

THE SENSE OF THE PAST IN HENRY JAMES

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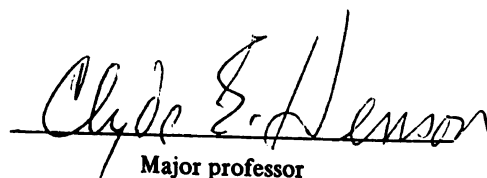
THE SENSE OF THE
PAST IN HENRY JAMES

presented by

James R. Huffman

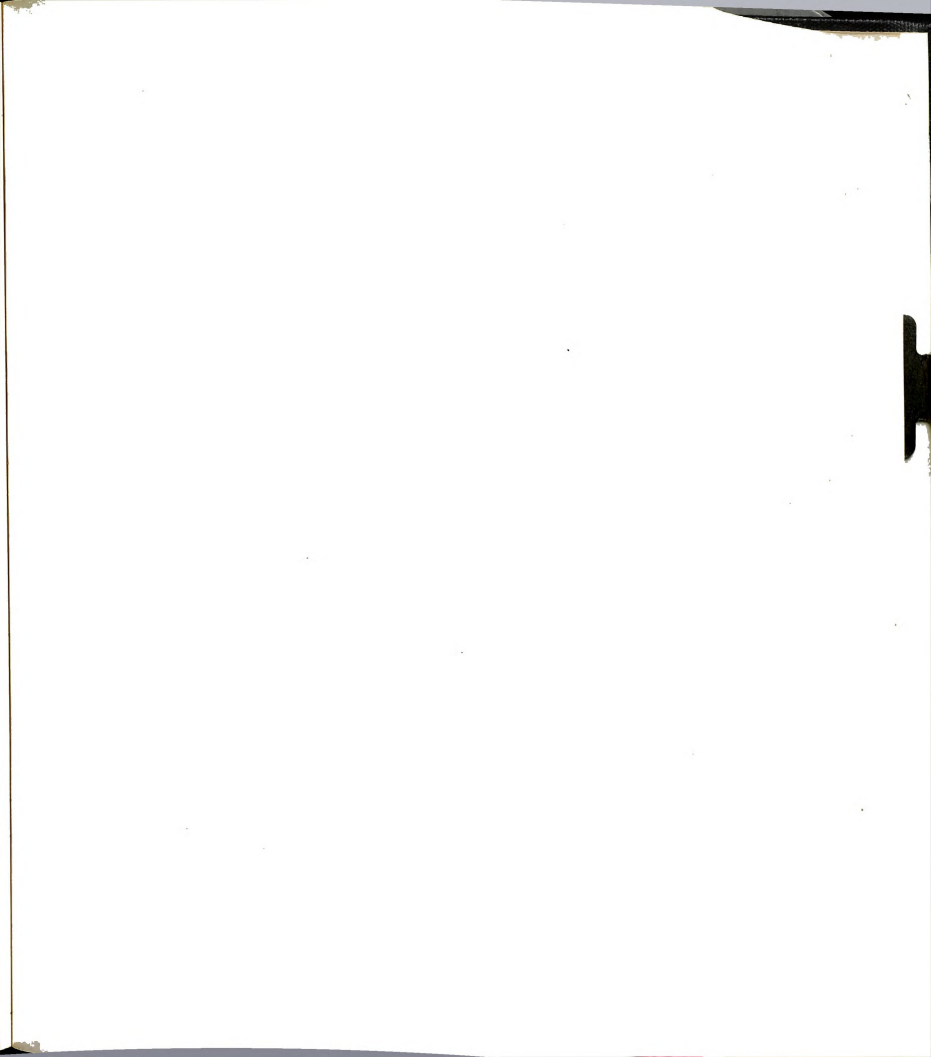
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ABSTRACT

THE SENSE OF THE PAST

IN HENRY JAMES

BY

James Richard Huffman

The sense of the past is ubiquitous in James's thought and fiction, and develops both as a theme and as a set of techniques in his work. His famous "international theme" is reinforced to a great degree by the sense of the past, for to James's Americans Europe is the past. And as the sense of the past becomes the central philosophical basis of the international theme, the issue of cultural contrast becomes much broader, including what stance a modern man should have toward the whole human past and how he should envision reality. James sees intelligent existence as the fine perception of the continuity of the past and the present, and he sees taste and even morality as integrally related to the proper apprehension of the past influencing the present and building the future. Fighting against both sentimental assessments and blithe rejections of the past which were common in America, James tries to distinguish what is valuable in customs and conventions from what is merely antiquated and preserved by nostalgia. He strives for a constant organic relationship with the past, and encourages the broadest cosmopolitanism by portraying

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maturity as full consciousness of the past and by satirizing deficient sensibilities.

James's representation of the sense, first as a sensitivity to the concrete residue of the past and then as an essential function of consciousness, develops in conjunction with his techniques of writing fiction. The external demonstration of awareness changes to the direct portrayal of consciousness, as his characters assimilate immediate impressions, compare them with past experiences, and then generate viable assessments of their current situations. Concurrently, these characters change from national types to archetypes, supplementing the thin veneer of "visitable past" which James portrays directly with a shadow of nearly mythic depth. Only about a century of the past can be immediately sensed by an observer with any accuracy, and a much shorter span is most common. So James uses archetypal situations and characters in the major phase which adumbrate patterns of human behavior reaching deep into the past.

This use of archetypes develops partly from James's keen awareness of past literature. Likewise, not surprisingly, the sense of the literary past appears as a strong element in several of his characters. Most important, the maintenance of that illusion of reality which alone defines realism for James comes to depend very strongly on reminding the reader of past conventions of literature, so he can contrast James's "realistic" deviations from them. Realism becomes primarily the explicit violation of romantic

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conventions, that is, as James sets up mnemonic devices designed to manipulate the reader's credulity. The setting up of parallel scenes and images that can be perceived only from the reader's viewpoint is another example of James's careful control of the sense of the past in his audience.

The developments and crises in James's personal sense of the past and in his musings on it, are reflected in both thematic and technical uses of the sense of the past in his fiction. In addition, the relation between the golden afternoon in so many novels and the sense of the past; between ficelles as the sense of the past and the sense of the present, and the main character as the consciousness assimilating each; between ultra-modern and anachronistic characters, or those without pasts and those with them; and the relation between the conception of a novel and the working out of its chronological connections, are only a few of the facets of the sense of the past worth investigating in James. In all these cases, the past is less the past of history than the vast existential realm of the infinite number of moments preceding the present. Both the conscious and the subconscious effects of the past appear in James's characters, and the recurring images which remain in their minds and the reader's take on symbolic significance in the growing web of association. Philosophically, James affirms the value of continually reassimilating the past, of adapting it to the present, and vice versa--a fair definition of the

James Richard Huffman

artist's current responsibility. Technically, he helps develop methods similar to stream-of-consciousness, enriched by characters with exquisite sensitivity to the past, which revolutionize the twentieth-century novel.

THE SENSE OF THE PAST IN HENRY JAMES

By

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The sense of the past is too ubiquitous in James not to have been commented upon already by many readers of his fiction. But it is likewise so broad and so multi-faceted a topic that only parts of it have been adequately discussed. Several areas are yet untouched, and no comprehensive study has been attempted. One scholar has nibbled directly on the topic before me, but was wise enough to limit his study carefully. My own work is limited as well, attempting to survey in some depth a few major points and to map the areas that remain unexplored, but I hope this beginning will someday become the full study needed.

Ruminating over The Tragic Muse in his notebooks, James notices that "I have, of course, as usual, spread myself too much in the first chapter--been too complacently descriptive and illustrative." Chapter III, the first one I worked on, suffers somewhat from the same fault. Ideas coalesce quickly around the first available organizing unit. And James more than repays the student of his work; he anticipates him, often doing a great deal of the preliminary probing thought. He is one of his own finest critics, and provides extensive commentary on his work for the analyst and historian. As he remarks in the preface

to "The Aspern Papers," "The historian, essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take." James thoughtfully solves part of the historian's problem by providing so many documents for him. But the writer of a dissertation on James still has major problems--more documents than he can really use, yes, but a great desire to use too many of them due to their fine quality; and he has the dramatist's temptation as well, to take liberties with the material to make it fit the required shape. Luckily the two problems complement each other, with the desire to use so much evidence offsetting any tendency to distort it. Accuracy thus acts as a fine excuse to cover up the scholar's dependence upon James's own analysis--to cover up the fact that he has been seduced by the eminent quotability, at length, of James's prose, and by the fine breadth and depth of his thought.

Acknowledgments are an old convention, but like the best ones, they gain value from a balance between adherence to the old forms and sincere departure. If I err in striking the balance, I hope it is in the direction of sincerity. I should like to express my thanks to Professor Kenneth S. Lynn, who first introduced The Portrait of a Lady to this unknown student and encouraged him to go to graduate school, and to Professor P. John Eakin of Indiana University, then finishing his dissertation on James's women, who as my tutor at Harvard helped find and mold the

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critical faculties lurking under the naivete. My greatest thanks go to Professor Clyde E. Henson, for demanding critical intelligence just by expecting it as a matter of course, for refusing to settle for less than fine quality work, and for encouraging me in numerous personal ways. His seminar on James focused my thinking, and the resulting study shows his professional guidance in its combination of flexible yet traditional form. Professors C. David Mead, Russel B. Nye, and Joseph J. Waldmeir have aided me with their carefully considered suggestions for this study and in several other projects over the past four years, and their efforts are deeply appreciated. The generosity of the English department, the Office for Advanced Graduate Studies, and the Alumni Distinguished Graduate Fellowship program in providing research funds also contributed measurably to the progress of this work. Since a dissertation is a product of more than the last year of study, I think it is proper to honor here the contributions of Professors Bernard J. Paris and Arthur Sherbo to my development as well. Similarly, the alert minds of friends, whom I have often imposed upon in my preoccupation, have helped me sharpen my ideas. Not the least among these friends is my wife Carolyn, who not only allowed me to bore her with my ideas but treated me more considerately during their incubation than any praise can repay. She has not read much James; she has read even less of my manuscript; nor has she typed a single word. Instead she has been a good wife,

which has been I am sure more important. Some acknowledgments even include the family pet, but I must admit that the goldfish contributed very little except profound silence. Nevertheless, to my daughter Julie, who accidentally made paper dolls from part of my manuscript, I owe the refreshment of warm diversion, the sane perspective of humor, and the incentive of a tangible goal. As trite as it may sound, without the patient indulgence of my family, friends, and mentors, this study would not have been completed.

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CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN SENSE OF THE PAST AND HENRY JAMES: BACKGROUND, DEFINITION, AND REVIEW

While Henry James was growing up, America was undergoing great changes. The frontier was narrowing and would soon disappear into plots cultivated by new implements and ringed with barbed wire; the machine was turning the ideal pastoral garden into a mechanized producer of incredible fecundity; industrialization was gradually changing an isolated rural land into a powerful and cohesive urban nation. Such changes caused a shift in American attitudes, or at least introduced some new problems which were uncomfortable companions to older ways of life. The crowding and noise and economic stresses of the Gilded Age, though holding out all the promises of fast wealth, made some nostalgic for the agrarian past as they idealized their memories and conceptions of it. The doctrine of progress was difficult for all to uphold through repeated depressions, particularly for those left with the promises and expectations alone.

But the fast pace of industrialization in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, in which James was born, left little room and time for doubters of progress and

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American superiority to air their views. Belief in progress meant hope in the future and repudiation of the past, so no historical arguments were heeded. Before the Civil War the average American "had little sense of the past or concern for it, was not historic minded, and relegated interest in genealogy to spinsters who could have no legitimate interest in the future. Even the recent past became speedily legendary . . . and as the future belonged to his children, he lived in them, worked for them, and pampered them."¹

James followed such compatriots to Europe in his post-Civil-War fiction--the "passionless pilgrims," shallow tourists like the Rucks and the Millers, families dominated by their children and their pocketbooks, and completely insensitive to the European heritage. But few such Americans bothered to go to Europe before mid-century. They felt that they did not need Europe, and most had not yet made the fortunes which would take them there. They had chucked the Old World for a new one, in which everything could start over "in a divinely granted second chance for the human race."² The American was a new Adam, and the frontier was Eden. The only possible direction for a man with a future to take was west.

This Jeffersonian agrarian ideal, though tarnished and amended by the gold and silver rushes and the robber barons, held on long after cities became grimy necessities. Frederick Jackson Turner did not propose the famous thesis that glorified the frontier as the real America until 1893,

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but even this late "it was inevitable that such a formula should appeal to a people who felt instinctively that they had created more than they had inherited and that they owed little to the Old World" (Commager, 296-7). The myth of an agrarian utopia helped suppress the uncomfortable reality that there was no escape, that dirt and poverty had had longer tenure on the farm than in the sweatshop. Since the frontier was disappearing and would not have to be returned to, it could be safely idealized by the factory worker. The President had barely seen a log cabin, let alone been born in one, so the log cabin could become a symbol of democracy in politics and the ideal childhood rather than hardship, poverty, and the rudest survival.³

As progress left the farm behind, Americans developed a sentimental sense of the past, catered to by so-called historical novelists and even scholarly historians. They had had this tendency for some time, and the pace of industrialization just made it clearer. For even though "Americans of the Middle Period were conditioned from their cradles to think in terms of change and to fix their minds upon the future," their weakness for idealism prepared them with ready homage for glorified episodes from the past.⁴ When his history was not particularly romantic, the American idealized it. Bare facts about Pilgrims and Puritans, backwoodsmen and trappers, miners, cowboys and Indians soon turned into legends. Textbooks on American history taught the Yankee heritage as "a story and a romance, a record of

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battles, of deeds of daring, and of mighty blows struck for freedom; it was a monument to the Pilgrim fathers, the Indian fighters, the patriots of the Revolution, the Founding Fathers, the trailmakers and pioneers of the West" (Commager, 24, 37). Paradoxically, the people with the greatest hope for the future and greatest contempt for the past were the ones most embarrassed by their lack of a history and most ready to create one:

A people made up of such conglomerate elements and with so little racial or religious or even geographical unity were at pains to emphasize their common historical experience and validate their historical unity. A people whose collective memory was so short were inclined to cherish what they remembered and to romanticize it. A people living in the present were conscious of the necessity of connecting that present with the past, of furnishing for themselves a historical genealogy. (Commager, 284)

But this task did not fall primarily on historians, in spite of their responding with romanticized textbooks. It fell on the poets and writers of fiction:

In America the image of the past was largely the creation of the poets and the storytellers, and chiefly of the New England-New York group who flourished between the War of 1812 and the War for the Union. That group familiar to an earlier generation through the amiable game of Authors: Irving, Cooper, and Bryant; Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Whittier; Emerson, Lowell, and Holmes. These were the Founding Fathers of American literary nationalism . . . /America's/ nationalism was, to an extraordinary degree, a literary creation, and . . . the national memory was a literary and, in a sense, a contrived memory. The contrast here with the Old World is sharp.⁵

Americans had a heritage ready-made for them, one they could have imported from their former homelands in Europe. In his

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stories of "passionate pilgrims," particularly to England, James depicts Americans attempting to find some viable relationship to the old heritage. But it is too late; the bonds have been broken, and few can find homes or clear titles to an Old World past. England had been a land of poverty and persecution for some of their ancestors, had been a villainous enemy symbolized by George III; memories of the homeland were very ambivalent, and the bonds of loyalty had been disrupted by stirrings of national pride. Furthermore, the "European" heritage could be a common bond only early in the nineteenth century, when that heritage was primarily English. Once the Irish and Scotch, Germans and French, Poles and other Slavic peoples immigrated to America, the range of ethnic heritages made the nation a patchwork quilt. With the rise of nationalism, in both its political and literary forms, powerful abrasive forces worked toward a conformity out of which might arise a common identity. This development of American identity is recorded in some of the tales of James's "English period," discussed further in the chapter on his "international theme."

Such uprootings and ambivalence created strange inconsistencies in American attitudes toward the past. The American who repudiated Europe completely as a guide to politics might be a slave to tradition in architecture and art, an aberration prominent in several of James's passionate pilgrims. In some fields the typical American valued

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only the products of the past, when he valued them at all: "Art was something that had happened in the past, and when he could afford it he bought the paintings of artists long dead, listened to lectures on French cathedrals, and built museums to look like mausoleums" (Commager, 10). Anti-intellectualism coexisted uneasily with the worship of culture. Americans in general seemed to consider the past something totally separate from everyday reality, and had little sense of the living influence of the past on the present. The past was a decoration for parades and holidays; until it faded far enough away to be legendary, it was useless.

These conflicting attitudes toward the past were often held by the same people, but separate groups also formed about the polar clusters of ideas. Historians like W.H. Prescott and Francis Parkman loved the past, coating it with nostalgia and fierce romance; flagwavers like George Bancroft, on the other hand, attempted to demonstrate that the future New World would be the "consummation of the universal historical process," supporting the old law of progress (Lewis, 160-65). Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and the Transcendentalists, of course, and to some degree William Dean Howells, were the main "party of Hope," rejecting the past and glorifying spontaneity, children, and the future. Writers like Irving, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, and their New England successors represented the line of the "party of Memory," upholding the value of

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tradition and custom in sometimes reactionary ways. A sizeable group of local colorists and now lesser known historical novelists similarly painted the past in golden colors. Lowell had switched from the hopefuls to the old guard, the reverse of the usual direction, and naturally there were as many mixtures and variations of the two groups as there were intelligent men to discriminate. Cooper had retreated from custom, tradition, and cities to the romantic wilderness of the past. Hawthorne had struggled with the past again and again, sometimes wanting to be free from it, sometimes feeling lost without it.⁶

Some later writers, such as Mark Twain and Henry Adams, were also caught uncomfortably in the middle. In works like A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court and Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, Twain presents the past as a brutally inferior period, subscribing to the Dickensian view of the nineteenth century as "the most advanced and enlightened century of all the centuries the sun has looked upon."⁷ History seems meaningless, repetitious, or even decadent, however, by the turn of the century (Burhans, 622-25). Twain vacillates between hope and despair, with neither view of history ever solidifying, though the less optimistic views are more prominent in his later years. The result is a terribly confused and anguished philosophy of life perhaps indicating wider American insecurity:

Twain has no theory of history because his view of history is an uneasy mixture of conflicting and inconsistent elements which he

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never reconciles. . . . Twain as a representative figure suggests the emergence in his time of a dangerous weakness in American culture and in its image of itself and of its destiny.

(Burhans, 617)

Even Henry Adams, with his great imaginative theoretical projections, is hardly the calm philosopher. With his glorification of the Middle Ages yet fascination with railroads and the power represented by the dynamo, Adams is a similar study in ambivalence. He felt caught, like Matthew Arnold, between his own dying heritage and a new world being born without him.

Nearly all these artists and historians were trying to find some workable relationship between the past and the present. As Rufus Griswold, one of the loudest hopeful advocates of a new national literature, explains, "The question between us and other nations is not who shall most completely discard the past, but who shall make the best use of it."⁸ But few writers had much success in uniting past and present. As Commager notes, "The literary task of creating a usable past was largely performed by 1865; after that date perhaps only Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and Louisa May Alcott added anything substantial to the treasure house of historical memories."⁹ Those who looked toward the west found no past at all, but only open land and an alien civilization, so they recorded local color and mythology with little historical depth. Later Willa Cather would find a thin veneer of history on the prairies, but only after the age of pioneers had long passed. Turner's thesis gave the

West no past, but only explained its influence, and his account of American character and history touched less than a century of its existence. Those who looked toward the East and Europe, such as James, Howells, Adams and occasionally Twain, found abysses of history as often as clues to the American experience. James certainly discovered more connections between America and Europe than most, as I shall discuss in the chapter on the international theme, but he placed more hope in future social integration than in the surviving common heritage. Certainly he found little of England left in New England, and nothing of York in New York. Edith Wharton discovered traces of old New York and New England, but only well after the turn of the century, and her touches had some of the flavor of the local colorists and historical novelists of the nineties. These local colorists or regionalists, such as Sara Orne Jewett, generally portrayed scenes restricted both in time and space, although The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896) captures a Maine passing quickly into anachronism if not history. Or, when American writers set out to be deliberately "historical," they chose settings as far away in American time as possible--such as the Revolution, a gold mine for historical romancers like S. Weir Mitchell. Few connected the recent past effectively with the present. Several historical novelists found the time too short in America to give romance the proper atmosphere, and shifted the scene across the Atlantic to gain remoteness in space and time; hence even the responsible

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novelist Edith Wharton set her first work in eighteenth-century Europe. Writers in the South had a little better success at capturing the tone of the second half of the nineteenth century, perhaps because the South seemed to have more history and tradition imported from Europe and nursed through the war. Twain always distilled more in his records of steamboating and in his Southern home town fiction than in his Western or European exploits, though he combines a good deal of sentiment and nostalgia with his history. His Pudd'nhead Wilson achieves a reasonable success in tracing the town of Dawson's Landing back to the founders of Virginia without losing its contemporary focus. Again, however, most treatments of the South of the Civil War and Reconstruction came not from the downtrodden generation itself, but from reconstructing writers of the twentieth century; and these often built as much legend as history. Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind (1936) is almost too late to count, for writers like Thomas Nelson Page, Ellen Glasgow and Stark Young began the nostalgic trend back at the turn of the century.

Interestingly enough, aside from his affinity for Hawthorne, James most resembles the best of these early twentieth-century writers on the past, particularly in his insistence on portraying a time within reach of the writer's memory. He most differs from the usual "historical novelists" among his contemporaries in refusing to dig further back than about fifty years even in fertile European

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soil, and in fighting sentimental romance with every possible weapon. Willa Cather would be a perfect parallel to him except for her later fall into the romantic:

To Willa Cather the past was significant for its moral qualities, and only gradually did romanticism triumph over morality. Throughout her long literary life she was engaged in an elaborate remembrance of things past--the past of the pioneers who had built the West, of the immigrants . . . of those earlier spiritual pathfinders, the Franciscans and Jesuits . . . of the Arcadian Virginia of her childhood, of the golden Nebraska of her youth, of the New York she had known as a young journalist, of the shimmering Southwest that belonged to the past even in the present, and the Quebec that seemed to have only a past . . .

Here was an imagination that could pick up the thin dime's worth of American past and make it pay. One wonders what James might have made of America had he been born a few decades later, and if he had known the South as well as Stark Young. Particularly if one keeps the example of Faulkner in mind, Stark Young seems incredibly like James with his "ever-present sense of the past" in this comparison of the two writers by Commager:

That sense of the past comes out in the feeling for tradition and usage, in affection for family and place and for material things even, when sanctified by time and familiarity: the old plantation houses, lovely in themselves and dearer because built by ancestors; the rosewood and mahogany furniture, brought over from France or England, perhaps, or carted across the mountains to what was a remote frontier; the family portraits, be they ever so bad, and the bright silverware and gleaming crystal glasses, polished by devoted hands; the magnolias and oak and crepe myrtle, the roses and camellias and yellow jasmine, whose shade and fragrance recalled the faith and affection of those remote

ancestors who had planted them. For the world Stark Young re-created was, like that which Henry James re-created, filled with furniture, but it was not in any sense furniture which Willa Cather repudiated, nor yet the mere stage furniture so carefully installed by historical novelists. It was rather a set of properties which united the present with the past and acknowledged its indebtedness, as the carvings and stained glass windows of medieval churches unite present with past in acknowledgement of the eternal truths of religion. It all gave a sense of continuity and thus of security, reminded men that they belonged in the stream of history and that their lives had meaning only as they touched other lives. (Commager, 148)

Here is that "sensuous rather than intellectual" perception of the past, the "enriched, magnified, more deeply lived and understood present moment" that Osborn Andreas describes in James; here are the old houses, plantations rather than estates like Somerset, which so penetrated James in Europe; here are the bad portraits that haunt White-Mason in "Crappy Cornelia," the trees and the shade and the afternoons.¹⁰ With a few additions and qualifications, the passage could just as well describe James, and goes far toward putting into perspective his distaste for historical novelists.

For James was often impatient with even the local colorists when they overstepped their chronological range, and he was sickened by the historical romancers. Edith Wharton and Sara Orne Jewett were fine when they kept their own place and time, but terribly false or incomplete when they left it. He writes Miss Jewett with repugnance of "the flood of tales of the Past that seems of late to have been rolling over our devoted country," and exhorts her to

[illegible]

"come back to the palpable present intimate that throbs responsive":

The 'historic' novel is, for me, condemned even in cases of labour as delicate as yours, to a fatal cheapness, for the simple reason that the difficulty of the job is inordinate and that a mere escamotage, in the interest of ease, and of the abysmal public naivete becomes inevitable. You may multiply the little facts that can be got from pictures and documents, relics and prints as much as you like--the real thing is almost impossible to do and in its essence the whole effect is as nought: I mean the invention, the representation of the old consciousness, the soul, the sense, the horizon, the vision of individuals in whose minds half the things that make ours, that make the modern world, were non-existent.¹¹ (Edel, Letters, pp. 234-5--Oct. 5, 1901)

Perhaps James was recalling some of his own lame efforts, such as Madame Bellegarde of The American, who is dated mainly by her ignorance of the telegraph. Edmund Gosse receives this account of the flood of historical novels at the turn of the century:

But I do so hunger and thirst, in this deluge of cheap romanticism and chromolithographic archaics (babyish, puppyish, as evocation, all, it seems to me,) for a note, a gleam of reflection of the life we live, of artistic or plastic intelligence of it, something one can say yes or no to, as discrimination, perception, observation, rendering . . .¹²

James also writes Gosse about Andrew Lang's account of Joan of Arc, regretting that "even there, with all the accomplishment, all the possession of detail, the sense of reality, the vision of the truths and processes of life, the light of experience and the finer sense of history, seem to me so wanting" (Letters, I, 277). The "finer sense" of history, the rendering of the fine consciousness of an era, is

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impossible to recapture for ages long past.

Certainly the most relevant past to James is not ancient history nor even the golden eras portrayed by contemporary historical novelists--there are no antique manuscripts serving as excuses for romance, no resurrected mummies unwinding the lore of the ancients, no Wellsian travels deep into time in his fiction. His Connecticut Yankees may mystify Europe, but they make a shambles of contemporary manners and chivalry rather than King Arthur's. James's innocents abroad crash more parties than precious pottery, put out more hostesses than eternal flames. Baedeker in hand, some do at least visit the ancient monuments, but any residue from the past falls off with the dust from their shoes; or, if more perceptive, they take away some essence of the past, some personal impression, that has more to do with their preoccupations than Caesar's. History is a thematic and aesthetic backdrop for contemporary drama and psychology in James.

He does write novels with a definite historical milieu and focus--no startling discovery to readers of such works as The Bostonians and The Princess Casamassima. Nevertheless, James did not set out to write "historical novels" in the usual sense of that genre. The Bostonians attempts to capture the most prominent feature in American life at that time, the 1880's, and even The Princess Casamassima, with its roots in French history, has a contemporary focus--much like the Dickensian social novel (See Notebooks, 47, 69).

In fact, none of James's major works has a setting far in the past. The novelist is, however, the most precious kind of historian to James, and he intended to be just such an historian. Instead of writing re-creations of the past, James wrote what could be called "contemporary chronicles" (lacking a better term), works attempting to capture the "spirit of the age" in which he was living. He hoped that his canon would form a continuum of the era, just as Whitman desired in Song of Myself to record what it felt like to be an American in the nineteenth century.¹³

Many writers in the movement known as "realism" set such chronicles as their goal--to "do" a place in their contemporary world, an exhaustive painting of milieu and character. The tremendous amount of accurate concrete detail used in such works, particularly by French and Russian realists, makes them much different from the floating romances, comparatively once upon a time and in unknown countries, which preceded them. James was strongly influenced by this school of realism, but from the beginning there was a difference between the nearly photographic Continental forms of realism and the "finer sense" of life that James was trying to record. The problem of The Europeans illustrates part of this difference very well.¹⁴ James pictures horse trolleys in Boston ten years before their actual introduction, an anachronism that was not lost on the reviewers. The fact that James had chosen to portray a period somewhat before his time made the error seem pure ignorance. But the year

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before publication James had written to Howells that "for the sake of the picturesque I shall play havoc with the New England background of 1830," which suggests that he purposely violated literal history (Edel, Letters, 100). That horse cars were not spinning through the hub of New England until some years later is irrelevant; artistically they catch the spirit of the time which he wanted to portray. The gathering and scattering of the populace into and from such conveyances perfectly pictures the accelerating pace and unstable cohesion of American society even before mid-century. Similarly, the fact that the Wentworths had not met many artists before, in spite of their presence in American society at the time, represents the general American innocence of art--whether artists were around or not. James thought little of mildly violating literal chronology for the sake of capturing the tenor of history, the intellectual and social conditions of an age. After all, chronology is partly a matter of chance. Like Dickens, Scott and the writers of the Elizabethan chronicle plays, James felt free to use facts for purely artistic purposes, and to reveal the subjective life rather than just the objective balance sheet of an era.¹⁵ As long as a situation or character is not "intrinsically false," the inaccuracy is unimportant--"for the mere accidental and relative falsity," says James, "I don't care."¹⁶ Similarly, James refuses to identify actual historical figures in his fiction, which would bind him to literal fact rather than

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give him rein to discover and represent the essential truth about typical characters. The artist, the fine historian, must not be limited to showing "clumsy life . . . at her stupid work."¹⁷

Novels should not be like history books. Too many facts make a novel heavy and uneconomical. Criticizing Middlemarch early in his career, James remarks that its documentary quality "acts as a limit, we think, to the development of the old-fashioned English novel. Its diffuseness, on which we have touched, makes it too copious a dose of pure fiction. If we write novels so, how shall we write History?"¹⁸ Eliot's desire "to reproduce the total sum of life in an English village forty years ago" is too heavy a task for the novel (261). James finds a similar fault even in his incomparable Balzac:

He sees and presents too many facts,--facts of history, of property, of genealogy, of topography, of sociology, and has too many ideas and images about them; their value is thus threatened with submersion by the flood of general reference in which they float, by their quantity of indicated relation to other facts, which break against them like waves of a high tide.¹⁹

So James does not become a photographic realist; when he paints a picture, he stresses composition as much as content. Eventually he discovers, in contrast to Balzac and Tolstoy and Dostoevski, that exhaustive concrete detail is not necessary to the capture of the essence of a time and place. In fact, it can be a hindrance, a kind of short-hand for representing moods and attitudes. So James begins concentrating on the selection of exactly the right detail,

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the most representative and symbolic touches, rather than recording every minute point. Consequently the late works rely as much on metaphors and symbols like a golden bowl, the wings of a dove, or an ivory tower, as on the rudimentary details of everyday living. James knows how to use details in place of finer evocation, as his shorter works with more dense concrete detail show. But he prefers to draw out the threads of consciousness in a more authentic manner, going back to longer forms of fiction because such fine representation takes much more space. Consequently the common charge that James is too abstract is readily explicable; the presentation of numerous concrete details is one of those shorthand methods of skirting the problem of representing character and fine consciousness that James eventually comes to detest. James has a different method of recording "history" than piling up masses of fact.²⁰

Determining how historical James's novels are, or in what sense they are historical, helps define the quality of the sense of the past in his work. As I have argued, James does not, like the historical novelist, focus on the past in his fiction. Though a forerunner of the impressionist and stream-of-consciousness writer, James nevertheless does not focus strictly on the present either. Rather, the consciousness at the centre of a James novel is founded solidly on the present, but with an acute perception of the past as it continually influences that present--much like stream-of-consciousness writing as developed by Faulkner. As a result,

the history James is interested in is more a matter of consciousness than a matter of record; history is not a set of documents to him, but is itself a sense of the past: "History is never, in any rich sense, the immediate crudity of what 'happens,' but the much finer complexity of what we read into it and think of in connection with it."²¹ At Concord, for example, "All the commemorative objects . . . speak, no doubt, in one of the subtlest tones of which official history is capable, and yet somehow leave the exquisite melancholy of everything unuttered. It lies too deep" (261). Somehow the observer, with his "intelligent after-sense," must "get round behind, in the past, as it were, and more or less understand" intuitively what Concord was (258). He can gain that sense mainly by reading literature: the "concentrated Boston of history" is "the Boston of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Lowell, Ticknor, Motley, Prescott, Parkman and the rest"--the Boston of the artists and imaginative historians of the time (245). James finds a lecture by Emerson or an abolitionist speech by Wendell Phillips "breathing more of the consciousness of literature and of history" than any architecture, relics, or imitative restorations of the New England past (249). The best history is not statistics but recorded consciousness, and the best sense of history comes from assimilating such documents into the imagination.

As James learns in revisiting America, a sense of history often depends entirely on the observer's imagination.

[illegible]

When he went to Richmond, stronghold of the Confederacy, he "had counted on a sort of registered consciousness of the past, and the truth was that there appeared, for the moment, on the fact of the scene, no discernible consciousness, registered or unregistered, of anything" (AS, p.370). Nothing was left; the Civil War had obliterated the Southern past in Richmond--a fact making James feel the weight of the past by its very absence. "It came back again . . . to the quantity to be 'read into' the American view, in general, before it gives out an interest" (372); "It is the poverty that is, exactly, historic; once take it for that and it puts on vividness" (394). History is the imaginative grasp of a time by the mind of a later observer, just as the finest record of a time is in the mind of an alert contemporary. James realizes that truth in America better than in Europe, for America provides almost no objective correlative for his sense of the past at all. Consequently, given the tiny amount of concrete residue left, "It was absurd," he says, stopping in the train station for fifteen minutes, "what I made of Savannah" (429).

What James wanted to do in coming to America was to go "scratching, scratching for romance, and all tenderly, in the deposit of history; but, plainly, no deposit would show" (393). The thinness of the past in America causes the "trivialization of history--a process one scarce knows how to name--its inaccessibility to legend . . . if the question is of legend we dig for it in the deposit of history, but

[illegible]

the deposit must be thick to have given it a cover and let it accumulate" (383). James does find one legend in the South, "this theory of an undying rancour" against the North, and he is fascinated by its development: "The flame-coloured idea has flowered out of the fact, and the interest, the 'psychologic' interest, is to see it so disengage itself, as legend, as valuable, enriching, inspiring, romantic legend, and settle down to play its permanent part" (386). If this heroic past, this legend, is nursed, it may ultimately create concentrated history--literature (cf. 387). James perceives this relation of literature to history best in America, for American novelists, having little to work with, must "improvise, with the aid of the historian, a romantic local past," then construct an action around it (458). This form of history, legend distilled by the living imagination, is James's interest.

Consequently direct historical allusions are relatively rare in James's works, though he uses cities with romantic and legendary pasts for his settings fairly often. He culls history only for "romance," using historical subjects or situations for that value rather than documentation. In The Ambassadors much of Madame de Vionnet's romantic quality is the result of her being part of an ancien regime, in effect, with her home laden with treasures of the French past. Strether senses Napoleon and the First Empire in her anterooms; sounds that remind him of the French Revolution come through her open windows; and at one point she is

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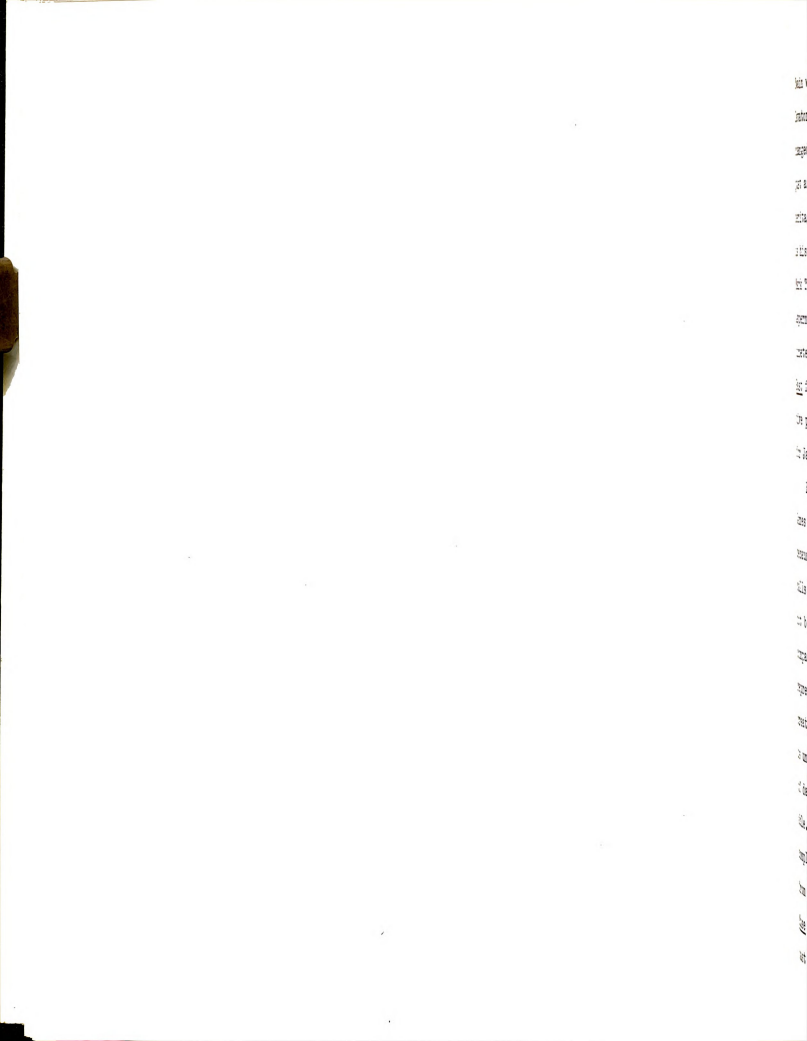
explicitly compared to Madame Roland. Since such allusions are rare, when they appear they generally relate closely to the theme of the novel or the psychological situation of a main character. In this case Strether's subconscious mind may, ironically, be recalling Madame Roland's well known lament as she was taken to the scaffold--"O Liberty! what sins are committed in thy name!"--as an analogue to Chad's and Madame de Vionnet's use of freedom (Cargill, 318).

Similarly, when the Countess Gemini refers to Madame Merle as both Machiavelli and Vittoria Colonna, the allusions are not gratuitous. On the surface Selina is as pious as the poet, but in effect she has been as manipulative as the philosopher.

Since James is attracted to the dramatic and romantic side of history, he often recalls such moments even when they are not finely appropriate. In The American Scene, "absurd as it may seem," James says, he thinks of young men and women being sent to the scaffold when he sees some American buildings marked for demolition (158). But he does not throw such historical allusions into his fiction without giving them a clear relation to its themes or characters. Milly Theale, with her incurable illness, reminds him of a noblewoman waiting for the guillotine because she too is a martyr (XX, 342).²² Likewise when the Colosseum appears at strategic points in "Daisy Miller" and The Portrait of a Lady, it is not there simply as romantic scenery; it is a symbolic reminder that both heroines are martyrs. As

Jonah Raskin points out in an article on James and the French Revolution, great events and historical places are used primarily for imagery and background in his fiction. James developed a reciprocal relationship between his fiction and the past; his "art was molded by the sense of the past, and it in turn reshaped the facts of history."²³ History is always subordinate in James to the demands of art, not the reverse, as in the traditional historical novel. As James remarks in the preface to "The Aspern Papers": "The historian, essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take" (Prefaces, 161).

Consequently James's sense of the past is not formulated upon any strict theory of history. "The Wheel of Time" (1892) makes one man's private history cyclical, but only for the purpose of creating an ironic reversal of situation. "The Last of the Valerii" (1874) makes history essentially progressive, with the Roman state as a primitive time in the history of man, antedated by even more primitive periods; history is also progressive in The Wings of the Dove, with Milly Theale as the culminating "heiress of all the ages." But both these stories, like "The Wheel of Time," use such views of history only for their effects on the themes, characters and situations of the particular stories, not as evidence supporting or principles derived from a theory of history. The course of human events is not necessarily progressive to James, as it sometimes seemed to



Twain when he surveyed the wonders of Pullman cars with lavatories. The American Scene laments an America badly changed by the Gilded Age and still changing for the worse, just as James's letters denounce the decay of the European heritage due to early forms of Americanization. But neither is history necessarily decadent, as it sometimes appeared to Mark Twain and Henry Adams. Old Juliana Bordereau of "The Aspern Papers" may have had her golden age in the early nineteenth century, but Ralph Pendrel of The Sense of the Past finds the same period unliveable, a crudely exploitative period of British history. There is no utopian century for James as there was for Adams.

Even if there had been a utopian era in the far past, James feels that no one would now be able to judge its value because the remote past is essentially inconceivable. He calls the distant past "dark" or "black" again and again, not because it is necessarily primitive, but because it is comparatively obscure for purposes of realistic artistic representation. Adams' twelfth century is an imaginative creation that James cannot believe in; a time so distant is unimaginable, an "unvisitable" period, for the quality of daily living and consciousness so long ago is unrecoverable. Some of James's early characters fail to condense completely from ethereal to solid form because they arise from such an era. James says Miriam Rooth of The Tragic Muse "was a beautiful actual fictive impossible woman of a past age, an undiscoverable century" (cf. VII, 126-27)--and

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she remains such a ghost, floating between reality and archetype, while her mother becomes one of those transitional anachronisms that "reconciled being alive today with having been alive so long ago" (VII, 114). Madame Merle of The Portrait of a Lady figuratively comes from another era, she says, antedating the French Revolution; Carteret of The Tragic Muse is a clock stopped about 1830; Juliana Bordereau of "The Aspern Papers," Waymarsh and Madame de Vionnet of The Ambassadors, date from the early nineteenth century--yet each of these characters is fully realized. The reason these anachronisms come to life even while acting as markers in time is that they are carefully connected to a present situation, and do not come from a past so remote that its immediately perceptible essence, its atmosphere, its flavor, cannot be sensed. They are the literally visitable past, bridging past and present.

James describes this optimum relation between the past and the present most fully in the preface to "The Aspern Papers":

. . . the case had the air of the past just in the degree in which that air, I confess, most appeals to me--when the region over which it hangs is far enough away without being too far.

I delight in a palpable imaginable visitable past--in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table. The table is the one, the common expanse, and where we lean, so stretching, we find it firm and continuous. That, to my imagination, is the past fragrant of all, or of almost all, the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connexions but tasting so of differences,

remains appreciable. . . . We are divided of course between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar; the difficulty is, for intensity, to catch it at the moment when the scales of the balance hang with the right evenness. (Prefaces, 164)

Under R.W.B. Lewis' categories, James is thus clearly one of the "party of Irony" like his father, one of those who see more complexities than either the optimists or the reactionaries, and who therefore seek "an organic relationship between past experience and the living moment" (The American Adam, 7-8). If there is any law of history James believes in, it is Orestes Brownson's "law of continuity," which states that "the present was elaborated in, and evolved from the past. The future must be . . . the elaboration and evolution of the present" (Lewis, 187). This sense of continuity is the whole basis for "The Aspern Papers," in which the "final scene of the rich dim Shelley drama" is "played out in the very theatre of our own 'modernity':

This was the beauty that appealed to me; there had been, so to speak, a forward continuity, from the actual man, the divine poet, on; and the curious, the ingenious, the admirable thing would be to throw it backward again, to compress--squeezing it hard!--the connexion that had drawn itself out, and convert so the stretched relation into a value of nearness on our own part.

(Prefaces, 163)

James always works for and appreciates this continuity. After weeks of experiencing the usual American disjunction of past and present on his return in 1904, James finds a refreshingly "ancient house without lapses or breaks, where

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the past and the present were in friendliest fusion, so that the waiting future evidently slumbered with confidence" (AS, 330). In the South he finds that "Nothing could have been a happier link than the old Confederate soldier--a link from past to present and future, I mean" (AS, 392). The sense of the past is always this integrally connected, organic fusion with the present in James, a faculty which does a remarkable job in The American Scene of also perceiving the future.

James discovered the value of placing restrictions of the depth of the past portrayed in fiction not only from the extreme historical novelists of his time, but from studying his better contemporaries and immediate predecessors. George Eliot felt that "to reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the highest purposes of truth" was the most glorious "work to be in any way present at, to assist in, though only as a lamp-holder!"²⁴ The lamp of the present in Eliot shines backward to illuminate the past, rather than the reverse as in James. And older contemporaries like Dickens sometimes foraged further back than the lamp would reach. In fact, "not only Dickens but practically all the Victorians were retrospective in their outlook and had a tendency to push novelistic time back behind the 1830's to the pre-railway era" (Raleigh, 127). They did not tie that past to the on-going present. Like many of their American counterparts, the Victorians reacted to the intrusion of the machine in the pastoral garden with

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marked nostalgia. Some, such as Hardy and Eliot, were more complex and ambivalent than the paradoxically nostalgic optimists like Dickens, but most still wanted to recapture worlds of the past. James too had deep misgivings about machines and capitalism, but he at least became reconciled to the inevitable changes, and was on fairly good terms with the automobile. He doggedly clung to the present. What he learned from these older contemporaries, both from their failures and their successes, was just how far back the novel could range with representational impunity, and how to connect that past with the living present.

Sir Walter Scott and Nathaniel Hawthorne, his predecessors rather than his contemporaries, perhaps provided the best object lessons. Scott's medieval novels were clearly false and romantic as representations of daily life, and even the Scottish novels like Redgauntlet revealed to James the infancy of the art of novel writing in Scott's time. But there was a difference between the Waverley novels and the medieval reconstructions, as Sir Leslie Stephen points out, one that James could hardly escape perceiving. The "creator of the Waverly world" was implicitly commenting on "the nature of the past and the present and the relationship between them" in a manner that the medieval romancer could not:

In theory a novelist could treat any subject from the most contemporaneous to the most antique. But Stephen argued that either extreme was unsatisfactory. The present could only be viewed in a harsh, confusing glare,

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while the remote past was lost in darkness; and he admitted that most of Scott's medieval novels were false. The ideal time was the remembered past, where things could still be seen but not in a harsh light--'the twilight of history,' as Stephen called it.²⁵

James may even have read Stephen's article on Scott; but in any case his conception of the proper depth of history in the novel, even in using the metaphor of light to describe it, is exactly the same. Hawthorne proved the same lesson to James, with his explicit attempts "to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us."²⁶ He could fathom the American past to a certain depth, but he could not recreate the fully convincing immediacy of the Puritan period from dry documents alone. Nor could he find the key to relate the States to mother England, though he sensed their connections in anticipation of James's international theme. He was ambivalent toward each nation, and strongly ambivalent toward the past. Although he felt the affinity of past and present and his works were not escapes, Hawthorne was generally unable to reconcile Europe and America, past and present, solitude and commitment.²⁷ As in The Marble Faun, he dug too deep to represent the life of the past; instead he formulated myth, fable and romance. This same tendency attracted James, who learned however to salvage romance and mythic value without losing immediate credibility. He does so by starting always with the present and working back gradually into the past, building careful continuity at each step and

keeping the focus on the present. Hawthorne begins with the past, as in The Scarlet Letter, and tries to make a long leap forward at the end; or he makes symbolic bridges deep into the past, as in The Marble Faun, which will not hold the necessary weight. But in such works as The House of the Seven Gables, even with its defective ending, Hawthorne is able to hold time fairly firmly in place, keeping the past from floating away in all but a few chapters (such as the flashback to "Alice Pyncheon") through a constant connection with the created present of the work.²⁸

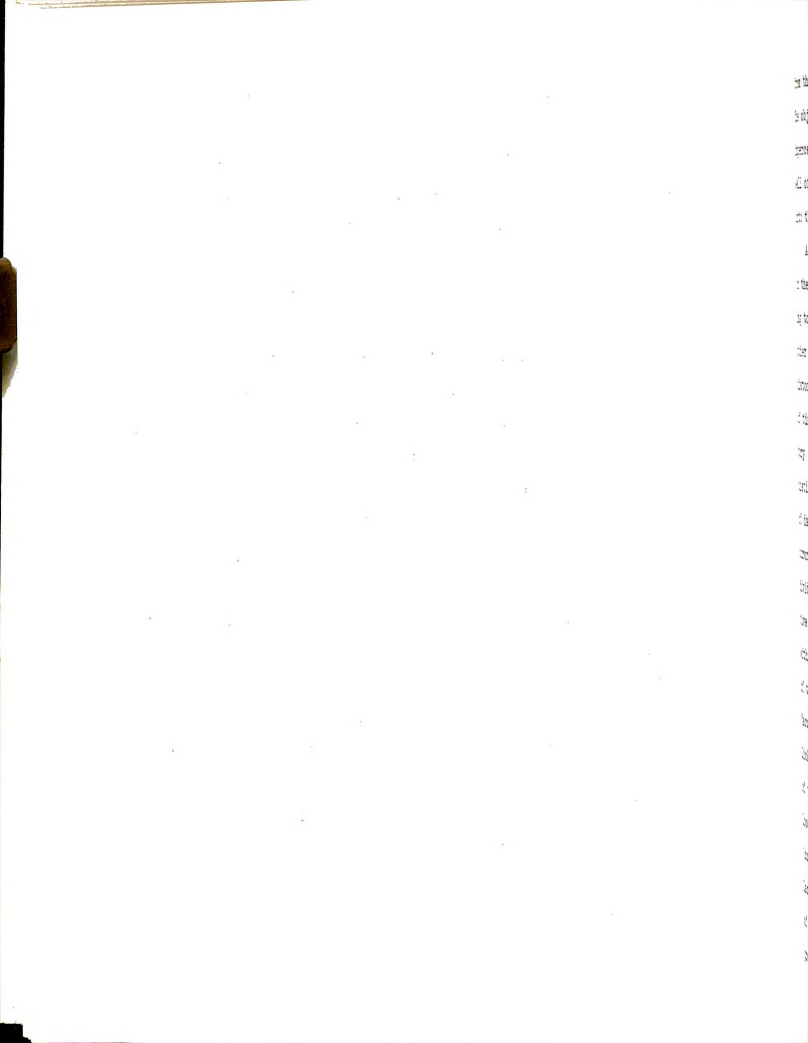
Several critics have recognized James's rigid control of the past, his constantly tying it to the present.²⁹ In general the technique has been praised. But George Poulet, comparing the representation of time in many authors, sets James apart for this fusion of past and present in an uncomplimentary way:

Far from being, as with Proust, a past that was rarely and fortuitously recaptured by the operation of the involuntary memory, the past for James is always present, always spreading out like a drop of oil upon consciousness; so much so that, in the final analysis, the great problem for James is not remembering but, on the contrary, disencumbering his thought by forgetting. For it is in swarms that images of the past, exactly like representations of the present, spread over consciousness . . .³⁰

Poulet feels that as a consequence, memory does not "enlarge and deepen the field of consciousness" in James, for it is constantly being restrained by the limits of the present (351). James's "visitable past" is therefore "not a true past": "By reason of its shallowness it is almost flush



with the present; it is without distance and without depth" (352). Poulet claims that James ignores the "true past" in general, so that in his works "there is no depth to the past. Itself bordered by death, it forms the vacant under-margin of the present, and thus a delimitation" (353). The best James can come up with, in his later works exploring what "might have been," is "a virtual past" based on the memories of his characters (354). This criticism is exactly parallel to T.S. Eliot's characterization of James. Comparing him to Hawthorne, Eliot claims that in one way Hawthorne is superior, in his "very acute historical sense." Hawthorne is concrete, "solid": "Both men had that sense of the past which is peculiarly American, but in Hawthorne this sense exercised itself in a grip on the past itself; in James it is a sense of the sense."³¹ That is, James does not apprehend the past itself so much as the faculty which senses the past. Both these criticisms are valid. Eliot's, however, is a mere criticism of technique or mode of presentation, since James chooses to portray the sense of the past through a central consciousness. What James might reply to Poulet, if he cared for theory, is that Poulet's "true past" is a philosophical and chronological entity that cannot possibly be apprehended by the mind. For the sense of the past is a function of consciousness for all practical purposes; and the only directly valid past, the only past which can be apprehended first-hand, is that which the mind perceives from its own memory of experience and



from the residues of the past still surviving in the present. The objective, external past exists, but is fundamentally imperceptible. How deeply James drank from his brother's well of pragmatism is clear when his practice is turned into theory.

A more useful assessment is John Henry Raleigh's essay on the three kinds of time in the English novel.³² According to Raleigh, the novel is involved perhaps more than any other form "with the dialectic between man and time and/or history," balancing between the subjective individual sense of time and the more objective collective measure of history (43). Using Nicholas Berdyaev's formulations, Raleigh distinguishes in the English novel cosmic time (the cycle of days, seasons, life and death), historical time (linear chronology) and existential time ("an extreme form of individualism" which makes the sense of time totally subjective). The Victorian time-sense is almost strictly linear, with little cyclic recurrence or, "despite the preoccupation of the nineteenth-century with the past," little truly "acute sense of time" or "deep sense of history" (45). Dickens, Trollope and Thackeray suspend the time convention of the novel at will; "their time convention was vague and loose as compared, for example, to the rigorously observed 'continuous present' of the late James" (46). Victorians lack "that more profound sense of the past," the "obsession of modern man that the past is continually impinging on the present and assuming the proportions of a nightmare" (47).

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James, however, exercised an early form of that modern sense of the past:

James was one of the first novelists to take time seriously and to make it an implicit part of his work. Preeminently in James things happen in time. In the typical James novel, meaning a late novel, all the psychic action is seen as the relentless unfolding of time, minute by minute, hour by hour, year by year, within the mind or sensibility of an individual.

History or the sense of the past likewise begins to appear in the novels of James. James of course, did not have the historical imagination of his friend Henry Adams with its conception of man's past as a construct of great forces bearing down on the present. Nevertheless, it is history that plays, generally, a major role in the motivation of all James's novels and it is history that becomes an obsessional preoccupation in his late novels. (48)

Raleigh's use of the term "history" here seems loose when applied to James's sense of the past, but his observations are essentially correct. He would be more accurate, I think, if he would take the formulation for James directly from his source: "Berdyaev makes no distinction between the time-sense and the historical-sense, taking them both to be specific manifestations of the general attitude toward temporal experience" (45). For in James, to sense time is to sense the past-present, to assimilate the present moment as it immediately becomes the past, and to perceive the continuing influence of the immediate past--as far back as memory and imagination can conceive it--on the living moment. This quality of the sense of the past in James makes him a key transitional figure from the linear Victorian time-sense, which is much more properly called a "historical" sense that James's, to the Joycean fusion of cosmic

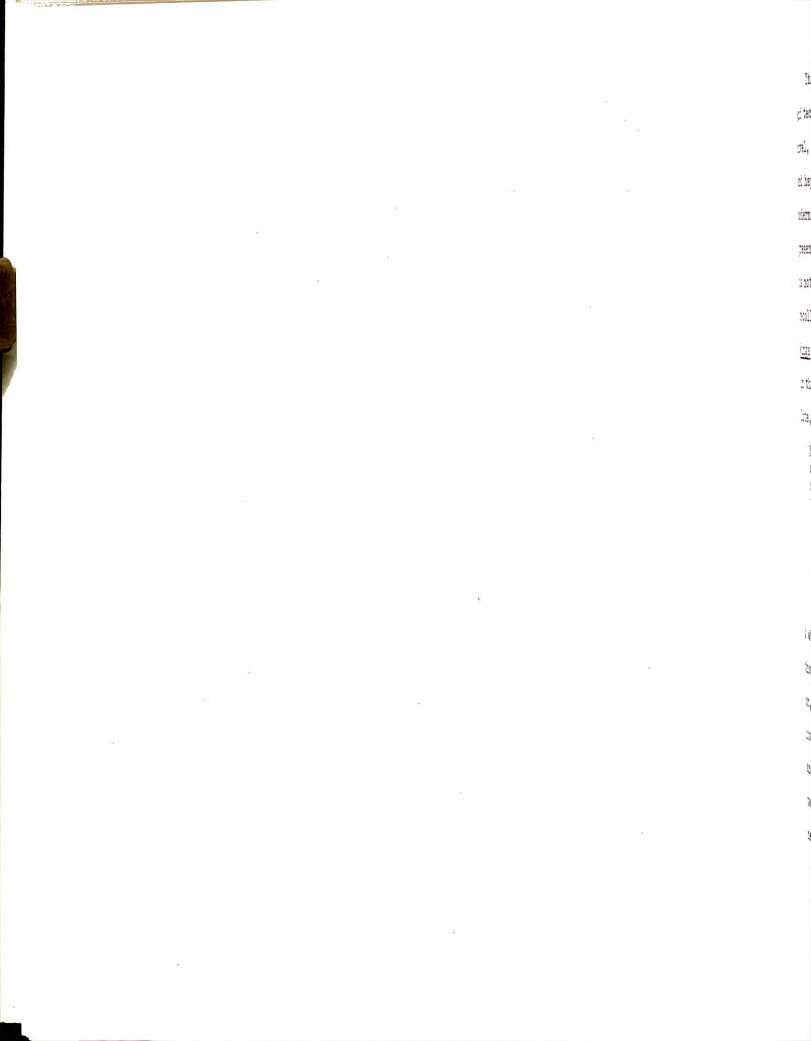


history and existential time into the huge nightmare of

Finnegan's Wake:

James's time-sense . . . is, in effect, a secular version of existential or subjective time. Ralph Pendrel of The Sense of the Past literally fulfills Berdyaev's definition of existential time--he escapes from history. Less obvious is the implicit sense of existential time in all of James's late work, where there is no objective reality, and thus no real time, outside of the mind of the individual. (51)

In his late fiction, therefore, "simple historical time, built along the idea of progress, is breaking down and cosmic and existential time are becoming the province of the novelist, who is, simultaneously, developing an historical sense and an immortal desire for an immersion in the past" (51). The late novels are thus "a critical stage" in the development of fiction, turning inward while simultaneously providing a window to the outside by changing "the idea of time-history into a complex metaphor which affords a glimpse of eternity" and by providing a "vision of life, under which man, now time-obsessed, is, at certain moments, free of time and, at other moments, bears the whole of human history, like a cross, upon his back" (53-54). To test the truth of this formulation, one need only recall Strether escaping the restrictions of time in Paris or, on the other side, Isabel Archer feeling the whole weight of Rome and human suffering. The novel is turning from sociology to psychology in James, from the objective to the subjective. The sense of the past is becoming in fact a "sense," a function of consciousness.



