

I -Memories and Portraits

In the chapter "A Humble Remonstrance," the author contemplates the intriguing perspectives of Mr. Walter Besant and Mr. Henry James on the art of fiction, despite their distinct differences as writers—James being meticulous and Besant more genially whimsical. Their agreement on discussing the "art of fiction" as a distinct entity from the "art of poetry" prompts a reflection on the true nature of fiction and its broader application across various art forms, suggesting that fiction permeates all arts, including prose, poetry, and even sculpture and painting, serving as a universal story-telling element rather than a standalone category.

The discussion then shifts to question the limitations imposed by defining fiction solely as a modern English phenomenon, bound by its material form (notably, the three-volume novel format). By questioning the necessity of qualifying fiction as "in prose" and "fictitious," the author illuminates how these boundaries overlook the essence of narrative art. He argues that fiction transcends medium and factual accuracy, exemplified by works ranging from "The Odyssey" to "Pilgrim's Progress," which, despite their varied forms, all engage in the art of narrative.

The heart of the chapter delves into the essence and methodology of narrative art, proposing that it doesn't strive to replicate life's chaos but instead offers a refined, emblematic abstraction. The comparison to geometry's abstract notions versus tangible nature emphasizes that art, including narrative fiction, simplifies and stylizes reality to convey deeper truths, eschewing life's complexity for a more profound, albeit less direct, engagement with human experience.

The exploration further categorizes novels into three principal types: adventure, character, and dramatic. Each category is distinguished by its primary focus—be it the thrill of exploration, the depth of individual traits, or the intensity of emotions driving human conflicts. The author underscores the varied techniques and objectives inherent to each type, arguing that the true craft of fiction lies not in its fidelity to life's minutiae but in its capacity to distill and elevate universal themes through the lens of these differing focuses.

Moreover, the chapter critiques the conventional expectations from each novel type, advocating for a flexibility that allows stories to resonate on their inherent terms rather than conforming to rigid constructs. By challenging these norms, the narrative advocates for a broader, more inclusive understanding of fiction that celebrates its diversity and its unifying core—the transformational power of storytelling.

Ultimately, "A Humble Remonstrance" champions the richness of fiction as an art form that transcends simplistic classifications, urging readers and writers alike to appreciate the multifaceted ways narratives reflect and reshape the human condition.