UNFAITHFUL ACCOMPLICES:

FORM, THEME, AND CHARACTER

IN FOUR NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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ABSTRACT

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Henry James's novels and his critical writings show a growing awareness of tensions between representation and interpretation in the novel form. In early works like The American and The Portrait of a Lady, the aesthetic evaluations urged by the authorial narrator clash with the psychic realities of the protagonists; James must resort to narrative evasions to salvage the tenuous coherence of these works. These evasions are mainly two: first, he introduces into the novel characters who are narrative "surrogates," who precipitate and comment on the action and voice the failed aesthetic norms of the work; and second, James allows a selective deference in the attitude of the normally authoritative narrator, who strategically refrains from commentary which would reveal too directly the inner antagonisms of form and content latently present in these novels.

In his later works, however, James translates these problems into themes, through the elevation of these evasive tactics into principles of narration and aesthetic theory. The "surrogate narrator," no longer peripheral, becomes the focus of the inquiry, and the authorial narrator surrenders his powers of commentary to allow the

emotions, judgments, and opinions of the surrogate, the "concrete deputy," to have full and center stage. The result in later novels like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove is a remarkable dramatization, through the consciousness of these surrogates, of the ethics of the artistic process and of human perception itself which recognizes the real brutalities and the visionary beauties which are essential aspects of consciousness. The purpose of this study is to trace the progress of James's awareness of these phenomena, both in his critical writings and in the novels themselves, and to detail the ways in which this growing awareness determines form, theme, and treatment of character in the novels of his major phase.

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CHAPTER I

REALISM, ROMANCE AND HENRY JAMES

In his preface to The Golden Bowl, Henry James distinguishes between the "impersonal author" and his palpable representative in the language of the work. This representative (or "ambassador") is himself a character and a participant in the action of the story, and is empowered to receive impressions of events and supply interpretive commentary with a freedom usually reserved for the author himself; he thus becomes the author's "concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied."[1] James says he does not want to present "my own personal account of the affair at hand," but rather "my account of somebody else's impression of it" (AN, p. 327). Thus in the works of his so-called "major phase,"[2] the language is not a window through which the clear light of authorial intention passes; rather, the language records the reflections and diffractions of meaning created by the characters themselves as they go about their business of encountering and interpreting experience.

As James elaborates: "It's not that the muffled majesty of authorship doesn't here ostensibly reign; but I catch myself again shaking it off and disavowing the pretence of it" (AN, p. 328). Why should James regard the privilege of authorial commentary as a

"pretence"? And why should he, an artist as passionate as any about the efficacy of his enterprise, be willing to yield his own hard-earned speaking platform to the voice of his own creations? James's ingenuous excuse of the "intensification of interest" (AN, p. 327) seems too lightly pleaded, given the risks thus incurred. To a critic no less than Wayne Booth, James's preference for seeing his story "through the opportunity and the sensibility of some . . . thoroughly interested and intelligent witness or reporter" (AN, p. 327) has pernicious and mystifying consequences; Booth says that this technique creates "a double focus" that blurs the clarity of James's intention and renders suspect the account provided by his "flawed reflector."[3] Similarly, Charles Thomas Samuels charges that "the entire Jamesian canon" is "darkened by obscurities," the result of James's own refusal to provide definitive authorial commentary on the behavior of certain of his characters;[4] Richard Hocks sees in James the difficulty of a "mind which . . . refuses to perceive values as fixed but is, rather, constantly imbued with 'possible other cases'";[5] and Sallie Sears says that James entertains "antithetical modes of structuring and comprehending reality without granting authority to any one mode."[6] Words like "paradox" and "ambiguity" dominate the criticism, and echo Booth's judgment that James seems in the end unwilling, or unable, to come to the point, and that the use of authorial "delegates" serves the novelist's habit of evasion.

One is compelled to ask, in surveying this critical response, what advantage, what knowledge, James seeks to gain for himself and for his readers by his retreat from authorial commentary; surely it

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cannot be his intention to be misunderstood, nor can it be his wish to put into words everything except that which he means to express. It seems in this light reasonable to assume that the essential "meaning" of these late works lies on a level other than that of the authorial judgment and opinion which this technique so deeply obscures. It is possible (and I shall argue that it is indeed the case) that the "muffled majesty of authorship" expresses, by its silence and deference, an invitation to examine the creative and interpretive functions which the characters themselves appropriate from the artist. The "delegation" of authorial presence, the "veiling" of it in one or more variously but inevitably fallible characters, may create ambiguity or paradox on the level of specified meaning, but it also directs attention to the individual and psychological origins of meaning itself, and to the problematical processes by which such meaning is articulated for others.

Thus James in his late works sacrifices the notion of "objective" and authoritative commentary (a positivistic value which Booth, in his insistence on "reliable narration," implicitly embraces) to gain insight into the processes by which individual and subjective meanings are created, expressed, and maintained. His own "reliability," though extending to his faithful accounts of the inner lives of his various "delegates," does not include the issue of extrapersonal significances which may be inferred from their impressions or expressed in their thoughts. The reader can trust James's representation of his characters' perceptions, but cannot be assured of the validity or correctness of the perceptions themselves, or of the interpretations

that derive from them. In this light, James's final "canonical" novels--The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, The Golden Bowl--seem an extended meditation on the inescapability of the subjective conditions of human awareness; and this sense of inescapable subjectivity is reinforced by James's own refusal to inject his own commentary as a corrective to, or as a judgment of, the impressions recorded by his fallible deputies.

James's later novels also resolve an apparent contradiction found in his 1884 essay, "The Art of Fiction." In that essay, James argues on one hand that the novel form has its basis in the subjective condition of the individual, but on the other hand maintains the primacy of the novel's reference to an external reality which the individual consciousness interprets. He says that "A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, direct impression of life," while expressing a faith in "the importance of exactness--the truth of detail."[7] The problem here is that an experience is not identical with its object, and James leaves some confusion as to which of these terms is to have the benefit of the novelist's precise rendering; to extend James's pictorial analogy, it is unclear whether the novel is to be a faithful rendering of the subject, or a faithful rendering of a portrait of the subject as conceived by an observer other than the novelist himself. In fact many of James's earlier novels display tensions which (as we shall see) are the result of rhetorical confusions as to whether the internal impression or the external event is being interpreted; thus some of his works are susceptible to Booth's criticism that they are afflicted with a "double focus."

But in his later fiction James minimizes this problem, as the exacting complexity of his syntax is made to represent inner processes of cognition rather than their external objects.

So the preface to The Golden Bowl, published in 1909, and 1884's "The Art of Fiction" show different phases in James's idea of the novel, and of his conception of his own role as a practitioner of the novelist's art. But what these two essays have in common is James's explicit acknowledgment of the centrality of character, of his designated "receivers of impressions," to all of his work. Throughout his canon, from his portrayal of Rowland Mallet in Roderick Hudson to that of Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl, James shows his ability and his desire to present the inner, private experience of his imagined people in the public form of language--whatever the risk to his larger design. Though it is not until the 1890's, with The Spoils of Poynton and What Maisie Knew, that James decisively embraces the internal frame of reference of his "centers of consciousness," one finds in earlier works like The American, The Europeans, The Portrait of a Lady, and even The Princess Casamassima characters whose fullness of humanity and liveliness of perception overwhelm the intentions of the authorial narrators charged with interpreting their stories. The genial arrogance of Christopher Newman, the latent desperation of Eugenia Munster and priggish pride of Robert Acton, the bloodless ambition of Isabel Archer, and the pathetic sensibility of Hyacinth Robinson--all threaten to rend the fabric of fiction in which the experience of these characters is tapped and woven into a narrative design.

The fullness with which James portrays his characters is essential to the later novels, in which the "delegates" themselves become the dominant consciousnesses in the discourse; it is in fact the completeness and complexity of the imagined humanity of characters like Lambert Strether, Merton Densher, and Maggie Verver that endows these novels with their essential conflicts, their richness and density of meaning. In these late novels, true to Roland Barthes' prescription, "the discourse creates in the character its own accomplice."[8] The dramatic action of The Ambassadors or The Wings of the Dove would be negligible without the peculiar depths that the events of those novels sound in the consciousnesses of the author's "deputies"; in fact, critics have been known to express dismay with what they perceive as intrusive lapses in James's apparent policy of strict non-involvement.[9] In the works of the major phase, the direction of James's intention is clear: there is an approaching fusion of character and design, effected by the author's gradual withdrawal from the scene of the action, and his dispersal of his own interpreting consciousness into that of his characters.

But in earlier novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady, authorial emotion and judgment are very much in evidence; and, Booth's injunctions notwithstanding, the result is that these novels, for all their greatness, lack a coherence of rhetoric and representation. The narrator's consciousness is itself split between two functions: the penetrating analysis of the inner lives of the protagonist and selected others, and the rhetoric of ethical and aesthetic evaluation, including the use of symbolism and allusion

to literary and artistic predecessors. Though the characters are seen from the inside, judgments are rendered from without, and the result is a strained connection between what is dramatized and what is evaluated. As we have seen in "The Art of Fiction," this is a dichotomy to which James himself is at first blind; but his acute creative sensitivity and his self-consciousness about his craft eventually reveal to him the mingled impulses reflected in his 1884 essay, and in his early novels.

It is my intention in this study to demonstrate that the radical changes in style and structure that occur as James moves into his major phase can be interpreted as a response to his growing awareness of the nature and soucre of the tensions described above. I shall also argue that it is the problem of treating character--of making his presentation at once faithful to the psychology of the individual and to the requirements of art--that both creates and reveals these difficulties. If one pursues this line of exploration, the novels of the major phase can be seen to express implicit understandings about the genre itself which are not articulated by others until well after James's death. Although "The Art of Fiction" and the preface to The Golden Bowl are useful clues to James's method and his understanding at different stages in his enterprise, it is my feeling that in the end James's greatest and most penetrating criticism is represented in the novels themselves; it is through them that the author pursues his long journey towards understanding that he, like each of his protagonists, has had to make.

But first it will be useful to describe some of the critical insights which James's work so remarkably anticipates. Ian Watt, in The Rise of the Novel, notes that the realistic tradition in which James participates emphasizes the particulars of individual experience rather than the actions of exemplary or representative types; the novel, says Watt, achieves its effects "by exhaustive presentation rather than by elegant concentration."[10] Watt's idea, which is generally agreed to, is that the novel, as the first great egalitarian literary form, emphasizes the imitation of experience rather than the codification or evaluation of it; it overturns the old expectation that art should provide "a picture of Man rather than . . . portraits of men," or "truth about experience rather than . . . truth to it."[11] This, of course, is the value embraced by James in his endorsement of the "solidity of specification" in "The Art of Fiction."[12] But both James and Watt state and then efface their awareness of the subjective conditions under which such truths are apprehended. Though in novels "the reality imitated is . . . the concrete and temporal reality of modern empirical thought,"[13] that reality is necessarily mediated through the individual human consciousness; Watt acknowledges that truth is "discovered by the individual through his senses,"[14] while James states that the Novel's "personal . . . direct impression of life" "constitutes its value."[15] Thus one finds in Watt's argument the same buried confusion over the primacy of subject and object that characterizes James's early essay and his early novels; but Watt, more clearly than James in "The Art of Fiction," sees the inimical

qualities of mimetic representation and traditional literary rhetoric and plot forms.

Consequently, James's argument in "The Art of Fiction" for the "intensity" of the represented impression shows his determination not to forgo the "elegant concentration" by which art distinguishes itself from reality. James's idea of the novel is that it is true to experience in its particulars, but that it is less prosaic than experience in its total effect. For him, the "province of art" may be "all life" and "all observation"--but it is "all feeling" and "all vision" as well;[16] and his failure to distinguish among these mixed values betrays his belief that they are intrinsically connected. This is a belief which Watt disputes, and which James himself later deconstructs; but from the beginning it is James's desire to make art answerable to the truths of experience (particularly psychological) "without losing all those literary effects which rhetoric alone can achieve."[17]

Furthermore, it is clear that what James has in mind in "The Art of Fiction" and in early novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady is an analogy with portraiture, with the frozen coherence of the preserved moment, and not the immersion in the "real time" of experience which Watt sees as the mainspring of realistic presentation. The painting metaphors which dominate James's novels of early prime suggest that these "caught images" are somehow faithful to the realities they represent, as actions in time simply become the progressive brush-strokes by which the total picture, the apprehended truth, is brought into full view; but the truth thus represented is,

as Isabel Archer complains, the painter's truth, and not that of his subject. In other words, James, like lyric poets, works to bend real time into his own frame, and to realize in the linear form of language an insight, an inspiration, that is in its essence a transformation rather than an imitation of reality.

Thus if one accepts Watt's idea that the essential impulse of the novel is mimetic, it is clear that from the outset James works to subvert the genre's basic order of reality. But this is inevitable, not just for James, but for any novelist as concerned as he is for the aesthetic and ethical propriety of his art. Watt himself fails to explain how the "realism of presentation" he describes might be supplemented by an accompanying "assessment"[18] which would satisfy the reader's dual demands for credence and for aesthetic pleasure, and which would keep the writer himself from becoming a slavish imitator of the world around him. The novel as described by Watt does not represent a literary form, but rather a technique, a value, in which form does not by definition inhere.

"Form" implies organization, interpretation, the balancing and patterning of experience; it goes beyond, or stops short of, the local application of close mimesis. In this light, it can be seen that the novel "has no form of its own";[19] James's use of portraiture to enrich and control his characterizations is one sign of his intuitive awareness of this fact. But novels, unlike paintings, do not portray static moments; the frame which encloses the characters is filled by movement in time as well as by spatial and tonal relations. James's pictorial conceits embellish his record

of impressions struck by individual scenes, but they do nothing to give direction or a logic of dramatic movement to the ongoing action. Like any poet who tries to convey a total impression through the linear and temporal medium of language, James needs to develop a rule of sequencing: he needs to know which brushstrokes to apply, and when, in the unfolding drama of completion which his narrative composition represents.

The novels themselves illustrate James's search for this sequencing, for the overarching form which will encompass and regulate the ordering of the psychic data produced by his close attention to his characters' experience. J. A. Ward, borrowing a phrase from "The Art of Fiction," depicts James's career as a "search for form" in which he finds the author "beginning with a blanket exploitation of some more-or-less standard genre or convention . . . and then transforming that model as he allows his subject to find its own shape."[20] But Ward makes things more complex than he needs to by failing to recognize the underlying exploratory mode which governs both James's and his characters' quest for meaning and coherence: that of the romance, which with its misty Otherworld idealities and its promise of absolute wisdom and fulfillment is the dialectical opposite to the close mimesis embraced as a value by James.[21]

It is not difficult to see why the romance mode speaks so powerfully to James's needs as an artist; while mimesis belongs "to the present, pure romance really belongs to the future, which is absolutely cut off from any possible reference to truth of fact or truth of sensation."[22] The mingling of these two impulses--the

mimetic and the romantic--represents the penetration of prosaic fact by poetic possibility; it enables James to imagine, without violating his own credence, sequences of events in which he and his characters share in the forward lunge away from the literal and towards the figural world of a dreamed or imagined alternity. Small wonder, then, that in "The Art of Fiction" James plants his flag on the soil of romance and on the soil of realism, ingenuously claiming to recognize no borders between the two; they are, he implies, two sides of the same coin, and may be exchanged freely without any loss to art or to credibility.[23] He argues that the distinction between "novel" and "romance" is a "clumsy separation," and insists that such superficial hair-splitting cannot be allowed to deny the artist his "freedom."[24]

Lionel Trilling has likened James's use of the romance form to an "experiment," "an artificial and extravagant contrivance . . . which is designed to force or foster a fact into being."[25] This is a useful insight if one recognizes that Trilling cannot mean "fact" in the sense of an empirical datum, a "truth of detail," but rather in the abstract sense of an explanatory idea or a compelling verity. The romantic quest may begin with an empirical goal in mind, but it always leads one into the land of imagination, of metaphor, of spiritual or psychic discovery. Northrop Frye recognizes this when he observes that underlying the most intensely mimetic works of literature there are hypothetical story structures and mythic impulses; though displaced or disguised by the "realistic" nature of the presentation, these properties nevertheless evoke the world of total knowledge and fulfillment which is expressed in the naked myth

itself.[26] Thus the novel form as practiced by James is inductive, exploratory; he uses his realistic materials, particularly the psychology of his characters, to give empirical form to his pursuit of ethical verities and aesthetic satisfactions; he is constantly in a struggle against "the refusal of the immanence of being to enter the empirical life."[27]

The pattern this "romance" takes in James is invariably a quest in which the protagonist, spurred on by an exotic and beckoning Otherworld, pursues the satisfaction of deep needs and desires, but does so always at the risk of being undeceived and returned, sadder but wiser, to earth. One sees this pattern in Christopher Newman's and Isabel Archer's trips to the mysterious continent of Europe, on whose congenially mercurial landscape they find etched the image of their unacknowledged desires; one sees it too in the bold flights of sensibility taken by worshipful idealists like Daisy Miller's Winterbourne, Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Casamassima, Lambert Strether, and Merton Densher--all of whom perceive their desired Madonnas in women who are in the end not up to the role demanded of them; one even sees the pattern in the experience of less lively imaginations, as in poor, dull Catherine Sloper's brief glimpse of romantic fulfillment in Washington Square. James's novels show us real people who are attracted by the spectre of decidedly unreal possibilities; from Newman's desire for the conjugal possession of the best item on the market to Merton Densher's search for impunity beneath the gilded wings of Milly Theale, one finds James's protagonists embracing the image of what is wished for rather than what is provided. The

novels thus become inquiries into the efficacy and durability of the connection between prosaic fact and poetic possibility.

But in the romance, this inquiry is itself irrelevant. The hero is insured against failure, both by the rules of the form and by the fact that he is a "type" designed for success, and not a problematical human character. In the Jamesian novel, this is not the case. His characters have a personal dimension, not an exemplary one, and there is no assurance that his heroes will pass their tests, or that their ordeals will yield enlightenment or satisfaction. Thus there is a great deal of tension between the inevitability of the romantic form, which promises success, and the complex inner workings of the characters' psychologies, which render that success, even when it is ostensibly achieved, oddly qualified. As Scholes and Kellogg observe, this is a "problematic quality which marks the great serious novels," and derives from "the novelist's insistence on inserting individualized characters into typical situations."[28] Or, as Bernard Paris observes, "in novels of psychological realism the main characters exist primarily as mimetic portraits whose intricacies escape the moral and symbolic meanings assigned to them."[29]

In early novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady the conflict between mimetic representation and symbolic assessment is particularly evident; though the overarching form and dominant tone of these novels derive from the romance tradition I have described, the omniscient narrator's internal analysis of Newman and Isabel reveals them to have qualities which are at odds with the virtues typically symbolized by the romantic hero. Even when their

actions ostensibly conform to the pattern of the heroic model, their motivations are sufficiently mixed to undercut the rhetoric which insists on the exemplary character of their external behavior. In these novels the truth of psychological detail conflicts with the demands of artistic form; and the authorial narrator, charged with making his characters at once individual in themselves and representative of formal values, is committed to the simultaneous pursuit of contradictory aesthetic goals.

But James refuses to surrender either the reality of his characters or the enrichment provided by the structure and rhetoric he has borrowed from romance. This would be disastrous to the coherence of these novels, or would beg the question of whether James's intentions in these novels were ironical,[30] were it not for two evasive devices which James employs: the selective deference of the omniscient narrator, who at the climax of each novel forgoes detailed analysis of the hero's inner state; and the creation in each novel of a character who is empowered to speak for, and act in accordance with, the romantic norms of the work. One can see in both these phenomena the germinal form of James's later style; after all, the concepts of authorial deference and of the essential role of the "reflector" or "concrete deputy" are the linchpins of the narrative philosophy expressed in the Golden Bowl preface and realized in the later novels. It will be the task of subsequent chapters of this study to trace the development of these devices from their roots in the early novels to a full-fledged narrative technique; but it will first be necessary to identify the important, if limited, use to which James originally put them.

Paris notes that the difficulty of resolving the mimetic and mythic aspects of fiction "becomes most evident at the end, where plausibility and realistic detail are sacrificed to an aesthetically pleasing resolution."[31] One sees James wrestling with this problem at the end of both The American and The Portrait of a Lady, as the once-omniscient narrator abandons his role of portraying the inner psychological reality of the protagonist, and allows the hero to perform his or her final emblematic action without subjecting it to authorial comment. An explanation of Newman's or Isabel's motives would surely upset the novel's sense of closure, and might openly contradict the implications of enlightenment and growth which accompany the completion of the underlying romance cycle. So the narrator draws back and says nothing, letting the characters' final gestures speak (however ambiguously) for themselves. James thus substitutes a change in point of view for the unrealized transformation the formal and rhetorical elements argue has occurred; the result is a phenomenon often repeated in James--that of the character, particularly the hero, who in the end somehow slips through the web of the book's design and becomes enigmatic, even to the narrator. This effect is repeated in novels like The Europeans and Roderick Hudson as well, and becomes more marked as one moves into the novels of the major phase, in which authorial deference becomes an almost constant factor; but in the earlier novels it is most evident at the conclusion, in which it is this evasion of the narrator, and not an actual change in the character, that creates the reader's final mystification.

The second phenomenon--that of the embodied delegate or apostle of the novel's romantic norms--is also crucial to the tenuous coherence of the narration. Mrs. Tristram in The American and Ralph Touchett in The Portrait each relieve the narrator of some of the burden of arranging for and presenting the romantic dimension of the story; they share in the romantic view of the hero or heroine which the rhetoric attempts to develop, and assist James in facilitating the romantic turns of the plot--Mrs. Tristram by introducing Newman to Claire, and Ralph by endowing Isabel with the material liberty of his own inheritance. Like the device of authorial deference, the romantic spokesperson becomes more and more central to the discourse in later novels, until the consciousness of the protagonist becomes identical with that of the character who embraces the romantic norms of the work--Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors, and Merton Densher in The Wings of the Dove. But in the early novels these characters remain peripheral; although there are such characters in other novels, like Mrs. Penniman of Washington Square and Felix Young in The Europeans, among these only Ralph Touchett is developed fully enough to become a realistic character in his own right.

The judicious use of these two devices (which are really evasions) allows James to keep the conflicting romantic and mimetic impulses in his novels from creating total incoherence. In The American and The Portrait, for example, Mrs. Tristram and Ralph supply their own romantic conceptions of Newman and Isabel, thereby deflecting attention from the narrator's own penchant for contradicting his dispassionate psychological analysis with passionately

idealizing rhetoric; and at the conclusions of these novels, which depend on the underlying romance plot for a sense of aesthetic completion, the narrator conveniently abstains from analysis which would mar the gracefulness of the protagonist's exit.

The crucial quality which both of these devices have in common is that of their ignorance--either the willed ignorance of the self-censoring narrator or the inescapable subjective ignorance of the surrogate romancer. This ignorance is in both cases strategic to the author's purpose, since it keeps anomalous aspects of the hero's personality from coming to light at aesthetically inappropriate moments. Mrs. Tristram is able to propose Newman as a romantic hero only because she lacks intimate knowledge of his inner motives, just as Ralph's idealization of Isabel is dependent on his failure to recognize her inner weaknesses and insecurities; Mrs. Tristram and Ralph would be neither as swift nor as assiduous in proposing such views of their respective protagonists if they shared the benefit of the narrator's penetrating analysis. Furthermore, the all-knowing narrator, for aesthetic reasons, imitates the subjective ignorance of the surrogates by adopting the limitations of their angles of vision; when Newman leaves Paris and the Tristrams, he leaves the narrator's sight as well, just as Isabel does when she leaves Gardencourt.

It is, then, the adoption of these limited perspectives, and not the empirical "truth of detail" which the narrator pursues elsewhere in these novels, that provides the authorial rhetoric with what tenuous coherence it finally has. The greatness of a work of

fiction may be, as Booth says, in the "emotions and judgments of the implied author,"[32] but in James's early novels one can see that it is the conflict, and not the harmonization, of these faculties that dominates the discourse; emotion and judgment, passion and analysis, fail to converge, and the coherence of these works is dependent on the strategic narrative repressions and evasions which disguise this failure.

Thus novels require "truth of detail," but not too much truth; the artist's "freedom" depends on how liberal he may be with his exclusion of the facts. But it is important to remember what facts we are talking about. James's realism is psychological, not sociological, and his interest from the beginning is not to establish the truth of event, but truth of character;[33] the knowledge he seeks is personal rather than historical, and therefore the discourse seeks to discover not <u>what happens</u> in the life of an Isabel Archer, but <u>who she is</u>. The conflict I have been describing between emotion and judgment, between passion and recognition, results from the discourse asking and answering this question of identity in two different ways, one aesthetic and one empirical.

This is the problem, cited by Scholes and Kellogg, of placing individualized characters in typical roles. As Lukács observes, "Art always says 'And yet!' to life";[34] typical characters, and the story-forms they inhabit, express this desire for alternity, but James's practice of combining realism of characterization with romanticism of assessment yokes his art to the very actualities of the human condition to which it supposedly takes exception. His portrayal of Isabel and

Newman expresses both his sense of who they are and his desire for what, on a formal level, they might become; the struggle to unify these two angles of vision is one which, in Lukács's view, the novelist can neither win nor abandon, since it can only be solved either by effacement of the characters' psychic reality or by the repudiation of the goals of art itself.

James eventually transforms this recognition from a problem into a theme. He dramatizes the way in which knowledge of others destroys one's hopeful and romantic illusions regarding them, and shows how the desire for beauty, in its more intense forms, must be satisfied through a repression rather than an enhancement of the facts that are before one. But James continues to regard these illusions, like the artistic formulations they resemble, as necessary and efficacious. A character like Hyacinth Robinson would be better off never to have met his Princess than to be disencumbered of his beautiful idea of her; it is perhaps better to live with one's private image of the dead poet Jeffrey Aspern than to have the intimate knowledge of his letters; and it is possible that the psychic puzzle of the governess in "The Turn of the Screw" speaks to the reader more compellingly as an enigma than would its resolution.

These narrative situations all express the avoidance of knowledge which is the obverse image of the desire for it. Again and again James dramatizes the hypothesis that the lover of art, of beauty, ought to fear truth rather than seek it out; the knowledge destroyed with "The Aspern Papers" may well be the same sort of knowledge which, when published, itself becomes a destroyer in stories

like The Reverberator. So silence and evasion, particularly on the part of the authorial voice, come to signify and express this potential for danger; as George Steiner says, in these works "we are meant to observe the tactics of exclusion. What is left out lies in ambush around the next corner."[35]

This rule of exclusion is certainly the underlying principle of novels like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove, in which the fear of the repressed recognition becomes the motive of the plot itself. Strether's longing for the uncorrected belief in the "virtuous attachment," like Densher's effort to preserve his illusion of innocence, represents a version of himself and of others which is dependent on his hiding from rather than engaging the totality of experience; Strether does not want to know what Chad and Madame de Vionnet are really doing any more than Densher wants to understand fully the duplicitous enterprise that he and Kate are involved in. Furthermore, the reassertion of that repressed actuality is a constant and mortal threat; Strether fears Sarah and Densher fears Kate because each of these women is capable of voicing the lucid recognition that would wreck the romantic enterprise already under way. In the end, Strether and Densher profess to want knowledge, but in reality stand in fear of it.

But something has changed from the problematic quality of earlier novels like The American and The Portrait. The conflict between beauty and lucidity is no longer primarily James's problem; it has been transferred to the consciousness of his characters, particularly his protagonists, and the inner quest of the work itself

is not so much for formal and aesthetic resolution as for the psychic integrity of the hero. In Strether and in Densher, James's surrogate romancer, with his impulsive thirst for the romantic, for the ideal, has been relocated at the center of the discourse, where he appropriates and speaks for the formal desire of the novel itself. Thus the "oddity of a double consciousness" which one finds in Lambert Strether is a distant reflection of James's own narrative persona in novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady; Strether's intense mixture of "curiosity" and "zeal" mirrors the narrator's impulse in those earlier works to seek a simultaneous fulfillment of his antagonistic needs for beauty and for knowledge.

Thus in the later works James moves to "veil" himself in surrogates whose inner psychology reflects the conflicting impulses of the narrative itself; he is able to make his delegates, and not himself, responsible for the repressions and evasions upon which his art depends, and frees himself from his schizophrenic authorial role as both creator and destroyer of romantic illusion. The real artists of James's late fiction are his "centers of consciousness" themselves, "deputies" like Strether and Densher and even Maggie Verver. They are ultimately the heroes and heroines of their own inner romances, of their own quests for harmony and integrity; the "process of vision" dramatized through the rhetoric belongs to these characters, and not to James himself. Thus any failure to take cognizance of the facts, any vulnerability of the romantic design to the lucidity of truth, represents a failure of the character's psyche and of the character's vision, and not of the artist. Similarly, the cost to truth at which

such a vision is realized (dramatized particularly in The Wings of the Dove) is not one which is levied against the artist's enterprise, but against that of the "reflector" whose process of vision the novelist records.

My interest in this study is to examine the phenomena in James's early writings to which this technique, and this definition of theme, is a response, and to identify both the advantages and recognitions of liability which James derives from its development. More specifically, this study will involve two phases of investigation: first, I shall examine the crisis to which the conflicting demands of realistic presentation and aesthetic form led James as a novelist; and second, I shall detail how he responded to this crisis without sacrificing either of the opposing terms which precipitated it. Since, as I have said, James's consistent interest throughout his work is the dramatization of human consciousness, a large portion of my treatment will be comprised by character studies, particularly of his protagonists; but this is not an object in itself, but a necessary means to an end--that of exploring James's awareness and handling of the conflicting demands of form and mimesis which his characters excite. I shall also examine, in their germinal and fully developed forms, James's use in his novels of authorial deference and of the surrogate romancer, both of which evolve from peripheral devices to determinants of theme and technique in the later works.

The study will focus on two novels of James's earlier period--The American and The Portrait of a Lady--in which the crisis of

narration I have described is evident, and then will proceed to two novels of the major phase--The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove--which show most clearly the nature of James's mature response to this crisis. I shall also examine briefly The Golden Bowl, whose preface states in discursive form the philosophy of composition embodied in The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove, and which is usually thought to complete a novelistic triptych with those other two works.

If one were to state a general theme which unifies all these concerns, it would be that of awareness: of James's own awareness, and of the awareness he urges on readers of "The Art of Fiction" of being ones on whom nothing is lost. James, like his characters, reveals his liveliness of attention by his changing responses to expanding knowledge and to changing conflicts as they reveal themselves through the forms in which he works. As much through the novels themselves as in his retrospective prefaces, James documents his growing sensitivity to the problematical nature of his task as a writer of fiction; and in particular it is his unflinching fidelity to the nature of human consciousness which produces his greatest difficulties and his most remarkable achievements. In the interest of "showing" his people, and of arguing their importance for the reader, he is willing to go to any lengths, as he strains to dramatize both that which is normally hidden from human consciousness and that which exceeds its grasp.

NOTES

[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 327. Hereafter cited in the text as AN.

[2]This term, which usually is used to refer to James's writings of the early 1900's, is introduced by F. O. Matthiessen in Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; rpt., 1963).

[3]The Rhetoric of Fiction (University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 346.

[4]The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 225.

[5]Henry James and Pragmatistic Thought (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 65.

[6]The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 85.

[7]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," The House of Fiction: Essays on the Novel by Henry James, ed. Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), pp. 29, 33.

[8]S/Z, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 178.

[9]See John E. Tilford, Jr., "James the Old Intruder," Modern Fiction Studies, 4 (1958), 157-64. Also cited in Chapter IV of this study.

[10](Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 30.

[11]Bernard J. Paris, A Psychological Approach to Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 286. I am indebted to Professor Paris for his clear formulation of the relationships among form, theme, and mimesis in the novel, articulated in Chapter I of his book.

[12]"The Art of Fiction," p. 33.

[13]Paris, p. 6.

[14]Watt, p. 12.

[15]"The Art of Fiction," p. 29.

[16]"The Art of Fiction," p. 39.

[17]Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; rpt., 1979), p. 189.

[18]Watt, p. 288.

[19]Scholes and Kellogg, p. 209.

[20]The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 218.

[21]There are almost as many definitions of romance as there are critics who use the term; by romance I mean the general plot structure of the Grail Quest, with its journey motif and cycles of departure and return, in which physical action is often symbolic of an internal search for identity or for spiritual fulfillment.

[22]Scholes and Kellogg, p. 228.

[23]"The Art of Fiction," p. 34.

[24]"The Art of Fiction," pp. 35, 36.

[25]Introduction, The Princess Casamassima, by Henry James (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1948); rpt. in The Liberal Imagination (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 65.

[26]Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 140. Frye uses the term "romance" to describe a median mode between pure "mythic" and "mimetic" which suggests "implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience" (pp. 139-40). But this does not mean that the possibilities expressed through romance are more empirically based than those of myth, but simply that the figures who act out these desires are understood as exemplary human, rather than divine, entities. There is no contradiction between Frye's conception of romance and that of Scholes and Kellogg.

[27]Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), p. 71.

[28]Scholes and Kellogg, p. 229.

[29]Paris, p. 12.

[30]This is the assertion of Anna Brylowski in an excellent but unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Irony in Henry James" (Michigan State University, 1967); however, I disagree with this premise.

[31]Paris, p. 277.

[32]Booth, p. 86.

[33]"The Art of Fiction," p. 34.

[34]Lukács, p. 72.

[35]"Eros and Idiom," On Difficulty and Other Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 107.

CHAPTER II

THE AMERICAN

Henry James's eminent biographer Leon Edel pronounces The American "a firm, rapid stride . . . into full literary maturity,"[1] and in many ways Edel's assessment is correct. The hero, Christopher Newman, is a more fully realized character than either Rowland Mallet or Roderick Hudson, the principals in his first published novel; the prose is crisp and confident, right up to the clamactic scenes; and the novel's rich comedy of manners, in which the ingenuous American protagonist squares off against a family of diabolical Europeans, is deftly played. Nevertheless, James himself singles out The American as one of three early novels (the other two are The Portrait of a Lady and The Princess Casamassima) which suffer the defect of "good intentions baffled by a treacherous vehicle, an expertness too retarded."[2] One is in the end forced to choose James's assessment over that of his biographer, and to acknowledge that The American, in the end, does fail to knit itself together; its form strains at the edges, and, except for its protagonist Newman, it lacks the vitality of characterization that one finds in subsequent novels.

Still, The American bears examination--partly because of the strengths cited above, and partly because one finds in this novel the antagonisms of form and content which, in the novels of his major

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phase, provoke James into his greatest and most daring fictional enterprises. The American bears within it the tangled impulses of realistic presentation and romantic rhetoric which mark the later works; it displays at crucial climaxes the technique of authorial deference which eventually expands into a philosophy of narration; and, in the slight figure of Mrs. Tristram, The American shows in germinal form James's strategy of using surrogates, or "deputies," to establish and articulate the romantic norms of the work.

To gain a sense of the author's difficulties with this novel, and to glimpse the ways in which it forecasts some of his future glories, it is useful to attend James's own comments in his 1907 preface to The American. In this belated post-mortem, written thirty years after the novel first appeared, James identifies his original conception of the work's "theme": it is, he says, "the situation, in another country and an aristocratic society, of some robust but insidiously beguiled . . . and cruelly wronged compatriot," who "should suffer at the hands of persons pretending to represent the highest possible civilisation." This "compatriot" would, moreover, "arrive at his just vindication and then would fail of all triumphantly and all vulgarly enjoying it"; he would "in the very act of driving it home . . . sacrifice it in disgust" (AN, pp. 21-22).

For James, the response of this "wronged compatriot" to his ill-usage is the essence of the tale; his beguilement by the Bellegardes is merely a device, a backdrop against which the drama of Newman's inner moral conflict is to be played out. Newman, says James, "supremely matters; all the rest matters only as he feels

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it, treats it, meets it" (AN, p. 37). Thus the Bellegardes, Newman's antagonists, are to be seen purely in terms of their effect on the hero; their treachery is simply the lightning-rod which draws the spark of Newman's true mettle. In his retrospective preface, however, James has some second thoughts about Newman's relation to his enemies; the author admits that the situation with the Bellegardes is gratuitously conceived and insufficiently dramatized, that the reversal in which they first accept and then spurn Newman's hand is capricious and inexplicable. James himself accounts for this defect by asserting that the "measurements" of his protagonist were such that he "had indeed to exclude the outer air" of realistic probability in order to "fit him in" (AN, p. 39).

This is a curious assertion, and invites examination. What James does not mean by this, I think, is that our view of the Bellegardes is limited to Newman's own direct knowledge of them, and that we therefore share in his puzzlement at their rejection; this is a phenomenon one might observe in the later novels, but Newman is not a "center of consciousness" in the same way that heroes like Lambert Strether and Merton Densher are. What James means by these remarks, rather, is that the terms of Newman's test, necessary to the dramatization of his character, require the Bellegardes to act in a manner which would seem nonsensical even if one understood their motives. Thus we find James apologizing for his "affront to verisimilitude," and admitting, somewhat sheepishly, that "I was so possessed by my idea that Newman should be ill-used . . . that I

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attached scant importance to its fashion of coming about" (AN, pp. 37, 35).

Furthermore, he claims that in writing The American he "had been plotting arch-romance without knowing it," and that Newman's European debacle must be taken as "the disconnected and uncontrolled experience . . . which romance alone more or less successfully palms off on us" (AN, pp. 25, 34). But the apology one senses here, given James's continuing use of the romance form in the novels that follow The American, is not for the fact that much of the action is generic rather than realistic, but for the typical quality of the figures surrounding Newman. James's apology is for the insufficiency of motive in the Bellegardes themselves, not for the situation they bring about.

But as we shall see, the author's remarks gloss over a possible, fuller explanation. James, in his insistence on Newman's heroism, misreads Newman and therefore misreads the Bellegardes' quite credible response to this obtuse American. The critical history of The American reveals that it is Newman's behavior, and not the Bellegardes', that has proved most difficult to explain. While capricious evil and inscrutably afflicted women are commonplaces of the Gothic or arch-romances to which the actions and settings of much of The American allude, it is not these elements that strain credence; the true dissonant element is Newman himself, whose psychological complexities overshadow and obscure the lines of demarcation between good and evil, between innocence and guilt, which form the essential matrix of his "situation."

Actually, the underlying romantic structure in The American is not that of the Gothic, whose intimations of violence and psychic are locally applied touches in this novel; the general outline of Newman's experience--his journey from America to the strange Other-world of Europe, his enchantment, fall, and final return to the point of origin--evokes the pattern of the romantic quest which, unconsciously or not, James employs in almost all his novels. Newman's ordeal also follows the legend, identified by Lionel Trilling, of "the Young Man from the Provinces" who, like "Parsifal at the castle of the Fisher King," is seen "picking his perilous way through the irrationalities of the society into which he has been transported."[3]

But, though Newman's experience conforms in broad outline to the patterns of the quest cycle and of the legend sketched by Trilling, Newman himself does not. Unlike the Young Man of myth, Newman is not "setting out to seek his fortune";[4] he has already made it. And, as James himself concedes, Newman's eye "is by no means the glowing orb of romance"; it is "an eye in which innocence and experience were singularly blended."[5] Newman, in short, is more experienced, more aggressive, and more commercially successful than the archetypes his story evokes. His innocence is problematical; it seems more a mark of emotional immaturity than youthful inexperience. And finally, his view of the world is not illumined by the light of the ideal which is for the romantic hero the essential ray of vision. With his "capacious appetite for facts" (p. 60), Newman is not an ingenuous idealist, but a hardened empiricist; his grasp of

the world is limited to the palpable and quantifiable aspects of things and people around him.

