of delinquency. That is, they *deduced* from the complexities of observed behavior certain single ideas. In other words, they used a process of reasoning about the whole observed situation in order to arrive at a particular idea. This process of reasoning is called *deduction* or *deductive reasoning*.

Moreover this thesis is composed by means of library research. Using this research collects the materials; data and information from several books, and dictionaries that concerning to the topic of analyzing.

1.6 The Goals of the Study

In *The American* renouncement is one of themes that James tries to point. In the novel he tells about a woman who gives up her life to achieve her hopes.

Apart from that there are many good lessons that can be taken. So the writing aims to show that one has to be herself. Another is to show to the readers about the real and immortal happiness, beside worldly happiness. Furthermore it aims to apply the theories that have been given during the study. The last is to widen the understanding of American novel, especially Henry James' *The American*.

1.7 The Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I is the introduction. Chapter II tells about the short biography of the writer, Henry James and the synopsis of the novel. The third chapter concerns with the meaning of the terms, whereas chapter IV discuss nunncy as Claire's renunciation of life and the reasons of taking the decision. The last chapter, chapter V embodies the whole discussion in conclusion.

CHAPTER II

THE BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY JAMES AND THE SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

2.1 The Biography of Henry James

Henry James was the largest literary figure to come out of America during the nineteenth and twentieth century. He gave American fiction the same discipline as Emily Dickinson provided for American poetry. Henry James was born in New York, on April 15, 1843. He was the son of Henry James, Sr. [1811-82] and Mary Robertson Walsh. He had four siblings; three brothers and a sister. They are; William (1842), Garth Wilkinson (1845), Robertson [1846], and Alice [1848]. One of his brothers was William James, the American philosopher of pragmatism. Unlike his brother, William who was energetic, brilliant, probably rather bossy, James was tended to think of himself uncommonly passive, incompetent, dreamy and slow of speech. In other words he was a thinker than a doer. He spent much of his time in the library. His father said he was a devourer of libraries. Later his father worried about it and attempted him to attend a preparatory school for engineering.

James' father was a traveller. He took the entire family to travel, moved and set up temporary residences from one country to other countries. In 1855 he took the entire family to travel to Europe. Around 1855-58 and 1859-60 the Jameses set up temporary residences in London, Paris, Geneva, Boulogne and Bonn. Thus experience, especially travelling to Europe impressed him very much. It gave him an everlasting impression. Next he returned and made his home there.

Returning to the United States, in 1862 he entered Harvard Law School at the age of 19 but soon he withdrew. James preferred reading literature to studying law. He started writing his first short story, *A Tragedy of Error*. It was published two years later. In 1866-69 and 1871-72 he was a contributor of *The Nation* and *Atlantic Monthly*. In 1871 his



first novel, *Watch and Ward* was written while he was traveling through Venice and Paris.

After leaving Paris he moved to England. First he lived in London and then in Rye, Sussex. During his first year in Europe, he wrote novels that portrayed an American who was living abroad, such as *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1877). In 1905 James visited the United States and wrote *The Jolly Corner*. The setting was New York.

Between 1906 and 1910 James revised many of his tales and novels. Around 1913-17 he wrote three autobiography novels. They were *A Small Boy and Others* that was published in 1913, *Notes of A Son and Brothers* (1914) and the posthumously published fragment *The Middle Years* in 1917. In 1915 he became a naturalized citizen as a loyalty to his adopted country. Also it was his protest against the United State's refusal to enter the war. James suffered a stroke on December 2, 1915, and died three months later in Rye on February 28, 1916.

During his five decades of creation James wrote some twenty novels and one hundreds and twelve tales, some of them are almost of novel length. Most critics have divided the career of Henry James into three periods, namely James I, James II and the Old Pretender.

James I is the period extended from 1865 to 1882. It is the period of his apprenticeship and his success, his discovery of his great cosmopolitan and his exploitation of it. One of his works is the tale of *Daisy Miller*.

