

Nelson Goodman's Theory of Knowledge and Representation in Henry James's *The Tone of Time*

EDWARD ADELSON

Abstract: James's fiction often centers on the question: "how can we comprehend representations others present to us?" using art as a third-party vehicle. But representation in James as a device for comprehending his characters' affect and intent is complicated, frequently existing in a state of tension between interior and exterior perceived realities. The use of portraiture in James's late story "The Tone of Time," analyzed in the context of Nelson Goodman's theory of knowledge and particularly his belief that denotation and not resemblance is central to aesthetic comprehension, can assist in clarifying James's notion of engagement with art and artist's intent.

Keywords: Nelson Goodman, Henry James, representation, denotation, cognition

Henry James's (1843–1916) fiction often utilizes objects of art to define his characters' sense of reality—both interior as well as external. Viola Hopkins Winner summarizes "James's novelistic artistry and visual sensitivity" as "revealed in the precision with which he selected particular art objects to express shades of meaning" (Winner 80). A poignant example is the dying Milly Theale in James's 1902 novel *The Wings of the Dove*, transfixed by her encounter with a Bronzino portrait that seems a near reflection of Milly herself. James's choice of Bronzino, a High Renaissance mannerist painter, seems designed to reinforce the novel's idealistic portrayal of Milly. Characters defined by aesthetic sensibilities are also prevalent in James's fiction. Examples include Gilbert Osmond in *Portrait of a Lady*, Adam Verver and his daughter Maggie in *The Golden Bowl*, and Adela Gereth in *The Spoils of Poynton*, each of whom views herself, in central ways, as defined by a personal collection of art.

James's fiction often centers on the question: *how can we comprehend representations others present to us?* both individual to individual, and, using art as intermediary, as third-party vehicles for the portrayals of others. James, personally invested in the visual arts (he had a particular fondness for the works of Vermeer), is thus fond of exploiting metaphors related to representation both through ownership as well as creation of art, utilizing three-dimensional media such as sculpture, and two-dimensional works including portrait and landscape painting. Winner reflects that "the foundation of James's defense of the novel as an autonomous art form rests on the resemblances he notes between it and painting" (Winner 68).

It requires perspicacity to unthread the Escher-like complexities of representation in James's stories and novels. Insights provided by the 20th century American philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906–1998), heir to the tradition of American Pragmatism, can assist in examining the implications of James's use of art as representation. Goodman, a student of C. I. Lewis and colleague of Quine, challenged many assumptions about the nature of truth, of what we know, and how we know what we know. His most important work touches on fundamental questions involving our underlying

tools of induction and deduction. In the words of Harvard philosopher Catherine Z. Elgin, “Nelson Goodman’s philosophy combines judicious skepticism about received wisdom, uncompromising rigor, and seemingly unbridled creativity in reconfiguring philosophical problems, resources and objectives. The solutions he offers are not permanent resting places, but launch pads for further inquiry” (NG 226). Beardsley characterizes Goodman’s primary thesis in his *Language of Art* as “a pro-legomenon to all future discussions of the subject, for it has changed the terms of such discussions radically” (Beardsley 96).

James’s challenge to a simplistic notion of representation is found throughout his fiction and essays. That he views novelistic representation as conjoined with pictorial imagery is explicitly affirmed in his essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884), where he asserts that he finds it impossible to disentangle the imagined from the representational:

A psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial; to catch the tint of its complexion—I feel as if that idea might inspire one to Titianesque efforts. There are few things more exciting to me, in short, than a psychological reason (LC1 61).

The centrality of image to the imaginative life of the individual is evidenced in James’s Preface to *A Little Tour of France* (1900), where he comments that “there is no happy mean... I hold, between the sense and the quest of the picture, and the surrender to it, and the sense and the quest of the constitution, the inner springs of the subject—springs and connections social, economic, historic” (TW 3).

An 1887 essay on John Singer Sargent provides a window into James’s expansive notion of an artist’s responsibilities, in the context of what he sees as representation’s inherent richness. In discussing Singer Sargent’s artistic output, James offers a bold assertion, stating that,

[While] There is no greater work of art than a great portrait... the highest result is achieved when... a certain faculty of lingering reflection is added. I use this name for want of a better, and I mean the quality in the light of which the artist sees deep into his subject, undergoes it, absorbs it, discovers in it new things that were not on the surface, becomes patient with it, and almost reverent, and, in short, elevates and humanizes the technical problem (1887, 691).

In suggesting such an expansive notion of representation, James presages sentiments of later modernist thinkers. Gertrude Stein in 1934, for instance, echoes James when she observes that a painting “must have its own life,” and that “a painter’s literary idea always consists not in the action but in the distortion of the form” (242-3).

While issues involving the convergence of art and individual are found across James’s fiction, his late story *The Tone of Time* (1900) provides an especially interesting set of complexities to the questions of representation. Its focus on the production of a portrait—especially since the portrait represents an individual who is deceased but who nonetheless casts a long shadow—gives it special resonance. Michal Peled Ginsburg summarizes the potency of portraiture in James’s fiction as providing a sort of double framework, given that “the portrait—the most obviously referential form of representation—cannot be understood in a naively mimetic sense, since the ‘art’ of seeing and representing is as much an element of the picture as the ‘life’ it represents” (167).

In this late work, an unnamed painter (the story’s narrator) turns over a commission from a wealthy widow, Mrs. Bridgenorth, to a colleague he deems more capable than himself of taking on the task. The strictures of Mrs. Bridgenorth’s commission at first blush seem anodyne: she wishes to have a painting of an imaginary man, which should appear as though it were painted two decades earlier. Her only additional requirement is that the portrait reflect “a *tres-bel homme*.” (CS5 307).