Newman's materialist predelictions are evident from the outset. His labored contemplation of the Louvre's artistic treasures has given him an "aesthetic headache," and he is beset by his inability to understand the "arithmetic" by which the paintings of Raphael, Titian, and Rubens establish their value (pp. 1-2). He finally approaches them not with an appreciation of their beauty, but with "the mania of the collector" (p. 12)--and at that, not a collector of originals, but of inferior copies which, "if the truth must be told, he had often admired . . . much more than the original" (p. 1). Newman, insensitive to standards of artistic merit, would rather possess a facsimile than simply gaze on an original he cannot have; he measures the value of art objects in terms of the cost of their acquisition, and derives satisfaction not from their beauty, but from the proof of his own success that, once possessed, they represent.

In short, for Newman works of art are signs of status. His inability to appreciate the contents of the Louvre is humorous, even ingenuous in a way; but Newman's projection of this attitude into human relations, particularly romantic ones, seriously damages his credibility as a potential hero. The parallelism between his ideal of "extracting a fortune, the bigger the better, from defiant opportunity" (p. 19) and his idea that a beautiful wife represents "the greatest victory over circumstances" (p. 35) is unmistakable, and cannot help but render Newman a little unappetizing as a paragon of

romance. He is "guilty of the Jamesian sin of treating people as things."[6]

There is language in the novel, and even in Newman's own mouth, which appears to indicate he is ready to make a qualitative change in his perspective. James writes: "He had won at last and carried off his winnings; and now what was he to do with them?" (p. 20); Newman himself seems to portend a change when he tells Tom Tristram, "I was sick of business . . . I seemed to feel a new man inside my old skin, and I longed for a new world" (p. 23). But this rhetoric of spiritual awakening is not borne out by Newman's own behavior; he simply brings his old philosophy of materialism to bear on what promises to be an essentially moral quest. Furthermore, as Richard Poirier observes, Newman is "a man without imagination";[7] he doesn't know how to begin this new life, as his hapless visit to the Louvre and his whirlwind tour of ugly churches attest. He has not come to Europe to engage experience, but to purchase its spoils; in short, Newman himself is not capable of seeking out the experience James has designed for him. He needs a sponsor, a person of imagination and romance, to show him what to do and to oversee his initiation into this new Old World.

Newman finds such a person in Mrs. Tristram, whose name provides a clue to her function in James's design; it is she, and not Newman, who represents the true romantic spirit in The American. James describes her in terms which supremely qualify her for this role: "Restless, discontented, visionary . . . but with a certain avidity of imagination," with "a spark of the sacred fire" (p. 26).

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She is constantly giving Newman romantic advice "for which he had never asked" (p. 27), and it is she who suggests to him that "it was high time he should take a wife" (p. 33). It is she who sets Newman's adventures in motion by encouraging him to pursue Claire dé Cintré; it is she who paints the picture of Claire's extraordinary qualities on the blank canvas of Newman's imagination. Newman, incapable of forming his own concept of the ideal woman, assimilates the one conveniently furnished by Mrs. Tristram; when Claire is pointed out to him, he instantly sees in her "the loveliest woman in the world, the promised perfection, the proposed ideal" (p. 39; my emphases). It is doubtful that Newman would enter this romantic adventure at all, if it were not for the eager prompting of Mrs. Tristram.

So Mrs. Tristram's romantic machinations aid and abet James's plan to place his hero in the "situation" described in the preface. Like James, Mrs. Tristram wants to see Newman "prove" himself; "I should like," she tells him, "to put you in a difficult place" (p. 32). She pushes Newman deeper into the Bellegarde snare by proposing to him heroic projects he might never have conceived on his own; when Newman expresses outrage that Claire is "subject to compulsion" by her family, Mrs. Tristram urges him "to use his wings . . . Fly to the rescue of Madame de Cintré!" (p. 77)

This pervasive influence of Mrs. Tristram on Newman's fate makes her the architect of his adventure; she lives vicariously through his experience as she fills his mind with notions and propels him into situations which Newman himself but half understands.

Her responsibility for what happens is so integral to the novel that she becomes a kind of surrogate narrator; she has the role of setting up scenes, dropping prophetic hints (it is after all she who first suggests that there is a dark and terrible secret in the Bellegarde family history), and mouthing all the romantic rhetoric which the sharp-eyed and even-spoken principal narrator avoids. Unlike the main narrative persona, whose interest in Newman is actual and individual, Mrs. Tristram admits that her own interest in him "has nothing to do with you personally; it's what you represent" (p. 32).

And what he "represents" to her are precisely those romantic possibilities which underlie the action of the novel as a whole; Newman is the Young Man from the Provinces, the questing knight of the Grail, the daring rescuer of ladies in distress. But the very defects of romantic sensibility which place Newman in need of Mrs. Tristram's services make him in the end unsuited to her plan. She, like James, confuses the actuality of Newman with the role she has designed for him; his abortive engagement to Claire de Cintré suffers, like the novel as a whole, the fate of "good intentions baffled by a treacherous vehicle." Mrs. Tristram finally refers to the entire Bellegarde affair as "the highest flight ever taken by a tolerably bold imagination," and admits that she urged Claire upon him out of curiosity: "I should have been curious to see," she says, referring to the marriage that never comes off; "it should have been very strange" (p. 342). Like James himself, Mrs. Tristram vicariously pursues the "freedom" of intensified existence, of heightened effect, at a sacrifice of recognition, and at the risk of the tragic collapse of the romantic enterprise.

What Mrs. Tristram, like James, fails to come to terms with is the decidedly unromantic nature of Newman which dooms both hers and the author's project from the beginning. Newman's failure with the Bellegardes is, unfortunately, not a gratuitous conception, but is the natural outgrowth of the hero's own deficiencies of character, and is in fact analogous to other events in his pre-European experience. These earlier events, though little attended in previous interpretations of the novel, are crucial to an understanding of its controversies; through them, and their parallels in Newman's experience with the Bellegardes, it is possible to see the motives and impulses which consistently rule his actions, and to assess the nature of the difficulties he creates for Mrs. Tristram and for the novel as a whole.

In the second chapter of The American, Newman tells his friend Tristram of a party who "had once played me a very mean trick. I owed him a grudge, I felt awfully savage at the time" (pp. 21-22). Newman gets his chance to repay this wrong, apparently through a stock manipulation; it would be "a blow the fellow would feel, and he really deserved no quarter." But with vengeance at his fingertips, Newman experiences "a mortal disgust for the thing I was about to do" (p. 22); he discovers that "I was sick of business; I wanted to throw it all up and break off short . . . I seemed to feel a new man inside my old skin, and I longed for a new world" (p. 23).

This experience is remarkably similar to his dealings with the Bellegardes, whose withdrawal of Claire's hand in marriage makes him feel used and foolish, to the point of humiliation. His discovery

of the family secret gives him his opportunity to smite them back; but when he returns to Paris for his final showdown, he finds that "the bottom had suddenly fallen out of his revenge . . . They had hurt him, but such things were really not his game." He then returns to his apartments and tells Mrs. Bread that he means to leave Paris and "to stay away forever" (p. 357), once again putting the ocean between himself and the scene of his defeat.

The parallels between these two patterns of events are too striking to be coincidental, and one must ask what aspects of Newman's personality are commonly brought to bear in them. Given James's assertion regarding Newman that "the picture of his consistency was all my undertaking" (AN, p. 37), it would seem that attention ought not be focused on the uncharacteristic nature of Newman's response in these situations; rather, one ought to examine the ways in which these moments of intense personal crisis radicalize facets of Newman's personality which are consistently, but less evidently, in play elsewhere in the story.

Central to Newman's personality, and crucial in his response to these personal disasters, is what J. A. Ward characterizes as Newman's sense of "fair play." This idea, as Ward observes, is intimately connected with Newman's glowing conception of himself.[8] James notes that Newman "liked everything, accepted everything . . . he was not discriminating" (p. 63), a quality which Newman himself wears like a badge. His eagerness to be pleased reflects in general his desire to be on good terms with others; but there is condescension in his generous appreciation of them. He expects that they will

recognize the merit of his "good-humoured prosperity" (p. 61) and grant him the approbation he feels he deserves. Newman's blandly indulgent generosity toward others, then, is really a veiled plea for reciprocal treatment; his good nature is his proof against being rejected, cheated, or betrayed. Because this tacit bargain with others is based on Newman's inflated idea of his personal worth (both moral and material), any failure of this bargain is an affront to his pride and to his necessary idea that he can be assured, on his merits, of the good graces of others.

This bargain is broken for Newman twice in The American, first by the business treachery of the nameless "other party," and second by the refusal of the Bellegardes to make a place for him in their family circle. These are blows to his pride rather than to his pocketbook, and the remedy he instinctively seeks is not justice but vindication. It is the excitement of being avenged that he experiences in New York, and again when he is handed the damning note by Mrs. Bread; but in both cases excitement quickly turns to moral nausea. As much as he may want revenge, Newman's pride is more deeply invested in his agreeableness toward others; it is his pervasive but blandly indiscriminate charity that gives him the pleasure of looking down on others "from the height of his bracing good conscience" (p. 116). In the end, his moral pride is too dear to be sacrificed; to carry through on his vengeance would be to buy satisfaction for the public humiliation by shredding his private integrity. His solution in both cases it to renounce his vindication, and to assauge his pain by taking pleasure in his own virtue.

The pleasure and pride Newman takes in his own goodness is clear from the moment he lands in Europe; it is difficult to miss the attitude of lip-smacking moral superiority with which Newman relates the tale of his sudden severance from his business affairs. But the very abruptness of his decision to come to Europe indicates the compulsive and compensatory quality of his renunciation: "When you want a thing so very badly you had better treat yourself to it," he tells Tristram; and the list of things to which Newman intends to treat himself is impossibly ambitious: "I want the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get. People, places, art, nature, everything!" (p. 23)

If Newman has come to Europe to seek satisfaction of his wounded pride, his remarks here do not indicate that the injury has made anything except that pride more sensitive. It appears to matter little to him that he lacks any appreciation for the essential qualities of the mountains, lakes, paintings, churches, or people he desires to experience; his wants are not authentic, but the expression of a vindictive need that was left unsatisfied by the moral nausea which overtook him in that New York taxi. He is not attracted to Europe by any properties of Europe itself; the Parisian world "neither inflamed his imagination nor irritated his curiosity" (p. 27). Europe merely promises poultice for his wound, a place where he can satisfy his vague but mighty "hankering . . . to stretch out and haul in" (p. 31).

One of the things that Newman intends to haul, he makes clear, is a wife. It is part of the program he outlines to Tristram upon

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their first meeting, and the idea of marrying looms ever larger in his imagination until it becomes his primary obsession; Newman convinces himself that a "great woman" is "one thing I can treat myself to . . . What else have I toiled and struggled for all these years . . . What am I to do with my success? To make it perfect, as I see it, there must be a beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument" (p. 34).

As this and previously cited remarks illustrate, Newman makes no qualitative distinction between the acquisition of wealth and the acquisition of a wife; they are both blessings of good fortune, a reward for righteous toil, the outward sign of the good graces in which he stands with the world at large and of his indisputable personal merit. Thus Newman depends on success in courtship as he had depended on success in business to maintain his exalted self-image; the point of his marriage, like that of his fortune, is to attest to and confirm in the witness of others Newman's personal excellence. As James D. Wilson observes, Newman "seeks perfection in the woman he is to marry because such an object will enhance his own image."[9]

Thus, although it is Mrs. Tristram who initiates Newman into his experience of European courtship, the attitudes he brings to that experience are stubbornly and uniquely his own. It must be remembered in this context that Newman's desire to have "the best article on the market" is a dream of vindictive conquest as well as a dream of possession; by marrying Claire de Cintré he will be achieving a personal victory over the manners and mores of a European society hostile

to his democratic virtues, and will have the pleasure of broadcasting his success back to America. In fact, the Bellegardes' initial resistance only magnifies the pleasure he takes in his prospective conquest; the more adverse the circumstances, the greater the victory. For this reason too, Tom Tristram's assertions that Claire is "haughty" and "proud" only spark Newman's interest, and make her submission all the more gratifying.

But Newman does not perceive the Bellegardes' circle as superior to his own simply because it is difficult for him to get into; it is the challenge provided by the opposition, and not the personal nobility of the opponent himself, that provides Newman with his satisfaction in victory. In fact, his attitude towards the Bellegardes is deeply condescending; he has, in addition to his personal conceit, the generic chauvinism of the American abroad. He thinks of Frenchmen as being of "a frothy and imponderable substance," considers their elaborate social rituals as a kind of "prancing . . . reserved for quadrupeds and foreigners," and even thinks of his friend Valentin with "the same kindness that our hero used to feel . . . for those companions who could perform strange and clever tricks" (pp. 96, 326, 89). Newman's pleasure in rescuing Claire, whom he prizes as "a felicitous product of nature and circumstance" (p. 163), seems to promise something of the satisfaction one might take in snatching a delicate crystal out of the hands of a family of marmosets.

But Newman will not be satisfied with such a small success; he takes it as his additional responsibility to teach the monkeys the

ways of men. He is both miffed and condescendingly amused at M. de Bellegarde's "holding his breath so as not to inhale the odour of democracy," and thinks with pleasure on the prospect of converting Valentin "into a first-class man of business" (pp. 167, 229). So Newman's European excursion is in some ways an exercise in cultural imperialism, in which he is "determined to impose his will on an order unwilling to accommodate it";[10] yet one must keep in mind the personal, vindictive needs expressed in this imperialist desire for conquest, and the egocentric pride that underscores Newman's cultural chauvinism.

The danger of a project of conquest like Newman's is that success is all, and there is always the possibility that one has made one's task too difficult, or chosen a task unsuited to one's abilities. The danger is all the greater when someone else selects the test, as Mrs. Tristram does for Newman. The prospect of rejection by the Bellegardes, of the failure of his suit, afflicts Newman with an anxiety and resentment as intense as the promised joy of success. If indeed he regards foreigners as an inferior class, their ways as irrationally odd and arcane, then he must be all the more outraged to find himself personally held at arm's length by them, to discover that his standards of personal worth, his money and his good nature, are regarded as irrelevant, and to feel their stubborn resistance to his efforts to make them see his point.

From the beginning of his acquaintance with Claire, it has chafed at Newman that he has never been regarded by her family as an equal, much less as a superior; early in the novel, he bristles at

Valentin's suggestion that he is not "noble," and expresses surprise that he is "not good enough to make a trial" at securing Claire's hand in marriage (pp. 108, 109). Even when he is finally accepted as Claire's suitor, Newman is "embittered by his having to stand there and so receive his passport from M. de Bellegarde," and is furthermore galled by the Marquise's assertion that in approving the marriage they "are stretching a point . . . doing you a great favor" (pp. 153, 159). All this, of course, is nothing but a provocation for Newman to show them their mistake--to prove that he is noble enough and good enough, to make them accept his own definition of those terms; and to show them that they are not in a position to condescendly do him favors, because he does not, in the end, require their passport. In short, Newman feels that he must vindicate himself, if not in their eyes at least in his own.

He has his first small chance for vindictive satisfaction when he receives telegrams from America congratulating him on his engagement. These missives provide Newman with an opportunity to remind the Bellegardes of the public way in which they have permitted their family name to be yoked with his; he "felt a peculiar desire that his triumph should be manifest," and he can't resist throwing the broadcast of his victory up in the Bellegardes' faces: "He wanted for once to make the heads of the house of Bellegarde <u>feel</u> him . . . He had had for the past six months a sense of the old lady and her son looking straight over his head, and he was now resolved that they should toe a mark which he would give himself the satisfaction of drawing" (p. 188).

Newman's idea of making the Bellegardes "feel" him is an expression of his thirst for vindication for their refusal to recognize the claims of his personal excellence; and, as is apparent from this passage, this idea takes root in his mind long before their breach of faith with him. As I have suggested, there is already a sense in which Newman's desire to marry Claire is in part an attitude of self-assertion, an attempt to make the indifferent European aristocracy take cognizance of his democratic virtues. But in any case, Newman's desire for a vindictive triumph over the haughty Bellegardes is a thread that runs through their entire relationship.

Edward Zietlow has argued that The American has two dramatic strands, the "love motif" and the "revenge motif," which are unified by the theme of Newman's moral growth;[11] but a close examination of Newman's motives shows that the underlying theme has more to do with Newman's pride than with his morals, and that in this regard the "love motif" and the "revenge motif" are intimately connected. Contrary to Zietlow's argument, the rejection of Newman's suit does not represent the beginning of his need for revenge; he already owes the Bellegardes a grudge, and their withdrawal of Claire's hand is merely the flowering of their long-standing aversion to Newman which Newman himself has found so gallingly incomprehensible. Thus the Bellegardes' breach of faith constitutes a dramatic reversal, but a continuation of theme.

It is in this rejection that James in retrospect finds his own affront to credibility; but the "queer falsity of the Bellegardes" (AN, p. 35) at this juncture may be explained away by a close

examination of Newman himself. As Charles Thomas Samuels says, "Because the Bellegardes don't have any clear reason for turning Newman off, we are invited to search his character for the cause . . . and the search bears fruit."[12] What James himself, in his idea that Newman is a "hero," does not acknowledge is how much of an irritation Newman must be to the Bellegardes, and how thoroughly mutual the antimony between the Europeans and himself actually is. Fortunately, though, there is ample evidence in the novel to explain the motives of the Bellegardes, even if there is little recognition of it in James's preface.

The evidence points principally to the intransigence of Newman's insensitivity to the Bellegardes themselves. Besides the incident of the telegrams, which is a calculated assault on their sensibilities, Newman affronts them in other ways which show the stubborn obtuseness of his provincial pride and manners. He brags, with all the galling smugness of the nouveau riche, that his "specialty has been to make the largest possible fortune in the shortest possible time" (p. 132); his bland conceit, and his indifference to their scale of social values, shows in his insistence that he is, on his own absolute scale, "the best" (p. 110). He takes for granted his right to be intimate with Claire's family; his "tranquil unsuspectingness of the relativity of his own place in the social scale" leads him, in a conversation with the Marquis, to indulge himself in "an unlimited amount of irresponsible inquiry and conjecture" (p. 166). He condescends to them by expressing the thought that he finds Valentin (and, by extension, the rest of the family) "amusing"

(p. 129). This comes to a head at the engagement ball, when, "stepping about like a terrier on his hind legs," Newman engages in an arm-in-arm promenade with the Marquise that leaves him tasting victory and her gagging on her pride (pp. 214, 218).

In short, Newman shows the Bellegardes the same lack of appreciation and the same oblivious contempt which he resents them for showing him. It is conceit, and not innocence, that keeps him blind to his offenses and persuades him that everything is going well. But Claire's family are not the only ones to whom Newman's pride makes him blind; he fails in significant ways to take cognizance of Claire herself, even though she does her painful best to be lucid with him. Her speech and behavior, if attended to closely, conveys a sense that her renunciation of Newman is not owing entirely to the tyranny of her family; it is partly her own decision as well--a decision made in deep psychic anguish whose hints Newman does not catch until it is too late.

Oscar Cargill says that "James's greatest failure in the book [The American] is not to acquaint the reader thoroughly with the heroine."[13] While it is true that in the end Claire remains somewhat enigmatic, her motives unclear, she nevertheless drops sufficient hints to apprise even the most insensitive listener of the fact that she is deeply troubled, and that she regards Newman's blind worship as a burden rather than a boon. From the inception of their courtship, Claire recognizes, while Newman himself does not, that he has formed an idea of her that takes little cognizance of her true nature. She is constantly protesting her weakness as he trumpets

her strengths, claiming fear where he claims courage, and expressing her need for security and peace as he drags her into open defiance of her family's wishes.

Evidence of Claire's discomfort is everywhere. As Newman leaves their first interview, James notes that she "looked with a trouble air at her retreating guest" (p. 87); his proposal of marriage is "something evidently painful to her," since it leaves "her face as solemn as a tragic mask" (p. 116). When Newman tells her to take comfort in the thought "that we love each other," she protests that she "should be very glad to think of nothing . . . I'm cold, I'm old, I'm a coward" (p. 180). She tells Newman, "You have some false ideas about me" (p. 181), and laments that he insists on seeing in her a creature more ideal than herself: "your mark is too high. I am not all that you suppose. I am a much smaller affair" (p. 206); she feels the need to remind him, in the end, that she is "not a heavenly body" (p. 208).

Newman ignores these protests, passing them off as anything but the fear of marriage which they appear, in the end, to betray; instead, he reads in her what he wants, regardless of the text that is opened before him. Claire is the centerpiece of his compensatory fantasy, and he has projected all his needs, all his hunger for vindication, onto her frail and trembling figure. He cannot understand "why the liberal devotion he meant to express should be so disagreeable" (p. 117), and, finding it incomprehensible, dismisses it as anomalous; neither does he notice her twice declining to assent to his spoken assumption that she loves him (pp. 180, 181).

Newman, like Mrs. Tristram, is building a vision out of materials of which he takes insufficient cognizance; what she does to gratify her imagination, he does to answer the tyranny of his vindictive needs. Newman's mighty project, like his romantic sponsor's, is a rock resting on a fairy's wing, tottering for a fall--a hazard which Claire, the spirit thus burdened, tries to apprise him of, to no avail.

Thus Claire's announcement that she is "giving him up" should not come to Newman as a total surprise, but it does; he feels that the family has "done something" to her, has "persuaded" her somehow to break with him (pp. 242, 244). He cannot believe that the possibility of her defection has been present all along, since his pride prevented him from hearing her caveats. But Claire herself, though she admits she is "obeying" her mother, speaks in terms not inconsistent with the fears and predelictions she has expressed before this turn of events; her last request to him is to "let me go in peace"--a peace which is "death," but which nevertheless resembles her earlier wish "not to think at all; only to shut my eyes and give myself up" (pp. 243, 180).

Newman has been cheated again--first of some money, and now of a wife. His wounded ego rages, effacing the reality of Claire's anguish in his own pain as he had once effaced it in his pleasure: "To lose Madame de Cintré after he had taken such jubilant and triumphant possession of her was as great an affront to his pride as it was an injury to his happiness" (p. 250). The loss of Claire is a blow to Newman's pride for two reasons: first, because he faces the

humiliating prospect of returning to America sans the European wife who was to be his vindication, and whose conquest he has already broadcast; and second, because the Bellegardes, in snatching Claire away from him, have summarily closed the door in his face and irrevocably consigned him to the status of a non-person in their social circle. Far more than denying Newman a wife, they are insulting him, belittling him. "A man can't be used in this fashion," he tells them, incredulously (p. 246); he feels that he has been "snubbed and patronized and satirized," and is "filled with a sorer sense of wrong than he had ever known, or than he had supposed it possible that he should know" (p. 281).

Newman's response to this situation parallels his reaction to his experience of betrayal, that "injury" which precipitated his voyage to Europe: his mind turns to revenge, his need for vindication now compounded and intensified. "I have been cruelly injured," he tells Mrs. Bread. "They have hurt me and I want to hurt them"; he wants, he says, to make the Marquis "feel" him. Providentially, the dying Valentin has hinted at a family secret which, if discovered by Newman, would empower him to do just that; and when Mrs. Bread places the scandalous proof in his possession, his vindication is at hand. He delights in the thought that the Marquise is "scared," and, after confronting the Marquis himself with the fact that he knows the secret, Newman meditates that he "ought to begin to be satisfied now!" (pp. 295, 317, 335).

Why, then, with the damning note in hand, does Newman not execute his threat to avenge himself? Quite simply put, he discovers

the "disagreeableness" to himself of acting in such a manner. It is one thing to conceive of one's revenge, to hold it close and nurse it, and still another to put that threat into action; the prospective ugliness of raising a public scandal, of being himself an agent of discord and destruction in human relations, strikes him as inconsistent with his ideal of himself and of his bracing good conscience. As in his earlier opportunity for revenge, he is overtaken first by a moral nausea, and then by a pervasive sense of his own superiority to those who have wronged him; the Bellegardes have blackened themselves with their treachery, but Newman sees himself as remaining unsullied, serenely but sadly above them.

Yet Newman is able to satisfy his need for vindication, in a way. He believes in fact that it is taking place, that the threat which he holds over the Bellegardes is quite adequate to provoke their terror, without him going to the odious extreme of actually making good on it. Newman thus finds himself "nursing his thunderbolt" and imagining with great pleasure the supposed terror of the Bellegardes: "He seemed to be holding it aloft in the rumbling, vaguely-flashing air, directly over the heads of his victims, and he fancied he could see their pale, upturned faces" (p. 311); he experiences "a hearty hope that the Bellegardes were enjoying their suspense as to what he would do yet" (p. 353). It is the perfect revenge, since it allows Newman the satisfaction of imagining his antagonists' discomfort, yet requires him to do nothing that he would find "disagreeable." The supposition that "they <u>were</u> frightened,"

he tells Mrs. Tristram, has given him "all the vengeance I want" (p. 360).

This is hardly the Christopher Newman which Richard Poirier describes as one who "proves his superiority" to the Bellegardes and provides the reader with an "exalted view of the possibilities of human conduct";[14] neither is it the hero, observed by J. A. Ward, who responds to his betrayal by developing "a higher sense of ethical values," and who acts in the end with "a fineness of response that counterbalances the anguish of humiliation and loss";[15] nor is the Christopher Newman we see, gleefully imagining the terror of his enemies, a person who "triumphs through renunciation" to achieve a "victory" of "moral transcendence."[16] If one grants, on the evidence presented here, that I have indeed been talking about the protagonist of The American, where does one find the Christopher Newman described by those cited in this paragraph?

There is no enigma here if one agrees that the reader sees both an actual and a symbolic Newman--one, revealed to us through the analytical skills of the narrator, a fully realized individual, with personal conflicts and motives; and the other typically heroic, deduced from the surrounding rhetorical materials of plot, setting, imagery, and supporting players. This second Christopher Newman is the one James sees most clearly in his preface to the novel, so it is not surprising that many have followed his lead; but the book contains both versions. Newman is both the Young Man from the Provinces and the Ugly American.

This schizophrenic feature is not helped by the ending, in which James forgoes internal analysis of Newman's character, and leaves only his enigmatic actions as a clue to whether he has, after all, achieved some sort of moral recognition. In the final scene, Newman burns the incriminating note, an act which cuts off the possibility of his acting on his threat; as it burns, Mrs. Tristram suggests to him that the Bellegardes had not been as terrified as he had imagined, but rather had counted on his "good nature" to restrain him from taking the full measure of his revenge. She tells Newman, "you probably did not make them so very uncomfortable . . . they believed, after all, you would never really come to the point . . . You see they were right" (p. 360). James shows Newman's response in a terse, one-sentence concluding paragraph: "Newman turned instinctively to see if the little paper was in fact consumed; but there was nothing left of it."

Who is making this backward glance--the Young Man from the Provinces, or the vengeful, Ugly American? It is difficult to tell on the basis of the narration itself. William Stafford describes this final action simply as a formal gesture, an "antithetical" motion which fulfills the "pattern of reversal" characteristic of Newman's behavior throughout the novel;[17] Floyd Watkins, viewing the situation as more problematical, objects that Newman's final action violates the "beneficent" quality he has displayed throughout the rest of the work, and says that the reader "must extend his imagination to a point beyond the actual ending . . . and realize there is still another change in Newman, even though it is not

described."[18] These interpretations and others like them embrace the idea that Newman is heroic, and that his final action must be explained either as a frustration or a completion of form; but it cannot be both.

If, however, it is seen as the gesture of the actual Christopher Newman, still smarting from his betrayal by the Bellegardes but believing that his threat alone is enough to terrify them, then this action makes unambiguous sense. The final "instinct" to resurrect the burning note shows Newman's abiding need to avenge himself on the Bellegardes. Until Mrs. Tristram's comment that his enemies had relied on his "good nature" to spare them, Newman is convinced that he has had his vindication, that he still is having it, in their terror of his expressed threat. However, Mrs. Tristram's comment reveals to Newman that he has not made the Bellegardes "feel" him after all, and that he has been their dupe to the end; thus his backward glance may be read as his impulse, acted on too late, to take up once again the sword of his vindication.

Thus the final scene reveals the actual Newman to be a character who outstrips and betrays the formal design through which he is to be revealed. Both in James's conception and in his execution, the entire raison d'etre of the novel is to show Newman's moral triumph through adversity; but he remains stubbornly unregenerate in the end, hostile to the rhetoric which argues for his apotheosis. The equivocal tone of the concluding scene, in which analysis of Newman's internal reflection is suspended, seems to

hint at James's suspicion that something is amiss with his Young Man from the Provinces, that the hero has failed to pass his test.

So Newman concludes his romantic adventure with the person who proposed it in the first place--Mrs. Tristram. As I have indicated, it is she who is the architect of Newman's fate, who acts as an accomplice in James's design of drawing Newman into his snare with the Bellegardes; and it is to some degree she who is responsible for the failure of the novel to cohere as well, since it is her carelessness with the material of Newman's and Claire's humanity that precipitates the double disaster of the hero's retreat to America and the heroine's retreat to a convent. In a sense, it is Mrs. Tristram who creates the "treacherous vehicle" that undoes the novel's good intention; she proposes to Newman an idealized version of himself, and of Claire, that he cannot achieve and she cannot accept. Mrs. Tristram's attempted beauty is her realized brutality.

Thus Mrs. Tristram resembles the "deputized" or "delegated" character of later novels; as with those other, more fully realized surrogates, Mrs. Tristram's aesthetic appetites, her necessities of imagination, precipitate the romantic action of the novel, and her sensibility either generates or reinforces the romantic assessment of the characters' actions. As do later works, The American depends for its aesthetic richness on the overreaching imaginations of its own characters; in her misreading of, or indifference to, the human actuality of Newman and Claire, Mrs. Tristram is simply taking on the mantle of "artist," sketching with a stroke, a suggestion, a whispered detail a sense of a world full of possibilities both

"wonderful" and "curious," which strains against credence, and fails with a descent as dizzying as the bold altitude of its flight of fancy.

Yet it is her remark in the last scene of the novel, the uncharacteristically lucid observation that Newman has been ultimately used, which destroys the novel's sense of formal closure. The backward glance she provokes upsets the motion towards denouement, towards the careful effacement of the protagonist's abiding conflicts, which James so skillfully achieves in later works; contrary to her function and to the function of the romantic impulse which she embodies, Mrs. Tristram reopens Newman's psychic wounds rather than allows them to mend. In the crucial final moment, Mrs. Tristram speaks realistically when what is called for is romance.

The revised ending which James published in 1907 is a significant indication of his later shift away from the strategies of realistic presentation. In this version, Mrs. Tristram, true to her function as the voice of romance, lets Newman keep his vision of potent control. She does not voice the recognition that the Bellegardes have after all had him "pinned," that they have manipulated him to the end; rather, she simply tells Newman that "I like you . . . Just as you are"; "bending her head, she raised his hand and very tenderly and beautifully kissed it."[20] Mrs. Tristram's gesture here, its effect on Newman and on the conclusion of the novel, is what one would naturally expect from a partisan of romance--infinitely more so than the devastating remark that she levels at the hero in the original ending; and the same might be said for her final words, the

final words in fact of the revised ending, in which she expresses her grief and sympathy for Newman's lost love: "Poor, poor Claire!"[21]

Stafford decries the "neat, tidy sentimentality" of this ending,[22] but in fact the new conclusion is more complex than this. In his later novels, which precede his revision of The American, James explores both the formal advantages and the real but repressed costs of sentimental and romantic modes of perception; works like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove dramatize the human price at which beauty is bought, and at which psychic equilibrium is, through sentimental and romantic self-conceptions, tentatively achieved. This is the function of Mrs. Tristram's "sentimental" gesture in the revised ending to The American; she has not changed Newman, but she has allowed his need for vindication to be satisfied, at least until the novel comes to a close. Like the authorial delegate of the mature novels, Mrs. Tristram has learned the danger of lucidity.

Thus the "neatness" of the revised ending is an expression of James's recognition, arrived at in later novels, that the artist must depend on illusion and evasion to keep fully realized characters like Newman from spoiling his effect. Such characters have a tendency to "unsquare" themselves, to break with form, since that form is, like Mrs. Tristram's romantic conception, an ideal construct. This ideality is an attribute of which Newman's own vindication partakes as well; his revenge exists only in his imagination, and the satisfaction it affords him can easily be destroyed by truth. Thus Newman shares with Mrs. Tristram and with the novel itself the

desire for harmony which can only be answered by evasion and repression. James's willingness to let these illusions stand, and to let his delegates voice them with all the authority of the novelist himself, is what marks the crucial difference between the 1877 and the 1907 versions of The American, and between the early and the late novels in general.

But there is truth enough as well as illusion enough in both versions of The American. The James of 1907 has not gone soggily sentimental, but has merely heightened his romantic treatment in order to show more effectively the "rage for order"[23] that is intrinsic to the human consciousness as well as to the forms of art. Mrs. Tristram is not as fully realized a character as later romantic surrogates like Ralph Touchett and Lambert Strether, but the impulses she represents are authentic. Her behavior towards Newman in the revised ending answers his rage for order, his need for peace; thus she solves by proxy (as do later delegates like Merton Densher and Maggie Verver) the author's own problems of form and content by allowing the protagonist to achieve at the expense of truth an inner harmony which covers the novel's conclusion.

Yet, this would be shallow if there were not some hint that this harmony is a qualified one; it takes too much effort, and affronts too many truths, to represent a total integration of content and form, of experience and desire. Accordingly, Mrs. Tristram's final allusion is to one of form's sacrificial victims. Her final reference to Claire hints at the hidden cost both of her vision and of Newman's; Claire is a casualty of both, and Mrs.

Tristram's sentimental ejaculation approaches this truth without actually facing it. It is as close as she, or Newman, dare come to a recognition of what their romance has cost others; thus the revised ending, far from being sweetly sentimental, imitates the conclusions of James's great novels, appearing placid only to hide a darker truth.

NOTES

[1]The Conquest of London: 1870-1881, Vol. II of Henry James (New York: Discus, 1978), p. 247.

[2]The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 344. Hereafter cited in the text as AN.

[3]Introduction, The Princess Casamassima, by Henry James (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1948); rpt. in The Liberal Imagination (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 63.

[4]Trilling, p. 62.

[5]Henry James, The American, ed. Joseph Warren Beach (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1949), p. 3. All references are to this edition, which follows the text of 1877, unless otherwise indicated.

[6]Charles Thomas Samuels, The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 46.

[7]The Comic Sense of Henry James (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 12.

[8]In The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

[9]"The Gospel According to Christopher Newman," Studies in American Fiction, 3 (1975), 86-87.

[10]Wilson, 36.

[11]"A Flaw in The American," College Language Association Journal, 9 (1968), 249-50.

[12]Samuels, p. 47.

[13]The Novels of Henry James (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1961), p. 51.

[14]Poirier, p. 94.

[15]Ward, p. 43.

[16]George Knox, "Romance and Fable in Henry James's The American," Anglia, 83 (1965), 312, 320.

[17]"The Ending of James's The American: A Defense of the Early Version," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 18 (1963), 88.

[18]"Christopher Newman's Final Instinct," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 12 (1957), 88.

[19]Zietlow, 253.

[20]Henry James, The American, Volume II of The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 539. Cited hereafter as NY.

[21]NY, p. 540.

[22]Stafford, 89.

[23]This is Austin Warren's phrase, from the title of his book Rage for Order (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959). Cited in Chapter VI of this study.

CHAPTER III

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

In Chapter 19 of The Portrait of a Lady, Isabel Archer and Madame Merle have a brief conversation which will serve as the keynote for our discussion of this novel. "My clothes," Isabel complains, "express the dress-maker, but they don't express me." To this, Madame Merle slyly replies: "Should you prefer to go without them?"[1] Brief as this exchange is, it reveals something of consequence which Madame Merle understands but Isabel does not. That something is the necessity, for practical purposes, of expressing oneself to others through a code or a system of conventions which is a symbolic extension but a literal concealment of one's actual self. Clothing--or any symbolic code--is a troping of the very thing it proposes to express; it necessarily exaggerates some features and effaces others, with the purpose of producing an identifiable and accessible public phenomenon. Regardless of one's actual identity, the "figuring forth" of the self is determined by the givens of the available conventions--be they sartorial or linguistic--and by the skill and vision of those whose province it is to ply the medium: the dressmaker, the painter, the biographer.

One has now a glimmering sense of Isabel's motive in her refusals of Goodwood's and Warburton's proposals of marriage. Warburton's suit in particular is an attractive one, but both

express their authors rather than Isabel; both, in Isabel's mind, would require submergence of her identity in theirs, and would preclude her being the author of her own destiny, of having "an orbit of her own" (p. 95). I shall return to this issue for further discussion; but it seems essential first to consider whether Isabel does not, in fact, also reject the suit of her creator, Henry James, who proposes to make of her the portrait of "a young woman affronting her destiny."[2]

The suggestion that a character might be capable of transgression against his creator is not at all as outrageous as it might seem at first glance. E. M. Forster has discussed this phenomenon at some length, and suggested that it is a problem endemic to the novel form. "The characters arrive when evoked," Forster says, "but full of the spirit of mutiny. For they have numerous parallels with people like ourselves, they try to live their own lives and are consequently engaged in treason against the main scheme of the book."[3] This is precisely the point served by my analysis of Christopher Newman, the problematical hero of The American; though James intended him as a romantic hero, capable of moral growth and insight, Newman proved particularly resistant to this plan, and remained largely unimproved and uninstructed by what should have been an elevating and enlightening experience. I shall argue that Isabel Archer is similarly at odds with her role in The Portrait of a Lady; she, like Newman, is endowed with a nature too complete, too humanly complex, to fulfill the representative and aesthetic functions James requires of her. The nature of James's problem in both these novels,

and with both these protagonists, may best be expressed by returning to the clothing metaphor: such characters insist on expressing themselves rather than the dress-maker, who then has the choice of either allowing them to spoil his effect or sewing exclusively for mannequins.

James's description of his method in The Portrait is revealing in the context of this metaphor. Though the image he uses is that of house-building rather than dress-making, his "organizing an ado" about Isabel has nevertheless the character of erecting an artifice about her so that she might be displayed to the reader; this "house," the novel itself, "had to be put up around my young woman while she stood there in perfect isolation" (AN, p. 48). But, though James places Isabel at the center of this architectural enterprise, the resulting edifice is, like Warburton's and Goodwood's proposals, made to express and gratify the author more than his subject. His is the process of "logical accretion" by which "the mere slim shade of an intelligent but presumptuous girl" becomes "endowed with the high attributes of a subject" (AN, p. 48).

There is, of course, nothing extraordinary in this; after all, it is the author's province to fashion a "subject" and, ultimately, a novel out of the raw materials of his experience and his imagination. But in The Portrait this activity is not exclusively the author's; it is mirrored in many of the characters who surround his heroine. Ralph and his mother discuss at length the question of "doing" something with Isabel (pp. 41-42), just as Madame Merle and Osmond conspire, with quite different ends in sight, to script her destiny;

like the suitors Warburton and Goodwood, all these persons are engaged in the question of what might be "done" with Isabel, and all are guilty to some extent of misreading her character. In this context, it seems that one is invited to judge whether the "organized ado" which the author supplies Isabel is any more congenial to her nature than those of his created rivals; for in the end James's activity is not so dissimilar from those of his characters. All are trying to fashion a "part" for Isabel which may or may not be congruent with her nature.