The second period has often been spoken as James' "social" novels. This period is classified into three acts:

1. The abandoning time being of the "international" theme and the writing of three long novels in the naturalist mode. The three long novels are *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Princess Cassamassima* (1886), *The Tragic Muse* (1890).
2. The abandoning of fiction for five years writing for the stage in 1890 to 1895. During these period he wrote seven plays, among of them are *Guy Domville* (1895) and *The Pupil* (1891).

3. The return to the novel in 1895. Then it was followed by years of experimental writing. James assimilated the techniques derived from the theater. He wrote the series of short novels, which dealt with conflict in human relationship. They are *What Maisie Knew* (1897), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Awkward* (1899).

The last period is the Old Pretender, accurately described as the "major phase". This phase gives a great support and also influences upon the twentieth century novels. This period extended from 1900 to World War I. During this final phase James wrote the Three Greatest, massive novels. They are *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

Henry James is an American-born writer, gifted with talents in literature, psychology and philosophy. In literature he has a great talent in analyzing, cultivating and reflecting life, man and reality. His models are largely French: Balzac, Mérimée, George Sand and also Hawthorne, one of American writers. James is really a great writer. His creative writing sustains his reputation as a great novelist. Dupee (1965:756) says,

The old belief that he was a "rootless cosmopolitan" is no longer widely held. On the other hand, his idea of tradition was so complex, his way of life so unusual, and his work so selective in its values and methods, that he is not easily defined and classified.....

2.2 The Synopsis of the Novel

Christopher Newman, a rich American, comes to Europe for entertainment and also hopes to find a wife. In Paris, in the Louvre, he meets Mademoiselle Noémie Nioche. She is a painter. Newman admires her painting. He says that her painting is more beautiful than the original. He promises to buy it even though it is very expensive. As a result, she introduces him to her father, M. Nioche. She drags her father to promise to Newman, a promise that he will teach Newman French.

While at the Louvre, Newman meets his old friend, Tom Tristram. He tells Tristram how much money he gets and the reason he quits his business. When he tells Tristram that he seeks a wife, Tristram suggests him to meet Mrs. Tristram who will help him to find a suitable wife. Mrs. Tristram suggests him to approach Madame Claire de Cintré, a proud lady. She belongs to one of oldest aristocrats of Europe.

Taking French lesson with M. Nioche, Newman begins to know him and his problem. According to M. Nioche, it is a big problem to have such a beautiful daughter when one does not have money. Therefore, he is afraid of failing to get a proper husband for her. Assuming that the Nioches are good, he offers to help them by giving a big sum of money in exchange for several paintings. M. Nioche is very glad but it is not his daughter, Noémie. The money offered by Newman according to her, could just enable her to marry a butcher or a grocer.

After returning to Paris from tours to Europe, Newman visits Claire. There he meets her brother, Valentin de Bellegarde and her sister-in-law, Madame Urbain de Bellegarde. Since Newman and Valentin are fond of each others, they often exchange visits and discuss many aspects of European life, most of all, about Claire. Soon they become a good friend. Although Valentin thinks that Newman cannot succeed to win Claire's heart, he promises to help him. Newman proposes Claire and she asks him not to mention the subject for about six months. After six months, she will give him her answer. One day, Newman meets Claire's brother, Urbain de Bellegarde and her mother. They are very cold and haughty but they allow him to keep seeing Claire.

One night Newman comes to the Bellegardes' house. They have a dinner party. In the party Madame de Bellegarde introduces Lord Deepmere, a distant relative who seems attracted to Claire, to him.

Six months have elapsed Newman proposes again and it is accepted. Claire is engaged to Newman. He is very happy. He intends to give a party but Madame de Bellegarde says it is their duty to give a party. Soon there is a party in the Bellegarde's house. In the party, at the

ball M. de Bellegarde introduces Newman to all of the aristocrats of France.

After the ball, Newman is at the opera, he meets Valentin, Noémie and another gentleman. Later he discovers that Valentin is going to have a duel with this gentleman. Newman cannot understand this.