The effect of this kind of time-sense on James's style and technique is tremendous. The optimistic Victorian novel, based on the assumption of progress, ended vaguely and happily at "a conjunction of the present-future"; the modern novel, however, ends at "a conjunction of the past-present," and is consequently more ambiguous. The future is not so certainly happy (Raleigh, 51, 53). Again, a brief recollection of the endings of The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Ambassadors places James clearly in the later group. Time is no longer objective and absolute, but is subjective and relative:

Moreover, this internal time, while it flows continuously, does not always move at a constant rate. What happens in James is that time is extricated from history, as, with the clock stopped, James explores, often for pages, the infinity of implications arising from an instantaneous impression, and, in a sense, James's late novels constitute a long essay on the potential infinity of individual psychological moments. (51)

A whole chapter may consist, as in The Golden Bowl, of the thoughts and feelings of a character as he turns a doorknob; or, as in The Portrait of a Lady, the chapter may occupy hours of pacing meditation. As a result "James's methods and interests led straight to the central convention of the twentieth-century novel, that is, 'the stream of consciousness' or 'interior monologue'":

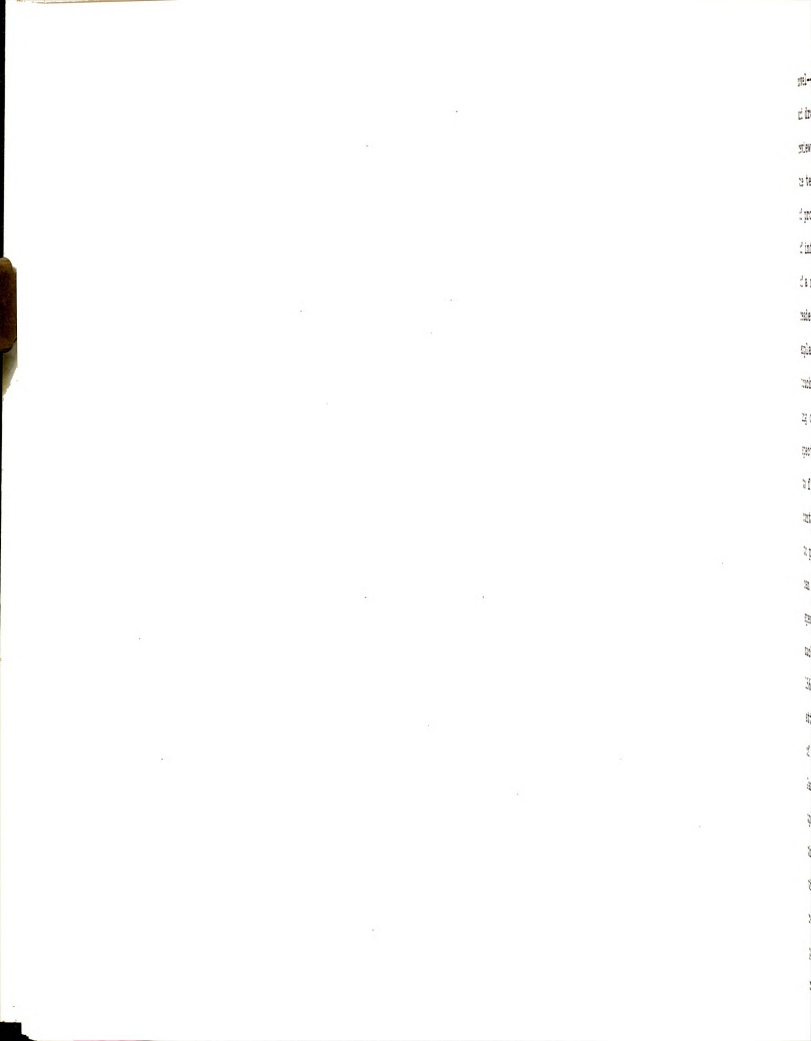
And this device, while its most obvious function was to body forth the inner life in a fashion impossible within the nineteenth-century novelistic conventions, was also a way of objectifying time-history in a manner unavailable to the Victorians: first it permitted the illusion of a continuous present (the existential), and, second, it permitted

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by reverie and memory, exploration of the past and the juxtaposition and confounding of past with present (the cosmic).

Except for certain rhetorical conventions of presentation, this technique of portraying a stream of consciousness continuously operating in the present but ranging from reveries of the past to speculation on the future is James's own technique. In fact, his presentation, when not intruded upon by authorial comments, is perhaps more realistic than many modern passages in stream of consciousness style. For external reality breaks through the thoughts of a Jamesian character a reasonable number of times, as James records immediate perceptions as well as the digestion and assimilation of experience.

The breaking in of reality upon such retrospection is a major way James creates fine dramatic and pictorial scenes in the late novels. Hisayoshi Watanabe, in a fine article on "Past Perfect Retrospection in the Style of Henry James," discovers that "Drama takes place in James's novels when the equilibrium of the internal world is broken by an action from outside--when the sensitive mind undergoes a new experience."³³ A retrospective mind like Lambert Strether's, exploring the impressions of the past, is suddenly snapped back to the present by the intrusion of an external event, changing the technique of representation from "picture" to "scene" in a second. This pictorial technique, the portrayal of vision rather than action, is the almost inseparable companion of retrospection in a Jamesian

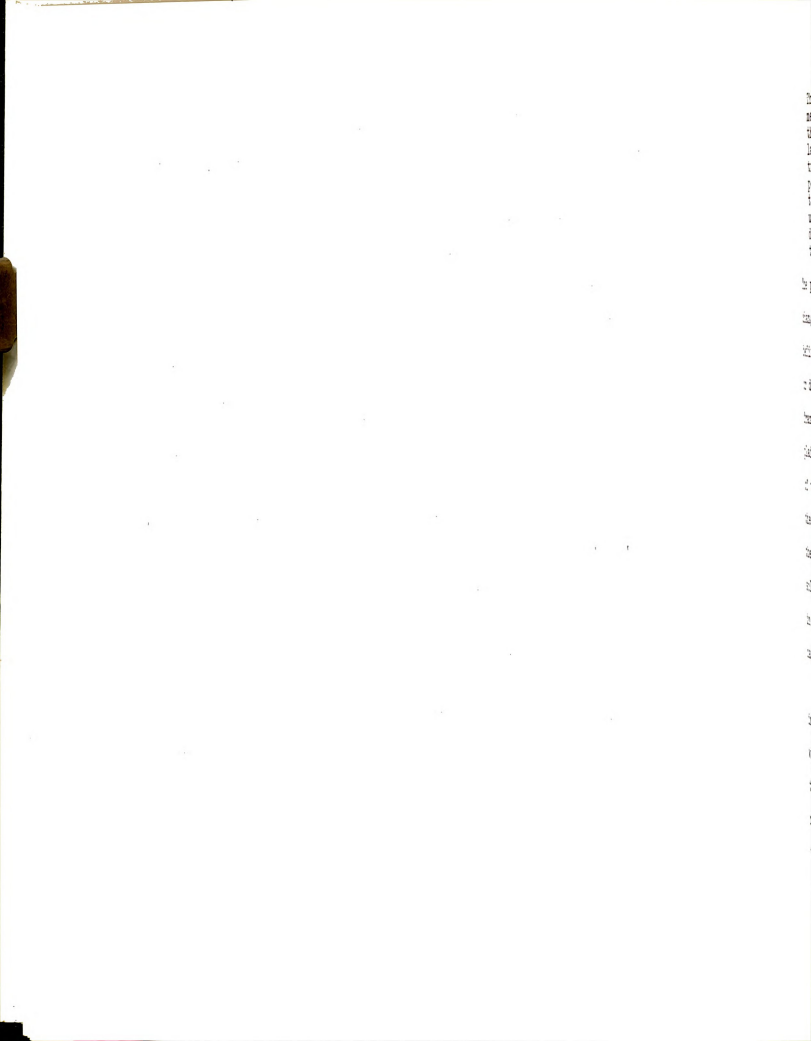


novel--though a character may on occasion recall dialogue and dramatic action--and acts as preparation for drama by reviewing the ground carefully for the reader.³⁴ In fact, the technique of portraying retrospection solves a number of problems for James. It disguises the usual "seated mass of information after the fact" needed near the beginning of a novel to fill in the past of the characters for the reader (Prefaces, 320-21); instead of a long narrative explanation or even a typical flashback, such as the one touching Isabel Archer's childhood in Albany near the opening of The Portrait of a Lady, James can use careful retrospection in the mind of a character like Lambert Strether to fill in the past without disturbing the illusion of a continuous present. (The use of a ficelle like Maria Gostrey to pump information is a useful alternate technique.) James can control the reader's knowledge carefully with retrospection, revealing through the character's thoughts only as much as he needs to prepare a planned effect (Watanabe, 166-67). He may, as in the opening of The Ambassadors, attempt a "synchronic introduction of all the main aspects of the narrative," or as he does later in the same work, James may feed information piecemeal to the reader to build up to a climactic perception, approaching his subject through the well-known "crooked corridor."³⁵ Even though the action of the novel may stop during a character's retrospection, the reader has the illusion that time is passing and action is taking place; and the illusion of reality is maintained without interruption by the fact that

everything is related to the mind of the character, who may exaggerate and misinterpret almost at will without calling the verisimilitude of representation into question. Using a central consciousness with a retrospective habit, James gains both the illusion of a continuous present and the freedom to range anywhere in time at any speed.

The portrayal of consciousness and duration are much more realistic through retrospection, which can create a sense of existential or relative time if properly used. Watanabe uses the smashing of the crystal in The Golden Bowl as the finest example. The Prince has been present in the room with Fanny and Maggie for an undetermined period of time; neither the ladies nor the reader are certain how long. Consequently his opening remark breaks into Maggie's and Fanny's "absorption with a sharpness almost equal to the smash of the crystal," and the reader is catapulted from a past-perfect recording of the scene to the present tense (Watanabe, 173). The switch in tenses produces more than a connection; it fuses past and present into a dramatic stasis. Watanabe explains the distortions of the usual time sense caused by the switch from retrospection to immediate perception:

It is as if everything else happened at the same time with the destruction of the bowl, and as if everything were standing still for a moment around the shattered bowl. The result is one of those pictorial scenes of which James was proud--or perhaps rather of a photograph stopping and holding a moment of sudden action. (173)



The scene . . . gives the effect of double image mentioned earlier. With the past perfect and the past functioning together, one image overlaps another . . . There is a psychological truth in the technique--it reproduces the way we perceive things at a "great" moment when our attention is concentrated, with images coming to us overlapped. As it is actually perceived, time does not appear homogeneous; it is felt at some times thick, and at other times thin. (175)

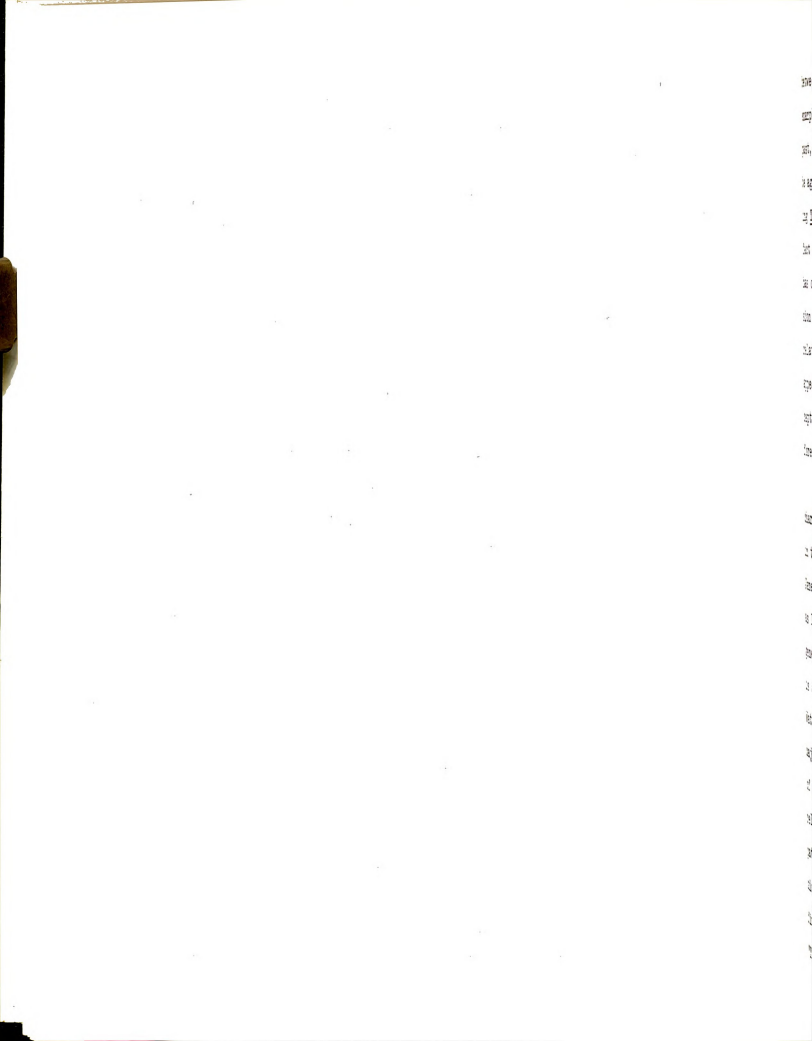
The proper manipulation of tenses, then, can represent the changing perceptions of time in a character. Almost by definition, the past perfect tense connects past and present, or deep past with shallower past, providing a moving time frame for the author. The author of Roderick Hudson, complaining in the preface about its ineffective presentation of the lapse of time, did not use this framework to vary the rate of presentation, so "his time scheme elapses at the same monotonous pace" (Watanabe, 175). James later solves the problem of the reader's sense of time elapsing in the novel, that is, with the same technique that enhances his portrayal of consciousness.

One of the most striking results of this sense of time in James, this continuous apprehension of the past merging with the present, is the constant concentration required of the reader--a foreshadowing of what Faulkner and Joyce would require. For James's late prose style uses a complex web of time-referents--numbers of adverbs, the sense for which James calls "the literary sense" (Letters, II, 214-15); subordinate and coordinate conjunctions and prepositions setting up chronological relationships, and successions of

"that's" connecting clauses with chronologically separate or disjunctive events; intransitive verbs with carefully controlled tenses, and transitive verbs with their action stopped by passive voice; and numbers of infinitives, participles and gerunds--all establishing a "multiplicity of relationships" the reader must often hold in suspension until the sentence ends, much as in German (See Watt, 259-60). The prose is not difficult to read in its components so much as complex in the syntactical and chronological relationships of its simple parts. Supplementing Ian Watt's analysis of the introduction to The Ambassadors, from which I have been borrowing, R.W. Short defines the complexity of a Jamesian sentence as a similar problem in referents. The connective words build on one another, "the relating expressions extend in every direction, like the arms connecting the chemical elements in diagrams of molecules."³⁶ The sense of the past is clearly represented in these relationships:

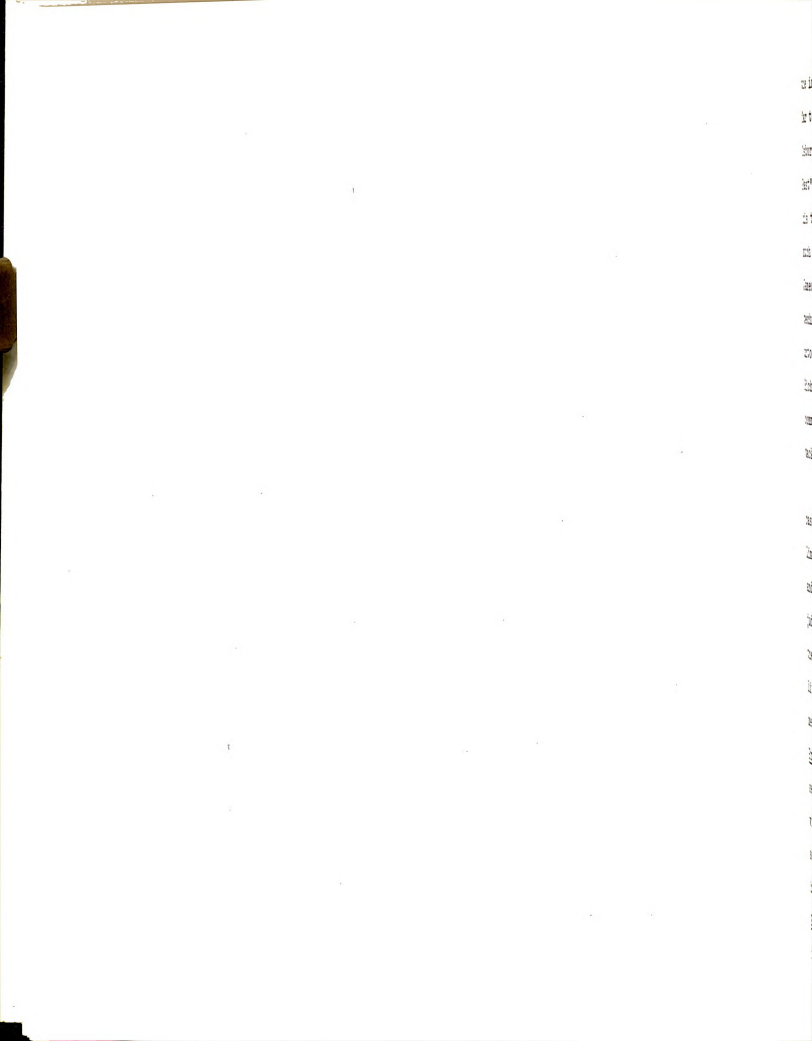
The referents tend to include all of the complex consciousness of a character or situation achieved up to the present moment. Yet the expressions are truly connectives rather than summaries . . . New units tend to contain elements of orientation with a great deal, if not all, that has gone before. (80)

The supreme example for Short is a bit of dialogue from The Sacred Fount: "You after all then now don't?" Aside from the essential subject and verb, the words are all referents--"after all" summarizing what has gone before, "now" bring it up to date, and "then" (like the word "therefore" in this case) indicating the logical relationship



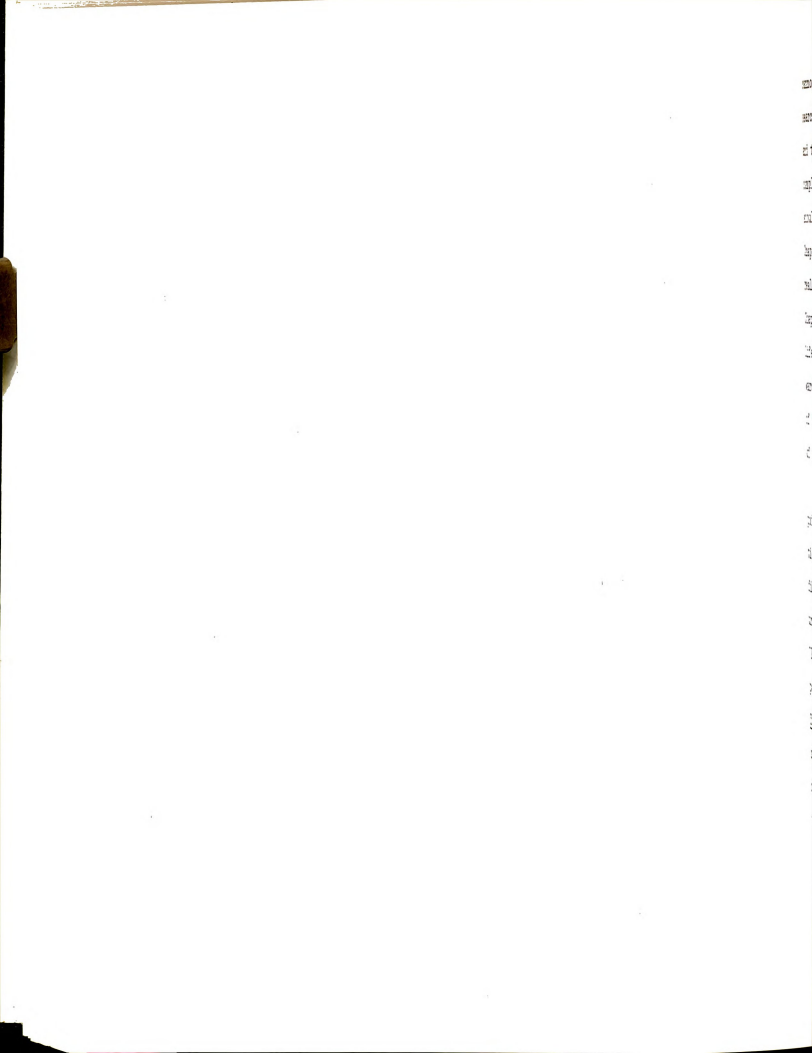
between the chronological elements. But there are many more examples. The ending of The Wings of the Dove connects past, present and future in one sentence: "We shall never be again as we were." Even Strether's "there we are" ending The Ambassadors is not a simple statement of present fact alone, but acts as a concentrated summary of all that has occurred up to this point in time, a compressed expression of his sense of the Paris past. James has made the relations which never truly end, as he admits, nevertheless appear to stop for a moment, framing a point of stasis which captures like a portrait the whole history that has gone before.

Virtually any of these major areas--style, structure, characterization, theme, technique--can be treated at length in terms of their relation to the sense of the past in James. So far only isolated articles on single areas, such as I have been quoting, have appeared, or treatments too general or incomplete to be comprehensive. James's style is still virtually untouched except for articles by Short, Watt, Watanabe, David Lodge, and oblique treatments by the major scholars of his work.³⁷ Treatments of James's use of the French Revolution and the Catholic Church, of the relation between James and Hawthorne, and of James's expatriation have filled in small corners of the picture of his sense of the past, but no broad canvas has been finished.³⁸ W.F. Wright has a good short subchapter on "The Present-Past" in The Madness of Art, and notes passim



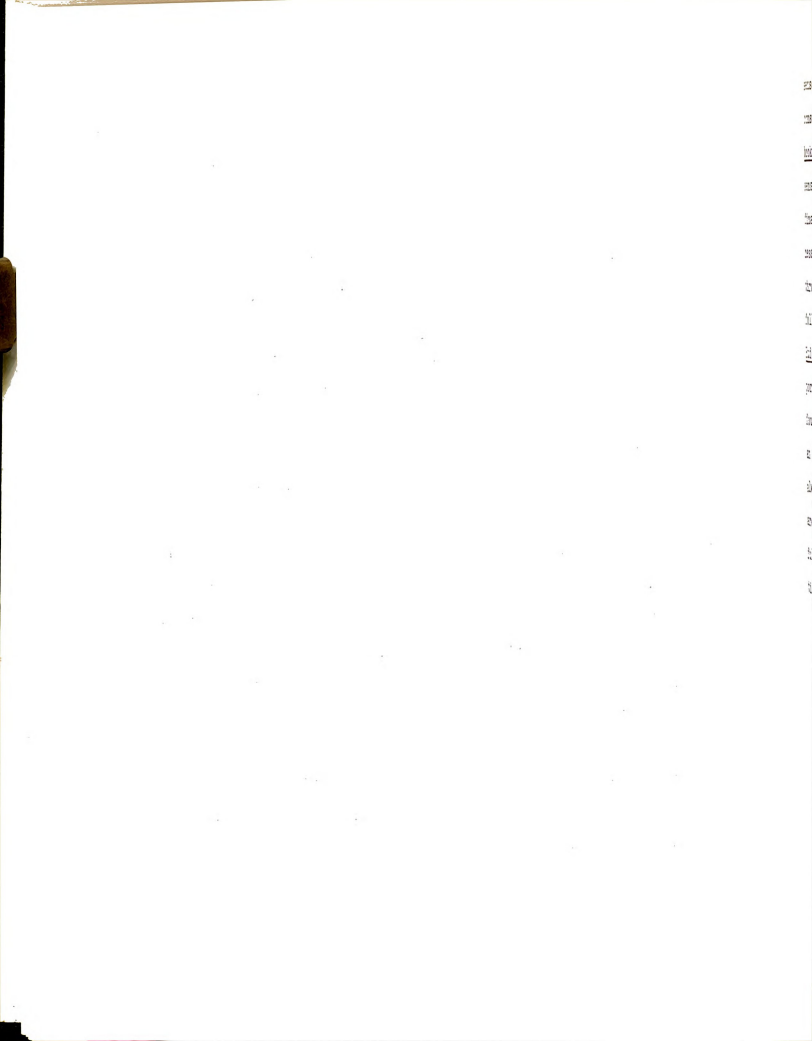
the importance of the sense of the past in James, but uses far too few works for comprehensive coverage. Likewise Osborn Andreas has a whole chapter on "The Sense of the Past" in Henry James and the Expanding Horizon, and while his treatments of nine stories are piercing, they are too much like plot summaries to act as more than an outline of James's use of the sense of the past as a theme. James's techniques in creating a sense of the past are left virtually untouched. Several fine critics of the past, such as Lyon Richardson and Herbert Read, have made interesting general comments on the sense of the past in James, but few have tackled the topic in depth.³⁹

Edward Stone, apparently the only graduate student rash enough to nibble on the huge topic before me, wisely limited himself to a fairly theoretical treatment of James and Einstein's theory of relativity, avoiding "critical judgments about character motivation per se" which "would therein assign my own study primarily to the realm of literary appreciation."⁴⁰ He nevertheless gives fine treatments, even from a strictly literary viewpoint, of The Princess Casamassima, The Tragic Muse, the late novels, and several intermediate works. But his somewhat non-literary viewpoint also causes him to overlook the breadth of James's sense of the past, as he claims that the sense of the past has a negligible role in such works as The American, The Portrait of a Lady, and What Maisie Knew--novels which are important, if not central, to the present study. But I



cannot begin to claim a comprehensive study either; my research has only convinced me of the magnitude of the task, and the chapters which follow represent merely a partial completion of the undertaking. This introduction, at least, should provide some measure of the breadth of the field. Chapter II, on the sense of the past as it helped create realism from romance throughout James's career, and Chapter III, on the relation of the sense of the past to the lifelong international theme, are two major increments toward a full study, I hope, and combine thorough treatment of the topics selected with as great a representative range of James's work and thought as possible.

In concluding this measurement of the topic, I can only point out more that needs to be done: a complete examination of the use of time of day and the seasons in James's fiction, factors which he felt were very important to an understanding of Balzac and Hawthorne (The House of Fiction, 71); a study of James's characters, the setting up of their past relations to one another, as the notes to The Ivory Tower particularly reveal the process, and the development of his characters in time; the use of ficelles and anachronistic characters as figures representing the sense of the present and the sense of the past, respectively, to a main character--Maria Gostrey and Waymarsh play these roles to Strether, Henrietta Stackpole and Madame Merle play them to Isabel Archer; the use of anachronistic narrators, as in "Maud Evelyn" and "The Tone of Time"; the centrality of the



sense of the past as a producer of contrast, which James considered essential to all fiction (Prefaces, 198; Note-books, 291); a more thorough study than Andreas' of the sense of the past as an element in James's themes;⁴¹ and finally, an examination of James's phenomenal memory, fondness for childhood experiences, and preference for working through reflection and retrospection.⁴² Strangely for a follower of realism, James wrote the portion of Roderick Hudson set in America while he was in Germany, and the portion set in Italy while in America, having "in general, found it difficult to write of places under too immediate an impression" of them.⁴³ The most rewarding research always turns up more questions than it answers. Here, then, are a few clarifications and a lot more mysteries, hopefully adding both to the understanding and to the admiration of a truly fine artist.

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¹Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven and London, 1950), pp. 5-6.

²R.W.B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago, 1955), p. 5.

³For a full discussion of industrial reality and the agrarian ideal, see Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (New York, 1964), and compare Merrill Peterson, The Jefferson Image in the American Mind (New York, 1960). Marx is especially good in treating the pastoral ideal in American literature.

⁴Ralph H. Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York, 1956), p. 39.

⁵Henry Steele Commager, The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography (New York, 1967), p. 25. All references to Commager in the text are to The American Mind, cited above.

⁶Lewis, pp. 123-24. For fuller accounts of these "parties," see Lewis, pp. 7-8. The brief characterization of Hawthorne's fight with the past is taken from Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate (New York, 1954), pp. 58, 62-68.

⁷Quoted by Clinton S. Burhans, Jr., "Mark Twain's View of History," Publications of the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLVI (1961), pp. 619-21.

⁸Quoted by Lewis, p. 81; cf. p. 8.

⁹The Search for a Usable Past, p. 27. Commager is speaking, of course, of a particular kind of myth-making by these authors. Writers like James, who found other uses for the past, were successful well after the Civil War.

¹⁰Osborne Andreas, Henry James and the Expanding Horizon (Seattle, 1948), p. 97. For the effect of a British estate on James, see F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, The Notebooks of Henry James (New York, 1947), p. 34. Hereafter cited as Notebooks.

¹¹Oct. 5, 1901, in Leon Edel, ed., The Selected Letters of Henry James (London, 1956), pp. 234-35. Hereafter cited as Edel, Letters.

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¹²Jan. 1, 1900, in Percy Lubbock, ed., The Letters of Henry James (New York, 1920), I, p. 345. Hereafter cited as Letters. To simplify references in the text, dates and addressees of letters will be given only when these are important to the meaning of the passage quoted or to dating developments in James's thought. Likewise ellipsis marks will be omitted at the beginning and ending of quotations within the text for smoother reading. Internal ellipsis and ellipsis in single-spaced quotations, of course, will be noted.

¹³Cf. Notebooks, pp. 101, 105-06; Letters, I, p. 138; and James's statement on the Howells canon, Letters, II, p. 225.

¹⁴See Oscar Cargill's discussion of The Europeans in The Novels of Henry James (New York, 1961, pp. 62-72, for a full account.

¹⁵Cf. John Henry Raleigh's analysis of Dickens and Scott on this point in Time, Place and Idea (Carbondale, Ill., 1968), pp. 114-15, 127.

¹⁶Henry James, The Art of the Novel, with an introduction by R.P. Blackmur (New York and London, 1962), p. 224. Since these are the collected prefaces to the 1907 New York Edition of James's works, this volume will hereafter be cited as Prefaces.

¹⁷Prefaces, p. 121. Cf. pp. 165-68 and 230-31 on the problem of an early American poet comparable to Jeffrey Aspern, and on the possible existence of such "supersubtle fry" as James makes his artists. Similarly, James even justifies revising some of William's letters for publication, changing "Abe" Lincoln to "Abraham" because the formal reference was allegedly more common in the family. Letters, II, pp. 347-48.

¹⁸Henry James, "Middlemarch" (1873), The House of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (London, 1957), p. 267.

¹⁹"The Lesson of Balzac" (1905), ibid., p. 70.

²⁰Cf. Letters, II, pp. 237-38, 324, on Tolstoy and Dostoevski. On James's use of detail, see Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1954), p. xciv; F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York, 1944), p. 30; Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas, Texas, 1958), p. 47; and Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors: An Explication," Essays in Criticism, X (July, 1960), pp. 255-56.

²¹Henry James, The American Scene, with an introduction and notes by Leon Edel (Bloomington, Ind., 1968), p. 182. Cited hereafter as AS.

²²The Novels and Tales of Henry James (New York, 1907-1917), XX, The Wings of the Dove, p. 342. This is of course the famous New York Edition of James's work referred to passim in the text. All canonical works are cited from this edition, unless otherwise specified, solely by volume number and page reference to simplify documentation.

²³"Henry James and the French Revolution," American Quarterly, 17 (1965), pp. 724, 733.

²⁴Quoted by Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven and London, 1957), p. xlii.

²⁵Raleigh, pp. 112, 118, commenting on Sir Leslie Stephen's article on "Sir Walter Scott," Hours in a Library (London, 1907), I, pp. 186-229. There is a chance, of course, that James read Stephen's article, but his theory of the ideal past had already been long formulated by 1907, the year the New York Edition appeared.

²⁶See the preface Hawthorne wrote for the 1851 edition of The House of the Seven Gables.

²⁷Cf. Bewley, The Complex Fate, pp. 57, 62, 68.

²⁸See Bewley's long treatment of Hawthorne and James in The Complex Fate for a fuller discussion, and compare James's remarks in his famous 1879 essay on Hawthorne. Compare also my long treatment of James and romance in Chapter II, pp. 56-118.

²⁹Walter F. Wright, "The Present-Past," The Madness of Art (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1962), pp. 168-72; Andreas, "The Sense of the Past," op. cit., pp. 97-106; and Edward Stone, "Henry James and His Sense of the Past," Diss. Duke 1949, passim, but mainly the last chapter on The Sense of the Past.

³⁰Studies in Human Time (Baltimore, 1956), p. 350.

³¹T.S. Eliot, "Henry James," Literature in America (Cleveland, 1957), ed. Philip Rahv, p. 227.

³²"The English Novel and the Three Kinds of Time," op. cit., pp. 43-55. Compare the fine article in the same volume on "Henry James and the Poetics of Empiricism," pp. 4-22, and my treatment of its implications in Chapter III, Part 3., "The Major Phase," pp. 260-63.

³³American Literature, XXXIV (1962-63), p. 177.

³⁴David W. Beams, in an article on "Consciousness in James's 'The Sense of the Past,'" Criticism, 5 (1963), p. 150, points out for example that "As Ralph comes into relation with the portrait James forsakes the scenic for the 'picture' technique, involving the more radical center of consciousness. Past and present are thus sharply discrete in method."

³⁵Ian Watt, "The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors: An Explication," Essays in Criticism, X (July, 1960), pp. 273-74. James uses the term "crooked corridor" in the Letters, I, p. 322, a metaphor for the indirect approach to dramatic material. Elizabeth Stevenson uses the term as the title for her work, The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James (New York, 1949).

³⁶"The Sentence Structure of Henry James," American Literature, XVIII (1946), p. 80.

³⁷See David Lodge, Language of Fiction (London and New York, 1966); and the well known standards of Jamesian criticism, already cited, by Beach and Matthiessen.

³⁸In addition to Bewley's well known study of James and Hawthorne, see Wright Morris, "Use of the Past: Henry James," The Territory Ahead (New York, 1963), pp. 93-112; R.P. Blackmur, "The American Literary Expatriate" and "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," The Lion and the Honeycomb (New York, 1955), pp. 63-76 and 274-87; Jonah Raskin, "Henry James and the French Revolution," American Quarterly, 17 (1965), pp. 724-33; and Robert M. Slabey, "Henry James and 'The Most Impressive Convention in All History,'" American Literature, XXX (1958-59), pp. 89-102.

³⁹See Richardson, ed. Henry James (New York, 1941), American Writers Series, p. lxxxix, and Scott, Men of Letters (London, 1916), pp. 91-92, quoted by Edward Stone, op. cit., pp. 4-5. For a good summary of James criticism up to Andreas (1948), see Beach's review of scholarship in the introduction to The Method of Henry James, pp. cviii ff.

⁴⁰"Henry James and His Sense of the Past," Diss. Duke 1949, p. 6.

⁴¹Edwin Bowden takes up some of the slack in The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), but focuses on the use of the "visual arts" in James.

⁴²These phenomena have been noted by James's major biographer, Leon Edel, but not analyzed deeply.

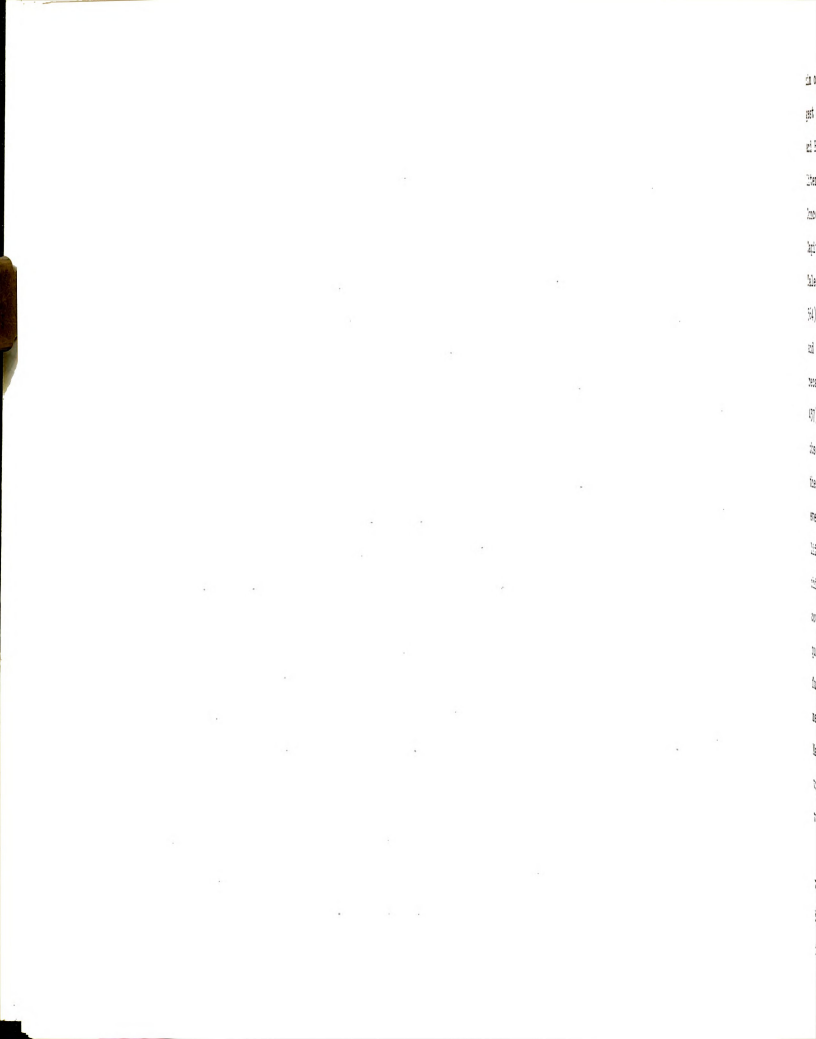
⁴³Prefaces, pp. 6-7, 27; cf. Notebooks, p. 135.

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CHAPTER II

THE SENSE OF THE LITERARY PAST

Since James's conception of the past is so imaginative, his sense and use of past literature are far more important in his fiction than his use of facts and historical allusions. For even his historical sense of a place is shaped as much by novels as by history books.¹ London is made up of sites "of which I have read in all old English novels. So does one move all the while here on identified ground" (Letters, I, 54). Rural England, too, is in "all things suggestive of the opening chapters of half-remembered novels, devoured in infancy" (I, 28). Britain has a literary as well as a geographical map for James. Brighton means Thackeray, and when James is near Piccadilly he likes "to think that Thackeray's Curzon Street, in which Becky Sharp, or rather Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, had lived, was not much further off."² Likewise, "fifty other London neighbourhoods speak to me almost only with the voice, the thousand voices, of Dickens" (Prefaces, 212). Visiting Scotland for the second time, James approaches a castle at twilight in a carriage and finds himself suddenly "in a Waverly Novel" (Notebooks, p. 36). Some places remind

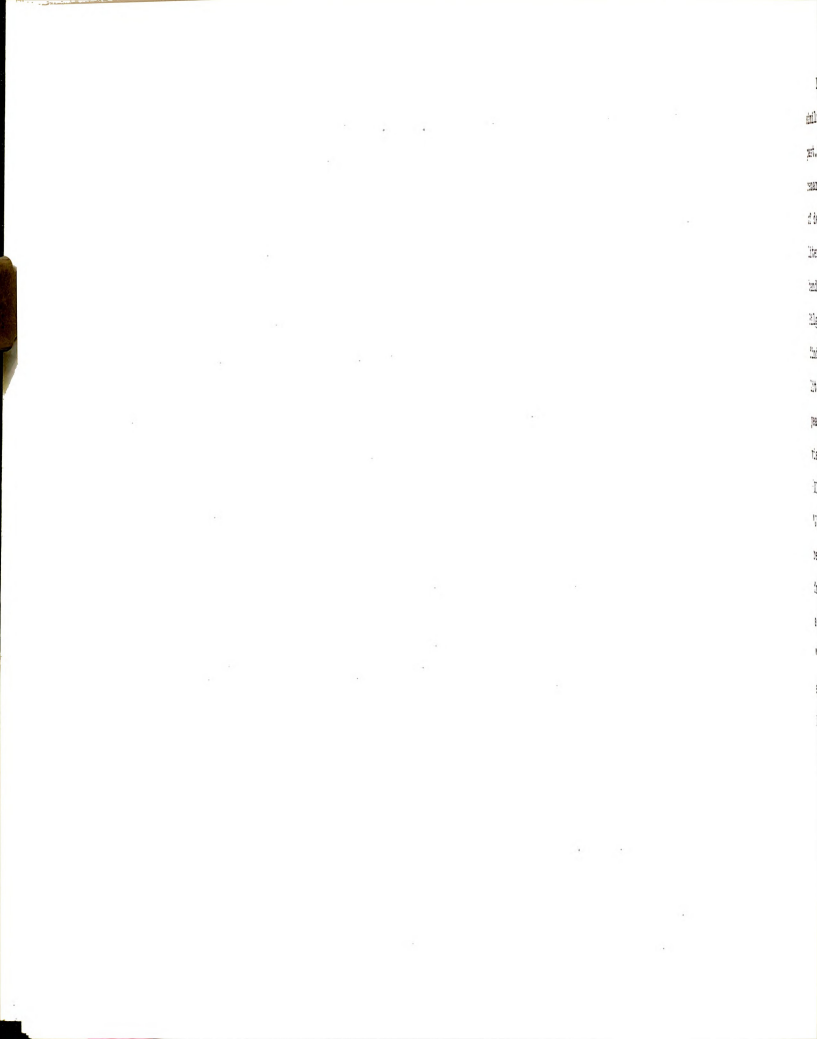


him of previous American pilgrims; English scenes often suggest Irving and Hawthorne, and Italian ones recall Hawthorne and Howells.³ America itself has at least one layer of literary history for him. The Hudson Valley is Irving; Concord is Emerson, Thoreau and Hawthorne.⁴ Indians at the Capitol, "for a mind fed betimes on the Leatherstocking Tales," foreshorten a whole era of American history (AS, 364). Even Florida has shades of the "old Spanish Dons" and "passionate Creole beauties," Seminoles and Everglades, recalled from a boyhood romance called The War Trail (AS, 437). Discussing the effect of James Russell Lowell on the observer of New England, James remarks that his works give the area "the direct literary consecration without which even the most charming seats of civilization go through life awkwardly and ruefully, after the manner of unchristened children" (AS, 69). And when James sees a Pennsylvania country house in a winter snow storm, he articulates the question that typifies his sensibility: "What was it confusedly, almost romantically, like, what 'old order' commemorated in fiction and anecdote?" (AS, 302). What Margaret Fuller said of Longfellow is just as applicable to James: "he sees life through the windows of literature."⁵

Van Wyck Brooks, noting the same phenomenon, claims that James had in fact read too much literature, causing him to perceive life--especially English life--in a very idealized way.⁶ In his later years, when he could not get

out, James admits some replacement of life with literature, but in a very special way: ". . . reading tends to take for me the place of experience--or rather to become itself (pour qui sait lire) experience concentrated" (Letters, II, 11). The fact that James assimilates literature so thoroughly that it becomes experience naturally colors his perceptions of reality. But James also travelled a great deal, walked and observed incessantly, and knew London social life as well firsthand as through literature. Furthermore, his reading was broad and, as F.O. Matthiessen remarks, almost oppressively contemporary;⁷ so it is more likely that James's reading supplemented his experience, enriched and concentrated it for him, firmly grounded him in his contemporary world, than that it distorted his immediate perceptions and romanced him back to another era.

I do argue, nevertheless, that James's particular form of "realism" was tremendously affected by so deep an acquaintance with literature. Brooks's charge that James "was to become a novelist, in short, by studying other novelists" (24), if not interpreted as depriving him of all direct experience, is essentially correct. The way James handles concrete experience is inevitably but exquisitely guided by what he has learned from other novelists, has refined and incremented, and by his knowledge of the conventions of past literature. The finest novelists become finer by such study. James is outstanding in the depth and range of his reading, and the broad use to which he put it.



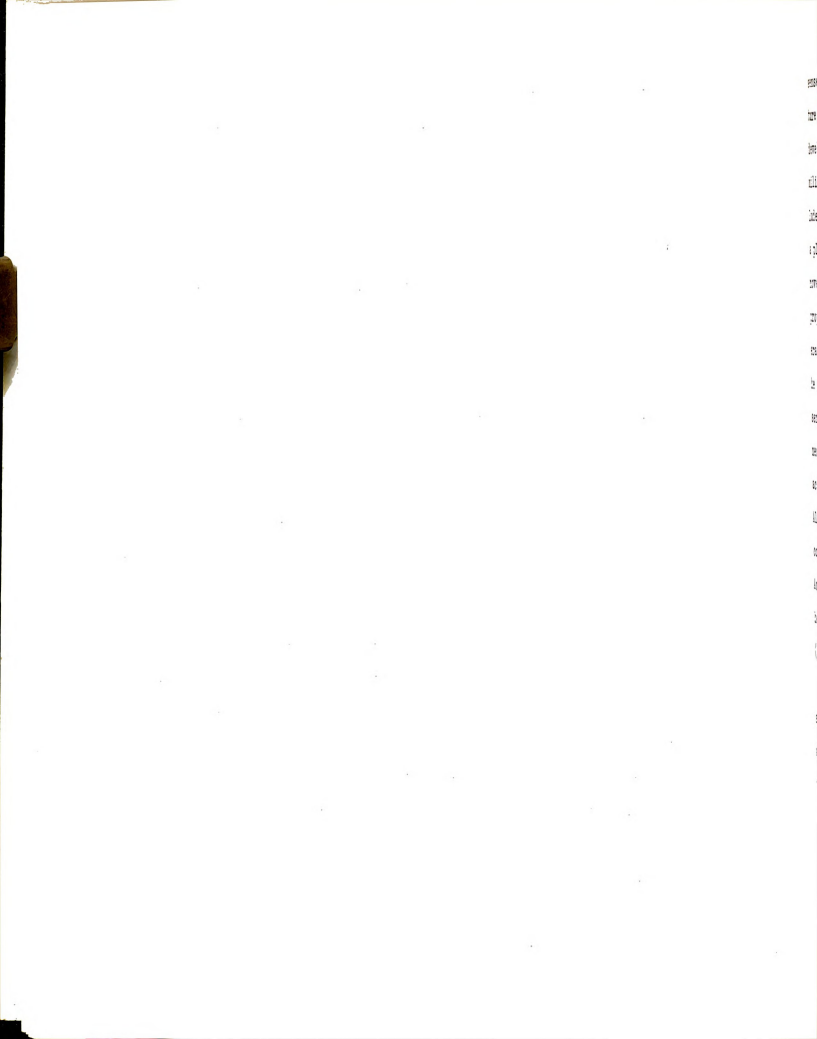
Nor surprisingly, some of James's characters exhibit a similar literary education influencing their sense of the past. Hubert Lawrence, the young parson in Watch and Ward, remarks that "Your real lover of Rome oscillates with a kind of delicious pain between the city in itself and the city in literature. They keep for ever referring to each other and bandying you to and fro."⁸ The narrator of "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), an American in London for the first time, finds everything familiar due to his schooling in English literature: "I had seen the coffeeroom of the Red Lion years ago, at home--at Saragossa, Illinois--in books, in visions, in dreams, in Dickens, in Smollett, in Boswell" (XIII, 335). Arriving at a feudal village, he remarks that "Just the scene around me was the England of one's early reveries. . . . It was this mild moist air that had blown from the pages of the poets" (XIII, 352). He and Searle see "the 'village green' of the tales of our youth" (364), "Tennyson's Talking Oak" (367), and a panorama of familiar scenery, as if taking a grand tour not of England but of English literature:

We walked over, some seven miles . . . and all through such a mist of local colour that we felt ourselves a pair of Smollett's pedestrian heroes faring tavernward for a night of adventures. . . . Going further yet we entered the russet town--where surely Miss Austen's heroines, in chariots and curricles, must often have come a-shopping . . . (365)

Isabel Archer has a comparable acquaintance with at least the nineteenth-century English classics (III, 178). Similarly in "A London Life" (1888), Laura Wing is reminded of

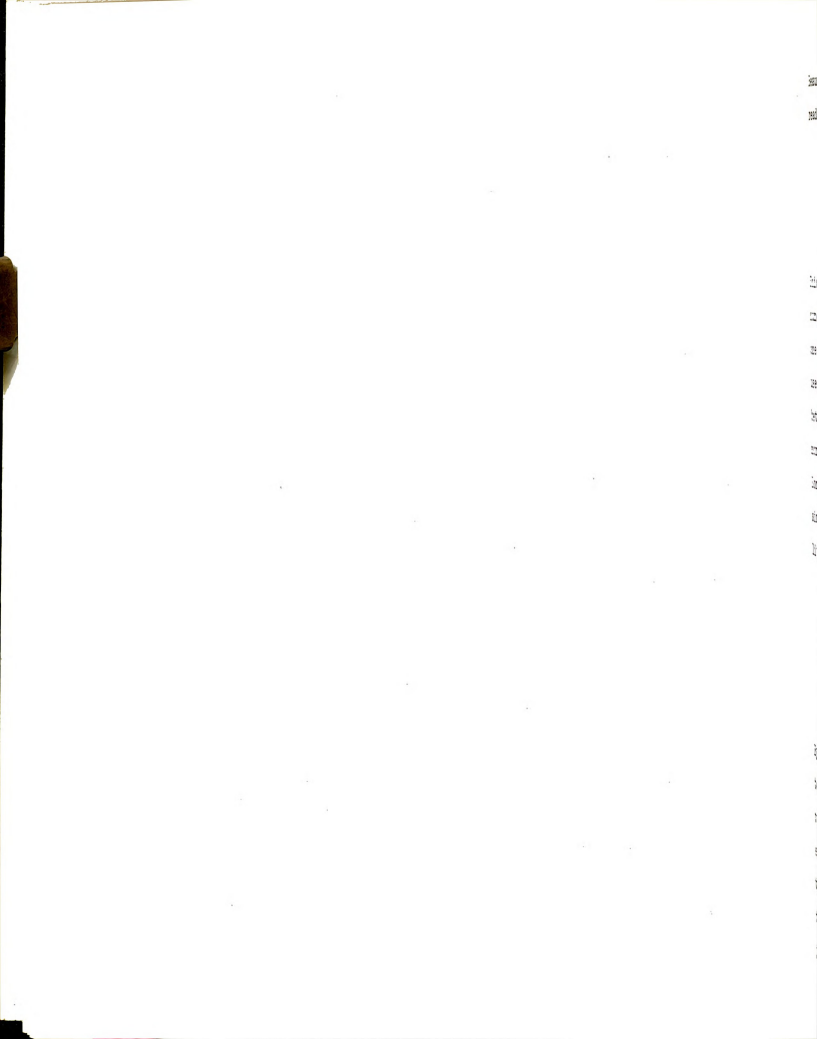
Johnson, Goldsmith, and Dickens in the great city (X, 354-55); of "the works of Mrs. Gore" by Lady Davenant's tortured use of French (282); and of nursery tales by the schoolroom and Shakespeare's comedies by the garden (290). In many of these cases James is attempting to show the affinity of the American mind for English life as the result of the common literary heritage--and also the misconceptions such a preparation may involve. Clement Searle's pathological sense of the past in "A Passionate Pilgrim," which will be discussed in connection with the international theme, is a good example; likewise Isabel Archer's romantic misconceptions are in part a result of her kaleidoscopic acquaintance with Browning, Eliot, and others (III, 46). Laura Wing has been brainwashed somewhat too. She does not object to dowerhouses as unjust to widows like Lady Davenant, unlike the more perceptive Fleda Vetch in The Spoils of Poynton, due to the fact that "there had been dowerhouses in the novels, mainly of fashionable life, on which her later childhood was fed" (X, 270). The literary sense of the past instilled in these characters has explicitly distorted their judgment--a recognition by James that casts further doubt on Brooks's charge that his perception was greatly blunted by literature, for James was obviously well aware of the danger.

James is hardly criticizing the reading of literature, of course, or its role in forming a sense of the past; his criticism concerns misunderstanding and misuse of literary versions of the past. Many of his characters with literary



sense do not have such distorted views. A sense of literature is generally, in fact, a positive indication of proper development. In addition James gains a touch of verisimilitude by allowing his educated people to discuss or allude to literature on occasion. For a character to discuss a play or compare his situation to the plot of previous novels or plays can help create an illusion of reality if properly handled. A character with a consciousness of literature may seem more outside literature by having it. If he has a sense of past and present literature, if he has a sense of place and history and culture, then his consciousness begins to approach the variety and complexity of an actual person's, and he may even begin to represent his age. Allusions to literature may be very artificial instead, of course, a fault James's early works sometimes suffer from. According to one astonished reader, for example, his early heroines "seemed to have read all Balzac in the cradle" (Letters, I, 8).

As James continues to write, however, his use of allusions to and conventions of past literature becomes more and more refined, and even his early practice is not incompetent. When he uses a first person narrator, a technique he was later to call the "abyss of romance" when used in long works, he can incorporate allusions fairly well because the form allows so much freedom (Prefaces, 320). Nevertheless, the result often makes the narrator seem artificial, as in the opening remarks of "The Pension



Beaurepas" (1879), in which the young man testifies to his reading of French writers:

I was an admirer of 'La Chartreuse de Parme', and easily believed one couldn't do better than follow in the footsteps of its author. I remembered, too, the magnificent boarding-house in Balzac's 'Pere Goriot'--the 'pension bourgeoise des deux sexes et autres,' kept by Madame Vaquer, née de Conflans.'⁹ (XIV, 393)

This speech helps characterize the narrator through its mild humor, of course, and parallels James's story with earlier ones, but is not so subtle a reference as his later works use. The device is too obvious. Allusions work a little better when they occur later in the action of stories told more objectively. Consider, for example, "The Siege of London" (1882), when further along in the story two men similarly discuss their situation in terms of French literature:

"You're in the position of Olivier de Jalin in 'Le Demi-Monde'," Waterville remarked.