I have alluded to the fact that in The Portrait consciousnesses other than the author's are concerned with the questions of "what to do" with Isabel; but, primarily and precisely, in what form does James himself attempt to represent her to the reader? His purpose in this respect is dual: he wants to display his "vivid individual" for the reader in all her internal complexities; yet at the same time he wants to transform this "sense of a single character" (AN, p. 42) into the "subject" of a novel. There is a division of concerns here--who Isabel is as distinguished from what might be done with her--which is mirrored in the division of James's treatment of his subject into two narrative strands. First, he supplies direct psychological analysis of Isabel, which is devoted purely to the exposition of her inner thoughts, desires, and conflicts and is largely non-judgmental; and second, he supplies evaluative rhetoric--the "house" with which he spoke of surrounding Isabel--consisting of metaphors, allusions, plot devices, and direct appeals to the reader. The first strand establishes Isabel's credibility as a "realistic"

character, a fully imagined human being whose behavior invites analysis and understanding in real psychological terms, and is mainly presentational; the second strand determines Isabel's representative and aesthetic functions, and is mainly interpretive, designed to elicit sympathy and admiration for the protagonist.

Ora Segal usefully distinguishes between these representational and evaluative functions by saying there are two attitudes towards Isabel in the prose of The Portrait; he perceives an "authorial narrator" whose "tone is somewhat more critical and less enthusiastic" than that of the second, the "observer" (an attitude embodied in the adoring Ralph Touchett but not confined to that character's observations), who actively takes up the task of sympathetic apology.[4] Segal notes that the "authorial narrator" also is "tenderly appreciative of the heroine's basically fine nature," but this is so only in a passive way; the exposition of Isabel's inner life merely effaces those details that might encourage a premature criticism of Isabel. At least in the beginning, the reader is spared those particulars of her behavior "such as a biographer interested in perserving the dignity of his heroine must shrink from specifying" (p. 47). The questions which Segal leaves unresolved, however, are whether both of these perspectives describe the same Isabel, and if not, whether the two Isabels they describe are reconcilable to each other. I shall argue that the two perspectives produce views which cannot be reconciled, and that the presentation of Isabel by what Segal calls the "authorial narrator" is in its particulars and its implications

corrosive to the vision of her that the evaluative rhetoric urges.

To understand how this is so, and what significance it has for The Portrait of a Lady as a whole, first it will be necessary to characterize the direction in which the evaluative rhetoric guides the reader. As in The American, James in The Portrait gives his protagonist a name which evokes immediate associations with Romance and mythic prototypes. As Oscar Cargill has suggested,[5] the name "Archer" suggests Isabel's affinities with Artemis, goddess of the hunt; as the patroness of "unmarried girls and of chastity,"[6] and as sister of Apollo, the god of fine arts and poetry, Artemis is the Classical model to which Isabel's distaste for marriage and bookish predelictions allude. This implication is strengthened further by the way in which James describes the effects of Isabel's literary pursuits: "Her reputation for reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic" (p. 33). Other elevating rhetoric attends her, such as the images of flight which Ralph's vision conjures (p. 318) and the scene late in the novel in which she is apotheosized as the Madonna herself (p. 433). In sum, the reader is invited to understand Isabel as strange, special, and of a finer grain than the rest of the vulgar world. Her afflictions derive from her own exceptional qualities.

That James intended this view unironically there can be no doubt; in his notebooks, he characterizes Isabel's differences with Osmond as "the open opposition of a noble character and a narrow one"; she is a "poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness" and

"finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional."[7] To note, as Segal does, that Ralph Touchett ultimately becomes the novel's main spokesperson for this view does not significantly complicate the impression one receives of Isabel; but the fact, revealed in the authorial analysis, that Isabel shares in this exalted view of herself is a crucial and troublesome issue, and one which I shall shortly address.

The Portrait has in common with The American a structural motif which reveals further the ennobling context in which Isabel is to be seen. Her history reiterates the theme, present in The American, of the innocent person who, though disillusioned and wronged, demonstrates nobility and consistency of moral resolve in the face of an adverse, even consuming, fate. Isabel, like Newman, is forced by circumstance to renounce a thwarted personal ambition and to find comfort and justification in an admitted defeat. More to the point, however, Isabel and Newman both follow the path of the Grail seekers of Romance, whose quest for the transcendent artifact leads them through purifying adversity to ultimate union with the sublime. This is in fact the pattern defined by the over-arching sequence of events in both novels, from their respective innocents' voyage forth into the Otherworld (Europe) through their dispiriting travails and reflective idylls (Isabel retreats to the flowered walls of Gardencourt, Newman to America), to their return for their final renunciatory "triumphs." The Grail Quest motif is evoked with special intensity in the case of Isabel; her rejection of the "vulgar" and "conventional," her celibate predelictions, and

her romanticization of suffering all underscore the symbolic affinity of her own ordeal with the spiritual and ascetic rigors endured by Perceval and similar heroes of Romance.

Richard Chase has observed James's "conscious assimilation of romance into the novelistic substance of The Portrait,"[8] noting that Isabel is engaged in a "romance of the self" which "requires that self-fulfillment shall take place only at a high level of abstraction."[9] Correctly, Chase says that the aura of romance is invoked by Isabel's exalted sense of her own destiny; but he speaks of James's direct authorial evocation of romance as if it were superadded, a metaphorical "enrichment" of the novel which, like some aesthetic vitamin, fortifies the grain of the work without disturbing its essential form. He either neglects the evaluative rhetoric of the work (apart from those fortifying metaphors) or considers them as direct extensions of Isabel's consciousness, which is, he says, "to a considerable extent our point of view as we read. Isabel tends to see things as a romancer does, whereas the author sees things with the firmer, more comprehensive, and more disillusioned vision of the novelist."[10]

As Paul Smyth has observed in his own excellent dissertation on James, Chase cannot be correct in so limiting James's involvement in the romantic components of his tale;[11] for, James's claim of having made Isabel the "centre" of his novel notwithstanding, she is revealed to the reader via the intercession of a largely omniscient narrator,[12] whose consciousness guides both the romantic and the novelistic impulses of the work. The "enrichment" Chase speaks of

is achieved through a total synthesis of the author's literary powers, from the immediate context of metaphor and allusion to the overarching form of the novel's architecture.

As my discussion of Segal has established, there are indeed two voices, two "treatments" of Isabel in The Portrait; but both ultimately belong to James. Their relation is not hierarchical, as Chase and others imply, but dialectical; the "objective" authorial voice is not given credence at the expense of the "romantic" assessment (which Isabel as a character shares in, but for which she is hardly the novel's exclusive agent). Rather, both voices are endowed with equal strength and authority, and their task is to negotiate a final balance, a harmonization, of the impulses they represent.

The ending of the novel represents, of course, the conclusion of this dialectical process; and if the novel is to be seen as having any formal coherence, a harmonization of these opposing terms must be achieved. Critics interested in demonstrating the total integrity of The Portrait have employed a number of paradigms to bring the novel whole, ranging from the Biblical prototype of the Fortunate Fall to the more recent, but structurally similar, Novel of Education as practiced by Jane Austen in such works as Emma. Whether treating Isabel's downfall as a fall from grace or from mere innocence, these paradigms resolve the tensions between the real and the romanticized views of Isabel by justifying her at the novel's conclusion. Chastened by the recognition either of her sin or of her folly, Isabel is glimpsed finally in a state of moral ascendancy, with

powers of mature discrimination and inner fortitude. Philip Rahv, speaking of the novel's conclusion, describes Isabel's case as involving "a principle of growth which is not to be completely grasped until she has assumed her final shape";[13] Lyall Powers has asserted that "the career of Isabel Archer has the completeness of form of the familiar pattern of redemption, of the fortunate fall,"[14] an idea he shares with Dorothea Krook[15] and Dorothy Van Ghent, who claims that Isabel finds "in the ruin where Pansy has been left . . . a crevice in which to grow straightly and freshly," "a fertilising, civilizing relationship between consciousness and circumstance."[16] Other noteworthy critics, particularly R. P. Blackmur and Richard Poirier, have voiced more complicated, but essentially similar formulations of the work, but they all have in common the same purpose: to achieve an interpretation in which Isabel's character is finally transformed and elevated to a condition consistent with the glorifying rhetoric that has been lavished on her (perhaps unduly) throughout the progress of her history.

Given the patterns of evaluation outlined above, it seems apparent that to suggest such an interpretation was James's conscious intent; but, as Maxwell Geismar notes, it is characteristic of James "to project a series of figures, situations, and relations which are often directly opposed to, in flat contradiction to, the conscious purposes of his craft."[17] Isabel Archer, in her fully realized and complex humanity, is just one such contradictory projection. As with Christopher Newman in The American, the analysis of her character, explicit in the narrator's forays into the depths

of her consciousness and implicit in her behavior, reveals a confused and disturbed young woman for whom the question of growth and maturity, even at the novel's conclusion, remains problematical. Again, as in The American, the issue of the work's coherence centers on the principal character; one must settle the question of whether in that character any positive change has occurred. In the context of the novel as a whole, with the elevating rhetoric and redemptive structure of the story as givens, this question takes another form: one must resolve whether the evaluative material of the novel reflects a transformation that has in fact occurred, or whether it provides an ironic counterpoint to the ongoing absence of such a change in the character. I shall argue that in The Portrait of a Lady neither relationship holds, and that both possibilities are effaced; but first it will be necessary to focus on the actual Isabel and suppress for a time the consideration of the rhetoric in which she has been clothed.

The character of Isabel Archer is so richly endowed with the vitality and complexity of "felt life" that she has attracted a long list of critical suitors, each, like Warburton and Goodwood, with a proposed "reading" of her to put forward. Nina Baym has aptly summed up the tone of the criticism which focuses on Isabel's character; it is, says Baym, "antagonistic towards her, stressing her self-righteousness, ignorance, and conceit, or her sexual coldness, inhibition, and general fear of life."[18] Though many of these critics have, I think, accurately perceived aspects of Isabel's character, Baym is also correct in discerning their judgmental tone, which has about it much of the resentment shown someone who is

discovered to be undeserving of the indulgence of a generous and amiable benefactor. For them, James is indeed generous, if not ironical, with his glorifying rhetoric, and his own commentary on Isabel seems generally to have been dismissed as of secondary importance in the furor over his heroine's psychological defects.

Joan Bobbitt, for example, interprets Isabel's "innocence" and her embrace of suffering as masks for an intense moral conceit;[19] the issue of Isabel's egoism is explored further by John Halperin in his excellent study of The Portrait as a Victorian novel,[20] and J. M. Newton attacks James for "not identifying Isabel's ambitious imagination or idealism as the disease that it is."[21] There is in the criticism alluded to by Baym an alternate strategy for demythifying Isabel; adherents of this second approach attack Isabel for her fear of sexuality rather than for her pumped-up ego. Stephen Reid attributes her "moral scrupulousness" to her "fear of the Phallic man," Caspar Goodwood;[22] William Bysshe Stein sees her as a character whose emblematic impulse is "her refusal to acknowledge her own sexuality";[23] and Seymour Kleinberg describes her "failure" to renounce her bloodless aestheticism in favor of the possibility of "sexually viable relationships."[24]

All these views are useful and accurate to some degree, and one is thankful for them; but in many cases the psychic dissection proceeds to such extremes that it becomes difficult to return Isabel, in her integral fullness as an imagined human being, to the context of the novel from which she has been removed. In the end, one must recognize that it is not the apparatus of psychological analysis

itself that makes these critiques seem blunt and insensitive, but the tone and emphasis with which that apparatus is applied. One may profit by their insights, even cite them for support (as I shall do occasionally in my own treatment of Isabel), while questioning the efficacy of their emphasis.

As with my treatment of Christopher Newman, I shall begin my analysis of Isabel by identifying an incident early in the novel which is a germinal model for her behavior throughout the course of her history. James, speaking of Isabel's childhood, tells of an establishment across the street from Isabel's grandmother's, "a primary school for children of both sexes" (p. 23). Isabel, "having spent a single day in it . . . had expressed a great disgust with the place, and had been allowed to stay home." James's sparing use of details in this scene begs explanation of the vehemence he attributes to Isabel's distaste for the place; and through those details which James provides one sees in Isabel's retreat the germinal form of her later prejudices and predelictions. Because the school is coeducational, there is the threat of intimacy with what Isabel will later characterize as "coarse-minded person[s] of another sex" (p. 50); and the sound of "childish voices repeating the multiplication table" is rife with associations later abhorrent to Isabel. "Childish," as distinguished from "childlike," has the connotation of immaturity, triviality, and dependence; and the methods of rote learning and unison recitation can hardly be appealing to a child, who like Isabel, has had both her imagination and her pride deeply indulged. In total, the scene at the Dutch House evokes the commonness, conformity,

dullness, and threat of male domination which Isabel later experiences as part of her abhorrence of the "conventional."

And yet, in her escape from this mean environment, Isabel feels not only the "elation of liberty," but the "pain of exclusion" as well. The voices that emanate from the school and reach Isabel in the solitary darkness of her aunt's study are, however vulgar, the sounds of life, the hum of society; and for one who, as James says, "carried within herself a great fund of life" (p. 33), the separation from others, and from opportunity, represents a basic denial of self. This paradox is brought to full flower as Isabel becomes older, and inescapably torn between her conviction that the world is too base to be dabbled in, and her crying need to dabble, to "find some happy work to one's hand" (p. 49).

Thus James provides in emblematic form the pattern of behavior which will rule Isabel throughout the novel: the deepening isolation of self, the retreat from real society and real males; the rejection of authority, particularly in an instructive role; and, simultaneously, the repressed longing for participation in the very situations from which she has separated herself. This would be paradoxical were it not for the fact that these opposite impulses are, simply, expressive of contradictory needs of Isabel's pride, which on one hand tells her that she is special and apart, and on the other hand desires the opportunity to gain love and approbation, which must be sought in the very quarter to which she is exceptional. Isabel may believe herself to be perfect (or at the very least

perfectible); but, as James observes, the "desire to think well of herself needed to be supported by proof" (p. 62).

But, like most proud people, Isabel is able to repress her sense of an objective less by converting it into a perceived gain which enhances her image of herself, so long as those repressed needs are kept in abeyance. By the time the action of the novel begins, her isolation and loneliness have been converted into personal imperatives of independence and freedom, and her uncorrected self-education has become, to her own mind, the progress of her native instinct towards a realization of the good and the beautiful. These ideals of self-determination and self-correction are held to with a vehemence sufficient to stifle the urgings of her repressed needs; and on the underside of these personal affirmations is the debasement, in her own mind, of those needs which she has not been able to countenance. The rejected elements of her own experience grow uglier, even as her gratified claims for self-determination are elevated to personal glories. What she spurns, she derogates, and her initial pain of separation is eventually ameliorated by her compulsive belief in the inferiority and inefficacy of that which she has given up.

But these derogated needs are not erased; they are only submerged, and she must constantly be on guard against them. This need for perpetual vigilance leads to a suspicion of, and a contempt for, any inner impulses that might threaten her resolve or her control; she regards emotions as "profane," and deeply resents what she perceives as attempts by others, particularly Goodwood, to

extort from her any sense of emotional obligation. She fears more than anything else the disordering sensation of guilt which comes from "inflicting a sensible injury upon another person"; the mere possibility of such an "error in feeling" on her part "caused her at moments to hold her breath" (p. 48). This strategy of repression leads Isabel to the edge of further self-contradiction: she must at once be supremely sensitive to the feelings of others, but allow no untoward emotions of her own to come to the surface; to remain true to her self-image, which embraces liberty and abhors liability, she must simultaneously acknowledge and deflect the emotional demands of others.

But Isabel has a peculiar way of regarding experience which keeps many of these contradictions at bay. The reading she does in her grandmother's study represents an activity in which there is at least a provisional congruence of Isabel's divergent impulses. The experience and knowledge Isabel gains from books has the illusory feel of human intercourse, but represents experience refined and idealized, free of the discordant notes that are sounded when real life, with its "conventional" brutalization of the self, is directly and fully encountered. Isabel arrives at an intellectual appreciation of the significance of feelings in one's life, but her understanding is one which is aesthetically ordered and regulated; what she sees is not the depth of true feeling, but what she calls "the natural and reasonable emotions of life" (p. 106). When she tells Warburton she cannot be happy if she is separated from "what most people know and suffer" (p. 123), she is not referring to the disordering

afflictions of authentic grief, but to something more akin to the "disagreeable," which her reading has told her "was often a source of interest, and even of instruction" (p. 31). By so distancing and abstracting the turmoil of emotion, Isabel's acquaintance with literature provides her with an easing of her conflicts; it responds to her repressed needs for contact with others and for participation in a social sphere--both of which are deeply desired, but too much of a threat to her precious "liberty" actually to be pursued. Like other readers, Isabel is instead able to enter an alternate society, an inner landscape whose atmosphere is purged of unwanted elements; in these surroundings she has become mistress of all she surveys, and other real human beings, like Caspar Goodwood or Aunt Lydia, are instinctively regarded as "intruders" (p. 24).

The result is that Isabel, in denying her need for others directly, has placed herself outside the necessary system of checks and balances which keep the subjective valuation of one's personal stock commensurate with its objective worth. Her view of herself is as idealized as the world of her books; James acknowledges that "Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem," and that "she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature" (p. 47); furthermore, "Her nature had for her own imagination a certain garden-like quality . . . which made her feel that introspection after all, was an exercise in the open air" (p. 50). As long as Isabel remains in her study with her books, she may contemplate her superior nature with total impunity; indeed, she has been allowed to do so for so long that it has become a habit. But

Isabel's pride is restless; she longs to show others her "fineness of organization," and Aunt Lydia's invitation to come to London provides an opportunity to gratify this wish.

But there are other forces at work in Isabel's acceptance of her aunt's offer. Like Christopher Newman's sudden urge to sail, Isabel's desire to "start anew" reflects an instinctive movement away from an intolerable conflict. Newman runs away to Europe because he cannot stand the thought of being a fool unavenged; similarly, Isabel is motivated by the desire to escape Caspar Goodwood, a young man whose qualities she respects intellectually but whose attentions towards herself are emotional torture. In both these cases the experience is one of intense disjunction between the image the character has of himself and the "reading" of him that is implicit in his situation; the threat Newman perceives is the disintegration of his basic moral tenet of "fair play," while Isabel recognizes in Goodwood a threat to her cherished "liberty" and "independence." Both seek to negate these situations of conflict by withdrawing themselves from the scene, and by seeking compensatory triumphs on a new field of battle. Furthermore, both of them are satisfied that their talents and discriminatory gifts, which have failed them once already, will be sufficient to the challenges of Europe.

That Newman has no imagination and Isabel a virtual overdose of it appears to make no difference in the structure of their fates; both are to be put "in a difficult position"--Newman by Mrs. Tristram, and Isabel by her own ambition to "have the pleasure of being as

heroic as the occasion demanded" (p. 48). The whole of Isabel's European experience, like the whole of Newman's, may be seen as an attempt simultaneously to escape a threat to one's self-image and to reinforce that image through the exercise of superior virtue. Finally, both characters are brought full circle to a fresh confrontation with their initial conflict; Newman faces once again the prospect of his blunted vindication, and Isabel the smothering embrace of Goodwood. The recapitulation of this conflict comprises the climactic moment in both these novels; but before discussing the conclusion to The Portrait of a Lady it will be necessary to examine the specific form taken by Isabel's European dream of glory.

Isabel Archer's compensatory ambition is the opposite of Newman's in that she seeks moral, and not empirical, enrichment. Her thirst for experience has a moral object--that of "getting a general impression of life," which is "necessary to prevent mistakes" (p. 50). As we have seen, "mistake" for Isabel means anything that makes one vulnerable to the tyranny of emotions or impairs one's freedom to choose; thus her "general impression of life" has the practical purpose of making her retreat from the emotional current of existence more orderly and controllable; the knowledge thus gained will prevent her own abandoned needs and the expressed needs of others from fogging the clarity of her decision. Then, her self-mastery assured, she will be securely and comfortably above the vulgar stream of life, and will be in a position to undertake her "difficult task" without psychic risk; she even muses that "she might make the unfortunate condition of others an object of special

attention" (pp. 50-51)--a thought that, paradoxically, has pride, and not charity, at its root.

This theme of bestowing oneself on the less fortunate is one which runs throughout Isabel's relationships with Warburton and Goodwood; and it is an essential filament in the web of complicity in which she is eventually "caught" by Osmond and Madame Merle. For reasons of pride it is impossible for Isabel to regard herself as "unfortunate"; it has been her habit of self-contemplation, as we have seen, to convert emotional and material deprivations (particularly those of a self-imposed nature) into perceived gains on a more abstract level. Thus Isabel sees herself, in the "fineness" of her organization, as being more fortunate than most, and her ambition and pride seek expression in the demonstration and disbursement of these gifts to an appreciative and hungry audience.

But it is necessary for this demonstration and disbursement to emanate from a position of strength; that is, Isabel can tolerate no implication that she needs others more than they need her, or that what they have to offer her is in any way greater than that which she herself has to give. This is particularly explicit in her rejection of Warburton; she feels she would not suit him not because her demands are too great, but because his are so small. "It is not what I ask," she tells him; "it is what I can give" (p. 100). This issue also impinges on her relationship with Goodwood; his very "magnificence" commands of her "a certain feeling of respect which she had never entertained for any one else" (p. 34). Isabel's sense of Goodwood's grand self-completeness leaves little room for

the exercise of her own imagination on him; like Warburton, he seems to her insufficiently needful, and insufficiently aware, of the very moral energies which she regards as her prize dowry.

There is another factor, perhaps more ascendant in Goodwood's case, which makes these lovers' suits so threatening to Isabel's sense of her own superiority and self-mastery. We have already seen how, in Isabel's mind (and, it would appear, in James's), terms like "liberty" and "independence" are code words for the strategies of detachment and avoidance by which she protects herself from emotional upheaval. The banishment of these emotional needs from conscious recognition is one of the principal achievements of her willed self-idealization, and one of its most integral. She feels "fortunate" and superior precisely because she has been able to keep her feelings under control, and has so avoided the tyranny of "profane emotions"; it is the achievement of this control, of "ardent impulse, kept in admirable order" (p. 163), which Isabel finds so "ideal" in Madame Merle.

But the possibility of these subjugated urges rising to demand satisfaction is one of Isabel's most constant fears.[25] She realizes that she has cooled her passions, but not extinguished them; James writes that "the deepest thing" in her soul is "a belief that if a certain light should dawn, she could give herself completely" (p. 50). Though the spectre of total emotional surrender is "too formidable to contemplate" (in the final chapter of the novel James makes it seem like death itself), Isabel is nevertheless shown to be aware of the insistent pressure of these repressed needs, and

of the tenuousness of her studied denial of them. Furthermore, this awareness goads her compulsive thirst to purge herself of these dangerous impulses, through the pursuit of abstract moral and aesthetic ideals. As long as her mind registers the muffled appeals of her denied emotions, Isabel will be painfully, fearfully cognizant that the fortress of her self-image is not yet secure; for this reason, men like Warburton and Goodwood are threatening in direct proportion to their potential for sparking emotional excitement in her, and their suits are regarded as "aggressions," "persecutions," "threats."

In Gilbert Osmond, one sees the negation of all that Isabel finds unacceptable in Goodwood and Warburton. He is peculiarly sexless and passive as a lover; he has neither the industry of the American nor the social attributes of the British lord; and, unlike either previous suitor, Osmond has the advantage of ambiguous form. He does not appear to Isabel to belong to any recognizable "type," and as a result his presence does not strike her as carrying with it the force of a "system" which might draw her out of her own orbit. Unlike the figural hardness and opacity of Goodwood and Warburton, Osmond's ambiguous form is plastic, translucent; he is, like his daughter, a "blank sheet" for Isabel's imagination to play upon; or, more accurately, Osmond is like a mirror, upon whose surface Isabel sees reflected the characteristics she associates with her own idealized image of herself. He seems to her a person of fine inner organization but meager external means, who has

nevertheless managed to reconcile a rich sensibility with material poverty. There could be no more perfect parallel to Isabel's sense of her own condition previous to her inheritance, as her glowing estimate of him indicates. James records Isabel's thought that she "had never met a person of so fine a grain" (p. 242), and that she has "a considerable sympathy for the success with which he had preserved his independence" (p. 246); when Osmond speaks confessionally of his "studied, wilful renunciation" (p. 245), he reflects back to Isabel the very strategy by which she has bargained for personal moral glory--the rejection as vulgar of that which she cannot have or which, for reasons of pride, she cannot accept. So Isabel's admiration of Osmond is not of the real, total man, whose "egoism," she later discovers, "lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers" (p. 396); rather, she worships a romanticized Osmond, an image created by the interplay of her imagination and his indeterminacy of type, and one which is much like the idealized image Isabel has of herself. It is on the basis of this perception that she forms a "fine theory" about Osmond, similar to her theory about herself, in which she sees "his very poverties dressed out as honours" (p. 321).

But even a prospective "soul mate" such as Osmond is not able to declare his love for Isabel without setting off her defensive alarms; though there is "an immense sweetness" in his announcement of love, "morally speaking, she retreated . . . as she had retreated in the two or three cases we know of in which the same words had been spoken" (pp. 286-87). For all the positive

values Osmond represents to Isabel, his declaration still resurrects the same conflicts between her emotional impulses and her intellectual censorship of her feelings: "What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread--the consciousness of what was in her own heart. It was terrible to have to surrender herself to that" (p. 287). As with Warburton's proposal, Isabel finds the promise of emotional satisfaction in Osmond's announcement, and recognizes the appeal to the heart that his words represent; but though she is able to entertain the image of such a declaration in the abstract, in the specific instance she pulls up short of acceding to its appeal: "That which had happened was something that for a week past her imagination had been going forward to meet; but here, when it came, she stopped--her imagination halted" (p. 289).

What eventually determines Isabel's decision to marry Osmond, then, is only partly in Osmond himself, and only partly in her need to disburse herself of the "burden" of her inheritance. In her decision there lurks the magnificent figure of Caspar Goodwood, whose prospective presence provided a shadowy motive for Isabel's initial acceptance of her Aunt Lydia's invitation to come to Europe. From the beginning, Isabel makes crucial decisions on the basis of her desire to escape this young man, who "had seemed to range himself on the side of her destiny, to the the stubbornest fact she knew" (pp. 106-7). Isabel's marriage to Osmond in large part is one such decision. It has become clear to Isabel that Goodwood, a man of infinite persistence and hope, will not desist

in his "persecution" of her until she is removed, by marriage to another, from eligibility for participation in the "destiny" which his love for her represents.

But it is important to recognize what features of this "destiny" Isabel is so determined to affront, and why it is necessary for her to go to the length of marrying Osmond to escape it. Goodwood, besides symbolizing the "phallic man,"[26] represents everything which Isabel has convinced herself she does not need--love, security, money; to accept him on these grounds, or even to admit the desirability of these attributes, would force Isabel to abandon the mask of the independent and unfettered self she has so laboriously created and maintained. Furthermore, Goodwood's "magnificence" extends beyond these rejected values to include crucial elements of Isabel's own value system--independence, industry, conviction, conscientiousness. In short, Goodwood's proposal represents to Isabel a situation in which even her best qualities would have a certain redundancy, serving only to magnify those aspects of Goodwood which they mirror. In Goodwood's embrace, she is forced to surrender the distinction of her own fine qualities, and at the same time recognize the reality of the emotional needs she has tried to deny in herself. The appeal of the "conventional" marriage he proposes is one in which male strength interfaces with female vulnerability; in this context, his sexual appeal is but a component of the total lure of the "conventional" which he represents for Isabel; to her, Goodwood is the embodiment of the entire complex of economic, social, intellectual, moral, and reproductive

bondage which is anathema to the strong but which keeps the weak and vulnerable singing in their chains. That Isabel believes herself (or wants herself) to be strong but is in fact vulnerable is what makes Goodwood so threatening.

Marriage with Osmond gives Isabel the security of a proprietary form--the wedding band--which makes Goodwood's claims impossible to gratify, and thus shields her from the temptation to surrender which he represents. Additionally, the facts of her own newfound wealth and Osmond's poverty reveal a situation in which her own relation to Goodwood is reversed; now the bonding of power and ideals is centered in her, so that Osmond becomes the vulnerable and dependent term of the equation. Her fortune gives her "importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty" (p. 207); she is now "magnificent" to Osmond, as Goodwood had once been magnificent to her. She is Osmond's "providence"; she reflects that "she loved him--a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him" (p. 393). Thus marriage to Osmond offers Isabel the prospect of giving from a position of strength while irrevocably voiding, <u>via</u> the exclusivity of the wedding bond, claims made upon her weakness by Caspar Goodwood.

Thus Isabel's marriage to Osmond is, like other of her decisions we have discussed, both an escape from conflict and a vindication of personal pride. Of course, Isabel wishes to be happy in her marriage, but its salient feature is the refuge it provides from those emotional appeals, always excited by Goodwood, which are too formidable for her to entertain safely. Her willingness

to turn herself into a portrait in Osmond's gallery is a denial of self and a virtual resignation from life, but it is part of a strategy of proud renunciation which Isabel has pursued throughout the course of her history. Her ensconcement in Osmond's dark web is the final brush-stroke in a painting that is, after all, a self-portrait; by becoming a work of art, she has finally removed herself from the stream of vulgar and profane emotions, and accomplished the detachment from reality that her aesthetic perspective in part worked to construct. It can be seen as early as her first intimate conversation with Warburton that her habit of seeing life as art was simply the imposition of a proprietary form with which she shielded herself from the emotional demands of others; and in her marriage to Osmond, that form becomes total. She hides behind her identity as his wife, using that mask to deflect the appeals of Goodwood, Warburton, and even Ralph; in urging her to leave Osmond's suffocating house and re-enter the stream of life, they fail to perceive that the desire to escape that very stream was her reason for marrying Osmond in the first place.

The souring of Isabel's marriage does not impinge in the least on its ability to protect her from the conflicts which Goodwood arouses in her; but the disintegration of her relationship with Osmond does frustrate the other need which she had hoped it would satisfy: her moral pride. What she originally had conceived of as her immensely beautiful generosity to Osmond has now been polluted by his expectation of her indulgence; she considers how "the knowledge of his expecting a thing raised a presumption against

it. It was as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favour a misfortune" (p. 391). Because of Osmond's presumption, Isabel is no longer able to give freely; and since she has put herself in a position in which her giving was to be all, she is unable to feel any pleasure in the generous impulse which that giving once represented. Furthermore, Osmond, rather than rejoicing in their oneness of spirit, has come to demand that identification of her impulse with his; she perceives now that her "real offence . . . was having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be attached to his--attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park" (p. 398). Where Isabel formerly had experienced her consciousness as a spacious bower, she now sees it as a narrow annex to Osmond's enclosure. She has become a mere extension of his ego--precisely the fate she feared with Goodwood and Warburton. Isabel wishes desperately to escape this oppressive situation; but she hesitates to seek respite outside it, because to do so would be to make her vulnerable to the very forces from which her marriage was to protect her. For this reason, she cannot risk admitting her unhappiness to Goodwood or Warburton, and she must find another shield, another proprietary form, which will cover her withdrawal from Osmond's tyranny.

Isabel finds such a form in her feelings of obligation towards her dying cousin, Ralph Touchett. Ralph comes to Rome in the terminal stages of his illness, and Isabel immediately seizes on his "little visit" as "a lamp in the darkness" (p. 400). Osmond resents Touchett's presence, recognizing in it a threat to his own control,

and disapproves of Isabel's ministry to her cousin; but his disapproval only exacerbates Isabel's sense of her husband's oppression, and makes the flouting of his displeasure all the more exhilerating: "he (Osmond) wished her to have no freedom of mind, and he knew perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom. It was just because he was this, Isabel said to herself, that it was a refreshment to go and see him" (p. 426). Isabel has found in Ralph a project with the dual purpose that has become characteristic of Isabel's behavior: it allows her to gratify her moral pride, by her conscious choice to minister to someone "less fortunate" than herself; and it provides her with relief (however temporary) from a situation in which her self-image is under severe attack.

But while Isabel takes pleasure in displeasing Osmond, she has no intention of openly defying him. This is because, paradoxically, the more unhappy he makes her, the more emotionally vulnerable she becomes; and the more vulnerable she becomes, the more she needs the protection of the marriage bond to prevent her from indulging the emotional needs she has long ago rejected as base and profane. For this reason, the more degenerate Isabel's marriage becomes in its particulars, the more ennobled it becomes for her in the abstract. She feels that going to Ralph in direct violation of Osmond's interdiction would be a horrible self-betrayal: "almost anything seemed preferable to repudiating the most serious act--the single most sacred act--of her life" (p. 426). When Ralph, dying in England, asks Isabel to execute her final

promise to attend his deathbed, Osmond responds with a categorical prohibition; and Isabel, though utterly committed to her promise, is torn between her need to be self-determining and her need to remain within the "magnificent form" which she has erected to keep herself from plunging into the dark abyss of her repudiated desires. She accepts Osmond's judgment out of fear; but "what she was afraid of was not her husband--his displeasure, his hatred, his revenge . . . it was simply the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain" (p. 498).

But the full revelation by the Countess of Madame Merle's and Osmond's duplicity is simply too much for Isabel to absorb directly; upon hearing the tale, Isabel retreats into a state of such extreme withdrawal that "she almost lost her sense of being personally touched by the story" (p. 503). Rather than plunge herself into the sordid emotions of anger and jealousy, Isabel removes herself from them, placing herself above--or beyond--the entire ugly situation; she allows herself the virtuous indulgence of pit for Madame Merle and Pansy, and seizes anew on her obligation to visit the dying Ralph. This last impulse appears both to the Countess and to the reader as a <u>non sequitur</u> in Isabel's behavior, but in fact it is perfectly consistent with her past responses to intolerable conflict. The project of visiting Ralph offers both an escape and a moral mission; it is Isabel's only available strategy for quelling the feelings of rage and self-loathing that the Countess's remarks must surely arouse.

In the narration of Isabel's flight to England, James brings the full force of his evaluative rhetoric to bear on the issue of her moral growth. First of all, he has Isabel returning to Gardencourt, the scene of her past innocence; now her "richly constituted refuge" (p. 516), it has become a pastoral retreat, which in its romance prototype represents an inward journeying and self-discovery. That Isabel's mind has been described throughout the novel as having a "garden-like" quality underscores the symbolic use James makes of her present destination. Furthermore, Isabel's meditations in the railway carriage trace her inner descent through pain and regret to a thirst for death, but conclude with a qualified affirmation of her will to survive; she has the "sense that life would be her business for a long time to come" (p. 517). One senses from this passage that Isabel is symbolically dying and being reborn, and that her blind but ingenuous innocence is finally giving way to enlightenment and acceptance of the realities of life.

At Gardencourt, two events occur which underscore these rhetorical indications of moral growth and regeneration in Isabel. First, there is Ralph's death, which appears to be a true emotional watershed. In the deathbed scene, Isabel seems drawn into a full awareness of, and immersion in, the ebb and flow of life; "There is nothing makes us feel so alive as to see others die," Ralph tells her, and Isabel, deeply moved, "feels a passionate need to cry out and accuse herself, to let sorrow possess her" (p. 530). This appears to be a genuine moment of guilt and contrition, in which Isabel realizes her sins and resolves against repeating them; it

has the quality of a confessional scene, in which all is forgiven and grace is restored. This movement towards knowledge and grace is capped by Isabel's vision, on the morning following Ralph's death, of the ghost of Gardencourt--an event which, we are to assume, indicates that Isabel has suffered enough, and which marks her full transformation into a mature but tragically aware individual.[27]

Throughout this sequence, which begins with Isabel leaving Rome and Osmond, James is lavish with his imagery of redemption and enlightenment; and, were one to glimpse Isabel's dark passage exclusively in the illumination of James's rhetorical flourishes, one might be convinced that such a transformation were actually taking place. The critical tone of the authorial narrator, so strong at the beginning of the novel, has now yielded to the voice of the apologist or, in Segal's terms, the "observer," whose tone is almost totally sympathetic. But a shift in the pitch of the rhetoric does not necessarily indicate a shift in Isabel's character; in fact, one searches her actions in vain for evidence of the new strength and self-knowledge and the newly ennobled nature that the rhetoric assures one is there.

Her growth is in fact an illusion, an aesthetic trope which, though pleasant, nevertheless effaces Isabel's continuing conflicts. Those conflicts remain, as does her inability to deal with them. Even as she mourns Ralph, her guilt and anxiety at having violated the cold security of her wedding bond begins to afflict her, and she finds herself seeking a rationale for staying on at Gardencourt: "She said to herself that it was but a common charity to stay with

her aunt. It was fortunate that she had so good a formula; otherwise she might have been greatly in want of one" (p. 535). She is unable to admit to herself that she came to England of her own free will, preferring to think of it as an insane impulse for which she is not fully responsible: "her coming had not been a decision . . . she had simply started" (p. 535). Yet in spite of this guilt she feels "a spiritual shudder" every time she thinks of Rome and Osmond. In short, she feels guilty for having come to England, but dread at the contemplation of returning to her husband. This is not the attitude of a strengthened and purged individual; it is a reassertion of Isabel's old conflicts, which derive from her need both for the liberty of independent action and for the security of protection from its emotional consequences. Her flight from Rome has not changed her situation, nor has Ralph's death; small wonder, then, that she experiences an acute paralysis of indecision, "postponing, closing her eyes, trying not to think" (p. 535). The only thing that keeps her at Gardencourt even now is the absence of any imminent threat to either term of this irreconcilable equation.

The reappearance of Goodwood, however, shakes Isabel from this uneasy equilibrium. He is more determined and self-assertive than ever, and more certain that he is just the thing for her; and Isabel's experience, rather than profoundly strengthening her, has made her profoundly vulnerable to his appeals. She allows herself to experience a taste of the exultation that might come with surrender to him: "she had never been loved before. It wrapped her about; it lifted her off her feet" (p. 543). Still, she clings to the shield

of her marriage bond in an attempt to keep from being totally swallowed up in the sea of her awakened emotional needs; she tells Goodwood that the motive behind the "ghastly form" of her marriage to Osmond was "To get away from you" (p. 543), and as Goodwood presses his suit James records that "she had an immense desire to appear to resist" (p. 544). This resistance expresses her stubborn obeisance to the proprietary form of her marriage; but it also indicates how abstracted from her true emotional needs this form is. Her need for the appearance of resistance shows that what she is clinging to is not the strength of her true self, but the protection of a mask.

But this tumult of emotion, "the confusion, the noise of waters," recedes, leaving her mind clear and emptied of the orgiastic emotions which she had been entertaining. She asks Goodwood to leave her alone, but he refuses to accept this request, instead embracing her with a passionate kiss and for the only time in the novel crossing the proprietary distance at which she has so constantly held him. His flare of passion is to Isabel "like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free" (p. 544). With this image, James makes it clear that Isabel's new firmness of purpose is not the expression of a will to "make life her business," but of its opposite; it is not the presence of light but the absence of it that allows her to see clearly. The road back to Osmond is thus a plunge into darkness, a retreat from Goodwood rather than an active acceptance of her lot in marriage. She cannot contemplate the orgiastic surrender which so imminently threatened in Goodwood's arms; she must escape it, purge herself of its sordid appeal--and

the "ghastly form" of her marriage offers now, as it did in the beginning, a place to flee to. The irony is that her coming to England was spurred by the same need that sends her back to Rome: the need to escape imminent and intolerable conflicts.