The narrator, thus believing he is providing his colleague a free hand, justifies bringing this commission to fellow portrait artist Mary Tredick, because he believes that, while he “can do but the face I see,” she can “see so many more” (307). The narrator’s colleague Mary, “an old, old friend,” is introduced as an aging and melancholy individual who had “given up everything but her work...” (306). Upon presenting Mary with the commission, the perceptive narrator senses that the very

notion of fabricating, *tabula rasa*, a faux portrait stimulated something deep within her: "I had touched, without intention, more than one spring; I had set in motion more than one impulse" (310). We sense that Mary's response arises from a complicated mélange of emotions: "I shall," Mary specifies, "make him supremely beautiful—and supremely base" (310).

We are never told of Mrs. Bridgenorth's motivation for wanting a faux portrait from a bygone era, except for the narrator's insight that "She clearly counted that [the portrait] would help her" (312). But as the story develops, inferences accumulate. In a series of ironic twists, Mary resolves to use as her model a man who jilted her years earlier, and so tackles the work with a great amount of pent-up emotion. "If I was to do the most beautiful man in the world," Mary confesses to the narrator, "I could do but one" (312).

Over time, we discover that Mary's model for her painting turns out to have been the same man who also had an amorous fling with the widow who commissioned the work. Mary, unaware of this complication, creates a work of stunning power, having approached her work with great emotion. "She had produced an extraordinary thing," observes the narrator. "My only reserve, from the first, was that it was too fine for its part..." (313), further characterizing the work as "beautiful and the suggestion infinite" (314). But at the same time, the narrator presents us with a perplexing equivocation, stating that the figure in the painting, in some indefinite way too perfect, "managed to be at once a triumphant trick and a plausible evocation" (314). Mary, still reeling from unresolved, raw emotion because of revisiting her long-ago affair, confesses that her motivation for the work was in fact "all *hate!*" (314).

Mrs. Bridgenorth's reaction when she sees the painting is immediate and overpowering: "She couldn't control... poor woman, the strong colour in her face and the quick tears in her eyes. She could only glare at the canvas, gasping, grimacing, and try to gain time" (316).

Details emerge. We learn that Mary is convinced that the subject of the portrait would have married her but for the complications of his relations with another woman, who turns out (needless to say) to have been Mrs. Bridgenorth. This is all especially ironic, given that Mary never meets Mrs. Bridgenorth, and claims when she receives the commission to not be familiar with anyone of that name, and thus entirely innocent of any specific intention behind the commission.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Bridgenorth, immediately perceiving who the artist is after the work is unveiled, is now desperate to own the portrait, willing to pay any cost for it, even as she believes the narrator's insistence that Mary is ignorant of who commissioned the work. Mrs. Bridgenorth confesses to the narrator that, were the subject of the portrait to have lived, she was to have married him. Realizing that if Mary becomes aware of who she is, "she won't let me have the picture" (318), Mrs. Bridgenorth attempts to bargain with the narrator, telling him that if he keeps her confidences, she will pay the artist double for the work.

Mary, having now inferred who commissioned the painting, becomes dead set against allowing Mrs. Bridgenorth to own it. Contrary to Mrs. Bridgenorth's back-story, Mary's take, as expressed to the narrator, is that it was her lover's affair with Mrs. Bridgenorth that prevented him from committing himself to Mary. Mary insists that Mrs. Bridgenorth "tried to make him marry her, and he was very near it. Death, however, saved him. But she was the reason" (323). The story concludes with Mary informing the narrator that she will hang on to the portrait until she dies, at which point she wishes to see the painting given to the narrator. After both women die, the narrator inherits the painting.

James's *The Tone of Time*, embedded with these almost impossible sets of coincidences, probes a range of complex issues about representation. Ginsburg observes that Mrs. Bridgenorth's commission is meant but to "*appear* as a substitute... for a non-existent person," and thus is "an empty sign whose function is to 'produce' its supposed referent." Ginsburg equates the responses of both women as resonating to a kind of a "ghostly apparition" of a man who "seems to exist only as a portrait." Thus, Ginsburg concludes, "When the portrait is completed and its sitter recognized by Mrs. Bridgenorth, the portrait does not become 'the next best thing' to the man but rather the man himself" (170-1).

As is common in many of James's works, issues are framed in a series of unanswered questions: Why, to begin, was Mrs. Bridgenorth so invested in owning a fictitious portrait, the only requirement being that it represented a man from two decades earlier? Was she motivated by a need to sort through unresolved emotions? Or, at the other extreme, was her commission an attempt to publicly celebrate a settled narrative that, two decades removed, is either reified in her memory or a willful imposition of autobiographical fiction (e.g., a wish to be seen as a respectable widow)? That her motivation might have been the former is suggested by Mrs. Bridgenorth's viscerally anguished response upon seeing the final product. That it might instead have been the latter is bolstered by James's framing of the intended place for the finished work: "a boudoir . . . overlooking the general garden of the approved modern row and, as she said only just wanting that touch . . ." (311). Further support for the latter possibility is Mary's observation that she does not recognize her nemesis's name, thus suggesting *Bridgenorth* might be a fictitious *nom de mariage*.

In a larger context, is James suggesting that a non-specific artwork *could* have succeeded in fulfilling either of Mrs. Bridgenorth's requirements?