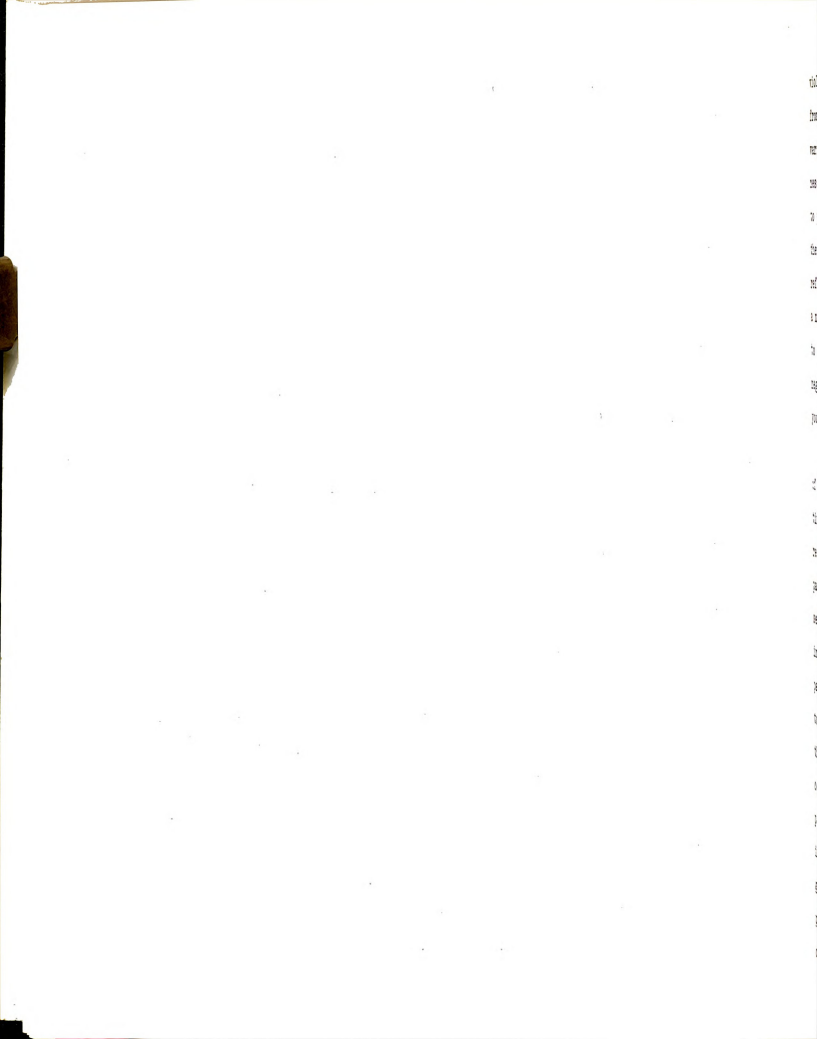
"In 'Le Demi-Monde'," Littlemore was not quick at catching literary allusions.

"Don't you remember the play we saw in Paris? Or like Don Fabrice in 'L'Aventuriere.' A bad woman tries to marry an honourable man, who does n't know how bad she is, and they who do know step in and push her back." (XIV, 259)

By using allusions in this manner, James is able not only to characterize Waterville as better acquainted with literature than Littlemore, but also to maintain verisimilitude even while alerting readers that he is dealing with a particular typical literary situation. Once the reader knows the usual story, as in this passage, he is better able to judge James's unconventional treatment--why the gentlemen

who know Nancy Headway's dubious past do not in fact step in and keep her from marrying Sir Arthur Demesne.¹⁰

In fighting the tendency of allusions and conventions to destroy verisimilitude, James learns to make them positive assets by a method that has not been generally recognized. Nearly every reader of James has heard the comment by T.S. Eliot that his mind was so fine that no idea could violate it. The statement is primarily a compliment, I think, meaning that James represents or portrays in his fiction rather than abstracts or allegorizes. But R.W.B. Lewis's reversal of the statement is more accurate: that James had "an imagination so vigorous that no idea could fail to be violated by it." (155). James's mutation of the American Adam motif in connection with the international theme, and the permutation described in "The Siege of London," are only two of dozens of examples. The technique is so widespread, I suspect that what produces "realism" in James--the illusion of reality sustained by the reader's continuing suspension of disbelief--is primarily the violation of the conventions of past literature, particularly the conventions of the romance. His use of a single consistent viewpoint and the portrayal of consciousness are strong components of his verisimilitude as well, of course, but these too are violations of previous practices by writers of typical romances. The technique that I am primarily describing is the deliberate, explicit setting up of a convention, followed by just as deliberate a



violation of it. The technique, according to James, springs from the artist's "need to cultivate almost at any price variety of appearance and experiment, to dissimulate likenesses" (Prefaces, 276). A simple way to hide parallels is to point out contrasts, to set up the typical situation and then give it a new twist. James's use of this technique reflects a very important but often neglected truth--that a new literary movement such as realism owes a great deal to the movements immediately preceding it, if only by negating their central principles or conventions through youthful rebellion.

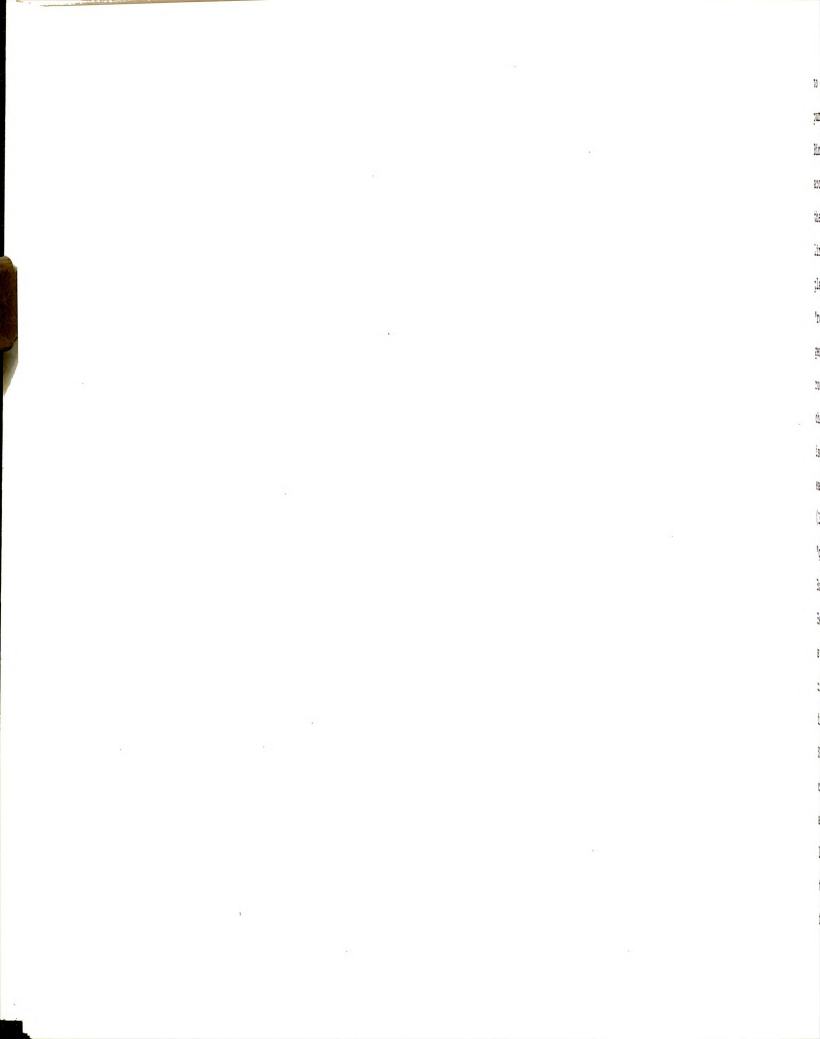
Since the conventions of romance partake so strongly of the past (the very nature of conventions), James's setting up of those conventions only to break them creates realism by establishing a contrast between the romantic past and the created present of the novel. A situation seems real and current, that is, partly because it differs in some important way from the stereotypical situations of past literature.¹¹ The reader's sense of the past is used to convince him that what he is reading is a portrayal of the present. In addition the setting up of the conventions connects the past with the present by delineating the parallels as well as the contrasts, by associating the two in the reader's mind. Life is different "now," but not so greatly different from life "then." James's sense of the present and his portrayal of it generally take shape as a comparison and contrast to his sense of the past.

This device of contrasting past and present links James even more closely with Hawthorne, adding to the validity of Marius Bewley's conclusions on their affinity. For as Lewis so accurately notices, "Hawthorne conveyed the idea of novelty by setting it in an ancient pattern: allowing it thereby to be recognized," just as James emphasizes his originality by setting up and breaking conventions.¹² And in the 1851 preface to The House of the Seven Gables, Hawthorne defines romance in a manner that perfectly parallels his practice with James's linking of the past and present:

The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us. It is a legend prolonging itself, from an epoch now gray in the distance, down into our own broad daylight, and bringing along with it some of its legendary mist, which the reader, according to his pleasure, may either disregard, or allow it to float almost imperceptibly about the characters and events for the sake of a picturesque effect.

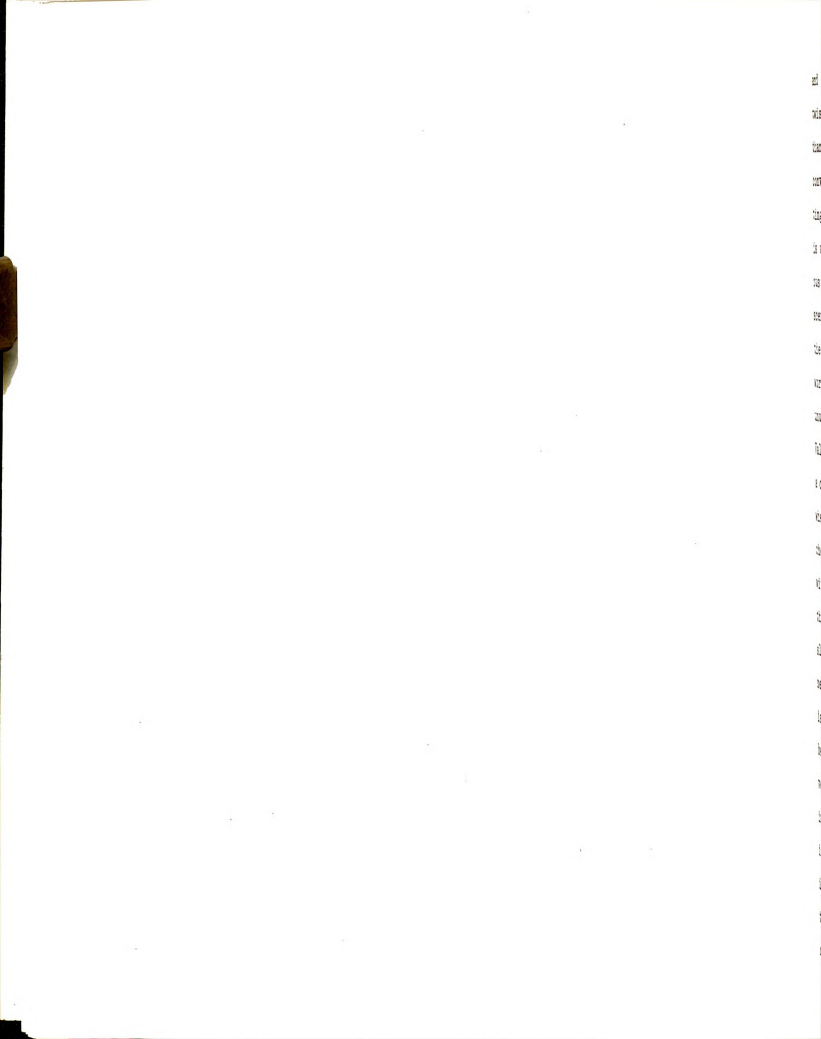
James would not consider the attempt to link the past and the present as necessarily romantic, nor does he reach so far into the past for a picturesque effect, but the central method James uses for turning romance into realism and connecting the past and the present is clearly carried forward from Hawthorne.

Turning romance into reality is quite a trick and develops slowly, but the battle between the two begins with his earliest works. Stories like "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," "A Problem," and "De Grey: A Romance" (1868),

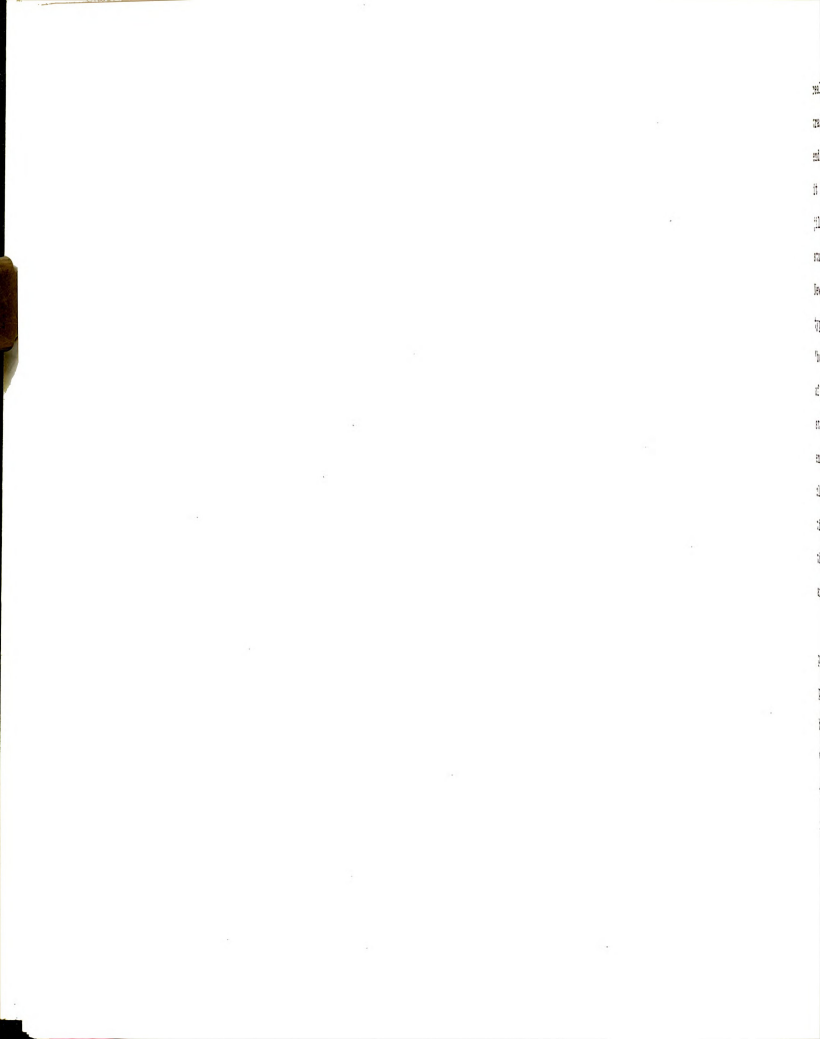


to name only a few, are explicitly romantic, and almost purely so. On the other hand, the plot of "My Friend Bingham" (1867), in which a woman marries the man who accidentally kills her son, is a concerted effort to fight the romantic and the sentimental; love develops from loneliness and pity, and no child from the second marriage replaces the first with trite poetic mercy. The word "romance" occurs again and again in these works.¹³ But generally the word is used in an attempt to dispel any romantic aura, as in "Poor Richard" (1867), in which a character remarks for the benefit of the reader that "This is not romance, it's reality" (Tales, I, 224). Even this early James sets up conventions, as in "Osborn's Revenge" (1868), in which the old revenge motif is explicitly denoted "quite romantic. It would do in a novel" (Tales, II, 43). But he does not allow the convention to govern the story. He adds psychological depth and ironic twists to make the story new. The would-be avenger discovers his revenge is misdirected and contemplates suicide, and his revenge is inadvertently carried out by another person (Tales, II, 57). Similarly the heroine in "Gabrielle de Bergerac" (1869) considers the time-worn possibility of giving up her beloved and going to a convent--but she does not go (Tales, II, 158). With so much practice on revenge stories and problems that families pose to marriage, James seems to be warming up for The American.

He needs to practice. His method is far from perfected,



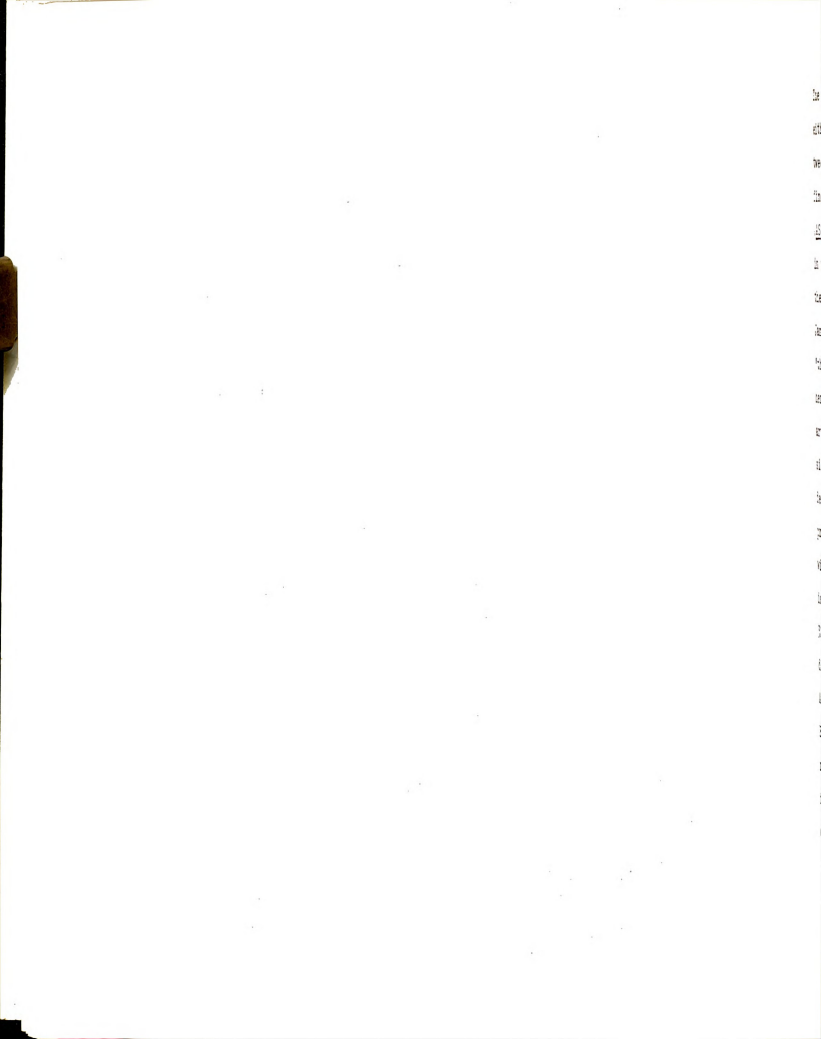
and generally just produces a romance with a few curious twists. Roderick Hudson (1875) seems far more romantic than realistic, with its explicitly romantic symbolism, conventional eavesdropping, coincidences and pastoral settings, and apparent suicide ending the work.¹⁴ The climax is underplayed compared to most romances and left ambiguous, but when a character remarks just before the final scene that "It's like something in a bad novel" (I, 511), the reader is more inclined to agree than to contrast worse ones. The American (1876-7) also comes off as an unusual hybrid of romance and realism. The coincidence of Valentin's duel and the broken engagement is too obviously a convenience in the plot, allowing Newman to learn the whereabouts of the family skeleton. Madame de Cintre's choice of the convent and her passionate farewell scene with Newman are highly romantic, even though James fights the old conventions by making her reasons for the choice slightly less than typical (II, 418-19). Newman's night meeting with Mrs. Bread, the trusty old English servant, is Gothic romance relieved only by caricature that may not be intended (424, 436), and his choice of celibacy seems very sentimental and conventional given his rather cavalier initial attitude toward seeking a wife (476). The American is like many earlier tales; its stroke of realism, at least in the plot, comes mainly at the end--reflecting the fact that James is more realistic in his conceptions than in his execution, and revealing that James conceives his



realistic fiction primarily as a contrast to romance. Contrast is his method. Newman thinks of the perfect romantic ending for him and Claire, so of course James does not allow it to happen (424).¹⁶ And mercifully, Claire has not simply jilted Newman, "since injuries of this order are the stalest stuff of romance" (Prefaces, 24). Neither does James allow Newman a Gothic revenge for his wound and for the nearly typical but ambiguous "murder" committed by the Bellegardes: "both his wrong and his right would have been in these cases of too vulgar a type" (Prefaces, 24). Newman's refusal to stoop to revenge is the central action toward which the entire novel is constructed. James creates an anti-romantic climax according to plan and succeeds in keeping the emotional value pure romance would have, but he also discovers that in most of the rest of his work he "had been plotting arch-romance without knowing it" (Prefaces, 22, 25).

Since *The American* is the novel over which James puzzles most about the nature of romance and realism, its preface provides a good key to his theory and practice of both arts, and may establish a working definition of "romance" long overdue in this discussion. James describes the artist's love of each "value," the romantic and the real, and claims that

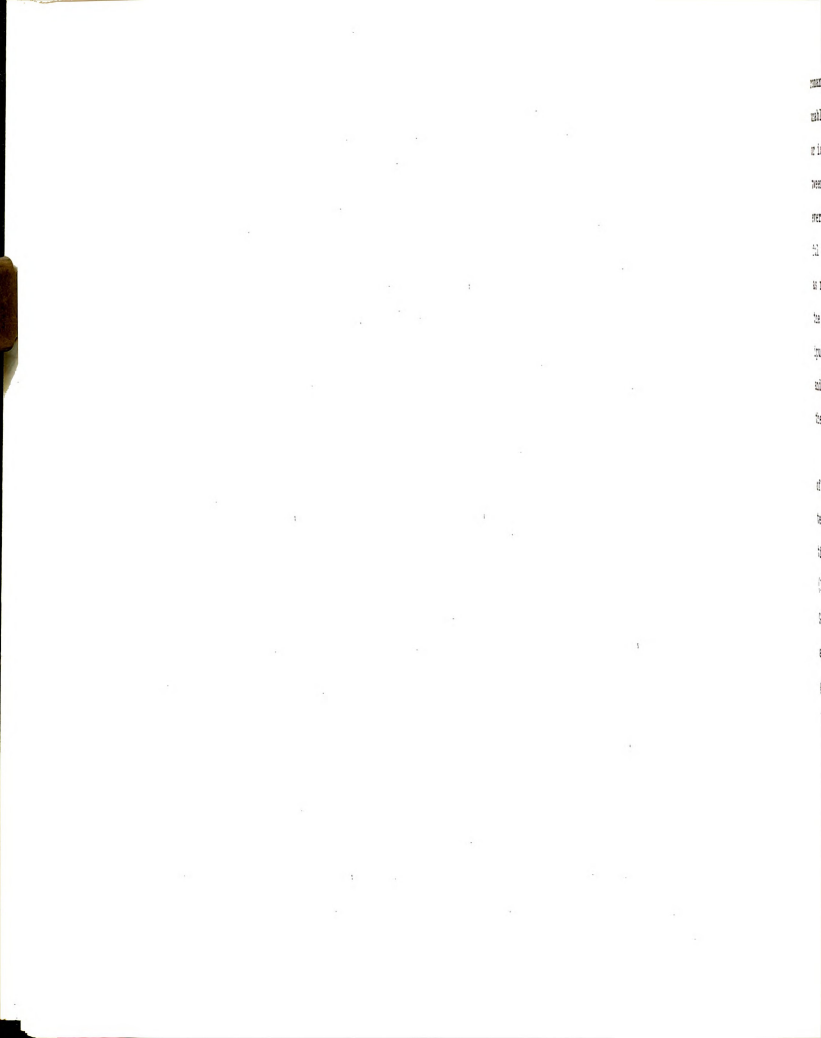
The interest is greatest--the interest of his genius, I mean, and of his general wealth--when he commits himself in both directions; not quite at the same time or to the same effect, of course, but by some need of performing his whole possible revolution, by the law of some rich passion in him for extremes. (Prefaces, 31)



The best artists, he goes on, do not deflect greatly in either direction, but run a rich, mixed, middle course between the two. James appreciates most cities like Baltimore, fine combinations of the "rich real and the rich romantic" (AS, 322), and fiction like that of Balzac or even Howells, in which the "romance of the real and . . . the charm of the common" balance the creation (Letters, II, 224). Surely James himself produces the same kind of fiction, finding "the extraordinary in the ordinary, the heroic in the anti-heroic."¹⁷ Yet what is "romantic" or what is "real" in an art that is based on effects, that is governed by the illusion that can be created? James goes through dozens of definitions of romance, rejecting those based only on the presence of conventions such as tigers and "beautiful wicked women," and disclaiming also the idea that romance is simply the portrayal of the pursuit of danger (Prefaces, 32). Neither of these formulations is broad enough. Nor does the type of characters represented determine the genre. A work may have a romantic heroine--James suggests Madame Bovary, but Isabel Archer would do as well--yet not resemble a romance at all if the record of her adventures is true to life (which is just as hard to determine as a definition of romance). He can find only one definition of romance with universal validity, described in the following well-known passage:

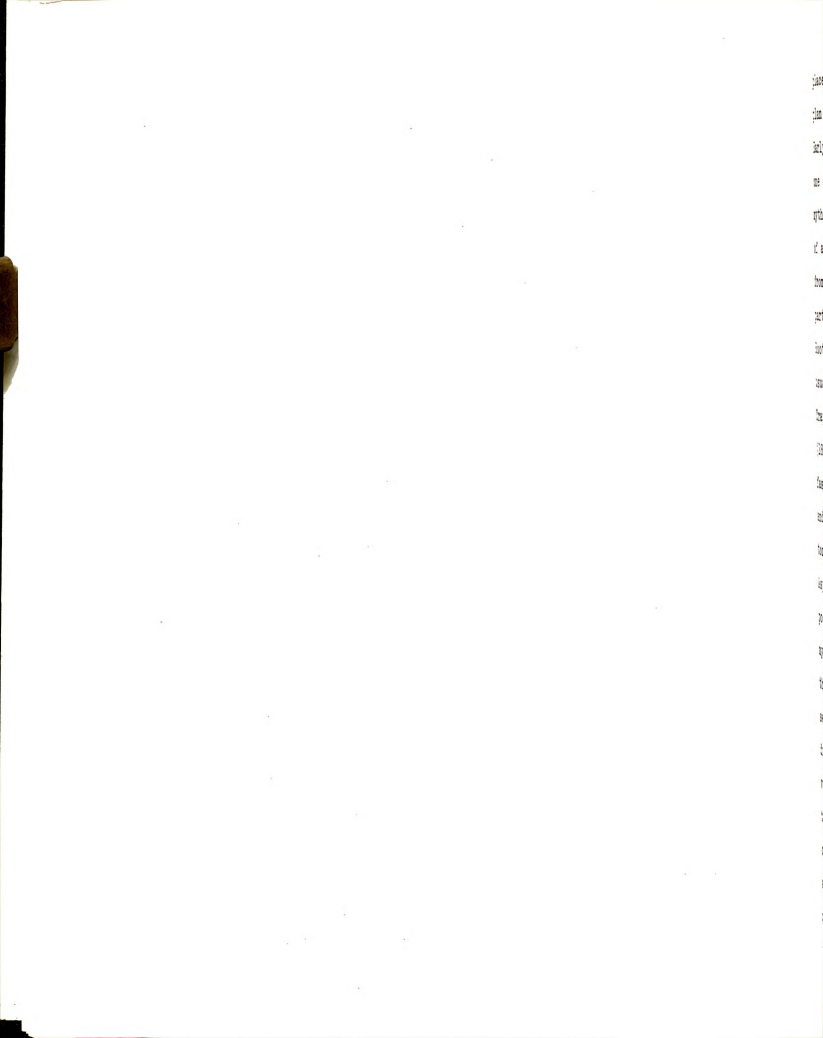
The only general attribute of projected romance that I can see, the only one that fits all its cases, is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals--experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it . . . and operating in a medium which relieves it, in a particular interest, of the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities. The greatest intensity may so be arrived at evidently--when the sacrifice of community, of the 'related' sides of situations, has not been too rash. It must to this end not flagrantly betray itself; we must even be kept if possible, for our illusion, from suspecting any sacrifice at all. The balloon of experience is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated: we only swing apart from the globe--though remaining as exhilarated, naturally, as we like, especially when all goes well. The art of the romancer is, 'for the fun of it,' insidiously to cut the cable, to cut it without our detecting him. (Prefaces, 33-4)

The American, James notes, is made up of such "disconnected and uncontrolled experience--uncontrolled by our general sense of 'the way things happen'--which romance alone more or less successfully palms off on us" (Prefaces, 34). The conventions set up and broken in such works serve to deflect the reader's suspicion that the events are not happening as they would happen in the course of actual events, by pointing out how unconventional the action is compared to typical romances. The action may be highly improbable, but if the artist can decoy the reader's sense of what is likely, then his romance will have the same convincing quality as realism and preserve the emotional excitement of

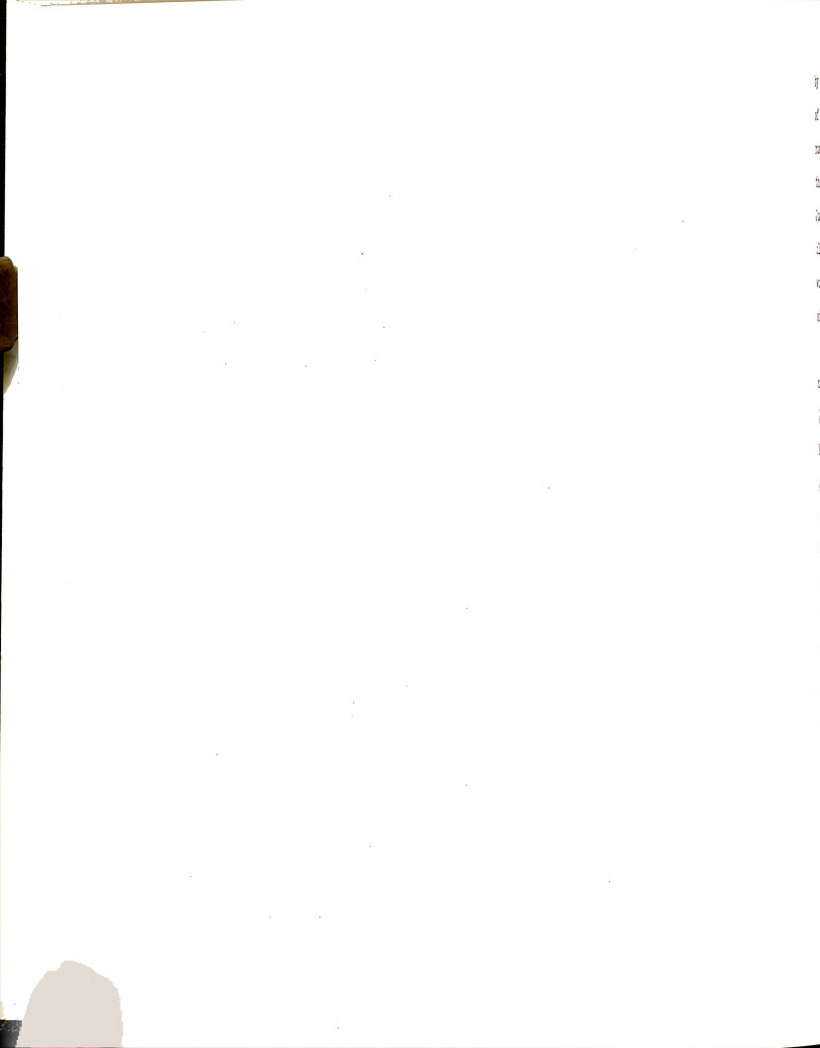


romance as well. On occasion the reader of James may be unable to decide, early or late, whether a work is realistic or is in fact a romance. For James is always at work between the two, and learns how to cut the cord quietly whenever it suits his purposes. The American is more successful than most of James's early works in disguising romance as reality: but it is not among those mature works in which the conventions of romance abound but are consistently manipulated, in which the reader is suspended between romance and reality throughout the action yet always finishes with the sense that he has witnessed solid experience.

The dozens of literary conventions which are violated, often explicitly, in James, establish the importance of this technique from the earliest to the latest periods. In addition to the early tales already mentioned, "Madame de Mauves" (1874) provides a good example. Euphemia is taken to a Gothic castle that "had battered towers and an empty moat, a rusty drawbridge and a court paved with crooked grass-grown slabs over which the antique coach-wheels of the lady with the hooked nose seemed to awaken the echoes of the seventeenth century" (XIII, 228). The deteriorating state of the castle makes its romantic qualities very contemporary, especially when the reader learns that the Mauves family is in need of money. Euphemia does not remain in the seventeenth century long. The lady with the hooked nose turns out not to be a witch, breaking another convention, but the American girl's only friend in the

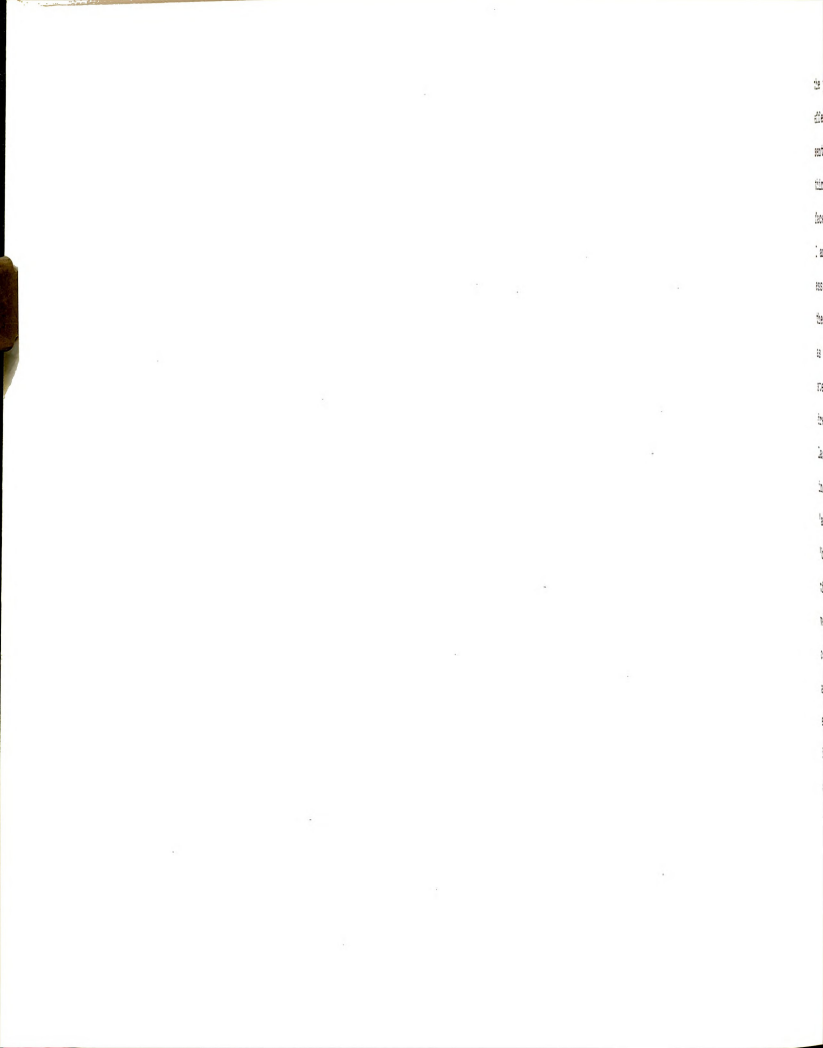


place; the real schemers are the younger generation, who plan to exploit her by marrying her money into the family. Early in the English period The Princess Casamassima uses one of these old literary conventions as a very destructive myth, the idea that Hyacinth Robinson is the bastard son of a British nobleman (V, 9-10). This fabrication, borrowed from a novel, inflates his self-image and is ultimately partly responsible for his suicide. Similarly, Miriam Rooth is a very romantic figure in The Tragic Muse, but the usual instant stage success does not materialize for her. Trapped in an apparently unsavory kind of "A London Life" (1888), unlike the idealized descriptions she has read in fashionable novels, Laura Wing nevertheless does not "escape and live in lodgings and paint fans" (X, 332). Every editor has his theory, his "little romance," about what "The Aspern Papers" (1888) reveal of the relationship of the poet to Juliana Bordereau--a fact which remains a romantic mystery. But the rest of the story is sordidly real. Although previously in the best company, Juliana has had to settle for visitors whose very names echo how far she has dropped, and now she lives "obscurly in Venice . . . on very small means, unvisited, unapproachable, in a sequestered and dilapidated old palace" (XII, 3).¹⁸ Of romantically uncertain origin, she came abroad when sea travel was almost heroic, and is supposed to be "too sacred for trivial modernisms--too venerable to touch" (46-49, 68). Yet the unscrupulous critic tries to swindle her out of her letters

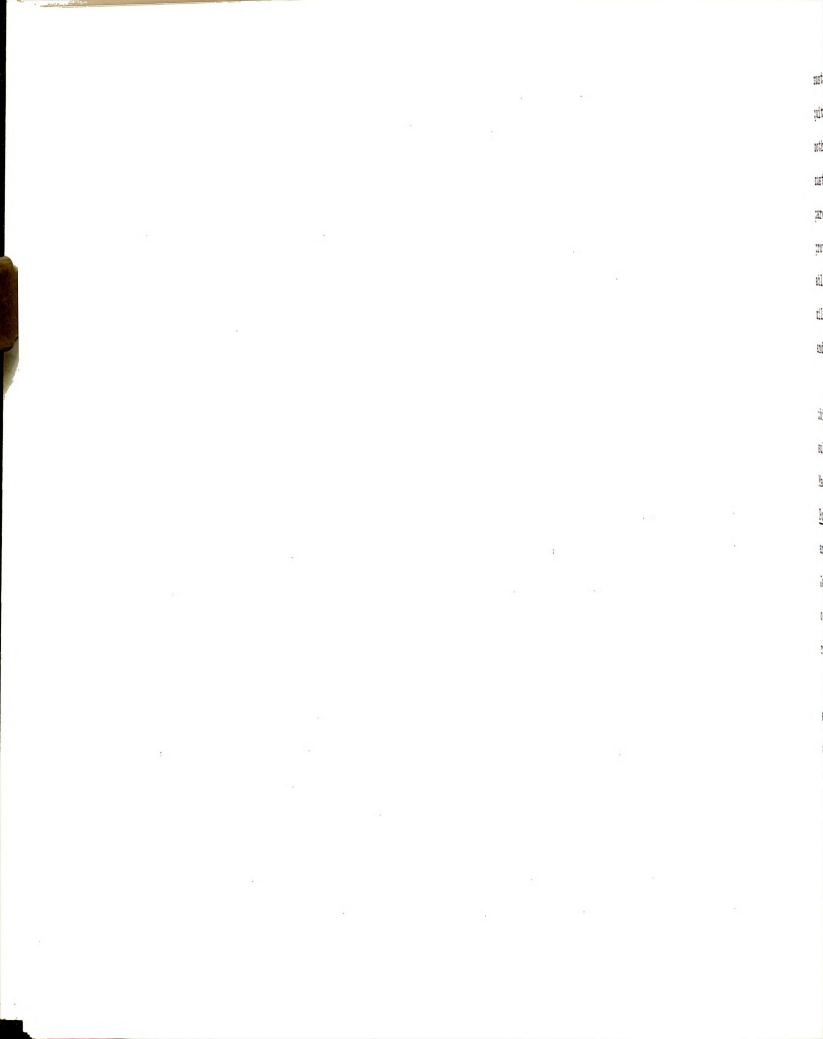


by romancing her niece in comically unconventional versions of the garden scene in Romeo and Juliet and the immemorial romantic gondola excursion (52, 79); Tina tries to bribe the critic into marriage with the letters (133); and Juliana herself is revealed as a "sarcastic profane cynical old woman" who, believing there is "no more poetry in the world," stoops to the vindictive, grasping, virtual extortion of money (71-3, 99).¹⁹

Even the later periods are laced with examples of such manipulations of romantic conventions. What Maisie Knew (1897) is hardly a romance, but the Dickensian caricature Mrs. Wix, whose conversation is "an endless narrative, a great garden of romance," could have walked right out of one (XI, 27-28). Her character is explicitly patterned on Mrs. Micawber, for she will "never, never, never desert Miss Farange" (126). The sober reality is that she is virtually the only one who will not, for one personal reason or another, desert the child. Likewise in The Wings of the Dove, Milly's sickness is by no means a fictional first and has a definite romantic effect on the plot, yet no death in the nineteenth century could be more common and real than death by disease. James stretches the conventions by creating his own particular heroism in her character, and by very carefully handling her discovery that she is going to die. In James's final, unfinished The Sense of the Past, he wants to be sure to avoid any analogy with the medieval dream vision in his portrayal of Ralph Pendrel's excursion into



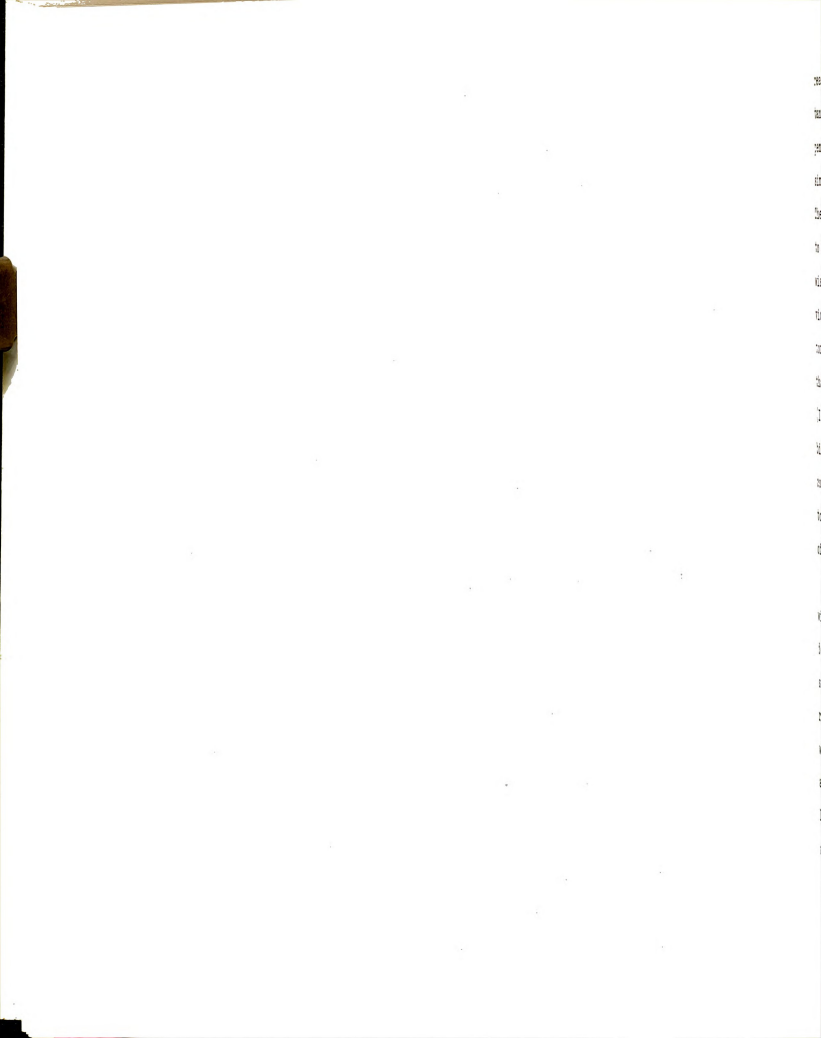
the past (XXVI, 293). Yet he wants to retain his romantic effect at the same time: "The 'romantic' of course has essentially to be allowed for, but what on earth is the whole thing but the pure essence of the romantic and to be bravely faced and exploited as such?" (Notebooks, 366). Once again I am reminded of Hawthorne in the fact that this "pure essence of the romantic" is primarily an attempt to connect the past with the present. The handling of Ralph's experience as a drama of consciousness, and the deliberateness of his stepping into the past, make the novel far from the old dream vision yet not at all so unromantic as a case study. Lastly, in his unfinished novel The Ivory Tower, James wants in creating Graham Fielder "to steer clear of the tiresome 'artistic' associations hanging about the usual Anglo-Saxon 'brought up abroad'; though only indeed so far as they are tiresome" (XXV, 337-8). He avoids following his own conventions of the international theme, that is, except as they can be molded to fit the particular situation. He uses, and perhaps sometimes abuses, conventions whenever and however they suit his purpose. Rosanna Gaw will come to visit Graham first, not the reverse, in order to indicate Graham's ability to draw her out of the ivory tower that social conventions and her fear of being exploited have built (277). To avoid staleness, there will be no trite complications in Betterman's will (296). And for once Jane Austen's ironic little "truth universally acknowledged" in Pride and Prejudice, "that a single man in possession of a good fortune



must be in want of a wife," will not be acknowledged in quite the usual manner. Horton Vint assumes, like the mothers in Austen's work, that a rich young man like Graham must be after a spouse. Not so, says Graham, and he apparently means it (204). Whether or not James would have provided Graham a wife had he finished the novel is debatable; but one thing is sure--he would have teased as much mileage out of the convention as possible through Rosanna and Cissy before turning it loose.²⁰

These short examples, of course, only establish the ubiquity and variety of the habit; they do not reveal the subtlety and development of the technique. Using "The Madonna of the Future," "The Turn of the Screw," The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors for somewhat closer analysis, I would like to show the progress and depth in James's use of conventions, to show how superbly his sense of past modes shapes his materials into a synthesis of romance and realism.

"The Madonna of the Future" (1873) is one of those early tales in which James had the most trouble separating and remolding "the American romantic" and "the American real" (Prefaces, 193-4). Somewhat like "The Turn of the Screw," the story has a narrator--"H____," known as "a clever man who had seen much of men and had a great stock of reminiscences"--who is recalling a tale of his youth and Italy (XIII, 437-38). This device places the tale in the past, like many romances, in the hope of putting the



reader's suspicion off guard, of achieving objective distance. A reader is more willing to believe something happened in a time less familiar to him or faded by memory, since he has less sense of the way things happened then. The use of a narrator allows any romance or exaggeration to be charged to his memory rather than the author's. Likewise not revealing H____'s full name, though a standard device, is intended to give more verisimilitude to the narrator as a figure; the mystery about his identity suggests that the name would be immediately recognized if revealed (I think of Howells, for example, just for the romance of biographical anecdote). Even when James is being utterly conventional, in other words, he uses conventions designed to preserve both the interest of romance and the conviction of realism.

More striking is his alternation of romantic convention with more sober realism in the tale. The narrator is wandering about Florence on a dark but moonlit night seeking to see the city's beauty in the romantic soft light of the past rather than the harsh light of the present. He meets a man wearing "some fashion of black velvet tunic (as it seemed) and with a mass of auburn hair, which shimmered in the moonlight, escaping from a little beretto of the cinquecento. . . .":

He was romantic, fantastic, slightly unreal.
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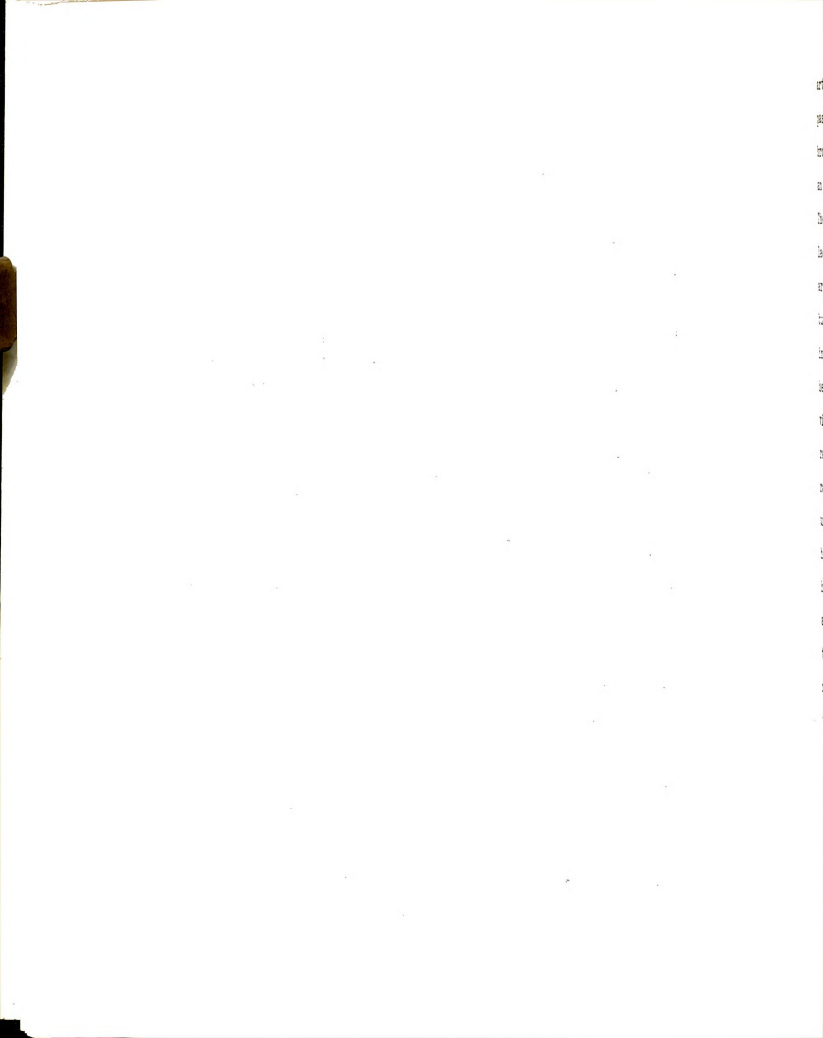


shabby little custode who flourishes a calico pocket-handkerchief and openly resents the divided franc. (XIII, 439)

James immediately breaks the romantic charm of the mysterious figure by a reference to his contemporary materialistic counterpart. The pattern repeats itself as the two converse. The stranger speaks eloquently of the romantic night and the past:

I've known Florence long, sir, but I've never known her so lovely as to-night. It's as if the ghosts of her past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter. That was the prime of art, sir. The sun stood high in heaven, and his broad and equal blaze made the darkest places bright and the dullest eyes clear. We live in the evening of time. (439-40)

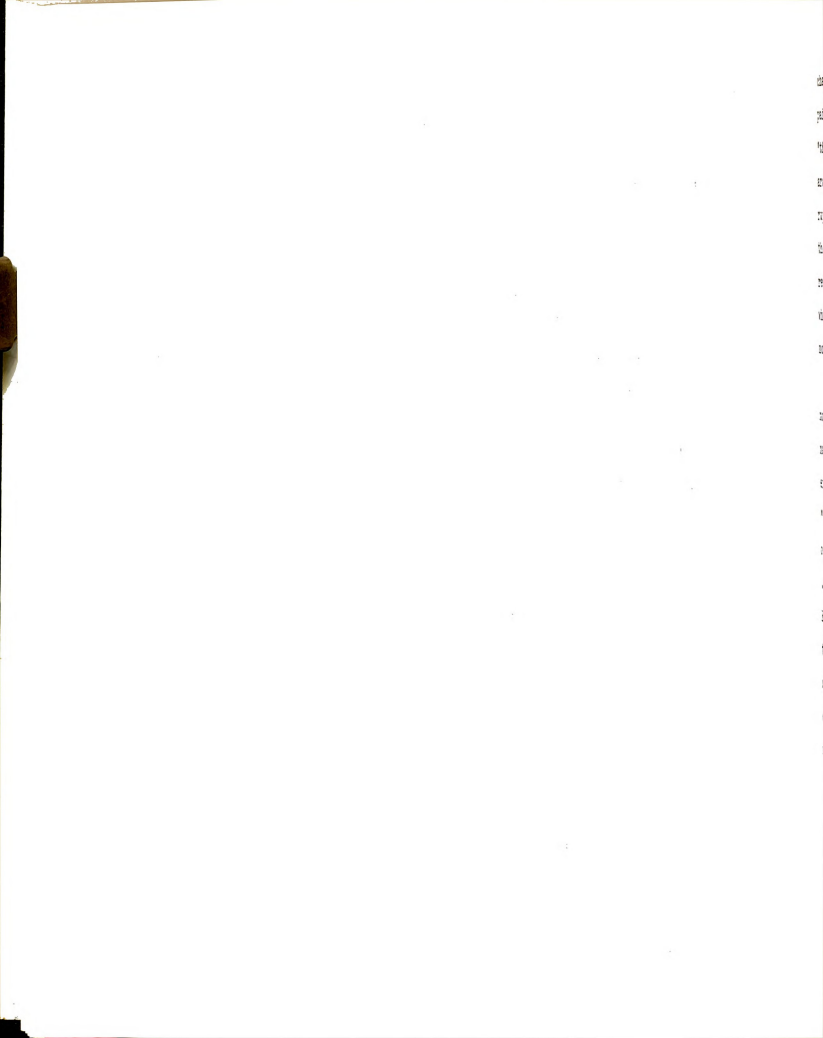
Theobald, the romantic painter, continues to combine his idealization of the past with the soft night, feeling "as if the moonlit air were charged with the secrets of the masters, and as if, standing here in religious attention, we might--well, witness a revelation!" (440). Suddenly the more realistic narrator has a revelation of his own, however, which breaks the spell the painter has been weaving for the reader: "The mystery was suddenly solved; my friend was the most characteristic of compatriots," an American, whose romanticism is the national disease of "the famished race" (441). The letdown drops even further as the artist mentions the custom of money patronage of the



arts: "For a moment I was alarmed. Was his irrepressible passion mere Yankee enterprise?--was he simply a desperate brother of the brush who had posted himself here to extort an 'order' from a sauntering tourist?" (441). But no; Theobald is a genuine romantic, raving on and on about the lack of atmosphere in America and the exile of American artists from the magic circle of beauty, until the narrator bursts the rhetoric with irony: "You seem fairly at home in exile . . . and Florence seems to me a very easy Siberia," he remarks, going on to give the artist very realistic advice about working instead of complaining (442). The narrator's irony breaks in again as Theobald continues to rant, bringing the reader's conception of the self-styled uncommercial artist down to earth with such barbs as "I had begun to feel unequal to the society of a genius of this heroic strain," and with his sceptical desire to see the artist "by common daylight" (444). Theobald disappears at the first stroke of midnight as in a fairy tale, but a morning view of him returns the perspective from the romantic to the real:

His midnight mood was over and he looked as haggard as an actor by daylight. He was much older than I had supposed and had less bravery of costume and attitude. . . . His velvet coat was threadbare and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness that marked it an 'original' and not one of the picturesque reproductions that members of his craft sometimes affect. (445)

The reader is left with the impression that Theobald is genuine, but that his romanticism is archaic rather than

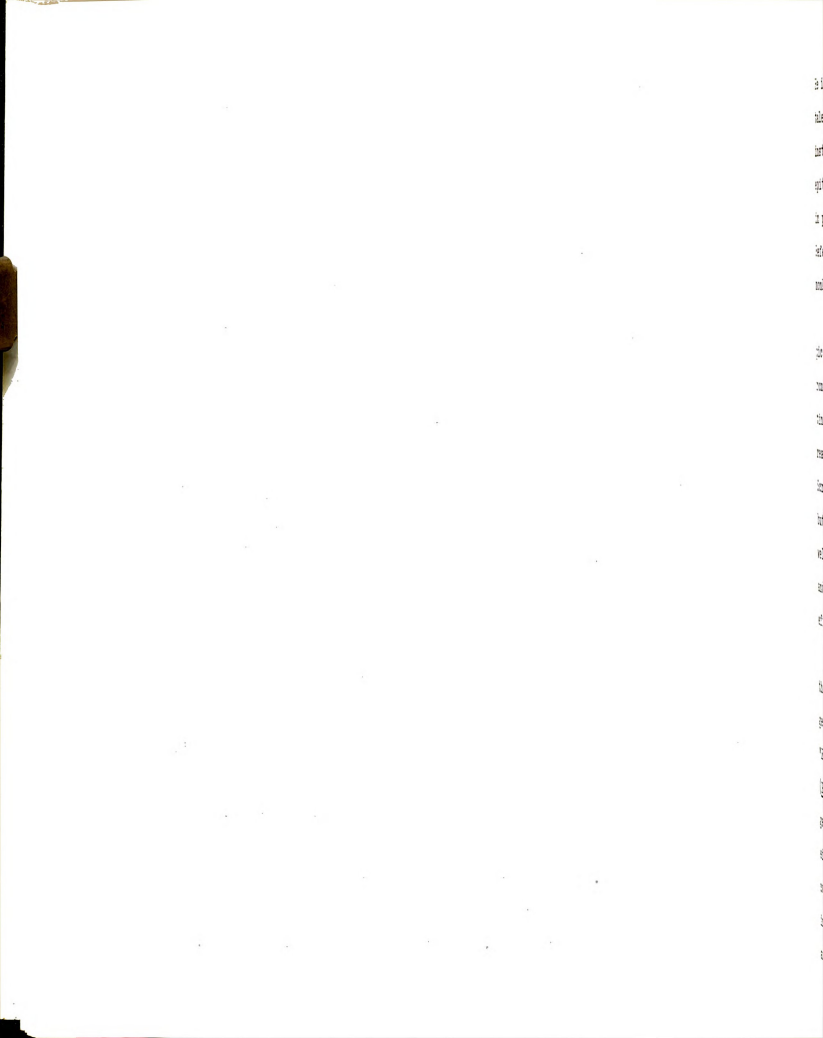


charming. At this point the artist reveals his desire to paint a madonna, and in spite of the fact that it is to be "the Madonna of the future," it would clearly be just as archaic as the artist's tastes. His unrealistic incorruptibility, "unsullied by the accidents of life," causes the narrator to continue his iconoclasm, questioning "the reality of an artistic virtue, an aesthetic purity, on which some profane experience had n't rubbed off a little more" (456).