The language of passion that pulses through this final confrontation between Isabel and Goodwood has an erotic intensity like no other passage in the novel; but it represents an emotional climax, and not a thematic one. Isabel's response to Goodwood's extreme behavior is marked only by the degree of its violence and the suddenness of its reversal; otherwise, it is remarkably like her earlier flights from Goodwood's arms. Thus the concluding scene does not represent the moral apotheosis towards which the novel's tonal and structural features direct the reader's expectation. Our lengthy analysis of Isabel reveals in the end a troubled young woman whose conflicts have been exacerbated rather than resolved, and whose character resists the stylization of the author's redemptive rhetoric, even as he is putting his finishing touches on the portrait.

This is a problem to which James himself was not entirely insensitive; in his notebooks, he expresses an awareness that he has not followed Isabel to the full conclusion of her fate: "The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished . . . that I have left her <u>en l'air</u>." But, he adds, "The <u>whole</u> of anything is never told . . . What I have done has that unity--it groups together."[28] James reveals here his paradoxical sense that character, though revealed by discourse, is not contained by it; and that it is

possible for the discourse to have an aesthetic integrity which character, though escaping its form, does not rupture.

But this formulation does not hold in The Portrait of a Lady. As we have seen, Isabel does rupture its design, by remaining so stubbornly irredeemable. Or, taking an alternative view, one might say that the attitudes and purposes embodied in the narrative design itself are insufficient to do full justice to Isabel as a character. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator praises Isabel's noble instincts while chiding her vanity, and the rhetorics of plot and evaluation work towards the end of enhancing the former while correcting the latter. But, as our analysis of Isabel has shown, her noble and narcissistic impulses spring from the same root: her need to maintain a self-image in which she renounces and debases those needs which she can neither satisfy nor accept in herself. Thus one cannot temper her pride without damaging her noble ideals; the two are intertwined from their origins. For this reason, Isabel's supposed "enlightenment through suffering" yields real pain but not real self-knowledge. One catches in Isabel's battering by fate a hint of Claire de Cintré in The American, protesting her weakness as Newman insists on her strength of nobility. Neither character has the invulnerability to risk what the occasion demands of them; for both Isabel and Claire, the "difficult situation" is an impossible one.

Has James, then, misread his own creation in Isabel, or has he seen her clearly and done what he would with her in spite of his knowledge? This question returns one to a consideration of Isabel's

remark that her clothes express the dress-maker, but not herself. One sees in this statement James's awareness that art is both an enrichment and an effacement of the living matter which lends it its substance; James recognizes at once the claims of Isabel as a fully human creation, and the claims of art that something be "done" with her or "made" of her. The appeasement of these twin claims leads in James to what William Gass cites as "the high brutality of good intentions"; Gass says that "in The Portrait, as it is so often in (James's) other work, Isabel Archer becomes the unworked medium through which, like benevolent Svengali, the shapers and admirers of beautifully brought out persons express their artistry and themselves."[29]

This is the practice of the novel's internal manipulators, such as Madame Merle, Osmond, Ralph, and even Mrs. Touchett, all of whom are concerned with the question of what to "do" with Isabel; but it is also the concern of the author who, having created Isabel, must now find a way of putting her through her paces, when it is perfectly possible that she might be better off left alone, in the walled room in Albany. That James is aware of this "brutal" aspect of his art seems evident from his attempt to obscure his own responsibility for his character's "situation"; as Gass says, "He constantly endeavors to shift the obligation and the blame, if there be any, to another: his reflector, his reverberator, his sensitive gong."[30] Thus in The Portrait one sees, as with Mrs. Tristram in The American, figures who become architects of Isabel's fate while amplifying and extending James's own admiration of his protagonist. In short, James may be

the dress-maker, but it is his surrogates who, admiring the figure thus cut, invite Isabel to their ball.

The most insensitive and brutalizing invitation comes, of course, from Madame Merle, who does not "pretend to know what people are meant for," but "only what I can do with them" (p. 222); but more germane to the question of James's attitude is the treatment of Isabel by those who share in his admiration of her, and who work to realize their vision of her happiness, as Mrs. Tristram does for Newman in The American. In The Portrait, Mrs. Tristram's functional counterpart is Ralph Touchett, whom Ora Segal accurately calls the novel's "second center of consciousness";[31] throughout, Touchett's view of Isabel echoes that of the "sympathetic observer" in the narration itself, and it is the brutality of Ralph's own good intentions that is the moving force in Isabel's fate.

Like Mrs. Tristram, Ralph vicariously participates in the romantic experience of others. He is initially conscious of his cousin as "an entertainment of a high order" (p. 58); he tells Isabel that she has "brought romance" with her to "prosaic" Gardencourt (p. 44), and, adoring her "without the hope of a reward," he claims as his consolation the privilege at least of "spectatorship" at the "show" which her life has become for him (p. 137). But Ralph is not satisfied with mere spectatorship after awhile; Isabel's means are not sufficient for her to achieve the "magnificence" he envisions for her. So he becomes actively involved in her destiny by persuading his father to bestow half of his inheritance on Isabel. Ralph's motive is partly to do Isabel a service, to prevent her from

having to make a vulgar marriage for financial convenience; but primarily, he feels that the money will enhance the quality of the spectacle of Isabel's life, and thus increase the depth of his vicarious pleasure in it. When Mr. Touchett asks what advantage Ralph expects to gain from halving his inheritance with Isabel, Ralph responds that he "shall get just the good . . . of having gratified my imagination" (p. 172).

But Ralph, in tailoring his view of Isabel to the requirements of his own imagination, has tragically misread her. His simplistic statement that she is "as good as her best opportunities" is based on an uncritical admiration which does an injustice to Isabel's true nature, and to her true problems. Her fortune, rather than giving her the freedom to pursue her life according to her taste, presents her with the burden of a crushing weight she is only too eager to discharge. We have already seen how Isabel's "freedom" is a compensatory ideal, through which her narrowed worldly prospects have been transformed into a renunciatory moral glory; "freedom" means to her the right to refuse any claims on, or appeals to, the material and emotional needs she has repressed. In her inheritance, she is presented with a surfeit of the wealth she has given up as vulgar; rather than widening her horizon of opportunity, Isabel's fortune forces her to narrow her sights, seeking the best way in which to transform her gross assets into lofty spiritual achievement. Her sense of the moral responsibility which wealth imparts to her is incredibly heavy; she is "afraid of not doing right," and is always on guard against the temptation to satisfy some base urge with her

money. She tells Ralph that "one must always be thinking . . . I am not sure that it's not a greater happiness to be powerless" (p. 206).

She is telling Ralph that she is weak, and that her money has made her more fearful of her weakness, but Ralph will not admit such a defect in his ideal. He tells her that if indeed she is weak, he is "awfully sold" (p. 207), and in this response James turns a clever pun. Ralph is sold, but Isabel is by the same token made "saleable" by virtue of the money he has bestowed on her; he has turned her into a valuable commodity, though one impatient to dispose of the very attributes that establish her worth. Isabel's need to do something morally beautiful with her newfound wealth dovetails with Madame Merle's mercenary instincts to produce, quite apart from Ralph's intention but quite consistent with James's, the "difficult situation" in which Isabel is to demonstrate her full noble and tragic potential.

When Isabel announces her engagement to Osmond, Ralph cannot imagine what has gone wrong; his script has veered off course, his heroine soiled by some foul earthly touch. He had envisioned her "soaring far up in the blue . . . sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men," but now he sees her felled, by "a missile that never should have reached you. It hurts me . . . as if I had fallen myself" (p. 318). Isabel's failure to pursue the destiny Ralph had designed for her is a personal failure for Ralph himself; the happy liberty which was to have flowed from his intention has somehow failed to take hold in Isabel, and his beautiful vision of her, along with the pleasure he hoped to take in it, is in danger of

extinction. But Ralph is not entirely wrong in being troubled by her engagement to Osmond, and his words have the ring of a partial dramatic truth: Isabel is making a mistake. What Ralph does not realize, though, and what the tone of this passage and others like it does not reveal, is that Isabel's decision to marry Osmond, though objectively bad and dramatically tragic, is nevertheless subjectively necessary for her.

Thus Ralph becomes the figure in The Portrait in which the intertwined nobility and inefficacy of romantic idealization may be most clearly seen. Though one does not, as Segal and others suggest, see Isabel primarily through Ralph's eyes, in the latter phases of the novel Isabel is treated with a sympathetic perspective that is consonant with, but not limited to, Ralph's point of view. The result of this technique is that crucial scenes involving Touchett or the influence of his sensibility on Isabel have an intensity and consistency of tone which allows them to dominate the closing chapters of the novel; such scenes have a prominence and an emotive power which almost convinces one that Ralph is, as his name suggests, the touchstone of Isabel's character and the agent of her full and final self-discovery. Unfortunately, Isabel betrays Ralph's intentions as she betrays James's. "You wanted to look at life for yourself--but you were not allowed," he tells her on his deathbed, "you were punished for your wish" (p. 531). Ralph believes that Isabel has been strengthened, "made alive," by the sight of his own dying; but, as we have seen, it takes only the appearance of Goodwood to show that a dying man's words may be as mistaken as they are sincere.

So James reaches the ending of his tale with his chief "reflector" departed and his heroine, Isabel, like her predecessor Christopher Newman, entangled in the same inner conflicts that her experience was to teach her to overcome. What is remarkable about the closing chapters of The Portrait is, as Charles Samuels has observed,[32] the consistency with which James allows Isabel's behavior to reveal her conflicts, even as his commentary works to present a case for her moral growth and self-enlightenment. But in the end the rhetoric must be seen as indicative of a redemption effaced rather than achieved. It is a beautiful plan frustrated, like Ralph's dream of "putting wind in her sails," or Isabel's own vision of a marriage which would lead her "to the high place of happiness, from which . . . one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage" (p. 391).

Given this failure, this frustration of the redemptive process which Isabel effects, James has to find a way of salvaging his ending, of "rounding off" his story. His situation, as we have seen, is similar to that which he encountered in The American; faced with an unregenerate hero, he was content to let others (specifically Mrs. Tristram) finish the tale, and thus avoid direct commentary on the novel's closing state of affairs. The narrator, for his part, retired to the sidelines, allowing himself to view Newman only from the outside, and relinquished his powers of inner analysis in order to end the novel on a muffled, if discordant, note. In The Portrait, this strategy is radicalized; Isabel is totally removed from the reader's--and the narrator's--horizon, and her remarkable decision to

return to Osmond is left unexplained. The result is that Isabel's behavior is rendered enigmatic rather than shown to be consistent with her earlier patterns of impulsive behavior. This shift in point of view can also be construed, as Segal observes, as emphasizing "the growth of the heroine's tragic stature and her moral isolation."[33] But this is not a discriminable intention of James's, and is in fact made possible only by the indeterminacy of evaluation which results from the lack of narrative commentary. The effect in the end is a mere adjustment of the perspective from which Isabel is seen, a shifting of the light which imparts an illusory shine to the finishing touches of the portrait.

Thus the impulses of aesthetic intention and realistic presentation are never resolved in The Portrait, just as they are left dangling in The American. But in this novel James has insinuated his artistic material more deeply into the fabric of the representation itself, by articulating it through the consciousness of a character like Ralph Touchett, who is not a trope like Mr. Tristram, but has the status of a fully imagined human being, comparable in his complexity to the heroine herself. But to the degree that James himself shares in Touchett's view of Isabel and in the brutality of Ralph's intentions towards her, he must acknowledge the hard lesson of Ralph's own failure: that the dress-maker may make his model wear his costume, but he cannot make her become it; sooner or later the ball must end, and the illusion must be spoiled.

NOTES

[1]Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 187. All references are to this edition, which follows the 1881 text.

[2]James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 48. Hereafter cited in the text as AN.

[3]Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1927), p. 102.

[4]The Lucid Reflector (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 39.

[5]The Novels of Henry James (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 85.

[6]J. E. Zimmerman, Dictionary of Classical Mythology (New York: Harber and Row, 1964), p. 26.

[7]James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Burdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 15.

[8]The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N. J.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 119.

[9]Chase, p. 132.

[10]Chase, p. 119.

[11]"Gothic Influences in Henry James's Major Fiction," Diss. Michigan State University 1980, pp. 130-31.

[12]Leon Edel is the most prominent proponent of the idea that the narrator of The Portrait is "omniscient." I essentially agree with his point, but with qualifications. In his Introduction, The Portrait of a Lady, by Henry James (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. xvi.

[13]Image and Idea (New York: New Directions, 1957), p. 51.

[14]"The Portrait of a Lady: 'The Eternal Mystery of Things,'" Nineteenth Century Fiction, 14 (1959), 155.

[15]The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 26-61, 357-69.

[16]The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1953), p. 228.

[17]Henry James and the Jacobites (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 47.

[18]"Revision and Thematic Change in The Portrait of a Lady," Modern Fiction Studies, 22 (1976), 184n.

[19]"Aggressive Innocence in The Portrait of a Lady," Massachusetts Studies in English, 4 (1972), 31-37.

[20]Egoism and Self-Discovery in the Victorian Novel (New York: Burt Franklin, 1974), pp. 247-76.

[21]"Isabel Archer's Disease and Henry James's," Cambridge Quarterly, 2 (1967), 3-22.

[22]"Moral Passion in The Portrait of a Lady and The Spoils of Poynton," Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (1966), 7-23.

[23]"The Portrait of a Lady: Vis Inertiae," Western Humanities Review, 13 (1959), 177-90.

[24]"Ambiguity and Ambivalence: The Psychology of Sexuality in Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady," Markham Review, [1] (1969), 2-7.

[25]A number of critics have dealt usefully with the issue of Isabel's "fear." Most pertinent is Tony Tanner, in "The Fearful Self: Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady," Critical Quarterly, 7 (1965), 205-19.

[26]See Reid, p. 25.

[27]A number of critics have asserted that Isabel's story has a "tragic" dimension. Although the plot and the rhetoric of the novel derive more from romance than from tragedy, the ambivalent emotions one feels at the end of The Portrait may be construed as catharsis. A useful study of Isabel's "tragedy" is John Roland Dove's "Tragic Consciousness in Isabel Archer," in Studies in American Literature, ed. Waldo McNeir and Leo B. Levy, Louisiana University Studies, Humanities Series, No. 8 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), pp. 78-94.

[28]Notebooks, p. 18.

[29]"The High Brutality of Good Intentions," Accent, 18 (1958), 66.

[30]Gass, p. 66.

[31]Segal, p. 34.

[32]The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 128.

[33]Segal, p. 54.

CHAPTER IV

THE AMBASSADORS

I have now examined two novels of Henry James's early phase, and have analyzed the inner dynamic which they share. That dynamic is the interplay of two distinct narrative strands. One, the voice of the authorial narrator, provides critical analysis and commentary; the second strand takes a more "artistic" view of the main characters and their actions, and is amplified in each novel by the presence of a figure (Mrs. Tristram in The American, Ralph Touchett in The Portrait) who shares in this view, and who precipitates the action through which the protagonist is dramatized. The first voice attempts to present the protagonist as he or she "really is," to reveal the character's total complexity as an imagined human being; the second invites the reader to see that person in a role which is aesthetically defined and which has particular significances in the life of the imagination, and in the arts which express and speak to that life.

The difference, then, between these two narrative strands might be expressed succinctly as that between practical insight and artistic vision--between the recognition of what is, and the imagination of what might or could be. In both The American and The Portrait of a Lady these two rays of perception fail to converge; in both novels, as we have seen, the protagonists themselves are too complex,

too fully human, to achieve a total identification with the roles designed for them. James is so generous with his human insight that it undoes his aesthetic intention, and these two impulses are never fully harmonized. Failing to knit up these loose ends, James carefully tucks them under; at the conclusion of each novel, he suppresses or effaces knowledge of his materials in order to round off his form. In The American, the concluding commentary fails to acknowledge Newman's abiding need for revenge, effectively allowing the novel's formal drive towards the hero's moral apotheosis to reach its apparent conclusion; similarly, in The Portrait, the climactic moment in which Isabel glimpses her "straight path" back to Osmond is left unanalyzed, thus sidestepping the question of whether her action springs from newfound moral reason or from the blind impulse which governs her in a number of preceding and parallel situations.

But a period of thirty years lies between The Portrait, the last of James's early major novels, and The Ambassadors, the keynote work of his "major phase." That thirty-year period, by no means a dormant time for James, is represented by a variety of experiments in form and point of view, by a number of failed attempts at stage drama, and by a remarkable series of tales which are meditations on the artistic process itself. Precisely what James came to understand about this novel during this period would be difficult to say, since the practical evidence of this understanding is both manifold and elusive; but the primary feature which distinguishes The Ambassadors from the novels of thirty years earlier is the striking interpenetration

of the two narrative impulses already observed. In The Ambassadors James places his powers of analysis at the service, and largely within the consciousness, of his protagonist, Lambert Strether. Thus he dispenses with the Victorian baggage of authorial commentary while preserving its authorial tone; the result is a narrative posture which principally confines itself to the perceptions of a single character, but which nevertheless appears to make claims for the "objective" authority of its own analysis. James tries to take the Victorian device of impersonal commentary and, by tying it to the movements of a single consciousness, to personalize its analysis, to make it sensitive to the requirements of the imagination while sacrificing none of its ability to penetrate the truths of human nature.

Lambert Strether is himself an accomplice in this revolution in technique, as can be seen by his difference from James's heroes and heroines of an earlier phase; he is not the protagonist observed, like Isabel and Newman, but an observer himself, like Ralph or Mrs. Tristram. Thus James focuses his attention on the process of seeing itself, rather than on him who is seen. As Tony Tanner has noted, in The Ambassadors "James, for the first time, makes the consciousness of the onlooker figure the central focus of a major novel."[1] Strether, like the earlier observer figures to whom he is analogous, is an aesthete, an agent of romance who wishes the life he observes to satisfy his imagination by its conformity with artistic ideals; but James has also placed in Strether's consciousness the responsibility for authorial judgments and discriminations. Thus

James, through Strether, directs his energies towards resolving the conflicts between insight and vision that had plagued The American and The Portrait and rendered their conclusions necessarily equivocal.

This does not make The Ambassadors a "stream of consciousness" novel, as some have claimed. Critics as early on as Percy Lubbock have observed that the novel is indeed a "drama of consciousness," with Strether's mind defining the boundaries of the stage; but the reader, though limited to this vision, is in the audience--an observer of the action, and not a participant in it. Furthermore, as in a drama, the reader is not privileged to know everything in Strether's mind; there are some operations of his consciousness which occur offstage; Lubbock says that James, "who all through the story has been treating Strether's consciousness as a play . . . can at any moment use his talk almost as though the source from which it springs were unknown to us from within."[2] Furthermore, the reader's knowledge of Strether's thoughts does not come in the form of those thoughts themselves, but in authorial summary, heavily digested and in a fastidiously organized syntax, with barely a hint of the emotional turmoil out of which those thoughts are generated. The voice one hears as one reads is that of the author, not of the character, though for the most part the reader's knowledge is circumscribed by the limitations of Strether's consciousness.

The precise angle of the point of view in The Ambassadors has been the subject of much debate and confusion; and, while it is not my intention to conduct an exhaustive analysis of James's method, it

is important to recognize the ways in which the author's hand is present. John E. Tilford, in his article "James the Old Intruder," notes that the narrator's use of such phrases as "poor Strether" and "old friend" in reference to the protagonist "inevitably implies an amiable understanding between the candid narrator and his gentle reader."[3] Tilford cites other instances in which the narrator ventures outside Strether's own sphere of knowledge or his own angle of vision, asserting that "James engages in speculations which, by designation, would never occur to Strether himself."[4] Tilford is correct in noting these periodic expansions of the point of view, which have the effect of an occasional stage aside; but he mistakenly turns his observations into a pejorative comment on James's technique, labeling these extensions of the narrator's horizon as "intrusive"--as if, besides these supposed lapses, James's hand were not otherwise present in the work.

William Thomas answers these objections by stating (correctly, I think) that "James never arrived at the extreme degree of limitation of point of view (complete effacement of the author) that is practiced by many . . . twentieth-century novelists."[5] Instead, he sees Strether as "sharing the authorial function,"[6] taking upon himself the role of commentator and evaluator ordinarily reserved for the omniscient narrator. James endows Strether with responsibilities identical to his own as author, but it does not follow that the character's consciousness thus conceals the involvement of his creator, nor <u>should</u> it follow. Rather, the result is that James's concerns are reflected in and identified with Strether in a way which keeps their

functions separate but their ultimate goal--the credible relation of art to life--the same. Strether is the vehicle, not the driver, but in the instance of The Ambassadors the close fit of the two makes it seem, on total impression, that James has foregone the privilege of extravehicular knowledge.

Thus James achieves an objectivity of tone while preserving to the greatest degree possible a subjectivity of angle in which Strether's visionary desires are not mocked or deconstructed by the demystifying analysis a more omniscient narrator might easily supply. But, as I have already suggested, James's success in this matter is a result of subject as much as strategy--or rather of a more perfect fit between the two than was evident in the novels of a few decades previous. Unlike Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman, Strether is a hero with whom the narrator shares an empathy rather than mere sympathy; he represents the apotheosis of narrative surrogates like Touchett and Mrs. Tristram, who carry the dramatic ado forward, prescribing roles for the other characters in the interest of having their imaginations vicariously satisfied. Strether, like his predecessors, is afflicted with the desire and the tendency to see life as art--a predeliction much closer in spirit to James's own creative commission as a novelist than the hungers for personal glory shared by earlier protagonists like Isabel and Christopher Newman.

So the mind of Lambert Strether is a determinant of style in The Ambassadors to a greater extent than are the consciousnesses of Ralph and Mrs. Tristram in the novels which those characters

respectively inhabit. Strether's "double consciousness," with its dual appetites for the adventurous beauty of art and for the security of correct and complete understanding, reflects the primary aims of James's own literary discourse. Strether has "detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference";[7] James, both realist and romancer, both analyst and artist, finds his own energies similarly divided between objectivity and passion. James is engaged on one hand in a quest for an accurate representation of the facts of human existence, and on the other in a demonstration of belief in the ultimate truthfulness and efficacy of art. Strether, as Richard Poirier notes, shares with the novelist the desire "to transform the things he sees into visions, to detach them from time and the demands of nature, and give them the composition of objets d'art."[8]

But, also like James, Strether hopes and trusts that these visions are essential and not irrelevant to the questions of how one ought to live, and that the real world, if understood in the proper relation, will not prove corrosive to those visions. The motive, then, behind James's prose style in The Ambassadors may be seen as that of constructing this "proper relation" between life and art, and making Strether's visions appear to conform (at least for the moment) to the demands of time and nature which they affront. James's syntax, so precise and to all appearances objective, is an analogue to Strether's own cerebral grasping after that magical "relation" which would make the enterprise of imagination seem a logically salvageable proposition rather than a romantic irrelevancy.

The forging of this relation is essentially the project of The American and The Portrait of a Lady as well; but in those novels the gulf between insight and vision is clearly too wide to be bridged. As I have shown, James's penetrating analysis of Newman and Isabel, his unflagging honesty in dramatizing the consistency of their behavior, works against the aesthetic ends that, through them, he is trying to achieve. Furthermore, the romanticized "readings" of those characters by Mrs. Tristram and Ralph Touchett are shown to have brutalizing and disastrous effects for all involved; it is left to the author to make art out of the failed scripts of his surrogates, and in these novels James tries to do so by turning the botched romances into opportunities for the protagonists' redemption and growth. But James's intention, like Ralph's and Mrs. Tristram's failed visions, is a formal end that ill serves, and is ill served by, Isabel and Newman themselves.

The Ambassadors, in its style, in its point of view, and in its choice of a protagonist, represents a new phase of this pattern and a new attempt at integrating its dissonant elements. I have already cited two of the principal characteristics of this new strategy: first, James moves the observer, formerly a peripheral figure, to the center of the discourse; and second, he makes the horizon of the narrator's awareness more congruent with that of his protagonist. But there is a third characteristic of this new strategy, in part design and in part a paradoxical effect of the second phenomenon treated here: one loses in the understanding of Strether what one gains in closeness to him. Though the novel is

burgeoning with Strether's thoughts, they are thoughts of a particular kind, which reveal only obliquely the depths of his emotional life. Thus in The Ambassadors the dramatization of the hero's consciousness is more tightly controlled than in earlier novels; F. O. Matthiessen observes that the novels of James's "major phase" "are strictly novels of intelligence rather than of full consciousness."[9] Stephen Spender, concurring, says that "James avoided the shocking revelations of his method of exploring the minds of his characters, by exercising strict censorship of their thoughts."[10]

The rationale behind this method may be seen by briefly considering once again the problematical conclusions of The American and The Portrait of a Lady. In these novels, the knowing narrator is able to explore the emotional conflicts which underly the actions of Newman and Isabel; and though each character's final gesture appears to fulfill the formal and thematic patterns of the novel (Newman forgoing his revenge, Isabel returning to face the consequences of her actions), the analysis of their emotional lives reveals that they have a less complete understanding of, and a more suspect motive for, their final actions than the rhetoric of the novel would indicate. The equivocal voice of the narrator in the final scene of each novel is designed to avoid acknowledgement of this disconcerting fact; in The Ambassadors the oblique view of Strether's emotional life is designed to circumvent from the outset this conflict between aesthetic completion and the unharnessed and unspent emotional energies of the characters. Where the novel and art in general represents the possibility of order

and harmony, the full consciousness of human beings (and characters who imitate them) represents a riot of thought and emotions; but in The Ambassadors James tries to reconcile the two and to avoid "falling into chaos" "by making Strether's thought entirely spiritual."[11]

The novel's suppression of Strether's emotional life helps explain why he is so often treated as a marvel of James's technical achievement rather than as a character whom the author has endowed with the apparent fullness and independence of human consciousness. But to be at all faithful to James's full intention in The Ambassadors, Strether must be considered in his fully imagined humanity, and not simply as a narrative device or a formal convention. The composition of Strether's character and its relation to his formal role in the discourse are essential features of the intention and the achievement of The Ambassadors.

But the rhetoric of the novel is designed to give the reader an aesthetic experience of Strether's inner life, and not a direct understanding of it. James's prose conceals as much about Strether as it reveals, and as a result those who look to the rhetoric alone for explanation are bound to duplicate Strether's own confusions. One is required, then, to examine those aspects of Strether's thought and behavior which remain consistent throughout the novel, independent of the shifts of rhetoric which attend them.

Fortunately, thought he is oblique on the topic elsewhere, James thoughtfully provides in Book Second a summary of Strether's past which serves as a useful key to his inner life. Having set foot

in Paris, the scene of his one youthful, self-gratifying impulse, Strether remembers with remorse "the young wife he had early lost and the young son he had stupidly sacrificed" (p. 61). He no longer feels particularly affected by his wife's death, but his deceased son haunts him. Strether blames himself for the death of the boy on several counts: he feels he had been "unwittingly selfish" in "neglecting the boy" and in having "insanely given himself to missing the mother." Also, in the "conscious detachment" which marked his period of mourning, he had regarded his son as "dull"; now, with regret, he perceives that dullness as but another effect of his own fatherly rejection and neglect.

In these brief but intense reflections one finds a key to much of Strether's behavior. The death of the boy is a memory which reveals many of the beliefs and fears by which Strether lives; he sees the event as emblematic of some past failure, strangely unarticulated, which he must at all costs avoid repeating. And, though this unnamed "failure" is a symptom rather than the root cause of Strether's conflicts, one can see in his meditations on it the paralyzing workings of his conscience. He imagines himself guilty of great sins; "I've sinned enough," he tells Maria Gostrey, "to be where I am" (p. 52), as if his past transgressions were somehow the cause of, and commensurate with, his present unhappiness. But if one closely examines Strether's sense of his particular failings with respect to his son, it becomes clear that the things he regards as "sins" are, though intertwined, morally contradictory. It is out of these contradictions that the conflicts in Strether

arise, producing in him what James discreetly labels as "the oddity of a double consciousness" (p. 18).

Strether feels above all that indulging oneself in violent emotions is morally dangerous. He views his excess of grief following his wife's death as an inexcusable loss of mental equilibrium; his remorse is described in retrospect as "insane," and his "sacrifice" of his son as "stupid." Now he aspires towards the quality, objectified in his first view of Chad, of "extraordinary . . . equilibrium arrived at and assured" (p. 111); faithfulness to such a standard of mental competence will, Strether believes, protect him from a relapse of "insane" emotion. In addition, Strether feels that the correctness of his knowledge and judgment must be as assured as his sanity; being "certain" and "finding out everything" are obsessions with him, since knowing all and perceiving accurately are the best proofs that he is in complete possession of his reason. In dealing with Chad, Strether warns himself that he "mustn't dispossess himself of the faculty of seeing things as they were" (p. 79); and, believing at one point that his European initiation is complete, Strether pales at Maria Gostrey's suggestion that he must "find out more" (p. 118). Most of all, he must avoid mistakes in judgment that make him seem "stupid" or "foolish"; he feels anxious, even guilty, whenever his expectations of himself or of others receive a serious rebuff--a humiliation with which Chad passively afflicts him during their first meeting in Paris.

Furthermore, Strether feels that his violent grief was "selfish"--that it produced in him a "conscious detachment" and a

destructive insensitivity to the needs and merits of others, particularly his son. He feels guilty at having judged his boy as "dull", and regards his sorrow as having uncharitably fogged his discrimination. Strether now clings to the belief that if he errs in judgment, it must be on the side of charity; he is compelled by conscience to be right--but if not right, at least mistaken in favor of others. His abhorrence of personal selfishness has also led him to live in disinterested service to others, particularly Mrs. Newsome; and his fear of the "insanity" of grief has led him to protect himself against tragic loss by the renunciation of personal wants and gains. He believes, as Madame de Vionnet says, that "The only safe thing is to give" (p. 321); it is a recurrent theme in Strether's talk about his European excursion that he is not, "out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (p. 344).

Finally, Strether sees the "sacrifice" of his son as a personal loss and self-betrayal; it has come to symbolize for him a lifetime of missed chances and denied satisfactions. The son is something "he might have kept" had he reacted otherwise to his wife's death; the thought of this deprivation, and how it might have been otherwise, makes Strether "wince with the thought of an opportunity lost" (p. 61). This "opportunity" has grown in Strether's mind into something greater than the mere loss of a son and a human connection; Strether senses that in the intervening years he, in the very act of avoiding other sins, has sinned against himself, that he has allowed himself to give up too much.

This is the crux of Strether's conflict, and the pole of opposition on which the entire novel turns; in Strether's system, to "live" as one defines it in the light of Paris is tantamount to sinning against others, or at the very least against the moral truths of human existence; but not to live is sinning against oneself. As Joan Bennett has put it, Strether's conflict is between the "morality of self-denial and self-fulfillment."[12] On one hand Strether's drives for personal satisfaction are checked by fears of moral transgression: the desire for personal gains is negated by fear of personal loss; the need for emotional release is repressed by a determination to preserve the balance of reason; and the desire to live for oneself is checked by a fear of betraying one's obligations of charity and service to others. But against these imperatives presses the very impulse that they are designed to throttle: the sense that one betrays oneself by not grasping the enjoyments and satisfactions that life presents.

Strether has for some time avoided conflict between his contradictory needs by suppressing one term of this painful opposition. He has given up self-satisfaction completely, and convinced himself that his opportunity for personal happiness is irrevocably lost: "What he wanted most was some idea that would simplify, and nothing would do this so much as the fact that he was done for and finished" (p. 61). So Strether, rather than face the conflict of competing inner demands, surrenders his desires to conscience, and to the conviction that his choice, determined by his past sins, could not have been otherwise. So long as he does not admit the

possibility of his desires being satisfied, they cannot agitate his placid resignation, and the "simplicity" of his existence will remain uncomplicated.

Strether's relationship with Mrs. Newsome represents the ultimate entrenchment of this solution. Though she never appears in the novel, this Woollett matriarch presses on Strether's consciousness with all the force of an alternate identity--which she is, in a way. Though wealthy, she comports herself with a tasteful austerity which Strether has idealized into a moral magnificence; to him, her life is "admirable," she is "fine" and "wonderful" (p. 45)--so much so that he is forced to admit that he is "a little afraid of her" (p. 46). But because she is "delicate and high-strung," and "puts so much of herself into everything" (p. 46), she serves as a foil for Strether's own image of himself as coolly balanced, and her "vulnerability" of feeling gives him an opportunity to place his powers of emotional control and fine judgment at her service. Furthermore, the relationship between Strether and Mrs. Newsome is not complicated by the danger of any mutual passion; he describes their attitude towards each other as "imperfectly romantic" (p. 43), and even her conditional offer of marriage seems to Strether a reasonable proposition whose material advantages to himself are not to be contemplated.

So in short Mrs. Newsome offers Strether an opportunity to fulfill his moral mandate of service to others without the danger of an intense emotional attachment. In fact, the terms of their relationship reinforce Strether's strict censorship of his own desires.

Because Strether has made Mrs. Newsome the focal point of his life of disinterested service, her approval has become for him the measure of his moral performance. She has, in effect, become his conscience personified, and the austere magnificence of her personal propriety is projected upon Strether's moral sense with a force sufficient to make him tremble at the very thought of disloyalty.

This detailed analysis of Strether's motives is necessary because it is the best way of demonstrating an important point: it shows that Strether's moral system has personal rather than institutional origins. By this I mean that such labels as "Puritan" or "New England" or even "Woollett," when applied to Strether's conscience, are not sufficient to explain the nature of his conflicts or difficulties. Such terms, though frequently used, reduce rather than reveal the workings of Strether's consciousness, much in the same way the dresses that Isabel Archer complained of failed to express her inner self. In The Ambassadors, America and Europe, Woollett and Paris, Puritanism and libertinism, are labels beneath which the actuality of Strether's motives and identity may hide; Strether uses them himself, dispersing his own psychic conflicts into the impersonal and abstract consciousness of Woollett, which "isn't sure it ought to enjoy" (p. 25). But even here the psychological fact is that Strether is concealing things from himself, not revealing them to the reader. The drama of the novel arises ultimately from personal conflicts and not from cultural or philosophical differences external to the character of Lambert Strether. These larger elements give aesthetic texture and symbolic

weight to Strether's psychic drama; but whether those resonances are ultimately harmonized with the actualities of Strether's inner life is a question which I shall save until the treatment of his character is more nearly complete.

In the context of the above caveat, it can be understood that the "first note of Europe" Strether feels is the vibration from within of his long-stifled desires. His awareness of this note is awakened during the hiatus between responsibilities that his layover in Chester provides; he finds himself experiencing "such a consciousness of personal freedom as he hadn't known for years . . . of having above all for the moment nobody and nothing else to consider" (p. 17). The "deep taste of change" he senses is intensified by the appearance of Maria Gostrey; she sustains and complicates the note by striking up a conversation with Strether in which an almost instant intimacy is achieved, and which finds him "forsaken, in this sudden case, both of avoidance and of caution" (p. 19). Strether catches instantly the scent of prospective enjoyment which Maria seems indirectly to offer; she appears to have the skill of making the most of experience, of possessing the "advantage snatched from lucky chance" (p. 21) of which Strether had long ago relinquished pursuit. But her "perfect plain propriety" and "expensive subdued suitability" (p. 20) project to Strether an image so "civilized" that he cannot decide whether she is inviting him to enter forbidden territory.

Strether is able to continue entertaining the prospects Maria offers partly because she flatters his scruples as well as appeals to his desires. She makes him feel like a "special case"

by turning all his self-deprecations into praise; for her, Strether's admitted "failures" are precisely his distinction. "Anything else [other than failure] to-day is too hideous," she tells him (p. 40). She also intimates that he is exceptional, not like the other Americans she is eager to get rid of (p. 36); she insists, against Strether's half-hearted protests, that he is "so much better--than all the rest of us put together" (p. 56).

But Maria's appeal to Strether goes beyond mere flattery. She seems to be like him in many ways. She is, "like himself, marked and wan," and they resemble each other so much that "they might have been brother and sister" (p. 21). She commiserates with his admitted failures in commercial enterprise and personal relations, telling him that the two of them are "beaten brothers in arms," and that "There are not many like you and me" (p. 40). So Strether perceives in Maria someone much like himself. Besides the physical resemblance, she appears to have many of the attributes towards which he aspires--perspicacity, knowledge, emotional detachment. Yet at the same time she evokes, through her connection to worldly civilization, the very appetites he has so strenuously kept in check. She at once praises him for what he is (the "perfectly equipped failure") while giving him the encouragement to question and even to reject the past which, constituting his self-betrayal, has made him so.

But the censorious spectre of Mrs. Newsome, and Strether's sense of his sacred obligation to her, keep him from freely entertaining even the most innocent of personal pleasures. The mere act of a walk around Chester with Maria makes him feel that, as she

observes, "You're doing something that you think not right"--to which he responds, tellingly: "Am I enjoying it as much as that?" (p. 25) To Strether, correct behavior and personal enjoyment are vaguely inimical, though he cannot say to himself precisely why this is so. Though he can "enjoy" the thrill of being on the edge of some obscure transgression, he cannot allow himself any indulgence which would rupture his tacit bond of loyalty to Mrs. Newsome.

Thus even the modest pleasures he enjoys with Maria are tinged with guilt and self-doubt. He feels an "exhilaration" at her "strange and cynical wit" (p. 26), and thrills to the "peril of apparent wantonness" in her approval of his purchase of a pair of gloves (p. 38). But his excitement in such moments is accompanied by a vague discomfort. He admits that he trusts Maria to show him "how to enjoy," but also that her capacity to teach this is "exactly what I'm afraid of" (p. 25); ultimately, he can't decide whether the liberties he has taken with her in conversation (particularly those on the topic of Mrs. Newsome and Waymarsh) are "magnificent" or "base" (p. 39). The more Strether enjoys himself, the more he isn't sure he ought to.

The "cut-down dress" and "red velvet band" which Maria Gostrey wears to dinner with Strether represent her most lurid intimation of the enjoyment into which she is capable of initiating him. Understandably, these items cause Strether his greatest discomfort yet. Neither piece is like anything Mrs. Newsome has ever worn, and Strether fixes on the neckband in particular as something that "complicates his vision" (p. 42). He feels that his pleasurable

appreciation of Maria's ribboned throat is a guilty luxury which distracts him from his task at hand: "What, certainly, had a man conscious of a man's work in the world to do with red velvet bands?" (p. 42) He compares Maria to Mary Stuart and Mrs. Newsome to Queen Elizabeth; this pair of associations indicates how utterly at war Strether's inner loyalties have become. Maria's invitation is for Strether to shake off his old bondage of service, and to seize this chance at serving his own enjoyment. This suggestion arouses in Strether a fear of turning traitor to his own moral obligations; yet it also underscores how sternly those obligations now press upon him, and how deeply he craves some sort of release from them. Miss Gostrey encourages while Mrs. Newsome restrains; these two women, through their contrasting effects on Strether, lay bare the painful bind of his "double consciousness," as he is caught between his weakening old resolve and new desires that are entertained but never consummated.

But for his encounter with Chad, Strether feels the need to strengthen him moral resolution, to "renounce all amusement for the sweet sake of . . . authority" (p. 64); he "must approach Chad, must wait for him, deal with him, master him" (p. 79). Strether is counting on his own moral scruples to keep himself in the right and to argue his case with Chad; but his recent experience has somewhat weakened his conviction in his moral system, and he is not sure whether his scruples will "give him for Chad a moral glamour" which would prove persuasive (p. 64). Furthermore, Strether's own confusions make it necessary that he find Chad disagreeable, that the

situation in Paris presents him with "the pretence of disgust" which would enable him to act with resolution (p. 152); Strether feels that "being sure he was sufficiently disagreeable" is "his only way of making sure he was sufficiently thorough" (p. 103). Strether's awakened desires have weakened the hold of his tyrannical conscience on his judgments and actions; he requires some great and undeniable affront on Chad's part to reinforce his moral tenets, and to uncomplicate his mission by restoring those errant desires to their proper place.