Shifting from the viewpoint of patron to artist, did Mary's deliberate attempt to leverage pent-up emotional fodder contribute to the potency and authenticity of her portrait? Why, in the first place, would Mary, offered a commission for, *tabula rasa*, a picture of an imaginary man, elect to paint the lover who jilted her so many years earlier? Was this an attempt for catharsis, or was it an opportunity to paint a more powerful piece of art than if she had simply attempted, *tabula rasa*, a fictitious artwork? Was the temporal requirement of the commission—that it hearken to a specific decade—the key to stimulating the need in the artist to revisit her personal experiences during that same timeframe? Should we assume that the creation of a portrait even *can* succeed in addressing unresolved emotional issues such as Mary's? Is it plausible to imagine that the reception of a single portrait could fulfill the emotional needs for *both* Mrs. Bridgenorth and Mary, given their different memories of their experiences with their (putative) shared lover? And if it can serve this purpose, how much likeness between the faux portrait and to their shared lover is required to fulfill this need?

More broadly: if the commission was intended to result in a non-specific work, but instead succeeded in capturing a tangible likeness, what, in the end, defines fiction versus *real* in a work of art? (Would, for instance, a photo of the deceased lover serve most effectively?) And, most fundamentally: if an unschooled observer were to encounter Mary's portrait (say, as it hangs in a museum), would her aesthetic experience be diminished in any meaningful sense by being deprived of the work's back story?

The above questions accumulate recursively through James's tightly packed tale, where we are first presented with the author's assignment of a narrator; then, afforded a window into the quizzical desires of a would-be art recipient (Mrs. Bridgenorth), as they are conveyed by the narrator to his colleague (Mary); after which we are provided insights into the motivations of the artist in tackling the work; then, we're provided information on the impact of the finished work on both artist and would-be recipient (a tumult of emotions and conflicting back stories); ultimately, in service to an unspecified aesthetic experience intended for *us*, James's readers. Lurking behind every one of the above perspectives is an overarching question: just what, in this concatenation of an intended artwork desired by a patron, created by an artist, and subsequently reacted to by both (all for the ultimate edification of us the readers), *is* being represented? Is Mary's painting a shared representation of a dead lover from long ago, or does it represent for each of them, as well as for the narrator and then for us as the reader, something unique and personal in each case? And, are James's readers, unlike the characters in James's story, oddly handicapped because, ironically, we are not privy to the painting itself?

Goodman's groundbreaking work on aesthetics can assist in understanding James's use of representation in *Tone of Time*, where conflation of subject, artistic intent, and interpretation create epistemic complexities. N. Falk, commenting on Goodman's insights, offers that "The relation be-

tween portrait and thing portrayed cannot...be studied independently of, or throw light on, the general question of how art is attached to the world; and a failure to realize this leads to a trivialization of the questions with which aesthetics ought to concern itself" (181).

Goodman's work involved formal logic and the philosophy of science, but he also was a significant voice in the philosophy of art. Importantly, Goodman believed that art and science share a common underpinning that requires, in each case, logic and utilization of symbols. In this respect, he seems the grandchild of one of the originators of American Pragmatism, C. S. Peirce, who was an early exponent of semiotics and believed that logic underpins all questioning of value. Goodman is also an example of the rarely encountered analytic philosopher who has deep knowledge of and experience with the world of art. During his protracted time working on his Ph.D at Harvard, probably primarily because of being Jewish and therefore not eligible for a graduate fellowship (CRSEC sec. 1), Goodman served for a period of 12 years as director of the *Walker-Goodman Art Gallery* in Boston. Later, as a professor at Harvard, Goodman founded a center he named *Project-Zero* to improve education in the arts. He was a passionate art collector, and a capacious thinker whose works on aesthetics, especially his 1968 *Languages of Art*, are considered seminal to the advancement of the philosophy of art.

Some of Goodman's most important thinking centers around a synthesis of logical empiricism and American Pragmatism (CRSEC sec. 2). In bringing these two philosophical movements together, Goodman manages to disavow some of the basic tenets of both, denying the notion of a *given* in response to his teacher C. I. Lewis (and thus in accord with Sellars), and denying the division of analytic and synthetic in response to logical empiricism (in accord with his colleague Quine). Goodman's most important work, *the Structure of Appearance*, which was developed from his Ph.D thesis, begins with the anti-foundationalist notion that all judgments are capable of revision (CRSEC sec. 2). From that, he develops an intricately constructed thesis that is bereft of any "fundamental ontological objects...logical principles, and...representation systems" (CRSEC sec. 2.1). Goodman is, additionally, widely known because of his reconsideration of the nature of the process of induction, through his vivid riddle that has come to be known as the *grue paradox*. Responding to Hume's challenge of establishing a rational basis for causality (Hume having asserted that it is really *habit* that encourages us to *assume* that something we have observed will with any certitude recur), Goodman observed that we set rules for inductive reasoning by making implicit compromises to derive a maximum amount of information from our sets of inquiries. Goodman thus believes that scrutiny involves establishing *a priori* priorities to our investigations, through the choices we make in how we frame the questions we ask. "Truth," he asserts, "far from being a solemn and severe master, is a docile and obedient servant" (WOW 18). "Regularities," Goodman asserts, "are where you find them, and you can find them anywhere" (AGSEC sec. 2).¹

This notion of truth as beholden to constructed apriority is echoed in a statement of literary critic William Gass:

Any principle that permits the rational expectation of some situation upon the occurrence of another is a principle of inference, and such a principle is called a rule when the conclusion to be inferred awaits an inferring power—a power that must be, therefore, ordered to its task—and is called a law when the inferring power acts, as it were, from within its premises (21).