The biggest burst of the bubble concerns Theobald's model for the madonna. He thinks she is perfect, but the narrator gradually lets the reader know that she is not exactly an immaculate figure for the artist's conception: "The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanour. . . . she seemed to have nothing whatever to say" (465). Except for the fact that the reader is conditioned by now to expect irony and euphemism from the narrator, this description is still fairly neutral. The madonna is a picture, even embroidering, apparently, "some ecclesiastical vestment" for a priest. The first major hint that something is amiss, is that even though the lady is still beautiful, she is no longer young. Quickly, then, the picture cracks and crazes. After a carefully worded description, the narrator breaks down into bluntness, noting that the woman "betrayed rather a vulgar stagnation of mind" and that "furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout" (467).

This madonna also has a child, and the crowning irony is that the lady, whose hands "lacked the traces of what is called honest toil," turns out also to be "a maiden mother, but she had been turned out into the world in her shame" (470). The woman Theobald has idolized is now a prostitute (476, 478-80). The narrator cannot keep the truth to himself. When Theobald realizes that his ideal is old, then for him "the charm in truth was broken" (473). He has awakened from his romantic illusion.

It is at this point that James fails to draw his romance fully back to reality. Theobald seems too extreme a case; the narrator finds him, disillusioned after twenty years, sitting before "a canvas that was a mere dead blank cracked and discoloured by time" (485). So great a distortion of the perception of concrete reality is difficult to conceive. There is something too much like Hawthorne or Oscar Wilde in the resulting parable, something too didactic in Theobald's sitting "face to face with the past" and its "terrible truth" (485-86). Like "The Beast in the Jungle," the tale is too clearly attached to a moral on the comparative value of past and present to fit the reader's conception of "the way things happen," and may belong with "Daisy Miller" as "pure romance" (Prefaces, 269-70). James tries to pull the story out with a trick learned from his French mentors. A cynical artist, a commercial sculptor of satirical animal figures whom the narrator found consorting with the would-be madonna, reappears for the last word.



He is just caricature enough, I think, to help move the tale back toward a suspension between romance and realism instead of leaving it in the grasp of pure romance. His epitaph for the story puts Theobald's experience enough in perspective to move the case closer to the credible. Referring to his work, the sculptor chants, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats--all human life is there!" (492).

James would learn, like Flaubert in Madame Bovary, to picture romantic characters with much less of a tinge of romance in the portrayal. Yet the basic technique of setting up and violating the conventions of romance to produce realism would remain. The governess in "The Turn of the Screw," Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether are all romantics, but the difference in the way they are portrayed shows how well James learns to control the conventions of literature and the representation of consciousness to produce romantic effects with all the conviction of realism.

"The Turn of the Screw" (1898) is a much later work than the "Madonna," but is an example of a much more romantic genre, the "ghost story," which James classifies as "Ever . . . for me the most possible form of fairy tale" (Prefaces, 254). By "most possible" James means that the genre is easiest for him to write in without sacrificing either strangeness or credibility. Sounding like his discussion of the elements of romantic and realistic fiction in the preface to The American, James tries to define what arouses "wonder" in the ghost-tale, and how it may be maintained

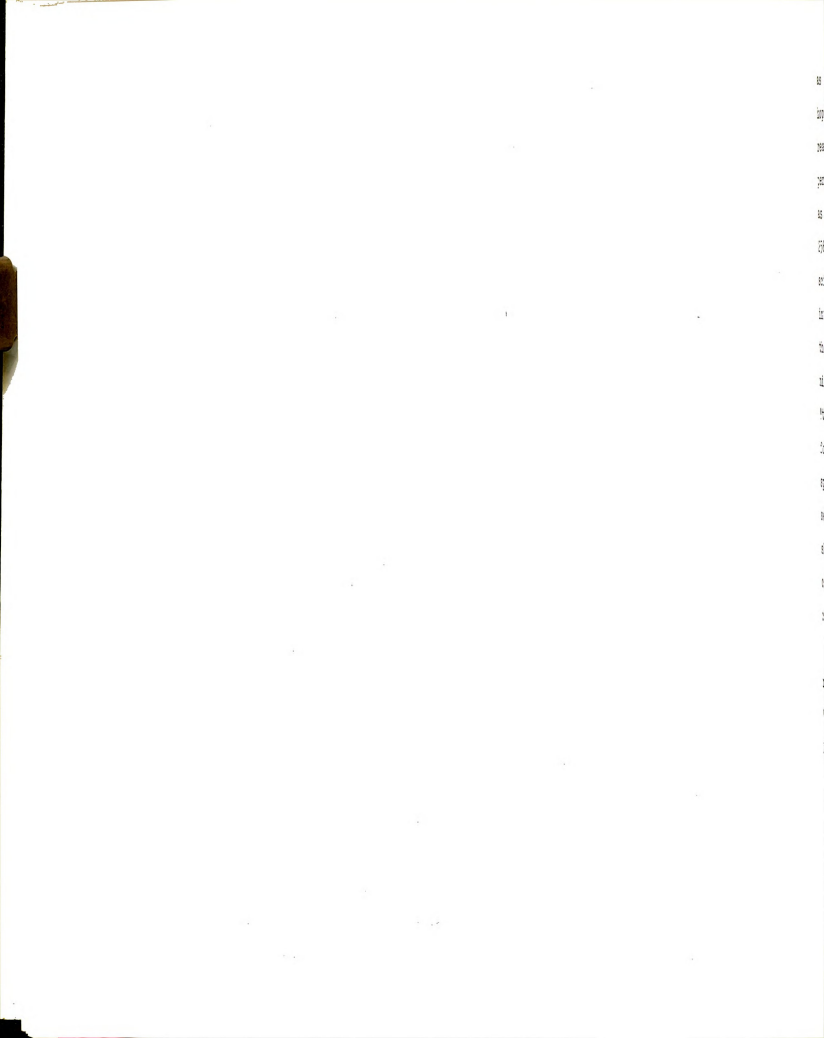
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(Prefaces, 30, 254). Again the solution is a mixture of the romantic and the realistic: "To begin to wonder, over a case," James says, "I must begin to believe--to begin to give out (that is to attend) I must begin to take in, and to enjoy that profit I must begin to see and hear and feel" (Prefaces, 254-55). The best way to create the childlike wonder of the fairy tale is to create the childlike credulity. Romance like Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, though it begins with direct representation, becomes disconnected from reality, and by lacking that "indispensable history," fails through destroying the reader's ability to believe (256-57). On the other hand pure realism, the case-history approach to obsessions, is not representation but dry analysis:

The new type indeed, the mere modern 'psychical' case, washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap, and equipped with credentials vouching for this--the new type clearly promised little, for the more it was respectably certified the less it seemed of a nature to rouse the dear old sacred terror.

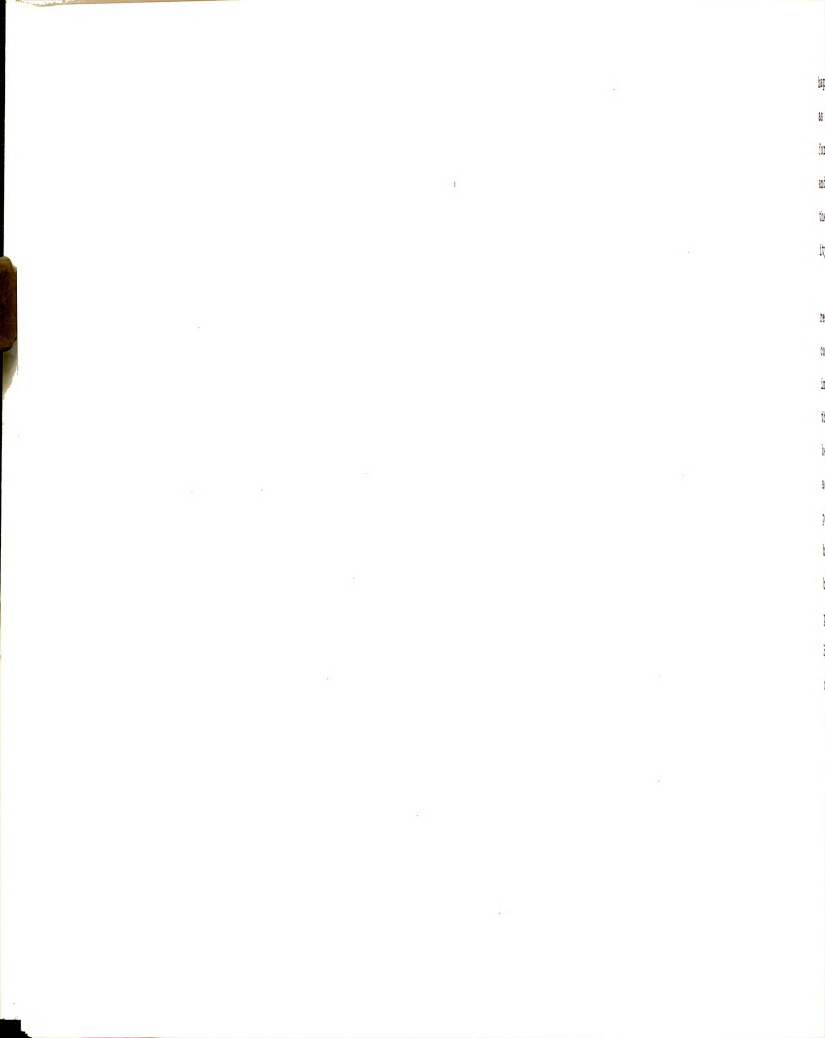
(Prefaces, 169).

Too much documentation destroys the value gained from the unknown and the uncertain, murdering the romance by dissection. Belief and disbelief must be held in careful suspension. What James wants to produce is "sinister romance" with the impact of reality: "The exhibition involved is in other words a fairy-tale pure and simple--save indeed as to its springing not from an artless and measureless, but from a conscious and cultivated credulity" (171). Here is the romancer drawing in the reader as far



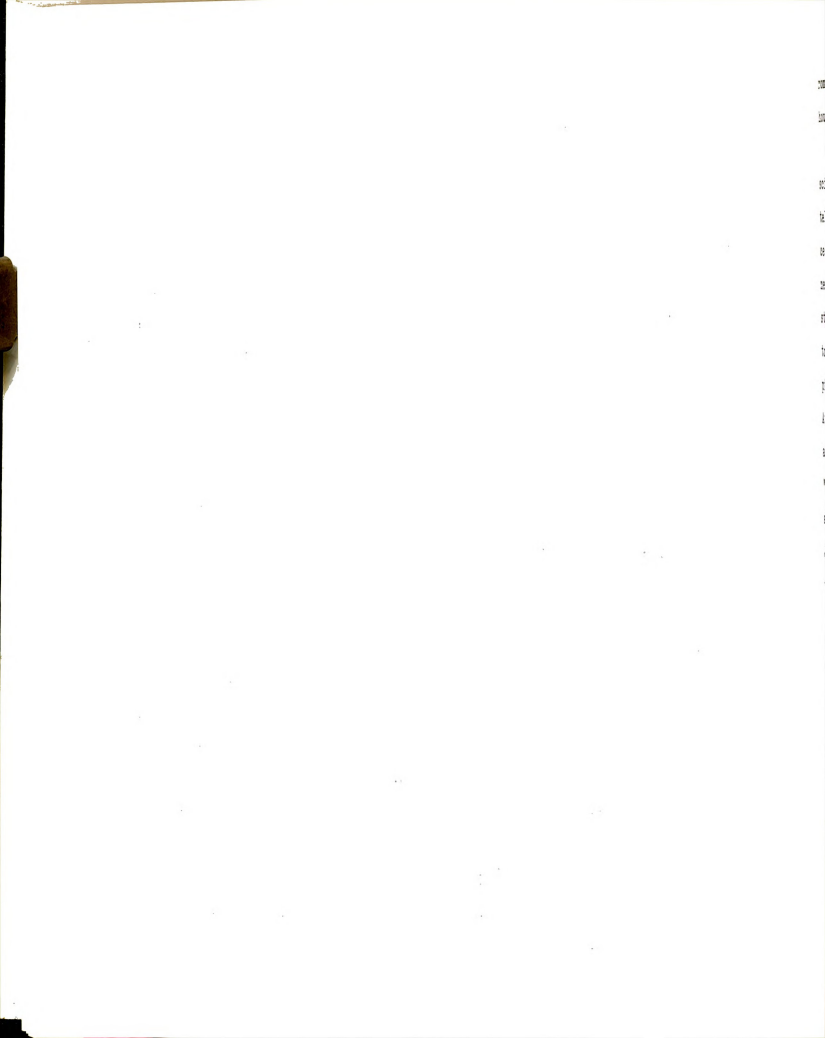
as possible, then cutting the cord connected to reality, hoping not to disturb him. To succeed in this mixing of reality and romance, the artist must portray "the indispensable history of someone's normal relation to something" as well as the abnormal relation creating the drama (Prefaces, 256). Consequently the artist needs to show a "human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets" the unusual experience; more particularly, since the "safest" means of proceeding with "moving accidents and mighty mutations and strange encounters" is through showing "their second" rather than "their first exhibition," the focus must be on that consciousness experiencing in retrospection (256). The events may be pure romance, but the sense of perception must be real. The ghost tale, then, shows the past haunting the mind of a central character, combining the romance of the strange with the realism of consciousness.²¹

In addition, of course, the usual conventions of romance are manipulated for romantic or realistic effects. "The Turn of the Screw" parallels "The Madonna of the Future" in its initial use of a narrator figure to objectify the tale, but once Douglas fulfills that function and also surrounds his story with mystery, he disappears. He has an ambiguous relation to the story, but the reader soon forgets that in the first-person narrative of the governess which follows the introduction. For most of the tale Douglas is not the reader's "normal" connection to the strange



happenings. Instead Mrs. Grose and the children, inasmuch as the reader perceives their interpretation of the events, form the normal relation to the history of Bly. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel, of course, are the "abnormal agents," and the reader sees both them and the representatives of normality through the governess.

The trick in "The Turn of the Screw" is to quiet the reader's suspicions of the unreal and portray the governess's consciousness so that the normal and the abnormal are nearly impossible to extricate. The greatest effect of terror and the greatest representation of consciousness--in short the best of both romance and realism--can be maintained by achieving this mixture. So just as in the "Madonna," James plays with the conventions of the genre to keep the reader believing. Douglas's reluctance to tell a story never told before adds to its credibility even as it heightens the suspense and the expectation of the unusual. The bachelor in Harley Street is a romantic element, "such a figure as had never risen, save in a dream or an old novel," but this image is made real through its connection with the governess's immature impression. That image arises "before a fluttered anxious girl out of a Hampshire vicarage" (XII, 153). Similarly, instead of arriving in a portentous storm (which James will use later for another purpose), the governess pulls up at Bly on a beautiful summer day (150, 158). The house is not darkly Gothic, but light and airy, and flowers bloom profusely. But neither is Bly a dream "castle of



romance"; instead it is a "big ugly antique but convenient house" (163).

The tale soon revolves around the governess's consciousness in more than the sense that she is the voice telling the tale; the question of how much that she perceives is real and how much is fantasy begins almost immediately to loom. James now finds a use for that portentous storm--to reveal the lady's sensitive emotions. She begins to hear noises with almost preternatural acuteness, suspiciously like some of Poe's well-known insane narrators. At first the governess felt like a cinderella (159), but her apprehension soon turns the situation into a Jane Eyre or a "mystery of Udolpho" with a possibly "insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement" (179). James resurrects this old idea just to get it out of the way. Clearly the thought is meant more to characterize the governess than to suggest that in fact Bly is an asylum.

The reader seesaws back and forth between the romantic and the realistic, the ideal and the ugly. Sometimes the order in which information is presented determines which way an event is interpreted. When the governess sees a man on one of the old towers symbolically "dating . . . from a romantic revival," she feels that "her imagination had, in a flash, turned real" (175). The reader, though his suspicion may be rising, is still quite ready to accept her tale. The incident seems authentic enough--until the next chapter ends with the discovery that the man she has allegedly

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seen is dead. Other reversals cause the reader to reassess the situation. The children change from romantically perfect to fiendishly evil in the governess's mind, and from impossible angels to vulnerable human beings in the reader's. Quint's death goes from a mysterious and perhaps horrible affair to a sordid and vulgar alcoholic's accident (195, 198). Yet the reader is suspended, unsure of his interpretation, through James's upsetting uses of conventions. When conventions become unconventional, interpretations grow uncertain. The old variations on midnight confrontations with ghosts alternate with a solitary mid-morning walk through a graveyard and broad-daylight showdowns with each. Strangely, the reader accepts most of the account as natural, for he is fully absorbed in the governess's quest, but he begins to understand at least intuitively the pattern of her obsession. She wants to be a saviour. A candle blown-out by Miles in an airtight room makes the governess start as though a hurricane had gone through (222). Since she wants so badly to redeem the children, ghosts and danger there shall be. Mrs. Grose apparently sees no ghosts, and the children never admit seeing any either. Flora is frightened out of her wits; Miles is literally scared to death--but by the governess, not ghosts. In the most interesting reversal of the novel, the governess begins haunting the children. Mrs. Grose steps in to protect Flora (280-81), but Miles--who clearly shows that he sees no ghosts by misidentifying the one the governess perceives and by being unable to

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locate it--Miles is forced into the protective arms of his tormenter.

This interpretation of the tale is far from universal, but in a sense the particular interpretation does not matter.²² As James stresses in the prefaces, he is striving for an effect, and the particular details of reality are subordinate to that effect. I have been arguing that the governess is a distorting narrator, a portrayal of a very romantic imagination. Her distorted sense of the passage of time and inability to distinguish the older tower from the newer one reinforce this interpretation, for an inaccurate sense of the past and the passage of time in James is a common index of unreliability. Consider this passage, for example (and cf. 221, 280-83):

I call it time, but how long was it? I can't speak to the purpose to-day of the duration of these things. That kind of measure must have left me: they couldn't have lasted as they actually appeared to me to last. (185)

The governess enters some kind of trance when she sees a ghost. After the confrontation with Miss Jessel by the pond with Flora and Mrs. Grose, she apparently faints and loses her sense of much of the afternoon. James uses the tradition of time stopping, of "prodigious palpable hushes" and "a stillness, a pause of all life" when the ghosts appear, to heighten again both the romance of the supernatural and the realistic portrayal of the governess's abnormal consciousness (245-46; cf. 174, 282-83). At least I think so. The tale is so beautifully complex that

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certainty may be impossible; it is the strangest hybrid of romance and realism James ever produced. Martha Banta, summarizing James's use of Gothicism, might as well be describing "The Turn of the Screw":

Henry James knew the tradition of the Gothic novel well. It was simple for him to take its basic conventions of character, setting, and plot and to transform them into something which kept many of the external trappings of old Gothicism while adding the terrors of a new Gothicism which--like the new psychology of the period--revealed the self as victim of its own self-villainy.²³

"The Turn of the Screw" is midway between the old ghost tale and the new case history. Separating the two is extremely difficult in the work--which is probably why it is so intriguing, and why it is so clear a progression in the fusion of the past and present, the synthesis of the romantic and the real.

Perhaps the most impressive manipulation of convention, however, occurs in those works which are apparently more realistic. Critics have argued over the verisimilitude of The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors, particularly the appropriateness of the endings, but what is generally questioned is the romantic sensibility of Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether in making their final decisions, not the romanticism of James. The works seem to be realistic records of characters with romantic sensibilities, not romantic distortions of realistic experience. Each abounds with the conventions of romance, modified to create the illusion of reality. But James does not deprive his works of their romantic possibilities just to insure

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R.W. Stallman, among others, spotted Isabel Archer's romantic tendencies long ago, a defect that makes her mistake Madame Merle for a French femme du monde and glorify a shell like Gilbert Osmond.²⁴ The discovery is not startling; after all, "the idea of the whole thing," James remarks in his notebooks, "is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness . . . finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional" (Notebooks, 15). But few have noticed how thoroughly laced with romantic conventions the novel is, nor how James manages to get away with them. The early romance with Lord Warburton is a good example. As soon as Isabel hears of him, she exclaims, "Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" (III, 18). And it is--so remarkably like a novel of the most romantic sort that only the cleverest technique makes the affair come off as real. Her expectations are formed almost exclusively by English fiction. Anticipating potential problems in conquering Lord Warburton, Isabel falls back for protection on a fictional commonplace about Englishmen: "I don't believe they're very nice to girls; they 're not nice to them in the novels" (76). Soon after she meets him, she puts him in another fictional category: ". . . at the end of an evening spent in his society she scarce fell short of seeing him--though quite without luridity--as a hero of

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romance" (91). Warburton does not have a chance to break through a sensibility so prejudiced by literature. Fearing that he is turning amorous, Isabel prepares herself with the recollection that "she had often heard that the English are a highly eccentric people, and she had even read in some ingenious author that they are at bottom the most romantic of races" (112). How carefully James is preparing for the proposal scene! Just so the reader will not be put off by its conventionality, James gives an explicit warning like Brecht of what is to come, so the reader's interest can be directed at something besides the romantic plot: "Yes, assuredly . . . the English are the most romantic people in the world, and Lord Warburton was about to give an example of it" (145). He certainly is. He plays in fact the standard hero of romance for which Isabel has billed him, beginning with a heartfelt but incredibly trite confession: "I lost no time, I fell in love with you then. It was at first sight, as the novels say; I know now that's not a fancy-phrase, and I shall think better of novels for evermore" (147; cf. 152). One reason the reader ignores Warburton's conventional approach, even in the typical garden, is that the focus is strongly on Isabel's mind. As they begin their romantic walk, the reader enters her thoughts:

It suddenly came upon her that her situation was one which a few weeks ago she would have deemed deeply romantic: the park of an old English country-house, with the foreground embellished by a 'great' (as she supposed) nobleman in the

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act of making love to a young lady who, on careful inspection, should be found to present remarkable analogies with herself. But if she was now the heroine of the situation she succeeded scarcely the less in looking at it from the outside. (146)

The scene hardly seems real to Isabel because it is so conventional, so much like the novels she has read. Instead of feeling that what she imagined has turned real, she senses the real abstracting into her imagination--thus her sense of dissociation from the scene. Paradoxically, she rejects Warburton because he is too romantic; marrying him would be a romantic escape, and she wants a romantic escapade (186-89). All the romance, all the unreality of the scene consequently is associated for the reader with Isabel's conceptions, so the literal conventionality of it slips right by.

In addition, of course, James has broken enough conventions in creating Warburton to make his lapse in the garden a romantic eccentricity. The lord does not believe in his social position, favoring disestablishment and marked social change (98-100), and he criticizes the Touchetts for being "mediaeval" in holding "ideas that people in England nowadays were ashamed to confess to" (95). So even as she considers him a romantic, Isabel takes into account his political leanings as "a nobleman of the newest pattern, a reformer, a radical, a contemner of ancient ways" (95), and the fact that the family had been liberal "from the earliest times" (95, 108). Since Isabel is so "devoted

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to romantic effects," Warburton invites her to see his "very curious old place" and to meet his sisters and brother in the clergy (94). Lockleigh is "of course . . . a noble picture" to Isabel, in spite of alternations:

Within, it had been a good deal modernised--some of its best points had lost their purity; but as they saw it from the garden, a stout grey pile, of the softest, deepest, most weather-fretted hue, rising from a broad, still moat, it affected the young visitor as a castle in a legend. (108)

The reader less romantically inclined will notice more that is not typical at Lockleigh. Unlike in most novels, Warburton's sisters get along beautifully with Isabel, and his brother holding the "family living" in the church turns out to be a very unorthodox wrestler (104)! Isabel is the only one ready "to fight to the death: I mean for the heritage of the past"--not the Warburtons (107). They are modern.

Isabel is surrounded by romance, but it is romance that has the disturbing habit of turning into disagreeable reality. Caspar Goodwood, an explicit representative of "the strong man in pain" kind of romance (221), will not stay on the shelf of memory provided for him; he keeps turning up at the awkwardest times, and ends in being the only person with an unfulfilled claim on her (IV, 434). Reversing another expectation, Osmond likes him better than any of Isabel's suitors. Everything Isabel thinks is romantic somehow loses its aura--for the reader if not for the girl. Mrs. Touchett's romantic house in Florence, host

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to three murders in its history (III, 35), is a fabulous home to the girl: "to live in such a place was, for Isabel, to hold to her ear all day a shell of the sea of the past. This vague eternal rumour kept her imagination awake." But James connects this old romance to present reality by pointing out that "the carven rafters and pompous frescoes of the sixteenth century looked down on the familiar commodities of the age of advertisement," and that Mrs. Touchett "found compensation for the darkness of her frontage in the modicity of the rent" (354-55).

Furthermore, Henrietta Stackpole keeps dropping in to bring the romantic back to reality. When Isabel describes "a swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see" as her "idea of happiness," Henrietta remarks that she is "like the heroine of an immoral novel" (235). And Miss Stackpole is always poking holes in romantic visions of history, royalty and nobility:

'They try to make us believe in America that they 're all handsome and magnificent and that they wear wonderful robes and crowns.'

'Ah, the robes and crowns are gone out of fashion,' said Lord Warburton, 'like your tomahawks and revolvers.'

'I'm sorry for that; I think an aristocracy ought to be splendid,' Henrietta declared. 'If it's not that, what is it?' (181)

She likes Mr. Bantling for his irreverence to the past, as in his calling Julius Caesar a "'cheeky old boy'," and is reminded by the chariot ruts in old Rome of American trolley tracks (414). Henrietta is an inveterate advocate of the new, the present and the future against the romantic past.

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She pronounces St. Peter's dome inferior to the Capitol in Washington (425), and Lord Nelson does not impress her because "that's the past--I don't care about the past; I want to see some of the leading minds of the present. I won't say of the future, because I don't believe much in your future' (199). In spite of her extreme opinions and bad taste, Henrietta is good for Isabel's romantic haze, perceiving remarkably of her that "You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views--that's your great illusion, my dear" (310-11). But of course such pronouncements create greater reactions in the attentive reader than in Isabel; for the reader recognizes her romanticism--Isabel does not. Consequently the reader is convinced that the novel is a realistic portrayal, charging all the romance to the American girl.

There are several people feeding Isabel's taste for the romantic and the past in Henrietta's absence, of course. The Parisian-American Mrs. Luce claims to be "one of the generation of 1830," which she explains to those not in on the joke by saying, "Oh yes, I'm one of the romantics" (303). Her husband is a reactionary who prefers the Empire to the Republic: "it's no use talking, the style's all gone. Napoleon knew what the French people want" (305). Then there is Edward Rosier, whom Isabel knew as a child, and whose name suggests that he has an even rosier view of the past than she has. His rooms are incredibly "decorated with old Spanish altar-lace," and he dislikes London because

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of its furniture: "no Louis Quinze--nothing of the first Empire; nothing but their eternal Queen Anne" (305, 308).

Isabel can ignore Edward for the most part. The most dangerous purveyors of romance, whom she cannot ignore, are Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond. Isabel thinks Madame Merle is the perfect femme du monde, and she is fascinated by Osmond as much because he is connected with her as for his own merits: "She felt that Madame Merle's ties always somehow had histories, and such an impression was part of the interest created by this inordinate woman" (352). Osmond, of course, is the connoisseur of supposedly "perfect" rooms--"old cabinets, pictures, tapestries, surfaces of faded silk" (348). His villa is not so perfect from James's view, however, as pejorative adjectives deliberately take the romance away:

. . . a variety of those faded hangings of damask and tapestry, those chests and cabinets of carved and time-polished oak, those angular specimens of pictorial art in frames as pedantically primitive, those perverse-looking relics of mediaeval brass and pottery, of which Italy has long been the not quite exhausted storehouse.

James brings this ancient flavor jarringly up to date:

These things kept terms with articles of modern furniture in which large allowance had been made for a lounging generation; it was to be noticed that all the chairs were deep and well padded and that much space was occupied by a writing-table of which the ingenious perfection bore the stamp of London and the nineteenth century. There were books in profusion and magazines and newspapers, and a few small, odd, elaborate pictures, chiefly in water-colour. (327)

Isabel cannot perceive the fault in Osmond's living "by himself, in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about

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art and beauty and history," with the rooms "full of romantic objects" and "everything . . . in the last degree curious and precious" (377-78). She cannot judge the man's sensibility properly, though the construction of his house, with its "imposing front" but "somewhat incommunicative character," reveals its owner perfectly:

It was a mask, not the face of a house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way--looked off behind, into splendid openness and the range of the afternoon light. (325)

Osmond puts on an imposing front as an aesthete of the most forward-looking taste; but in reality, like his house, he faces the other direction, open only to the afternoon light of tradition and the past. Similarly, he puts on a mask of not caring for applause, but behind the pose he works only for external effect (IX, 144). Unfortunately, Isabel "carried away an image" of harmony instead of hypocrisy:

. . . the image of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno and holding by the hand a little girl whose bell-like clearness gave a new grace to childhood. The picture had no flourishes, but she liked its lowness of tone and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. (III, 399)

Isabel has no yearning for the most gaudy romantic, but is still captivated by the sweet and sentimental, thinking Osmond has an "old sorrow that sometimes ached today."

Pansy appeals to her romantic inclinations as well. Although she is an American girl of American parents, Pansy is created as the epitome of European convention: "She was like a sheet of blank paper--the ideal jeune fille

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of foreign fiction" (401). She has been brought up "in the old way," and is the incarnation of Osmond's preference for old ways of doing things. As long as Isabel is charmed by Pansy, she is charmed by Osmond. She resists hearing the truth from the Countess Gemini, the profanely pragmatic daughter of a romantic American poetess (IX, 223-24) who takes Henrietta's place as iconoclast, by deliberately keeping Pansy in the room so the Countess cannot disillusion her (88).²⁵ Before long, however, both she and Pansy will pay for their romanticism.

James prepares the reader for his version of an age-old convention by making Pansy the perfect jeune fille, and by recording Ned Rosier's reaction to the Palazzo Roccanera. Everyone else likes it: "But Rosier was haunted by the conviction that at picturesque periods young girls had been shut up there to keep them from their true loves, and then, under the threat of being thrown into convents, had been forced into unholy marriages" (101). He is not a bad prophet. Pansy is kept always within the bounds of the palazzo after Rosier proposes, then is sent back to her old convent school (345). Osmond plays the role of the old villainous father, though "there is to be nothing ascetic," he says, about Pansy's confinement (348). The convention is carefully skirted, yet all its romantic effect is preserved: "But all the same the girl had taken fright . . . poor little Pansy became the heroine of a tragedy" (349). Isabel prevents (after her fashion) any forced and "unholy

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marriage" to Lord Warburton, of course, but Pansy and Rosier are nevertheless romantic types in a typical predicament, slight characters but believable due to their contrast with the surroundings. Conflict as deep as that between Isabel and Osmond can support any number of romantic subplots without loss of verisimilitude. Ned brings the archetypal situation up to date by the pathetic sale of his treasures, thinking that he just is not rich enough for Osmond to accept him as suitor to Pansy. He so clearly adores Pansy in the time-honored manner of youth, worshipping her as a beautiful china doll, that his romanticism seems real. He is so romantic he becomes credibly pathetic.

Meanwhile other romantic bits of the past are dying for Isabel. Old romance is becoming disagreeable reality too quickly. Warburton, who had met Isabel in Rome before her marriage only to lose once more against the appropriate romantic backdrop of the "Dying Gladiator" (6-9), and who has deluded himself for a time that he loves Pansy and not her mother, has at last announced a serious marriage: "Isabel felt as if she had heard of Lord Warburton's death. She had known him as a suitor, and now that was all over" (409). She had known him only in a romantic role, that is, never as a real human being. Ralph Touchett, who had fought Isabel's romantic disaster by telling her that Osmond looks "like a prince who has abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness and has been in a state of disgust ever since" (III, 358), does in fact die, having left her a romantically secret

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inheritance of thousands and a very real legacy of pain (IV, 414). At long last Isabel sees the ghost of Gardencourt, the one she could see only after suffering--but it is Ralph's.²⁶ Again James carries off the romance, including a remorseful deathbed scene and sentimental facts such as the observation that her old room at Gardencourt had not been slept in since she left (405), by keeping the sentiment attached to the characters instead of the reader; for the reader has known of Ralph's love and sacrifice for a long time. Both the tragedy and the reality are reinforced by tough old Mrs. Touchett's hard grief, as she tells Isabel who has lost her baby that she should be glad at this moment she has no son.

Romance dies with ever increasing rapidity. Even fiercely American Henrietta Stackpole is disappointing, as she surrenders so easily to the shallow Englishman Bantling (400-01). Isabel has left far behind the "romantic island" of her first time in Rome with Osmond (12); has left behind the adolescent romance of keeping her engagement secret from her sisters (34); has left behind the baby as dead as her marriage--an early touch of hard reality in the romance; and has discovered that in her romantic delusion she has been married by a mistress to her lover for the sake of their illegitimate child. What sounds like bleeding heart romance of the dampest type is made real by the focus on the loser of the blood. She endures, for she has all Rome to uphold her suffering, in perhaps the most romantic passage in the novel:

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. . . in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet were still upright, she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew objective, so that as she sat in a sun-warmed angle on a winter's day, or stood in a mouldy church to which no one came, she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. Small it was, in the large Roman record, and her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater. She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. That was what came to her in the starved churches, where the marble columns, transferred from pagan ruins, seemed to offer her a companionship in endurance and the musty incense to be a compound of long-unanswered prayers. (327-28)

Like a martyr she goes to the desolate Colosseum, this time to sit appropriately "in the despoiled arena" (340). The long past of Rome casts its shadow into the present; the force of legend touches the suffering of a one-time chit. James can get away with such romantic symbolism and eloquence because the progression of the whole novel is behind them, and because the pain will be resolved not by an unrealistic happy ending or desperate action but by slow inner reconciliation and renunciation. Even a final passionate scene with Goodwood, who burns "I'm yours for ever--for ever and ever" (434), cannot bring about the usual resolution. James is determined not only to avoid the happy ending, but to make certain the reader notices the contrast. And since James has prepared the reader for the scene with Goodwood by its romantic predecessors in the same garden, not even its romance can deflect the sense of realism; James makes

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Strangely, it is Isabel's consistent romanticism that makes the novel seem real, as her romantic sense of duty and order motivate her return. James has raised the record of her unheroic and limited adventures to the height of the romantic, depriving romance of its conventions to preserve its effects. Henrietta Stackpole's "cheap comfort" for Caspar Goodwood, the lightly romantic advice "just you wait," ambiguously "added, on the spot, thirty years to his life" (438). The reader is caught wondering whether Goodwood will live in romantic hope for another thirty years, or has aged thirty years by recognizing that hope is vain. Critics wonder how long Isabel's decision will last as well, and how she will carry it out. James intended it so. His mixture of romantic suspense and realistic probability has captured the best of both modes.

The Ambassadors, like its companion works of the major phase, is surely one of the finest fusions of realism and romance in the Jamesian canon. The endings of The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl surpass in tension and climax the quiet note ending The Ambassadors, but the Lambinet scene and its aftermath are brilliant records of romantic illusion and realistic disillusion battling toward a full appreciation of experience. Helping produce this rich effect are myriad modifications of the conventions of romance throughout the work. Perhaps the most striking is

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In The Portrait of a Lady Rome and its history become a backdrop reflecting all human suffering, a masterful development compared to the presence of Rome in Roderick Hudson and "Daisy Miller," though the city has some symbolic value even in these works. Similarly, the romantic qualities of Venice are well adapted, though in very different ways, to "The Aspern Papers" and The Wings of the Dove.²⁷ And James can make virtually anything out of London, as the contrasts in the settings of "A Passionate Pilgrim," "A London Life," The Princess Casamassima, The Wings of the Dove, The Golden Bowl and The Sense of the Past amply show. The city is a storehouse of settings for the artist, as James discovers seeking frontispieces for his collected edition: "London ends by giving one absolutely everything one asks" (Prefaces, 333-35). No wonder James so often selects the city when considering the proper milieu for his characters and themes.

Paris, however, is a different proposition. Writing to Howells in 1876, James disparagingly remarks, "Paris itself meanwhile is a sort of painted background which keeps shifting and changing, and which is always there, to be looked at when you please, and to be most easily ignored when you don't" (Letters, I, 48). London is just as shifty, but James knows what to do with its moods, how to read even its "great featureless Philistine vista" (Prefaces, 335). He knows its atmospheres, its nooks and repositories of

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national character. In contrast Paris "strikes me as a monstrous massive flower of national decadence, the biggest temple ever built to material joys," though "with a deal of beauty still in its great expansive symmetries and perspectives--and such a beauty of light."²⁸ Paris reminds him of New York, both cities having a cosmopolitan air difficult to define as peculiarly its own.²⁹ Consequently James felt at sea when setting a major work there, and maintained that few novelists other than Frenchmen had done it well. He criticizes Edith Wharton for using Paris in The Reef because the action is "unrelated and unREFERRED save in the most superficial way to its milieu and background . . . The notorious wickedness of Paris isn't at all required to bring about the conditions of the Prologue" (Letters, II, 284). He knew what he was talking about, for he had tried a similar experiment, The American, and felt he had produced a work only vaguely connected with France. Granted, he had avoided the worst conventions of Parisian romance among Anglo-Saxon writers. Newman is not jilted, nor does he execute a Gothic revenge, but only because as James notes in the preface, "I doubtless even then felt that the conception of Paris as the concentrated scene of rash infatuations and bold bad treacheries belongs, in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, to the infancy of art" (Prefaces, 24). Nevertheless, Paris is not essential to the story, with neither its history nor its literary portrait functioning integrally enough to demand its presence.

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To write a proper tale of Paris, then, would be to avoid the triteness of its literary history yet use its shifting romantic qualities to the full. In his notebooks James first considers a story about a married couple who can be happy only if they stay out of Paris, portraying the city as the corrupter of marriages (Notebooks, 113). He decides to develop, however, something even more traditional than that--a variation on the European convention of the mature woman initiating a younger male into society, somewhat comparable to Winterbourne's "study" in Geneva.³⁰ This audacious flirting with arch-romance, in order to be carried off as realistic, is filtered through a slightly less conventional plot, that of a middle-aged man nostalgically discovering that he has lost his youth. But even this precaution does not relieve James's discomfort with the setting in the early stages: "I don't altogether like the banal side of the revelation of Paris--it's so obvious, so usual to make Paris the vision that opens his eyes, makes him feel his mistake" (Notebooks, 226). Once James decides on an American rather than an English hero, however, he feels the setting "must be Paris" due to the old American image of the city as a sinner's heaven--an early convention of the international theme.³¹ Yet that image is precisely the problem:

There was the dreadful little old tradition, one of the platitudes of the human comedy, that people's moral scheme does break down in Paris; that nothing is more frequently observed; that hundreds of thousands of more or less cynical

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persons annually visit the place for the sake of the probable catastrophe, and that I came late in the day to work myself up about it.
(Prefaces, 316)

The situation is so surrounded by romantic conventions that only James would try to rescue it. He succeeds precisely because the tradition is "one of the vulgarest in the world"; it is workable "simply because its vulgarity is so advertised." In fact the legend of Paris "had the great merit of sparing me preparations," since the notoriety could be used as a basic presumption to be manipulated.³² And just as the focus on Isabel Archer's consciousness diverts the reader from the romance of the plot, so Strether's "blest imagination" would create a "drama of discrimination." Strether would not be vulgarly tempted; rather, he would go through a period of "intense reflexion" and transformation of consciousness, so that the "surrounding scene" would be "a minor matter, a mere symbol" of a finer kind of life than provincial New England could imagine (Prefaces, 316). The result, as one critic maintains, is that Paris in The Ambassadors is "not the wicked city of the popular view, nor is it the city of reality; it is a great poetic symbol expressing and vivifying the themes of the novel."³³

Like a straw man, the legend of Paris as sin city is set up fairly early in the novel; Chad Newsome, in the judgment of his relatives in Woollett, Massachusetts, has been seduced and corrupted by a Parisian femme du monde, so supposedly stalwart Lambert Strether is sent as an

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ambassador to summon the prodigal home. The focus is on the romance of Strether's adventure, however, not Chad's, for the reader is introduced first to the older gentleman and only gradually to the alleged situation of the younger. By exposing Chad's state only indirectly and slowly, James helps the reader swallow its conventionality, and also establishes Strether as the focal point. With the name "Lewis Lambert" (XXI, 14), taken from one of Balzac's more autobiographical novels which incorporates his theory of the will, Strether is pictured in contrast as a man who has exercised little will power, and to whom comparatively little has happened. He realizes this lack at age fifty-five, creating "all the romantic sympathy necessary" for the story (Notebooks, 374), and concludes deterministically during the crisis in Gloriani's garden that life is just a mold "into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured" (XXI, 218). Balzac also believed in environmental determinism, but when he wrote Louis Lambert he was arguing for the development of a spiritual force in man as well, an almost Swedenborgian concept of will power (volonté). Just as in some of his earlier stories, James is using Balzac's figure as a suggestive literary analogue for his hero in Paris.

It is Strether's conception of Paris that forms the romantic background of the novel. In no other work is the connection between the romantic and the past so clear. The link begins as soon as Strether gets off the boat in Chester,

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England, a medieval town with a cathedral and crumbling walls (XXI, 15). Picked up by an attractive middle-aged woman, Strether walks romantically by the wall as he had "in the far-off time, at twenty-five; but that, instead of spoiling it, only enriched it for present feeling and marked his renewal as a thing substantial enough to share" (16). He had been to Europe with his now deceased wife and son, so his nostalgia is notably thick. In fact, as he tells Maria Gostrey, "I'm always considering something else; something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment" (19-20). Maria, mysterious in her history, tries to divert Strether toward a more carpe diem attitude, a sense of the present rather than just a sense of the past (20, 35-36). But in fact she helps immerse him more in the past, whetting his appetite for Europe. He feels that a "woman of fashion was floating him into society," a parody of Chad's conventional initiation through Madame de Vionnet, and that "these first walks in Europe were in fact a kind of finely lurid intimation of what one might find at the end of that process" (40-41). Maria has cost Strether his American past, he says, "in one great lump"; but she will help replace it with the past of Paris (45).³⁴

To keep Strether from floating too far away from reality, James provides another American, Strether's old friend Waymarsh, as a companion. He is a foil for Strether--a financial success where Strether is a failure, yet making Strether's failure more attractive; the standard image of

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"some great national worthy of the earlier part of the mid-century," the charismatic "personal type" with penetrating eyes and a beard like Abraham Lincoln.³⁵ He makes Strether's American profile seem very anti-heroic, but emphasizes Strether's adaptability to Europe by being so uncomfortable and out of place there (26).

Arriving in Paris, Strether and Maria continue their playful mock-romance. Maria wears a very low-cut dress (50), and when Strether explains melodramatically that he may lose "everything," she promises to be his "till death!" (75). Clearly the two are intoxicated by the Paris atmosphere. Strether is too flattered and unused to flirting to be tempted by Maria, so their "affair" becomes a fine parody of the Parisian fling. The situation is made even more comic--and thus more realistic through contrast with serious seduction--by Waymarsh's sober disapproval and Maria's constant "vision of gold" (66). If she is not a gold-digger, she is at least well acquainted with the value of money (cf. 119-21). Any unreality in the scene is quickly attached, in addition, to Strether's consciousness, for he sees a "world of types"; people in the audience of a play seem "interchangeable with those on the stage" (53); on the streets "little brisk figures, figures whose movement was as the tick of the great Paris clock, take their smooth diagonal from point to point" (79). Again this vision is subordinated to his sense of the "crowded past," into which even Waymarsh is immersed as a historic

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landmark (83), as Strether senses his previous visit re-viving, "feeling the general stirred life of connexions long since individually dropped" (86).

Sometimes he is jolted briefly back to the present, however, such as when he misses the palace that has been demolished in his absence. Disappointed by such unromantic changes, his "historical sense" of the city "often winces like a touched nerve" (79). Nevertheless, enough of the romantic past remains to create something more serious than a case of nostalgia. Strether begins to feel the "meagreness" of his personal past, "vague and comprehensive, stretching back like some unmapped Hinterland from a rough coast-settlement" (87). Feeling inferior, he is beginning to be seduced by Paris:

. . . a vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seemed all surface one moment seemed all depth the next. (89)

His scruples still keep him from buying all the romance, symbolized by the gold volumes of unrealistic fiction in the book-stalls (87, 93-94), but its attraction is beginning to deceive him like the harlot Babylon. James is getting good mileage from the romantic image of Paris.

Chad enters the romance indirectly from the traditional Latin Quarter, the "scene of rather ominous legend," just "like so many young men in fiction as well as in fact" (90). James brings this romantic milieu into realistic focus by

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pointing out its elements of "the usual" as well as "the immemorial," and by remarking that if Chad took up with the conventional "Musette and Francine," they were "Musette and Francine vulgarized by the larger evolution of the type" (90, 93). And since Chad does not appear on stage in person yet, his traditional setting melts unobtrusively into the symbolic background.

To Strether, walking through the Quarter in the hope of brushing "the wing of the stray spirit of youth" before meeting Chad, the old arcade and "shock-headed slouch-hatted loiterers" with "young intensity of type" are as close as he can come to a vicarious renewal of his young manhood. He is constantly thinking of his responsibility to Mrs. Newsome in Woollett, and cannot fully enjoy the pleasure of the moment: "There was youth for Strether at this moment in everything but his own business" (98). More and more his choice is becoming irresponsible romance or sober reality, past or present, Europe or America. He cannot concentrate on both. Fortunately, since Chad is not back from Nice, the business can wait, and he can indulge in a romantic lull with impunity in the company of the young man on Chad's balcony (cf. Notebooks, 388). The only alternative is his dreary hotel, which "expressed the presence of Waymarsh" even when Waymarsh is not there. With John Little Bilham, Strether can "escape that alternative" for a while (98-99).

Returning inevitably but ambivalently to Waymarsh, Strether tells him that "There's no doubt I want you to

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come down on me and squash me," which Waymarsh performs with alacrity (108-09). Strether is torn, through the clash in social conventions, between the beauty of Parisian life and its dubious morality (118). He is attracted by Miss Barrace's freedom and familiarity and strange combination of the old and new (113, 116); by the serenity Europe has given the American Little Bilham, who serves for Strether as a John the Baptist kind of forerunner of Chad (125-26); and by the way Maria meets "boys . . . with the air of old Parisian practice" (128). But he is continually haunted by his New England scruples, and has the uneasy feeling that unless he forces Chad on the boat, he may be burning his own ship to America behind him (129-33). Maria divines part of his predicament in getting Chad home: "Oh, I see what you're thinking--that Paris is an awful place, and that it may be awfully difficult" (Notebooks, 386). In a fine reversal, however, the task of removing Chad is easy. What is difficult is believing Chad should go back to America. For the boy that Strether remembers appears, at long last, neither as the old immature Chad nor as a rogue from the Latin Quarter, but as a sophisticated young man of the world. He has apparently been forced to mature by the "crammed consciousness of Paris" (137, 142); "Strether had never seen the thing so done before--it was perhaps a specialty of Paris" (150). Strether's scruples are completely off guard. If Chad is a pagan, Woollett could use some pagans. With the aid of Maria, who identifies herself

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as the kind of woman that Mrs. Newsome fears Chad has taken up with, Strether rejects the New England suspicions, and begins to question whether Woollett is morally obtuse as well as aesthetically deprived.

He is now a pushover for the romantic effects of Gloriani's garden, for his scruples are undermined even before he has met the piece de resistance of the Parisian feast, the incarnation of old Paris, Madame de Vionnet (cf. Notebooks, 374). The sculptor's garden reveals the "range of the immeasurable town," the "survival, transmission, association" of the thick past still living as a "cherished remnant" (195-96). Gloriani is himself the archetypal romantic artist, a "dazzling prodigy of type," with an artist's sensitive face and "penetrating radiance" and mystery (196-99). Strether drinks in talk claiming that Paris is "always as charming as this; it's as if, by something in the air, our squalor didn't show. It puts us all back--into the last century" (201). Once again the romantic is indissolubly linked with the past. Mademoiselle de Vionnet, whom Strether presumes is Chad's interest rather than her mother, first strikes him as a type from Woollett, and he thinks Chad may have shown an "aboriginal loyalty" in choosing her (213). Like Pansy, however, Jeanne is the typical jeune fille, and Strether soon realizes that her charm is not Woollett's at all, but a foreign note of perfection emanating from Madame de Vionnet (222-23); cf. 256). Comparing such elegance to his own pallor, Strether feels it

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is "just simply too late" for him to be fine, and he bursts into a torrent of carpe diem advice to Bilham (217). This scene, the germinal one for the novel (Prefaces, 307), is potentially very sentimental and pathetic. To keep Strether's emotion from distorting the reader's perception of the scene, James points out the incongruity of the cause and the effect (cf. Notebooks, 373-74):

It was nothing new to him, however, as we know, that a man might have--at all events such a man as he--an amount of experience out of any proportion to his adventures; so that, though it was doubtless no great adventure to sit on there with Miss Gostrey and hear about Madame de Vionnet, the hour, the picture, the immediate, the recent, the possible--as well as the communication itself, not a note of which failed to reverberate--only gave the moments more of the taste of history. (227-28).

All the romantic effect, carefully preserved, is charged explicitly to Strether's consciousness, not to distortions of plot or setting. His retrospective temperament filters experience for the delicate romantic note, but carefully screens out the gaudy.

Soon, however, his sense of the romantic begins to vibrate at a high pitch, especially in his impressions of Madame de Vionnet, so James must keep the reader constantly inside Strether's mind. Not that Strether is tritely in love with her; she excites "some more distinctively disinterested aesthetic, intellectual, social, even, so to speak, historic sense in him" than pure romance would dictate (Notebooks, 392). Even though Strether's mind is

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highly stimulated, then, it is emotionally controlled, as the reader views Madame de Vionnet and her environment almost exclusively through his eyes:

The house, to his restless sense, was in the high homely style of an elder day, and the ancient Paris that he was always looking for--sometimes intensely felt, sometimes more acutely missed--was in the immemorial polish of the wide waxed staircase and in the fine boiseries, the medallions, mouldings, mirrors . . . He seemed at the very outset to see her in the midst of possessions not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary cherished charming.

. . . he found himself making out, as a background of the occupant, some glory, some prosperity of the First Empire, some Napoleonic glamour, some dim lustre of the great legend; elements clinging still to all the consular chairs and mythological brasses and sphinxes' heads and faded surfaces of satin striped with alternate silk.

The place itself went further back--that he guessed, and how old Paris continued in a manner to echo there; but the post-revolutionary period, the world he vaguely thought of as the world of Chateaubriand, of Madame de Stael, even of the young Lamartine, had left its stamp of harps and urns and torches, a stamp impressed on sundry small objects, ornaments and relics. (243-44)

Strether's nostalgic sense of his own past and its lacks is being supplemented with the romance of French history, the sense of old families and "private honour," which he gains through his relation to Madame de Vionnet (246). All previous romance now pales for Strether, from Chad's tasteful home to "Miss Gostrey's little museum of bargains," and James turns his balanced rhetorical style to a high pitch in long paragraphs of finely wrought description (cf. 244-46, 249). Even the presence of the "great Revue" (Revue de Deux Mondes) can be "scarce counted here as a

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modern note" (246). Jeanne de Vionnet becomes a romantic image, "a faint pastel in an oval frame . . . the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing was known but that she had died young" (256). And Madame de Vionnet herself, the very type of the "femme du monde" in a silvery grey dress and collar of emeralds, is like an antique head on a Renaissance coin, a goddess, a sea-nymph, a Cleopatra "half mythological and half conventional: (270).

Not even the fact that Maria Gostrey went to school with her brings Strether back to reality (272). Nor can Miss Barrace, "this picturesque and original lady, who struck him, so oddly, as both antique and modern," retrieve Strether from the romantic past (263). Part of the realism at this very romantic point depends on James's careful control of the reader's knowledge, just a step or two ahead of Strether's own, but not so far that the effects of plot changes are lost.³⁶ Strether does not see--but the reader is beginning to--that Madame de Vionnet has not raised Chad for Jeanne but for herself (279); that she cares a good deal more for Chad than he does for her, which is one reason Strether is deceived (282-83); nor that even if Miss Gostrey has not been commissioned to lead him astray, certainly Miss Barrace and Little Bilham are deliberately keeping the dangerous Waymarsh out of the way (263). The reader is beginning to have a dual perception--of Strether's romantic illusion, and of an increasingly unromantic reality.

As in most of James's long novels, the romantic peak

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comes just after the midpoint. From this mark disagreeable reality begins to penetrate the main character, though the reader's sense of it may accelerate faster than his. Isabel Archer hits the zenith in Rome with Osmond; Strether, using the reverse metaphor due to his scruples, feels he has "touched bottom" in buying the yellow volumes he has been resisting.³⁷ Once again James is parodying the myth of Paris. Strether's great mistake is "trying with head back and eyes aloft, to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo," and his great yielding to temptation, "giving rein for once in a way to the joy of life," is the extravagant purchase of a seventy-volume set of Hugo's works (7)! He has, symbolically, "bought" the whole romance of Paris. Shortly afterward, connecting the symbol more directly with the reality, James shows Strether sitting in Notre Dame. He notices a woman, and once again a convention of romance is at work. She "reminded our friend--since it was the way of nine tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined--of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read . . ." (6-7). The lady, of course, is Madame de Vionnet, and "our friend had indeed at this hour a kind of revelation of her heritage. She was romantic for him far beyond what she could have guessed" (9). Meeting her in Notre Dame connects her with Hugo for Strether, so he speaks to her of "the great romancer and the great romance, and of what, to his imagination, they

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had done for the whole" (10). He is referring, of course, to Hugo's Notre-Dame de Paris, the famous romance set in the fifteenth-century--an allusion that not only shows how far off the deep end Strether has gone, but makes The Ambassadors seem ultra-realistic in comparison. The work is the epitome of those "rash infatuations and bold bad treacheries" that James is trying to avoid (Prefaces, 24). With such a background Madame de Vionnet's upholding of her romantic image by saying she will end as an old woman haunting churches, becomes a portentous hint of her condition rather than the light touch of fancy it would be alone (8).

Paris is now "more than ever penetrating" to Strether. But reality is looming over him like thunderheads. Chad is ready to give up the fling and head back to the drawing-board, but Strether is enjoying a vicarious adolescence (34). Still under the illusion that Chad and Jeanne are in love, Strether reveals that "They're my youth; since somehow at the right time nothing else ever was," and he does not want that youth to end too soon like the first (51). Mrs. Newsome has sent him an ultimatum (36); Waymarsh is uneasy and uncertain; but Strether is as controlled in his excitement as Chad has been (63-65). While Strether grows more and more convinced that Chad is innocent, the folks at home grow more certain that Strether has been seduced, until finally Mrs. Newsome sends in the reserve troops.

When the Pococks arrive, they bring the standard image of Paris with them. Jim Pocock ribs Strether about having

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a fling, but is himself "an example, in characteristically vulgar form, and with all due humourous effect, of the same 'fatal' effect of European opportunities on characters giving way too freely, which Strether more subtly embodies" (Notebooks, 400; cf. XXII, 84-86). Jim's comic shallowness makes his conventional dissipation seem realistic, and the irony of the arch-Americans having "a 'European' affair" carries off Waymarsh's "romance" and "fine, free intimacy" with Sarah Pocock (Notebooks, 401; XXII, 136-37). By their conventional American reaction to Paris, the Pococks make the main plot more real.

