Lady is ‘a study . . . of the life of the mind of the later Isabel’ whereas the original was ‘frequently an uneven portrait of a girl’s caprice’; moreover, this girl ‘does what she does for reasons perhaps best ascribed to the folly of her youth and the esthetics of her incompleteness’ (p. 619). Throughout his essay, Mazzella suggests that James’s identity is related inextricably to the mature character of Isabel Archer, that her altered state reflects the novelist’s sense of his own fully developed consciousness as well as his squeamishness about sex.

3 Technical and structural criticism

In a general sense, it would be perfectly logical to discuss literary uses of technique and structure separately. Students of technique look at the minutiae of method, such as an author’s use of point of view, while students of structure look at relations of a given work’s large parts, as one might ponder the acts of a play. But I have combined technical and structural criticism into a single category here because James’s own practice seems to require it, as numerous critics have discovered. In James, how a character sees determines what she sees in its totality.

Thus, there are a number of lengthy and complex essays dealing with both James’s use of sophisticated narrative technique in The Portrait of a Lady and the resultant elaborate structure of the novel. Throughout his career, and increasingly so from the middle period onward, James prided himself as an architect of the novel; in the critical Prefaces to the New York Edition, he refers to himself implicitly and, on occasion, explicitly as an architect or engineer, a master builder who is not only constructing impressive edifices but also bequeathing to posterity a set of plans that others may adopt for their own purposes. In addition, The Portrait of a Lady is a transitional novel in James’s career and in the development of the novel as a whole. Therefore, its specific historical importance combined with James’s general desire to be a literary theorist as well as practitioner make the novel an object of crucial interest to students of James’s writing. Technical-structural studies of The Portrait of a Lady make it clear that to understand technique is to understand the real meaning of James’s novels. And to some extent, to understand technique is to understand James himself, given the emphasis, in the Prefaces, that he places on the operation of his own critical sensibilities.
David Daiches calls *The Portrait of a Lady* ‘the first of James’s full-length novels to illustrate clearly and successfully what he was trying to achieve in his fiction’ (p. 573). He makes his point by contrasting *The Portrait of a Lady* to *Roderick Hudson*. The latter is an old-fashioned ‘novel of public significance’ in which physical and moral events are equated, often unconvincingly; thus Roderick has to get drunk at Baden-Baden to signify his moral failure as man and artist, and he tests the reader’s credulousness by becoming engaged to Mary Garland so that he can further endanger his soul when he proves unfaithful to her (p. 574).

*The Portrait of a Lady*, on the other hand, is a ground-breaking ‘novel of personal sensibility’ in which important occurrences, notably Isabel’s decision to return to Osmond, are presented as decisions rather than mere events (p. 573). What makes the difference between the ‘life’ portrayed in *Roderick Hudson* and the ‘felt life’ of *The Portrait of a Lady* and most of the fiction that followed it? Technique, says Daiches: ‘style, structure, organization’ is the ‘filter that distinguishes “life” from “felt life”’ (p. 577). Writing in 1943, Daiches felt that ‘full justice has not yet been done to James as a writer whose technical skill enabled him to make convincing and inevitable a personal moral interpretation of human behavior – in other words, as a novelist of sensibility’ (p. 579). This observation was made just before the great post-war surge in literary studies, and while the nature of interpretation precludes there ever being a so-called last word on any author, the concluding portion of this section will make clear how sophisticated literary analysis has become since Daiches’ day.

In ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884), James chides Anthony Trollope for admitting in his fictional digressions that, as a novelist, he was only pretending, only practising the art of make-believe, and thereby suggesting that the novelist is less interested in truth than the historian. Linda A. Westervelt notes that James refers to *The Portrait of a Lady* (completed three years before he wrote ‘The Art of Fiction’) as a ‘history’ and uses that term in the text seven times; to her, James’s desire to be a historian not only resulted in a technical shift within the novel but also a development in literary history, since *The Portrait of a Lady* ‘opens with the conventions of a Victorian novel but ends as a modern one’ (p. 74). Specifically, James stops using the intrusive, omniscient Victorian narrator halfway through and instead adopts the manner of a historian and begins to treat Isabel as a real person. The upshot of this technical experiment is nothing less than the