Strether's first meeting with Chad, however, produces the opposite effect. Chad, rather than being disagreeable, is exquisitely mannered and anything but the reprobate of Strether's expectations. Additionally, Chad seems more confident and self-possessed than Strether himself; the exotic self-assurance of Chad's "different ways" points up to Strether the dearth of his own experience and the insufficiency of his own preconceptions. In his confusion, Strether finds himself "conscious of everything but of what would have served him" (p. 91). But there is an added complication to Strether's discomfort and uncertainty: he has not only expected the wrong thing of Chad; he has wrongly expected the <u>worst</u> thing. Strether has, with the rest of Woollett, mistakenly "insisted on his [Chad's] coarseness" (p. 101); but whatever he is, Chad is certainly not coarse. This ruptured expectation is particularly distressing to Strether because he has now twice judged, in ignorance and harshness, a "son" he would rather have saved--first his own boy, and now Mrs. Newsome's. And in both cases, the realization has come too late for Strether himself to be of apparent use.

These reversals of expectation have the effect of alienating Strether from his Woollett-centered judgments and opinions without lessening any of their power over him. His horrible gaffe has occurred because he embraced, with Mrs. Newsome, the necessary view that Chad's Parisian existence must be degenerate; and, still lacking a precise adjective to attach to the Chad he now perceives, Strether is nevertheless struck by the thoroughness with which Woollett is rebuked by the evidence. He sees now that he, and they, have judged in pride and ignorance--that, though those at Woollett "hadn't a low mind," still "they had worked, and with a certain smugness, on a basis that might be turned against them." Worst of all, Chad has "even pulled up his admirable mother" (p. 101), for whom Strether is expected and obliged to be an apologist. Strether feels humiliated by this turn of events, betrayed by his own trust in the theory of Chad's degeneracy. He has "had to take full in the face a fresh attribution of ignorance" (p. 102); this grievous blow reveals to Strether his failure to live up to his own imperatives of perspecacity and charitable judgment, and damages the credibility of his mission without releasing him from his obligation to fulfill its terms.

Furthermore, Strether's failure is painful to him because it has not as yet had the virtue of proving instructive. He cannot determine whether the favorable impression Chad has made on him reflects an inner improvement in the young man's character or whether it is a mask concealing his ultimate decadence. But there is no question that Strether hopes the truth lies in the first possibility.

Though he cannot ascertain whether he is dealing with a "Pagan or a gentleman" (p. 102), Strether nevertheless is attracted to the gentility and sophistication of Chad's manner, and to the intimation of grand experience that lies behind it; he sees in Chad "the hint of some self-respect, some power . . . latent and beyond access" which, though morally suspect in its origins, is still "enviable" (p. 99). Self-respect and power are precisely what Strether feels lacking in his own life, and whose ends he has always felt barred from pursuing by the moral insufficiency of the means required to attain them. But, lacking a clear indication that Chad's apparent splendor is tied to any inner moral compromise, Strether begins to entertain the possibility that one might, after all, have at once the satisfactions of being virtuous and of getting on in the world.

Thus Strether begins to look to Chad, and to the "connection" through which Chad has been transformed, for support in his hope that conscience and desire are not inimical. This is the "vision" into which all the particulars of his experience must now be transposed. And he is only too eager to seize upon any interpretation of those particulars which will support his new hypothesis. Strether accepts little Bilham's equivocal assertion of the "virtuousness" of the attachment between Chad and Madame de Vionnet simply because that is what he wants most to believe; it gives Strether a "new lease on life" (p. 112) in every sense of the phrase. He believes Little Bilham first of all because the latter's statement reduces some of his painful anxiety about Chad's moral state; but secondly he accepts the statement because he is eager for "verification for the

aesthetic values exalted by his tender sensibilities" rather than for "the dark truths harbored in the sly evasions of sympathetic friends."[13]

For this "verification" Strether is dependent on the behavior of Chad, in whom he sees what he himself might have become, had his own "mistake" not irrevocably dashed his prospects. Strether expects Chad to mirror his own values, and for the "connection" with Madame de Vionnet to assume the form it might have for Strether himself, as a young man in similar circumstances. Though Madame de Vionnet may have "saved" Chad the "social animal" (p. 167), Strether intends to complete the young man's apotheosis by saving him as a moral animal, in a way that goes beyond the assumed "virtuousness" of the connection. Strether conceives of the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet as both romantic and non-sexual; he sees the two of them as leading a life of mutually devoted service, "facing the future together" and "giving things up for each other" (p. 169)--a formula that dovetails perfectly with Strether's own moral values, but which preserves in the form of a Platonic relationship the luxury of wordly elegance and grace that has been missing in his own life. Strether refers to his plans for this pair as a "tribute to my youth," and tells Maria Gostrey that his own youth "has to come in somewhere, if only out of the lives, the condition, the feelings of other persons" (p. 197).

Many critics have remarked on this vicarious element of Strether's vision, and have tried to explain the motivations behind this phenomenon. Sallie Sears says Strether is one of those Jamesian

characters, like Mrs. Tristram and Ralph Touchett, "who achieve their strongest emotional satisfaction by observing and sometimes manipulating the lives of others";[14] to E. M. Forster, Strether is simply "the observer who tries to influence the action";[15] and, perhaps most to the point, Stephen Spender notes that the whole of The Ambassadors is Strether's "vision of what he has lost," and that "out of his vision he passionately takes the side of those whom he imagines to be, as he sees it, living."[16] But few have provided an adequate explanation of why Strether should find vicarious enjoyment his only avenue of satisfaction, why his position must be, in the phrase of Tony Tanner, that of "the watcher from the balcony."[17] The tendency has been to invoke formal considerations rather than to focus on the nature of Strether's character itself; this is not surprising since, as I have noted, the presentational strategy of the novel and the workings of Strether's consciousness are closely analogous. But, as F. O. Matthiessen has noted, The Ambassadors is not a novel of "the full consciousness," and the narrator tends to efface himself whenever the question of Strether's motivation arises. I shall now try to explain why Strether continues to perceive his options in such limited terms even after his imagination has been liberated from the provincial attitudes of Woollett.

Strether's inability to expand his actions into the enlarged boundaries of his vision is directly connected to the inner conflicts I have already described. As much as he might desire "reparations" for his past injuries of self-deprivation, he must above all remain faithful in his service to others. He has in effect turned traitor

to Mrs. Newsome by rejecting as false her reading of the Paris situation; but he believes this rejection is based on moral discrimination, and is the reasonable response to the undeniable evidence of Chad's improvement. So Strether must show his good faith by accepting none of the personal benefits that might accrue to him as a result of this defection; as a fob to his own conscience, he must be convinced in his own heart that, however he deviates from Mrs. Newsome's intention, it is in the interest of rendering greater and more selfless service to everyone involved. Thus Strether's best hope is to establish in the lives of others what he himself perceives as ideal situations and relations; he is able in this way to cloak his own desires in the garb of unselfish advocacy and service, satisfying both his active conscience and his sublimated thirst for a "beautiful" existence.

But Strether's debt of loyalty to Mrs. Newsome is only one of the liabilities which keep him from actively pursuing the satisfaction of his awakened desires. Strether's second handicap is his need to escape responsibility for his past sins against himself. This he does by denying the freedom of his own will and lamenting the impossibility, for him, of choosing to be otherwise, either then or now. Though Strether now has an enlarged view of the possibilities of life in general, he cannot allow himself to act on that expanded vision; for him to change his behavior now would be to prove to himself that he might, at any earlier moment, have thrown off the chains of his tyrannical scruples and become a better, happier person. So Strether must renounce active satisfaction in the present

to escape guilt for his past; he must cling to his theory that self-sacrifice and the failure to enjoy are inescapable terms of his existence.

But Strether's denial of free will does not extend beyond its application to his own case, as can be seen in his exhortation to Little Bilham in the crucial garden scene of Book Fifth. Though to Strether himself "the affair of life" "is at best a tin mould . . . into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured," he entreats Little Bilham to live with "the illusion of freedom" (p. 132)--as if, strangely enough, Little Bilham had a choice in the matter, after all. This is neither a confusion nor a paradox if seen in the context of Strether's inner conflicts. On one hand, he cannot recognize in himself the capacity for choice, since he needs, as I have discussed, to believe in the predetermination of his fate; yet on the other hand, his liberated imagination, through which his desires seek covert satisfaction, looks upon the lives of others as a field of infinite possibility, in which resides the potential for beauty that has been lacking in Strether's own existence.

So what Strether urges on Little Bilham in the garden scene is not the gift of wisdom, but a plea for the young man not to betray the imaginative potential that his untapped possibilities hold for his older companion. Strether is in effect asking Little Bilham to play a role in his own vision of lives redeemed by beauty--a vision of which Strether himself is a sponsor, but which he cannot enter as a participant. In this respect, Strether's real ambition is to be like Gloriani rather than like Chad; he does not want to live life,

but to be a handler of its substance, transposing the existences of others into his own conception of moral and aesthetic beauty. Barred by inner prohibitions from choosing how he will act, Strether instead develops the option of choosing what he sees, inviting others to collaborate in his active romanticization of the life around him.

So, though Strether's "irrepressible outbreak to Little Bilham" is characterized by James as the "subject" of The Ambassadors,[18] Strether's words are primarily expressive of his immediate personal crises, and do not necessarily comprise a direct statement of the theme of the novel. His speech in this instance has the character of what Roland Barthes calls a "snare"; a revelation that is considerably less than it seems. In this scene, Strether is not possessed by any new knowledge that would give his words credence or substance; he is confused and afflicted, despondent over his irreversible failure, and as yet unsure of how his mistake occurred or how it might be avoided by others. But he has seen, in the figure of Gloriani the artist, the only path of satisfaction open to him, and his outbreak to Little Bilham is his first move in that direction. James says in his Preface that in this moment Strether "now at all events sees,"[19] but this scene represents only the beginning of Strether's "process of vision," and not its culmination. Strether's speech to Little Bilham contains the germ of his discovery that, though his own life is unsalvageable, he might make something satisfactory to himself out of the lives of others, by the urging of his own desires upon them.

To this end, as I have said, Strether begins to live vicariously through Chad, whose youth strikes him as a redeemed version of his own. But if Chad is the medium through Strether experiences his own effaced possibilities, it is Marie de Vionnet who ultimately emerges as the object of Strether's mediated desires. She is to him "one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, but never met, whose very presence . . . from the moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere recognition" (p. 150). Madame de Vionnet has, in other words, insinuated herself into Strether's consciousness as a figure of imagination, a trope of his idealized desire. She is a creature of romance rather than of his impoverished actual existence. The "process of vision" which dominates the middle third of The Ambassadors is chiefly Strether's entanglement in the romantic possibilities which Marie de Vionnet represents to him; she is seen as a "goddess," a "sea-nymph," a "femme du monde" (p. 160). Strether finds her "romantic . . . far beyond what she could have guessed" (p. 174), and in fact the principal literary association evoked through his relationship to her is that of Marie de Vionnet as Cleopatra, with Strether usurping Chad in the role of Antony.[20] Summing up, William Bysshe Stein phrases it fairly when he says that Madame de Vionnet "becomes the apotheosis of the life that he [Strether] has missed."[21]

The extravagance of these associations might prompt the question of how Strether could allow himself to be so indulged, even in imagination; and in fact he is wrestling constantly with the question of "what service . . . he was after all rendering Mrs. Newsome" (pp. 152-53); he observes that Madame de Vionnet "had only

after all to smile at him ever so gently in order to make him ask himself if he weren't . . . going crooked" (p. 128). But Marie has given Strether no "pretext of disgust" upon which to base his objection to her, and in the absence of such a pretext Strether's imagination is free to construe the most permissibly favorable impression. Though he is at first uncertain whether "liking" Marie de Vionnet would be "fair" to Mrs. Newsome (p. 143), his pangs of conscience are muffled by Chad's assertion that his friend's life is "beautiful" and "without reproach" (p. 144). Strether confirms this for himself, being taken in by her "air of supreme respectability" (p. 146).

In addition, Strether projects onto Marie many of his own idealized values. As a divorced woman whose connection to the one man in her life is supposedly "virtuous," she shows Strether a remarkable restraint of passion. Furthermore, as he sees it, she is nobly self-sacrificing, since she has apparently "saved" Chad not for herself, but for others (p. 168); Sallie Sears is to the point when she observes that for Strether Madame de Vionnet's virtue "does not consist in her charm" but "in her personal sacrifice to Chad."[22] In the scene at Notre Dame in which her moral apotheosis becomes complete, Marie is revealed to Strether as a person whose confidence and security in her own virtue is unassailable; he sees her as a figure with a "discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity" (p. 172). These are all qualities which Strether has tried, with meager success, to actualize in his own life; perceiving their palpable

rendering in the figure of Madame de Vionnet, he is helplessly committed to her worship and to her service. She has become Strether's paragon, with the status in Strether's mind of a full rival to Mrs. Newsome herself.

So Madame de Vionnet is, like Mrs. Newsome, able to secure Strether's loyal advocacy. He agrees to "save" her, if he can, though he is uncertain of what he has assented to (p. 152). Gradually, as is Strether's habit, this indeterminate project takes on the form potentially most pleasing to Strether himself; he decides he must fix Chad's wandering attention on the "virtuous attachment" with Marie which Strether himself finds so ideal. To this end, he deliberately forsakes his responsibility to Mrs. Newsome and asks Chad to stay, at least for awhile. Strether sees this request, of course, as a part of his "service" to Madame de Vionnet; but in fact he is dependent on Chad's faithfulness to the "virtuous attachment" for his vicarious enjoyment. Nevertheless Strether has convinced himself that he is simply trying to arrange a situation that is best for everyone, and looks to his own non-existent prospects for gain as proof of his good faith in the matter.

But Strether's glowing account of Marie to Mrs. Newsome has produced from Woollett an ultimatum: he must return home, or Mrs. Newsome's daughter Sarah will be obliged to come and retrieve both him and Chad. But Strether cannot go back under these conditions; to do so would be in effect a repudiation of Marie de Vionnet and the romantic vision of which she is the focus; after all, the ultimatum carries the implication that he has been seduced

and enthralled. Furthermore, Mrs. Newsome's orders challenge Strether's newfound sense that, as Marie Gostrey puts it, he "can toddle alone" (p. 190); her note calls Strether back to a psychic and moral dependence which he feels he has now transcended. Unwilling to surrender the emotional satisfactions of his Parisian vision, he tries to buy time by refusing to return himself, and forcing the Pococks to come and get him.

Only when Sarah's arrival is imminent does Strether begin to realize the full extent of the risks in the confrontation he has brought on. He is not entirely convinced that Sarah will see the improvement in Chad or the virtue and beauty of Madame de Vionnet which are the underlying assumptions upon which his whole vision, and his whole rationale for not coming home, is based. The figure of Sarah Pocock haunts him, as if she were an angry and avenging angel: "She loomed at him larger than life; she increased in volume as she drew nearer; she so met his eyes that . . . he already felt her come down on him, already burned, under the reprobation, the blush of guilt" (p. 201).

What Strether senses here is the anxiety of insufficient proof, and the extent of the reproach due him should his vision turn out, after all, to be a self-delusion. Though dedicated in theory to the truth and compelled by conscience to seek it out at all costs, Strether has, as in the period following his wife's death, allowed his view of things to be determined by emotion rather than by reason, and in doing so has failed to take complete cognizance of the facts. He has accepted without examination the

"virtuousness" of the relation between Chad and Marie de Vionnet; and his impression of his own "magnificence" has become, in the reflecting mirror of Maria Gostrey's praise, "as impersonal as truth itself" (p. 197). So the "truth" to which Strether clings is that which is most pleasant to him, and not one which is necessarily warranted by the facts in evidence. Strether begins to realize this as the arrival of the Pococks draws nigh, and finds himself "whistling in the dark" (p. 194) as he waits for his fragile vision to be submitted for review. He wonders if he is, "on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth," and whether he is living "in a false world, a world that had grown up simply to suit him" (p. 212); he admits to Maria Gostrey, in a tone that perhaps expresses more doubts than he intends, that "I shouldn't be at all surprised if I were mad" (p. 191).

In these reflections one can see fully the advantages James gains by moving his "observer" figure to the center of his discourse. The susceptibility of Strether's vision to the "menacing touch of the real" (p. 212) mirrors in effect the risk that all art runs when subjected to the scrutiny of the cold eye that sees through its illusion without being trapped by its beauty. The integrity of art is always maintained by effacing to some degree the reality which, though providing a "subject" for the artist, is in its totality inimical to his ends. As James says in his Preface, "the felicity . . . of the artist's state dwells less, surely, in the further delightful complications he can smuggle in than those he succeeds in keeping out."[23] Strether's "double consciousness,"

grasping on one hand for emotional fulfillment and on the other for intellectual certainty, is itself engaged in this strategy of repression, by which the subjective necessity of life-enhancing vision restrains the habit of objective scrutiny which, if indulged, would destroy the illusion. Thus James makes Strether, through the workings of his own consciousness, assume the risks of the novelist; the record of Strether's inner experience reveals the satisfactions, beauties, and dangers inherent in the artistic process itself.

This interplay of beauty and danger is most dramatically rendered in the scene in which Strether discovers, to his horror, the total sexual aspect of the connection between Madame de Vionnet and Chad. In fact, one might fairly characterize this event as the explosion, from the inside, of the artistic illusion. The surroundings in which this revelation takes place remind Strether of a Lambinet painting "that had charmed him, long years before" and which "abode with him as the picture he would have bought" (p. 301); thus Strether's pastoral journey represents his literal recovery of a lost possibility that was, in its original form, only a likeness of the scene now in his actual possession. Strether has himself entered the frame in which his desires are contained, and is "freely walking about in it . . . to his heart's content" (p. 302).

The danger inherent in this scene is that one element of the vision, which might seem "exactly the right thing" if kept in perspective, may betray the whole effect if examined too closely. This is precisely what occurs when the romantic couple in the boat

are, at a nearer glance, revealed to Strether as Chad and Madame de Vionnet. What had begun as the finishing touch to a perfect picture develops into "a sharp fantastic crisis" (p. 308) as the true sexual nature of the "virtuous attachment" becomes apparent. This discovery threatens to overturn Strether's entire vision; the "crisis" derives not so much from the emergent sexual aspect itself as from the fact that Strether's impression of the relationship has been so opposite of its actual character. Strether sees now that what he has been experiencing vicariously, through its public form, is in its intimate reality not morally beautiful, but coarse and vulgar. He feels his "generosity betrayed"[24] by the materials on which he has expended it; his beautiful vision is exposed to him as a lie whose outward form masks rather than reveals its true origins. The result for Strether is a perception that, in the words of J. A. Ward, "evil is an attribute of beauty,"[25] and that, by extension, there is impunity in pleasure only as long as one can hide from oneself the debased nature of what is being enjoyed.

This revelation, and the disillusion it engenders in Strether, is the real crisis of the novel, and is for Strether's case the "difficult place" in which all Jamesian protagonists find the test of their mettle. James himself describes this scene as "the climax . . . toward which the action marches straight from the first";[26] but the question which James leaves dangling is that of precisely what in Strether is being tested, and what response on his part would constitute success. It would be too simplistic, I think, to conclude that James has brought Strether--and the reader--all this way, only

to dash the expectations of both on the rocks of disillusion. Indeed, the very function of the pastoral idyll, a motif of which Strether's country excursion clearly partakes, is to be an enabling experience to the hero rather than a debilitating one. So, then, one is compelled to ask how Strether is to respond to this unforeseen smash, and what formal movement the novel, through him, is expected to complete.

As in The American and The Portrait of a Lady, the pattern of events in The Ambassadors strongly evokes the motif of the romantic quest. Allen Stein sees in the novel a process of "testing and initiation" in which "James exploits in a realistic manner a major Romantic genre, the internalized quest romance." He states further that "the growth of Strether's heroic nature" results from the dynamic opposition of "his commitment to a quest which he believes will take him through a realm of ineffable beauty . . . and the opposing, educative pressures of reality guiding him back to himself and his long forgotten innate integrity."[27] John Paterson notes that the "language of adventure" in The Ambassadors imbues Strether's inner conflicts with the richness and violence of bloody battle itself,[28] and James admits in his preface that Strether's internal peregrinations represent "adventure transposed."[29] Thus in its structure of events, in the color of its language, and in the open admission of its author, The Ambassadors partakes of the form of the knightly quest, or perilous journey.

A corollary view to this interpretation is one that, not surprisingly, was imposed on The American and The Portrait as well--

that of the redemptive movement, or the motif of the Fortunate Fall. Robert Hudspeth says that the plot of The Ambassadors "presents first the definition and then the loss of innocence";[30] Oscar Cargill characterizes the novel as "the story of the growth of a man, belatedly, from innocence to maturity";[31] Daniel Mark Fogel claims that the novel is "dialectical," and that Strether returns to Woollett with his spirit enriched and his prospects enlarged;[32] and J. A. Ward writes that The Ambassadors "has to do with an inward transformation" that is much like a "religious conversion."[33]

I find these interpretations consonant with my own view that the novel creates the expectation of Strether's salvaging something positive out of his disillusionment. But the crucial revelation scene presents some difficulties which cannot be easily gotten over if one wishes to read the book in this way; in contrast to The American and The Portrait (and the romances of which their forms are derivative), The Ambassadors dramatizes a pastoral retreat not in which the hero's strengths are nursed and consolidated, but in which his vision is totally blasted to pieces. The peculiar question posed, then, in the concluding chapters of The Ambassadors is whether the "process of vision" which Strether experiences has somehow given him the power to deal in a positive way with the disintegration of the vision thus created.

The answer, from a purely formal point of view, must be yes, and many of the critics who give this answer go to great lengths to explain the nature of Strether's redemption. But all these explanations in the end have the attenuated timbre of Strether's own

whistling in the dark; the impulse to see the novel thus "rounded off" is merely the rationalization of form, an aesthetic desire derived from the prototype romances upon which The Ambassadors draws for its structure. This is the "zeal" of the reader as he drives the novel towards the harmonious completion of a familiar pattern; yet unless one wishes to repeat Strether's mistake of granting credence to beauty on insufficient grounds, one is obliged to weigh against this impulse the evidence of Strether's behavior following his crucial revelation.

Robert Garis, while concurring with the interpretation of the novel's formal aspects I have developed here, nevertheless finds that Strether's redemptive progress appears to stop at the precise moment it ought to crystallize; he says that "James quite distinctly changed his mind about Strether at the crucial point when he supposedly rounds out his 'education.'"[34] He asserts that Strether's revelation does not bring about enlightenment or integration, but gives rise instead to "a sickening sequence of acts and attitudes devoid of imaginative energy," that it "produces, in brief, final evidence of Strether's incapacity for either education or life."[35]

Garis's essay is important because it is one of the first in which the internal irresolution of the novel is recongized; I take exception only to his view that James "changed his mind" about Strether. James created in Lambert Strether a character whose integrity of personality and identity persists regardless of the author's "treatment"; in fact, that is precisely the problem. Like Newman, like Isabel, Strether is imagined and portrayed with such a

generosity of human substance that he cannot be altered to fit the needs of the discourse. What Garis senses is not James changing his mind about Strether, but James's relentless honesty in keeping Strether consistent, even as the aesthetics of form demand that he be changed.

Strether is incapable of integration and of growth because his intelligence is too obsessed with the establishment of self-protective certainties to entertain actively and consciously his highly contradictory needs and values. Thus, with his dream of moral beauty shattered, its full contradictions exposed, Strether is as before the dream in need of some idea that will "simplify" his relation to his experience. His "idea" is that he will be all right if he purges himself of his attachment to the insidious pleasures that had brought about his delusion and downfall; he rejects all aspects of his now-derogated romantic vision, scorning beauty as but a guise for vulgar worldliness. The violence and the totality of his rejection may best be explained, then, in terms of his earlier craving for an "idea that would simplify": Strether's greatest need of all is for his inner life to be uncomplicated, free from the ambiguities and anxieties with which his conscience and desire have conspired to afflict him; it is in the interest of serene simplicity that he pursues total renunciation. When Strether discovers that the beauty he thought pure is in fact ambiguous and paradoxical in its origins and effects, he is forced by psychological necessity to reject it as debased, and to raise himself above it.

So Strether receives fresh confirmation of what he had previously feared and thought vain in worldly satisfaction, in personal ambition, and in the very appreciation of beauty itself. His pejoration of such vanities, suspended while he pursued his vision, has returned with a vengeance, and clamped the lid over his desires so securely that, for the first time in the novel, Strether allows himself to display fully the unqualified, priggish moral pride of Woollett. Looking down with smug, sad superiority at Madame de Vionnet, "he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed" (p. 323). These "possibilities" are for Strether the vision of what beauty there might have been for him to appreciate, had she not demonstrated by her own weakness the lurid vulgarity out of which such beauty may arise.

But her anguish in this final interview shows the brutalizing effects on her of Strether's idealization, which she encouraged and in whose collapse she must now share, with him, some of the suffering and responsibility. But she, unlike Strether, has known all along the disjuncture between her real self and the symbolic intensity with which Strether had imagined her. Madame de Vionnet, like her predecessors Claire de Cintré and Isabel Archer, is a typical Jamesian love-object who, protesting her own weakness, nevertheless shoulders the weight of her lover's idolatry; but the collapse of the idolatrous vision is in the end more a result of the lover's own self-delusion than of the insufficiency of its object. Madame de Vionnet is acutely aware of the significance Strether has attached

to her "virtuousness," and of her precipitous fall from his grace; but her present view of herself as "abject and hideous" (p. 324) is more a consequence of Strether's habit of seeing her than of her own actions. As U. C. Knoepflmacher observes, "it is Strether, and not she, who has shrivelled. For he has become aware that the woman standing before him is his own creation."[36] She represents, in effect, the debris of his collapsed vision; and the moral superiority of his tone shows that he has turned his shattered dream of her into a wreck upon which he may now elevate himself, if he is careful not again to lose his balance.

But to avoid repetition of this mistake, Strether must once again protect himself from the snares of experience and desire. To this end, he begins once again to worship his chains of conscience, invoking his old prohibitions against the headlong plunges of his hungry, adventuring imagination. "I never think any further than I have to," he tells Madame de Vionnet (p. 324); and he asserts to Maria Gostrey that "I <u>have</u> no ideas. I'm afraid of them. I've done with them" (p. 344). These statements are symptomatic of his retreat from imagination, and from the thrill and risk of its outward grasp. His greatest desire now is to be "lucid and quiet, just the same for himself on all essential points as he had ever been" (p. 327); and his once-large possibilities shrivel to the single pale axiom of self-justification with which he began the novel; his "only logic," he tells Maria Gostrey, is "Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself" (p. 344).

This sentiment directly contradicts Strether's exhortation to Little Bilham in the garden scene of Book Fifth; and in his rejection of the small comfort offered by Maria in the book's final scene, one sees Strether's final gesture of betrayal of his earlier insight. And, since Strether's speech of Book Fifth is in fact the "subject" of The Ambassadors, his spurning of Gostrey's profferred hand represents his ultimate severance from the goals of the discourse itself. As Judith Wilt has noted, Strether's pairing with Gostrey "is the ending the Story seeks, both by the formal energy of the 'comic' resolution and by the peculiar energies of the Story's subject."[37] His behavior in this final scene, then, represents his inability to countenance the demands that artistic form places on his thoughts and actions; he is incapable of integrating in himself the novel's dual requirements of beauty and discrimination, and retreats from both.

Strether has despaired of the reconciliation of these demands, and is unable, for reasons discussed above, to conceive of or embrace an idea of "good" that is anything less than absolutely pure and abstract. Gostrey's offer "of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days" appeals to needs which Strether has now repressed and derogated; though he feels "It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things" (p. 344), Strether cannot help betraying his conviction that the comforts she offers are ephemeral and somewhat beneath him in the moral glory of his total renunciation. He tells her finally that "It's you who would make me wrong" (p. 345). This is neither heroism nor chivalry; it

is moral scrupulousness of a most priggish and overbearing nature, and reveals that, though Strether may go through some of the obligatory motions of the educated hero (such as his discharge of his final service to Madame de Vionnet), they are empty for him, and express formal intentions from which his own inner motives are completely alienated.

But the severity of this disjuncture between character and form is not specifically acknowledged in the knowledge of the novel; Garis says that "the extraordinarily fluent stream of the late James prose has served to hide this fact from most readers and apparently from James himself."[38] I agree with the first part of Garis's statement, but must object his final phrase. James himself was manifestly aware that Strether's education remains uncompleted at the conclusion of The Ambassadors; in fact, in the very prose upon which Garis remarks one can find shifts in purpose which reflect James's awareness of this irresolution, and which also represent his strategy for dealing with it.

In the concluding interview with Maria Gostrey, James permits the reader only intermittent glimpses of Strether's thoughts; the narrator appears to have denied himself the privilege and responsibility of internal analysis in this crucial scene. As a result, there is no interpretation of Strether's final words, which in the absence of commentary rise like enigmatic bubbles from the invisible depths of his consciousness. He seems, in this shifted light, to be somehow different from what he was; he is more mysterious, more unfathomable, than the creature to whose mind the reader has previously

had such easy access. But, as can be seen in his words and in the consistency of his closing gesture with motives expressed by him elsewhere in the novel, he is, in his own words, "just the same for himself on all essential points." James's final strategy, then, is precisely that with which he addressed similar problems in the climactic moments of The American and The Portrait of a Lady: the effacement, through an increased distance between narrator and subject matter, of the inner actuality which separates the mind of the protagonist from the designs of the work as a whole. When analysis falls silent, form is left to complete its statement, to fulfill its syntax of expectation.

Thus James tries to preserve, even in the face of Strether's defection, the unity and roundness of the novel which Strether himself has rejected. The author thus commits himself, as novelist and artist, to the preservation of the illusion even when he knows that, through Strether, it is being undone. James shows a faith in the efficacy of art, while his protagonist shows disgust and intellectual despair upon discovering the sullied roots of his vision. Yet his shift of light, away from Strether's mind and onto the ambiguous surface of his words and actions, shows James's unwillingness to lie to the reader with explicit assurances of his hero's triumph; rather, as in the earlier novels, he lets the reader dangle between truth and fantasy, hoping that, in the generous reader, the choosing of one will not result in the automatic devaluation and derogation of the other.

Thus James in The Ambassadors has raised the image of a discerning hero, just as Lambert Strether raised in Madame de Vionnet the image of a person of moral beauty. For both author and character there is a risk commensurate with the degree of beauty attempted; as R. P. Blackmur says, "it is the perennial job of uprooted imagination, of conscience, choosing from beauty and knowledge, to raise such an image." But he also cautions that in such an enterprise one "may not transgress reality without destruction; the images must not be taken for reality though the heart craves it."[39] This is a lesson James teaches twice in The Ambassadors--once through Madame de Vionnet's failure to remain within the form Strether creates for her, and again through Strether's own inability to rise to the occasion that art demands of him. James's own equivocations at the end of the novel indicate that he, unlike Strether, knows what has gone wrong, and why; it is such displays of awareness, in this novel and in the others examined in this study, that lend credence to Sallie Sears' incisive observation that "James's finest talent . . . is for seeing what will not work." James is indeed, as Sears says, "the most unsentimental of our great romanticists,"[40] for in The Ambassadors he essays to make great art, and great romance, out of the discovery that these forms are of the imagination, and that one must neither mistake them for nor judge them against the reality into which one inevitably awakens.

NOTES

[1]"The Watcher from the Balcony: Henry James's The Ambassadors," Critical Quarterly, 8 (1966), 38.

[2]The Craft of Fiction (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 169.

[3]Modern Fiction Studies, 4 (1958), 157-64.

[4]Tilford, 161.

[5]"The Author's Voice in The Ambassadors," Journal of Narrative Technique, 1 (1971), 108.

[6]Thomas, 114.

[7]Henry James, The Ambassadors, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 18. All references are to this edition, which is based on the corrected New York text of 1909.

[8]A World Elsewhere (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 124.

[9]Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; rpt. 1963), p. 23.

[10]The Destructive Element (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p. 81.

[11]Spender, p. 82.

[12]"The Art of Henry James: The Ambassadors," Chicago Review, 9 (1956), 16.

[13]William Bysshe Stein, "The Ambassadors," The Crucifixion of Sensibility," College English, 17 (1956), 292.

[14]The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 120.

[15]Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1927), p. 120.

[16]Spender, p. 77.

[17]Tanner, 38.

[18]James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 307.

[19]The Art of the Novel, p. 308.

[20]U. C. Knoepflmacher has produced a useful study on this theme: "'O Rare for Strether!' Antony and Cleopatra and The Ambassadors," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 19 (1965), 333-44.

[21]Stein, 290.

[22]Sears, p. 118.

[23]The Art of the Novel, p. 312.

[24]Poirier, p. 136.

[25]"The Ambassadors: Strether's Vision of Evil," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 14 (1959), 50.

[26]James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 413.

[27]"Lambert Strether's Circuitous Journey: Motifs of Internalized Quest and Circularity in The Ambassadors," Emerson Society Quarterly, 22 (1976), 245.

[28]See "The Language of Adventure in Henry James," American Literature, 32 (1960), 291-301.

[29]The Art of the Novel, p. 319.

[30]"The Definition of Innocence: James's The Ambassadors," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 6 (1964), 305.

[31]"The Ambassadors: A New View," PMLA, 75 (1960), 444.

[32]"The Jamesian Dialectic in The Ambassadors," Southern Review, 13 (1977), 468-91.

[33]"The Ambassadors as Conversion Experience," Southern Review, 5 (1969), 351.

[34]"The Two Lambert Strethers: A New Reading of The Ambassadors," Modern Fiction Studies, 7 (1961), 305.

[35]Garis, 307.

[36]Knoepflmacher, 341.

[37]"A Right Issue from a Tight Place: Henry James and Maria Gostrey," Journal of Narrative Technique, 6 (1976), 78.

[38]Garis, 305.

[39]"The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James: Notes on the Underlying Classic Form in the Novel," Accent, 11 (1951), 139.

[40]Sears, p. 151.

CHAPTER V

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

In his Preface to The Wings of the Dove, Henry James describes that novel's "idea, reduced to its essence" as "that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early strickened and doomed, condemned to die under short respite."[1] But though Millie Theale, the tragically ill "dove" of the title, provides the generative image for the novel, it is not her own "ordeal of consciousness" which dominates the presentation; as James says later in his Preface, "her stricken state was but half her case, the other half being those affected by her."[2] In the end, it is this latter aspect of Milly's "case" which dominates The Wings of the Dove and gives rise to its essential controversies and interests; the dying Milly Theale is not, finally, the novel's "subject" in the same way as Isabel Archer in The Portrait, or Lambert Strether in The Ambassadors. If anything, Milly resembles Christopher Newman's love-object Claire de Cintré, or Strether's romanticized madonna Marie de Vionnet; like both those women, Milly's principal role in this novel is as one whose selfhood becomes a field of free play for the imaginations of others.

It is the consciousness of one of these "others," namely Milly's purported lover Merton Densher, which becomes the crucible wherein the novel's elemental oppositions are compressed and heated.

Milly's situation, while central to the novel's design, "matters" principally in terms of its palpable effects on Densher, and in its dynamic contrast with the situation of the vital but impoverished Kate Croy, Densher's actual lover. As Christof Wegelin says, The Wings of the Dove is in essence "the story of Densher's changing relations to Milly and to Kate"; he sees in the novel "a skeletal plot almost of the nature of the fairy tale or the morality play" which "suggests the struggle of the good and the bad princess for the mastery of the prince, of the good and bad angel for the possession of the soul of a man."[3] Within this "allegorical framework" are other associations: "the white and black in which Kate and Milly are clothed," the Biblical allusions to Christ's own ordeal, and in particular the bird imagery, which identifies Milly as the grace-giving sacrificial dove and Kate as the "crow"[4] or cormorant, preying for her sustenance on the fortunes of others or (more to the point) on their dead or dying flesh.

But these associations, like the moral paradigm they define, are important as local manifestations of Densher's consciousness rather than as expressions of the novel's central theme. They are, like Densher's role as the novel's primary "reflector,"[5] emergent rather than initially specified features, moving gradually to the fore as the action progresses. It is the phenomenon of these features' emergence, and not the mere fact of their evoked associations, that seems to bear most fruit upon analysis; the novel is not simply the story of "mankind undergoing regeneration," symbolized in Densher's final rejection of Kate for Milly.[6] It is, rather, an

account of how the desire for such a regeneration is aroused in Densher, and the roles which both Kate and Milly play in the "process of vision" by which Densher pursues his redemption.

Precisely what I mean by the "emergent" quality of the novel's features may best be explained by noting some important points of contact and departure between The Wings of the Dove and the James novel immediately preceding it, The Ambassadors. That novel too is concerned with a "process of vision," but in Strether's case that process is underlined by a Romance story structure which has the effect of validating the hero's desperate romantic self-delusions. What results is, as we have seen, a blurred distinction between the author's vision and that of his sad, even pathetic protagonist. In The Wings of the Dove one finds a romance cycle of departure and return (from London to Venice and back again), of epiphany and moral regeneration, similar to the course marked for Strether in The Ambassadors; but in Wings, this structure does not govern the novel as a whole. In fact, the pattern does not really assert itself until the second half of the book, and the symbolic attributions which define the terms of Densher's ordeal are not wholly specified until very late in the story. Thus the formal elements of romance in Wings seem less the result of authorial design than of the collaborative effort of the characters themselves (a process increasingly dominated by Densher) as they try to make something beautiful out of the lot which life has handed them. It is after all Kate who conceives of Milly as a "dove," and Milly and Densher who model their behavior according to that definition;

furthermore, it is Densher who finally identifies Kate with destructive worldly ambition, designing for her in the last two books a series of tests which serve for him as a proof of her inferior moral nature.

This does not mean, of course, that the first phase of the novel simply marks time until the "real" story of Densher's moral ordeal begins; the opening chapters are in fact an implied commentary on the symbolically charged action which ensues as the characters finally discover and assume their roles. In these early chapters James dramatizes the human cost of the role-playing upon which the integrity of the social and literary fabric is dependent, and calls into question the efficacy of the symbolic roles which Kate and Milly are assigned, at the expense of their wholeness and vitality as characters, in Densher's inner moral drama. In this respect The Wings of the Dove is both radically different from and perfectly an extension of The Ambassadors: as in that preceding novel, a primary feature of James's technique is his ostensible sharing of authorial functions with the characters through whose eyes the story is seen. But in Wings this sharing occurs on a far more pervasive scale; James forgoes from the beginning the strict and evident formal control of earlier novels, and patiently waits for the imaginations of the characters themselves to establish the symbolic and formal properties of the "situation" in which they find themselves. In this way James allows the characters to absorb responsibility for the story's controlling form, and through them examines the process of form-giving as yet another phenomenon of the individual consciousness.