But the impression of Paris changes with their arrival as well. From Sarah's incredible "glazed and gilded room," the little touch of the Tuileries and "far-spreading presence of Paris" that eventually filters through to the windows "suggested some parade of the circus" (97). Paris is indeed a temple of pleasure to the moral ranks of Woollett. The Pococks have a more vulgar fling than Chad or Strether. It is no accident that Waymarsh, spending money freely on a woman in the old American way, takes Sarah to see an actual circus (137). She has come to Paris primarily to see a circus. So even though Madame de Vionnet wears the same "discreet and delicate dress" she had worn to Notre Dame, she is unable to break through Sarah's perception of her as just another role-player in the show.

For Strether, however, Madame de Vionnet and her "noble old apartment" are still the same, "full, once more,

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It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that, among old waxed parquets, pale shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra, he had always needfully to reckon with . . . The oddity, the originality, the poetry . . . of Chad's connexion reaffirmed for him its romantic side. (125)

By now the attentive reader is diverging considerably from Strether, having reckoned with his mind more than Strether himself has. Jeanne de Vionnet's engagement to someone other than Chad destroys Strether's naive idea that Chad was being groomed for Jeanne. To Strether the arrangements seem "deep and dim," and although he appreciates them as the "real thing," there is "something ancient and cold" in the tradition (129). Perhaps Strether is beginning to perceive, at least subconsciously, what has been going on. The reader certainly perceives more fully Chad's role in the engagement, apparently arranged to repay Madame de Vionnet and to demonstrate to Sarah their friendship (137-38). Strether is not certain what has happened, but feels left behind by the movement of events. Sarah's room, with only Mamie Pocock in it, "looked empty as only a room can look in Paris, of a fine afternoon, when the faint murmur of the huge collective life, carried on out of doors, strays among scattered objects even as a summer air idles in a lonely garden" (143). In this setting Mamie gives "sharpness, above all, to his sense of the flight of time"; he knows the romance is ending (148). More important, Mamie has

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the real "manner of Woollett," the "true inwardness" that makes it "a loveable thing again to Strether" (153). She is "real" and "right" (172). Yet Strether is working to match her with Little Bilham in order to take her out of contention for Chad, whom she also has come to "save" (166-68, 171). He does not know what is wrong, but he senses something. Everyone seems to be "knowing and watching and waiting" (179). "All voices had grown thicker and meant more things; they crowded on him as he moved about" (210). Waymarsh is enjoying himself now, but Strether is doleful--an uncomfortable and ominous reversal (183-85). Once more the sense of Paris is the pang of lost youth rather than the joy of its recovery (211). The past is no escape; and all too real, "the great sponge of the future," Sarah Pocock, is cutting off all escape in the other direction (232).

With this preparation of malaise in Strether's consciousness, James is ready for the scenes that are at once the most romantic and realistic, most colored by the past yet contemporary, in the entire novel. Since Paris's romantic qualities are so deeply shaken, he must get away from the city to rural France:

It had been as yet for the most part but a land of fancy for him--the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of letters; practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated. (245)

Romance can still "weave itself, for Strether's sense, out of elements mild enough" (245). He remembers a landscape

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painted by Lambinet, one that he would have bought if he had had the money, but that he has never wished to see again for fear of disappointment (246). He doubts, in other words, his romantic sense of the past, fearing that it has idealized reality. He thinks, though, that he can stand to have the whole romantic landscape made real, "to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements--to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour" (246). In fact, however, all Strether wants is romantic escape. He finds the scene in rural France, and it links that day he saw the painting in the Boston shop with the living present: "it was Tremont Street; it was France; it was Lambinet" (246). Not wanting to spoil an idyllic setting with too much reality, he does not ask the name of the stream, for "such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars" (246, 255)--just as the stream of time moves him inevitably on. He has a book to read, doubtless a romance, but there is a portentous reminder in the scene of the more realistic Maupassant (247-48). The stage is set for the most ironic turn in the novel. At this high point of romance, a woman and a man appear on the stream in a boat, making the picture perfect. But it is Chad and Madame de Vionnet; his ideal romantic escape and theirs are the same: "it was as queer as fiction, as farce, that their country could happen to be exactly his" (256). Strether is completely disoriented, so unprepared that he has almost nothing to say. A stark reality has appeared right in the

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middle of the highest romance. He knows now that Chad and the ideal woman of old France are "intimate with the last intimacy" (Notebooks, 409). All are shocked "out there in the eye of nature," with all the romantic aura gone (257-58). Madame de Vionnet babbles in idiomatic French and Chad puts on an awkward attempt at a suave front; "fiction and fable were, inevitably, in the air" (261-62).

Strether realizes now, the finest use of the convention in the novel, that "He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris, and so were they, poor things--how could they all together help being?" (271). James uses the romantic convention directly, unadorned, but has turned it into the sober realism of disillusion. Strether wants punishment to follow, having regressed to his Puritan state. He has not yet assimilated the shock, and does not like "all floating together on the silver stream of impunity" (272):

He reverted in thought to his old tradition, the one he had been brought up on and which even so many years of life had but little worn away; the notion that the state of the wrongdoer, or at least this person's happiness, presented some special difficulty.

But there is no bolt of lightning, no apocalypse; curiously, to Strether, there is not even any apparent guilt. Not knowing fully why, he goes to Madame de Vionnet's apartment, partly because he wants to see her "in her own best conditions," to round off the "typical tale" in some typical romantic way.

The "vague voice of Paris" is still there. As if one

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consummate scene were not enough, James follows the Lambinet confrontation with a splendid fusion of romance and realism in Madame de Vionnet. First Strether renews the romance to the highest pitch of its tension, through his "odd starts of the historic sense, with no warrant but their intensity":

Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of revolution, the smell of the public temper--or perhaps simply the smell of blood.

It was at present queer beyond words, 'subtle,' he would have risked saying, that such suggestions should keep crossing the scene; but it was doubtless the effect of the thunder in the air, which had hung about all day without release. His hostess was dressed as for thunderous times, and it fell in with the kind of imagination we have just attributed to him that she should be in simplest coolest white, of a character so old-fashioned, if he were not mistaken, that Madame Roland must on the scaffold have worn something like it. This effect was enhanced by a small black fichu or scarf, of crape or gauze, disposed quaintly round her bosom and now completing as by a mystic touch the pathetic, the noble analogy. (274-75)

With all the old history and romance and the new threatening thunder, the most romantic of all figures, a woman in distress, holds center stage:

The associations of the place, all felt again; the gleam here and there, in the subdued light, of glass and gilt and parquet, with the quietness of her own note as the center--these things were at first as delicate as if they had been ghostly, and he was sure in a moment that, whatever he should find he had come for, it wouldn't be for an impression that had previously failed him. (275)

The romance of the past is concentrated for Strether in this living moment; all his old sense renewed, he is clearly preparing for an intense experience, knowing it must subside

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quickly into memory. Madame de Vionnet's opportunity for supreme romance is at hand:

She might intend what she would, but this was beyond anything she could intend, with things from far back--tyrannies of history, facts of type, values, as the painters said, of expression--all working for her and giving her the supreme chance, the chance of the happy, the really luxurious few, the chance, on a great occasion, to be natural and simple. (275)

Like shifting Paris, Madame de Vionnet is now a "mild deep person," whereas the night before she was "a person committed to movement and surface and abounding in them" (276; cf. XXI, 89). The romantic and the real are so mixed that Strether cannot tell whether she is perfectly natural or "the perfection of art" (275). Soon it is apparent that she is totally natural, crying all too sincerely; but that only enhances the romance:

She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man. (286)

Just as Madame de Vionnet could put her elbows on a table with grace, the most trivial action, so she could be the most human with the greatest romance.³⁸

Like the great lady, Strether now feels old (288, 307). The illusion of youth has passed. Lesser romances, such as escape with Maria Gostrey, now seem tame; and anyway his old scruples have returned (293-94). A drama awaits him in Woollett, a "great difference," but after Paris that can only be anticlimactic (325). Strether must now be "real"

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and "right" like Mamie Pocock, be himself instead of the questing knight, return to reality now having had his romance:

He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. They came out, on one side, at their hour, jiggled along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jiggled his little course--him too a modest retreat awaited. (322)

As one critic notes, "the action is of course fictitious; . . . it has something of the fable or fairy tale" about it.³⁹ But at the same time "the mark of the real never ceases to show" in Strether (Notebooks, 414). The conventional romance of the plot is continually diverted; the past always merges with the present; the old convention is always made new.

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Notes

¹See Stone, p. 26, and compare Letters, II, p. 227, on George Sand and France.

²Prefaces, pp. 212, 261; cf. Letters, II, p. 61.

³See D.W. Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader (New York, 1964), p. 46, on James's English Hours and Italian Hours.

⁴Cf. The American Scene, pp. 154-55, 266. Hereafter again cited as AS.

⁵Quoted by Lewis, The American Adam, p. 80.

⁶See The Pilgrimage of Henry James (New York, 1925), pp. 10, 21, 43, 69, 78-79, and passim.

⁷Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 40.

⁸Watch and Ward (London, 1923), p. 95, quoted by Stone, p. 76.

⁹Cf. Prefaces, p. 28, in which James recalls the same Maison Vauquer as similar to the hotel in which he wrote The American.

¹⁰Cf. the allusion in The American, II, p. 388, to "Les Liaisons Dangereuses," and the reference in "The Madonna of the Future," XIII, p. 461, to a "terrible little tale of Balzac's" about a painter.

¹¹See Letters, II, p. 130; III, p. 1

¹²On James and Hawthorne, see Bewley, The Complex Fate, pp. 5 and passim, and on Hawthorne's sense of novelty see Lewis, The American Adam, p. 43.

¹³Cf. "Master Eustace," The Complete Tales of Henry James (Philadelphia, 1962-65), ed. Leon Edel, II, p. 341, and "Guest's Confession," II, pp. 404-05. To distinguish references to the tales from references to the New York Edition, the designation "Tales" will precede the volume and page number cited.

¹⁴See I, pp. 123, 259 f., and 486 f. These references and those following are once more, of course, to the New York Edition.

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¹⁵Compare, for example, his projection of a story in which there is not the usual "woman of the people, who in consequence of a stroke of fortune has to play the grande dame, but a grande dame who in consequence of a stroke of fortune has to play a woman of the people" (Notebooks, pp. 184-85). Likewise in The Awkward Age he plans to use the explicit opposite of the typical jeune fille (Notebooks, p. 192), and in "The Next Time" projects a reversal of the usual author's fate--that of a fine author who is unable to write badly enough to be popular, "to make, as it were, a sow's ear out of a silk pure" (Notebooks, p. 180).

¹⁶Until, of course, James revises the work into a play and caters to the audience's desire for a happy ending.

¹⁷John Paterson, "The Language of 'Adventure' in Henry James," American Literature, XXXII (1960), pp. 292-93.

¹⁸Pointed out by Matthiessen and Murdock, editors of the Notebooks, p. 73.

¹⁹Sam S. Baskett, "The Sense of the Present in The Aspern Papers," Publications of the Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLIV (1959), pp. 384-85.

²⁰See Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, p. 165, on the likelihood of Graham Fielder marrying Rosanna Gaw, a possibility which fits Wegelin's theory of growing social fusion in James, but which I question in Chapter III, part 5, pp. 341-47.

²¹Cf. Martha Banta, "The House of the Seven Ushers and How They Grew: A Look at Jamesian Gothicism," Yale Review, LVII (1967), p. 56.

²²For a few of the many "Another Turn of the Screw" type articles, see Gerald Willen, ed., A Casebook on Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" (New York, 1960). Everyone has his own interpretation.

²³Banta, p. 65.

²⁴The Houses that James Built (East Lansing, Mich., 1961), p. 17.

²⁵All page references following are to volume IV unless otherwise designated.

²⁶Cf. III, pp. 64-65, to IV, p. 418.

²⁷See James's remarks in Edel, Letters, p. 59.

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²⁸In a letter by James quoted by Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, p. 334, n. 46.

²⁹Cf. Edel, Letters, p. 99.

³⁰The convention has been Americanized in such characters as Mrs. Robinson of The Graduate (New York, 1964), by Charles Webb, among other characters.

³¹Notebooks, p. 227; cf. "An International Episode," in which the conventional American view of Paris is satirized along with several other conventions.

³²On the value of conventions as preparation savers, see Letters, II, p. 321, on the conventions of French drama; and see Notebooks, p. 131, on The Golden Bowl, once set in Paris.

³³Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), p. 99, quoted by Cargill, pp. 327-28.

³⁴See Stone, pp. 127-50, especially p. 129.

³⁵Cf. Notebooks, p. 327; see XXI, pp. 25, 44, 131.

³⁶"But though in The Ambassadors the point of view is primarily Strether's, and though it appears to be his throughout the book, there is in fact an insidious shifting of it, so artfully contrived that the reader may arrive at the end without suspecting the trick. The reader, all unawares, is placed in a better position for an understanding of Strether's history, better than the position of Strether himself."--Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1921, 1954), p. 162. See Watt's analysis of the introductory page of the novel again, pp. 269-70.

³⁷XXII, p. 7. Unless otherwise designated, all following page references are to volume XXII.

³⁸Cf. Notebooks, p. 413, for James's description of this scene as the climactic one.

³⁹Wegelin, p. 88, in a vague statement that nevertheless describes fairly accurately the reader's suspicion that James is turning realism into myth.

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CHAPTER III

THE INTERNATIONAL THEME: SEARCH FOR A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Introduction

The so-called "international theme" is part of James's earliest and latest formulations of the relationship between the present and the past. It is a growing complex of characters and ideas taking important shape as early as "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871) and continuing to develop through his last, unfinished work, The Sense of the Past. Tracing the changes in the international theme, then, provides a good outline of the changes in the sense of the past in James's thought and fiction.

"International theme" is one of those terms that is so generally used by readers of James that it seems to need no definition--which is convenient, since it can be defined only approximately, with various qualifications inserted to make the definition valid for different periods in James's development. In some stages the "international theme" is only nominally international and barely a theme at all. It gets its name, of course, from the early mixture of national settings and characters in James's fiction--Italy, France,

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Germany, England and America, each peopled with expatriates as well as natives, or visited by representative tourists from one or more of the other nations. The resulting contrasts and confrontations of customs, manners and morals gain the status of a "theme" through the virtuosity of the combinations James is able to permute, in his improvisations on what he calls the "international chord," without losing the central melody: the American experience of Europe and the European reaction to Americans. For experiments with a principally European cast, like The Princess Casamassima, are exceptions which eventually prove to James the rule that his international dramas perform best with a sizeable American contingent. Reversals like The Europeans, which brings Europeans to America, are far outnumbered by travelogues of Americans making the essential pilgrimage to the Old World; so American protagonists and European settings become the two inseparable sides of the international coin. The sense of the past, then, becomes the American's sense of Europe, and the international theme records James's attempt to define and develop the American character by charting its relation to Europe and by refining, among other capabilities, its sense of the past.

Marius Bewley formulates the increasingly complex issues of the emerging international theme as a set of conflicts:

The problem is basically the problem of Europe versus America, and conjointly with that, the problem of past versus present, and both the

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past and present versus the future, the time problem being only another aspect of the geographical one.¹

These problems are conspicuously American ones, and are generally centered in the predicaments of Americans like Clement Searle or Isabel Archer, who see their pasts or futures intimately connected with Europe. But the list of conflicts is incomplete. Through developing conventions of national contrasts, James makes his characters allegedly typical representatives of the conflicting moral and social philosophies of their respective countries; anachronistic embodiments of past cultures, ultra-modern mannequins of present ones, or Adamic consciousnesses torn between the past and the present; and archetypal figures dramatizing the process of initiation and other confrontations of innocence and experience. Bewley's formulation is only a beginning, and is valid mainly for the early stages of development. The contrasts between Europe and America, past and present persist in some form throughout James's work; but instead of being pitted against one another, they eventually become complementary, and the best parts of each are fused to form the ideal society prefigured in the novels of his mature period.²

The international theme is so complex, in other words, that it can best be treated in stages. No division is perfect, and each period overlaps or predicts later ones, but these five major stages of development will structure my discussion of the sense of the past at work in the

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international theme: (1) the early period, roughly 1860 to 1883, in which the attempt to unite past and present ends with James's decision to live permanently in Europe, and includes fiction from "A Passionate Pilgrim" up to "Lady Barbarina"; (2) the "English period" in his work resulting from that decision (1883-1901), with its tremendous effect on both the quantity and the type of international story produced, particularly in The Reverberator, "The Aspern Papers," and "A London Life"; (3) the "major phase" (1901-1904), christened by F.O. Matthiessen, during which international conflicts move toward a "sublime consensus" of the present and the past and characters take on archetypal stature, in The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors, and The Golden Bowl; (4) the period of reassessment (1904-1914) following his first visit to America in twenty years, in which the incongruity between the present and James's sense of the past results in the strong criticism of The American Scene and in such almost anti-American stories as "The Jolly Corner" and "Julia Bride"; and (5) the war era (1914-1916), in which James's struggle with the horrible present and the nostalgic past is reflected in intermittent work on his unfinished novels, The Ivory Tower and The Sense of the Past.

Within each period the sense of the past--meaning both what constitutes the past and what is a proper perception of it--has its own form, and depends a good deal on the shifts taking place in the international theme. For the international theme has at its center a major form of the

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sense of the past, the American sense of Europe, as increasingly perceptive American characters attempt to relate the cultural and historical past of the Old World to their own particular social present. The sense of the past changes, then, with the development of James's Americans and with the progress of his techniques in writing fiction. Most of these changes are at least reflected in the developing international theme, if not central to it. In short, tracing the development of the international theme records the changes in James's personal sense of the past, the changes in his thought on it, and the development of the sense of the past as a theme and as a set of techniques in his fiction.

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1. The Early Period (1860-1883)

From far back, as James reminisces in the preface to a volume of the 1907 New York Edition of his works, the international had been his fortune. Tales based mainly in international contrasts appear very early in his work, and increase rapidly from 1871 to 1884. The comedy of manners "Daisy Miller" (1878), for all the furor it raised as a supposed slur on American girlhood, was his nearest approach to a popular success, and was the kind of short international story that William Dean Howells repeatedly urged him to write. The advice was not lost on James. Matthiessen and Murdock, editors of his notebooks, point to evidence in certain entries that James exploits this success by transforming "English material so that it will involve one of the international contrasts that he knew to be his most distinctive vein."³ James does not, however, simply dress his figures in peculiarly national clothing to make them better selling dolls on the knick-knack market. He is seriously concerned about the relationship of European countries to each other and to America, as exhibited in the relations between representative individuals. Although local color stimulates James's individualism and his sense of the past, temporary international contrasts are not nearly so important as the forces working toward a cohesive world society.

James is one of the first men of his age to transcend the epidemic of nationalism. Early in his career he begins

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to hope for a union of at least the Anglo-Saxon world, and his hope soon turns to expectation. By the major phase, perhaps mirroring the optimism of the turn of the century, James is producing novels based on a certain degree of already "achieved social fusion" among the most perceptive representatives of America and England (The Wings of the Dove), France (The Ambassadors), and Italy (The Golden Bowl). The endings of these works and the projected resolutions of his later unfinished novels testify to his desire for even greater unity. Even the war has its bright side. Its main redeeming feature to James is the resulting closeness of England and France, and the apparent inevitability of the eventual union of American and British interests. His naturalization as a British citizen in 1915, finally, is not the act of a nationalist nor an admission of irrevocable differences between him and his native land, but is an attempt to accelerate the process of unification by providing the United States an example of proper commitment. James does not give up the dream even when he sees the possibility of nightmare.

He is, to be sure, hesitant to affirm a utopian vision early in his career. At first, perhaps, he hopes just to trace the origin of Americans and their messianic claims. The American is after all a startling social phenomenon in Europe. Where has he come from? Where is he going? Where, indeed, is he? Clearly the American must have developed somehow from European roots, but his manners seem to have

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almost as much in common with the Indians. Comparisons of the uncultured, innocent American and the sophisticated European indicate more erasure of heritage than development of it--particularly to European observers. James senses the break with the past that America has made, yet he also senses her underlying continuity with it, and he tries to detect the fine Old World threads still clinging to the social fabric which will provide meaningful clues to the nature of American experience.

For several years he feels that his scrutiny reveals little. In one of his early essays on Turgenieff, which often seem as applicable to himself as to the Russian, James remarks:

Turgenieff gives us a peculiar sense of being out of harmony with his time--of having what one may call a poet's quarrel with it. He loves the old, and he is unable to see where the new is drifting. American readers will peculiarly appreciate this state of mind; if they had a native novelist of a large pattern, it would probably be, in a degree, his own.⁴

James, of course, fits his projection of the American artist perfectly. In this early period he not only feels somewhat out of step with his era and prefers some facets of the old order, like Henry Adams, but he also is not yet able to chart the new social drift. Even as late as 1873 he is ready to disclaim any tracing of history:

I don't pretend in the least to understand our national destinies--or those of any portion of the world. My philosophy is no match for them, and I regard the march of history very much as a man placed astride of a locomotive, without knowledge or help, would regard the progress of

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that vehicle. To stick on, somehow, and even to enjoy the scenery as we pass, is the sum of my aspirations.⁵

But such modesty is misleading. His appreciation of the scenery and the ride includes an acute testing to determine the prevailing historical wind. An earlier letter, in which he reports that he has decided to let the western breeze of America blow freely through him, indicates that he finds some direction. "I know what I am about," he reassures his brother William in 1878, "and I have always my eyes on my native land" (Letters, I, 60). For several years he sees America better from abroad than many see her from home.

But he perceives both Americans and Europeans best when they clash with one another. From his earliest acquaintance with Europe James perceives those contrasts which become the main colors on the international canvas. Europeans are too dulled by their constant exposure to the beauty of the past to appreciate their own heritage; only fresh Americans like himself seem to sense it properly:

Never from a single Englishman of them all have I heard the first word of appreciation and enjoyment of the things here that I find delightful. To a certain extent this is natural: but not to the extent to which they carry it. (Letters, I, 26)

Even English literature is better appreciated by Americans: "English readers may fancy they enjoy the 'atmosphere' of Middlemarch; but we maintain that to relish its inner essence we must--for reasons too numerous to detail--be an American" (The House of Fiction, 266). European boys are slower in

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wit and general perception than American boys the same age, to judge from James's classmates in Geneva, though they excel in social polish:

They are almost a different race from boys of their own age at home. They have, if I may judge from these five specimens, more book learning, but less general knowledge which comes from unrestrained reading and less of the quality we call smartness. . . . They seldom make any jokes themselves, though if you tell them one they do not seem incapable of enjoying it. . . . But if, on an average, these little fellows are not so acute or clever as their brothers at home, I think that they are infinitely more comely mannered.

(Edel, Letters, 42-43)

Already (1860) the seeds of perceptive but socially Adamic Americans like Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer have been sown, and the prototypes of dull Mr. Bantling and Lord Lambeth have been cut. American ladies in Geneva, fore-runners of the pretty Daisy Millers and more sophisticated belles, are like angels compared to the "hideous German women," and for many years James considers the "intellectual grace" and "moral spontaneity" of American women superior to the character of British women as well.⁶

But these are far from the highest claims that James makes for Americans in the sixties. Comparing Sainte Beuve to the new breed, James glorifies Americans' alleged disadvantages:

One feels--I feel at least, that he is a man of the past, of a dead generation; and that we young Americans are (without cant) men of the future. I feel that my only chance for success as a critic is to let all the breezes of the west blow through me at their will. We are Americans born--il faut en prendre son parti. I look upon it as a great blessing; and I think that to be an American is an

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excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically &c) claim our property wherever we find it. To have no national stamp has hitherto been a regret and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. We must of course have something of our own--something distinctive and homogeneous--and I take it that we shall find it in our moral consciousness, our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour. In this sense at least we shall have a national cachet.--I expect nothing great during your lifetime or mine perhaps; but my instincts quite agree with yours in looking to see something original and beautiful disengage itself from our ceaseless fermentation and turmoil. You see I am willing to leave it a matter of instinct. God speed the day. (Edel, Letters, pp. 52-53)

This extremely significant statement shows how early James thinks in terms of an intellectually and morally superior American as the figure demonstrating to the world the value of an "intellectual fusion and synthesis" of the best national traits from each land. Stimulating the creation of such figures as Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer, and culminating in characters like Lambert Strether, Milly Theale, Maggie Verver, and Ralph Pendrel, this manifesto declares the emerging American to be the best judge of the past and creator of the future likely to evolve, setting up one of the major conventions of the international theme. In addition it provides a measure of James's early reaction to the nationalistic idea of an American Adam, a morally

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upright figure who can create a new world.⁷ Unlike Emersonian versions, the Jamesian Messiah cannot create the future by cutting himself off from the past, but must incorporate the best of all nations and times into that vast synthesis. As James realizes that Americans are not becoming as cosmopolitan as he hopes they will become in synthesizing the national traits of the melting pot, he grows less and less willing to leave the salvation of society "a matter of instinct." The Adamic American may have the potential to be a Messiah for James, but this second Adam must have the decent leaves of a proper heritage to clothe his forming character. The problem is to prescribe and insure his training.

James's Americans, of course, do not develop a perfect sense of the past--or of anything else--very quickly. To a degree they follow James's own development. Nationalism is a strong force in the sixties, and there is a marked dose of the nationalistic "passionless pilgrim" of some early tales in the Henry James who can throw cool water on the romance of Paris:

When a man has seen Paris somewhat attentively, he has seen (I suppose) the biggest achievement of civilization in a certain direction and he will always carry with him a certain little reflet of its splendour. (Edel, Letters, 49)

As usual in a Jamesian sentence, those qualifying words "I suppose," "somewhat" and "certain" carry the main attitude. Perhaps this reaction to Paris is not so flat as Mr. Dosson's in The Reverberator, but it comes perilously close to the

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dabblings of Christopher Newman, and only hints at the fine perceptions of Lambert Strether. James is no innocent abroad, but neither is he the ripest observer yet. Even London, which alternately enthralls and appalls James in later years, is only beginning to be the siren she becomes:

The truth is that the face of things here throws a sensitive American back on himself--back on his prejudices and national passions, and benumbs for a while the faculty of appreciation and the sense of justice. (Letters, I, 19)

For a time these "national passions" play a strong role in James's developing sense of Europe, his loyalty to the New World inhibiting his pleasure in the old.

But not for long. It is fascinating to watch James's nationalism decline. The longer he stays in England, the clearer the relative merits of Englishmen and Americans become. If Americans have character, "energy, capacity, and intellectual stuff," Englishmen have "manners and a language," making the Yankees look and sound vulgar by comparison (Letters, I, 22). But James is still so sensitive about saying anything negative on Americans, who are very self-conscious due to nagging feelings of inferiority, that he adds apologetically to his mother in the same letter, "I have seen some nice Americans and I still love my country." He is reassuring himself as much as his family, for clearly as James's opinion of England rises, his evaluation of America falls. He develops a powerful ambivalence toward the United States, accompanied by a guilt that shows in the denial that his criticisms are treason. Increasingly,

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moreover, he is estranged from America as a place to live even as he glorifies the possibilities of its people. When he gets home, he writes to Grace Norton that he does not know

what, now that I have got America again, I am going to do with it. Like it enormously sans doute: they say there is nothing like beginning with a little aversion. My only fear is that mine is too old to end in a grand passion.

(Edel, Letters, 66)

He was right. He knew better what to do with America when he was abroad. The only grand passion that James was to have for his country was in idealizing its finest representatives and its future--from a safe distance.

For nationalism was not to be James's major problem, nor that of his characters, in spite of the number of times he pictured it in the Henrietta Stackpoles, Marcellus Cockerels, George Flacks, and other ugly-named American ambassadors like the Pococks. The problem would be more intricate. The "complex fate, being an American," includes just the opposite of nationalism, or rather nationalism displaced from the nation itself to its origins--the tendency to accept a "superstitious valuation of Europe." James fought this aberration as fiercely as he fought other provincial qualities in his countrymen.

According to critics like Vernon Parrington and Van Wyck Brooks, no one can doubt that James lost the fight against over-pricing European artifacts. But their interpretations are too simple, too difficult to reconcile with the acuteness of a man who could perceive the stupidity of

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conservative French politics (Edel, Letters, 70), the provincialism of French artists (78), and the "flatness" of the English country house even while appreciating "the ripest fruits of time" in each nation (83). James could see that the English aristocracy was as ripe for a fall as the French had been, and while he felt that the English were the greatest race, he was often exasperated with them (Letters, 124, 114). James's early evaluation of both Europe and America is, I think, balanced and essentially accurate.

What is inaccurate is his prophecy of the future of these cultures. His desire for a union of the civilized world, particularly England and the United States, distorts his assessment of the probability of that union. That is, James's perception of contemporary conditions is excellent, but his projections for the future developing from these conditions is over-optimistic. For while he pictures beautifully in this era the problems of Americans trying to break into European society, and recognizes in his own social problems the fact that he has a "much less factitious and artificial relation" to America than to Europe (Letters, I, 36), his great hope for an Anglo-American union begins to override the frustration of the actual situations he is witnessing. What could be more natural than combining loyalty to America with a love of Europe, forming the conviction that the two cultures are inevitably merging?

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Again, however, the full utopian vision develops slowly. James quickly enters a period of objective evaluation of the chances for unification among so many differences, and places about equal blame on each side for barriers to complete communication. At the height of this objectivity, in a letter to a reviewer of "An International Episode" (1878), one of the most balanced of his works in revealing the errors of both sides, James gives a clear warning to those who would tie him down to any partisan position:

Nothing is my last word about anything--I am interminably subtle and analytic--and with the blessing of heaven, I shall live to make all sorts of representations of all sorts of things. It will take a much cleverer person than myself to discover my last impression--among all these things--of anything. (Edel, Letters, 106)

Ironically, since he is so often accused of being anti-American, James is trying to defend himself against the reviewer's charge that he is anti-British. He is truly trying to remain in suspension about the future of international relations at this time.⁸

But his predilections have already shown, and will show again. Even his earliest international story, "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), ends on a note of hope for the union of England and America after an ironic treatment of the prejudices blinding each side. By the "English period" his concern for union is paramount. In 1885 he writes to James Russell Lowell, American minister in London who has just returned to Washington, "Don't forget that you have produced a relation between England and the U.S. which is really a

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gain to civilization and that you must come back to look after your work" (Letters, 119). Soon James will be producing his own ambassadors of good relations. For by 1888, if I may skip ahead to show where his thought is going, James has tired of the portrayal of contrast and conflict with no resolution in sight, and has definitely made up his mind about the direction of the future:

I am deadly weary of the whole "international" state of mind--so that I ache, at times, with fatigue at the way it is constantly forced upon me as a sort of virtue or obligation. I can't look at the English-American world, or feel about them, any more, save as a big Anglo-Saxon total, destined to such an amount of melting together that an insistence on their differences becomes more and more idle and pedantic; and that melting together will come the faster the more one takes it for granted and treats the life of the two countries as continuous and more or less convertible, or at any rate as different chapters of the same general subject. (Letters, 141-42)

This attitude becomes a prescription for illusion in the major phase--and eventually disillusion, with James's visit to America in 1904 and the coming of World War I.

James has decided just to take for granted a growing unification, and by so doing to accelerate its progress. Pretend there is concord, and union shall come to pass; ignore disharmony, and differences shall go away. The critic who had used a social microscope to demonstrate a division now looks through a telescope and sees only continuity.

The fiction James writes in the seventies and eighties reflects the development of his thought in the early period. Nationalism and a love of the past alternately attract and repel James to and from both America and Europe, forming a

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complex force field of ambivalence. Fairly early these conflicting feelings neutralize each other to form a fine cosmopolitan analytical balance, so that his international stories become deliberately weighted presentations of the faults and merits of each side. Barriers to social synthesis abound as subjects for dramatization. But the hope for union also pokes its nose into the tales. Even the early social comedies based primarily on conflicts have an air of testing the possibilities of social fusion rather than negating them forever. As James notes in the 1907 preface to a volume of early international tales, the "international relation" first presented itself "after the liveliest fashion a quarter of a century ago and earlier, as a relation of intermarrying" (Prefaces, 203); and marriage, after all, is the very symbol and essence of social union. If most of the tests of union do not succeed in the early stories, sometimes failing to produce marriage, other times leading to less-than-perfect childless alliances, there is nevertheless a clear improvement in some of the characters seeking union. So when external social conditions begin to match the internal growth already advancing, the catalyst of marriage may begin, couple by couple, the social chain reaction.

Only a fraction of the two dozen international tales and half dozen novels James wrote during this period may be examined as evidence, of course, but I shall outline briefly relevant elements of tales in the same categories as those

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I discuss at length, to avoid the great distortions of selectivity. Wherever possible James's comments on particular tales are included as additional evidence of the general accuracy of the points being made.

The earliest international tales James sees fit to include in the New York Edition are "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), and "Madame de Mauves" (1874). These three tales struck James in writing a preface for them

as sops instinctively thrown to the international Cerberus formidably posted where I doubtless then did n't quite make him out, yet from whose capacity to loom larger and larger with the years there must already have sprung some chilling portent. Cerberus would have been, thus, to one's younger artistic conscience, the keeper of the international "books"; the hovering disembodied critical spirit with a disengaged eye upon sneaking attempts to substitute the American romantic for the American real.

(Prefaces, 194)

In other words, James found the peculiarly American reality that he intended in these tales gobbled up by romance. This Cerberus, as James hints here, was to bother him more and more in later years as he realized how much of what he had written under the guise of "realism" was in fact pure romance. At this stage the romance takes somewhat different forms than later, but I hope to demonstrate eventually the continuity of his early international romances with the later illusions.

"A Passionate Pilgrim" is a striking example of this continuity, so I am using it as the main representative of these early years. For the situation of the tale is very similar to that of later works, particularly James's last

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novel, The Sense of the Past: a dispossessed American heir of an English country house goes to England in the hope of recovering the estate. This relationship between the United States and England, especially with an American trying to recover his past, occupies an important place in James's thought and fiction. As Christof Wegelin points out, the pose of the dispossessed American relative of an old English family is an established convention of nostalgia for many American writers (37), so James is dealing with a major native strain. Caught by the "nostalgic passion" for Europe, James describes his personal position during this interim of living in America after a grand tour of the Old World, as "a romantic analogy with the state of dispossessed princes and wandering heirs" (Prefaces, 195). His feelings are very similar to Clement Searle's:

I had in the spring of 1869, and again in that of 1870, spent several weeks in England, renewing and extending, with infinite zest, an acquaintance with the country that had previously been but an uneffaced little chapter of boyish, or--putting it again far enough back for the dimmest dawn of sensibility--of infinite experience; and had, perceptively and aesthetically speaking, taken the adventure of my twenty-sixth year "hard," as "A Passionate Pilgrim" quite sufficiently attests.
(Prefaces, 194)

This visit to England was to leave in him a lasting romantic desire for its synthesis with American culture.

But James is not the morbidly nostalgic Clement Searle; nor, contrary to Wegelin (34), is he to be confused with the meddlesome narrator, who triggers the devastating confrontation by informing the British household that its menacing

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American cousin is there. James is struck with the marked cultural relationship between the American and England, however, so in at least a few speeches his viewpoint virtually coincides with the narrator's:

The latent preparedness of the American mind even for the most characteristic features of English life was a matter I meanwhile failed to get to the bottom of. The roots of it are indeed so deeply buried in the soil of our early culture that, without some great upheaval of feeling, we are at a loss to say exactly when and where and how it begins. It makes an American's enjoyment of England an emotion more searching than anything Continental. (XIII, 335-36)

To the searching American eye there is no tint of association with which the great grimy face of London doesn't flush. (348)

James is clearly emphasizing the underlying similarities of English and American culture as much as the external contrasts. The two peoples have most of the same history, the same common law as the basis for jurisprudence, political systems emerging from similar philosophical bases, and most important to the writer, virtually the same language and literary heritage. On the other hand, the contrast in tone of the speech of the Americans in the Red Lion "may in English air be called alien in spite of coincidences" (339). James is holding the question of cultural compatibility in suspension: just how closely related to the English is the American?

The tale is therefore a fable on English and American cultural identity, and the crux of the fable is whether or not the fresh American, not dulled to the beauty of the

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past by overexposure, is in fact a finer instrument of perception than the native. "Suppose I should turn out a better Searle than you--better than you nursed here in romance and extravagance?" Clement Searle asks his female cousin, who is completely ignorant of the family heritage (379-80). Later, when Richard Searle is also present, Clement again breaks out in a discourse that the narrator calls "a divine apprehension, a romantic vision free as the flight of Ariel, of the poetry of his companions' situation and their contrasted general irresponsiveness" (393).

But if the British branch of the family is normally undersensitive to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, Clement is an oversensitive receptor of the past, having developed his preternaturally acute sense in order to be able to feed at all upon the sparse American scene. In the continuation of the conversation with Miss Searle mentioned above, he pleads:

Come don't disappoint me. You've some history among you all, you've some poetry, you've some accumulation of legend. I've been famished all my days for these things. Don't you understand? Ah you can't understand! (380)

If the American is more sensitive than his British cousin, he runs the risk of being too sensitive. In London Clement has an orgy, as the narrator partly perceives:

We were as conscious one as the other of that deeper mystic appeal made by London to those superstitious pilgrims who feel it the mother-city of their race, the distributing heart of their traditional life. Certain characteristics of the dusky Babylon, phases, features, "say" more to the American spiritual ear than

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anything else in Europe. The influence of these things on Searle it charmed me to note. His observation I soon saw to be, as I pronounced it to him, searching and caressing. His almost morbid appetite for any overscoring of time, well-nigh extinct from long inanition, threw the flush of its revival into his face and his talk. (361)

Now, James is not repudiating the latent cultural unity of America and England in such passages, nor the sense of past. The American narrator's appreciation of England is essentially valid. But James is decrying any morbid or "superstitious valuation of Europe" like Searle's. It is fine for the two men to sense "the noble friendliness of the scenery, its latent old-friendliness, the way we scarcely knew whether we were looking at it for the first or the last time" (362). But when Searle sees a "rook haunted churchyard . . . a grey, grey tower, a huge black yew, a cluster of village-graves with crooked headstones and protrusions that had settled and sunk," and almost literally dies to be buried there, his unhealthy necrophilia is unmistakable (365). It is no accident that Clement looks like his eighteenth-century ancestor. He is anachronistic; he has allowed his sense of the past to deprive him of any modern identity, and hence any use or relevance in the world of his contemporaries. Not equipped to live, he is ready to die. He is, as he grotesquely fancies, very much like a reincarnation of his ancestor, whose spirit within him "has rattled about these forty years, beating its wings against its rickety cage, begging to be taken home again. . . . Now at last the bruised spirit can escape" (371-72).

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As he correctly insists, "I am a ghost!" (391).

Unlike James's later American Adams, Searle does not make enough of a virtue from his lack of a personal history. He just laments "My name is Clement Searle. I was born in New York, and that's the beginning and the end of me" (356). Somehow--and this is pure romance--Searle develops his extraordinary sense of the past in a vacuum.⁹ He is born old: "I entered upon life a perfect gentleman. I had the love of old forms and pleasant rites," though nothing on which to exercise this love. "I should have been born here and not there; here my makeshift distinctions would have found things they'd have been true of" (357). Instead he is considered pseudo-English among his American friends, having none of the position and heritage, but only "nice tastes, as they call them, and fine sympathies and sentiments" (356).

Within Searle's predicament is the central problem of American identity and its relationship to England, neatly reversed in setting in "The Jolly Corner" and taken up again in The Sense of the Past. Facing the fine old estate, Searle questions and the narrator replies:

"I know what I am, but what might I have been? What do such places make of a man?"

"I dare say he gets stupidly used to them," I said. "But I dare say too, even then, that when you scratch the mere owner you find the perfect lover." (367)

Richard Searle, then, the British cousin, is the test of what Clement might have been, and the narrator's speculations

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about such a man are partly fulfilled. For Richard, the "mere owner" of Lackley (a suggestive name), is in fact a reserved old clam. But once the grit of sand is inserted by the American--the fragile claim to the estate which irritates Richard so intensely--the stodgy franklin shows his appreciation of Lackley with an exquisitely well-informed tour of the place: "He knew his house to perfection. He touched upon a hundred traditions and memories, he threw off a cloud of rich reference to its earlier occupants" (395). Continuing to rise to the occasion, the owner is finally scratched enough for the intensely jealous lover to emerge:

"Let him, with his high-flown parade of loyalty, imagine a tithe of what I feel! I love my estate; it's my passion, my conscience, my life! Am I to divide it up at this time of day with a beggarly foreigner--a man without means, without appearance, without proof, a pretender, an adventurer, a chattering mountebank? I thought America boasted having lands for all men! Upon my soul, sir, I've never been so shocked in my life." (401)

Apparently, then, the American claim to an English heritage and identity is exposed as a pretentious presumption.

Or is it? Is Richard Searle the only judge of manners and heritage? I think both characters are ridiculed; not only Clement's assumption of complete interchangeability, but Richard's assumption of absolute separation is ludicrous:

He spoke of it [America] as of some fabled planet, alien to the British orbit, lately proclaimed to have the admixture of atmospheric gases required to support animal life, but not, save under cover of a liberal afterthought, to be admitted into one's regular conception of things. I, for my part,

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felt nothing but regret that the spheric smoothness of his universe should be disfigured by the extrusion even of such inconsiderable particles as ourselves. (388)

More eloquent satire can hardly be imagined. Richard Searle is an anachronism as bad as his cousin. James is bursting not only the romantic, conventional American illusion of England, but the narrowness of those British reactionaries who could assume of the American that "so provincial a parasite would hardly have good manners" (387). Richard does not see even the possibility of union represented in the romance between Clement and Miss Searle.

The end of the fable is perhaps most revealing. After his rude expulsion from Lackley, there is nothing left for Clement Searle but to live his illusion to the hilt, to complete his imaginative exchange of identity with his ancestor (415), just as Ralph Pendrel does in The Sense of the Past. So he reverts to the good old days of "rank abuses, of distinctions and privileges the most delicious and invidious"--but perceives that "some of the foundation-stones are loosened, some of the breaches will have to be repaired" (415). If he lives a "delightful lie," as he calls it, "the happy faith that life is all a green old English garden and time an endless summer afternoon" (417), he transcends the lie by perceiving it. Now a worthy kin to the later American Adams of James, he has "positively turned rhapsodist and seer." The narrator describes the change:

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I was particularly struck with his having laid aside the diffidence and self-consciousness of the first days of our acquaintance. He had become by this time a disembodied observer and critic; the shell of sense, growing daily thinner and more transparent, transmitted the tremor of his quickened spirit. (420)

In this state Searle reveals the deep ambivalence that affected James during this period: "You English are really fabulous! I don't know whether I most admire or most abominate you!" And during this interim of lucidity, Searle pontificates on the relation of Americans and Englishmen to the Anglo-Saxon tradition:

We're nursed at the opposite pole. Naked come we into a naked world. There's a certain grandeur in the lack of decorations, a certain heroic strain in that young imagination of ours which finds nothing made to its hands, which has to invent its own traditions and raise high into our morning-air, with a ringing hammer and nails, the castles in which we dwell. Noblesse oblige--Oxford must damnably do so. What a horrible thing not to rise to such examples! If you pay the pious debt to the last farthing of interest you may go through life with her blessing; but if you let it stand unhonoured you're a worse barbarian than we! (418)

His ancestor, dispossessed of any estate by the law of primogeniture, and ruining the young woman he is not allowed to marry, is part of the barbaric fruit of English culture. Searle is giving a warning as well as an appreciation. If the Richard Searles continue to foster such injustices, there will be American cousins to take up the dishonoured heritage!

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of reality still holding James, future unions are clearly predicted. Searle himself is a fusion of the two peoples, as shown in the ambiguity of his anguish for "my country, my country, my country!" (429). Which country? Presumably "this awful England," since Searle gives up his superstitious sense of the past and sells his "battered relics," his "gifts and mementoes" of the past, to give an Englishman the chance to become a good American. But Searle is never more American than in this action, when he gives a man cut off from the past a chance for a future. There are other symbols of synthesis. The union made possible by Richard's death is left unfulfilled by Clement's own death. He learned too late. But Miss Searle is not long clad in black for the dead Richard; perhaps with an ambiguous motive, she soon wears "colours" again according to Clement's request--dedicated to life and the future instead of death and the past.

James did not write another international story set in England until after his decision to live in Europe. Consequently few of his stories in the early period deal as directly with cultural closeness as "A Passionate Pilgrim." But his best American figures nevertheless develop finer and finer character and in some cases a discriminating sense of the past, both of which will aid them in merging with European society. Just as often, however, James writes fables on pathological senses of the past--such as "A Passionate Pilgrim" or "The Madonna of the Future," on a

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sterile American artist, and "The Last of the Valerii" (1874), about an anachronistically pagan Italian count--so his warnings about "superstitious valuations" of Europe and the past are evidently important enough to be repeated. Americans must overcome such illusions in order to bring about a viable consensus.

"The Madonna of the Future" is not as broad a fable as "A Passionate Pilgrim," for its main character has a narrower form of the American disease, a slavery to old European art. Once again, however, the tale shows how an overdeveloped sense of the past in a member of "the famished race" (XIII, 441) can mislead him into a sterile life. The American narrator and the poor American artist study Florence's early paintings, particularly the madonnas, rather than "the full-fruited knowledge of the later works" (455). As an art critic, much like Clement Searle in judging landscape, the artist seems to the narrator to be "inclined more than I approved to the sentimental proposition, was too fond, I thought, of superfine shades and of discovering subtle intentions and extracting quintessences." (446). His aesthetic sense is overdeveloped in a single direction, a reaction to his American background, just as his abhorrence of the commercial is a clear sign of rebellious Americanism (456). The problem is that he has rebelled too much. Listen to him rave:

We're the disinherited of Art! We're condemned to be superficial! We're excluded from the magic circle! The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit! Yes, we're

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wedded to imperfection! An American, to excel,
 has just ten times as much to learn as a European!
 We lack the deeper sense! We have neither taste
 nor tact nor force! How should we have them?
 Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our
 deafening present, the constant pressure about us
 of unlovely conditions, are as void of all that
 nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as
 my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so!
 We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile. (442)

The artist's tirade sounds like a parody of James's own comments on America, especially the famous passage in his biography of Hawthorne on the artistically nude qualities of the American scene. And it is a parody, showing that the artist has "all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion and our native relish for sonorous superlatives" (456). America and the present must not be underrated.

The artist is so beguiled by the beauty of the past, embodied in his once beautiful model, that he never perceives the old fading in the light of cumulative aesthetic development. One of James's earliest aphorisms for artists, "Madonna" is interesting here primarily as a demonstration of the inseparability of taste, creativity, and a proper sense of the past.

The heroine of "Madame de Mauves" also has a faulty sense of the past. Her error is a "romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling" (224); but eventually, almost like Isabel Archer, she regrets thinking that "a needy nobleman was the ripest fruit of

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time" (261). She has a feature redeeming her romanticism, though, one important in James's conception of the developing American character. Her "moral imagination," which her husband lacks, makes her "a model to all the inferior matrons of his line" (251). That this trait is not Euphemia's alone, but is shared with all her countrymen, is clear from Mrs. Draper's contrast of American and European character: "The lightest of us have a ballast that they don't imagine, and the poorest a moral imagination that they don't require" (222). Unfortunately Madame de Mauves does not redeem her husband through her virtue. He is cured of the philandering that is the national pastime and falls in love with his wife, but her "outraged virtue" refuses to forgive him--so he commits suicide! (331). Reflecting James's ambivalence toward America just as earlier stories reveal his mixed feelings about Europe, the story presents both sides of the Puritan American woman--her capacity for virtue, and the corresponding capacity for exercising that virtue with a vengeance.

In "The Last of the Valerii," however, written the same year, the softer side of the American woman prevails. Count Valerii's American wife Martha, "a more perfect experiment of nature, a riper fruit of time, than those primitive persons for whom Juno was a terror and Venus an example,"¹⁰ is her husband's "pledge to the present," an "incontrovertible modern" who saves the Count from the cold beguiling beauty of the past. Like Clement Searle, Count Valerii has a tendency to prefer the dead to the living,

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and combines this necrophilia with a distorted aesthetic sense comparable to that of the artist of the madonnas.

To be sure, the Count "never became, if you will, a thoroughly modern man" (122), but his wife is able to rescue him from those "evil germs which history had implanted in his line," from the "heavy heritage" of that "interminable ancestry" that stretches "back through all the darkness of history" (107). Martha is "a riper fruit of time" than the Count because she has a more balanced perspective on life and death, the present and the past.

Although a number of insensitive "passionless pilgrims" and expatriates people the international scene, the main stream of Jamesian characters leading from the early period to the major phase is his most perceptive group of native Americans. And as the character of James's finest Americans develops in the early period--or his English men and women in the middle period, or men and women of various nationalities in the major phase--the sense of the past is refined inseparably from moral and aesthetic senses. Ultimately the sensibilities of the best characters are a fusion of exquisite taste, impeccable conscience, and a finely discriminating historical sense. If one or more of these senses is undeveloped or overdeveloped, the result is a distorted personality like Gilbert Osmond or Mrs. Newsome. But in general the three develop together; the person with the best taste is the most moral, and properly distinguishes the influence of the past on the present. In Americans the

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"superstitious valuation" of the past carried by "passionate pilgrims" or the irreverence toward the old that marks the "passionless" ones is represented as an immature plateau in the movement toward a more mature perception.

The contrast that Wegelin sees between the sense of the past in James and in earlier American writers is also apparent as an early stage in the development of his characters:

For the sense of the past was no less strong in him than in the earlier Americans. But it was different. American writers of the first half of the century had seen the lingering past of Europe primarily as a matter either of the material "mementos"--the ruins, the monuments, the moss, and the ivy--or of political and social conservatism (the so-called feudal institutions) with its concomitant polish of manners. In James the lingering past became part of a stream of time extending into the present and accounting for it; in him the past lives, not only in outdated political institutions which ought to be dead or, vaguely, in the sentiments which romantic pilgrims allow themselves in the presence of its "mementos," but in the texture of society and of the active lives of individual men and women. (22)

The early Clement Searle pays attention to the mementos and the ivy. Daisy Miller visits monuments just to say she has been there. But those with any saving intelligence do not perceive the past and present in terms of buildings and monuments, quaint customs and clothes alone. To Isabel Archer, for example, the Roman ruins become the tangible evidence of vast human suffering. Nick Dormer sees politics in terms of outdated "rotten" boroughs, his father, opportunistic Julia Dallow, and the ancient Carteret. Such knowledge and capability do not come easily, and only a few

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of James's early Americans get far beyond the opening stages. Searle goes as far as most, but he dies. Isabel perhaps learns more than any, but she too is trapped. There is a great potential for tragedy in becoming mature, for in order to develop a fine sense of the past, of art, and of morality, these characters often must be able to discover evil and deal successfully with it even as the knowledge of evil helps create the consciousness needed to master it. Their task is to obtain the knowledge and the sensibility before the evil destroys them. Quite often the past harbors evil, as in "The Last of the Valerii." But there is an evil in the amoral or innocent present as well. The international theme records many of the tragedies and comedies of Adamic Americans as they try to develop this total sense of life, past and present, flowing through the people around them.

James's first major novel, Roderick Hudson (1875), shows more the potential of Americans than the achievement. For Roderick is an artistic and moral failure, and his case is a variation of the aesthetic fable in "The Madonna of the Future" and the moral fable in "Madame de Mauves." Roderick is most successful, symbolically enough, when he creates a statue of Adam, but instead of developing his pure instincts, he hankers after forbidden fruit. He is unable to tell a genuine product of the past from a veneered substitute, the superficial social beauty that glosses the Americano-European Christina Light, and his resulting moral and aesthetic decline is symptomatic of this deficiency in his

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sensibility. Similarly, Mary Garland, as Rowland Mallet tells her, was made to appreciate Europe. If she and Roderick had united as planned, their combined qualities--aesthetic and moral--might have reversed the failure. But she is too much the relative of the New England Puritans to be a very passionate pilgrim, too bound in moral hide to be penetrated enough by Italy to help Roderick.

The American (1876), true to its title, defines the American character and relation to Europe in a similar manner. But its protagonist is less corruptible than Roderick. For Christopher Newman, while he is not yet much of a judge of art or tradition, and is betrayed by the romantic urge that causes him to choose an anachronism like Claire de Cintre--Newman is nevertheless "nature's nobleman," both intelligent and highly moral, and he almost pulls off a grand alliance. Unlike Roderick, at least, he chooses a genuine article. Instinctively moral (II, 102), Newman also claims to "have the instincts--have them deeply--if I haven't the forms of a high old civilization" (45). He thinks too highly of himself, perhaps, and has a very strange attitude toward a wife as an article to be found in a marketplace, but his character is essentially sound.

His character is the major item to be tested. As James explains in the preface, he is trying to portray "some cruelly wronged compatriot" who should "suffer at the hands of persons pretending to represent the highest possible civilization and to be of an order in every way superior to

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his own" (Prefaces, 21-22). As every reader of the novel knows, Newman proves instead to be the superior social specimen in both manners and morals.

But there is another test in the novel, one marking an important phase in the international theme. For Newman's proposed marriage is a test of the possibility of social fusion--literally an experiment of Mrs. Tristram's. Much like James in intent, she wants to see what will happen to Newman and to an old family with a daughter who is the "skim of the milk of the old noblesse" (54) when the question is social integration. The only way James can insure any revealing friction is to anachronize the Bellegardes back to a Napoleonic stage, since as he well knew contemporary European society had compromised and mellowed enough for a rich American to be pounced upon by any financially pinched noble family. Newman himself is one of the best articles in the market, and would not be shunned just because he is a bargain. The result is a partly false test with artificial barriers. James writes to Howells the year following publication that it was the "insuperable difficulties" of the case that attracted him, and that "We are each the product of circumstances and there are tall stone walls which fatally divide us." Such deterministic statements make the case sound impossible. But look at the example James gives of the supposedly "insuperable difficulties" that the couple would face if they married:

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For instance--to speak very materially--where would they have lived? It was all very well for Newman to talk of giving her the whole world to choose from: but Asia and Africa being counted out, what would Europe and America have offered? Mme. de C. couldn't have lived in New York; depend upon it; and Newman, after his marriage, (or rather she, after it) couldn't have dwelt in France. There would have been nothing left but a farm out West.¹¹

These are not "material" barriers; they are psychological ones--or, rather, external social barriers that prevent union by exerting psychological pressure on the lovers. As James clearly sees later when he writes the preface to the work, Newman and Claire are both victims (Prefaces, 24). The barriers to their happiness are mainly outside them; even Madame de Cintre's reservations have been imposed on her by her family and her society. When James removes some of the external hurdles, the result is marked progress, as in "Lady Barbarina"; when some of the internal reservations fall, as in the case of Gaston Probert of The Reverberator, the chances for a fruitful union are even better. James seems to be implying that not only his Americans, but inflexible Europeans like Lady Barb and the Bellegardes must sharpen their perceptions and revise conventions in order to create a more perfect union.

The phase of the international theme that The American most strongly develops, in addition to the nature of American character, then, is the possibility of a synthesis of old and new, the reconciliation of Europe and America. Picking up the thread of "A Passionate Pilgrim" and "Eugene Pickering," The American marks the high tide of European

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intransigence. After this the faults are more equally shared, and the stories are more hopeful tests of the conditions for union. Americans abroad are mistaken for Englishmen by other Americans, instead of for Russians or Germans.¹² Comedy and romance prevail, and a few international engagements even make it to the altar. Some may not survive much longer, as in the ultra-romantic "Longstaff's Marriage" (1878), but many are the typically happy marriages that resolve social differences at the end of comedies.