Goodman's most important insight in looking at art is that art is, counterintuitively, a *cognitive* undertaking, just as is science, and that both rely on *symbols* for understanding. But Goodman's definition of cognition is broad: "In contending that aesthetic experience is cognitive, I am emphatically not identifying it with the conceptual, the discursive, the linguistic. Under "cognitive" I include all aspect of knowing and understanding, from perceptual discrimination through pattern recognition and emotive insight to logical inference" (MOM 84).²

Artworks, he asserts, rely on our *interpretation of symbols* to convey understanding. And further, both symbols and concomitant interpretation are constrained to what Goodman assigns as specific

“worlds.” “Which symbols are successfully projected over time,” Giovannelli comments in an essay on Goodman’s aesthetics, “largely depends on what is customary, “entrenched,” within a certain cultural, artistic, or linguistic community” (*AGSEC* sec. 2). This circles back to Goodman’s observation about the relatively arbitrary nature of the underpinnings of induction. Goodman’s central point is that there is an onus on the recipient of a work of art to comprehend its symbolic properties while at the same time not becoming distracted by questions of “expression.” “Identifying the properties of a literary—or pictorial or musical—style matters more than further classifying them into ways of saying, exemplifying, and expressing” (*WOW* 33).

To comprehend a work of art, Goodman stresses, involves cognitive processing of its underlying symbols: “Style,” he stresses, “has to do exclusively with the symbolic function of a work as such” (*WOW* 35). Goodman subtitled his 1968 *Languages of Art* “*An approach to a theory of symbols*,” positing artistic explorations not as aesthetic inquiry per se, but rather as windows into “a general theory of symbols” (*LA* xi). Goodman reflects in the introduction to the book that he would have preferred to title the book *Symbol Systems of Art* (*LA* xi–xii).

This differentiation between cognitive understanding and expressive intent is crucial to comprehending what, for Goodman, Mary’s role as portrait artist in *Tone of Time* would entail. Goodman believes that the meaning of a work of art “does not rest upon an artist’s intentions.” Rather, he stresses, “what counts are properties symbolized, whether or not the artist chose or is even aware of them...” (*WOW* 36).

In discussing denotation, Goodman comments that

The plain fact is that a picture, to represent an object, must be a symbol for it, stand for it, refer to it; and that no degree of resemblance is sufficient to establish the requisite relationship of reference. Nor is resemblance *necessary* for reference; almost anything may stand for almost anything else. A picture that represents—like a passage that describes—an object refers to and, more particularly, *denotes* it. Denotation is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance (*LA* 5).

Goodman’s thesis that representation, independent of resemblance, is a type of denotation, has been found to be both innovative as well as controversial.³ James Elkins characterizes *Languages of Arts* “a centrally important text for the ongoing discourse on the relations of the verbal and the visual” (349). In its clarification of emotional response as orthogonal to aesthetic comprehension, Goodman’s thesis seems apposite to the scenario James presents, where we have two interested parties who resonate to a work of art, even as they come at this work from (apparently) opposite corners of experience.

Mrs. Bridgenorth is expecting a generalized work of art that she can hang in her boudoir to provide evidence (we assume) that she is a widow of a respectable man who was in his prime several decades ago. Mary, however, paints not an anonymous individual as requested, but rather one who deeply effected both women. Mary creates the work from “hate,” but we don’t get any sense that Mrs. Bridgenorth, upon the shock of recognizing the subject of Mary’s work, resonates to the “hateful” aspect of the work. She simply recognizes the individual and, it seems, reacts with personalized emotions that well up within her.

Goodman stresses that the assumption, normally implicit, that art is, primarily, defined by its emotional content is both fallacious as well as distracting:

My insistence on the cognitive aspect of art makes...others fear that I am bent on anaesthetizing the aesthetic. What I want to emphasize is that pleasure or even ecstasy alone, without insight or inquiry, without recognition of significant distinctions and relationships, without effect on the way we see and understand a world including the object itself, can hardly be considered aesthetic (*MOM* 7).

Rather, as expressed by Cohnitz and Rossberg, Goodman believes we “judge how realistic a picture is by how readily we can retrieve information from it about the object it represents” (*NG* 172). To Goodman, the notion that “an artwork expresses the emotion it causes, or is caused by” is but an artifact of a popular Romantic-era assumption (*NG* 175). Further, adhering to a simplistic

goal of “accurate” imitation, to Goodman, is degrading. Reacting to the assumption that “To make a faithful picture, come as close as possible to copying the object just as it is,” Goodman comments that “This simple-minded injunction baffles me; for the object before me is a man, a swarm of atoms, a complex of cells, a fiddler, a friend, a fool, and much more” (LA 6).⁴

Goodman's aspersion of the “simple-minded injunction” of “*faithful imitation*” is as much about the a priori constraints of artist as it is about the complexity of subject: “The catch,” he asserts, “is that there is no innocent eye. The eye comes always ancient to its work, obsessed by its own past and by old and new insinuations of the ear, nose, tongue, fingers, heart, and brain... It does not so much mirror as take and make...” (LA 7–8). This suggests that Mary would have faced constraints no matter where she found inspiration for her portrait, whether in a recreation of her former lover, or instead in a fictitious subject as Mrs. Bridgenorth requested.

A central theme of Goodman's scrutiny of art from the point of view of analytic philosophy is that aesthetics is a branch of epistemology. Indeed, Goodman believes that both art and science are united in this goal. Fueling the task of understanding art, Goodman stresses, is an informed *understanding*,⁵ which he believes amounts to being adept in processing symbols utilized in the work. This requires coming to a clear understanding of words, in literature; notation, in music; color, texture, perspective, and line in art; and movement, in dance. And attaining such understanding, Goodman explains, further requires that the symbols of the medium in question can serve as *references* for modes of inquiry, including denotation and exemplification.