This is not a new area of inquiry for James. As we have seen in our other investigations, James's novels always dramatize the human impulse to see real experience in the light of aesthetic conceptions. This impulse is shown most radically in the "surrogate romancers" like Mrs. Tristram and Ralph Touchett, and most manifestly in Lambert Strether, whose "process of vision" so totally dominates The Ambassadors; but in these precedent cases, the aesthetic impulse in these characters is reflected in and implicitly endorsed by the authorial rhetoric, both in its ongoing commentary (in The American and The Portrait) and in its determination of form (in The Ambassadors). In Wings the authorial presence betrays a suppression of this impulse, and a deference of its powers to the characters; the question of what to "do" with Milly or with anyone else appears to be a concern of the participants alone, and not of the author, whose intentions are principally evident in the establishment of the community of characters in which the question of what to "do" with Milly is posed and answered. This authorial deference allows James to show more clearly than ever before that the "artistic" process by which experience is endowed with form and beauty is not a faculty of the artist (or author) alone, but is in fact symptomatic of humans in general, and can be observed in artistic creations of sufficiently realized humanity.

Thus one may see an ostensible rationale for James's indulgence of his impulse to "get down into the arena . . . to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle" in his novels:[7] the "muffled majesty of authorship"

that prevails in these later works represents not so much a renunciation of the authorial function as an attempt to examine its processes and its consequences in activities other than the author's own. In The Wings of the Dove particularly James appears to be engaged in an attempt to understand his own role and his own difficulties as an author by dramatizing and observing the authorial process in his surrogates, the characters. In the end, James is not so much getting down into the muddle with his characters as hoisting them up into his own vertiginous tower, the better to observe the symptoms produced by breathing such rarefied air.

The principal difficulty that the authorial role presents for James himself is, as we have seen, that of hewing his materials into harmony with his design, of forging an identity between the process of authorial vision and the human particulars on which that vision is to be imposed. But the achievement of this identity has proved so problematical for James that in Wings he declines to attempt it; he appears to understand from the outset that his characters are bound to betray the symbolic associations which attend them, so he effaces his own presence as magisterial author and allows his "bleeding participants" to apply the symbolic treatment themselves. For example, Susan Stringham's view of Milly as a "princess" imparts a necessary romantic amplification of the story's texture;[8] but this "princess" motif, like the image of the dove which ultimately supercedes it, is not confirmed by authorial endorsement, but rather is offered for examination by the reader. Thus, if the characters fail in the end to adhere to their roles, the onus is

on James's surrogates rather than on the author himself; the task left to the author, then, is not that of supplying an interpretation of his own, but ofassessing the success of those provided by the characters, and of measuring the cost at which such interpretations are achieved and maintained. In this way, James recognizes as given the problematical nature of the aesthetic contract between artist and subject, but consciously makes this recognition the central issue and the structural principle of the novel itself. As L. B. Holland has observed, The Wings of the Dove is "a novel that builds . . . on its own failure."[9]

The seeds of this failure are conspicuously planted in the opening chapters with Kate Croy. Though Kate is ultimately cast as the ostensible villainness of the story, the "destructive persistent element"[10] which parasitically feeds on Milly's moral beauty and material wealth, she is introduced by James at her moment of great personal crisis, in which her painful conflicts and mingled motives are apparent as nowhere else in the novel. Unlike the stalking "panther" which she is later to become, Kate is introduced as a potential victim in her own right, afflicted by a dilemma that is calculated to appeal to the understanding of the sensitive reader. The terms of this dilemma are crucial to our understanding of Kate, and the way in which her problems are subsequently effaced is revelatory of James's strategies and intentions in this novel.

Kate's dilemma, in its most elementary terms, involves her making a choice between love and money. But her situation would not be a dilemma, nor would it be Jamesian, if it could be so simply

put. For Kate, as Sallie Sears has observed, neither of these choices is acceptable.[11] On one hand, Kate desires the wealth that would derive from a marriage arranged by her Aunt Maud; but she fears the surrender of identity that would occur in her transformation into a marriageable commodity. Furthermore, Kate resents her status as her family's sacrificial lamb, whose selfhood is to be offered on the altar of marriage so that her disgraced father and impoverished sister might be provided for. On the other hand, Kate desires to gratify her romantic impulses by marrying Merton Densher, a young journalist with a fine mind but no material prospects; but she abhors the brutalization a penniless marriage has wreaked on her sister, and is too morally sensitive to her "duty" to her family thus to "throw herself away" on a romantic urge. The choice of marriage either for love or money represents a betrayal of Kate's image of herself, either of her egoistic needs or of her moral sensibility; she can accept neither without the complement of the other.

What Kate needs is a course of action which will simplify this dilemma. But the simplifications available to her are both limited and extreme: she must be willing to give up or to grasp for all. To give up, as she offers to do in the opening scene with her father, simplifies by negation; her offer of total renunciatory service, though it satisfies her sense of her own "family duty," is nevertheless in essence an "escape" from the higher demands of Aunt Maud. Thus to "save herself," Kate admits, she would be willing even to sacrifice her love for Densher.[12] The other alternative--grasping for all--promises to simplify her dilemma by action; in "trying for

everything," Kate would be pursuing the hope of both discharging her family obligations and satisfying her desires for material comforts and for Densher at the same time. But this course is more risky, since it requires Kate and Densher to play a game of delay and deceit with Aunt Maud, and a sense of when, how, or whether her ends will be achieved is not immediately forthcoming. But for Kate, either direct withdrawal or covert engagement is preferable to the untenable choices between love or money that otherwise present themselves.

In this context, Kate's resolve to "try for everything," which is the motive underlying her deceit and ill use of Milly, is shown as a decision of last resort, arrived at only after her initial impulse to try for nothing is frustrated. In the opening scene of the novel, James clearly dramatizes the defeat of this original intention: Kate is desperate for relief from her conflicts, and is willing to give up all to escape them if only her father will provide her with a moral rationale for doing so by accepting her offer of service. This scene has important consequences for the rest of the novel, since it reveals in Kate an impulse totally antithetical to the actions and imagery which become emblematic of her as the story progresses; she becomes the "crow," the "panther," only after her father spurns her offer and "throws her back" into the oppressively prodigious lap of Aunt Maud (p. 49).

So James's dramatization of Kate's case reveals that her ultimate acceptance of her role as deceiver and manipulator is a desperate game played against the constricting limits of her

situation. Kate's initial gesture reveals the harrowing anxiety from which her later resolution springs; thus she sparks a vestigial sympathy in the reader that even her most duplicitous behavior cannot completely extinguish. One cannot help but remember, even as Kate works to sacrifice Milly for herself and Densher, that she herself has almost been a victim, and that, given a choice, she would rather have removed herself from the fray than become a predator. The opening scene reveals Kate's preference for the renunciatory gesture which, when seen in Densher, becomes the ostensible moral standard of the novel; but this option is closed to her by her father's rejection of her offer.

In such a light, it is difficult to see Kate purely as the "bad angel" who vies with Milly for the possession of Densher's soul. The rhetoric which guides the reader towards such an interpretation is mocked by the lucidity with which James presents Kate's case and dramatizes her desire to escape moral peril. This conflict between lucid analysis and aesthetic valuation is, as we have seen, one that is characteristic of James's fictional enterprises; but in Wings it appears to have become the main issue. James makes Kate's antithetical impulse the keynote of the work itself; her opening scene prepares the reader for the discovery that the roles eventually assumed by the characters are diminutions of the full humanity they display before their aesthetic values are fixed.

Nowhere is this issue more pertinent than in the case of Milly Theale, whose humanity is ultimately occluded by her symbolic function. Among critics who have taken Milly's symbolic role at

face value, it has been customary to accuse James of having insufficiently endowed his heroine with human verisimilitude; Stephen Koch aptly summarizes this attitude when he states that Milly is "a character with the literary virtues of the impersonal in a personal drama," and that "James made her a figure without a conventional fictional being."[13] But this "impersonal" or figural quality of Milly's is an effect of the consciousnesses of James's "reflectors," beginning with Susan Stringham, and not a direct indication of James's own attitude. It is evident, from Milly's words and actions, that James has granted her a greater measure of human reality than do the characters who supply interpretations of those words and actions; but this human reality is gradually subsumed in the symbolic roles through which Milly's identity is eventually defined by herself and other characters. Her elevation "into a symbol and a register of a common truth" is indeed "a process that robs her of her humanity";[14] yet Milly's human actuality is not, as Koch suggests, "retracted" by James, but rather is gradually repressed in the consciousnesses of the characters themselves. Therefore there are two aspects of Milly's presence and of her role in the novel that must be kept in mind: first, it must be granted that in Milly Theale there are human riches to be plundered for aesthetic gains; and it must also be recognized that the authorial James is a passive and not active accomplice in the conspiracy of vision by which the effacement of Milly's humanity is achieved.

As one might expect, James's endowment of Milly with the full prerogatives of human will produces some dissonance between her

personal reality (the terms of which I shall shortly discuss) and her "impersonal" literary virtues. Critics have generally regarded Milly's role in the novel as a redemptive one, in which she allows herself to be sacrificed so that others in the work--particularly Densher--may be enlightened or redeemed.[15] These views of Milly's nobility and transcendent moral beauty are based on the assumption that her actions are ultimately to be construed as selfless and benificient; this reading is consistent with Milly's assigned role as the sacrifical dove, and with the numerous analogues in image and action which link her to the Christian Savior. Furthermore, this reading is supported not only by localized imagery in the language of the novel, but by the overarching pattern of Densher's regeneration which Milly appears to shape in the latter half of the story. That some have seen this regenerative process as failed rather than achieved is an important issue, but is most pertinent to the question of Densher's fitness for his own role as the moral knight-errant, and does not bear significantly on Milly's relation to her part. The rhetoric betrays no doubts regarding the transcendent power of Milly's gilded wings, though in the final analysis one may reasonably question whether their descending grace has its desired effect.

Not all readers of The Wings of the Dove have agreed with the view of Milly as a redeemer and symbol of grace; some maintain, against the indications of the evaluative rhetoric, that she is sadly, even execrably, human after all--that her beautiful behavior is symptomatic of neurotic insecurity, selfishness, or pride, and that its charming effects conceal basic self-aggrandizing or

self-destructive tendencies.[16] These interpretations are useful to the extent that they recognize James's intention of creating in Milly a fully imagined human being; but they fail in the extent to which they interpret the disjunction between Milly's psychological weakness and her symbolic strength as a failure either of vision or of execution on James's part. If one takes his treatment of Kate Croy as a paradigm for his method in The Wings of the Dove, it is clear that James is aware of this disjunction, and that he has in fact made it the governing theme and the prevailing technical consideration in this novel. Milly, though she provides the novel with its central symbol, must be understood first in human terms; but an application of this understanding to her aesthetic function reveals, as in Kate's case, a number of impulses which are antithetical to the values she is made to represent in her apotheosis as the selfless, grace-giving dove.

Milly's inner conflicts are remarkably similar to Kate's; in fact, they represent the obverse image of Kate's own. Kate is distinguished on one hand by her energy and vitality, and on the other by the suffocating threat of poverty which afflicts her; Milly is financially secure but is passive towards the very thing she desires, the experience that lies beyond the encircling fortress of her wealth. Still, like Kate, Milly wants to annex what she lacks without placing at risk what she already has; or, failing that, she faces the possibility of giving up all rather than accepting the median joys of her insulated existence. When Milly longs for "The power to resist the bliss of what I have" (p. 89), she is expressing her sense that her

material advantages are either inappropriate or insufficient to her needs; she is also praying for deliverance, through either enlargement or total renunciation of her prospects, from the provisional security which her money has bestowed on her.

So Milly, like Kate, must choose between surrendering or hoping for everything. Milly's contemplation of this choice is indirectly dramatized in her introductory scene, in which Susan Stringham finds her perched at the edge of an Alpine cliff. In light of the conflict sketched above, this image has a psychological dimension which is a truer register of Milly's character than the often-invoked analogue with Satan's temptation of Christ; Milly is represented here as having the option of immediate and total self-destruction on one hand and the deferred possibility of total self-satisfaction on the other. There is a real sense in which Milly, like Kate, must choose between giving up all (in the sweet oblivion of the abyss) and hoping to gain all (by descending from the mountain into the world of experience). And, though the novel chiefly dramatizes Milly's pursuit of the second option, it is the appeal of the former possibility that immediately registers on the observing Susan Stringham. She sees in the cliff scene "some betrayed accordance of Milly's caprice with a horrible hidden obsession" (p. 84), and suspects that Milly is contemplating a suicidal plunge. Though this impulse of Milly's is effaced in much of the action and analysis which follows, the undertow of her potential despair ripples the surface of even her bravest performances, reaching its fullest expression in Book Ninth, as she "turns her face to the

wall" in an emblematic rejection of life and love. But Milly's final despair is not for her a new syndrome, sparked by her discovery of Kate's and Densher's treachery; it is rather an old one revived, a return to her initial contemplation of death as an escape, in which she may substitute the successful abolition of her needs for the failed satisfaction of them.

It is symptomatic, incidentally, of Mrs. Stringham's view of Milly that she immediately suppresses her instinctive recognition of her "princess's" unseemly thirst for self-destruction; after all, Milly is in Susan's eyes a heroine of romance, endowed with an innate nobility and strength of spirit, and in such a "reading" of Milly the idea of despair or self-surrender must be inadmissible. Therefore, Mrs. Stringham rationalizes that if Milly was indeed "looking down on the kingdoms of the earth . . . it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them" (p. 84); the prospect of Milly's "sharp and simple release from the human predicament" is a threat to the romantic enterprise through which Mrs. Stringham has defined her relation to her "princess," and is accordingly denied. Instead, Susan sees Milly as "taking full in the face the whole assault of life" (p. 85)--a view which overrates Milly's ability to deal with such an onslaught, though it satisfies Susan's romantic conception of her heroine. So Mrs. Stringham, out of the necessities of vision, draws a curtain across the peril of despair she glimpses in Milly, and replaces this hint of real weakness with a symbolic attribution of strength; but it is too late for her errant insight to be erased from the discourse; it has already been shown to the reader, and the effaced prospect

of Milly's despair hovers over the subsequent action, a ghostly antithesis to the rhetoric which argues for Milly's intense love of life and her noble endurance of pain and betrayal.

But Mrs. Stringham is not the only person in the novel who has trouble plumbing the true depths of Milly's consciousness. Milly herself is unsure of who she is, and what her life is for. Ironically, the very wealth which others (particularly Kate) see as the wellspring of Milly's strength and liberty is in truth the source of paralyzing anxiety; her prodigious inheritance actually keeps her important questions of identity and purpose from being fully answered. Though endowed with the "creative agency of money,"[17] Milly is trapped in the image which her wealth projects; as Susan Stringham observes, "that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be <u>the</u> thing you were" (p. 82). Milly's money and tragic history, so palpable in their presence and in the impressions they produce in others, bespeak themselves through her, rather than the other way around. Like the clothing of which Isabel Archer complains, Milly's material advantages are in fact personal constraints; she does not wish to be identified solely by her wealth any more than Isabel wants to be known solely by her clothing. But the actual Milly has trouble escaping the powerful impersonal image projected by her money and her family history; it is an image which reflects inward as well as outward, frustrating not only her desire for authentic human contact--her "plea for people and her love of life" (p. 97)--but for self-knowledge and self-determination as well. It is the tyranny of this impersonal identity which Milly ruefully

regards as "the bliss of what I have," and her "wanting abysses" (p. 123) is merely the expression of her desire to feel the deep plunge of the real through which her true needs can be answered, and her true self can be revealed and recognized.

Yet Milly has great need of this impersonal image which her money projects. Though she longs to plunge into the stream of life, to feel the pull of the real, she also has a fear of drowning in this powerful tide. Her sense of self is not firm enough for her to abandon the protection of her given mask; neither is her knowledge of the world sufficient to sustain her should she forgo the artificial bouyancy which her impersonal self provides. This vulnerability of Milly's is revealed in the small crisis of her first extended encounter with Lord Mark; James records her alarm at the "perverse quickening of the relation" between them, and notes that "She wished to get away from him, or indeed, much rather, away from herself so far as she was present to him" (p. 108). Milly feels endangered by the prospect of such intimacy because she does not yet feel ready to be "presented" to others in personal terms. This is particularly true in her encounters with others who, like Lord Mark, have the self-possession and the knowledge of the world which Milly finds wanting in herself; such people, with their "lack of imagination," seem to Milly capable of seeing her as she really is, with her doubts, insecurities, and covert ambitions, and denuded of the romantic cloak in which Susan and others have protectively wrapped her. By "keeping herself in abeyance" (p. 110) through the various masks which circumstances offer her, Milly is able to conceal her inner

weakness in a show of apparent strength; thus Milly accepts the interpretations of herself which others provide, without totally identifying with them. She would rather pass as a "cheap exotic" or seem "easy" to Lord Mark than have her actual self exposed to his scrutiny; such simplified readings, while inadequate to account for the real Milly, have the virtue of stopping the thoughts of others at the gates of her citadel, rather than allowing them to pass through and discover the vulnerabilities within.

Mrs. Stringham senses the lack of identification between the real and the symbolic versions of Milly when she observes that her princess lacks a "motive" adequate to her means (p. 130). But it is typical of Susan not to suspect that there may be a contradiction between the actual Milly Theale and the significance she has come to assume for her companion; Susan's remark suggests, rather, that Milly simply has not yet "grown into" her money, and the role that it determines for her. But in fact, as we have seen, the money is an impediment to, and not a symbolic extension of, Milly's possibilities for full self-realization. The conspiratorial effects of wealth and of tragic family loss have left Milly alone, alienated from others and unsure of her place and value in the world at large; but Milly's only defense against these anxieties is her further retreat into the very situation which fed her insecurity and alienation in the first place. She is dependent on the insulating and glorifying effects her wealth projects to others, even as its effect on her is to exacerbate the very conflicts she is hoping to resolve. Contrary to her expectations, Milly's money neither brings her closer

to the contact with life she desires, nor aids her efforts to withdraw and consolidate herself for the full assault of experience; it is ultimately the cause rather than the cure for these difficulties, though it presents itself to Milly as the only medium through which she may work for her happiness.

So money is the ambivalent force at the core of both Kate's and Milly's conflicts; just as Kate's dilemma is defined by her poverty, Milly's is defined by her wealth. Furthermore, Milly's strategic response to her dilemma is much like Kate's: they both use the overt roles supplied by circumstance as secured battlements from which the satisfaction of private needs and desires may be covertly pursued. But Milly, unlike Kate, does not know how to become an active agent in the workings of her own fate. Conditioned to passivity by her fears and by the received advantages which have ruled her destiny, Milly's idea of grasping for all is "neither to seek nor to shirk," but "to let things come as they would" (pp. 96, 97). For Milly, destiny and identity are matters of what is granted by the world at large rather than cases of what may be grasped from it. She does not wish to use her money to buy a false image of herself, nor does she require it (as Kate does) for the support of a self-concept that is already formed; rather, it represents for her a womb-like security, at once safe and suffocating, out of which she expects eventually to emerge.

Yet she characteristically shrinks from experience, even when it presents itself without seeking on her part. Though she professes herself in theory to be "delighted to know that something was to be

done with her" (p. 119), in actuality Milly fears the risk of intimacy that such "doing" might involve. We have already seen this fear excited, in the context of her conversation with Lord Mark; but it is evident as well in her response to the imminent return of her acquaintance Merton Densher. Her first impulse is to avoid him by making herself absent; and, when pressed by a puzzled Susan Stringham, Milly simply answers that "I don't know what I want to run away from" (p. 131). In addition, she seems so intent on clearing Densher's way with Kate that Susan has to remind her not to be "more interested for them than they are for themselves" (p. 134). Though Susan interprets these gestures of Milly's as symptoms of a lack of "motive," Milly's motive in fact is clear: her fear of direct contact with life is in the end a more binding inner mandate than her expressed desire to leave her cocoon and submit to the danger and excitement of the real world.

What Milly really wants from her existence is revealed both to her and to the reader in the scene with the Bronzino portrait. Milly is reduced to tears before the painting, as she contemplates that the woman in the picture "was dead, dead, dead" (p. 144). L. B. Holland has remarked that in this scene "the reader is . . . reminded of a sense in which any work of art, no matter how brilliant, is dead";[18] but, while this is certainly true, Milly's pity and sympathy for the woman thus framed comprise only one aspect of her own recognition. Her statement that "I shall never be better than this" is not purely a reflection on the image of the portrait itself, but refers as well to the cathartic outpouring of emotion

that the painting has provoked in her. Milly's catharsis has made her feel vital and alive, and has given her a taste of the full range of human feeling which she heretofore felt she had not experienced. But this vitality of emotion is extremely qualified; when Milly tells Lord Mark that "everything this afternoon has been too beautiful," she is expressing her preference for the aesthetically aroused emotion over the torrential feelings of actual interpersonal contact; she professes herself to be "glad" that Lord Mark has "been a part of" her experience, but in fact he has shared nothing, understood nothing. The sole emotional transaction has been between herself and the painting. She has felt a catharsis, surely; but it is a controlled catharsis, an onanistic emotion which has the effect and illusion of real human contact without any of its risks. Milly may weep for the painting, but it cannot weep for her.

Furthermore, her own resemblance to the portrait--insisted on by Lord Mark--underscores Milly's subliminal awareness that she has glimpsed in the painting a representation of her own idealized self-image: the person who is able to touch life (as the woman in the picture has touched Milly) without herself being touched by it. This is the precise condition which Milly has set upon her attempts to annex the world of experience beyond her protected fortress, and for this reason the painting speaks powerfully to her. The beauty of the portrait, its very effect, is for Milly a result of the portrayed woman's self-sacrifice; it symbolizes a renunciation which, in the case of the woman in question, was apparently joyless, but which Milly, pleading the excuse of weakness, would be glad to

embrace. Thus for Milly the initial impression of "death" is converted into a symbolization of escape and transcendence in which Milly, by imitating the woman in the protrait, may gain her relation to life by abstracting herself from it. Milly's encounter with the painting shows her how to remove the question of "living" from the difficulties of personal contact and place it on the level of the aesthetic, where the possibilities of formal representation might allow her weakness of will to be symbolized as a renunciatory beauty. Thus Milly's catharsis partakes both of her sorrow and pity at the other woman's sacrifice and of her joy in having discovered her own dream of glory.

Milly's discovery of her grave illness comes as a powerful reinforcement for the course suggested to her by the painting. Her disease does not only provide an explanation for the attenuated nature of her desires, but determines the basis on which her relation to others will henceforth stand; Sir Luke's tacit verdict gives her something "firm," and she finds that "to see her life put into the scales represented to her the first taste of orderly living" (p. 154). Furthermore, Milly feels the elation of "an impulse simple and direct, easy above all to act upon" (p. 161); the basis of this ease, and of this newfound certainty, is the simplification of the problem of "living" that occurs when Milly transfers her pursuit of human relations from the actual to the symbolic. Although she feels that she has been given "a great adventure, a big dim experiment or struggle in which she might, more responsibly than ever before, take a hand" (p. 162), the terms of this task are curiously alienated

from human society; she feels that "her only company must be the human race at large, present all around her, but inspiringly impersonal" (p. 161). This reflection carries the startling implication that, for Milly at least, personal humanity (in the form of real and discrete individuals) is somehow inadequate or hostile to the requirements of the imagination.

In short, Milly's illness relieves her of responsibility for taking, in Susan's words, "the whole assault of life"; she sees her path towards self-fulfillment as a task of forging an "impersonal" relation to others which keeps her secure in her fortress while she works her beautiful effects on them. Thus she welcomes signs that she has made an impression on another, so long as that impression is neither personal nor connected with the old, restrictive identity in which her money speaks for her. A telling sign of Milly's new philosophy is her response to Kate's complaint of Densher that "one remains, all the same, but one of his ideas"; Milly answers that "There's no harm in that . . . if you come out in the end as the best of them" (p. 182). She would rather conceive of herself as a beautiful idea than as an abject actuality, since such "ideas" offer Milly an escape from, as well as insurance against, the sad ugliness of her own weakness.

But Milly's sense of her own real helplessness and weakness persists, and is brought home to her most pointedly in her relationship with Kate; so it is in this interpersonal context that Milly feels the greatest need to transform her real situation into a play of symbols and ideas. Milly is dominated and threatened by

Kate's vitality; she feels herself "in a current determined, through her indifference, timidity, bravery, generosity . . . by others" and in particular by Kate, who "was the keeper of the lock of the dam" (p. 178). Milly needs desperately to find an excuse for her passivity and for the "want of confidence" (p. 183) which overtakes her when she is alone with Kate. Thus the idea that Kate is "a creature who paced like a panther" (pp. 183-84) strikes Milly as apropos; it supplies her as well as the novel with the image of a predatory Kate--a reading which puts the relationship between these two women on a symbolic plane, and makes Milly "a little less ashamed of having been scared" (p. 184).

Kate's reading of Milly as a "dove" completes this new symbolic relation; though it expresses the truth of Milly's danger, Milly does not regard it as threatening because it is "not presented with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially" (p. 184). In other words, the role of "dove" which Kate offers Milly is, like Milly's own image of Kate as a panther, a symbolic attribution which effaces and excuses Milly's sense of her own weakness in the face of the other's strength. Furthermore, like Sir Luke's tacit diagnosis, the "dove" image offers Milly a further specification of her developing self-image: "it lighted up the strange dusk in which she had lately walked. That was the matter with her. She was a dove." There remains for her, of course, the question of "how a dove would act" (p. 185); but the problem of symbolic consistency seems to Milly infinitely more soluble than that of the actual conflicts she has heretofore been wrestling with.

Like all mentally distressed people, Milly is most acutely in need of an idea that will simplify her psychic dilemmas; and her encounters with Sir Luke and Kate conspire to offer her just such an idea. The image of the dying dove extends to Milly a new symbolic identity in which her weaknesses are transformed into virtues, and her retreat from life becomes a renunciatory testament to her thwarted vitality.

So, finally, the symbol of the dove and the fact of her disease provide Milly with an aegis under which she can consolidate her identity and proceed to act; but, unlike the suffocating mask of her wealth, this new image seems to Milly to express her, to represent her value to the world at large, in a way her money never did. This is because her new self-image effaces rather than exacerbates her conflicts. While her money protected her from the fearful chaos of experience, it also denied her the desired personal recognition and esteem of others, even as its prodigious material potential mocked her own reticence and weakness. But as the dying dove, Milly feels both protected from the dangers of actual experience and provided with a reason for begging off; furthermore, she may feel that her success with others is after all "personal," since the image they are now responding to is (she believes) not based on her wealth, which conceals her true identity, but on a new understanding of her in which her inner weaknesses are transformed into an outward moral beauty.

So, though the esteem Milly receives from others is still based on an impersonalized, symbolic version of herself, she has

nevertheless found a way of maintaining her contradictory needs to be both with other people and apart from them; she has the illusion of contact with life and with others, without the risk of personal exposure she so fears. Thus she convinces herself that for her, the question of life "was now beautifully provided for" (p. 187); but the irony is that these questions are not truly solved, but only avoided. That these reflections occur to Milly as she enters the National Gallery indicates the nature of her solution; in substituting aesthetic relations for interpersonal ones, she has indeed left the "personal question," in all its immensity, "outside." But it will only remain so as long as she does not leave the realm of art, as long as she does not descend from the frame in which she has ensconced herself, and return to life.

This erection of symbolic interfaces between oneself and others is symptomatic of the behavior of all the principals in The Wings of the Dove. The novel as a whole seems in fact to stress the tragic necessity of such symbolic mediation, in human intercourse as well as in literature; after all, it is the consciousnesses of the characters, filling the gaps left by the deferent author, which formulate, agree to, and maintain these interfaces. But these mediated identities are subject to deconstruction, just the same as the interpretive and evaluative rhetoric supplied by authorial narration in other novels we have examined. Like the authorial rhetoric of The American, The Portrait, and even The Ambassadors, the symbolic interfaces produced by the characters in Wings fail for one reason: they do not articulate the full human possibilities of the characters whose

identities they try to express; they are, like Isabel Archer's clothing, symbolic extensions but actual effacements of the inner realities of those characters.

James's technique in The Wings of the Dove allows him to examine the conditions which underlie both the creation and the collapse of these symbolizations; by shifting from one center of consciousness to another, recognizing the inner necessity of each view without endowing any with authority, James gives his novel the density of symbolic texture while reserving for himself the power to critique the process of symbolization in which the characters, in their own names and for their own reasons, continually engage. I have already examined in psychological terms the primary illustration of this process, in which Milly's identity as the benificent "dove" is raised before the reader, and before the other characters in the novel; but I would like to comment briefly on the significance of this process as a metaphor--or a substitution--for the activities of the author himself.

Northrop Frye says in his "Theory of Symbols" that literature "has the function of expressing, as a verbal hypothesis, a vision of . . . the forms of human desire."[19] A work of literature, then, represents the author's attempt to symbolize, through recognizable literary conventions, the human desire which has no face or shape of its own, so that it may be objectified and its satisfactions pursued. In Wings, James allows his characters to usurp this authorial function and seek the formal articulation of their own desires. In doing so, they attempt to use each other as the author

generally uses the materials of his own experience: for them, others become the base materials which imagination may then shape into median forms, at once real and ideal, which satisfy the demands of the senses while providing a phenomenal embodiment of desire itself. Thus one may understand the issue of "types" in James as expressing a power relationship in which characters attempt to impose their own imaginative requirements on each other; "typing" is in the end a game of reducing others to pure formal possibilities through which one's own desire may be expressed and actualized. As Frye recognizes, form is dependent on the reductive conventions of "type" to assure the inner harmoniousness and coherence of its effect; but when characters are understood first as fully imagined human beings, as they are in James, this typing process is revealed as brutal and self-serving. By dramatizing his characters both as objects and agents of this process, and by holding back from it himself, James shows how inarticulate desire motivates not just art, but the entire activity of human perception, and reveals "typing" as a habitual and cruel symptom of the human drive towards self-fulfillment.

The mutuality of this process may be seen most clearly in Kate's and Milly's early views of each other. Milly, impressed both by Kate's vitality and by her mystery, sees her new friend, "by a necessity of the imagination, for a heroine," feeling "it was the only character in which she wouldn't be wasted" (p. 114); Kate, in Milly's eyes, is able "to show as a beautiful stranger, to cut her connections and lose her identity, letting the imagination make for a time what it could of them" (p. 138). In other words, Milly

sees in Kate the actualization of the romantic mystery, private self-assurance, and zest for life that she wishes for herself. Kate, for her part, has "a perception of the high happiness of her companion's liberty," and believes that Milly "had to ask nobody for anything, to refer nothing to anyone; her freedom, her fortune, and her fancy were her law" (p. 116).

In short, each of these women reads the other as an articulation of her own frustrated desires; but neither perceives that the other, with all her advantages, is no more happy, no less desperate, than she herself is. Milly does not see Kate's hopeless choice between moral or material depravity, and Kate herself does not recognize in Milly the personal paralysis which her wealth conceals and exacerbates. Instead, each "thought herself, or assured the other she did, a comparatively dusty object, and the other a favourite of nature and fortune" (p. 115). By showing the reciprocity of Kate's and Milly's views of each other, James illustrates how the lives of others may become for one the stuff of romance, of artistic symbol and form; he also shows that art itself is not a special case, but a mere extension of the human drive to convert the materials of experience into tropes of desire--or, in Frye's words, to make "a total human form out of nature."[20]

But this mutual projection of one's desires on another is not entirely reciprocal. James habitually dramatizes situations in which passive and introspective characters are dependent on other, more aggressive personalities for the articulation of their own wants and needs; his reflective protagonists in particular are often

forced to receive their impressions and to pursue the actualization of their desires through forms imposed on them by others. This is the situation of Lambert Strether, whose suggestible consciousness is easily manipulated by Chad and Madame de Vionnet; it is also evident in Isabel Archer, whose need to "find some happy work to one's hand" drives her to acceptance of the "ghastly form" of her marriage to Osmond; and, finally, one sees this pattern in the experience of Christopher Newman, whose romantic intoxication makes him pliable in the hands of the scheming Bellegardes.[21]

The difficulty for these protagonists is that their desires are generally non-empirical, and are harder to objectify in real terms than simple material ambition or avarice. All these characters know they want something, but cannot say precisely what it is. This difficulty of being unable to specify the object of one's desire makes it hard for these characters to act, and produces in them an anxious drive for closure of this question; their desperation makes them vulnerable to manipulation by others, who may specify for the helpless protagonist a desired object that best suits their own, and not the protagonist's, purpose. Thus the passive or reflective hero in James often is forced to accept without sufficient examination versions of his own inner needs that other, more active characters provide.

This syndrome is evident in the relationship between Milly and Kate in Wings; Milly, with her material advantages secured, has trouble specifying the object of her shapeless longings and the desired self those longings express. Kate, believing herself assured

of Densher's love, seeks only to underwrite her romantic fulfillment by gaining financial security as well. Thus Kate has the advantage of an easily identifiable object for her desires--money--while Milly is paralyzed by her ambiguous conception of the "life" for which she longs. Kate's strength is that she can say what it is she wants, while Milly's weakness is that she cannot; and this strength grants Kate the apparent freedom of action which Milly both respects and fears. Furthermore, this "freedom of action," coupled with Milly's psychic paralysis, empowers Kate to propose the forms which Milly's relationship with her (and with others) may take. Thus the image of the "dove," which becomes the symbolic interface through which Milly establishes her relation to others, is the fruit of mutual consent between perceived and perceiver, in which the latter (Kate) has the other at a psychic disadvantage. Milly needs the specified identity that Kate's reading of her provides, just as Kate ultimately depends on Milly's faithfulness to this role for the success of her own plan.

This phenomenon of the "symbolic interface," in which characters derive the forms of their desires from others, is an important key to understanding the nature of James's investigations in Wings. If, as Frye says, form is the articulation of desire, then the overarching Romance structures and redemptive rhetoric of James's earlier novels represent the author's attempt to define for his protagonists what the shape of their own desires should be. It is, as in the relation between Kate and Milly, a case of one intelligence with a goal firmly in mind (the author's desire that his imagined

"situation" bear, through the character, artistic fruit) impressing those goals on a character whose own needs and desires are either confused or unspecified. James wants Newman to become his "good fellow wronged," wants Isabel to take on the noble stature of "a young woman affronting her destiny," wants Strether to embrace and profit from the ordeal of his supremely sensitive consciousness; and these characters, unable to articulate desires of their own, accept the ones provided by James, and at the behest of the author attempt valiantly but vainly to fulfill those intentions.

What one sees in The Wings of the Dove, however, is the total absorption of James's interests and objectives into those of his surrogates, particularly Kate and Densher. It is they who, "by agreeing to enact its plot,"[22] make the novel's symbolic texture serve their own, and not James's, wasted passion and desire. Kate's reading of Milly as a "dove," and Milly's acceptance of that symbolic charge, imitates the author-character relationship I have sketched above, in which the authorial intelligence impresses its own intentions on a character, and then convinces that character to identify those expressed intentions with his or her own needs and desires. It is not James who casts the parts in the internal drama of this novel; it is the characters themselves, particularly those whose consciousnesses are clear enough about their objectives to become an active force. To them belongs the immediate success and the ultimate failure of bonding character to role which were shouldered in earlier works by the author himself.

It is now time to close the long parenthesis which will represent our consideration of Kate's and Milly's roles as centers of consciousness in Wings. These long expositions of Kate and particularly of Milly have been necessary for two reasons: first, it must be understood that James created in these two characters imagined people whose fullness of humanity exceeds and occludes the symbolic roles which they ultimately assume; and secondly, it must be recognized that the roles with which Kate and Milly become identified do not arise directly from the needs of the discourse, but from the processes of vision of the characters themselves. Furthermore, the tension between inner psychology and outward symbolism is marked by initial and antithetical motions on the part of each character: Kate, who is eventually signified as predatory and cruelly calculating, becomes so only after the frustration of her attempt to escape such moral peril; and Milly, who emerges as the sacrificial dove, is shown as having a thirst for personal satisfaction which is so intense that she considers destroying herself rather than see her desires frustrated. Thus the roles these women assume are indeed simplifications of their own complex inner identities as presented by James; but the simplifications are their own, not the author's. They are self-desired and self-willed, and are based on the needs of the characters themselves to suppress or excorcise impulses threatening to their psychic harmony.

Having established both the psychologies and the symbolic properties of Kate and Milly, I turn now to a consideration of the character who completes the romantic triangle about which the

significant action of the novel revolves. I have saved my analysis of Merton Densher until now because it is only in relation to Kate and Milly, and to the roles assumed by them, that he emerges as a fully realized character; his own introductory scenes are, significantly, sandwiched in between those of Kate and Milly, and reveal him to be a character of indeterminate possibilities; his function in the novel, like the question of his personality, does not receive its "final stamp" until the presences of Kate and Milly are firmly established. This is appropriate, since the climactic phases of the novel show Densher achieving this "final stamp" by a systematic repression of the full humanity with which James endows Kate and Milly in the first half of the novel. Through "his revulsion at the methods of the lioness, and his gradual surrender to dove-like human nature,"[23] Densher establishes his identity by defining his relations to symbolic versions of Kate and Milly; like his predecessors Strether and Newman and, to a lesser degree, Ralph Touchett, Densher is a character whose satisfaction depends on the unconscious symbolic abuse of the very women he idealizes, and upon his success in ignoring the psychic integrity and reality of others.

Early in the novel, for example, Densher sees Kate as the essence of life which, to compensate for his own deficient vitality, he feels "he must somehow annex and possess" (p. 37); later, when Kate's energy has begun to lose its luster for him, Densher turns his eyes to Milly, who suggests a symbolic value quite different from Kate's: he perceives in the dying heiress the ethereal but impersonal essence of "embodied poetry" (p. 337). It is in fact

these opposing readings of Kate and Milly as representative of the appeals of flesh and spirit which comprise the basic terms of Densher's conflict and of the dialectic between symbol and substance which dominates the last third of the novel. But this dialectic, like the roles that Kate and Milly perform in it, is local to Densher's own consciousness; it emerges from his own psychology, and is not authorially impressed on his experience. Indeed, this dialectic becomes, through Densher, the dominant personal crisis of the novel as a whole; but to understand the centrality of Densher's role, and to explain the motive and necessity for his behavior, we must first have a grasp of the reality of this character's inner conflicts.

Densher, like Milly, is basically a passive character whose desires are transcendental rather than material; but the elevated character of his desires represents a response to his lack of wealth rather than, as in Milly's case, to a surfeit of it. In a society that defines wealth as the measure and symbol of one's personal worth, Densher enjoys a distinct lack of material prospects; and, as a defense against his sense of this painful inadequacy, Densher attempts through professed indifference to devalue the material exigencies of life, and to shun the pathways of social ambition which, personified in Mrs. Lowder, he regards as "cruel" and "colossally vulgar" (pp. 54, 53). Furthermore, he regards monied society (again represented by Mrs. Lowder, and by his rival for Kate's hand, the "brute" Lord Mark) as "stupid," and perceives outward social forms as false "codes" which force one to dissemble and prostitute oneself (pp. 235-36). Thus Densher is like Isabel

Archer in his disparagement of that which he cannot have, and is morally committed to its repudiation.

Having rejected social and financial standing as measures of self-worth, Densher embraces a value system in which his very deficiencies can show as strengths, at least to himself. He prides himself on remaining undeceived by the illusory social codes he disparages, and holds instead to a personal code of fealty to "truth" in its pure and positivistic form. His "weakness for life" finds its positive inversion in a "strength merely for thought" (p. 37); and in his studied detachment ("detached . . . was indeed what he called himself"), Densher displays his independence of, and contempt for, the promiscuous interpersonal contact in which others, through the application of their false standards, might find him wanting. Densher thus confines himself to a narrow circle, and denies entry to all but those who, like Kate, are tolerant and supportive of his value system. It is, in fact, the introspective and insular nature of Densher's consciousness that gains him the esteem of Kate, and forms the basis for their mutual idealization of each other; where she represents "life" to him, he symbolizes for her "what life had never given her . . . all the high, dim things she lumped together as of the mind" (p. 36).