There is nevertheless a paradoxical quality in these international comedies: the more intelligent, moral, higher elements of each society cannot get together, much as James wants them to; but the less perceptive, more common couples get along swimmingly. Poor Jackson Lemon has trouble keeping Lady Barb even in New York, but Herman Longstraw can carry Lady Agnes all the way to the Pacific. Daisy Miller could have married Giovanelli at the drop of a parasol, and Winterbourne can have his pick of clever foreign ladies to "study" under--but neither Daisy nor Winterbourne can communicate genuine feelings to the other. The Bantlings can fitly marry the Stackpoles, and Osmond's sister gets the brutal Count Gemini she deserves, but can Lord Warburton attract Isabel Archer? If Isabel must marry an expatriate, why not Ralph Touchett instead of Gilbert Osmond? Ralph, like some of Cooper's figures, seems killed by a blow aimed by the author. The Nancy Headways can dupe the Sir Arthur Demesnes ("The Siege of London"), and Felix can lead

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Gertrude Wentworth to the altar; why can't the Baroness Eugenia bait the trap well enough for Robert Acton (The Europeans)? After a time I think that James is yielding to a certain perversity, refusing to produce happy endings just because romances have them, and realism must always differ from romance. "Daisy Miller," with its abrupt and far from inevitable disposal of Daisy through "Roman fever," especially left me with this feeling.

But James does not want to be unreal by painting an all-black picture either. The marriages that do come off seem deliberate pledges that all is not lost, that union is possible--a comic balance to the main failure of union. Anything bordering on the naturalism that is realistic to the French is unreal for Americans, Howells argues, and James recognizes similar differences in the cultural heritages of the two nations. Some balance, the happy marriage of the secondary couple (almost like a control group in a scientific experiment), must be allowed to offset the disjuncture of the central figures.

Such balanced, deliberately weighted presentation reaches a high point in "An International Episode" (1878-79), "Diary of a Man of Fifty" (1879), "A Bundle of Letters" (1880), "The Point of View" and "The Siege of London" (1882). As Wegelin so well demonstrates, "An International Episode" is "the classic example of James's dramatization of the mutual misunderstanding of Americans and Europeans" (48). Characters on both sides make silly errors based on the

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reigning American conventions of how Europeans act and are motivated, or the European assumptions about American behavior and intentions. Percy Beaumont and the British ladies assume that all American girls are out to marry English lords, and the pseudo-sophisticated American Mrs. Westgate falls for the established rumor that the English reply to hospitality with snobbery. Both conventions are undercut, of course, by Lord Lambeth's proposal and Bessie Alden's refusal of it. Lord Lambeth is no snob, and Bessie is no social gold-digger. Furthermore, the air is filled with cliches that are ironically undermined by the story. James's main point seems to be that the conventions and cliches are false, and get in the way of social harmony and union.¹³

Most of these stories, I claim, set up such conventions as the main hindrances to social integration. After a time, as in "Diary of a Man of Fifty" and "A Bundle of Letters," union or isolation is determined primarily by attitude--or as James calls it in a third tale, "The Point of View." In the "Diary" mistrust keeps a retired British general from marrying an Italian widow, and he warns the young Edmund Stanmer not to marry this widow's daughter. When Stanmer marries anyway and is apparently happy, and tells the general he was wrong about the older countess, it is presumably the general's attitude that is the main barrier preventing his own happy marriage. Likewise in "A Bundle of Letters" everything depends on whose eyes are judging.

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Each character measures the others, most of different nationality, in his own way. The result is a complex of relativity, but the reader does not have to decipher conflicting assessments; the main contrasts, indeed the main characterizations, are inherent in the viewpoints rather than the descriptions. Consequently the main source of antagonism or compatibility is apparently the attitude each maintains. Just how ironic James can be in juxtaposing attitudes is shown in "The Point of View" itself, to add an example to "An International Episode." The whole range of viewpoints is once again present--Americans like Louis Leverett who are pro-European, nationalistic Americans like Marcellus Cockerel, a British Parliamentarian, and a Parisian. The irony is that the only thing most of these men can agree on is the beauty of American women like Aurora Church--yet she and her mother think marriage prospects are so bad that they have to go west to find her a husband!

Just as in "An International Episode" Lord Lambeth and Bessie Alden are "victims of a world so deeply entangled in international prejudice as to make a simple human relationship impossible" (Wegelin, 51), so Aurora Church and any would-be suitors fail to get together primarily due to conflicting prejudices that fail to allow genuine feelings to be communicated. The conclusion is an optimistic one, however. When Americans develop a proper sense of the past, and Europeans conceive a reasonable perspective of the present, the two can meet somewhere in between in an intelligent combination of the old and new.

Introductory

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¹The Complex Fate, p. 56.

²Cf. Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James, chs. IV-VI.

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³Notebooks, p. xv; cf. pp. 77, 167 as examples.

⁴Quoted by F.O. Matthiessen, The American Novels and Stories of Henry James (New York, 1947), Introduction, p. xvi.

⁵Edel, Letters, p. 73. Again, references to Letters with no author preceding the citation refer to Lubbock's volumes.

⁶Edel, Letters, p. 47; Lubbock, Letters, pp. 26, 120.

⁷See Lewis, The American Adam, Prologue and pp. 62, 152-55.

⁸Cf. Wegelin, pp. 48-51.

⁹A criticism of James's Americans leveled by Van Wyck Brooks in The Pilgrimage of Henry James, p. 94.

¹⁰Tales, vol. III, p. 117. All references to "The Last of the Valerii" are to this volume.

¹¹Edel, Letters, pp. 98-99. Compare my discussion of the close relationship between this quotation and "Lady Barbarina," in Chapter III, Part 2, pp. 170-71.

¹²Clement Searle is mistaken for a Russian by the narrator of "A Passionate Pilgrim," XIII, p. 338, and Winterbourne is mistaken for a German by the heroine of "Daisy Miller," XVIII, p. 12, but the narrator of "The Pension Beaurepas" is more accurately mistaken for an Englishman by Ruck, XIV, p. 401.

¹³Wegelin, pp. 48-51.

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2. The English Period (1883-1901)

After he had finished The Portrait of a Lady (1881), which I shall discuss in the next section since it is so closely related to the novels of the major phase, James considered any serious formulation of the international theme as a heavy burden. The Portrait had been difficult as well as exciting, and he had expected it to be received as his finest work to date, though he knew much more needed to be said. But the novel was only a mild success. So given the failure of his most serious international work to be popular and the difficulty of knowing both America and Europe well, James saw the necessity of choosing only one of them to be his main field of operation:

One can't do both--one must choose. No European writer is called upon to assume that terrible burden, and it seems hard that I should be. The burden is necessarily greater for an American--for he must deal, more or less, even if only by implication, with Europe; whereas no European is obliged to deal in the least with America.¹

His choice was not long in coming. He could not waste his time in crossing and recrossing the Atlantic. After returning to London in 1883, James was to remain in Europe for twenty years without visiting the United States.

Once permanently in Europe, as quoted earlier, he begins to envision England and the United States as "a big Anglo-Saxon total" destined to converge. As a consequence James hopes to be able to fuse the two cultures in his creations:

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I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries) and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilised. (Letters, I, 141-42)

Not surprisingly, then, there is a growing cosmopolitanism in the tone and viewpoint of the international tales of the English period, and a treatment of the question of social fusion explicitly as the subject or implicitly as part of the background of these tales.

After finishing The Tragic Muse in 1890, however, James feels the need to concentrate more on England than America: "One thing only is clear," he writes to Howells, "I must do, or half do, England in fiction--as the place I see most today, and, in a sort of way, know best" (Letters, I, 166). Consequently the number of wholly English works, such as The Tragic Muse itself, increases at the expense of his international tales, resulting in the "English period." The uncertainty in his "half" doing England and knowing it best "in a sort of way" reflects James's losing battle with one of the principles of realism--a battle which, as I shall argue later, has a profound effect on the portrayal of Americans during this era. But his main justification for selecting England as his field is that ignoring the old conflicts will promote social integration, so it is the idea of Anglo-Saxon unity that deserves initial consideration during this stage of the international theme.

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When James looks back over "the classic years of the Americano-European legend" in the prefaces to the New York Edition, he outlines the major difference between the international theme in its early days, extending through the first years of the English period, and the formulations of the international theme in the major phase. In the preface to the volume containing "Lady Barbarina," James notes that all the tales in that volume depend upon "the narrower application of international terms" (Prefaces, 200), on the greatest contrast "between the distinctively American and the distinctively European outlook" (198). The "classic years" are "years of limited communication, of monstrous and unattenuated contrast" (152). But the fine novels of the major phase are based on "a new scale of relations altogether, a state of things from which emphasised internationalism has either quite dropped or is well on its way to drop" (199). "The emphasis of the international proposition has indeed had time, as I say, to place itself elsewhere--if, for that matter, there be any emphasis or any proposition left at all . . ." (Prefaces, 211). Since the prefaces were written in the optimistic years 1906-07, just after the three novels of the major phase and before he had finished evaluating his cultural shock in The American Scene, James is surprised to see the "inveteracy" of the way the conflicts in his earlier works shape themselves (200). For the subject changes more and more for him to the question of the natural mixture of the cultures.

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The tension between the attraction of conflict and the desire for a "sublime consensus of the educated" is nowhere more evident than in the preface to "Lady Barbarina," in spite of its overwhelming emphasis on social synthesis. For the "dramatic side of human situations subsists of course on contrast" (199); James must discover a way to retain the drama of conflict yet fulfill the desire for consensus. The schizophrenic quality of the split makes James's renewed acquaintance with "Lady Barbarina" a very ambivalent experience:

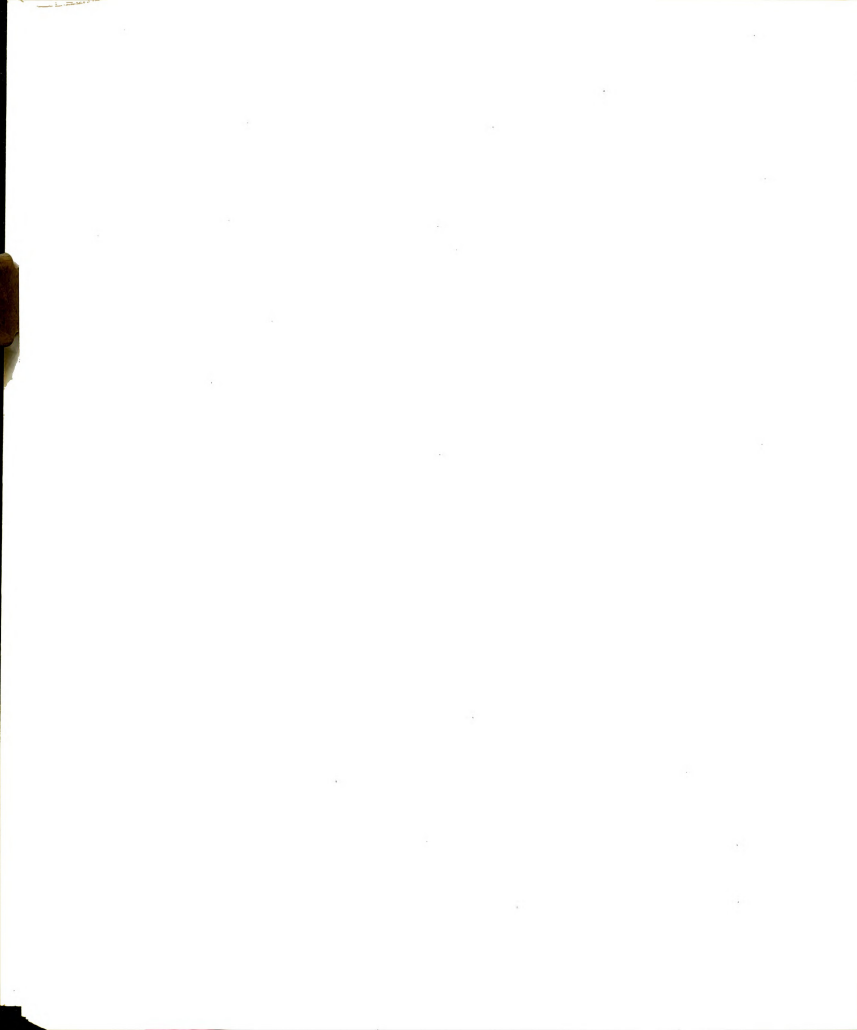
Half our instincts work for the maintained differences; without them, for instance, what would have been the point of poor Lady Barbarina? I have but to put that question, I must add, to feel it beautifully large; for there looms before me at its touch the vision of a Lady Barbarina reconciled, domesticated, developed, of possibly greater vividness than the quite other vision expressed in these pages. (202-203)

He can see Lady Barb either as intransigent or as "reconciled" and "domesticated." By writing the story as a conflict, he makes it nearly obsolete when published, for "so many of the perceived conditions in which it took birth have changed that the account of them embodied in that tale and its associates will already pass for ancient history," an "archaic subject treated by a 'primitive' master of high finish" (206). Four years earlier James had written a work based on a good deal more "achieved social fusion," The Portrait of a Lady (1880), and he was increasingly to see that fusion "as a portent and an opportunity" (199). Why, then, does he write "Lady Barbarina," whose explicit theme



is social fusion, as an irreconcilable conflict?

Part of the answer of course is that James continues to perceive the differences even as he believes in the growing synthesis. In addition "Lady Barbarina" is largely humorous, and James probably was not up to another serious work on the subject yet. Conflict makes better humor than reconciliation. But the major reason is that a work on growing social fusion would be "less easily formulated" because it would have to loom "beautifully large" (202). Painting a believable reconciliation of the most perceptive representatives of American and European culture, if deep differences are presumed to exist, would require much more canvas. The intelligent cannot simply gloss over differences, but must work them out carefully at length. As long as James is trying to write short fiction, contrasts must unavoidably form the core. Consequently when the failure of The Tragic Muse influences James to write nothing but short tales and plays (Letters, I, 232), he is going to write stories of international conflict even though firmly committed to the concept of inevitable social fusion. So James writes occasional international tales based on the old conflicts all through the English period. "Pandora" and "A New England Winter" follow "Lady Barbarina" in 1884; "Mrs. Temperly" takes shape in 1887; "Louisa Pallant," "The Modern Warning," and "The Patagonia" are fairly conventional international tales of 1888; and other scattered sisters of these tales--"The Solution" (1889-90), "The



Pupil" (1891), "Lord Beaupre" (1893), "Covering End" (1898), "'Europe'" (1899), "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" (1900), "Mrs. Medwin" and "The Beldonald Holbein" (1901), "Flicker-bridge" (1902) and "Fordham Castle" (1904), for example--remind James of "stray spark(s) of the old 'international' flame" still trying to glow with life (Prefaces, 280).

Not until he decides to write long novels again, leading to the finest fiction of his career, will the social synthesis that he predicts form the central background of his international theme.

Meanwhile, however, the international tales of the English period at least hint at the social fusion to come and the kind of American character that will make synthesis possible. "Lady Barbarina," "Covering End," "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie," "Mrs. Medwin" and "The Beldonald Holbein," as I shall discuss in their turn, provide good predictions of the future if only by their negation and reversal of James's conventions. And those more extensive international products of the long-fiction phase of the English period, falling between The Princess Casamassima and The Tragic Muse, predict interesting developments in James's portrayal of American character: The Reverberator and "The Aspern Papers" show a loss of identity among American figures resulting in a blurring of national type toward archetype, while "A London Life" demonstrates the virtual interchangeability of nationality in James's characters, which will be the hallmark of social fusion in the novels of the major phase.



"Lady Barbarina" is an excellent example of James's interest in social synthesis showing through the conflicts that prevent it. For just as The American is Mrs. Tristram's experiment in pouring new wine into old bottles, so "Lady Barbarina" is Lady Marmaduke's test of social compatibility--but one showing at least a touch of progress. If no marriage at all takes place in The American, two take place in "Lady Barbarina"; and if the Lemons have a slightly sour union, at least it is ambiguously sweetened with Anglo-Saxon children--and the second marriage, though of inferior components, shows how well the lower orders can combine. There are very interesting parallels between the two works. Both Christopher Newman and Jackson Lemon choose a European wife as the finest available. Both Claire de Cintre and Lady Barbarina are slightly archaic models, reflecting the slight defect in American taste also evident in Clement Searle's desire for an old-fashioned wife. And there is a striking similarity between those alternatives James lists for the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Newman if they had married, and the actual alternatives worked out in "Lady Barbarina":

Mme de C. couldn't have lived in New York; depend upon it; and Newman, after his marriage, (or rather she, after it) couldn't have dwelt in France. There would have been nothing left but a farm out West. (Edel, Letters, 98-99)

As Jackson Lemon finds out, Lady Barb cannot live in New York, and he cannot research well in London; and the only choice left for Lady Agnes and Herman Longstraw, until the Cantervilles recover from their elopement, is to flee to

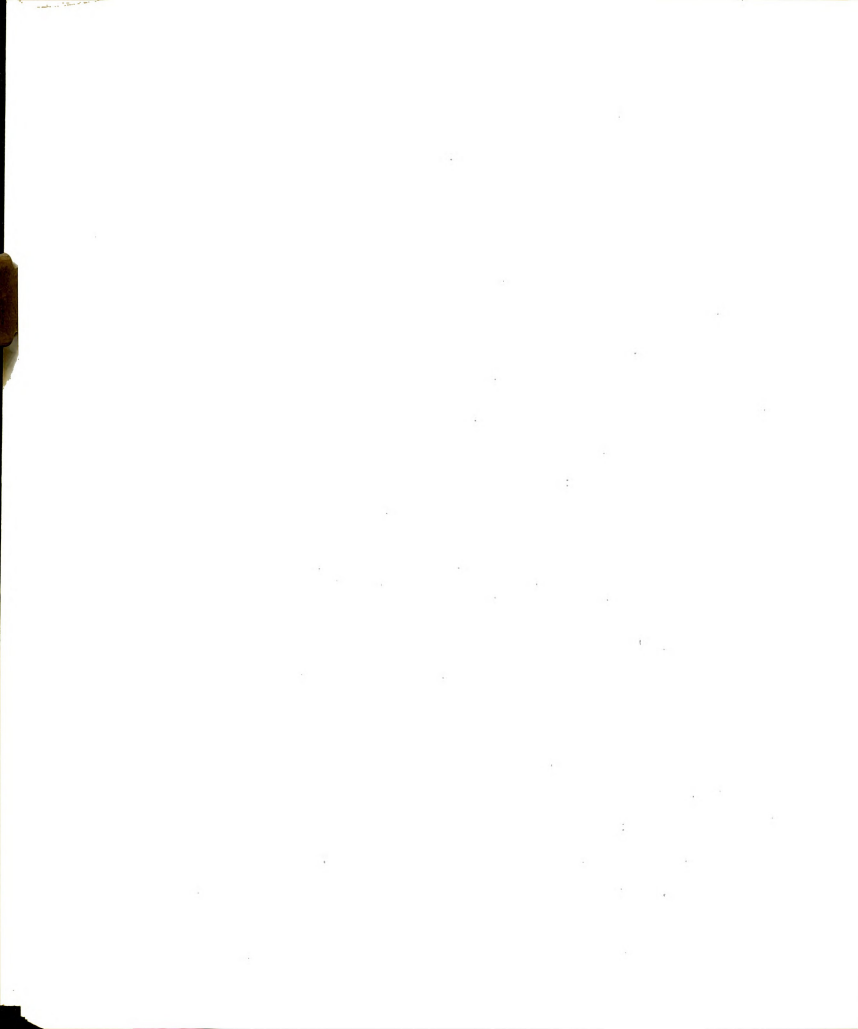


the emancipated West. At least both marriages are holding together, however, and the Longstraws make quite a social hit when they return to England. The incredible lanky Longstraw is a delightfully comic caricature of tall Christopher Newman, from his cowboyish Western origins right down to his hilarious moustache (XIV, 102, 115). Apparently James is reworking the earlier romantic novel into a comic--if not satiric--parody on the question of social fusion.

The idea of merging British and American society runs comically throughout the work. Lady Marmaduke is the conventional American girl who has landed a British lord while he was in the States:

She wished to add an arch or two to the bridge on which she had effected her transit from America; and it was her belief that Doctor Lemon might furnish the materials. This bridge, as yet a somewhat sketchy and rickety structure, she saw--in the future--boldly stretch from one solid pier to another. It could but serve both ways, for reciprocity was the keynote of Lady Marmaduke's plan. It was her belief that an ultimate fusion was inevitable and that those who were the first to understand the situation would enjoy the biggest returns from it. (XIV, 30)

Lady Barb picks up the idea from Lady Marmaduke and her own sister Lady Beauchemin, who are matchmakers much like Mrs. Tristram, but Barb just parrots the words rather stupidly in short blurbs: "I think English and American society ought to be but one. I mean the best of each. A great whole" (34). Even Lord Canterville has been indoctrinated, but at least he reworks the theme with the rhetoric of a British politician:



. . . he thought it a capital thing the two countries should become more united, and there was nothing that would bring it about better than a few of the best people on both sides pairing-off together. The English indeed had begun it; a lot of fellows had brought over a lot of pretty girls, and it was quite fair play that the Americans should take their pick. They were all one race, after all; and why shouldn't they make one society--the best of both sides of course? (61)

Lady Marmaduke must have been persuasive indeed.

That "best of both sides" becomes a very ironic refrain. When Lady Barb continues to emphasize "just the best in each country" (35) as eligible for such unions, the irony is wonderfully tart, for she is far from the best herself. Like one of Matthew Arnold's aristocratic Barbarians (Barbarina), she sounds like a parrot on the Anglo-American question because she "for the most part was incapable of imagining a thing she hadn't seen" (125). Barb cannot even vaguely picture American society (it "must be odd"), let alone conceive anything so comprehensive as its union with British society. At parties she appears "dazzlingly indifferent, looking about her as if she saw very little"--and she doesn't see much (42). She has a statuesque figure (39) and "sculptured eyes," but no one can miss the irony in the fact that those eyes "were as beautiful as if they had been blank, like those of antique busts" (128-29). She is simply not intelligent (137). Although Barb is immitigably English (Prefaces, 200), and has all the signs of "race" (XIV, 39),

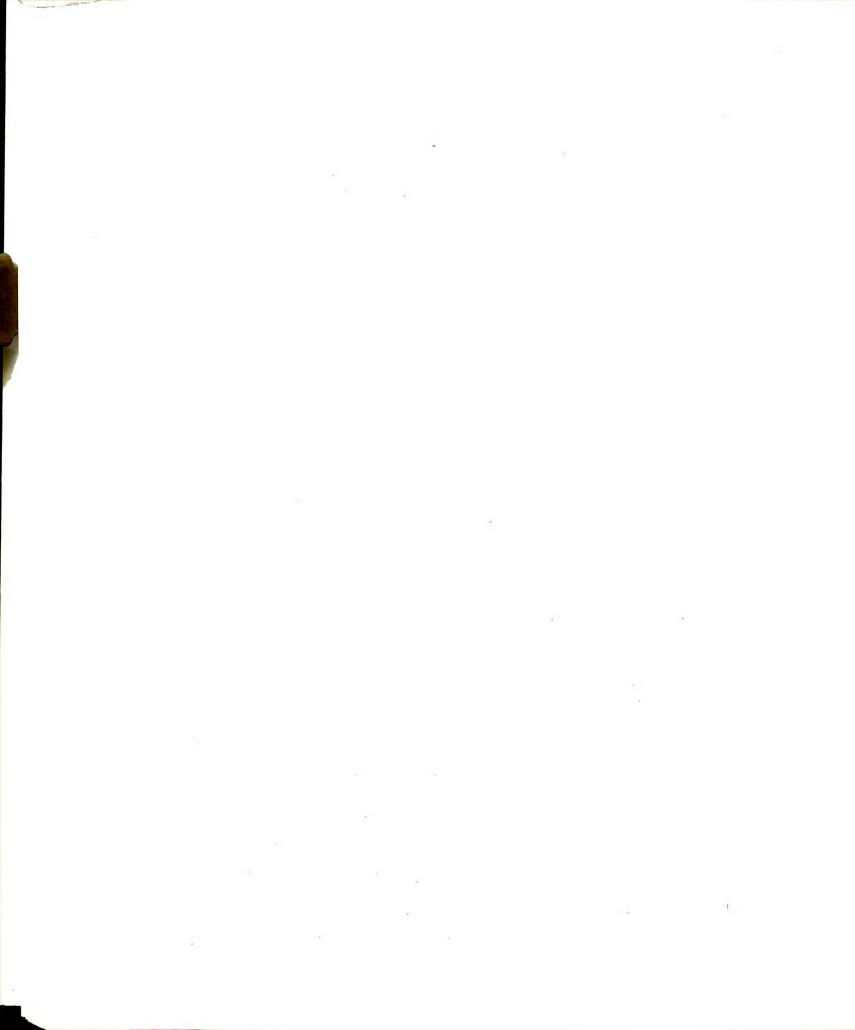


Striking cleverness wasn't one of the signs, nor a mark of the English complexion in general; it was associated with the modern simper, which was a result of modern nerves. If Jackson had wanted a wife all fiddlestrings of course he could have found her at home; but this tall fair girl, whose character, like her figure, appeared mainly to have been formed by riding across country, was differently put together. (40)

One can see Lady Barb riding on her broad character!

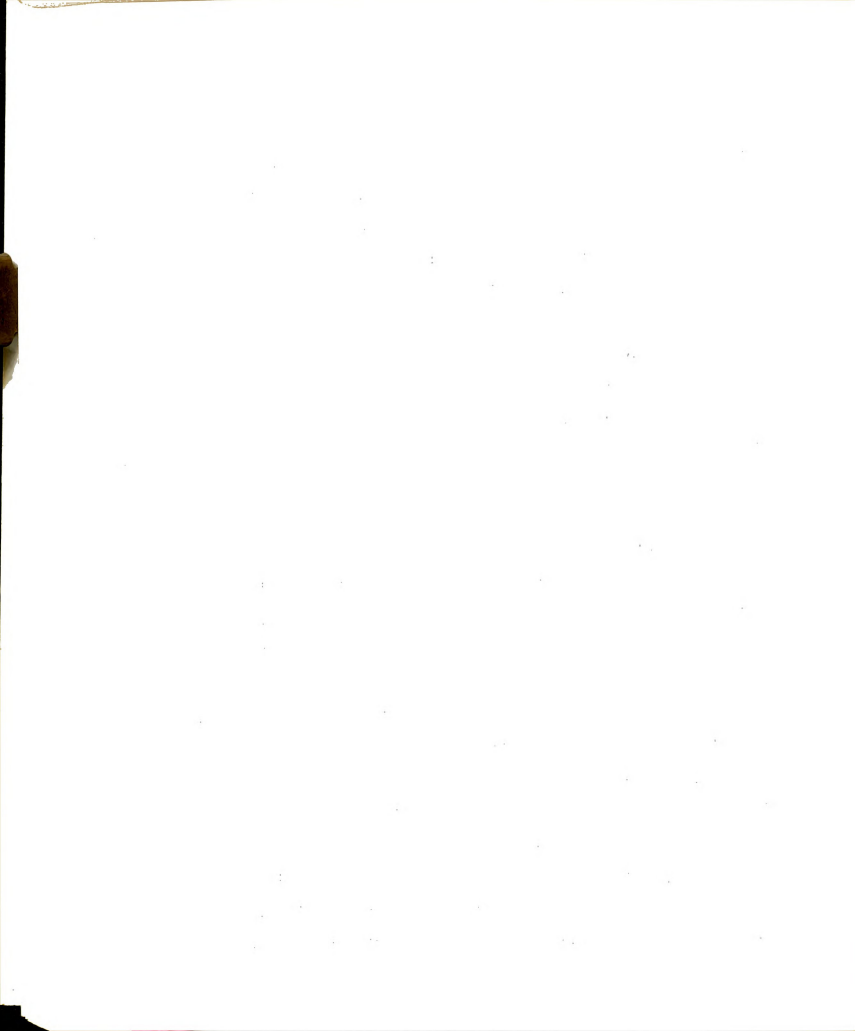
The creation of an American male who would be attracted to such a woman and could attract her as well is James's main problem. For the case of an American man even desiring a European mate, let alone sufficiently attracting one to coax her across the Atlantic without having to club her and drag her to his cave by the hair, was so unusual at the time that James felt he had to "forge the very documents" of the story (Prefaces, 204). With American girls the hottest article on the European marriage market, why should a virile American look at anything else? To "get my young man right," says James, is the greatest difficulty, and therefore the greatest artistic interest; so "Jackson Lemon and his shades, comparatively, and his comparative sense of shades" become the focal point of the story (205). Lemon becomes one more progression in the development of an American connoisseur of English life which culminates in such figures as Milly Theale and Ralph Pendrel.

"Lady Barbarina" is a transitional work connecting the early period with the English period, written just after James's decision to remain in England, so Jackson Lemon has as many connections with the earlier time as with the later.



When he is subjected to "the imaginative test" of social compatibility, he is bound to see the "experiment come so near failure" that only comparison with The American makes the test seem optimistic (Prefaces, 205). For realism demands that the rare case cannot be an exception to the likely rule that would govern such cases; that is, if few such marriages take place, the likelihood of one being perfect is extremely small. Furthermore, James's low opinion of the standard American male will not allow him to create in Jackson Lemon the finest of Americans, who are usually women in his fiction.² The best that is available is not likely to be good enough.

Nevertheless it is interesting to see just how good Jackson Lemon is. Compared to Lady Barb, in a fine reversal of the reader's expectations, he is tremendous. He is at least fully aware of "his inward drama," while Barb's "goes on in comparatively close darkness" (Prefaces, 205). And he avoids several pitfalls of the American male. Like Newman he escapes the taint of the business world yet retains the advantages of its money, by inheriting a fortune from his father's business but substituting medicine for commerce as a career. In order for the British prejudice against physicians to be less supportable, Lemon is described as a medical researcher rather than a practitioner who makes house calls. His unimpeachable humanitarian position and dignity undercut the social stiffness of the British, who are primitively behind the times in sniffing at a mere



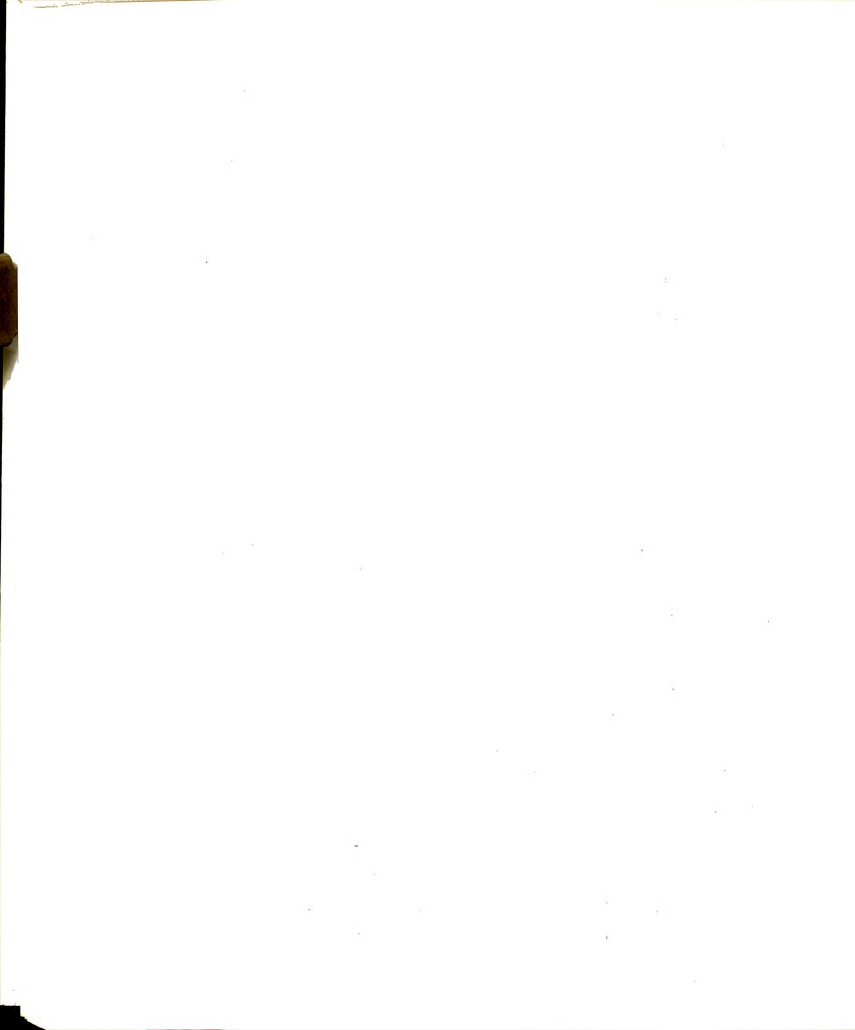
"medical man." As Mrs. Freer justly remarks, the British "use much the same term as the Choctaws" in referring to physicians (23). If Lemon had to have an occupation--and since America recognized no leisure class until after Thorstein Veblen, Americans had to have occupations--then James could not come up with a better one for his suitor.

Lemon's medical training also explains his interest in Lady Barb, a crucial motivation in the story. The doctor has an acute awareness of physiognomy, a sense of "race" that is unfortunately an incomplete and inadequate sense of the past. "Jackson Lemon was no Anglomaniac, but he took particular pleasure in certain physical facts of the English--their complexion, their temperament, their tissue." Lady Barb is an exquisite physical specimen of the race, which Jackson perceives as aesthetic evidence of her nobility:

There was something simple and robust in her beauty; it had the quietness of an old Greek statue, without the vulgarity of the modern simper or of contemporary prettiness. Her head was antique, and though her conversation was quite of the present period Jackson told himself that some primitive sincerity of soul couldn't but match with the cast of her brow, of her bosom, of the back of her neck, and with the high carriage of her head, which was at once so noble and so easy. (39)

Lemon's judgment of English character is obviously superficial, based mostly on external qualities. He does not perceive the nature of English temperament. For the most part he marries Barb to insure the physical beauty of his children--a very incomplete reason for marriage.

But if Lemon's early perceptions are inadequate, they

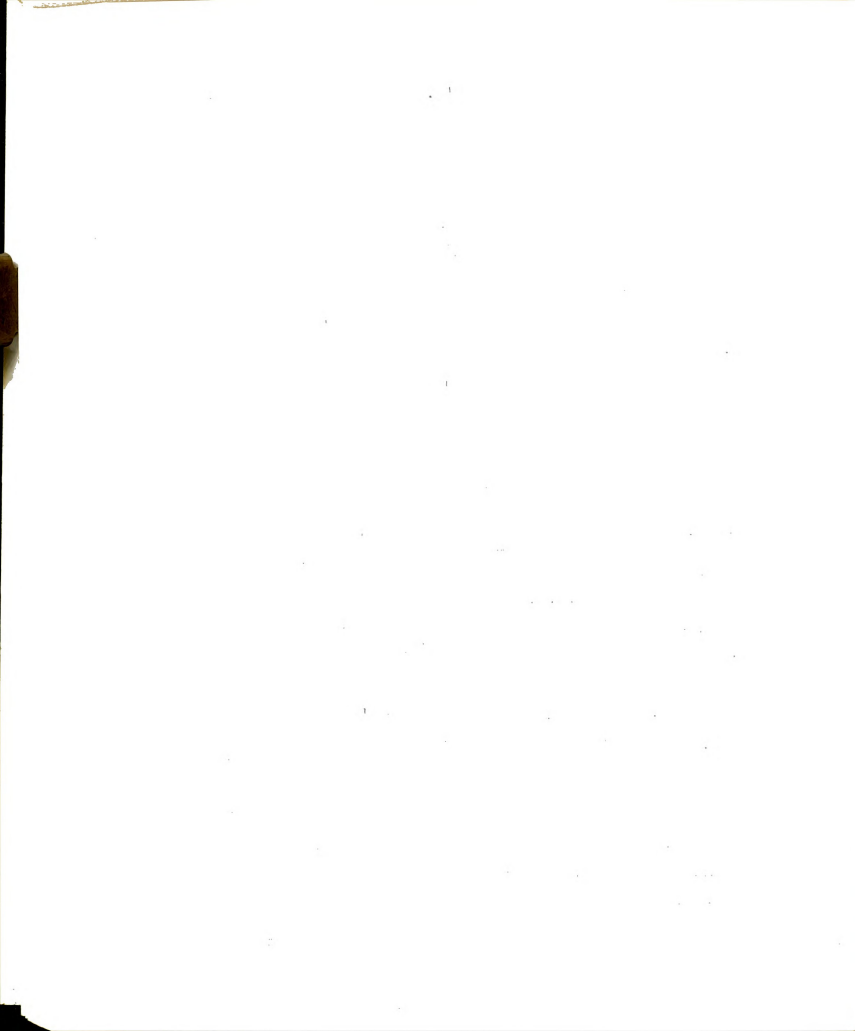


are far better than anyone else's. Barb and Lord Canterville are examples of English people dulled to their own qualities and heritage by overexposure. When Lemon remarks that Barb is a "very rare type," Lord Canterville does not understand him in the least (54). Barb is unconscious of "her own finest points"; but her husband is "intensely aware of all of them; nothing could excel the minuteness of his appreciation of his wife" (98). And Jackson's perceptions grow. Neither Barb nor Lady Beauchemin can fathom him (35-36), but he learns to probe Barb's rather shallow waters to the bottom.

Lemon is, in fact, explicitly an early version of the American "heir of all the ages" (86):

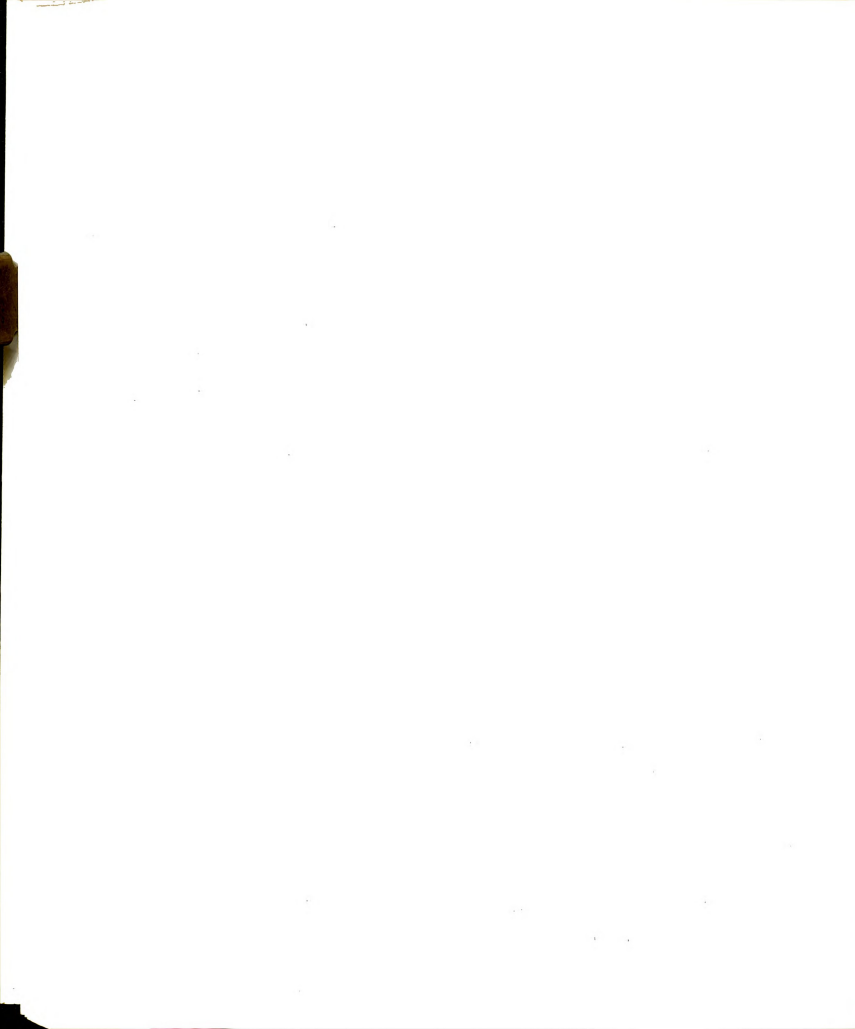
He had the best education the age could offer . . . He had devoted himself to one of the noblest of professions--a profession recognized as such everywhere but in England--and had inherited a fortune far beyond the expectation of his early years . . . He was one of the most fortunate inhabitants of an immense fresh rich country, a country whose future was admitted to be incalculable, and he moved with perfect ease in a society in which he was not overshadowed by others. (87)

This passage, however, is primarily Lemon's estimate of himself. No Englishmen look at him the way Merton Dansher eventually looks at the later heiress of all the ages, Milly Theale. Like the other New Yorkers in the succession--Milly, Clement Searle, and Ralph Pendrel, for example--"Jackson believed in the New York mind--not so much indeed in its literary artistic philosophic or political achievements as in its general quickness and nascent



adaptability" (124). He is heir to the ages because he can sense their value better than others. He has no past, not even the "fabulous antiquity" of Mrs. Vanderdecken, which stretches ironically all the way back to the last century (125, 134). Like Adam he has only a future, and this facet of time is not recognized very well by the Cantervilles.

To be sure, Lemon is Adamic in other ways, lacking for example a truly discriminating aesthetic sense. He never reads contemporary novels (94), but appreciates Lady Barb's letters for their "fine by-gone quality, an old-fashioned, a last-century freshness that might have flowed, a little thinly, from the pen of Clarissa or Sophia" (75). Such freshness flows from a stale fount. Nevertheless he is able to synthesize past and present tolerably well: "His ingenious mind could appreciate this hereditary assumption [of a financial settlement for a marriage] at the very same time that, to light his own footsteps, it remained entirely modern" (76). He feels that "customs were all very well, but that really intelligent people recognized at sight, and then quite enjoyed, the right occasion for departing from them" (77). In fact the only major problem with his temperament is that "anything he had once indiscussably made up his mind to acquired in three minutes the force, and with that the due dignity of a tradition" (75); even when he finally relents to the demands of the Cantervilles for a financial settlement, he does so hastily in irritation at the Freers' comments on his lack of progress.



This flexibility of Lemon's in agreeing to a settlement, though a hasty reaction, is the major force that works toward social unity in the story. The marriage takes place as a result of his pragmatism, and it holds together later only because Jackson is perceptive and adaptable. He has very "high tone" about the incompatibility of Barb and New York, "but he began to perceive that the highest tone in the world could n't change the nature of things" (136)--meaning the nature of Lady Barb, who is a force for disunion through her denseness and inflexibility. Her obsession with returning to London is a "dumb insuperable ineradicable purpose," and Lemon knows that "if she should plant herself firm no power on earth would move her." Barb's "blooming antique beauty and the general loftiness of her breeding" soon appear to Jackson to be "but the magnificent expression of a dense patient ponderous power to resist" (137).

For it is essentially Barb's fault that the union does not work in America; or rather it is her identity that makes compatibility impossible: "no one else in New York had made any difficulties; the difficulties had sprung from the very, the consummate, make of her" (137). She is almost idiotically imperceptive. Barb can see no social distinctions in America (93, 107); "she confounded and transposed American attributes in the most extraordinary way. She had a way of calling every one Doctor." She is like the stereotypical foreigner who thinks everyone looks alike, for "in New York there was nothing to know people by, their names



were so very monotonous" (108). The only American (except her husband) that Barb likes is old Mrs. Lemon, who is to American provincialism what Barb is to British. As Doctor Feeder sees, Barb "would neither assimilate nor be assimilated" (130); she never looks at him--or anything else.

Barb's sister Agnes, on the other hand, takes to America as a land of social emancipation, and understands the country fairly well (131). Of course Agatha and Longstraw "had not a perception of shades" (112), so they are unaware of any cultural clash. Only Lemon, and perhaps the Freers (whom I shall discuss in another context), appreciate the English heritage and the American promise. They perceive the problems of synthesis more deeply than the others, so they will also perceive the solutions sooner. As for the less perceptive proponents of union, "Lady Beauchemin and Lady Marmaduke are much disconcerted; the international project has not, in their view, received an impetus" (141). The reader will perceive the improvement in the chances for union more readily; Americans are becoming more and more perceptive candidates for social integration. When James has more space and a sharper Lady Barb, or a European gentleman fit for the blossoming American girl, the synthesis will begin.

The seed for "Lady Barbarina," of course, is a reversal of the conventional international marriage of the American girl to a European lord.³ If there is any characteristic that runs through nearly all the international tales of the

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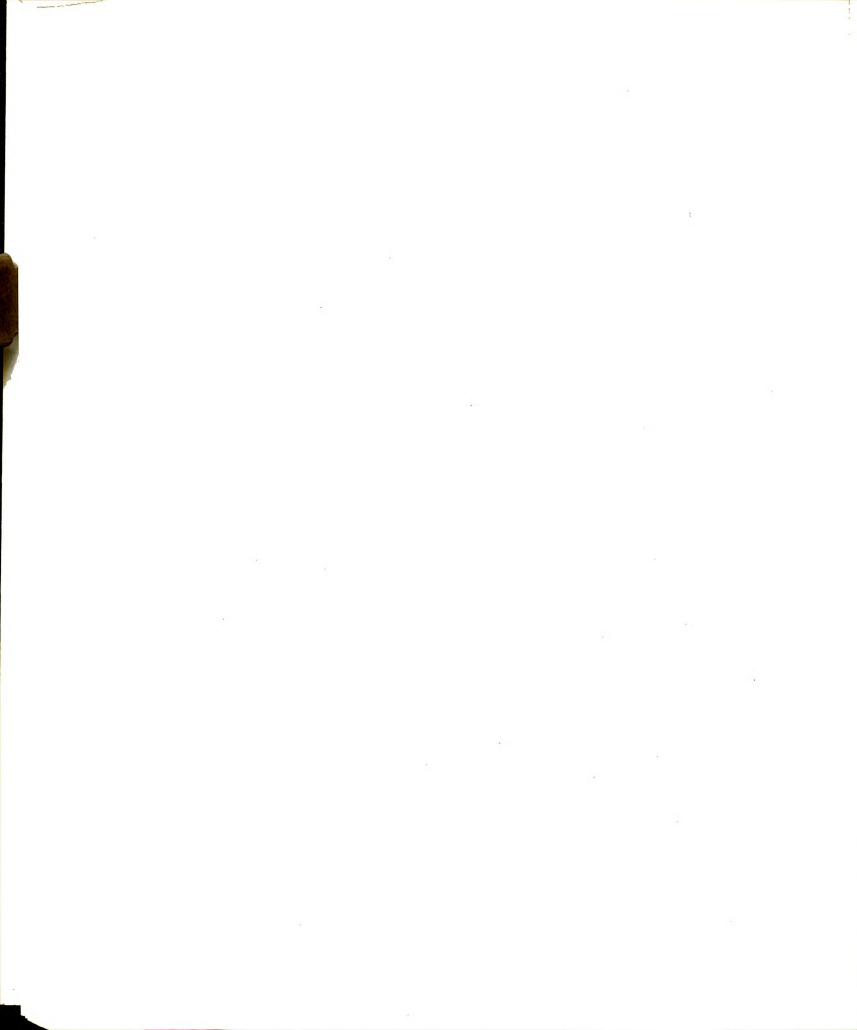
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English period, it is the reversal of old conventions of the international theme. Matthiessen and Murdock comment on the development of "Mrs. Medwin" (1901) in the Notebooks as just such a playing with conventions:

The 'international' note was introduced by making Mamie and her brother Americans, and Mrs. Medwin and the others British. Possibly James was amused by thus reversing the usual situation of the American who buys her way into English society under British sponsorship. (280)

Likewise in "The Great Condition" (1899) Mrs. Damerel, an American widow, hints that she has a scandalous past just like the typical European lady. She does not have a "past," it turns out, so the convention is doubly reversed--much as the tradition of Paris as the city of moral disintegration is toyed with in The Ambassadors. A tale like "The Beldonald Holbein" (1901) is made of reversals. The agelessly beautiful may be a hard glossy surface, less interesting artistically than an ugliness which reveals the wear of time. Beauty and aesthetic interest are in the eye of the beholder; much depends, as in the early period, on the point of view. When James makes his "Holbein" figure of attractive ugliness an American widow, ignored and unrecognized in her own country, the antithesis takes on another dimension. The point is made by a reversal of the reader's expectations that artistic interest would reside in the beautiful and the European. James is turning around his earlier charge that nothing aesthetically "good" can come out of the great American desert.⁴



Not all the reversals of conventions in this period are related to the international theme, of course. The heart of The Awkward Age is the creation of a "little girl who is conscious and aware" rather than the typical jeune fille (Notebooks, 192). James delights in breaking conventions throughout his career, as argued in the previous chapter. But a number of reversals in this period indicate the breakdown of the conventional barriers and conflicts of the international theme, a preparation for James's later depictions of social fusion. If any convention of the international theme can be reversed, the implication is that American characters may be interchangeable with European ones, a sign of growing social unity. And Americans are the major beneficiaries of the broken conventions, becoming more perceptive and in some cases more European than the Europeans.

Perhaps the main convention James is breaking is his own picture of the American as a "passionless pilgrim." For a number of Americans in the early tales are not the "passionate pilgrims" that I have been tracing, not the intelligent Americans developing their capabilities through the enlightening experience of Europe. Like little Randolph Miller, such passionless Americans do not care much for ancient monuments, except as they provide playgrounds for tourists. Daisy Miller was probably James's best known passionless pilgrim, the popular picture of what he supposedly thought of American girls. Not only Daisy but Mr. Tristram of The American (1876-77), the Rucks of

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"The Pension Beaurepas" (1879), the heroine of "Pandora Day" (1884), the Dossons of The Reverberator (1888), and Jim Pocock and Chad Newsome of The Ambassadors (1903) are among the variations on the type. They are important in tracing the development of the sense of the past in Americans because they generally have none. The Colosseum is as romantic to Daisy as the Castle of Chillon (Cf. XVIII, 41, 42), which she also fails to appreciate, and Mr. Dosson does not know one past war from another (XIII, 85). Dosson is in fact the supreme example of an American with absolutely no sense of the past, lounging in the court of a French hotel:

But Mr. Dosson had no sense of waste; that came to him much more when he was confronted with historical monuments or beauties of art, which affected him as the talk of people naming others, naming friends of theirs, whom he had never heard of: then he was aware of a degree of waste for the others, as if somebody lost something--but never when he lounged in that simplifying yet so comprehensive way in the court. It wanted but a quarter of an hour to dinner--~~that~~ historic fact was not beyond his measure . . . (XIII, 24)

Such characters function best as examples of what happens to those without a sense of the past: some are victimized by their innocence, like Daisy Miller and--very nearly--Francie Dosson; others become amoral, exploitative souvenir hunters like Chad. These are the figures showing the underdeveloped side of the American tree of knowledge, the green rather than the ripe fruits of time.

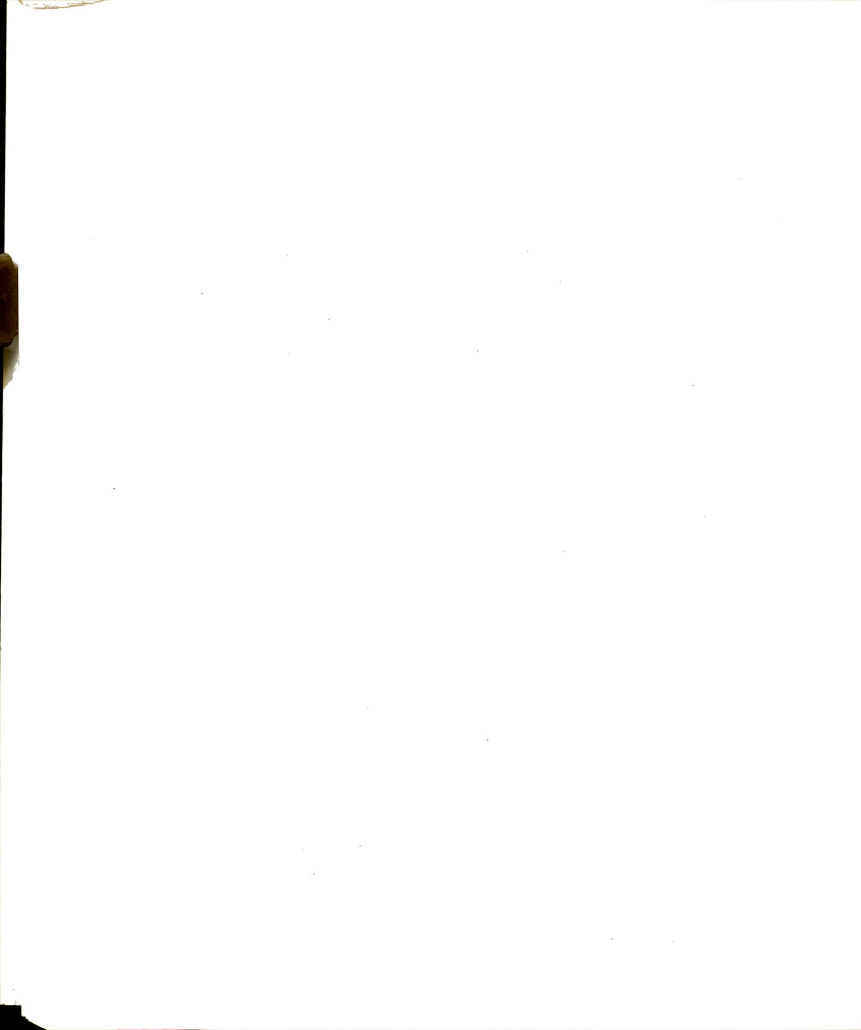
Their companions are often from another group of Americans or one-time Americans, the broad range of expatriates

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found in James, from the eternal nomads to the established colonists. Sometimes these are nearly villains, having the forms of civilization but not the moral essence, such as Christina Light, Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. Like the superstitious pilgrims, they have a distorted sense of the past and its values; Osmond is so captured by the image of tradition that he is described as being convention itself. Milder forms like Winterbourne and Gaston Probert have simply lost some of their American moral innocence and identity, and have picked up a European shell. At their worst such characters are more European than the Europeans, and like the American colonists in Rome and Paris, they follow European social conventions more strictly than the natives.

These two groups, the passionless pilgrims and the Americano-Europeans, form an implicit contrast to his most perceptive Americans, establish a set of conventions of common American behaviour in Europe against which James can project more intelligent attitudes and actions. Instead of irreverence toward the past and inane innocence made up primarily of ignorance, James's finest compatriots have an intelligently fresh and flexible perception of the past; instead of being more European than the natives by following the local social customs more strictly, these Americans exceed European standards by becoming more perceptive connoisseurs of the past. Such figures generally have European counterparts; they can in fact be portrayed as Europeans

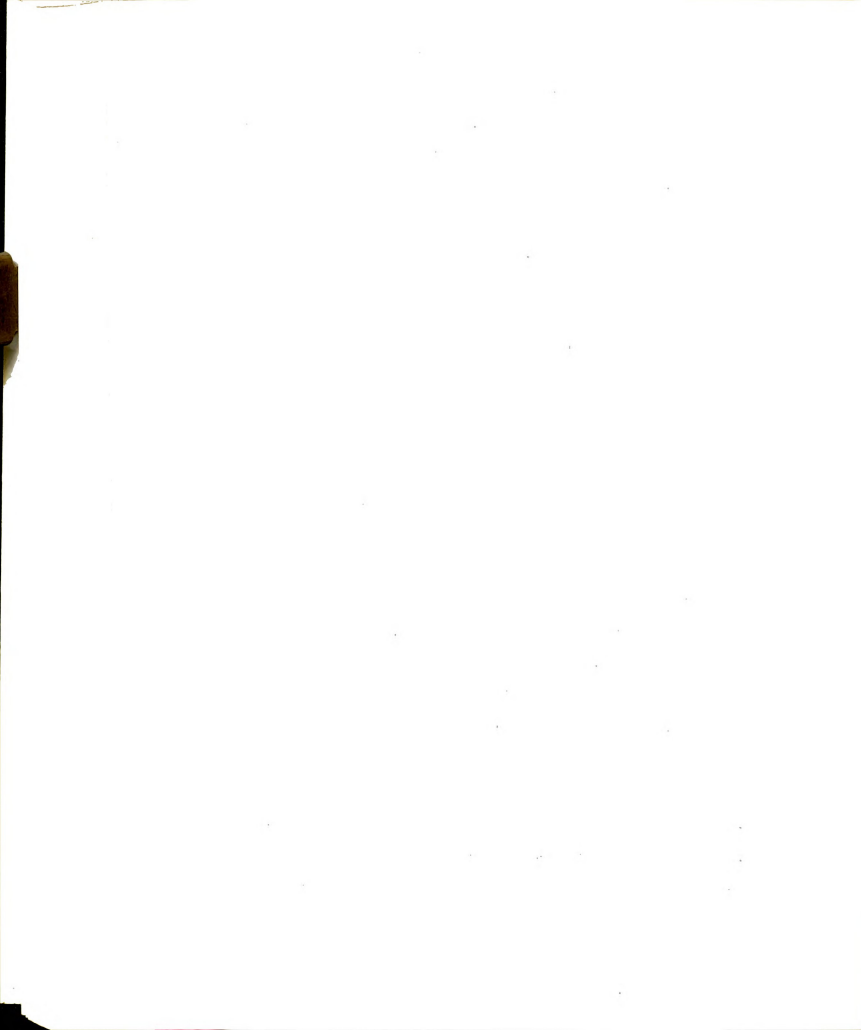


when James so chooses. But they retain their American identity, as James defines it, by refining the same innocence and morality that characterize their more vulgar countrymen. Their reversals of the conventions of American behaviour and character, that is, are contrasts in development rather than essence. James projects a story, for example, based on American chivalry and generosity:

It might be something to do--as very characteristically American. Do the old grand seigneur in a 'new bottle'--Frank H.'s cabling his eloping wife £100,000, a case in point: the sort of thing which a 1000 French pens would have commemorated of the Duc de Richelieu. (Notebooks, 233)

The American trait underlying such an act takes a very European turn, reversing the situation in which an American would normally exercise such chivalry. The French are famous for such acts--perhaps because, as James suggests, a thousand pens turn them into mythical conventions through publicity. Nevertheless an American combining the generosity of Christopher Newman and old Mr. Dosson might do the job quite credibly.