Denotation is defined as the relationship between something and its label. Goodman argues surprisingly that a picture is problematic when it attempts to directly *resemble* something or someone. His proof of this is that resemblance, in contradistinction to representation, is reflexive and symmetric: to *resemble* means that *B is as much like A as A is like B*. A painting, Goodman says, may represent the Duke of Wellington, but the Duke of Wellington does not “represent” the painting (LA 4).⁶ But at the same time, the painting of the Duke of Wellington does *denote* the Duke, serving as a clear *label* for him, whether the particular snapshot (in Goodman's example, of the Duke) captured by the artist is inherently limited to a constrained or unspecified time frame, or even is a representation of a fictional character. Thus, the *painting* of the Duke stands as a *symbol* of its subject.

The specific symbols of denotation, Goodman stresses, comprise the defining aspects of any work of art. As a result, responsibility rests on the recipient to understand the symbols that inhere in the work to participate intelligently in an aesthetic experience. “Denotation,” Goodman stresses, “is the core of representation and is independent of resemblance” (LA 5). Chasid summarizes Goodman's thesis as: *The pictorial relation is identical to reference* (227).

The import of Goodman's insight that denotation is central to an art experience addresses what Goodman would argue is a commonly misplaced notion of causality: the implicit assumption that an art experience, if galvanized by an emotional reaction to a work of art, is thus *defined* by the emotions as initially experienced. Goodman's argument suggests that causality is more complex than that: we might have a visceral reaction to stimuli,⁷ but for the experience to rise to the level of *art* requires cognitive processing of its component parts.

Thus, Goodman's determination that

Symbolization... is to be judged fundamentally by how well it serves the cognitive purpose: by the delicacy of its discriminations and the aptness of its allusions; by the way it works in grasping, exploring, and informing the world; by how it analyzes, sorts, orders, and organizes; by how it participates in the making, manipulation, retention, and transformation of knowledge (LA 258).

The notion that emotional response is not key to aesthetic understanding is, of course, unsettling as well as counterintuitive. Sparshott, in parsing Goodman's reliance on symbolism as central to artistic comprehension, addresses this in commenting that:

A work of art expresses an intuition. But what aspect of it? Not the fact of its intuitiveness, but the quiddity of what is intuited. What is expressed is indeed a quality, as Goodmanian analysis requires. But

this quality is not, as in the romantic version, literally a quality of the expression. On the contrary, it is precisely that quality which the impression as such lacks: that of having a peculiar sort of comprehended and enjoyed order (195-6).

Elgin adds that Goodman's conception of art as a cognitive undertaking, far from constraining an encounter with art, can serve to expand one's aesthetic experience: "By attending constantly to the symbols themselves we gain new ways of seeing, hearing, and understanding not just the symbols... Successful encounters with the arts yield new world-versions, new structures of appearance and of reality" (2001, 687).

If we assume that there is a shared understanding of Mary's portrait *as a work of art* by the two women in James's tale not because of common emotional resonance, but rather because they can each come to a personal but nonetheless "informed" understanding of what the portrait denotes, we can (Goodman would say) come to a rational understanding of the work itself. This does not abrogate immediate, strong emotions involved in the case of the two women. They presumably would have equally strong reactions to any potent representation of their lover two decades removed, whether or not the stimulus they experienced rose to the level of *art*. Rather, it gives license for anyone who has the proper "tools" of analysis to contextualize and elevate Mary's portrait *as art*, including both women invested in memories of the man in the portrait, but also including an innocent observer of the work unaware of its back story. Goodman's Pragmatic predecessor Peirce argues similarly when he discusses the importance of what he terms "prescission," wherein one can separate attributes of an object to better understand its meaning (involving, in Peirce's case, the parsing of the object's firstness, secondness, and thirdness).

From this perspective, Mary's portrait denotes her (and Mrs. Bridgenorth's) shared lover, but it cannot rise to the level of resemblance. This is because their shared lover, despite any level of realism expressed by the portrait, is incapable of representing the portrait itself. This is significant in addressing our earlier question, because if the work is a denotation and not a resemblance, it potentially fulfills a more constrained role. Presumably, the simple *mentioning* of the name of the putative shared lover would stimulate a high level of emotional resonance, but one would not argue that such an experience constitutes *art*. Ginsburg points out that, because the painting in *Tone of Time* is at the same time a picture of a dead man and an attempt to convey "the false impression of having been painted in the past, the fiction of the painting and the fiction of the man's being alive become the same" (173).

Symbols can both denote as well as exemplify. In the English language, for instance, the symbol *system* is the letters a-z; the symbol *scheme* is the collection of letters into words, governed by roles of syntax and semantics; its *denotation* involves items within its field of reference. Goodman deems denotation the distinctively salient aspect of pictures. *Exemplification* refers to some aspect of the label (or predicate).

Returning to our example of the portrait of the Duke of Wellington, portraying him on his horse in a hunt would exemplify a specific aspect of his leisure predilections. *Exemplification* is thus a limited or confined aspect of a denoted object or thing. A tailor's swatch can *exemplify* a specific color, weave, and fabric, though it does not denote an entire piece of clothing. Exemplification and denotation, each in its own role, are important tools in Goodman's toolbox for coming to grips with the symbols involved in interpretation. In the realm of Mary's portrait, her work can exemplify specific aspects of a shared lover, and this can help explain the overlap in emotional response between the two.

As explained by Elgin:

To understand a portrait, a partita, or a pas de deux, Goodman believes, is not to consider it beautiful, appreciate it, ascertain what its author intended by it, or have a so-called "aesthetic experience" of it. Rather, to understand it is to interpret it correctly... **Understanding works of art is not a matter of passive absorption, but of active intellectual engagement with symbols...** (Elgin 1997, as quoted in NG 163-4).