Next time he visits Claire, she says that she cannot marry him. Newman supposes what she did is because of her family, whom does not like him. He intends to know the truth. He is going to visit the Bellegardes, but he cannot realize his aim because of a letter, which is sent by Valentin. It is informed that Valentin is badly wounded at present. He goes to see him and finds that he is still alive. He knows that Newman has a problem but Newman refuses to tell him the truth, Valentin feels ashamed of his family. Therefore, in his deathbed, Valentin tells Newman that he should see Mrs. Bread, their housekeeper, who has a secret to reveal.

Newman tries to persuade Claire to marry him but she tells him that she is not going to marry at all. She intends to be a Carmelite Nun. He is angry and then he goes to the Bellegardes. He drags them to keep their word and let Claire marry him. They refuse. Then, Newman goes to Mrs. Bread. She tells him that the old marquis on his deathbed left a letter about the crime that was committed by his wife and son. For her kindness, Newman offers Mrs. Bread to be his housekeeper.

When Newman goes to the convent, he meets the Bellegardes. He shows them the letter, which will shock them but still they refuse Newman. Newman decides to take a revenge. He plans to reveal the secret to the grand duchess but he conceals it. Soon afterwards he returns to America, and still wants to revenge. Later, he returns to Paris and tells Mrs. Tristram that he has something to do that can ruin the Bellegardes. He is informed that the Bellegardes have left Paris to Fleuriere. He then throws the paper and sees it burn. He feels ashamed of himself for such bad intention.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANING OF THE TERMS

3.1 The Meaning of Nunnery

The word "nunnery" is derived from the word "nun". So, before explaining "nunnery", first it is necessary to know about it and the definition of the word. The word "nun" comes from Coptic (Christian Egyptian) *nane, nanu* that means good, beautiful, pure. It is also believed that the word is derived from Latin *nonna* that means child's nurse. In popular usage the name is given to the member of religious institute of women in the Roman Catholic Church. Webster and Hornby give two brief descriptions. Webster (1974:651) says, "Nun is a woman devoted to a religious life who lives in a convent or nunnery, under vows of perpetual chastity, obedience, and poverty." Hornby (1989:846) defines, "Women living in a convent, usually after taking religious vows." So, "nun" is a woman who is living in a religious congregation under the control of abbess. She takes solemn vows in monastery or a cloister of an order of the Roman Catholic Church. She is living a life of religious observance under the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. She accepts the call of Christ, the call to a life of contemplation and mortification, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the spirit of Christ.

After getting the definition of "nun", then lets turn to the word "nunnery". Merriam and Webster (1996:1551) point out this word as;

- * 1. an establishment housing a community of nuns: CONVENT
- 2. an order of nuns: SISTERHOOD*

Webster (1974: 651), himself states, "Nunnery is a convent in which nuns reside."

Based on those statements it can be explained that "nunnery", which is also known as convent is a special house, a particular congregation, in which a community of nuns living a life under the control of abbess. Firstly some women built this particular congregation.



congregation. They were gathered, built a community, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the spirit of Christ. It is based on the saying of Gospels, "Where two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt, 18:20). There nuns devote to contemplate and active; contemplate and mortify life by prayer and prayer, and active in serving the society as teachers, nurses, medical women and social workers.

3.2 The Meaning of Renouncement

The second term is "renouncement". This word is derived from the word "renounce". Hornby (1989:1968) denotes "renounce" as,

1. (a) agree to give up ownership or possession of (sth.) esp. formally;
(b) give up (esp. habit) voluntarily; abandon
2. **sb./sth. (for sth.)** reject or stop following sb./sth.; repudiate sb./sth
3. refuse to associate with or acknowledge (esp. sth./sb. with a claim to one's care, affection, etc.)

While Merriam and Webster (1996:1922) comment that renounce is

1. announce, declare, proclaim
2. to announce one's abandonment of the ownership of: give up, abandon, or resign usu. Formally (something possessed).
3. to give up or abandoned (something practiced, professed, intended)

In conclusion renounce means to withdraw or sacrifice something (beliefs, a pursuit, feeling etc.) or somebody.