The problem with clothing an American in European conventions, or to use James's reversed metaphor, of pouring old wine into a new bottle, however, is that the label may be the only clue to the identity of the resulting mixture. The essence may be difficult to distill and recognize. Morality and innocence, the two supposedly American characteristics James usually depends on, are fairly slender threads from which to weave an identity. If conventions

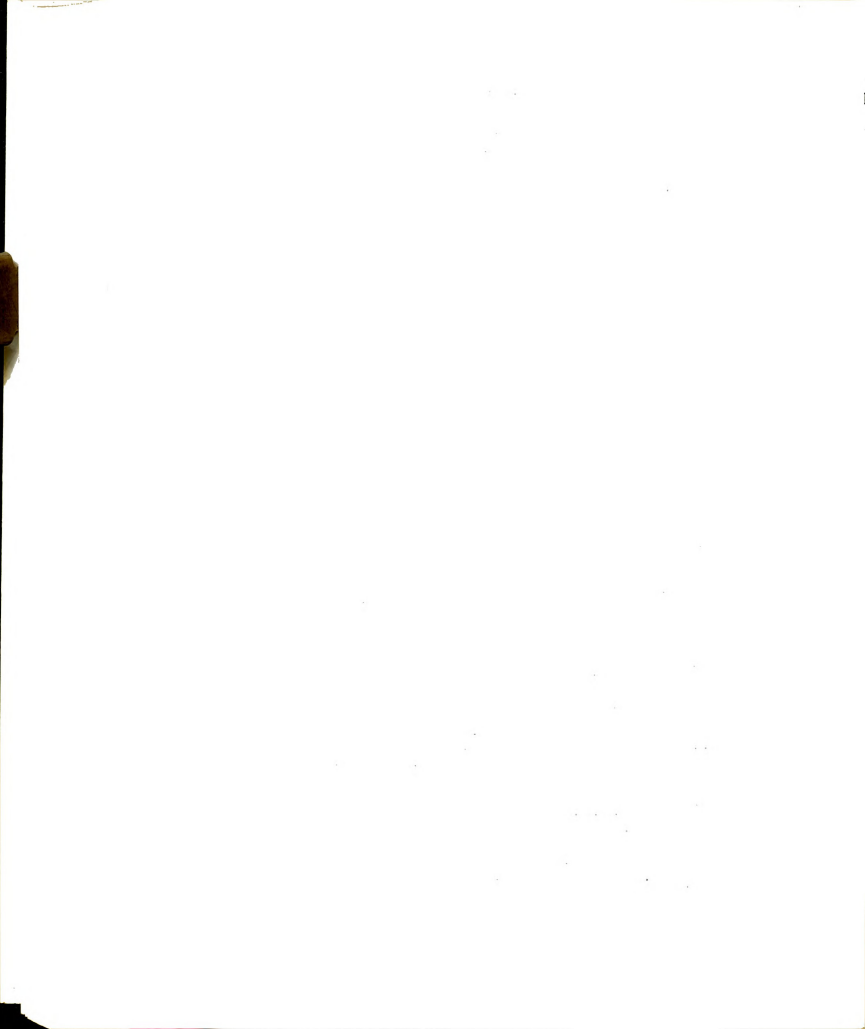


are reversed often enough, if the American and the European can change positions almost at will, the result is not only social synthesis but the fusion or confusion of national identities. Consequently when Milly Theale performs an act of chivalry even more startling than the one James projects here for his new grand seigneur, her innocence and fine morality impress the reader less as the essence of a national type than as defining characteristics of an archetype.

James is very aware of the problem reversals of conventions present to the maintenance of national identity in his characters. He defines the difficulty most explicitly in his discussion of the germinal idea of "Covering End" (1898):

The idea of the comedy must reside in the fact of the renversement, the alteration of the relations of certain elements of intercourse; the reversal of what the parties traditionally represent. . . . What my American woman must represent, at any rate, is the idea of attachment to the past, of romance, of history, continuity and conservatism. She represents it from a fresh sense, from an individual conviction, but she represents it none the less . . . In other words, she, intensely American in temperament--with her freedoms, her immunity from traditions, superstitions, fears and riguardi, but with an imagination kindling with her new contact with the presence of a past, a continuity, etc., represents the conservative element among a cluster of persons (an old house, family, race, society) already in course of becoming demoralized, vulgarized, and (from their own point of view), Americanized. . . . charming and interesting, it seems to me, should be the problem of representing the combination of this function of hers, this work, this office, this part she plays, and the intensity, the vividness, the unmistakableness and individuality of her American character.

(Notebooks, 128)



Mrs. Gracedew, the American whom James is projecting, must somehow become more English than the English yet retain her American identity. How does she do it? The reader's expectations, based on the long-standing conventions of the international theme, are reversed at nearly every turn. To be sure, the estate of Covering End is saved by Mrs. Gracedew's wealth, a standard use of American money from The American to The Golden Bowl. But she saves it from "some vulgar English people, very new and very dreadful," who cannot appreciate the English heritage, rather than from crass Americans (Notebooks, 185). Even more unconventionally, Mrs. Gracedew is more discriminating as a tourist at Covering End than Clement Yule is as the owner. Unlike "A Passionate Pilgrim," in which owner Richard Searle is the consummate guide, in "Covering End" James conceives the newcomer Mrs. Gracedew, "the charming woman showing the house herself, showing it better than any of them can" (Notebooks, 185). In spite of his name the owner has little appreciation for the English hearth, until "Mrs. Gracedew argues Yule into a love for the house and the ancient tradition it represents" (Notebooks, 186). The question of whether the Briton who may be dulled by overexposure, or the American who may be perceptive through freshness, is in fact the better sensor of the past--Clement Searle's old dilemma--is now clearly resolved in favor of the American. And the right kind of American identity, the proper



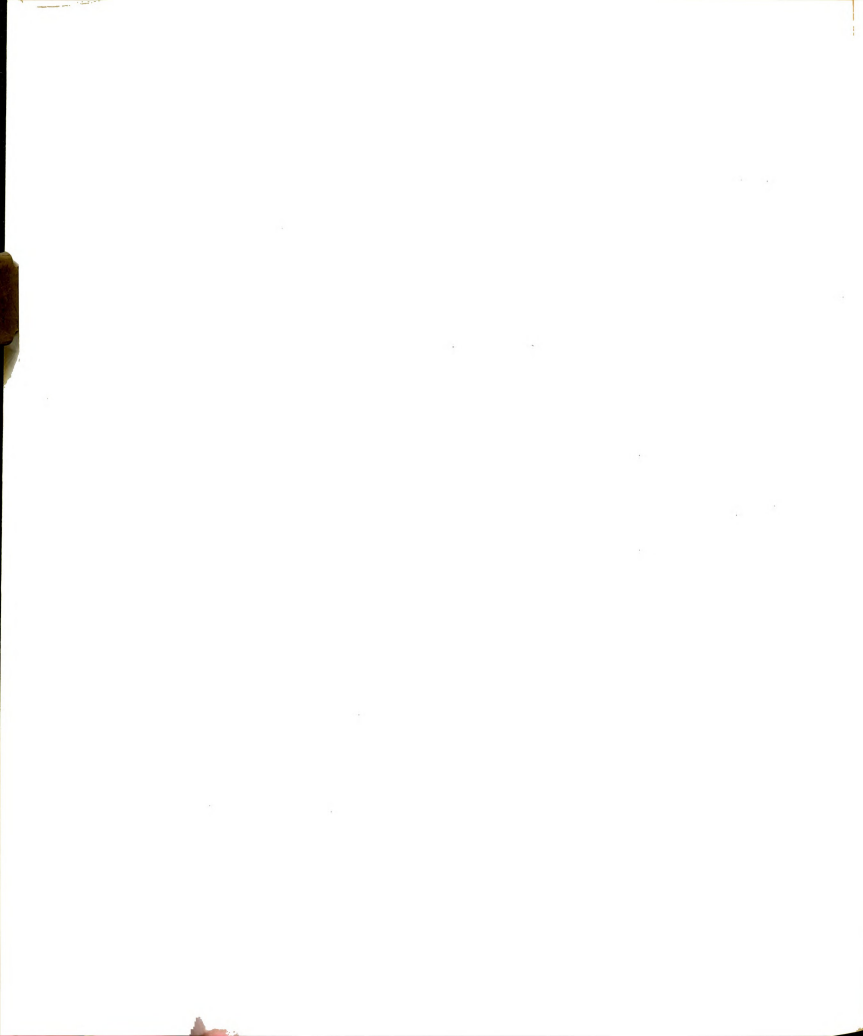
development of native gifts, becomes the key to Anglo-Saxon unity. What, then, preserves Mrs. Gracedew's identity as an American? I submit that it is in part the American sense of the past, the no longer pathological but still very sensitive faculty which accompanies intelligent American innocence and freshness. When combined with the most discriminating morality, this sense of the past is the greatest dowry an American can bring to the social fusion. Granted the total is not an impressively particular identity. But neither is Milly Theale's nor Maggie Verver's--as we shall see in the major phase.

In addition to the stories of perceptive Americans, those of less perceptive and even "passionless pilgrims" in the English period predict elements that will be important in the major phase. "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" (1900) is one of these, supporting part of what I have argued on the basis of "Covering End." Wegelin judges the story as "a flicker of the old international flame" in its treatment of the question of contrasting manners, but more importantly "What gives it the color of the later period is the emphasis on the puzzle of Americanism. For more and more James's concern with Europe became a function of his preoccupation with the American character" (54). As early as 1892, though he has left the early surge of international tales behind him, James reads an article in the Revue des Deux Mondes that makes him "want to do something more with the American character" (Notebooks, 125). "Miss Gunton" touches on the



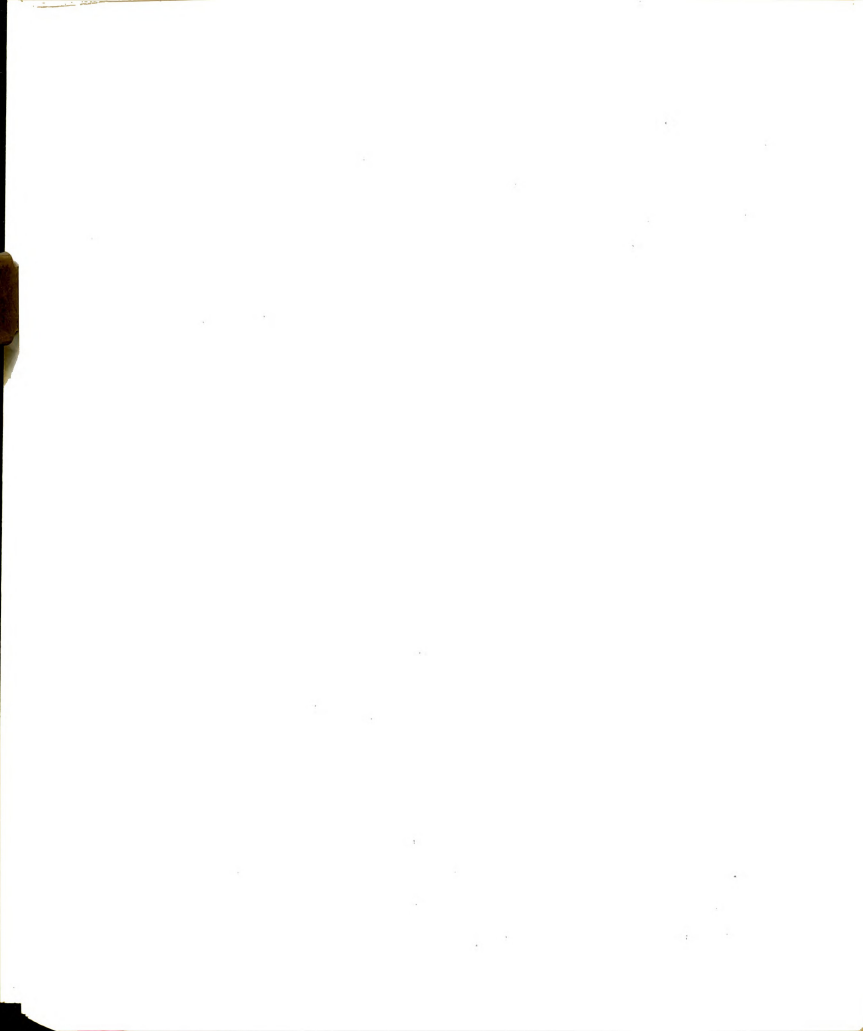
development of American character in a manner similar to "Covering End," though its heroine is not so perceptive, and provides interesting parallels to the development of Americans in The Golden Bowl.

Christina Light introduced readers of James long ago to the sport of hooking Italian princes, so the exploits of Miss Gunton with her prince, who is caught and let go, are not in themselves that new; but they do parallel a portion of Maggie Verver's relation to Prince Amerigo. In spite of her insistence that the prince's mother break with European tradition by writing first to welcome her into the family, Lily Gunton is attracted to the prince mainly by such traditions (cf. Matthiessen and Murdock, Notebooks, 190). The sense of the past that draws Lily to her prince will also attract Maggie to Prince Amerigo. The parallel grows stronger when the reader discovers that the prince is partly attracted to Lily by her expectations of a fortune; for the Ververs certainly interest Amerigo because they can help him bail out his patrimony. Finally, Miss Gunton throws over her prince for Adam P. Bransby, just as Maggie has the choice between Amerigo and her Adam. But of course Maggie chooses the Prince and the Prince chooses Maggie. Their romance is the epitome of social fusion. For just as Maggie learns to appreciate the Prince as a human being formed by a magnificent heritage, so Amerigo learns to appreciate Maggie-- even though, as Lady Champer tells the other prince in "Miss Gunton," the American character is



all that Americans have, and "if you marry anything you marry that."⁵ If nothing else, "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" is a good example of how situations and characters similar to ones treated in the major phase must be dealt with in a much different manner in the English period to produce a short comedy (cf. Notebooks, 189).

But there is another technique used in "Miss Gunton" which has interesting parallels in works of the later period. The fact that the tale is told from the English viewpoint of Lady Champer adds a fine perspective to the story, juxtaposing or overlaying national perceptions. Similarly "The Path of Duty" is a story which has an American providing the perspective on a story of British manners and morals. Such viewpoints direct the reader toward a cosmopolitan angle, for the overlaying of American and English perspectives acts as an ironic corrective of each. The synthesis of American and English viewpoints is taking place within James just as he had planned in 1888, for he can pose as an Englishman looking at American behaviour or as an American looking at English behaviour (cf. Letters, I, 141-42), and the reader is nudged toward a similar perspective. This technique will be broadened by alternating English and American viewpoints in The Wings of the Dove, which hints at the gradual coalescence of Densher's and Milly's outlooks. Likewise The Golden Bowl is made up of alternating "overlaid" national viewpoints, the first half containing the Prince's view of the action, the second half switching



to Maggie's American perception of the situation. The two viewpoints become one at the end of the novel, with the Prince looking at Maggie and Maggie looking at the Prince in a steady equal gaze of perfect harmony. "I see nothing but you," the Prince explains, and Maggie can tell by the light in his eyes that what he says is true (cf. Wegelin, 137).

But as Wegelin notes, the major characteristic that places stories like "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie" in the later phase of the international theme is the centrality of the question of American identity. What is an American? James asks this question many times during his career--certainly in "A Passionate Pilgrim" and The American, to some degree in "Daisy Miller," and predominantly in The Reverberator and the novels of the major phase. The question takes on a special poignancy during the English period and the major phase because James is trying to answer it from a distance, through observing samples of Americans abroad, and the evidence is more tantalizing than satisfying. Finally the issue becomes sharp enough to prick James into his long overdue visit to America to study the animal in its native lair. But by then his major fiction is behind him, and the result of answering the question solely from abroad has clearly left its mark. James realizes that even some of his early Americans like Daisy Miller are the "stuff of pure romance" (cf. Prefaces, 270), and that his finest Americans are idealizations woven as much from strands of



myth and literature as from basic threads in the social fabric.

In the early years of the English period, of course, James feels he knows American character more fully than English character. He may have qualms about "half" doing England, but when he makes that half the settings, he can populate a scene he knows with the American characters he knows and feel perfectly safe. Thus in 1888, for example, he decides to write "Louisa Pallant" as a story of Americans in Europe because "Howells writes to me that I do the 'international' far better than anything else" (Notebooks, 73). Yet as early as 1885 he had written The Bostonians as a deliberate "attempt to show that I can write an American story" (Notebooks, 47). Such vulnerability to the criticism of his allegedly un-American sensibility may reveal a disturbing uncertainty of his American identity. He watches very hopefully the ministry of James Russell Lowell from 1885 to 1890 working toward good British-American relations in London, a positive evidence of increasing social unity among the educated of both nations. But a disturbing observation intrudes: "Strange was his double existence--the American and English sides of his medal, which had yet so much in common. That is, I don't know how English he was at home, but he was conspicuously American here" (Letters, I, 184). James must have wondered whether or not he too seemed neither fish nor fowl. That uncertainty grows.

He tries hard to hold on to his sense of America. But



as time goes on an intermittent alienation from all things American gnaws away at his sense of communion, and at his hopes for an ultimate synthesis of the most cultured in America and England. Disgusted by the monotony of news from the States, he writes to Charles Eliot Norton in 1892 that the only American products are "railway-smashes and young ladies for lords" (Letters, I, 194). And after more than a dozen years abroad, in 1896, James admits that he no longer understands America and its jingoism; like Winterbourne in "Daisy Miller," he says he has been away too long, and he fears his optimistic Anglo-Americanism may be an unequal yoking together of two civilizations--"or rather one civilization and a barbarism."⁶ In a projected story he fears the "age of Mrs. Jack . . . the American, the nightmare," with her fellow "Americans looming up--dim, vast, portentous--in their millions--like gathering waves--the barbarians of the Roman Empire" (Notebooks, 207). He feels "out of it," as he writes to Howells, for "A new generation, that I know not, and mainly prize not, has taken universal possession" of the Anglo-Saxon world (Letters, I, 230).

With such a sense of alienation from common Americans, James more and more relies on almost wholly English materials, and limits his presentation of Americans to such "stray spark(s) of the old 'international' flame" as he is still able to strike. So Wegelin's explanation of his concentration on English materials as a result of his assumption of the cultural unity of England and the United States is

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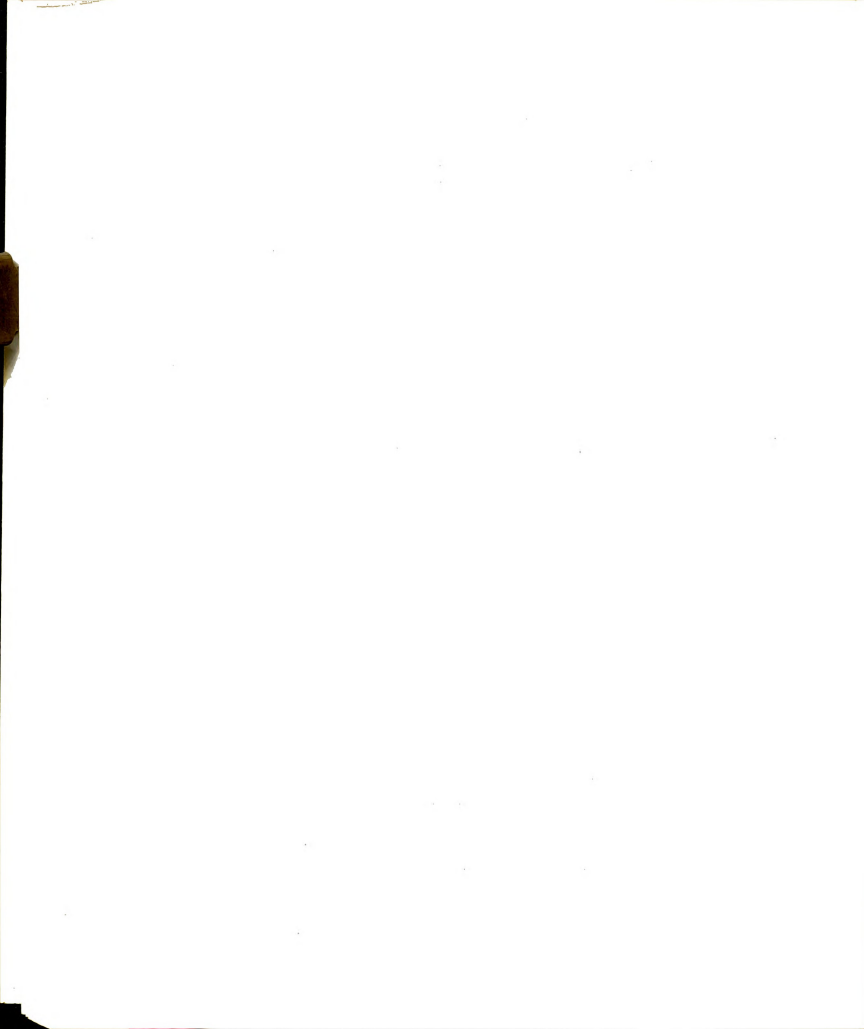
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therefore only half an explanation:

As prolonged residence abroad made the superficial differences between American and European manners familiar and therefore less absorbing to him, he turned for a time from the international scene to purely English subjects, gradually lowering his sights at the same time from the surface of the world of manners to more hidden currents of ethical feeling--a focus which he retained when toward the turn of the century his native interest in the American character reasserted itself. (47)

This assessment is correct in outlining the original impetus for James's turning from international works to English ones, and in tracing part of the results through the major phase. The problems of ethics and consciousness obviously grow in importance through The Spoils of Poynton (1896), What Maisie Knew (1897), "In the Cage" (1898), "The Turn of the Screw" (1898), The Awkward Age (1898-99), The Sacred Fount (1901), and the novels of the major phase. But surely James's sense of increasing distance from the main current of American life must also have influenced him to choose English subjects. If the sense of social unity alone governed his choice of subjects, he would create more fine Americans in the English period. The biggest paradox is that his alienation from America continues to grow up to the turn of the century, when his Americans in fact become the finest and his hopes for social fusion so clearly flower--but this problem is reserved for the major phase.

More immediate is the question of the influence of such feelings about America on the creation of American characters in the international tales of the English period.



If James is becoming alienated from Americans or at least getting out of touch with them, there should be evidence of that gap in his depiction of them. Such evidence is clearest, naturally, when James specifically treats the problem of American identity. As the Freers of "Lady Barbarina," the Americans and Americano-Europeans in The Reverberator, and the Bordereaux of "The Aspern Papers" amply demonstrate, that problem becomes one of giving Americans any identity at all.

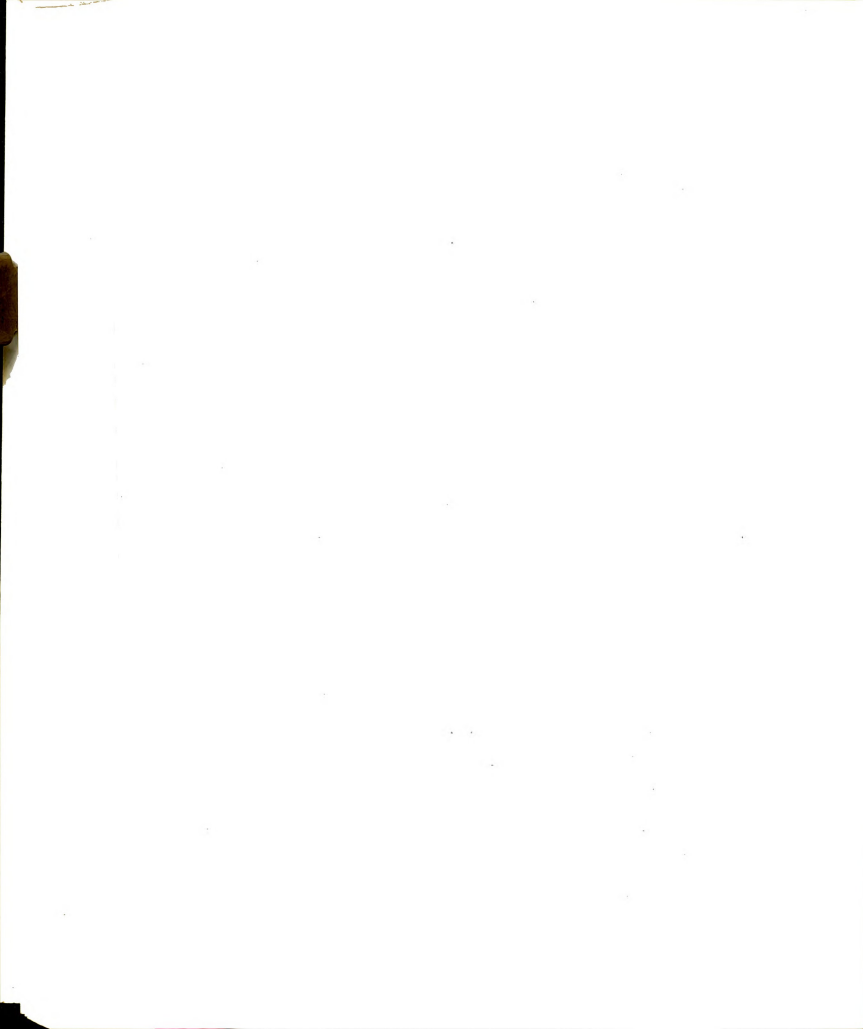
From the first, of course, James had difficulty making his Americans full and round. The fact that readers accept the Daisy Millers and Christopher Newmans so readily as individuals is a fine tribute to James's ability to make a little dialogue and a very few selected details go a long way. Christopher Newman's face, for example, "had that paucity of detail which is yet not emptiness, that blankness which is not simplicity, that look of being committed to nothing in particular, of standing in a posture of general hospitality to the chances of life, of being very much at one's own disposal, characteristic of American faces of the clear strain" (I, 3-4). Such faces are beautifully American--but they have the identity only of a type and are delineated primarily by characteristics which they do not possess. Compare also the famous description of Miss Birdseye in The Bostonians, James's most unpopular attempt to describe an American since "Daisy Miller":



She had a sad, soft, pale face which . . . looked as if it had been soaked, blurred, and made vague by exposure to some slow dissolvent. The long practice of philanthropy had not given accent to her features; it had rubbed out their transitions, their meanings. The waves of sympathy, of enthusiasm, had wrought upon them in the same way in which waves of time finally modify the surface of old marble busts, gradually washing away their sharpness, their details.⁷

Those "American faces of the clear strain" get much clearer, much blanker than Newman's ingeniously described countenance or even Miss Birdseye's erased visage, until the passionless pilgrims in particular and even the more perceptive Americans are faceless. The problem of describing and defining American figures in the absence of positive characteristics grows more and more acute, and while James often makes this paucity of personality very comic, it is nevertheless a severe problem for him as a professing realist, a novelist supposed to thrive on concrete detail.⁸

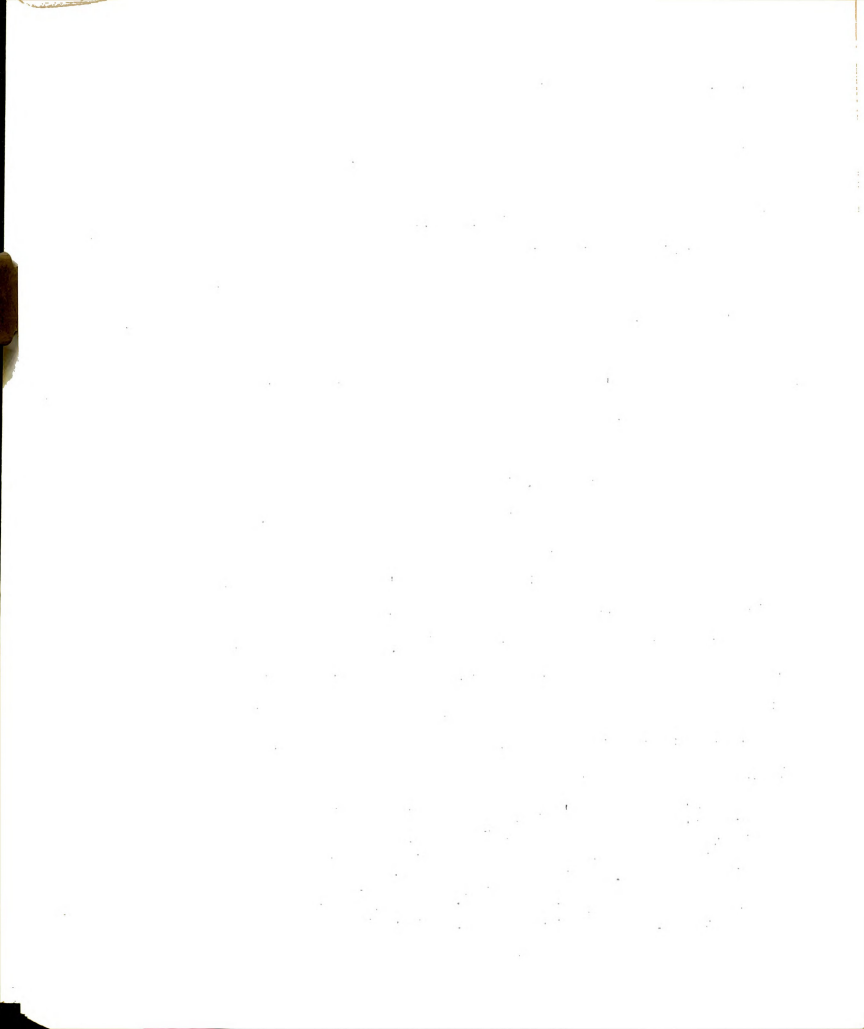
Granville Hicks argues that the works of this period are less than wholly English because James is never fully assimilated by English society (115-16); Van Wyck Brooks argues that a similar fault shows in his creation of Americans during this period (104 f.), since James is also out of touch with his native land. With adjustments made for the exaggeration that always accompanies debate on controversial points, their arguments have considerable validity. For James is caught somewhere between the two cultures, being more sophisticated than either the average Briton or the average American and out of touch with both to some



degree.⁹ But whether his decision to live abroad is considered as an acceptance of the challenge of treating Europe which he never quite succeeds in mastering, or as an attempt to save himself as an artist at the cost of diminishing his immediate sense of America, or whether a more generous interpretation of his gains and losses is maintained--the fact remains that the artistic consequences of the decision are tremendous. The resulting malleable if nearly colorless nature of Americans portrayed in the English period helps explain why James's later Americans take on increasingly archetypal roles. For if James discovers that he can make virtually anything out of an American, he also finds that characters without a past, innocent and with a world to make or to learn, are the staple fare of fairy tales, the "pure stuff" of romance.

In describing the shift from James's early period of objectivity and nearly equal emphasis on American and European foibles in his international tales, to the paradoxically greater concern with American identity in the international tales of the English period, Wegelin characterizes the change in the international theme as primarily a switch in the type of characters portrayed:

The shift to James's more pronounced concern with its American aspects soon showed itself in the frequency with which Europeanized Americans replaced Europeans in his international dramas. This happened particularly when the scene was not England but another European country, since James's reason for the shift was, in the first place, quite simply



the kind of doubt expressed in Portraits of Places, the doubt of his ability to render foreign characters with anything but worthless approximation. (54)

What Wegelin apparently has not noticed is that James's Americans and Europeanized Americans are approximations as well. His Americans become more and more blank, and his Europeanized compatriots become less and less American--or any other specific nationality. Just as James's most perceptive Americans move toward archetypes by having only characteristics which define their general sensibility or which simply separate them from the ordinary by reversing the conventions governing such types, so his passionless pilgrims approximate archetypes by becoming nonentities defined by their roles, and his Europeanized Americans are effectively freed from the restrictions of national character for broader dramatic purposes. James is emancipated from the provincialisms of national characters. He learns to use or reverse "national" characteristics established by his international conventions to save him "preparations" in the portrayal of figures with archetypal roles in psychological dramas.

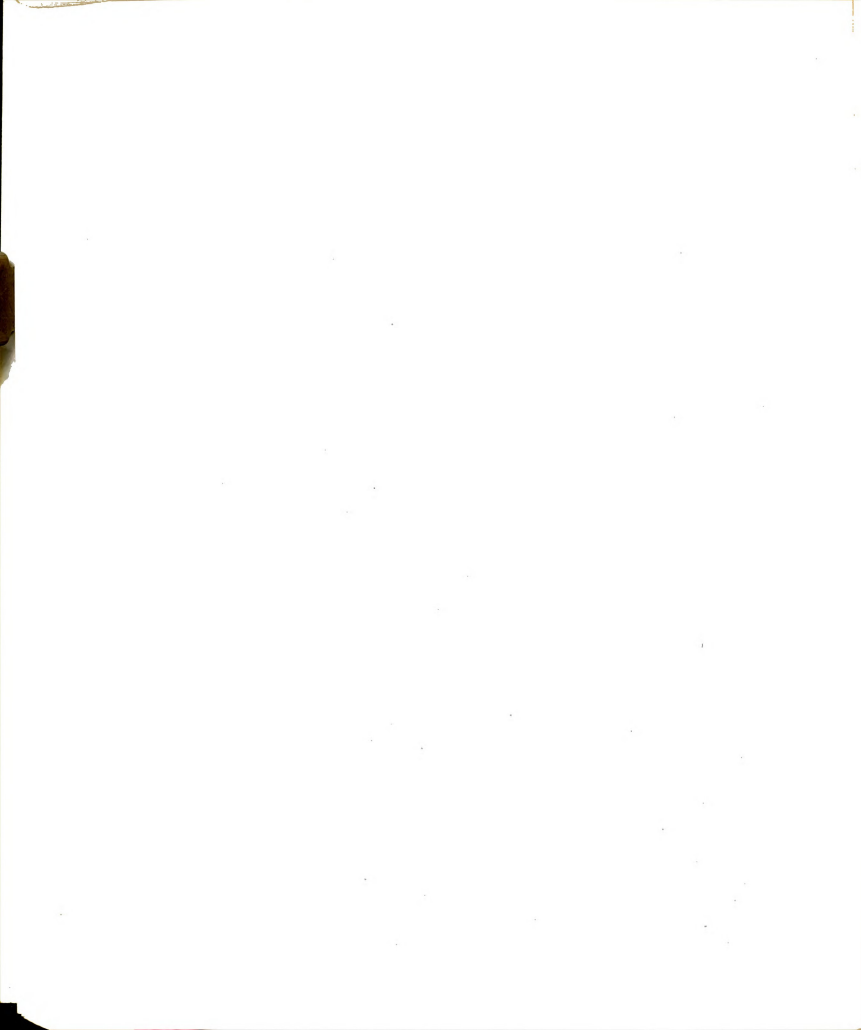
Winterbourne's loss of his American identity in "Daisy Miller" through staying abroad too long has already been mentioned. The narrator of "The Pension Beaurepas" (1879) has lost much of his American quality as well, especially when compared with the Rucks (cf. XIV, 401). But even when there is little question of loss of American identity,



James is hard put in the English period to define exactly what an American identity is. The best examples of his difficulty are the Freers of "Lady Barbarina" and George Flack and the Dossons of The Reverberator.

Mr. and Mrs. Dexter Freer are just that--more free than Europeans. But freedom is not an identity in itself, in spite of its role in characterizing such figures as Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer and Milly Theale. There must be more. The Freers are a special brand of Americans, almost but not quite expatriates, nomads of Europe but socialites of Cincinnati. They are extremely adaptable, in deliberate contrast to inflexible English people like Lady Barb. The problem is to identify and define such people through some meaningful frame of reference. What is their exact cultural identity? The Freers are fairly perceptive, but they are very difficult to perceive in the culture they are observing. Their protective coloration, or lack of all color, makes them nearly invisible:

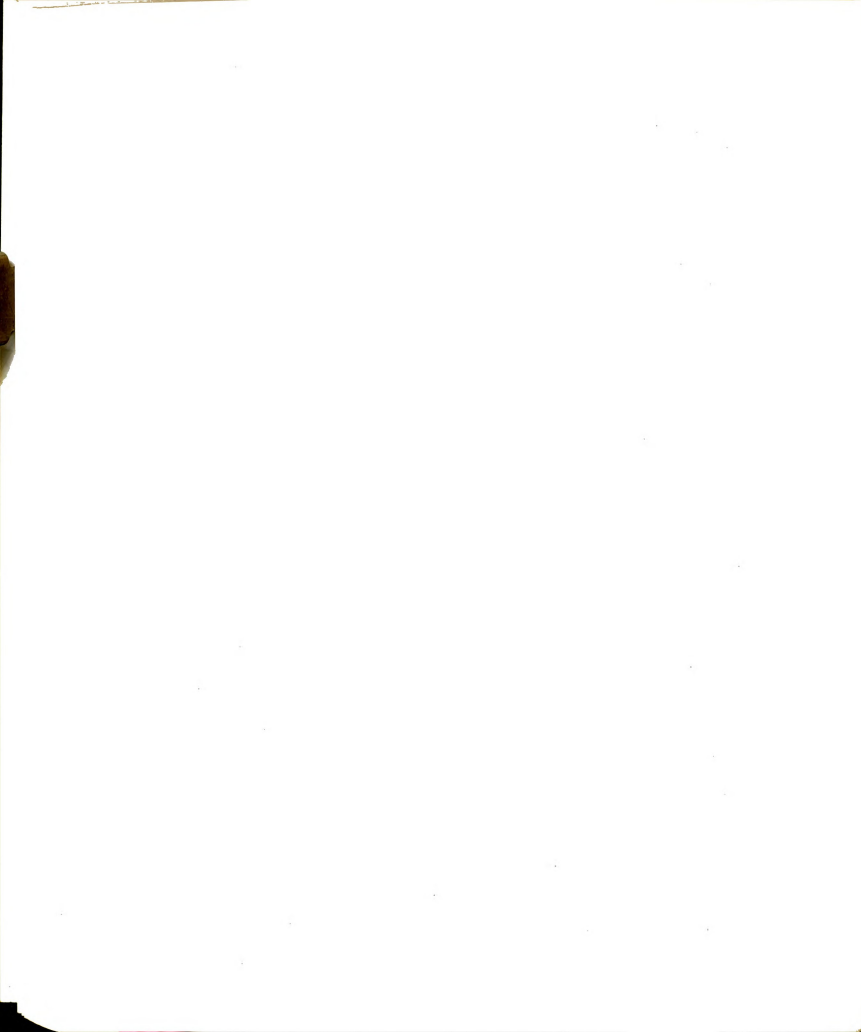
. . . they were of that nationality for which Hyde Park at the height of the season is most completely illustrative. They were native aliens, so to speak, people at once so initiated and so detached could only be Americans. This reflexion indeed you would have made only after some delay; for it must be allowed that they bristled with none of those modern signs that carry out the tradition of the old indigenous war-paint and feathers. They had the American turn of mind, but that was very secret; and to your eye--if your eye had cared about it--they might have been either intimately British or remotely foreign. It was as if they studied, for convenience, to be superficially colourless; their colour was all in their talk. They were not in the least verdant; they were grey rather, of monotonous hue. If they were



interested in the riders, the horses, the walkers, the great exhibition of English wealth and health, beauty, luxury, and leisure, it was because all this referred itself to other impressions, because they had the key to almost everything that needed an answer--because, in a word, they were able to compare. They had not arrived, they had only returned; and recognition much more than surprise was expressed in their quiet eyes. Dexter Freer and his wife belonged in fine to that great company of Americans who are constantly "passing through" London. (XIV, 4)

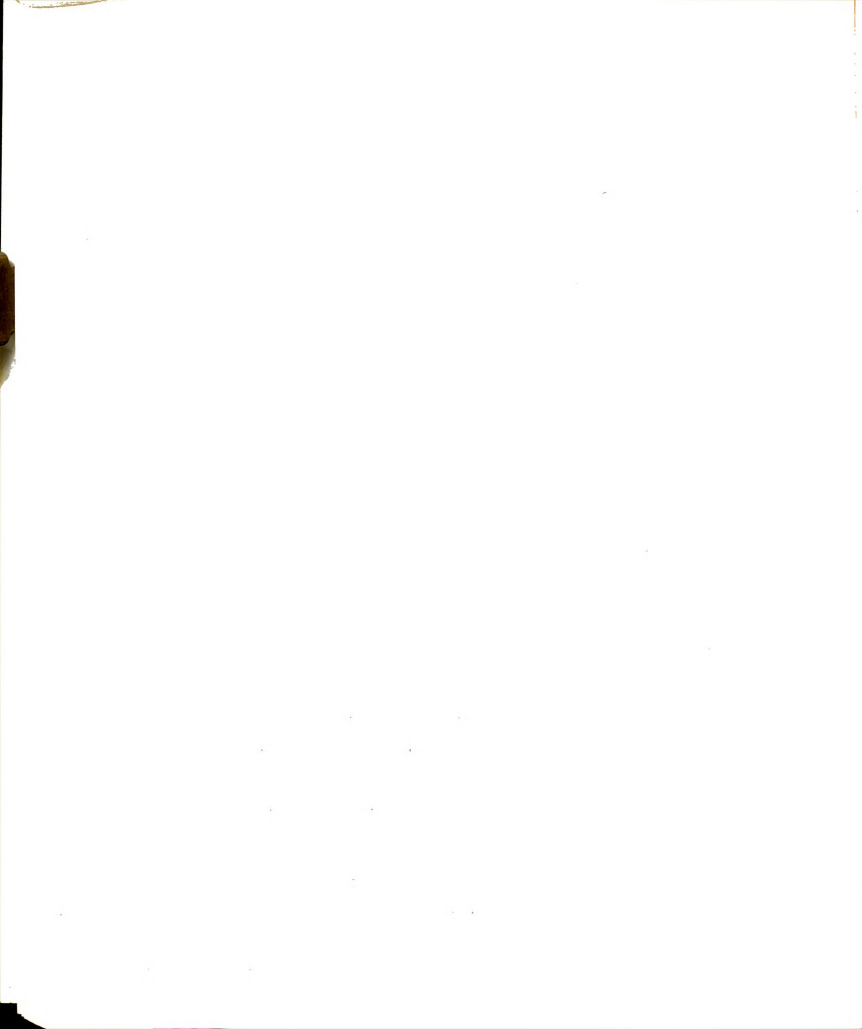
Lady Barb is not the only one who has trouble spotting Americans like these. Almost all external American coloration has come off. The only thing American left is their "turn of mind," and that is revealed only in dialogue, which is fairly sparse. Again, as with Mrs. Gracedew, their main defining mental capacity is the perception of contrasts for comparative purposes, including of course a sense of the past. They are more discriminating and less worshipful than Clement Searle or even Jackson Lemon, and in their paradoxical synthetic state as "native aliens" both "initiated" and "detached," the Freers are very objective observers. While their curiosity and meddlesomeness are mildly ridiculed in the story, they nevertheless act as a chorus commenting on the action. They tip the reader off to the fact that James is writing a Thackerayan satire (22-23), and quite correctly advise Lemon that being an American with an English wife will not be simple (84, 136).

The problem is that such characters tend to lose all identity, or at least become very much alike. Their colorlessness, already emphasized, fades toward invisibility.



Mrs. Freer, a "small plump person, rather polished than naturally fresh, with a white face and hair still evenly black, smiled perpetually, but had never laughed since the death of a son whom she had lost ten years after her marriage" (5-6). Her dress is always "black or dark grey," and "harmoniously simple." The touch about her being "rather polished than naturally fresh" is a fine distinction as ingenious as the description of Christopher Newman, but is essentially a camouflage for her blankness. The hint about her son gives her the depth of a past, but only in the vaguest manner, and the point is not very important in the story. Just as vague, Doctor Feeder has a "delightful face, which was both simple and clever and, as if this weren't enough, showed a really tasteless overheaping of the cardinal virtues. . . . he was clearly a person who would shine at sea with an almost intolerable blandness" (14-15). Americans, with only their simplicity, morality, and intelligence, are faceless.

When James's Americans are not intelligent, their lack of identity is even more obvious. Consider, for example, the all-Americans of The Reverberator. Delia Dosson, appropriately named Fidelia for her virtues, has a "large white face": "She always looked the same; all the contrivances of Paris couldn't fill out that blank" (XIII, 11). Another American visage of the clear strain, hers is "a plain clean round pattern face . . . a china plate"; it is like "a room kept dusted and aired for candid earnest

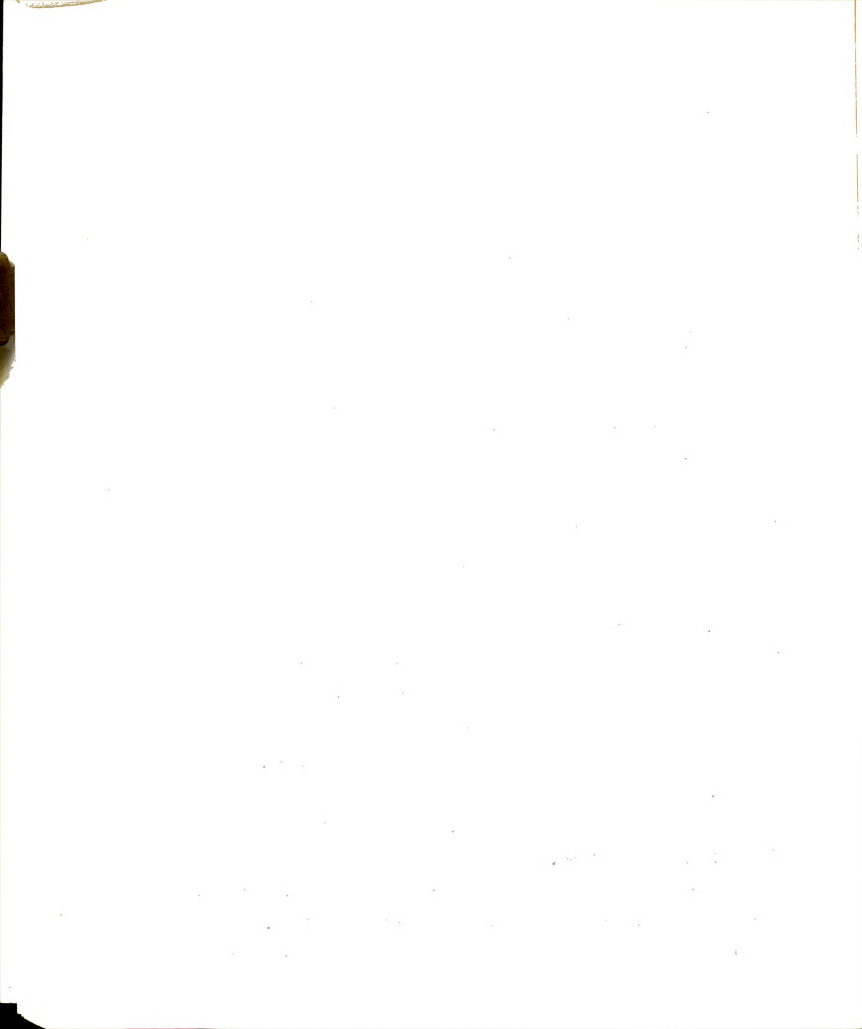


occasions" (11). Her sister Francie, though her shred of intelligence suggests what James will do with a truly intelligent tabula rasa in the major phase, has little more identity. Her "unaffirmative chin" and "inconceivabilities of ignorance" are joined by a nondescript figure:

Rather tall than short, fine slender erect, with an airy lightness of hand and foot, she yet gave no impression of quick movement, of abundant chatter, of excitable nerves and irrepressible life--no hint of arriving at her typical American grace in the most usual way. She was pretty without emphasis and as might almost have been said without point . . . (16)

That is, Francie has no distinguishing marks. James defines her primarily by negating characteristics of his other typical American girls. But negation does not result in a positive personality. The fact that "there was nothing in her . . . to confirm the implication that she had rushed about the deck of a Cunarder with a newspaper-man" is not sufficient to separate her from the Pandora Days and Daisy Millers. Her opinion of herself also shows how little identity she has: "She was not to be counted on; she was a vague soft negative being who had never decided anything and never would, who had not even the merit of knowing how to flirt and who only asked to be let alone" (58; cf. 172, 195-96). Her perverse certainty of failure might easily be developed into a fine neurosis, but even this possibility is not exploited.

George Flack, more than Francie or even Delia, however, is the epitome of this brand of nondescript American. Given James's low opinion of the American man, the best example



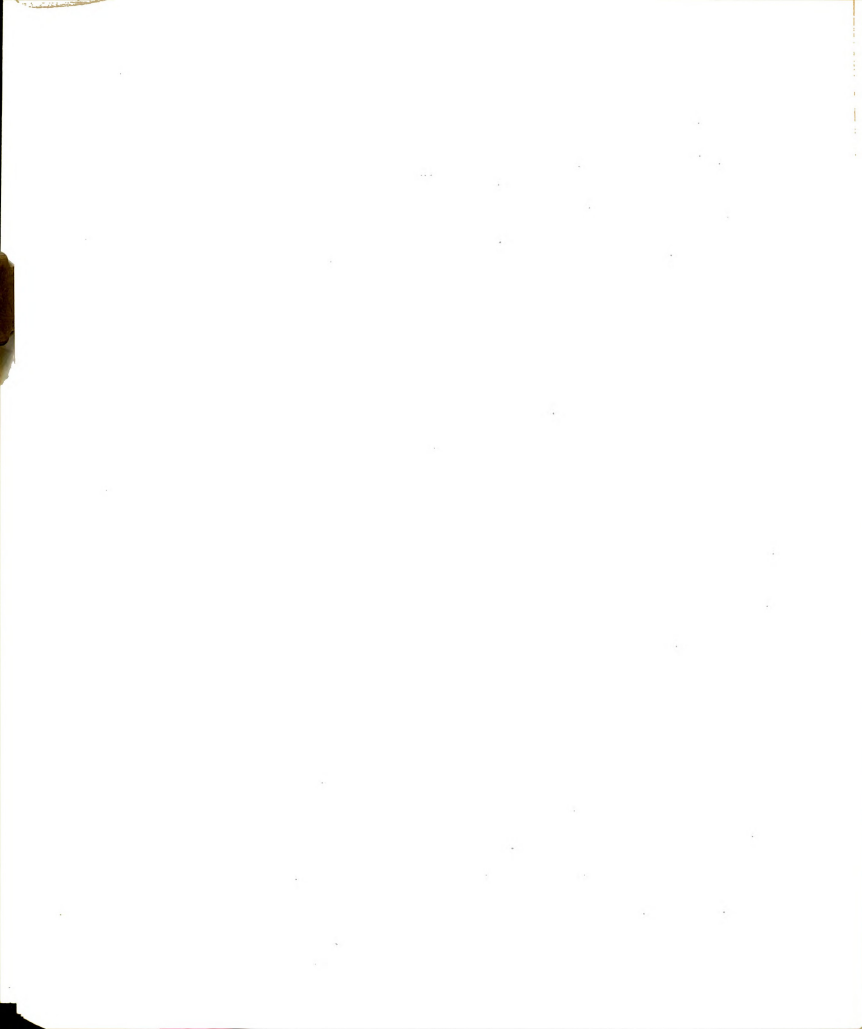
would have to be male. Observers feel "they had seen him before":

And, oddly enough, this recognition carried with it no ability to remember--that is to recall--him; you couldn't conveniently have prefigured him, and it was only when you were conscious of him that you knew you had already somehow paid for it. . . . He was not a specific person, but had beyond even Delia Dosson, in whom we have facially noted it, the quality of the sample or advertisement, the air of representing a line of goods for which there is a steady popular demand. (14)

A reporter less striking than Henrietta Stackpole, Flack could be designated by "a number," like a newspaper, and "adequately marked as 'young commercial American'" (14). James mocks Flack's comic lack of identity by noting that he has "in his right forefinger a curious natural crook which might have availed, under pressure, to identify him. But for the convenience of society he ought always to have worn something conspicuous--a green hat or a yellow neck-tie" (15).

Such characters are symptoms of James's limited range of experience with American character. He never fully understands the "down-town" world of business in New York City, and there are few types (particularly of males) "up-town" for him to deal with (Prefaces, 193). Consequently Christopher Newman has only the vaguest background in business, and a man like Mr. Dosson carries on activities in banks "in a manner best known to himself" (83):

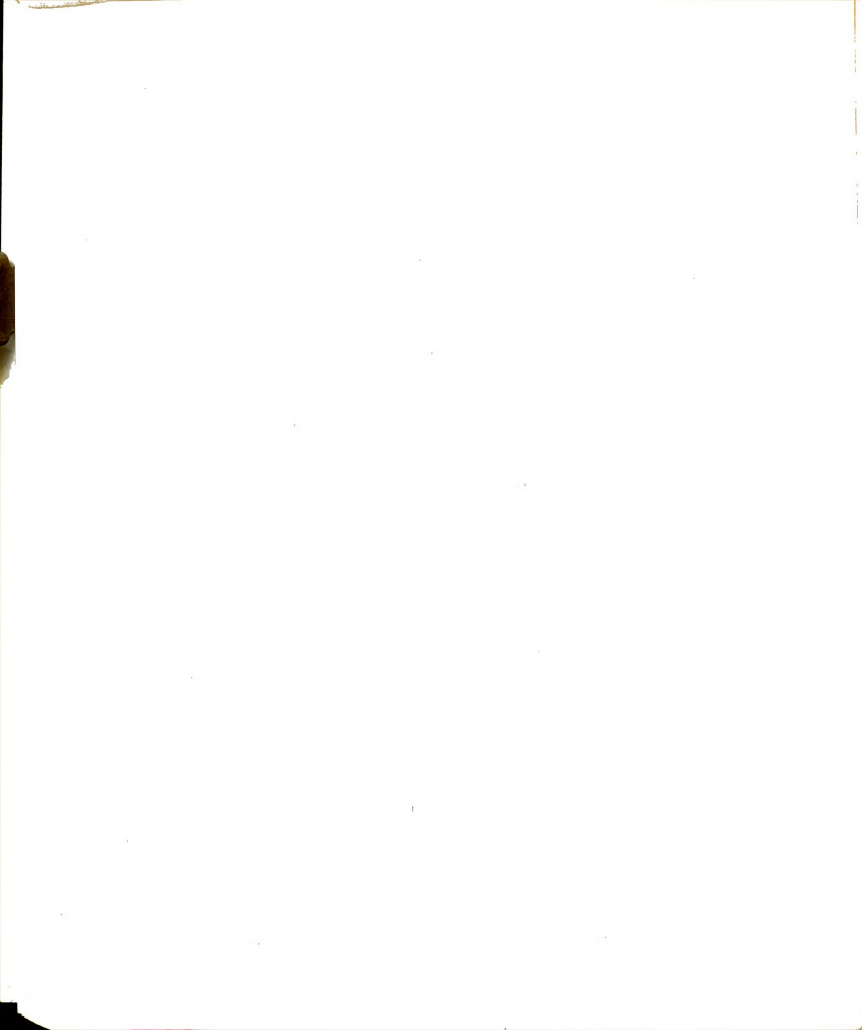
Mr. Dosson, it may further be noted, was a person of the simplest composition, a character as cipherable as a sum of two figures.