What this implies is that a recipient must endeavor to *intelligently* understand a work of art by grappling with the symbols that fuel and define it. Representation, Goodman believes, is not imitation. It rather involves adept interpretation of a symbolic system that arises as a part of a notational system. And for symbols to comprise a notational scheme, according to Goodman they need to adhere to a set of syntactic and semantic criteria he identifies as essential to comprise a notation (NG 150).⁸ Goodman's conditions come from his determination of what he sees as the goals for notation, allowing him to, *post hoc*, define a symbol system as one that conforms to these goals.

It is important to reconcile Elgin's notion of "correct" interpretation with James's fixation with the imagination. As summarized by Weinstein, "Events seen in the mind and reflected upon, anticipated, imagined, or remembered, assume a greater burden of importance...throughout James's fiction, than the actual events themselves" (33). But this does not mean that Goodman's emphasis on "correct" understanding of symbols is misplaced. I have bolded the relevant portion of Elgin's statement: that "active engagement" and not "passive absorption" is key to achieving an understanding of representation. *Active engagement*, Goodman argues, requires understanding of symbols, but it does not invalidate Weinstein's observation about James's fixation on the imagination. Rather, it can be argued that emersion in and familiarity with symbols underpinning a work of art *facilitates* the imagination to pursue representational possibilities.

In James's *The Tone of Time*, it is not relevant whether the woman who commissioned the portrait knows or is aware of the affective state of the artist. What counts is that she can synthesize the art work's visual symbols to gain a holistic notion of the work itself. Such a process can facilitate a helpful denotation, or label for the work (in this case, identifying it as a portrait of the man she once knew) and an exemplification as well (conveying, for her, a generalized meaning that in the artist's work relates to personal love lost). This would suggest that Mrs. Bridgenorth might have come to the same visceral place with a fictitious "portrait," as long as Mary fulfilled her requirement: *portrait of "a tres-bel homme" as he would have looked twenty years ago*.

Goodman believes that metaphor in art essentially *creates* a sense of similarity rather than recapturing similarities that existed previously. In that respect, Mary's commissioned portrait in *The Tone of Time* can be seen as creating the *opportunity* for two women who have had no shared experiences for at least twenty years to identify commonalities through the artwork itself. "Reception and interpretation," Goodman comments, "are not separable operations; they are thoroughly interdependent" (LA 8).

In fact, Goodman is clear that denotation and exemplification can operate appropriately whether a work of art is a representation of anything real (a so called two-place predicate) or rather a portrayal of a fictitious and fanciful subject such as a unicorn (a one-place predicate) (see NG 143). "A picture," Goodman says, "must denote a man to represent him, but need not denote anything to be a man-representation" (LA 25). And Goodman goes on to assert that in many instances the line between the two is not clearly discernable, stating that "the information needed to determine what if anything is denoted by a picture is not always accessible" (LA 26). In this sense, even while Ginsburg notes that *Tone of Time* deals with "fiction and illusion," Goodman would allow that there can nonetheless be a legitimate sense of its meaning. "Representation is thus disengaged from perverted ideas of it as an idiosyncratic physical process like mirroring, and is recognized as a symbolic relationship that is relative and variable" (LA 43).

There is another issue imbedded in James's *the Tone of Time* that Goodman addresses as well, this one involving counterfactual conditionals. The portrait artist Mary, once it becomes clear for whom she has unwittingly created her painting, directs her ire at Mrs. Bridgenorth, because she reflects that, *were* Mrs. Bridgenorth to have *not* been in the picture, her lover thus *would have* committed himself to Mary. We have no way to verify any of this, of course.

According to Goodman, counterfactuals present important and complicated epistemic challenges. In his 1955 book *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, Goodman points out that all counterfactuals are logically true if considered as truth-functional compounds. *De re*, it is impossible to refute Mary's notion that

Mrs. Bridgenorth's relationship with the man in the portrait derailed Mary's chances for happiness. The challenge, Goodman points out, is to set up a "criterion of truth . . . in the face of the fact that a counterfactual by its nature can never be subjected to any direct empirical test by realizing its antecedent" (*FFF* 4). The reason or set of reasons Mary never was successful in affirming her relationship with the subject of her portrait is a matter of pure conjecture.

Goodman additionally points out the possibility for what he calls a *semifactual*. In this case, an example would be Mrs. Bridgenorth's possible counter to Mary that *if she and the man in the portrait had established a relationship, it would not have worked out*. From this, Goodman would observe, we can glean the generalization that semifactuals affirm, while counterfactuals deny.

In both cases, Goodman tells us, the challenge, assessing the worth of a statement with an antecedent that can't be proven to lead to a consequent, is to study what he calls the *relevant conditions* underlying the statement. In some cases, "cotenability", which relates to prior solutions that equate to the specific contrapositive assertion, can help, but in the realm of Mary's relationship to this unknown man there are clearly too many imponderables to allow for such a consideration. Probably the best we can do, Goodman suggests, is to try to remove the modality that is causing the confusion in the first place and see if we then have a justifiable statement. This would leave us with the assertion that *were* circumstances propitious for Mary (e.g., no such person as Mrs. Bridgenorth), her relations with her aspirational lover *would have* been successful. Since we can't make sense of that statement—maybe the problem instead was an inability of the aspirational lover to commit to *anyone*; or fantastically, maybe both women invented a fictitious man in their imaginations, each for her own reason—we can never assess the potential validity of Mary's counterfactual assertion. As Edmund Wilson points out, James's fiction is peppered with "unmistakable cases of women . . . who deceive themselves and others about the origins of their aims and emotions" (97).

Seen in this guise, it becomes clear that James's story is, at essence, about reawakening the unresolvable. Mrs. Bridgenorth's commission and Mary's response seem in both cases to be attempts to deal *post hoc* with lingering emotional issues that accept of no resolution. The metaphoric portrait ending up in the possession of the unnamed narrator suggests that pursuit of resolutions to unresolvable issues is, in the end, intrinsically hollow.