After getting the definition, now it is time to define "renouncement". Merriam and Webster (1996:1923) say that renouncement is the synonym of renunciation. It means the act or practice of renouncing; SACRIFICING, REJECTION, REPUDIATION. Hornby gives another definition. Hornby (1989:1068) defines,

- *1. giving something/somebody up; renouncing
2. habit of renouncing things, self denial *

From those statements a conclusion can be withdrawn. "Renouncement" means an act of giving up or sacrificing something,

such as right, belief, a pursuit, way of living, feeling or also somebody. This act of renouncing is conducted due to some reasons, for instance to gain a success, to get a better life, to escape from a problem, to honour someone and so forth.

Claire, the female main character renounces life, enters to a particular congregation, nunnery. She devotes herself to Carmelite nunnery, becomes the member of the religious community. She renounces life; worldly things, her title of noblewoman and then living in nunnery under vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

3.3 The Meaning of Life

The last term is "life". A great deal is known about it. There are some definitions about this word. All of them surely mean that "life" is something complicated. In general "life" is defined as the period that starts to count from the time when a baby is born in the world to the time he/she passes away. Some psychologists comment that life is the period during which life lasts, the period from birth to present time to death. Hornby (1989:720) has the same idea with say that "life" is the period from birth to death.

Merriam and Webster (1996:1306) give some terms about it. They state that life are

1. animate being: the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body or purely chemical matter
2. [a] the state of a material complex or individual characterized by the capacity to perform certain functional activities including metabolism, growth, reproduction, and some form of responsiveness or adaptability (b) a specific aspect of the process of living or performing the functions involved in living (the physical and emotional)
3. the duration of the earthly existence of an individual; specif. : the period from birth to death

Essentially they state that "life" is the opposite of death. "Life" is defined as any system capable of performing a number of such functions as eating, metabolizing, excreting, breathing, moving, growing, reproducing and being responsive to external stimuli. On the other hand death is

considered as the stop working of those systems and the dead or non-living matter never has any system as the living matter.

In relation to the title, "life" is worldliness; title, money, social status etc. It is related to worldly things. What is considered as being living is when a person enjoys, gains and seeks for worldly things. Claire renounces all of worldly things. For her, worldliness is not important at all. She does not care on her title of Bellegarde, her status of a noblewoman, takes all of them aside. She is tired of them all, particularly the bad treatments which have been given by her family. So, she is living in Carmelite nunnery, leaves the glamour life of the member of aristocrat of Europe, lives as a nun under vows of poverty. There is no more the word of marriage she contemplates and mortifies life, pledges to a life of chastity and prayer. The only thing that she holds is purity and to get the mortal happiness.

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

Some people say that life is renouncement, because normally, in this worldly life human being has desires, hopes and expectations that he tries to fulfill. Often he sacrifices something to achieve them. As a writer James was aware of the reality and chose the act of renouncement as one of themes and portrayed it in his novel, *The American*. He exposed and presented it through the actions that were performed by Claire, the female main character.

Claire, who is an imitation of a normal human being, has desires, hopes and needs of something, both material and immaterial. Due to her hopes she renounces life. Apart from that, actually, beyond her action there are many reasons that motivate her. They are the domination of her family, her tragic love, and her suffering. The domination of her family is reflected in the way of her mother's and her older brother's spying on her actions, interfering her decisions and performing their authority fully by the name of conformity. Another reason is her mother's command to release Newman, her lover, a day after her engagement party. The last is her suffering. In reality, continuous sorrow comes, goes and shocks her. In other words she almost never feels happy, especially after Valentin's death. His death, which she determines as a curse upon her family is a great shock for her. Because of the conditions, Claire, a woman who has no one to help her to lift up her sorrow is unable to handle the complicated problems. Then she thinks of a place where she can lift up them. The place is nunnery. In the institution she expects to escape her family from the curse, proves her true love and seeks the mortal happiness, which she has never got for long.

It is true then that sometimes there will be times when someone would willingly give everything he possesses to get something and he cannot deny it. The real fact is Claire. She leaves everything to get her hopes. For her, she finds them in Carmelite nunnery.



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