

## Part II

# Constituting the Real Place in Fiction



After having acquired a sense of the issues involved in the relationship between tourism and literature, and our investigation of the structure of the (not so) non-fictional genre of the travel essay, we will turn to fiction in order to further examine the supplementary role of place and fiction. In an analysis of the romantic love story we find the place as carrier of values which, for the reader, act as signal of the genre and, within the narrative economy, are metonymically linked to the elements of the repertoire that affirm the hero and his love object. In James's late masterpiece, *The Ambassadors*, the place as repository of value is part of the dramatic economy as well as a reflection of this part.

The tendency of the travel essay narrator to recollect the place as a fictional persona is brought to full realization in the hero of the romantic love stories. In fact, in the early fiction of James, we often find a hero who travels as if he were a writer of travel essays. However, his sensitivity and knowledge do not just aim at the cultured reader's consent and appreciation, but rather provide the individualizing traits that presuppose the reader's appreciation and supply the positive norms of the repertoire that in the course of the story are finally affirmed. The hero, then, functions as the embodiment of values that to a large extent are defined through his relation to the place. In the love stories this is a semantic attachment, the values of art and culture are a sort of master metaphor constituting the criteria for identifying the hero and his love object, who become equivalent by sharing the same concerns about the place. The place works as a key, so to speak, to the values established as positive and narratively put at risk until the final affirmation.

In a semantic perspective, the context of the love story assigns a specific function to the place. In the semantics of love, the loved one is as hard to find as she is special; the equivalence in values that we identified at the most abstract level of fictional construction here finds an embodiment in the characters of the narrative as individuals. It is their individuality that is marked as such by their special sensitivity to the spirit of the place, and that enables the protagonist and his Significant Other to constitute their own world against the prosaicism of their contemporaries. The semantics of love already includes a certain narrative dynamics that is strategically used in the fiction. The two narratives analyzed will exhibit different ways of using that dynamics, and although in both cases the place mediates between two individuals on a level which otherwise would not be communicable, the mediation is differently implemented.

In *The Ambassadors*, the dramatic function of the place as well as its symbolic value are integrated into a complex metonymical bracing; the hero is not so much a character to which values are attached but rather an agent exercising the processes of value creation, thus reflecting the processes of reading in the reader for the reader. Although the place becomes an explicit object for reflection, in its constitution it still serves as a specific background in the narrative even while being thematized as such. The function of the place is thus located on a more abstract, and yet more concrete level of reflecting the reading processes in its capacity for constituting individuality.

We will turn to this (de-) construction of place, the foregrounding of the background, in due time. But before that, the scene will be set as the background of love stories.