In James's late (1908) story *The Jolly Corner*, longtime expat Spencer Brydon returns to New York to raze his family's abandoned property. While there he encounters spectral voices and haunting imagery that suggest his life would have been markedly different had he not elected to leave home three decades earlier. Brydon is terrified by the jarring disconnect between his chosen life as expat and the life he would have led in New York. The alternative of a life not chosen, precisely because it seems credible, creates a disconnect so great as to be unfathomable: "The face *that* face, Spencer Brydon's?—he searched it still, but looking away from it in dismay and denial . . . the face was the face of a stranger" (*CS* 5725).

From this last example we can glean the importance of an overarching theme in Goodman's ontology, his insistence that "many different world-versions are of independent interest and importance, without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base" (*WW* 4), and "Identity or constancy in a world is identity with respect to what is within that world as organized" (*WW* 8). Because Goodman believes that we can endorse varied "worlds" with equal validity (an example he offers is that earth can be understood as either stationary or in motion—both are valid and in a sense independent), he as a result expresses the view that "Realistic representation . . . depends not upon imitation or illusion or information but upon inculcation" (*LA* 38). "Truth," Goodman offers, "cannot be defined or tested by agreement with 'the world'; for not only do truths differ for different worlds but the nature of agreement between a version and a world apart from it is notoriously nebulous." Rather, he says, "a version is taken to be true when it offends no unyielding beliefs and none of its own precepts" (*WW* 17).

"That we know what we see," Goodman explains in an essay from 1960, "is no truer than we see what we know. Perception depends heavily on conceptual schemata" (*AGSEC* sec. 4.1).⁹ And in a

riff on Kant's famous maxim that *experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play*, Goodman states that "although conception without perception is merely *empty*, perception without conception is *blind* (totally inoperative)" (*WW* 6). "Thinking in words or pictures or other symbols..." Goodman says, "is a process of preparation or state of preparedness for producing or judging or perceiving such symbols" (*MOM* 27).

Thus, Mrs. Bridgenorth and Mary are primed to experience Mary's artistic creation through a world view that they already, even if unknowingly, share. We, as innocent observers of Mary's art, may not be privy to their back stories, but if we understand the structure, components, and symbols involved in Jamesian prose we can utilize these cognitive abilities to grasp what Goodman refers to as the "referential function" of his artistic work. Whether or not, to Goodman, Mary's portrait is a true representation is irrelevant. "We risk confusion when we speak of pictures or predicates as 'true of' what they depict or apply to; they have no truth-value..." (*WW* 19). And this is because we can't succeed in "copying" reality when we are unable "to specify what is to be copied." In summary, Goodman stresses that "In representing an object, we do not copy such a construal or interpretation—we *achieve* it" (*LA* 9). "Realism," he asserts, "is relative" (*LA* 37).

In thinking about meaning in representation, it is easy, Goodman reminds us, to fall into a trap. We often assume that the apparent neutrality of a reflected image ameliorates issues of accurate representation. The cultural historian Melchior-Bonnet offers a vivid counter to that assumption in her retelling of an 18th century Korean legend (cast in various iterations across different cultures). Melchior-Bonnet's version involves a poor pottery merchant named Pak. Pak's wife has an obsessive dream, in which she feels that she absolutely must own a mirror. Pak finds her one. When she gazes into it, she's aghast to see that standing next to Pak in the reflection is an unfamiliar woman who looks like an utter tramp. Not realizing that this is she, she cries out in alarm. Pak grabs the mirror and is completely infuriated to see a man standing next to his wife who clearly looks like he must be her lover. A vicious marital fight ensues. In a last-ditch effort to bring some resolution to their individual grievances, they bring the mirror to the village prefect. The prefect looks into the mirror, and is devastated to see a strange civil servant, dressed in full uniform, who clearly is there to replace him... (4-5).

Mirrors, like Mary's portrait, are there to represent. But representing, as we have examined, is fraught with inherent complication. "The copy theory of representation," Goodman asserts, "is stopped at the start by inability to specify what is to be copied" (*LA* 9). As summarized by Falk: "To say that a painting is a representation of a particular face means we have the right to ask Which face? But this does not mean that we have the right to an answer" (187).

James seems very much in accord when he reflects that:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it (*LC2* 1041).

For Goodman, *denotation* is the central concern of art precisely because art is, intrinsically, a complicated cognitive undertaking requiring processing of symbols and delineation of "worlds." Goodman's insights on the cognitive requirements for experiencing art can thus assist in illuminating the complexities of *representation* as expressed in James's tightly woven tale of passions unleashed by two individuals who share in a portrait's collective secrets.