But, because his value system is a defensive and compensatory one, Densher must be totally faithful to his ideals in order to keep his self-image happily intact. His private honor is dependent on his rigorous adherence to his axioms of clear-sightedness, honesty, and independence, and on his avoidance of the guilt that would be

engendered should he betray any of these ideals. James notes that for Densher innocence is even more crucial than egoistic satisfaction: "Being kept down was a bore, but his great dread, verily, was of being ashamed, which was a thing distinct" (p. 216). Furthermore, to assure himself of avoiding such mistakes, and as protection against the dissembling powers of the social codes he loathes, Densher demands of others the same total sincerity and honesty he requires of himself. For Densher, the free exchange of information, particularly regarding the feelings of others, is the guarantee against doing anything he would be "ashamed of" on one hand, and against being deceived and made a fool of on the other. This is the basis of his need for total "lucidity" from Kate, and for his belief in "sincerity making a basis that would bear almost anything" (p. 208). These ideals of independence, honesty, and clarity supply Densher with the feeling that he is free and clear, unencumbered by false status or false ambition, and immune to the accusations and recriminations regarding his self-worth.

Yet the material exigencies he has rejected still have the power to afflict him, particularly when manifested in the form of Kate's view that they cannot consummate their relationship without the material advantages to keep it from degenerating into brutality and meanness. Densher cannot escape the sense that his own want of means is "a great ugliness" (p. 44), and he recognizes in Mrs. Lowder "the great public mind that we meet at every turn and that we must keep setting up 'codes' with" (p. 63). So, in spite of his contempt for money and society, Densher admits that they are facts

that must be dealt with, and is acutely aware of the measure to which they find him wanting; he knows he is "a very small quantity, and he did know, damnably, what made quantities large" (p. 58).

Because he cannot escape this sense of material inadequacy, Densher needs constant confirmation of the sufficiency of his own positive attributes; and, because his relationship with Kate is the only arena in which he experiences an interpersonal assurance of his own self-worth, Densher is desperately dependent on her continued company and approbation, and on the enduring exclusivity of their circle of two. Not trusting the durability of their privately consecrated agreement, in which they see "marriage . . . somehow before them like a temple without an avenue" (p. 42) Densher longs for the confirming and enforcing effects of a public betrothal, and is frustrated by the necessity of having to deceive Aunt Maud. Densher is fearful that any change in their relationship will be to his own detriment, and pleads with Kate, in the absence of marriage, for "Our being as we are" (p. 67) in perpetual futurity.

These feelings of Densher's are made all the more intense by his long absence from Kate when he goes to America; he returns to find that "His demands, his desires, had grown," and that he cannot hold out "against a patience that prolonged, that made a man ill" (p. 199). The combined strategies of deference and deception by which Kate and Densher have forwarded their cause are damaging both to Densher's pride and to his sense of his own moral forthrightness; he feels that "Waiting was the game of dupes" (p. 200), and regards the difficulties of their clandestine meetings

as proof that they ought to bring all above board and announce their engagement. "It's one more nail, thank God, in the coffin of our odious delay," he tells Kate, only to be reminded by her "dodging the ultimatum . . . how little they could work it" (p. 206).

Thus Densher is doomed to participate in a charade which requires Kate to act in a manner totally contrary to the very assurances that Densher requires of her. He distrusts the apparent relish with which she plays her role, and begins to resent the thoroughness with which she publicly denies her affection for him; he tells her that she shows her "complacent eye" to him more than her part requires (p. 213). Densher has great difficulty in his situation of having a lover whose actions are not concomitant with her supposed feelings for him; his personal anxiety makes him dependent on the equivalence of word and action, of motive and gesture, which Kate actively subverts, and the open flouting of this equivalence brings Densher to the disturbing realization that Kate might be "deeper than himself," that he might not be able "to keep her . . . where their communications would be straight and easy" (p. 207). Denied the proofs and assurances he has always required of Kate, Densher is simply left to wonder helplessly "at her freedom of action and his beauty of trust" (p. 213).

The ambiguous and confusing nature of Densher's situation, and his deep fear of doing something of which he might be "ashamed," keep Densher from acting to change his intolerable situation. He finds himself reduced to mere spectatorship, viewing Kate's performance "as in his purchased stall at the play" (p. 217). Paralyzed

by his opposing commitments to remain faithful to Kate and to his own prohibition against the active lie, Densher suffers from a "humiliation of . . . impotence" (p. 216) which he is powerless either to ameliorate or to escape. He is rendered totally passive, "dominated by Kate's vitality,"[24] and must accept on grudging faith the "beauty" of the ends towards which Kate's deception is leading them.

But Densher's discomfort is so intense that he begins to resent Kate for the situation in which she has placed him, and gradually starts to feel his alientation from her. Densher is able to tolerate this increasing distance from Kate because he has found in Milly Theale another person whose company provides him the emotional satisfaction he craves. Kate's concealment of her own affection creates in Densher a thirst for approbation so intense that he would have stopped to drink at the first congenial fountain; but Milly is much more than a convenient water-stop. She asserts herself in Densher's mind as a kindred spirit to himself, in many ways more attractive to him than what Kate, with her newly revealed potention for scheming and dissembling, has lately come to be. Milly has wealth; but, unlike the materialist order which has held Densher in judgment, the young heiress's money strikes Densher as a passive, benevolent phenomenon rather than an active, aggressive one. Her nobility of spirit appears to be innate, and not derived from any of the social codes which Densher himself finds false and vulgar. And, though she is reticent, Milly strikes Densher as ingenuous and incapable of the sort of deception into which Kate

has so dizzyingly plunged him. In all, then, the American heiress figures forth to Densher a distaff version of his own idealized self, with her appearance of intrinsic dignity, ingenuous sincerity, and benevolent wealth. Thus Densher sees in her an image in which all his needs, both moral and material, are wonderfully harmonized; and her company allows him to assuage the doubts and conflicts he experiences as a result of Kate's own complacent behavior towards him.

Milly is, furthermore, as different from the denizens of Lancaster Gate as Densher himself; her "success" there represents a triumph over the rigid social order in which Densher himself may feel the pleasure of a vicarious vindication. But Densher sees Milly, as he sees himself, as a potential victim of that order as well. Her own innocence makes her vulnerable to the hidden machinations of cultured society; aware of the plot afoot against Milly (in which he, ironically, has a major part), Densher sees her as "a Christian maiden in the arena, mildly, caressingly, being martyred" (p. 222). Here Densher calls up the image of Kate as the lioness, and identifies himself with Milly, the victim, rather than with Kate, who is his actual partner in the sacrifice; this deflection of Densher's sympathy from Kate (who is implied in this analogy but is not named) to Milly displays his unconscious impulse to deny his identification with Kate and with her mercenary intentions.

But so long as his relation to Milly is still identified with Kate's own purposes, Densher is dependent on her to see to it that he plunges into no odious moral peril. He contemplates his

entrapment in Kate's "wondrous silken web" (p. 237), and pleads with her not to betray his trust: "Don't fail me," he tells her, "It would kill me" (p. 236). Given these anxieties on Densher's part, it may be seen how Kate's suggestion that he "comfort" Milly provides Densher with the very device he needs to maintain his illusion of his own innocence: it establishes a proprietary form through which he may safely, and without shame, pursue his relation to the dying girl. Densher sees that by following Kate's suggestion he can indeed "please his conscience and Kate at the same time,"[25] and have the pleasure of Milly's company as well.

Still, Kate has the power to crush Densher by speaking the words that would strip away his rationalization and hit him full in the face with the truth of his own part in their treachery. Furthermore, any demand of explicit assurances on Milly's part would force his moral crisis as well, necessitating either that he reveal his hypocrisy by telling the truth, or that he seal it with the dreaded lie. Thus Densher's earlier demand that Kate and others be "lucid" with him is now countered by his need for the evasion which will allow him to maintain the illusion of his innocence. He has, paradoxically, become as dependent on others' silence for his peace of mind as he once was on their sincerity and openness; he needs the aid of Kate's and Milly's ellipses to escape awareness of his shameful behavior towards the dying girl. And Kate, sensing correctly Densher's susceptibility to guilt, wisely tries to get him "to carry out her plan without putting it into words."[26]

Densher's conflicting needs for silence on one hand and for "lucidity" on the other comprise an opposition which is central to his character, and to the point of view of the novel as a whole. As we have seen in our analysis of him, he requires knowledge in order to feel secure and in control; but at the same time, his fear of shame makes him want to disavow knowledge and relinquish control, insofar as these things represent responsibility for action and the potential for guilt that comes with such responsibility. When he pleads with Kate "Don't fail me," his words express two implicit requests: first, he is praying that being caught in her web of intrigue will not have for him the consequence of disillusionment, regarding either himself or Kate; or, if her plan does involve actions and consequences that might produce such a result, that she will shrink from specifying those elements, and allow his beliefs in himself and in her to escape contradiction.

So Densher's psychic integrity, like the integrity of a work of art, is dependent on the selective effacement and unspeaking of the very facts which may be pertinent to it, in the interest of excising those elements that would violate the need for inner harmony. Densher's simultaneous needs to be deceived by silence and to have the assurance of lucidity in others reflect in a personal way the conflicting demands of artistic form, particularly of the novel, in which human materials must be worked to achieve effects both credible and beautiful. As a novelist, James like Densher (and, as we shall soon see, like Milly) depends not so much on the overt lie as on the strategic silence, the indeterminacy of meaning which allows

interpretation to rush over the errant or discordant facts without feeling too sharply the pierce of their jagged edges. This is the effect and, I believe, the intention of the equivocal narrative voice which treats the closing scenes of The Portrait and The Ambassadors, in which analysis of the characters is suppressed to keep them from kicking the conclusion to pieces; but in Wings this phenomenon of strategic silence is revealed as a psychological as well as an artistic necessity.

The revelation of this necessity comes primarily through Densher, whose need for inner harmony gradually becomes the controlling force in the novel's rhetoric; but in fact all the principals in Wings engage in this tactical retreat from specification. Kate, having deceived both Aunt Maud and Milly with a lie, must secure Densher's collution without perpetrating an untruth on him or revealing the full moral consequences of his participation; Densher himself tries to gain the advantage of an indeterminate silence which will spare him the choice between the moral ugliness of lying to Milly and the emotional ugliness of hurtfully undeceiving her; and Milly effaces the fact of her emotional vulnerability and her physical disease by "denying it a verbalized existence."[27] In all these cases, one may view both the advantages and risks of a silence which allows for the freedom of interpretation; this freedom is a mixed blessing which James characteristically claims for his fiction, and one which, finally, in The Wings of the Dove, he claims for his characters as well.

This interpretive freedom, based on a willful repression of the facts, allows these characters to present themselves as formal expressions of each others' desires. Densher, for example, becomes for Milly the spurned lover to whom she may give the comfort of her passive goodness and beauty, while she becomes for Densher a symbol of devulgarized wealth and transcendental beauty. And, because these characters derive emotional benefits from being so perceived and so treated by each other, they evade discussion of the discordant facts; Densher is loath to probe the subject of Milly's disease, and Milly reluctant to mention Densher's relation to Kate, because they fear that such "lucid" examination of these topics might spoil the efficacious beauty of the relationship that their mutual effacements have created. In other words, Milly and Densher, while pleading for knowledge of the world, hide from the truths that would interfere with the image of fulfilled desire they perceive in each other; in life as well as in art, the need to believe in the beautiful illusion is often stronger than the need to recognize the bald, stubborn fact.

Thus if it is true, as John Carlos Rowe says, that "Milly becomes the author of her own composition,"[28] she is dependent on the uncritical response of Densher, her reading audience, for her carefully composed public image to have its desired effect. The success of Milly's poeticized self is a direct consequence of the fact that she shows Densher what he wants most to see; he does not perceive in her the real, dying, vulnerable Milly that Kate has specified for him, but rather an image, embraced and set forth by

Milly herself, in which the fact of her disease is transformed into an outward show of intrinsic nobility, benificence, and ethereal beauty. It is to this beautiful illusion, and not to the facts of her case as "lucidly" communicated by Kate, that Densher is drawn; his response to this raised image reveals that, for all his supposed fealty to the "real," he is in fact an acolyte of the ideal, which has now become embodied for him in the person of Milly. He embraces her symbolic denial of the fact of her disease by assuring himself that she "was never, never . . . to be one of the afflicted for him" (p. 243); and in his view of "poor pale exquisite Milly" (p. 316) one sees Densher's repression of the intimate bond between her figural beauty and her actual decay.

Thus Densher gradually "comes to recognize Milly as someone whose claims on him outweigh Kate's, and also as someone to whom he spontaneously responds."[29] The strength of Milly's claims on Densher derives from the fact that, as I have already said, she shows Densher what he wants to see; the terms of their relationship are concomitant with his desires and inclinations, and have the additional advantage of providing him with immediate and ongoing satisfaction of his needs. Kate, by contrast, shows Densher precisely what he doesn't want to see. He is nettled by her publicly complacent treatment of him, and is disturbed by the private evidence she gives of her capacity for the vulgar usage of others, including himself. Furthermore, the satisfaction she promises is in the distant and hazy future; she asks Densher for the immediate surrender of their relationship's moral integrity in the interest of gaining

the material means which will ultimately enable them to assume and maintain the deferred mantle of romance. Densher cannot accept the idea that he and Kate must be prosaic now in order to be poetic in the future, particularly when he has before him as a fait accompli the "embodied poetry," inviolate and uncompromised, of Milly herself.

So Densher must somehow divorce himself from Kate's plan, even though it is as a part of that plan that he receives the benefit of his proximity to Milly. He resents that his behavior "was all doing what Kate had conceived for him; it was not in the least doing . . . anything he himself had conceived" (p. 309); he finds that, in acting under the auspices of Kate's motives, he is "reading the romance of his existence in a cheap edition" (p. 310). Thus it is not the outward form of his role that galls Densher; it is the inner awareness of its origins. What Densher wishes to rewrite is the inner subtext which explains his actions to himself; he needs to purify his own motives by casting out Kate's, while retaining the advantage of the situation in which she has placed him.

In short, Densher wants to continue playing his part in Kate's plan without incurring any responsibility for its consequences. To do this, he must first demonstrate that his own desires are not concordant with Kate's--that he does not, after all, want Milly's money, but only her company. So he rationalizes that "he really hadn't 'begun' anything, had only submitted, consented, but too generously indulged and condoned the beginnings of others" (p. 315). Because his part in Kate's plan may be explained as a result of his own benevolent deference, Densher is able to excuse his participation

on the grounds of his passive inclinations; but at the same time he places before himself the idea that his own reasons for wanting to be close to Milly have a causal primacy over Kate's: since "he had been the first to know her," he "was not there . . . through Kate and Kate's idea, but through Milly and Milly's own, and through himself and his own" (p. 327).

Thus Kate and Kate's motives are significantly excluded, or repressed, from Densher's private version of his relation to Milly; but, as always, he requires some external correlation of this newfound inner truth. Since Densher's actions serve Kate's ends as well as his own, he must demonstrate the primacy of his own motivations by exerting his own will over Kate. He takes the first step towards such a demonstration when he changes his Venetian residence, knowing that Kate will misconstrue his motives for doing so; her inability to fathom his reasons enables Densher himself "to impute to her a weakness of vision by which he could himself feel the stronger" (pp. 312-13). Kate interprets Densher's move as a sign that he is taking up her purpose, when in fact he is working against her; the "proof of will" that Densher now requires takes the form of a vindictive testing of Kate, in which he uses her love for him to force her into a compromising situation, in a direct reversal of Densher's perception of what Kate has done to him.

Densher's request is, of course, that Kate should visit him in his rooms, for the implied purpose of a sexual liaison. When Kate agrees, Densher has his needed confirmation that he is indeed ruler of his own destiny, and firmly in possession of his own

motives: "He had never tasted, in all his relation with her, of anything so sharp--too sharp for mere sweetenss--as the vividness with which he saw himself master in the conflict" (p. 346); afterwards he reflects with pride on the fact that "It had simply worked, his idea, the idea that he had made her accept" (p. 347). Densher's reaction to his success is a clue to the motive behind his plan: the "conflict" is between himself and Kate, and between competing versions of reality which each tries to enforce on the other. Densher cannot accept Kate's impression that he is capable of the betrayal of Milly which is his part in her design; he needs to assert his own idea of the situation by his domination of Kate herself. He does not in the end care so much for the security of Kate's loyalty, or for the pleasure of her sexuality, as for the knowledge that he, too, is capable of asserting his will and making the necessities of his own vision binding on others. Densher's real object is not to consummate his relationship with Kate, but to cleanse his relation to Milly.

But Kate's admissions and Densher's proof of will confirm more than his new identity as the "bon prince, capable of exerting a will and being seen to";[30] it is also the culmination of a long process of vision through which he has been trying to define his idea of Kate herself. All along Densher has been torn between his attachment to Kate and his revulsion at her ruthless methods; furthermore, as much as he has "admired and envied . . . her great talent for life" (p. 310), he has resented deeply his own helplessness before her. He has seen her as lover and destroyer, as goddess and

tyrant. So Densher's attitude towards Kate is deeply ambivalent; he has feelings of both identification and alienation, of affection and dread, which are alternately sparked by identical actions and attributes on Kate's part. He has been spared from the full intensity of these conflicts by Kate's careful effacement of the brutal realities of her plan, and of Densher's part in it; but the result for Densher has been a kind of indeterminacy in Kate herself, and an inability on his part to maintain a fix on her inner reality. His sense that she is thus "deeper than himself" produces in him a need to press her for the very clarity, the very "lucidity," which on other grounds he so deeply fears.

Thus Densher's insistence on "dragging things out into the open"[31] comes only after he has distanced himself from Kate and disacknowledged his responsibility for his own part in her plan; the knowledge he seeks is not to establish the depth of his own guilt, but of Kate's. He finally gets her to admit her intention--that he is to marry the dying Milly for her money, so that he and Kate might be provided for after the heiress's demise; and, though this revelation "was a truth he hadn't been ready to receive so full in the face" (p. 342), it is nevertheless Densher who phrases it, Densher who wants it, because Kate's confirmation has the desired effect of revealing her own guilt, and not his. Her breach of their "grace of silence" allows Densher, he feels, "to know her, spiritually, 'better'" (p. 343); but what he perceives in this revelation is not a more accurate version of Kate so much as a more palatable view of himself, achieved at Kate's expense. She is made, in Densher's

mind, to shoulder the responsibility and the guilt for the plan in which Densher has participated through willed ignorance; she has, by her admission, cast herself as the antagonist in a moral struggle which Densher, though himself implicated, views as if from a spectator's seat, in the impunity of his own passivity.

Furthermore, by surrendering to Densher her closely guarded truth, Kate also gives up the advantage of "mystery" which has kept her a formidable rival to Milly in Densher's imagination. Like Milly, Kate has depended on ellipses and silences to maintain her appeal for Densher, and her control of his image of her; the effect of her "lucidity" is to rob her of this power to compete with Milly's prodigious show of symbolic strength and transcendent beauty. The contrast of Kate's admitted deceit and betrayal with Milly's triumph of "candour" (p. 345) reveals Kate to Densher as Milly's opposite, her antithesis in symbolic associations. And Kate has become--regardless of initial motivation--the external correlative of Densher's own morally despised self, which longs for the liberty of material wealth, freedom of action, and indulgence of passion, even at the expense of honor, truth, and beauty. Densher now sees Kate's own promise of beauty as the proffered Edenic apple which he, having eaten of in ignorance, now recognizes and rejects for the snare it is.

This recognition is completed, even consecrated, by Kate's visit to Densher's rooms. Paradoxically, the moment in which Kate gives Densher the greatest demonstration of her love for him is the moment in which her ultimate eclipse by Milly is assured. His

physical possession of her denudes her of her final shred of mystery and transcendent appeal; their carnal knowledge, the undramatized putting off of clothing, represents the final lucidity through which Kate's identity becomes symbolically impoverished for Densher. She becomes for him the embodied representation of prosaic human passion, contrasting with the "embodied poetry" of Milly's grace. Where Densher simplifies his relation to Milly by worshipping her, he simplifies his relation to Kate through derogation of her own appeals to him; he has brought Kate down to terms he can understand. What Densher has sought to establish through his "test" is not Kate's loyalty, but her non-transcendent sexuality, signified even in the phallic terms in which he perceives his triumph: "all erect before him, really covering the ground as far as he could see, was the fact of the gained success that this represented" (p. 347). He has succeeded in disencumbering himself of his ideals regarding Kate; her lingering presence in his rooms is a mere "lucidity" into which "he sat and stared" (p. 349).

So Densher, torn between his loyalty to Kate and his worship of Milly, is forced to choose between the claims of rival goddesses; and his only way of making his choice clear is to bring one of those deities to earth. Kate is the easier of the two to pull down because she is most frank, and because her lucidity reveals the disjunction of her motives with the high-minded idealism that Densher requires in his love-objects. So Densher's demand for the truth, and the sexual demands he places on Kate, are expressions of his need to demystify her so that he might more freely worship Milly and Milly

alone. His disillusion is deliberate and disingenuous, and his "proof of will" simply a strategy by which he makes it possible to pursue his preferred goddess--the ethereally beautiful and benificent Milly--without the nagging consideration of Kate's rival claims.

Densher prefers Milly in the end because she does not demand action of him as a proof of his fealty and worship; her beauty, unlike that which Kate works for, is in Densher's eyes achieved, static and ethereal, and does not involve or evoke the process of vulgar striving which Densher finds so abhorrent. Furthermore, Milly has so totally identified herself with her role that there is no danger of the lucidity which, in Kate, stirs Densher's anxieties as to the identity of appearance and reality; though Milly's behavior is, as we have observed, a show of strength which covers her vulnerability, she gives no lucid acknowledgement of her weakness to Densher, while Kate on the other hand cannot help but remind Densher of the defects of their own situation, and the deceitful part she plays in her attempt to remedy it. Where Kate exhibits a wordly passion and energy which overflow Densher's original idea of her, Milly is for him eternally "as she is," fixed in that ghostly phase in which life is frozen without being destroyed; Milly's is the captured moment, the figured identity, which she had glimpsed in the Bronzino, and which Densher now sees in her.

Thus emerges the struggle between Kate and Milly, the "bad and good angels," which Wegelin and others have characterized as the essence of <u>The Wings of the Dove</u>. But this opposition is not

central to the novel as a whole, but only to Densher's consciousness; the full significance of Milly's and Kate's roles is determined by Densher himself, and arises out of his need to be relieved of the paradoxical qualities of human relations. The "final solution" to which he subjects both Kate and Milly is therefore hostile to the full humanity of the characters themselves; and the sense one has in the final chapters of recognition "tapering to a point" is not a property of James's large design, but of Densher's local process of vision as he desperately tries to harmonize his inner conflicts. James's exposition of Kate and Milly in the first few books of the novel enables one to examine the repressions on which Densher's final solution is based; this order of presentation also shows James's recognition of the problems one encounters when one attaches symbolic values to real quantities. In his earlier novels, the formal design expresses a hope that the character may fulfill the role which the rhetoric of event and evaluation indicate for him or her--a hope that is dashed by the characters, and its failure effaced by James. The deference of form in the first half of Wings, however, establishes a lucid understanding of Kate and Milly which serves to deconstruct the views of them eventually formed by Densher. Thus James proceeds from, rather than towards, a recognition that the real and the symbolic values presented in these characters are not in harmony with each other; he undercuts from the outset the hope that Densher's choice may in the end have the clear moral significance that Wegelin, Anderson, and others have argued for it.

James himself has called the latter part of Wings--the part dominated by Densher--"the false and deformed half" of the novel;[32] he sees in this section the impulse for "foreshortening at any cost, for imparting to patches the value of presences, for dressing objects in an air as of the dimensions they can't possibly have." But the deformity he describes--that of the presentation being insufficient to the implied evaluation--is not the result of James's defect of design, but of his deference of control. It comes of his sharing authorial responsibility with a character, Merton Densher, whose hungry imagination and sensitive moral palate create the terms in which the action is dramatized, in which Kate and Milly are seen. The symbolic values which these two women are made to assume are indeed based on foreshortened and patchy renderings of the characters themselves; but, as we have seen, both the foreshortenings and the symbolizations which one observes in the second half of Wings may be explained more directly and more fully as phenomena of Densher's psychology than as requirements of the discourse itself.

Because the reader may recognize in Kate's and Milly's symbolic roles a deformation of the original human potential with which James initially endowed them, there is a failure of the symbolic texture finally to realize the associations and implied evaluations which it strains towards; the good-bad opposition which Milly and Kate finally come to represent is one that holds only for Densher himself, whose powers of repression, of selective interpretation, are allowed to have precedence over James's own. John Carlos Rowe

has observed that though "the mythic referents of Milly's character provide points of reference for describing her journey, they nonetheless lead us no closer to any final meaning";[33] one could remark similarly that Kate's final relation to her role, and to the implied moral correlative which it represents, is an ambiguous and inconclusive one, even though Densher believes it is clear enough. So Densher appears to achieve the satisfaction of a final meaning which, as others besides myself have noted, the novel as a whole does not. But the novel's failure to achieve such a satisfaction is James's premise rather than his investigation in Wings; his topic is this very success of Densher, as it is seen in the context of the novel's own inner antagonisms.

To understand the nature of Densher's qualified success (for qualified it is) and the conditions which make it possible, it is necessary to examine his method of dealing with the greatest threat to his newly defined project of imagination. The ultimate recognition that Milly is dying is a literal fact which mocks the illusion of transcendent vitality which she has impressed upon Densher's consciousness; her impending demise represents the disintegration of her mask of beauty and show of strength, and of her symbolic value as incorruptible "embodied poetry." Densher realizes, to his "outrage," that Milly's beauty is a result of an aesthetic impulse, a "generous ideal," shared by himself and all the others in the "conspiracy of silence" that had effaced the truth of her disease (p. 388). He understands that the beauty he has been worshipping is based on a selective unspeaking of the facts, and

that he has been living in "a general conscious fool's paradise, from which the specified had been chased like a dangerous animal." Densher experiences, as does his predecessor Lambert Strether, the risk of disillusion that is incurred in the worship of beauty, and the condition of willful ignorance which makes the appreciation of such beauty possible. The "smudge of mortality across the picture" compromises Densher's transcendental object of worship without extinguishing his need for it, and threatens to throw him back upon the now-demystified Kate, who no longer gratifies his imagination.

But Milly's imminent death presents Densher with a psychic defense that is not immediately apparent. She has all along displayed a tenuous relation to and acceptance of human society that reflect Densher's own "weakness for life"; and it is not long before he comes to regard her death as the ultimate embrace of that weakness. He perceives that Milly, like himself, wants to "live," but finds that life asks too much, is too gross to be entertained on any large scale; Densher explains Milly's death to himself as her transfiguration of the "terror of the end" into "heroic" resignation (p. 415). This interpretation allows him to formulate clearly the contrast between Kate and Milly which he needs to establish: Densher sees that Kate is willing to give up her moral beauty in order to live, and that Milly is impelled to surrender life in order to be beautiful. Since in the end it is beauty, with its qualities of stasis and passivity, that Densher prefers and Milly embraces, he understands her death as an ultimate sacrifice to that ideal. He finally sees that what he loved in Kate and what he worships in Milly

are really inimical--that Kate's very vitality is the antithesis, and not merely a corrupted form, of the sort of "life" that is symbolized in Milly. Milly's death is the final sign that she is superior to the lucid and prosaic world which Kate has such abysmal need of, and from which Densher has always insisted on his independence. In the end Densher worships in Milly his own weakness symbolically transfigured and justified; and he rejects in Kate the vitality, denuded and pejorated, which he himself lacks. It should also be noted that the newfound active will with which Densher achieves his triumph over Kate is thus revealed to be but a temporary attribute; rather than representing a real qualification of his passivity, Densher's "proof of will" is at root just another expression of his need for "justifying and consecrating his alienation from everything except his inner vision of an ideal."[34]

Densher's spiritual transfiguration of Milly's disease is in the end sealed by her removal from him, first by geographical distance and finally by death; she disappears from the arena of Densher's experience, and enters the more congenial environs of his memory and imagination. Where Kate lives before his eyes, helplessly lucid and inflexibly real, Milly lives on in his mind, helplessly symbolic and pliable to the designs of desire. But desire is inward, and requires the articulation of external form to be recognized and pursued; so Densher's private idea of Milly takes on a public reality in language, as he voices his own version of Milly to Mrs. Lowder. As he "pictured the case" to Aunt Maud, Milly assumes for him the "heroic" character of "some young victim of the

scaffold, in the French Revolution" (p. 415); he begins to see her, in the reflected objectivity of his own words, as a noble casualty, silently raging against the dying of a light that is after all too strong for her (and for Densher) to bear.

The role of language itself in this process cannot be underestimated. Densher finds a "relief" in the process of "naming" by which he gives verbal form to his internal fears and desires regarding Milly; and because Milly is dead to him, she can no longer give the lie to these accounts of her character. Her absence is also a silence, and she is in death expressed and made present only through the words of others. Densher may thus engage, freely and without risk of contradiction, in the speculations which most gratify his need to wring something positive and beautiful out of Milly's dying. Densher, always in need of external corroboration, seeks to confirm his inner vision of Milly in the only way available to him: through the form-giving powers of language, which makes possible in human relations as well as in literature the creation of hypothetical realities, and the giving of substance to the urgings of inarticulate desire.

Thus Densher's project of erecting his symbolic temple over the literal fact of Milly's death illustrates the important function which the demise of the love-object plays in this and other of James's works. Death, and its symbolization through language, enables a character's existence to assume for others a determinacy of meaning which is impossible, or at best provisional, so long as the character continues to speak and act with his own motives and towards his own

ends. Characters who die or otherwise take leave of the work do not outlive or outstrip the formal roles assigned them by others (including the author); they become in death or absence fields of free play for the imaginations of those others, and may be made to represent, through the symbolic assignations of language, ideals which living, thriving characters will inevitably betray. Thus in death, Milly becomes for Densher a finished book, a rounded poem of coherent and harmonious wholeness; this effect stands in marked contrast to the paradoxical and jagged emotions which Kate excites in him. Kate in fact recognizes the source of Milly's triumphant appeal when she accuses Densher of having loved the dead girl not "for the time she lived" (p. 456), but only after he had seen her for the last time; Kate sees, finally, that the ideals embraced by Densher can be fulfilled only by a woman who is dead to him, because the living, like Kate herself, have ideas of their own.

Thus one can observe on a personal as well as on a formal level the simplifying force of a death symbolically or vicariously experienced; and through the example of Densher it is possible to understand the impulse of the Jamesian hero, who characteristically builds altars to his dead while shrinking from the flame of life that burns one's fingers as it lights one's way. Life does not offer closure, security, harmony; and those who seek such assurances, whether out of aesthetic hunger or inner anxiety, are bound to be disappointed with life, and to prefer images of death or stasis in their symbolic forms--such as the Bronzino portrait, or the image of the sacrificial dove. Mildred Hartsock observes that "in James,

memory of the dead is destructive when it turns the living away from the pursuit of their lives";[35] but for characters like Densher, driven by desire but paralyzed by moral risk, such turning away is nearly inevitable. The memory of the dead love is simply more pliable matter than the reality of the living, acting person. Language is safer than action, art is safer than life, so long as they do not have to compete with the reality whose absence they mark.

The only thing that threatens Densher's temple of worship is Kate's rival construction of what they have done, and how they must now act. Densher has assured himself all along that he does not really want Milly's money; his resolve to get nothing for himself out of their relation has been for him his proof of good faith, his shield from guilt and his badge of moral glory. But Kate's version, though only partially verbalized, is quite different. Without broaching the subject of Densher's personal relationship to Milly, Kate insists that it is in the acceptance of Milly's money, and not in his refusal of the bequest, that Densher's and her own glory must be achieved. Thus she insists that for Densher as well as for herself, success is to be signified by the surrender of the outward proofs of innocence.

The topic of Milly's money is for Kate a subject apart from that of Milly herself, which Kate scrupulously avoids when with Densher. Her strategic silence is calculated to shield him from guilt; she knows that any allusion to Densher's part in their deception will weaken his taste for seeing their plan through to the end. But Densher has seen too much already. There is between them "a

knowledge of each other that they couldn't undo" (p. 447), and Densher cannot help filling the gap of Kate's conspicuous silence with the spectral image of his own culpability; while he still has a "horror . . . of her lucidity" (p. 421), her illucidity is now just as threatening, since her silence gives free play to his suspicions of his own deep-rooted guilt.

Furthermore, Kate's silence has the additional effect of denying Densher's idea of Milly a verbalized existence between them. Densher feels the "heroic" version of Milly he has put before Mrs. Lowder is somehow inadmissible with Kate; and Kate's evasion of the subject allows him to confirm this. Their mutual repression of the topic eventually interposes between them a gulf of silence so great that it impoverishes their relationship, at least for Densher; despite their "perverse insistence to make up what they ignored" (p. 449), the superficial quality of their intercourse cannot disguise for him the "bland" depths into which their relationship has fallen. Denied an expression of his ideal, and afflicted with the real threat of personal shame, Densher must finally and irrevocably divorce himself from Kate, and flee from the despised definition of himself and of his relation to Milly that, either in silence or in word, Kate figures forth to him.

Thus Densher's "obsessive guilt turns him . . . toward a cruel testing of Kate"[35] in which he seeks to exercise the prerogatives of his own vision by forcing her to conform to his image of her. He gives Kate the opportunity, on successive occasions, to open two letters: the first, a deathbed message from Milly, is a

"sacred script" (p. 444) through which he offers Kate a final glimpse of the transcendental truth he believes himself to have found; the second letter, from Milly's New York executor, is the vulgar script which announces the extent of their sinful gains, the knowledge of which Densher refuses. Kate, perhaps because she is afraid of being personally confronted, even in writing, by one whom she has used and betrayed, tosses the sacred artifact into the fire (p. 445); but she does not hesitate to discover the contents of the second letter.

This dual test is calculated to force Kate to reveal herself to Densher as the representative of prosaic human greed and passion; he has already come to regard her as "alien" to himself (p. 430), but the letters provide him with an opportunity to show his difference from Kate, and to project his shame onto her. It is his rationalization that guilt, in the end, is proved by one's acceptance of the spoils of sinful action; so if Densher can demonstrate his innocence through his rejection of Milly's money, then Kate may prove her guilt to him by her willingness to accept the bequest. Densher's hope is, ironically, that Kate will prefer the contents of the vulgar script to those of the sacred one, since in so choosing she will irrevocably prove her difference from him, and will take upon herself the weight of his own guilt. In Densher's world, to the sinners go the spoils.

Kate recognizes in Densher's final ultimatum his "desire . . . to escape everything" (p. 455), and correctly diagnoses what has happened to their relationship: "Her memory's your love," she

tells Densher, referring to Milly. "You want no other" (p. 456). A more succinct and accurate assessment of Densher's final condition would hardly be possible. He has finally made room for Milly by forcing Kate to give him up, and has secured his sense of his own innocence by rejecting in Milly's inheritance the profits of sin. Through total renunciation of everything but his symbolized ideal, Densher has made himself free to withdraw to the moral safety and comfort of his passive solution.

Sallie Sears has noted that there is a defect in this ending. She feels that "Densher does not suffer enough,"[36] and that Kate is made to bear too greatly the brunt of the shame and pain. This is indeed a defect, but not one attributable to James; the ending must be understood as the culmination of Densher's process of vision, which is not necessarily identical with the author's. Densher's mental energies throughout the novel are focused on the project of deflecting guilt from himself and purifying his relation to Milly; and his testing of Kate in the final chapters is, as we have seen, an attempt to make Kate assume the mask of responsibility by forcing her into a choice that shows her to her own moral disadvantage. But it is Densher who is forcing Kate's hand, and not James; and it is Densher who is responsible for distributing the guilt in this final scene. The defect of the final scene is not, as Sears implies, that James does not believe in Densher's guilt; it is that Densher does not believe in it. For this reason, and because Densher's consciousness dominates the discourse in the final chapters, it naturally appears that he escapes the lion's share of moral responsibility. The

defect that Sears senses in the ending is therefore intentional, since it represents the corrective to Densher's sense of his own final impunity.

The failure of the ending to achieve a satisfactory closure may be attributed to a failure in Densher that James, in his earlier novels, discovered in his own authorial narrators: there is in Densher's vision a lingering antagonism of representation and evaluation, of materials and form. Densher's difficulty, like James's, is that the human beings on which he builds the vision of final redemption cannot in the end be confused with the masks which they assume in his imagination. Because James takes pains to introduce Kate and Milly through angles of vision other than Densher's own, we understand them more deeply, see them more clearly, than Densher himself, even though it is his perspective which ultimately dominates the novel. They are certainly endowed with greater measures of humanity tha Densher grants them; if one recalls the early chapters of the novel, one becomes aware that Densher's final illusion of impunity is achieved at the expense of Kate's desperate humanity and Milly's effaced actuality.

Densher does not recognize Kate's anguish over the cruel choice he puts to her; neither does he recognize her self-sacrificial impulse, revealed in the opening scene with her father and again in the penultimate scene at her sister Marian's, to exchange the risks of grasping passion for the abject peace of renunciatory service. He does not see in Milly, his apotheosized dove-goddess, the covert rejection and fear of life which is the actuality behind her rage

against the dying light; nor does he see "the infernal pride that causes her to repel help in the very time when her need is greatest."[37] But most of all, Densher does not recognize the true face of his own weakness. He does not see in himself the hidden moral egoism which must be gratified and protected at all costs from the slightest smudge of shame; neither does he recognize his covert desire for the very things he professes to find vulgar and repugnant--wealth, social acceptance, gentility. Finally, he does not see that it is the satisfaction of these covert desires that he, through his passive acquiescence, has empowered Kate to pursue for him, even as he has enjoined her to protect his moral pride from peril. In the end he cannot come to terms with any of the inner hungers, either spiritual or material, that have resulted in his symbolic brutalization of Kate and Milly.

Thus the ending of Wings strikes a hollow but tenuously concordant note, echoing Densher's desperate attempt to harmonize his inner conflicts at the expense of the human actuality of himself and others. His redemption is illusory, an apotheosis imagined rather than achieved, but is sustained by the creative power of the language in which it is couched. As with his idealization of Milly, Densher depends on the phenomenal reality of his own words to argue the truth of his necessary view of himself. Yet here the language itself cannot help but hint at the absence that it marks; Millicent Bell says that in the end the "language . . . fails to offer consolation";[38] the hollow ring of the conclusion does not signify, as Dorothea Krook suggests, that "language is grossly inadequate to the

experience,"[39] but rather that Densher himself is inadequate to the role which the language, and the action, suggest for him. He is a moral hero only on his own insular terms, and achieves his heroism only by a rampant use of others which calls the very morality of his triumph into question.

James in The Wings of the Dove, then, has dug to the very seed of the brutality on which art and human relations are predicated. The quest of his characters for meaning, for psychic coherence, and the ruthlessness with which they impose their desired forms on others, reflects the impulse of all art to rein in the chaos of experience and give it an order which pleases the senses and alleviates anxiety. In Wings James shows through the actions and mental processes of his characters that this impulse is pervasive in human relations, that ordinary perception partakes of the same partial cognizance, the same horror of lucidity, which is expressed in the controlling form of art. The very process of "seeing," of "knowing," is itself a negotiation between the given and the imagined which is never formally concluded, and which requires the constant sacrifice of small truths to keep from breaking down.