Notes

- ¹ Peirce expresses a similar sentiment in an 1886 letter to F.E. Abbott when he asserts that “all deductive reasoning, even simple syllogism, involves an element of observation...I grant you one cannot perceive relations without a perceptive understanding.” Peirce (1993) 281.
- ² David Sakris and Rosenberg Larsen (2011) make a similar point.
- ³ See Arrell (1987). Perspectives on Goodman’s thesis can be found in Leonard Beardsley (1978); Giovannelli sec. 4.1, Sparshott (1974), Walton (1974), Chasid (2004), Files, (1996), Lammenranta (1992), Carrier (1974), Mitchell, (1991). Davies (1991) discusses Goodman’s and Elgin’s differentiation of symbol systems as employed in the visual arts versus in texts. Abel (1991) offers an expansive accounting of Goodman’s symbol system as it relates to his ontology.
- ⁴ Goodman points to Picasso’s famous reaction to criticism that his portrait of Gertrude Stein did not resemble her by responding that “No matter; it will.” Goodman probably is referring to a passage in Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, loc. 136: “After a little while I murmured to Picasso that I liked his portrait of Gertrude Stein. Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said.”
- ⁵ It is important to keep in mind what Goodman means by *understanding*. Giovannelli offers that “*Understanding* is, for Goodman, a broader concept than knowledge, one that is not bound by literal truth, and that is thus applicable also to the literally false and to what admits of no truth value: metaphors and paintings, for example” *AG, SEC*: sec. 4.6.
- ⁶ Peirce conveys this similarly in his writings on semiotics, in defining “copy” in his tripartite separation of copies, indexes, and symbols, asserting that *copy* describes something without referring to it.
- ⁷ See, for example, Denis Dutton’s argument of intrinsic artistic predilections.
- ⁸ Note that all five conditions, while strict, are not found in every system of notation. Language, for instance, is characterized by the omission of some of them. See sec. 6 of Cohnitz and Rossberg for a delineation of the conditions.
- ⁹ Goodman, 1972 review of Ernst Gombrich’s *Art and Illusion*.

Works Cited

- Abel, Gunther. “Logic, Art, and Understanding in the Philosophy of Nelson Goodman,” *Inquiry*, 34, no. 3 (1991), 311–321.
- Arrell, Douglass. “What Goodman should have said about representation.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1987) 46.1: 41–49.
- Beardsley, Monroe. “Languages of Art and Criticism.” *Erkenntnis: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 12.1 (1978): 95–118.
- Carrier, David. “A reading of Goodman on representation,” *The Monist*, 58.2 (1974): 269–84.
- Chasid, Alon. “Why the pictorial relation is not reference.” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54.3 (2004): 226–47.
- CRSEC—Cohnitz, Daniel and Marcus Rossberg. “Nelson Goodman.” In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (summer 2022 edition), Edward N. Zalta, (ed.). <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/su2022/entries/NelsonGoodman>, 2022.
- . *NG—Nelson Goodman*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2000.
- Davies, David. “Works Texts, and Contexts: Goodman on the Literary Artwork.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 21.3 (1991): 331–45.
- Dutton, Denis. *The Art Instinct*. Bloomsbury Press, 2009.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. “True Enough.” *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 113–131.
- . *Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary*. Cornell University Press, 1997.
- . “The Legacy of Nelson Goodman.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62.3 (2001): 687.
- Elkins, James. “What Really Happens in Pictures? Misreading with Nelson Goodman,” *Word and Image*. 9.4 (1993): 349–62.
- Falk, B., “Portraits and Persons.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 75 (1974–5): 181–2005.
- Files, Craig. “Goodman’s rejection of resemblance,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 36.4 (1996): 398–412.
- Gass, William H. *Fiction and the Figures of Life*. Jaffrey, New Hampshire: Nonpareil, 1979.

- Gibson, John. "Representation and the Novel." *Henry James Review* 34.3 (2013): 220-231.
- Ginsburg, Michal Peled. "The Portrait's Two Faces: James's 'The Special Type' and 'The Tone of Time.'" *Henry James Review*. 33.2 (2012): 165-176.
- AGSEC—Giovannelli, Alessandro. "Goodman's Aesthetics." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall, 2017 edition) Edward N. Zalta, (ed.). <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/su2022/entries/Goodman's-Aesthetics>, 2017.
- Goodman, Nelson. *MOM—Of Mind and Other Matters*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- . *WW—Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978.
- . *SS—Seven Strictures on Similarity*, In *Experience and Theory*, L. Foster and J.W. Swanson (eds), 19-29. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1970.
- . *LA—Languages of Art*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.
- . *FFF—Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*. Bobbs-Merrill, 1955.
- James, Henry. *CS5—Complete Stories, v. 5: 1898-1910*. The Library of America, 306-325, 1996.
- . *TW—The Collected Travel Writings: The Continent*. The Library of America, 1993.
- . *LC1—Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers*. The Library of America, 1984.
- . "John Singer Sargent," *Harpers New Monthly Magazine* 75 no. 449, 683-91, 1887.
- Lammenranta, Markus. "Goodman's Semiotic Theory of Art." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 22.3 (1992): 339-351, 1992.
- Melchior-Bonnet, Sabine, Katharine H. Jewett (trans). *The Mirror: A History*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Mitchell, W.J.T. "Realsim, Irrealism, and Ideology: A Critique of Nelson Goodman," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 25.1 (1991): 23-35.
- Peirce, Charles S. *Writings of Charles S. Peirce, volume 5, 1884-1896: A Chronological Edition*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Sakris, David C. and Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen. "Are there 'aesthetic' judgments?" *Erkenntnis* 89.8 (2024), 2985-3003.
- Sparshott, F.E. "Goodman on Expression," *The Monist* 58 no. 2 (1974): 187-202.
- Stein, Gertrude. "Pictures," *Lectures in America, Gertrude Stein, Writings, 1932-1936*, New York: Library of America, 224-43, 1998.
- . *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (NY: Modern Library, Kindle Edition).
- Vacca, John. "The Art of Memory in James's *The Tone of Time*." *Studies in Short Fiction* 35.3 (1998): 259-65.
- Walton, Kendall L. "Are Representations Symbols?" *The Monist* 59.2 (1974): 236-54.
- Philip M. Weinstein, *Henry James and the Requirements of the Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971.
- Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James," in *The Triple Thinkers, Edmund Wilson, Literary Essays and Reviews of the 1930s and 40s*, New York: Library of America, 2007: 90-164.
- Winner, Viola Hopkins. *Henry James and the Visual Arts*. Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1970.