In human transactions such as those between lover and beloved, between victim and victimizer, and even between author and created character, this process is marked by tyranny, and often by the sacrifice of human truths which, while hostile to form, are essential to understanding. For this reason, Milly's "apotheosis as the beneficial dove is . . . her personal defeat";[40] the role she assumes represents a form conferred on her by others, and precludes

the possibility either of personal growth or of an authentic response on the part of others to her psychic vulnerability. Her acceptance of her bestowed image "cheats her of the world's compassion,"[41] as the human "desperation of her loneliness" is finally converted into the inhuman image "that 'covers' the book."[42] In her ultimate apotheosis as the love of Densher's memory, it is Milly's essential human truth, and not her life, that is the real redemptive sacrifice.

Just as Milly's humanity is sacrificed so that she might be worshipped, Kate's is sacrificed so that she might be cast away. Densher's gradual change from reliance on Kate to derogation of her energy, vitality, and creativity indicates how necessary her powers are to the process of his vision but how inimical they are to the values reflected in its achieved result. James's dramatization of this gradual shift reveals how deeply, and with what mingled discovery and dread, James must have probed the artistic process in its analogue, the mind of Merton Densher. Densher's final solution, in which he projects his own guilt onto Kate, mirrors that of James himself, who depends on surrogates, many of them well-meaning villains, to organize the ado by which something is "done" with the people he has so lovingly created. Densher by his passivity has authorized Kate to act for him, but recoils in horror at her methods, and in the end rejects her as debased, adoring instead the beautiful image in another that her surrogate efforts have provoked into being. This is precisely the practice of James in his earlier, less self-conscious novels, in which he relies on the Osmonds and Madame

Merles, whose behavior he abases, to create the "difficult situation" in which the moral beauty of his Isabel Archers will be clearly and wonderfully visible.

Densher is one who worships the beautiful result but finds the process of creating it abhorrent. He does not want to know at what cost the transcendent image of Milly has been produced, nor does he want to know his own part in extracting that price. He would rather believe, for impunity's sake, that Milly's beauty is a natural emanation of her own personality, and not a forced effect produced by the energy of Kate's lie and the force of everyone else's wilful repressions. Thus James shows through Densher the degree to which art, and the symbolic renderings of people that are like art, partakes of a brutality that the artist himself suspects but does not acknowledge; the artist, like Densher, effaces the very energy through which reality is converted into desire, and makes it seem as if this forged unity is, after all, an innate and natural one.

There is a temptation to argue that Densher's withdrawal from the chaos of experience, and "to renounce life in society for solitary integrity,"[43] is a reflection of James's own increasing habit of deference in his fiction, almost as if he were afraid of incurring responsibility for exerting the brutal authorial will; but James is not Densher, nor Densher James. Densher's consciousness is a model of the unconscious and unreflective artistic impulse, unwilling to subject its constructions to the lucid facts that might mock it; James's purpose in The Wings of the Dove and, to a lesser extent, in

The Ambassadors, is to turn conscious reflection on that impulse, to discover its sources, its hidden repressions and vulnerabilities. Where Densher's deference is defensive and self-embedding, James's is expansive and exploratory: he wants to reckon the cost to truth that the unopened envelope, the strategic silence, the hermetic metaphor represent. This, and not the struggle for the soul of Densher, or even the tragic self-sacrifice of Milly, is the issue at the heart of this prodigious novel.

In Wings James turns his analytical and dramatic capabilities as a novelist inward on the form itself, to examine the inner tensions he had been wrestling with for thirty years. The Wings of the Dove is an assessment of the cost of alleviating those tensions--of the cost, in a way, of art itself. James's conclusions are twofold. He reveals through Milly's abrogated selfhood, in Kate's final abjection, and in Densher's waste of passion, that the cost of art is great; but the fact that after finishing Wings he turned to another novel, The Golden Bowl, demonstrates his estimation that it is not, in the end, intolerably prohibitive. James discovers in the realistic novel the continual horror of lucidity that characterizes all art, but finds it coupled with the simultaneous demand for lucid reportage of human actualities. This is the paradox at the center of the novel form itself, the inner antagonism that can never be resolved. But this discovery represents for James cause for reflection, not for despair. In the various fictions which follow The Wings of the Dove, one sees James's continuing conviction, all the more articulate for his investigations in this novel, that the

beautiful mask is a habitual and probably a necessary domestication of the raw and violent truth; but it is too insubstantial to replace the reality it tropes, and it must not be employed without full recognition of the potential cost at which it is imposed or assumed.

NOTES

[1]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 288.

[2]The Art of the Novel, p. 294.

[3]The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 110.

[4]Wegelin, p. 110.

[5]The seminal article embracing this view belongs to Quentin Anderson, "The Two Henry Jameses," Scrutiny, 14 (1947), 242-51.

[6]Anderson, 250.

[7]The Art of the Novel, p. 328. Although this description of James's method is found in his Preface to The Golden Bowl, it is not specific to that novel, and in fact has its most fertile applications in The Wings of the Dove.

[8]See R. P. Blackmur, "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," Accent, 11 (1951), 142; F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 59. These two critics give succinct and pertinent accounts of Mrs. Stringham's contribution to the story's "romantic" elements.

[9]The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 286.

[10]Blackmur, 137.

[11]The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 71.

[12]Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (New York: Penguin, 1972), p. 50. All subsequent references are to this edition, which follows the text of the first English edition.

[13]"Transcendence in The Wings of the Dove," Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (1966), 98.

[14]Koch, 94.

[15]Again, Quentin Anderson's article is the seminal one for this idea.

[16]Dorothea Krook, for example, asserts that Milly's "fatal flaw is her pride" ("The Wings of the Dove," Cambridge Journal, 7 ((1954)), 678); and Robert C. McLean, in a reading of the novel that is idiosyncratic to say the least, suggests that Milly's manic-depression causes her to kill herself, and that her bequest, which separates Kate and Densher, is a form of posthumous revenge ("'Love by the Doctor's Direction': Disease and Death in The Wings of the Dove," Papers on Language and Literature, 8, supp. ((1972)), 128-48).

[17]John Goode, "The Pervasive Mystery of Style: The Wings of the Dove," The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James, ed. John Goode (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 253.

[18]Holland, p. 303.

[19]Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 106.

[20]Frye, p. 105.

[21]For an extensive treatment of the phenomenon of "passive" and "active" characters, see Daniel J. Schneider, The Crystal Cage (Lawrence, Kansas: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

[22]Holland, p. 287.

[23]Leo Bersani, "The Narrator as Center in The Wings of the Dove," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (1960), 137.

[24]F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; rpt., 1963), p. 74.

[25]S. M. Conger, "The Admirable Villains in Henry James's The Wings of the Dove," Arizona Quarterly, 27 (1971), 157-58.

[26]James E. Mulqueen, "Perfection of a Pattern: The Structure of The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl," Arizona Quarterly, 27 (1971), 136.

[27]Sita Patricia Marks, "The Sound and the Silence: Nonverbal Patterns in The Wings of the Dove," Arizona Quarterly, 27 (1971), 148.

[28]"The Symbolization of Milly Theale: Henry James's The Wings of the Dove," Journal of English Literary History, 40 (1973), 158.

[29]Bersani, 137.

[30]Goode, p. 288.

[31]Mulqueen, 136.

[32]The Art of the Novel, p. 302.

[33]Rowe, 141.

[34]Bersani, 144.

[35]"The Most Valuable Thing: James on Death," Modern Fiction Studies, 22 (1976-77), 523.

[36]Sears, p. 97.

[37]Krook, 678.

[38]"The Dream of Being Possessed and Possessing: Henry James's The Wings of the Dove," Massachusetts Review, 10 (1969), 114.

[39]Krook, 687.

[40]Alan W. Bellringer, "The Wings of the Dove: The Main Image," Modern Language Review, 74 (1979), 23.

[41]Marks, 148.

[42]Koch, 98-99.

[43]Bersani, 144.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOLDEN BOWL AND BEYOND

The Golden Bowl is in many ways a meditation on, and an elaboration of, an issue raised by Milly Theale's behavior in the closing chapters of The Wings of the Dove. Informed by Lord Mark of Kate's and Densher's treachery, Milly assures him that he is mistaken, and convinces him that it is she, and not Kate, that Densher really loves. What Milly signifies by this action is crucial not just to our understanding of her character, but to our view of the relation between truth and beauty that Wings and its successor, The Golden Bowl, explore so deeply. Milly, knowing Densher's love to be counterfeit, nevertheless is disposed to continue treating it as the real thing; she thus attempts to redeem the foolishness of her credulous conduct by trying to realize the appearance of a beautiful relation between herself and Densher as an end in itself. But in the end, Milly is not able to sustain the connection between the beautiful appearance and its antithesis in the lucid facts as provided by Lord Mark; in an emblematic gesture of despair and disillusionment with life, she "turns her face to the wall," and covers her exit with a final show of benificence toward those who have betrayed her. Milly's dilemma is put to Densher by Kate herself, who observes: "She never wanted the truth . . . She wanted you."[1]

Kate's remark is equally appropriate as a description of Maggie Verver's attitude towards her husband, the Prince, in The Golden Bowl. Like Milly's idea of Densher, Maggie's beautiful image of her Prince is threatened by the ugly revelation that his loyalties as a lover are divided at best; but unlike Milly, Maggie is able to see the truth and yet live. To be sure, Maggie is shocked and demoralized by the discovery that her husband Amerigo and her friend and stepmother Charlotte Stant have been, and continue to be, lovers; but her response is not the despair of life displayed by Milly, but rather a determination to survive the loss of her overingenuous innocence. She is determined, for her father's happiness as well as for her own, to neutralize the destructive potential of the Prince's and Charlotte's infidelity--to keep the ugly truth from intruding on the beautiful forms in which she and her father have ensconced themselves. To this end, Maggie seeks and discovers in herself the strength (some would say the cruelty) which allows her to absorb the lucid truth about Amerigo and Charlotte without letting them escape the roles in which she and her father, by virtue of their marriages, have fixed them.

Thus one finds repeated in The Golden Bowl a conceit which rules The Wings of the Dove as well: human relations, particularly love relations, are like art works which both depend on and are vulnerable to the human materials which lend them substance. The Verver marriages, though beautiful in their outward forms and in the emotional satisfaction they provide Adam and Maggie, are nevertheless based on an incomplete recognition of the nature of their spouses,

and on the Ververs' own misconceptions about each others' needs. The neat symmetry of mutual satisfaction comprised by this foursome is, then, in actuality a map of misreading, in which the objects of these misconstructions--some intentionally and some inadvertently--engage in an overt acquiescence to, but a covert subversion of, the designs imposed on them by others.

This is a potential problem which the Prince recognizes from the beginning. He tells Maggie that, while she does know his "public" self, "there's another part" about which she has thus far found out nothing--"my single self, the unknown, unimportant--unimportant save to you--personal quantity."[2] The Prince knows that Maggie does not perceive or understand him in personal terms; rather, he is to be the crowning addition to the Verver museum, a perfect Old World specimen whose charm lies in the romantic seeds of his ancestry. He is to the Ververs a "personage" rather than a person; his value to them is symbolic and greater than the sum of his actual attributes, which they leave unexamined. He "was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts" (p. 43).

In this light, it is obvious that the golden bowl, with its incipient and fatal flaw, does not represent the Prince himself so much as the Ververs' habits of perception. It is Adam who regards Amerigo as "a pure and perfect crystal" (p. 120), and his and Maggie's thirst for romance which creates the illusory "charm" that pervades the Verver household. The vulnerability of this illusion, though revealed by Amerigo's and Charlotte's adultery, does not

ultimately derive from it; the fault is not in the human passion of the illicit lovers, but in the inhuman readings of them proposed by Maggie and Adam, who gloss over the personal, emotional truths of the Prince and Charlotte in the interest of making them "romantic." Thus the cracked bowl is not a symbol of Amerigo's or Charlotte's inability to sustain the beauty the Ververs have imagined for them; it represents rather "the Ververs' deformed attitude towards their precious people. For when people are treated like works of art, certain human needs are ignored which will eventually assert themselves."[3]

But these ignored needs, expressed particularly in the love between Amerigo and Charlotte, represent private feelings which need not be carried into the public and symbolic forum of the Verver family circle. The Prince is aware of this disjunction of public and private reality from the beginning; he sees his responsibility as being not so much to remain faithful in essence to his role, but merely to avoid betraying the appearances which it requires of him. Similarly, Charlotte is expert at using public gesture to disguise personal realities, such as the show of "cleverness" with which she hides her "abjection"--letting it "be known for anything, for everything, but the truth of which it was made" (p. 61). In other words, the Prince and Charlotte both recognize the value of playing the parts that the Ververs desire of them; the "beauty" of their relations with their victims "covers" the lovers in The Golden Bowl as surely as Milly Theale's symbolic wings reach out to cover Kate and Densher in The Wings of the Dove. But, like Kate Croy and unlike Densher, Amerigo and Charlotte in no way confuse their parts with their

actual selves; nor do they let the dimension of the personal, banished by the Ververs' idealized conceptions of them, enter into their marital relationships. Rather, they hide behind the silences and evasions which serve the single purpose they share in common with their spouses: the preservation of the placid beauty of appearances, regardless of its relation to the lucid facts.

The Ververs themselves contribute to this conspiracy of silence and manufactured ignorance, but for far different reasons. They do not want to be disencumbered of their idealistic notions regarding their spouses because, as Maggie tells the Prince, being romantic "is just what makes everything so nice for us" (p. 34). But the air of romance with which they have surrounded themselves is, as we have seen, an impoverishment rather than an enhancement of the actual atmosphere; it is based on a depersonalization of the beloved, in which he or she becomes an aesthetic object, an image bound up intimately with one's own desires but served from his or her own human actuality. Like Milly, the Ververs would rather have romance, and the imagined "life" it represents, than the living truth itself; and, like Milly, Maggie and Adam foster the conspiracy of silence which keeps them insulated from the truth but makes them vulnerable to the designs of others. They are reluctant to solicit answers, to break the seal on envelopes, in which they might find struck the "note" of the personal, the real, which would obscure the image of desire which they see reflected in their spouses. It is precisely this willed absence of lucidity which allows the balloon of romance to float free of its earthly moorings;[4] but it also

leaves one dancing on air, and with a long, long way to fall. Small wonder, then, that characters like Maggie and Adam are so reluctant to look down.

The story of The Golden Bowl, then, is like that of so many other of James's novels: that of the "lucid truth" rising to confront the dream of the beautiful; and of the efforts of one or more of the characters (in this case Maggie) to continue valuing that beauty without denying the facts which reveal it as an illusion. In previous novels like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove, such attempts result in moral paralysis (Strether), withdrawal (Densher), and even death (Milly Theale); but in The Golden Bowl, Maggie Verver survives her initial disillusionment and converts it into decision and action. She learns to deal in ambiguity and illusion herself, and in doing so is able to deceive those who have begun by deceiving her.

She is able to accomplish this reversal because, while she and Adam have misread the Prince and Charlotte, the two lovers have misgauged Maggie herself; it does not occur to them that Maggie, like themselves, could be a dissembler. The Prince does not consider that the worm of knowledge could find a nest in the flower of his wife's apparent innocence, nor does he doubt that her faith will be sufficient to "cover" his betrayals; he is convinced, rather, that her "easy imagination . . . would keep up with him in the end," and that her view of him is "unruffled by a sense of anomaly" (pp. 238, 252). The Prince, in short, makes the mistake of holding as blindly to Maggie's belief in him as she herself does.

The Prince values Maggie's idea of him not because it represents an interpretation which he finds flattering, but because it provides him with a knowledge of what others believe and expect of him; he is able to know, through Maggie, the boundaries of the public form that interposes itself between his personal reality and the identity conferred on him within the Verver family circle. The advantage the Prince gains from thus knowing the shape of his mask has as much to do with his connection to Charlotte as with his relationship to Maggie; it gives him a sense of what he may do in the name of love without publicly violating that which he ought to do (or ought not to) in the name of marriage. The Prince, like Charlotte, must rely on his external adherence to the symbolic contract he has formed with Adam and Maggie because he knows that on a personal and private level he is bound to betray their agreement. Amerigo knows that he can never be, through and through, what Maggie believes him to be; the best he can do is make, like the gilded bowl, a public display which suggests a consistency of surface and substance, but which in fact conceals the flawed material to which the pristine gilt is bonded. The Prince recognizes the intrinsic flaws in Maggie's illusion, just as he recognizes the fault in the bowl; and this recognition weighs heavily on him, especially when he runs the risk of exposing his true self to Maggie's or Adam's scrutiny. Accordingly, he admits to being "afraid of cracks" (p. 269), and has his "real, honest fear of being 'off' some day, of being wrong without knowing it" (p. 48).

Thus when the Prince finds to his horror that Maggie has discovered the very "crack" he feared, he is desperate to know how far her awareness has spread--whether the discovered flaw has merely affected her idea of him, or if it has become a public fact of which he must now be cognizant. When Maggie refuses to tell him what Adam knows of his and Charlotte's infidelity, the Prince is stymied; he can no longer be certain which of his actions, past or present, remain concealed under the public image of his conjugal faithfulness. He cannot know what personal liberties of word or of action he may allow himself, nor what past indiscretions have risen into the light of general knowledge. It is an axiom of the Prince's moral system that playing a role is not hypocritical unless one is careless enough to supply others with the proof that one is actually playing; but Maggie's silence leaves him uncertain as to whether anyting has been proven at all, except to Maggie herself. The result of this is that the Prince and Charlotte, unable to admit or deny the truth of their relationship without risking public compromise, are paralyzed by their uncertainty, and become malleable to Maggie's design.

Thus Maggie finds her salvation by gaining a knowledge of her deceivers that they never expected, and becoming as mysterious to them as they had previously been to her; she substitutes power over others for ther now-defunct belief in their intrinsic beauty. She also escapes the "ambush of truth" that lies in wait for so many Jamesian protagonists by perceiving finally that "knowledge was a fascination as well as a fear" (p. 395) and by not shrinking

from the prerogatives in action that such knowledge brings. The Golden Bowl, then, shows us two Maggies, neatly divided by a narrative ellipse at the center of the novel: one is innocent and deceived, like Milly Theale, while the other is, like Kate Croy, hardened by experience and willing to play a part to gain an objective. Maggie changes from a passive admirer of the Prince to one on whom the Prince himself looks with a mixture of fear and gaping wonder; she triumphs over Charlotte, the "Dark Lady" of the novel,[5] by adopting Charlotte's own methods of beguilement, clothing her new understandings in the expired truth of her old innocence. And, like the authorial "Personage" she finally resembles (p. 166),[6] Maggie takes pleasure in the creation of an effect she knows to be purely formal--the preservation of her own and Adam's marriages--while knowing also that in other eyes, particularly her father's, it will be viewed as the real thing.

But the symmetry of the novel, which shows Maggie as deceived and then as deceiver, as victim and than as victimizer, makes her final triumph over the Prince and Charlotte seem more like a vulgar payback than a positive step toward maturity. Because Maggie succeeds by mastering the methods of her betrayers, she is a problematical heroine whose actions in the final analysis evoke as much sympathy for her enemies as for herself; after all, she has done little more than exchange roles with the Prince and Charlotte, and her final claims for moral heroism are hollowly pleaded if the best one can say on her behalf is that others sinned first.[7]

As always in James, the problems of sympathy in The Golden Bowl arise because the author has created in protagonist and antagonists alike characters whose actions spring from psychic necessity as well as from the dramatic needs of the discourse. It is difficult not to feel the anxiety of the Prince, who must read in Maggie's mystical silences the extent of his exposure; and one cannot help experiencing the frustration of Charlotte as the Prince is slowly, inexorably removed from her, and her passion for him walled up within the bland confines of her marriage to Adam. Thus in The Golden Bowl the claims of humanity obscure the claims of moral assessment; but if one is looking for judgments in this novel, for clear assignations of guilt or of innocence, one is mistaking James's point. As with previous novels like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove, the story of The Golden Bowl is ultimately the quest of one character--in this case Maggie Verver--for psychic wholeness, and the assessment of the cost at which this is pursued.

Like Strether and Densher (and, incidentally, like early protagonists such as Newman and Isabel), Maggie requires an external and public form which will articulate and corroborate her sense of her own inner integrity, restoration of harmony and order to her marriage; this is an enterprise which, if successful, will signify the active realization of her creative power and her control over the forms of her existence--proofs against her earlier abjection at seeing herself as a bird in a "gilded cage" of the Prince's and Charlotte's making (p. 329). She needs, in other words, to dispel her sense that her life is not her own; Maggie wants to be the

keeper, not the pet. The demonstration of her strength, of her maturity, will be her construction of a cage that will hold her husband, the Prince, while keeping out Charlotte; she must bring whole through revision an earlier, failed project whose design had been ruptured by the Prince's adulterous deception.

To achieve this end, Maggie must repudiate her old innocence; as Charles Thomas Samuels observes, Maggie knows that her old, childish Eden had in it the seeds of disorder and collapse,[8] and her plan to recapture the Prince is in essence an attempt to conceive in all lucidity what she had previously misconceived in all ignorance. Maggie now recognizes that the Prince will not conform naturally to the role of husband, but that she must make him do so through mastery and mystification, closing his escape route to Charlotte and leaving him no choice but to accept the binding mandate of form.

But in her lucidity, as in her ignorance, Maggie regards the Prince's personal actuality as distinct from his essential value to her; she knows his acceptance of his role is forced, but she does not care so long as he does not actively protest. Thus her quest through marriage for an integrated identity is merely a recapitulation of her childish dream of possession. She does not seek to recapture the Prince to gain "erotic fulfillment,"[9] but to reclaim him from Charlotte as an object she believes to be rightfully hers, to restore that object to its proper place. Maggie's idea of the Prince has been changed by her discoveries, as have her methods for dealing with him; but the essential use she wishes to make of him remains constant. It is the integrity of the form she is interested

in--a goal to which the Prince's real pain of loss and real sense of helpless wonder is a small but recognized obstacle. Like an author relentlessly pressing his characters into the desired pattern of action, Maggie manipulates and mystifies the Prince into behaving as she will, even as she senses his stifled cries of protest.

So Maggie is like the novelist who must build on knowledge and against it to achieve effects which are most purely apprehended in innocence; or, rather, she must control the actual elements in her field of vision so they do not distort the image she is projecting on them. For her, as for the novelist, the tactics of silence and evasion are essential tools. Maggie wants her plan to reach fruition, but she does not want it to be forced; like the Jamesian narrator, she depends on others to take up the suggestions (in this case, threats) which she leaves dangling in her deferent silences, even as those others disacknowledge the painful imprint of her will. In short, the Prince and Charlotte must bend to Maggie's plan without admitting they are being bent; the slightest protest or denial, particularly from the Prince, would make Maggie conscious of the mark of her own heel, and upset the delicate moral equilibrium which allows her drive for integration to stay on course.

So, though the Prince is tormented by his exposure and by his separation from Charlotte, Maggie can risk no provocation which would bring this truth to his lips; such an open admission would compromise both the purity of her intended effect and the impunity of her means. Maggie is afraid of challenging the Prince on the

still-unpublished score of his love for Charlotte for another reason as well: she wants to avoid striking the abhorrent note of her own "jealousy" which, though authentic enough, would be inharmonious with her rationale that her desire for the Prince is really a desire to preserve her father's "stillness of peaceful sleep" (pp. 351-52). She feels the "specific" must be kept caged, since letting it out "would run to earth, somehow, the truth . . . at which she mustn't so much as indirectly point" (p. 357)--that truth being, again, the suppressed reality of Amerigo's love for Charlotte. She is fearful of the Prince admitting the pain which would testify to the fact of that now-frustrated attachment, feeling that "any blindness that might wrap it [the Prince's unhappiness] would be the nearest approach to a boon" (p. 423). Finally, even as Adam and Charlotte march away from them into the New World, Maggie finds that the prospect of hearing a "confession" from Amerigo "charged her with a new horror . . . All she knew, accordingly, was that she should be ashamed to listen to the uttered word" (p. 547).

What can all this mean, except that Maggie intends to have her truth and bury it too? It is knowledge she has asked for, and knowledge she has gotten; but it has not served her much better than ignorance, since the power it engenders is made dangerous by the moral complications which attend its use. The acquisition of truth has, paradoxically, proven useful to her means but destructive of her ends; she cannot accept the stain of guilt that comes from using truth as a weapon. Thus Amerigo, though he may not know it yet, still has the power to burst the cage, to shatter the bowl, by the single

lucidity which will reveal the flaw in Maggie's moral reasoning. It may be true, as J. A. Ward maintains, that "Maggie really is an artist . . . who seeks the ideal fusion of the appearance and the content of her marriage";[10] yet what she actually achieves is not fusion, but exclusion. Her tenuous harmonization of content and form derives from a repression of old truths, and not from the forging of new ones. The clear triumph which she appears to have achieved is in fact a trick of perspective, of focus; there are truths hovering in the background which "she agrees not to know or judge." Instead, she "labors to keep things fuzzy"; she "sacrifices clarity."[11]

The image of the gilded bowl with its incipient crack is thus symbolic not only of Maggie's initial conception of Amerigo, but of her response to the "discovery" of his and Charlotte's adultery. In the second half of the novel Maggie builds on knowledge to create an image of herself, and of the Prince, that is just as vulnerable as the one which, in the first half, she builds in ignorance. Unlike Densher, who replaces his blind worship of Kate with an equally blind worship of Milly, Maggie Verver emerges from her blindness into the light of experience, only to embrace the axiom with which, unconsciously, she began: that the truth, whether known or not, will not in and of itself suffice. Maggie cannot help seeking the comfort of beautiful forms, even when she is able to recognize the debased reality of the things they symbolize; her knowledge has not changed her need or her desire for these forms, but only her methods for bringing them to realization. So even

though in the end she trades her father to get a husband, her maturity is illusory; in saving her marriage, she merely substitutes an artificial innocence for the actual one that has been given up.

One may infer from Maggie's final disposition a sense of where James himself, after four decades as a novelist, finally "comes out." The Golden Bowl, like its preface, has the air of "a ceremonious leave-taking";[12] as the last work in James's canonical revisions, it represents an endpoint in the author's long quest for an artistic fusion of form and substance. This quest is mirrored, carried out by proxy, through the "process of vision" of James's various reflectors and appointed delegates--surrogate artists to a person, who like himself try to make desire answerable to truth, to make pleasure consonant with credulity.[13] By letting his characters go their own way, by dispersing the terms of his enterprise into their own inner lives, James is able to gain a direct sense of the problematical nature of his art without, like his characters, becoming too hopelessly entangled in difficulty and ambiguity. As I have suggested, The Wings of the Dove represents the final exploratory phase of this long process of inquiry, and The Golden Bowl a dramatization of conclusions arrived at. The position this last great novel occupies in the Jamesian canon is true to the image which governs it and provides its title: it is James's vision of his own problematical Grail, just as the cracked crystal itself represents the uncertain terminus, the tremulous tapering to a point, of Maggie Verver's own quest for internal consistency.

The Golden Bowl, in its style and structure, expresses a conviction that the illusion of the bowl's integrity is more valuable (and even, in some senses, more functional) than the piecemeal truth of its constituent parts; this is, of course, reflected in Maggie's own conviction that form is, in the end, a greater comfort, a richer prize, than the knowledge which strains or breaks it. Significantly, the novel's title alludes to the appearance of wholeness, of identification of substance and form, which is the bowl's illusion rather than its truth. I do not believe that James means this ironically, as a reference to the fact that the "golden bowl" is in fact gilded crystal, and cracked crystal at that; rather, the title is a cautious recommendation of the desire for beauty, of the imagination's power to mend faults which lucid awareness does not press on too heavily. The bowl may not be all it appears to be; but, as the shopkeeper tells Charlotte, that is something that a "gentleman" would decline to notice (p. 106). Like the bowl and the thirst for beauty which it symbolizes, the novel itself must in the end have "justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface" (p. 104).

The "charm" of the novel's shape, with its carefully arranged symmetries and parallels between the first and second books, has been more than adequately analyzed elsewhere;[14] but of more immediate interest is the "unique tone of its surface," which brings the clustered sonorities of James's late prose style to a dizzying crescendo. James has all along argued for the special "intensity" of artistic effect, beginning with "The Art of Fiction" in 1884;

but in The Golden Bowl he finally explores the full depths to which the imagination must plunge in order to bring the "felt life" in all its fullness to the surface of language. He describes in his preface to The Golden Bowl the ideal for which he strives in that novel: not that of "pretended exhibitory prose," which one reads in vain "for closeness and charm, for conviction and illusion, for communication," but rather that of those "poetic" forms, "whose highest bid is addressed to the imagination, to the spiritual and aesthetic vision, the mind led captive by a charm and a spell."[15] In The Golden Bowl, James the novelist turns lyric poet, imitating that artist's special interest in the correlation between image and insight, between qualities of mind and language.

While this may at first glance seem an incongruous standard for a "realistic" novelist to invoke, it is for James a natural step if one considers his long-standing preference for portraying the internal register of experience rather than its external stimulus. The language of his late style is not analogous to action and object, nor to the field of visual arts which seems to function as an ancillary code in novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady; rather, it takes the form of elaborate symbolic figures, like the pagoda image which rises from the center of The Golden Bowl and dominates the novel at large as well as the enclosed garden of Maggie's consciousness. Such linguistic structures do not refer to events and objects in the real world, or even in the fictional world shared by the characters; rather, they signify conditions of thought and memory, impulses and desires--qualities of human

consciousness that exist outside of real time, in pre-linguistic states for which the language nevertheless seeks to find its own correlates.

As Austin Warren has suggested, it is this quality of "emblematic perception," of "symbolized intuition,"[16] that gives a character like Maggie Verver her mythic dimension, even though the metaphors themselves attempt to describe real psychological states. The hermetic consistency of a metaphor like the pagoda image, for example, appeals to Maggie because it provides an explanatory analogy for her confusions of happiness and discontent; yet at the same time the image provides a metaphorical enrichment of the novel itself. Her search for psychic clarity is thus shown in terms which imbue the narration with a greater richness and density than more "lucid" analysis might produce. This technique is James's real triumph in The Golden Bowl, as he at last achieves the suffusion of his psychological insights with the poetic "intensity" of presentation. One sees this phenomenon intermittently in The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove--Strether's idea of the "jelly" of his consciousness and, of course, the overarching image of Milly Theale's "wings" being instances--but in The Golden Bowl, the very logic of the presentation, particularly in the second half of the novel, seems to derive from the associative properties of these metaphors.

It should also be noted that the search for identity which Maggie engages in is, like Strether's and Densher's, internal; it is the process of vision, not a plan of action. Like the exploration

of the pagoda, it occurs in a mode somewhat disconnected from the world that is shared with other characters, other consciousnesses. The result is that temporal and causal relationships become obscured, extraordinary coincidences are effaced, and the conflict itself is expressed through minute fluctuations in the awareness or anxiety level of the principal "reflector." As Joseph Warren Beach observes, it seems that James "had agreed . . . that time--as well as space--is not a reality, but a condition of our consciousness."[17] James would assent, I am sure, so far as to admit at least that these qualities matter only in terms of their impression, their register, on the mind of the individual; and in The Golden Bowl one feels through Maggie's internalized metaphors that subjective sense of the world's movement, that lyric time in which it is thought, and not event, that seems to rush.

One finds such moments of lyric intensity in earlier novels like The American and The Portrait of a Lady; James's description of Isabel's bookishness, in which her "reputation for reading" is like "the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic," is but one example of his determination to have romance as well as realism in his presentation. But metaphors such as this one are exclusively the narrator's; they are imposed interpretations in which the characters themselves do not necessarily share. And, as distinctly authorial commentary, such imaginative flights clash with the "empirical" mode of presentation which the narrator engages in elsewhere in these novels. For this reason, The American and The Portrait do not harmonize the realistic and romantic impulses in

their presentation. But in the novels of his major phase, James relocates these impulses in the minds of his characters; the metaphors, the allusions, appear to speak through them as well as about them. The imaginations of his "reflectors" provide the romance, while their experience provides the requisite "air of reality"; as a result, their quest for psychic coherence, through the harmonization of desire and reality, is identified with the discourse's own need for internal consistency.

The Golden Bowl, like The Wings of the Dove, is a novel in which the protagonist's quest for identity is pursued at the expense of truth, particularly truth about other people; but more than in Wings or any previous novel, James dramatizes the active, creative power of the word itself as an instrument of vision. Maggie finds in language her own romance of self; while the elaborate metaphorical figures of The Golden Bowl contribute to the poetic "intensity" of James's effect, for Maggie they are keys which help her unlock the secrets of her own desires. Furthermore, she discovers the power of words to subvert and exclude the real world; she uses language to create meanings contrary to the facts (her lying to Charlotte is the ultimate instance of this) and to erect barriers between herself and others which gain her the advantage of mystery. Thus, in language, Maggie finds the means as well as the end in her attempt to define and reconstruct her lost Eden; metaphor and hypothetical diction become operative realities for her and for the novel, squeezing out the lucidities which would prove hostile to her--and to the author's--enterprise.

But language has powers of suggestion as well as expression, and James shows in this novel the ways in which the associative properties of the medium itself lead understanding and desire forward. It is in her exploration of the pagoda, and not through any identifiable event in real time, that Maggie discovers the kernel of her suspicion and discontent; language is shown here to precede knowledge, to suggest the directions that discovery might take. But more startling, and more revealing, is language's effect on Adam as he prepares to propose to Charlotte. He initially decides to marry her to "square" himself with Maggie; but as he prepares to speak, he is struck with an awareness of "the word itself being romantic, pressing for him the spring of association" (p. 169). Bringing his idea to the conscious level of language changes his attitude towards it; it is no longer something for Maggie, but something for himself. It calls back and reconstitutes in his imagination a youth which he has left behind but which suddenly, through the suggestive power of language, seems again within his grasp.

Thus the "romantic" thrust of language in The Golden Bowl has the peculiar effect of marking the absence of its object[18] while turning attention away from the present truths to which it might refer. Words in this novel are often used to express a desired world, not an existing one, an Eden in which the principals are free to imagine themselves "lying like gods together, all careless of manking" (p. 361). It is the world of innocence and impunity, unmarred by the consequence of action, which provides Maggie with "that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any

time depended" (p. 303), and once it is lost she can think of nothing but getting it back. But it is, as Adam is aware, a world summoned forth and sustained by a "charm" (p. 361); it is a trick of language, in which the expression of desire and the repression of truth rush up to meet the flight of the imagination. It is not real, but it is beautiful, and the only way of creating or maintaining it is to screen out, to edit, the reality it affronts.

The elaborate metaphors of Maggie's consciousness perform this function for the novel as well as for herself; their sense, like the lyric poem, is insular rather than expansive, centripetal rather than centrifugal.[19] They efface the patterns of act and consequence, of sin and retribution, which if given a stronger foothold in the novel would challenge Maggie's final sense of her own reconstructed innocence. Thus the metaphorical terms through which we come to know her are indicative of her self-absorption and of her disconnection from the human actuality of others. Furthermore, the novel as a whole appears to imitate her willed blindness; following Maggie's own process of vision, it sacrifices clarity for harmony, substitutes metaphor for analysis.

But the overriding image, the conceit which "covers" the novel and gives it its name, hints that the effect is in the end as essentially compromised for the work as it is for Maggie. This is because James's own attitudes are split; he sympathizes with her aims, but abhors her methods and regrets the cost at which her fragile success is achieved. She is, like himself, an artist trying to realize a vision, exercising the freedom of imagination which

James himself has endorsed; but Maggie, like other heroes and heroines throughout James, reveals the degree to which the exercise of this freedom partakes of the brutal use of others. The cry of their strangled selfhoods is the note that always mars the harmony of the final effect; it is the crack in the bowl that, try as they might, neither James nor his delegates can prevent. Maggie's success is in the end illusory because she still has not recognized the personal reality of the Prince or of Charlotte, and that suppressed truth may still rise to shatter her fragile peace. Her tenuous satisfaction, constantly vulnerable to the ambush of this truth, is both her reward and her punishment.

James's intention in The Golden Bowl is not identical with Maggie's; as I have already suggested, the image of the bowl itself indicates that he knows from the outset that the substance, if not the effect, of his enterprise is flawed. James does not want, as Maggie does, to achieve success at the expense of those who inhabit his field of vision, or to deny their problematical reality; but neither does he want to portray his desire for success as shallow but insincere. He wants what Maggie wants, what Densher wants, what Strether wants; but, unlike those characters, he recognizes the expense of vision, and backs away. James's attention to the wholeness of his characters, even at the sacrifice of clarity of theme or roundness of form, is what gives his novels their paradoxical qualities of fullness and incompleteness; unlike Maggie, he is unwilling to tell the lie which will bring his plan whole by violating his materials.

The Golden Bowl in the end expresses to the reader a twofold plea: to recognize its flaws, but to believe in its creator's good faith. James wants his readers to be, like the good artist, "ones on whom nothing is lost"; but by this he does not mean that they should scrutinize the bowl for cracks so closely that they lose sight of the bowl itself. He wants his readers to appreciate both the efficacy of his work and the necessity of the flaw which mars it. This is what James himself sees, and tries to represent; and it is this double recognition of James, his equal sensitivity to form and substance, and his undying faith in the necessity of both, that is responsible for the essential glories and difficulties of his work. His novels in particular dramatize the dual nature of his prodigious imagination, which allows him to recognize the disaster that lies in ambush as well as the desire that, dangling constantly ahead, draws one on. The lingering note of novels like The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove is an exhortation for indulgence and recognition, for trust and alertness, in short for an embrace of the accursed "double consciousness" which will allow the reader to recognize the inherent flaws of the object and the attempt at flawlessness which hovers, ghost-like, about the artifact. This, in the end, represents the wisdom of The Golden Bowl, the meaning of the symbol from which it takes its name, and the importance of the author who created both.

NOTES

[1]Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, p. 405.

[2]James, The Golden Bowl (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 33. All references are to this edition, which follows the text of the first English printing.

[3]Adeline Tintner, "The Spoils of Henry James," PMLA, 61 (1946), 250. F. R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), expresses a similar view (p. 160).

[4]James, The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), pp. 33-34.

[5]Austin Warren, Rage for Order (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), p. 156.

[6]The epithets "Personage" and "Author" are originally applied to the Prince; but in Book Second these mantles pass to Maggie.

[7]Oscar Cargill, in The Novels of Henry James (New York: MacMillan and Company, 1961), provides a useful summary of the critical schizophrenia that Maggie has provoked (pp. 403-5).

[8]The Ambiguity of Henry James (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 210.

[9]Samuels, p. 211.

[10]The Search for Form: Studies in the Structure of James's Fiction (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 213.

[11]Samuels, p. 210.

[12]Ward, p. 199.

[13]See Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 253-54. Wright provides a useful account of Maggie as an "artist."

[14]See Ward, pp. 205-8.

[15]The Art of the Novel, p. 346.

[16]Warren, p. 149.

[17]The Method of Henry James (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 40.

[18]The idea that language marks the "absence" of the thing it signifies is the observation of Jacques Derrida, in Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974). To a certain extent, this is true even of the most "referential" use of language, since speech itself is metaphorical. But the metaphorical quality is compounded in the analogies of psyche we are discussing here, and it seems to me that what these figures express is as distantly absent from reference as one can get.

[19]This terminology is borrowed from George Steiner's discussion of the difficulties of translation in After Babel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Steiner is particularly interested in the interface between public and private dimensions of language; his discussion of this interface has a great deal of applicability to James's work, and my approach here bears his influence.

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