He had a native financial faculty of the finest order, a gift as direct as a beautiful tenor voice, which had enabled him, without the aid of particular strength of will or keenness of ambition, to build up a large fortune while he was still of middle age. (21)

Such a description derives too much from the myth of the easy fortunes to be made in America, a myth which Lady Canterville so ludicrously misunderstands in "Lady Barbarina" that she thinks such fortunes may vanish as magically as they appear (XIV, 68, 78). Dosson's only distinguishing feature is that he is not the ravenous Dreiserian titan; he is just defined as a negation of such figures. James does not comprehend the "financial faculty," so he must explain it in terms of "gifts" and miracles.

This increasing restriction in James's apprehension of American character changes the international theme tremendously. As he explains in the preface to The Reverberator, "the finer comparative interest" in the story, the old contrast of cultures, all but drops out in favor of the phenomenon of "the extraordinary amount of native innocence" that such "passionless pilgrims" as Francie Dosson and her family must have (Prefaces, 186, 189). The story reveals next to nothing about Europe, says James, but "in its indirect way, flooded 'American society' with light, became on that side in the highest degree documentary" (186). But what does Francie Dosson document? The only light she can shed across the Atlantic illuminates just that "extraordinary state of innocence" which James makes famous.

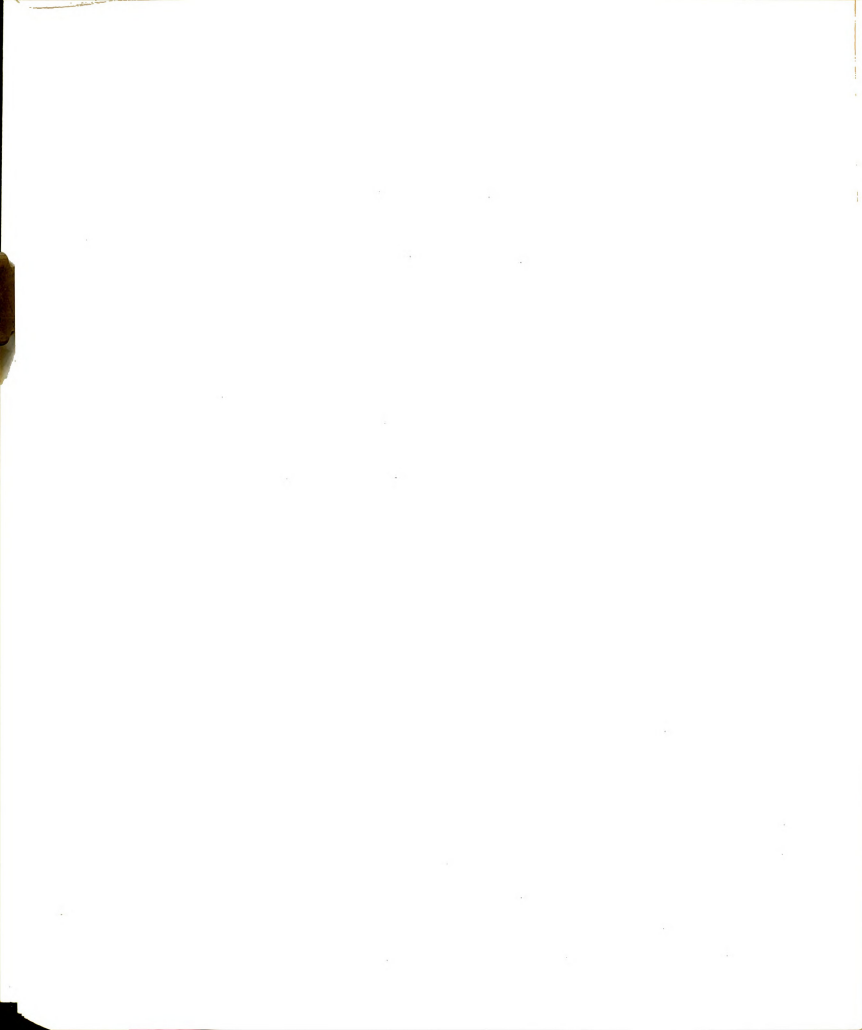


And as he clearly sees, American innocence is a rather blank social document:

I had indeed early to recognize that I was in a manner shut up to the contemplation of it--really to the point . . . of appearing to wander, as under some uncanny spell, amid the level sands and across the patchless desert of a single and of a not especially rich or fruitful aspect. . . . if I hadn't, on behalf of the American character, the negative aspects to deal with, I should practically, and given the limits of my range, have had no aspects at all. . . .

Given, after this fashion, my condition of knowledge, the most general appearance of the American (of those days) in Europe, that of being almost incredibly unaware of life--as the European order expressed life--had to represent for me the whole exhibitional range; the particular initiation on my own part that would have helped me to other apprehensions being absolutely bolted and barred to me. (Prefaces, 187)

Francie Dosson is documentary of a certain social condition, but she is also an innocent fated to play an age-old role--the low-born girl who makes the faux pas that breaks the charm and hence endangers the dream of a high marriage. She fluctuates between the social and the mythic roles because the story is a transitional one, but later dramas and fairy tales will come in which social documentation serves more as staging than as subject. What else could James do but move toward myth? He has "the clear sense that if I didn't see the Francie Dossons . . . as always and at any cost-- at whatever cost of repetition, that is--worth saving, I might as well shut up my international department" (192). His so-called "international" tales therefore become variations on the exploits of the innocent, which is almost by definition the heart of the romance and



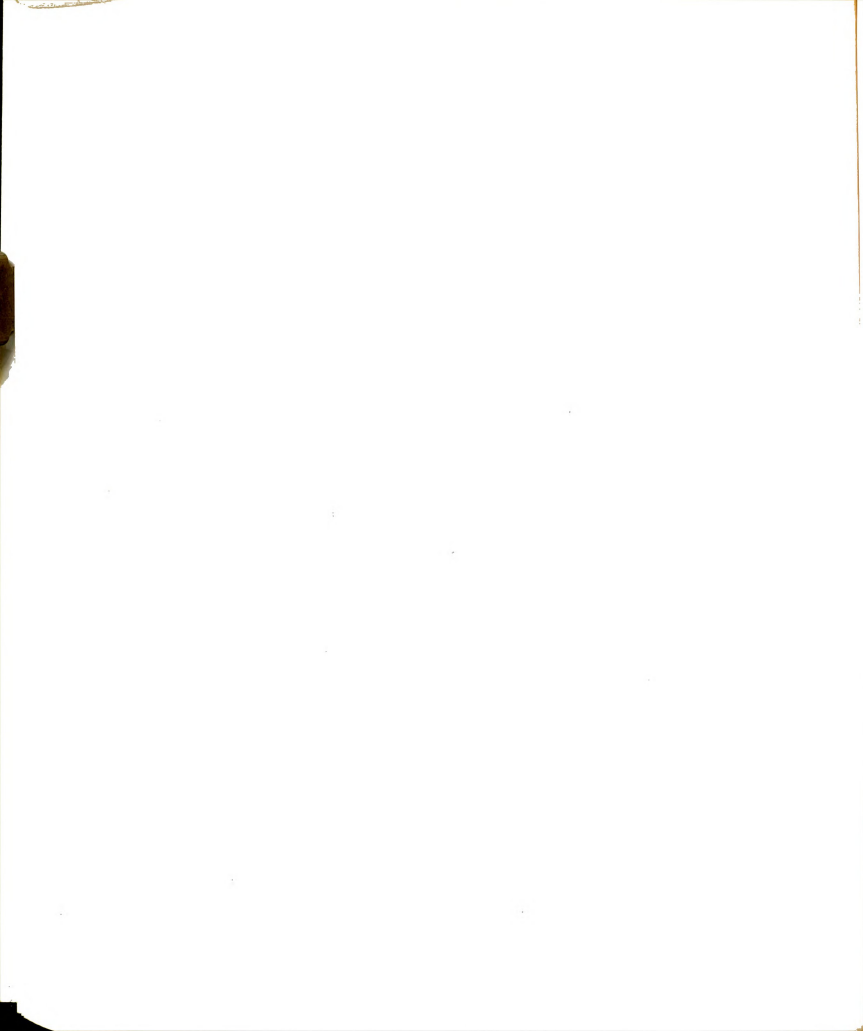
the fairy tale.

Rather than shut up shop, James also turns to another type of character--the Europeanized American--and once more produces neither American nor European figures, but structurally and thematically useful hybrids. The Proberts are selected for The Reverberator because they make the central situation believable, and save James the difficulty of testing his knowledge of a European society sensitive to publicity. The problem, as James explains in his notebooks, is to find people who would be shocked enough to contrast strongly with Francie's unshocked innocence of wrongdoing; that is,

where to find people today in Europe who would really be so shocked as that comes to--shocked enough for my dramatic opposition. I don't in the least see them in England, where publicity is far too much, by this time, in the manners of society for my representation to have any verisimilitude here. (Notebooks, 84)

Likewise the notoriously unshockable French society, near which James decides ironically to set the tale, would not react enough to the newspaper article. The event on which the story is based had happened years before in a city of southern Europe (Prefaces, 183), a time and place too remote for James to reproduce. He therefore creates a condition similar to the one in "Daisy Miller," in which the American colony in a major European city is more sensitive to shocks from American girls than the native society is:

So I found my solution where, with the help of Heaven, I hope to find many others in work to come; viz, in the idea of the Europeanized American. And it is that that represents not simply an easier

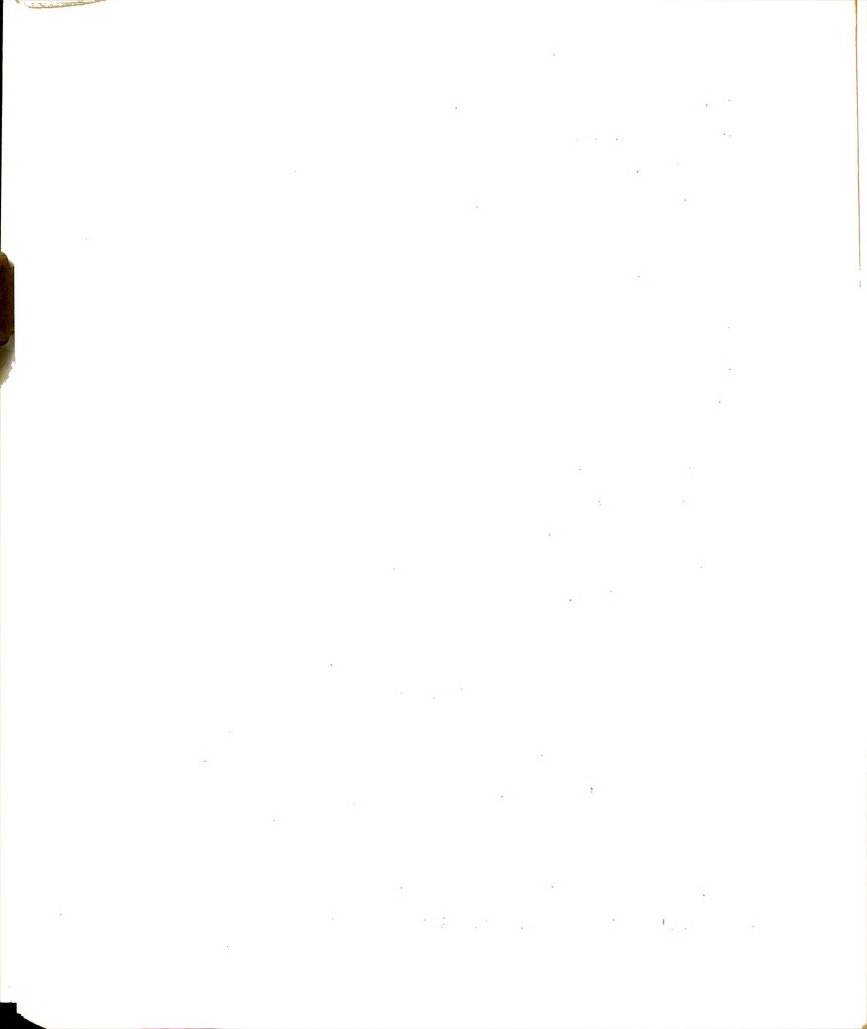


way, but a greater reality. . . . They would really be the people most detached and most scandalized . . . (Notebooks, 85)

James is right. Such Americans would be less secure in their place within the society, and would therefore be most likely to over-react. But James also uses Europeanized Americans because they are in fact "an easier way"; for they need be neither American nor European, but just a combination that follows strict conventions. And such figures, again, derive as much from types in literature as from any nation.

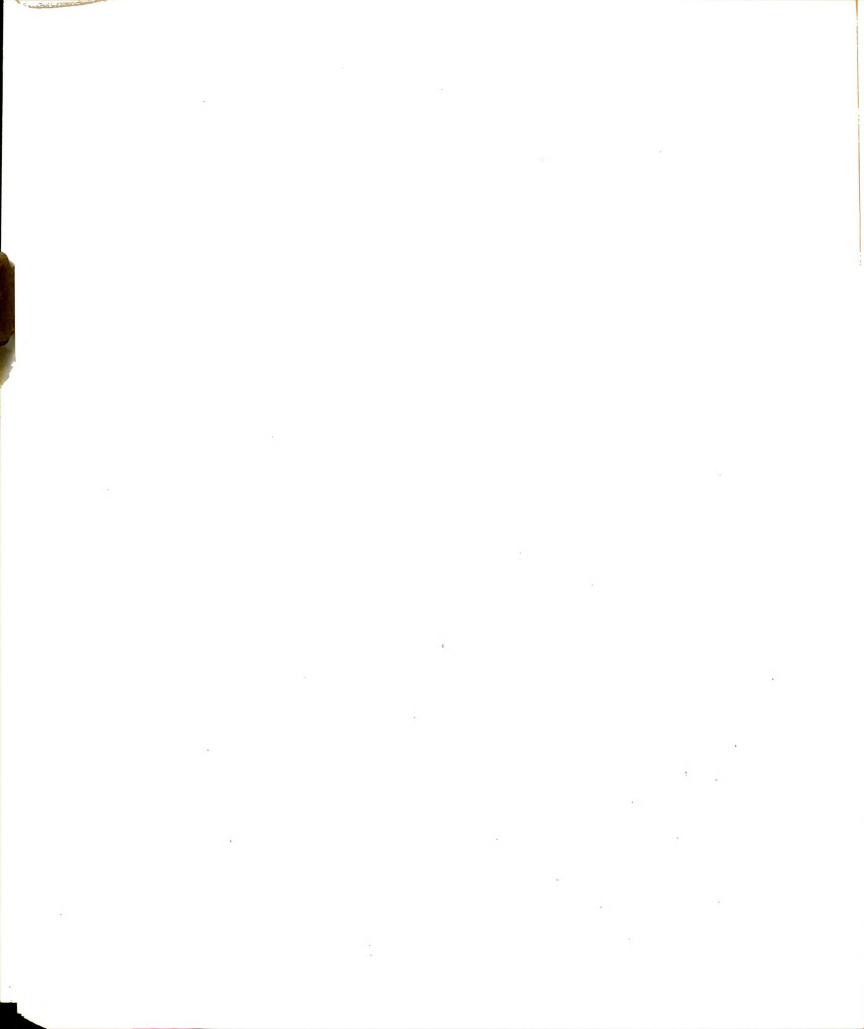
The Proberts have a social history which explains their condition, of course, but like that of the Bordereaux in "The Aspern Papers," their family history is the servant of dramatic convenience. That is, the history serves more as a rationale for the Probert mentality than as the subject in its own right. Likewise the sense of the past in these characters and the theme of social synthesis add to the dramatic situation without taking it over. There is a balance between the old sociological elements of the international theme and the portrayals of psychology and dramas of consciousness which will predominate in the major phase.

Gaston Probert's father, "a Carolinian and a Catholic, was a Gallomaniac of the old American type" (XIII, 39). Given the love of France that the American Revolution had fostered, and the South's ties to Europe during the Civil War, Probert's aristocratic appreciation of France is quite credible. But the story is as much a fable on expatriation



and social synthesis as a portrait of forgotten Americans. The Proberts seem more important for what they represent, the American absorbed by Europe, than for what they are as a particular case. James is very interested in the changes in American character which are wrought by expatriation. Does Gallomania or Anglophilia, the result of a particular kind of love of the past, result in the best form of social synthesis? As in the early international tales, in which the passionate pilgrims are pathological cases of nostalgia, so the expatriate Americans of the English period are victims of a faulty sense of the past, and therefore make neither good Americans nor good Europeans.

If the Dossons have no sense of the past at all, the Proberts have an anachronistic love of it. Neither family has a balanced perspective, a proper sense of the relation of past and present. If Francie thinks the Proberts go back "a thousand years" (135) and George Flack mistakes the American colony for "the real 'grand' old monde" (121), M. Probert reads only books on the origins of things and understands nothing but "le vieux jeu," as Gaston calls it (131). The rest of the Proberts are just as anachronistic. Old Mme. d'Outreville "belonged to the old-fashioned school and held a pretty person sufficiently catalogued when it had been said she had a dazzling complexion or the finest eyes in the world" (76). Mme. de Cliché is adequately identified by her name. Mme. de Brecourt and her husband have an apartment in an old family mansion, "under the roof

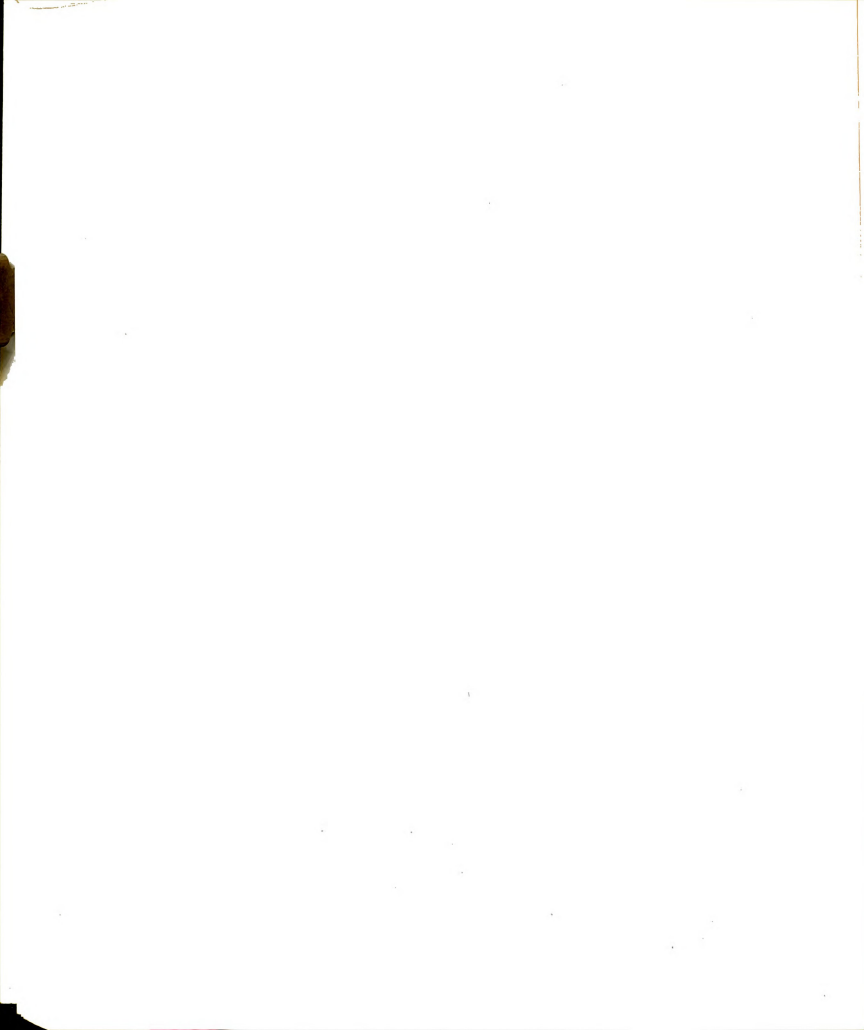


that covered in associations as the door of a linen-closet preserves herbaceous scents," so she can recall "her mother's life and her young days and her dead brother and the feelings connected with her first going into the world" (94). She is perceptive and sympathetic to Gaston and Francie, so she is only gently ridiculed. Her sense of the past is more balanced. But to make certain that his ironic intention toward the Probert clan is not mistaken, James adds the devastating picture of M. and Mme. de Douves:

M. de Douves was the person who took the family, all round, most seriously and who most deprecated any sign of crude or precipitate action. He . . . was suspected by his friends of believing that he looked like Louis XIV. Mme. de Brecourt went so far as to believe that his wife, in confirmation of this, took herself for a species of Mme. de Maintenon: she had lapsed into a provincial existence as she might have harked back to the seventeenth century; the world she lived in seemed about as far away. . . . The old clothes she fondly affected . . . added to her look of having come down from a remote past or reverted to it. (95)

She and her husband even write "roy" and "foy" in their letters! Most hilarious, and most clearly damning, is James's description of the lady's intelligence:

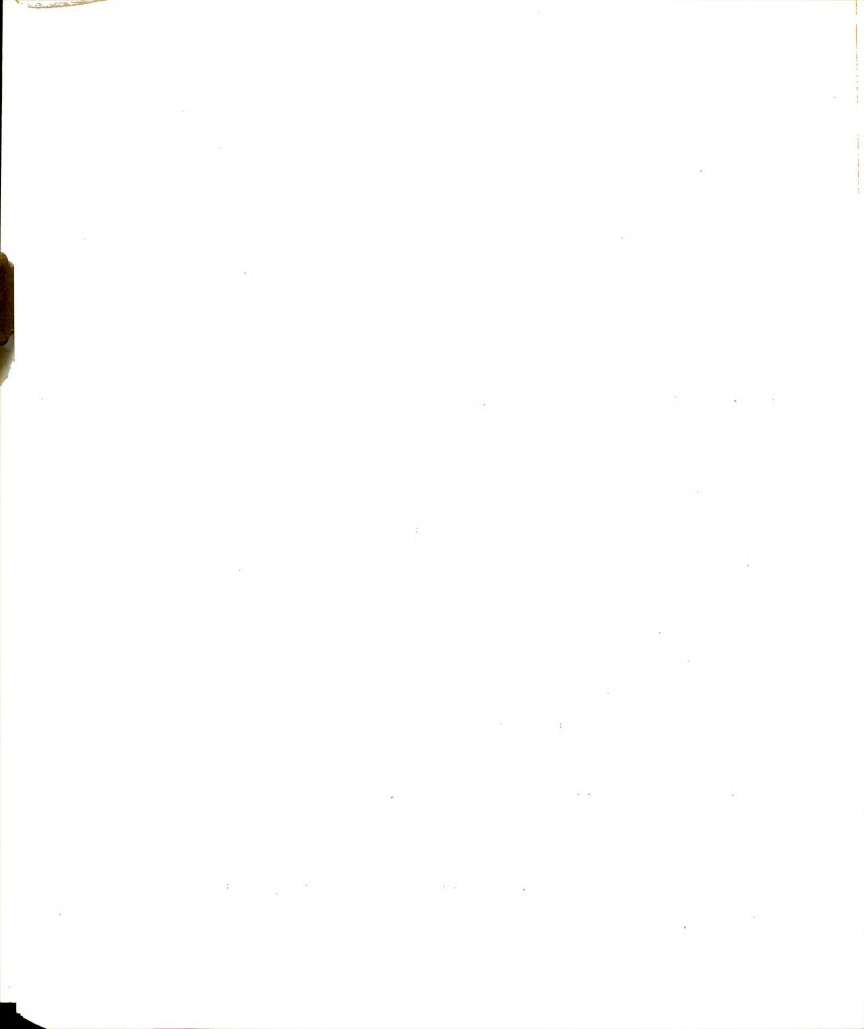
. . . the action of her mind was wholly restricted to questions of relationship and alliance. She had extraordinary patience of research and tenacity of grasp for a clue, and viewed people solely in the light projected upon them by others; that is, not as good or wicked, ugly or handsome, wise or foolish, but as grandsons, nephews, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters-in-law, cousins and second cousins. You might have supposed, to listen to her, that human beings were susceptible of no attribute but that of a dwindling or thickening consanguinity. There was a certain expectation that she would leave rather formidable memoirs. (95-96)



The whole family is pretentious. They ridicule the Dossons' English while speaking the language as if it were French (81; cf. 98, 36)! Like the rest of the "American colony" in Paris, they think of themselves as "a little kingdom of the blest" (43).

The main problem with the Probert family, however, is that it has lost its American identity and virtues without acquiring any better replacements. As Mme. de Brecourt perceives of the Dossons, "for the reality of the thing . . . they're worth all of us. We're diluted and they're pure, and any one with an eye would see it" (96). The Dossons have "native and instinctive delicacy" and "charming primitive instincts" (97), while as Francie says with unconscious irony about the Proberts' reaction to her faux pas, "I never saw people so affected" (157). Even Mme. de Brecourt is crude enough to ask Gaston about the Dosson fortune (82), an indelicacy the Dossons would not even consider committing.

Gaston Probert has the most serious problem discovering his and his family's national identity. "He would have had a country and countrymen, to say nothing of countrywomen, if he could"--but he cannot (39). He is "an American who had never been in America," a Frenchman who knows he is not French (38). Even Francie perceives his dilemma: "'Well, are you a Frenchman? That's just the point, ain't it?'" (47). Actually to Gaston the point is more whether or not he is an American, for in an intriguing variation



on the convention of the American seeking his identity from Europe, Gaston is trying to "recover the national tie" of his family to the United States. He takes much less time than Winterbourne to discover that the Proberts have been too long abroad: "There's a sad want of freshness--there's even a provinciality--in the way we've Gallicised" (111). He wants to be American. But with a Gallomaniac father and "an old Legitimist marquis" as godfather,

the young man, therefore, between two stools, had no clear sitting-place: he wanted to be as American as he could and yet not less French than he was; he was afraid to give up the little that he was and find that what he might be was less . . . (39-40)

He is, says James, a man without a country (41, 67). Consequently he feels that he is in danger of having no identity at all.

Gaston is one of those unfortunates who is forced to choose between past and present, his family or Francie, because no reconciliation of the two is possible. The decision to marry Francie is the only one which allows Gaston to retain any individual identity (205, 210). The heritage of his family is a false past, and to marry a girl of his father's choosing would be to surrender both his identity and his taste:

He didn't know what old frumps his father might have frequented--the style of 1830, with long curls in front, a vapid simper, a Scotch plaid dress and a corsage, in a point suggestive of twenty whalebones, coming down to the knees--but he could remember Mme. de Marignac's . . . and the taste that prevailed in that milieu: the books they admired, the verses they read



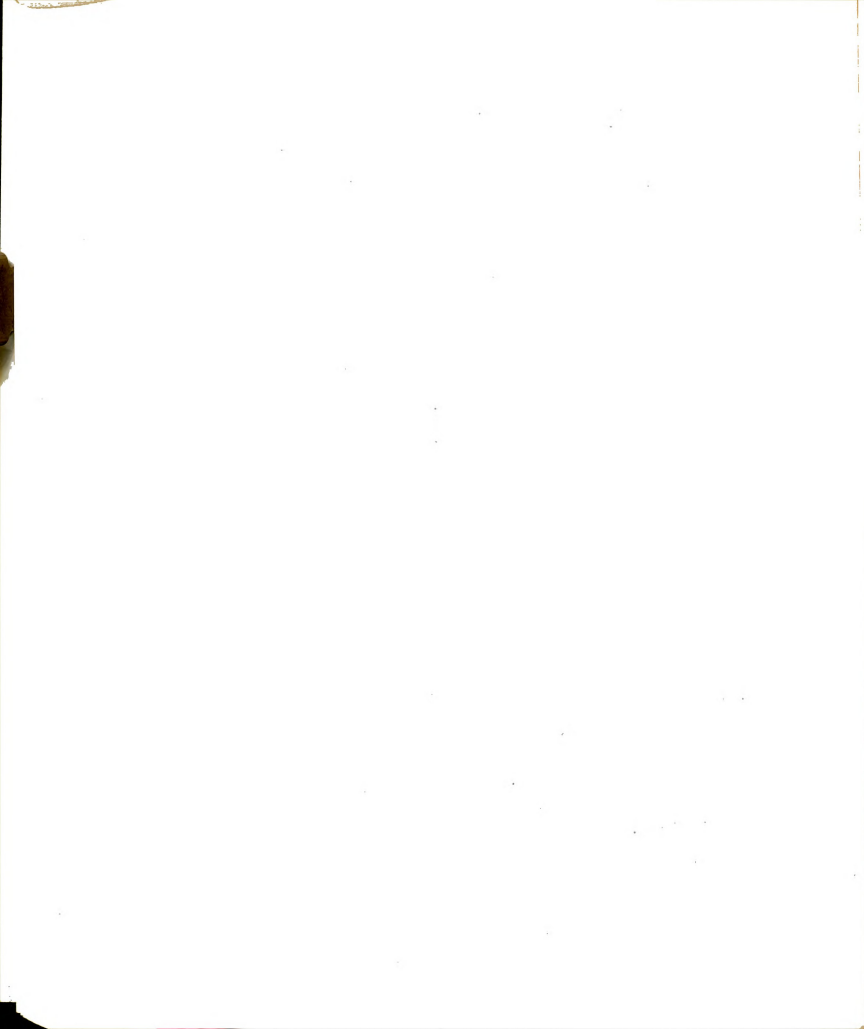
and recited, the pictures, great heaven! they thought good, and the three busts of the lady of the house in different corners (as a Diana, a Druidess and a Croyante: her shoulders were supposed to make up for her head) . . . (108)

So Gaston chooses the beauty and sincerity of Francie Dosson instead, hoping to mold her plastic qualities, like Waterlow the American artist, into a sophisticated form. What is needed is the rejuvenation of the old conventional manners so that they express genuine feelings again, a synthesis of the sincerity of the Dossons with the "high standard" of the Proberts (101-02). Since Francie resembles a figure of the French Renaissance, she may eventually become the revivifying fusion Gaston desires.

But Gaston himself will need to be changed as well. Waterlow, the impressionist painter who "combined in odd fashion many of the forms of the Parisian studio with the moral and social ideas of Brooklyn Long Island" (96), sees that Gaston is still "essentially a foreigner" when in anguish:

. . . he had the foreign sensibility, the sentimental candour, the need for sympathy, the communicative despair. A true young Anglo-Saxon would have buttoned himself up in his embarrassment and been dry and awkward and capable and, however conscious of a pressure, unconscious of a drama; whereas Gaston was effusive and appealing and ridiculous and graceful--natural above all and egotistical. (202)

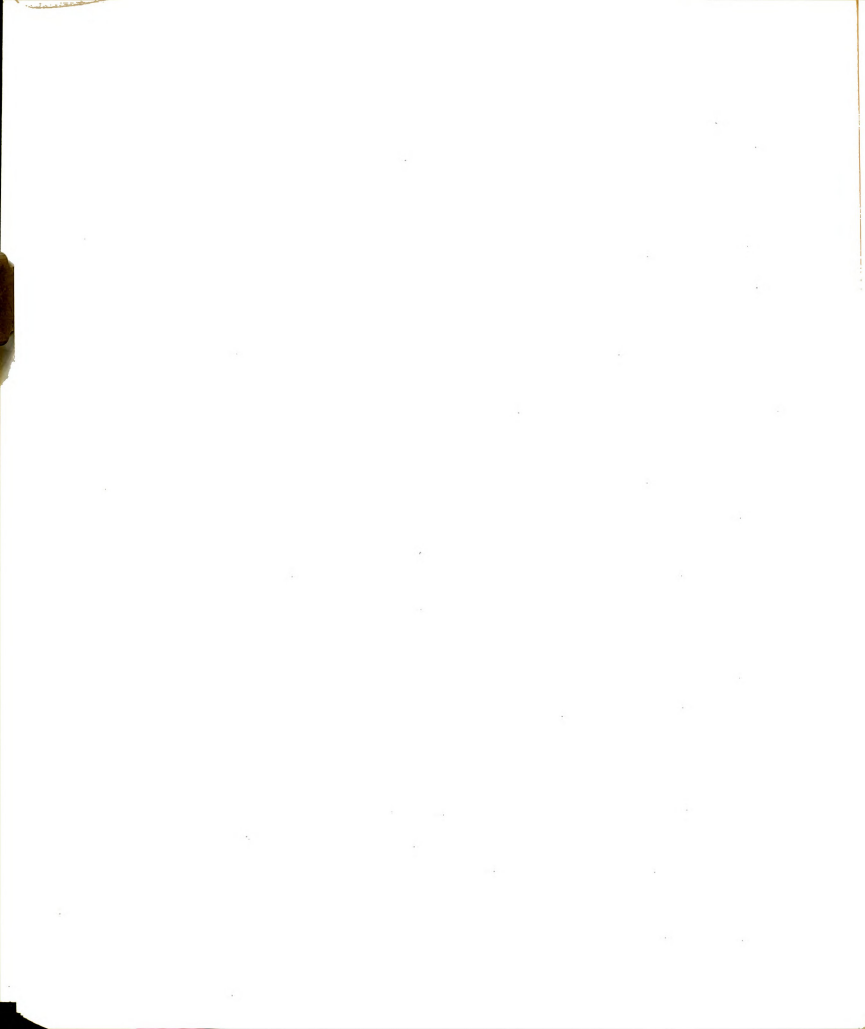
Gaston follows the tradition of the lover in the French novel. Francie must change him as he changes her; she begins by forcing him to make the choice between her and his family. Later somehow she must accustom him to the



American necessity of making a living. And as the German waiter, not assimilated himself into French society, perceives of the couple leaving the café, they do not seem to know where they are going let alone how they will get there.

So the novel works as a parable on expatriation and social fusion, on American identity and European effects on it. But in addition the work is as much the old story of the young man marrying the girl he loves in spite of parental opposition, as a realistic assessment of social conditions. James uses the conventions of his international theme to set up the conditions of a typical social comedy. Nationalities are lessening in importance in the international tales--which can hardly be international without them. Just how interchangeable and irrelevant nationality becomes in the international stories, though, is clearest in works like "The Aspern Papers" and "A London Life."

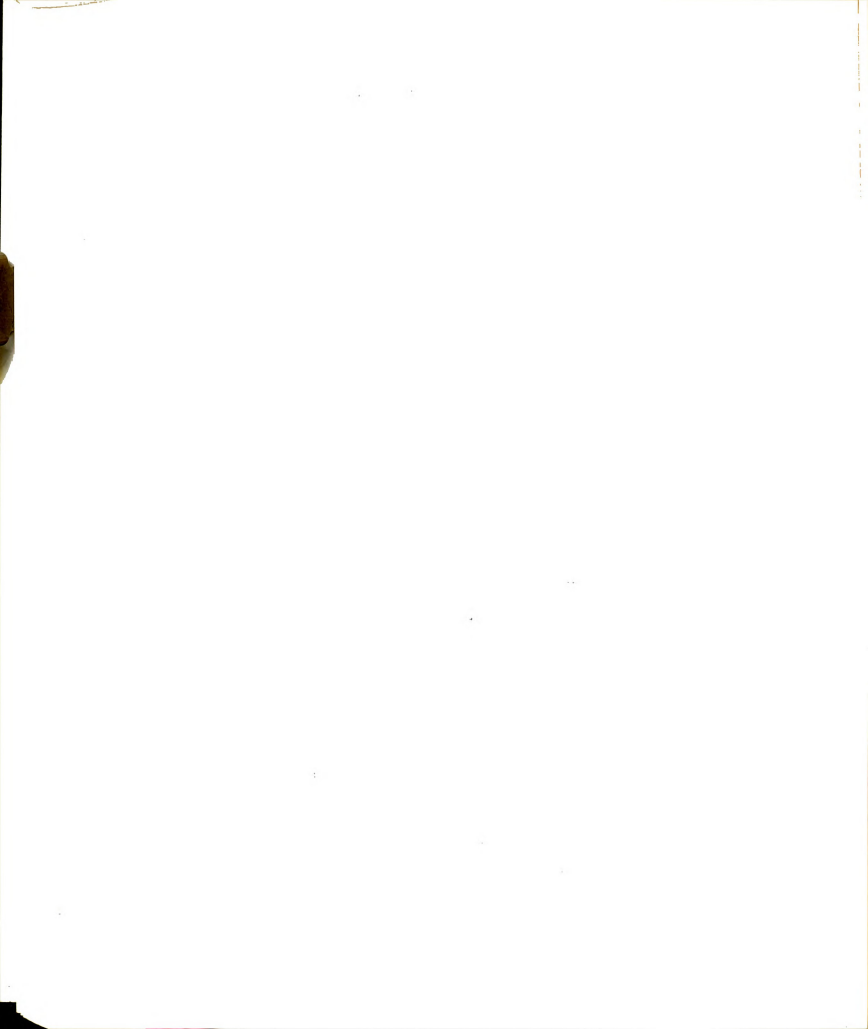
In "The Aspern Papers" nationality is just a device--one James would learn to use exquisitely in the major phase--to detach the characters from the restrictions of conventional national traits. The Misses Bordereau, after all, are supposed to be American women with French names who have lived for years in a Dutch house in Italy (XII, 10). After so many mixtures in and removals from national identities, they have no nationality at all: "They were believed to have lost in their long exile all /American/ national quality, besides being as their name implied of some remoter French affiliation" (4). When Miss Bordereau is asked if



she is American, she replies, "I don't know. We used to be." Pausing, she adds, "We don't seem to be anything now" (19). Much more than the Freers or even the Proberts, the Bordereau ladies are an "altogether new type of American absentee"; "the American name had ceased to have any application to them" and they have shed "all native marks and notes" (47).

The reason James wants to deprive the Bordereaux of all nationality is summarized in the preface to the work. For "romance-value" he wants to be tied to literal facts as little as possible: "The historian, essentially, wants more documents than he can really use; the dramatist only wants more liberties than he can really take" (Prefaces, 161). James is changing from the early historian of the international theme to the later dramatist. He is not so much interested in a specific social fact as in a dramatic situation and an idea--"the reality and the closeness of our relation to the past" (162). This preoccupation would take more explicit form in The Sense of the Past, but even as early as "The Aspern Papers" (1888) the relation between the past and the present is a major strain of the international theme.

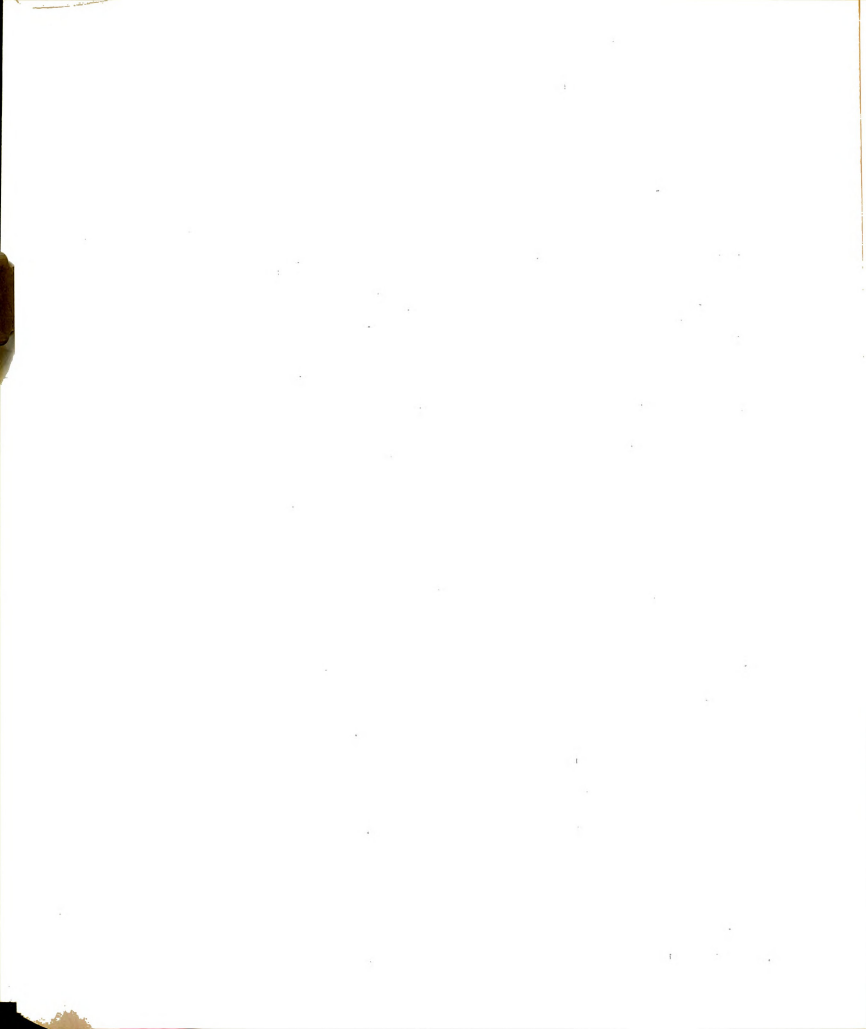
It was, of course, the survival of Shelley's mistress well beyond the Romantic Period that started James's imagination to work. For the Byronic era was the most attractive of all to James--just far enough in the past to be intensely different but also firmly continuous with the present standpoint from which he was writing (Prefaces, 164-65). James



transplants the story's antecedents from England to America, he says, to protect the source of his "germ" for the story, to avoid irrelevant comparisons with the real Shelley and his mistress. But James is also conducting an experiment, he claims, in recovering the Byronic age as felt in America:

. . . it was natural, it was fond and filial, to wonder if a few of the distilled drops might n't be gathered from some vision of, say, "old" New York. Would that human congeries, to aid obligingly in the production of a fable, be conceived as "taking" the afternoon light with the right happy slant?--or could a recognisable reflexion of the Byronic age, in other words, be picked up on the banks of the Hudson? (Only just there, beyond the great sea, if anywhere: in no other connexion would the question so much as raise its head. I admit that Jeffrey Aspern is n't even feebly localised, but I thought New York as I projected him.) (165)

James may have thought of New York and the Hudson, but no trace of either appears in any way in the story. The Byronic light hangs solely over Venice and makes Aspern's supposed American nationality a mere detail. That fact, like Juliana's nationality, plays no part in the tale whatsoever. Rather, as James notes in his rationale, the work is a "fable," a construction having much more to do with romance and drama and an idea than with social fact. James asserts that switching Aspern's origin from England to America as a device "was 'cheap' or expensive according to the degree of verisimilitude artfully obtained" (166).¹⁰ James claims that he could have worked out a thoroughly credible American Jeffrey Aspern, one that would satisfy even the historian. Perhaps so, but he does not, and he does not have to. Jeffrey's nationality, like Juliana's, is never



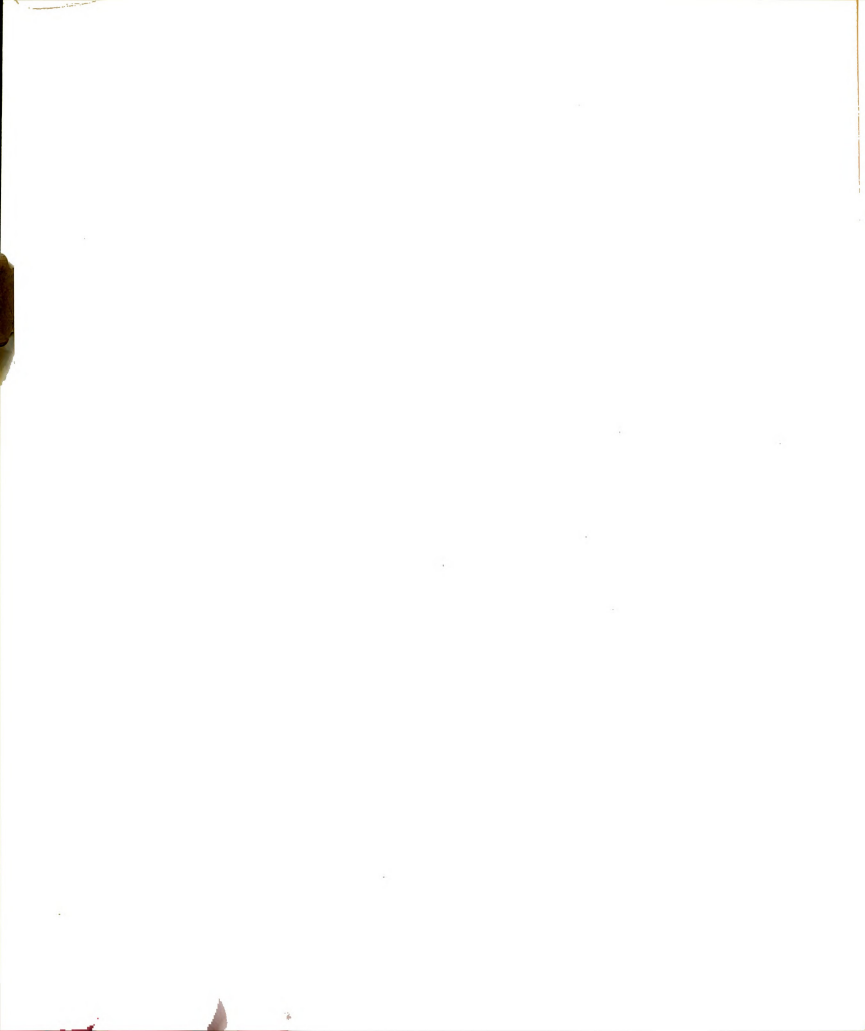
questioned. For the focus of the story is on the myth of Jeffrey Aspern, that part of him which survives in the present through Juliana Bordereau; the reality of his past dies with Juliana and goes up in smoke with the letters. Only the romance of the vague past remains, and the drama of the confrontation of Juliana and the critic--the man who would destroy all myth to get at a vulgar reality.

James is writing pure romance, pure drama, pure fable. He does not care about literal facts so long as the reader believes them enough to be drawn into the story. His refusal to justify the nationality of Jeffrey Aspern proves its insignificance:

If through our lean prime Western period no dim and charming ghost of an adventurous lyric genius might by a stretch of fancy flit, if the time was really too hard to "take," in the light form proposed, the elegant reflexion, then so much the worse for the time--it was all one could say! (Prefaces, 168)

This blatant begging of the question shows how far James had moved in the direction of non-realistic fiction. Such a rationale belongs with his defense of the "supersubtle fry" of the fables for artists and the fine intelligences of the major phase; if these do not exist, they should. (Prefaces, 221-23). They are larger than life; they are types; they are archetypes.

"A London Life" (1888) also demonstrates the mere expediency in James's use of nationality. Likewise the tale reveals James's problem in portraying American characters as distinct from European types, a problem which



explains not only the declining significance of the old international conflicts but also the growing tendency of his characters to be types belonging more to the conventions of literature than to separate nations. The "supposed 'international' conflict of manners" that he had been portraying for years is justly considered an "international fallacy" in the preface to "A London Life" (Prefaces, 132). James is tired of "the scant results, above all for interesting detail, promised by confronting the fruits of a constituted order with the fruits of no order at all":

We may strike lights by opposing order to order, one sort to another sort; for in that case we get the correspondences and equivalents that make differences mean something; we get the interest and the tension of disparity where a certain parity may have been in question. Where it may not have been in question, where the dramatic encounter is but the poor concussion of positives on one side with negatives on the other, we get little beyond a consideration of the differences between fishes and fowls. (132)

Just as James's passionless pilgrims end up with no identity at all or one defined primarily in negative terms, so James recognizes how tenuously even some of his more intelligent figures cling to their shreds of American identity. There is no necessity in their being American; they are not narrow national types, but broadly human ones:

"A London Life" breaks down altogether, I have had to recognise, as a contribution to my comprehensive picture of bewildered Americanism. I fail to make out today why I need have conceived my three principal persons as sharers in that particular bewilderment. There was enough of the general human and social sort for them without it; poor young Wendover in especial, I think, fails on any such ground to



attest himself--I need n't, surely, have been at costs to bring him all the way from New York. Laura Wing, touching creature as she was designed to appear, strikes me as a rare little person who would have been a rare little person anywhere, and who, in that character, must have felt and judged and suffered and acted as she did, whatever her producing clime. (133)

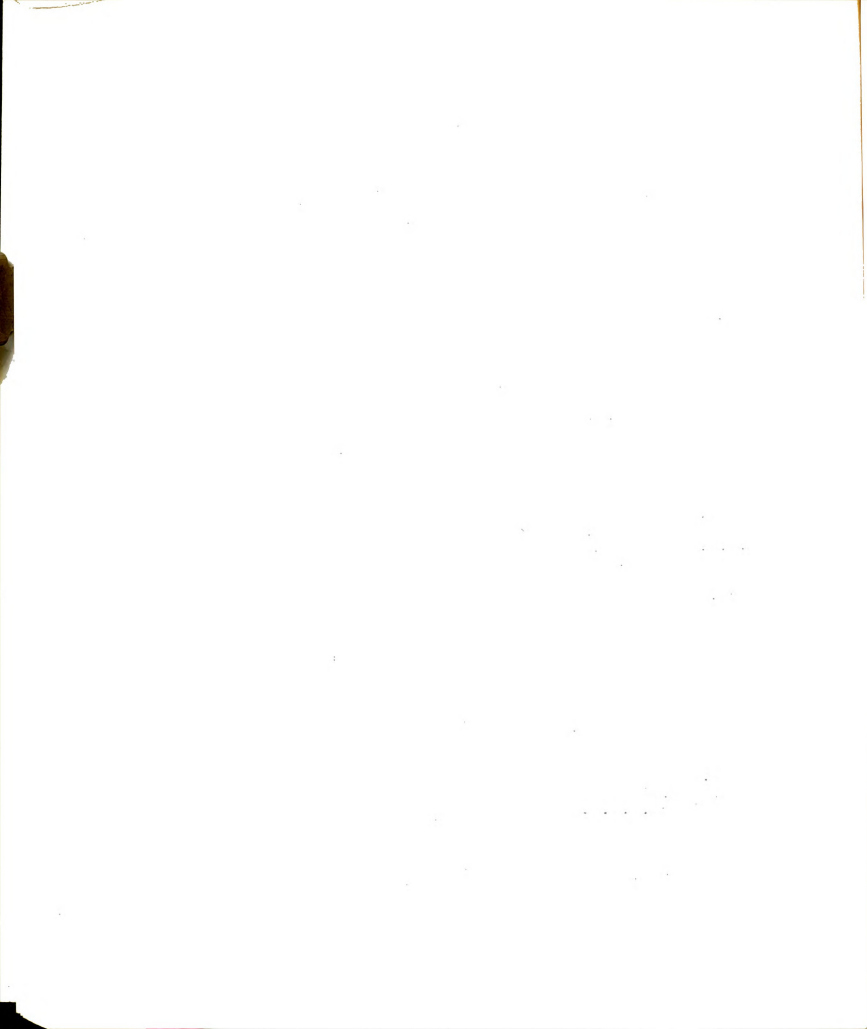
These passages are so self-explanatory, due to James's own deep insights into his work, that commentary seems superfluous. The heart of the old international theme is breaking down because James is more interested in creating drama than social commentary:

What matters . . . is that the prime intention shall have been justified--for any judgment of which we must be clear as to what it was. It was n't after all of the prime, the very most prime, intention of the tale in question that the persons concerned in them should have had this, that or the other land of birth; but that the central situation should really be rendered . . . Nobody concerned need, as I say, have come from New York for that . . . (134)

In fact, there is no necessity in such characters coming from any particular location. Consequently Laura and Wendover are gratuitously American; and Laura's sister Selina is perhaps falsely so:

The great anomaly, however, is Mrs. Lionel; a study of a type quite sufficiently to be accounted for on the very scene of her development, and with her signs and marks easily mistakeable, in London, for the notes of a native luxuriance. . . . the wicked woman of my story was falsified above all, as an imported product, by something distinctly other than so engendered in the superficial "form" of her perversity, a high stiffbacked angular action which is, or was then, beyond any American "faking." (133-34)

James was so used to being able to make anything from his flexible countrymen that he did not create Selina carefully

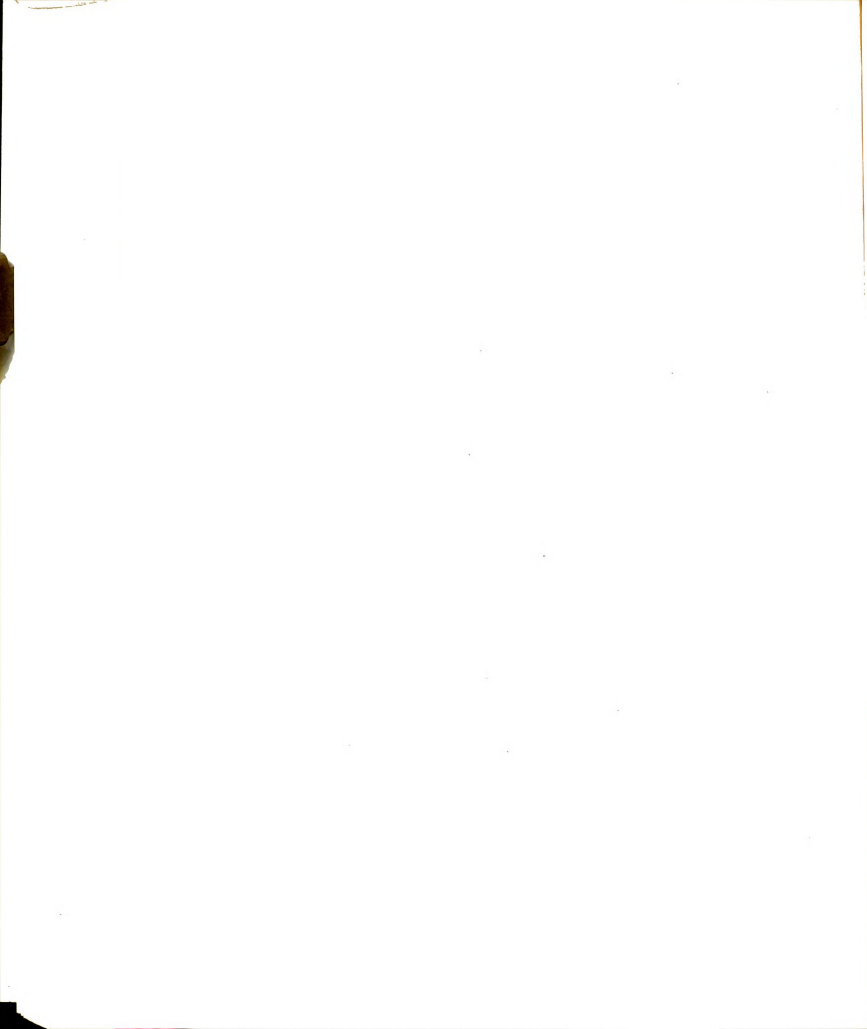


enough to insure her credibility as an American. Whether anyone else would have noticed if James had not pointed out this weakness is doubtful, since Selina's nationality is no strong factor in her role. The reader might indeed wonder, though, how two people as different as Laura and Selina could have the same background.

The main question is why Laura is American. Once again James acutely provides his own answer:

I must have seen the creation of my heroine, in 1888, and the representation of the differences I wished to establish between her own known world and the world from which she finds herself recoiling, facilitated in a high degree by assured reference to the simpler social order across the sea. (134-35)

In addition "the impression was always there that no one so much as the candid outsider, caught up and involved in the sweep of the machine, could measure the values revealed." That is, James is learning to use nationality and the conventions of the international theme to save himself "preparations" and to reinforce the dramatic situations that form the core of his fiction. And he is using his fresh Adamic American as the most objective observer-participant possible. Again, we shall find these techniques refined in the major phase.



Notes

¹November 25, 1881, Notebooks, p. 24.

²Cf. Notebooks, p. 129. The observation is a commonplace of Jamesian criticism.

³See Notebooks, p. 49; Prefaces, pp. 203-04.

⁴The fact that Mrs. Brash is without honor in her own country is evidence, of course, that America still has an imperfect taste for its past.

⁵See Wegelin, pp. 54 ff.

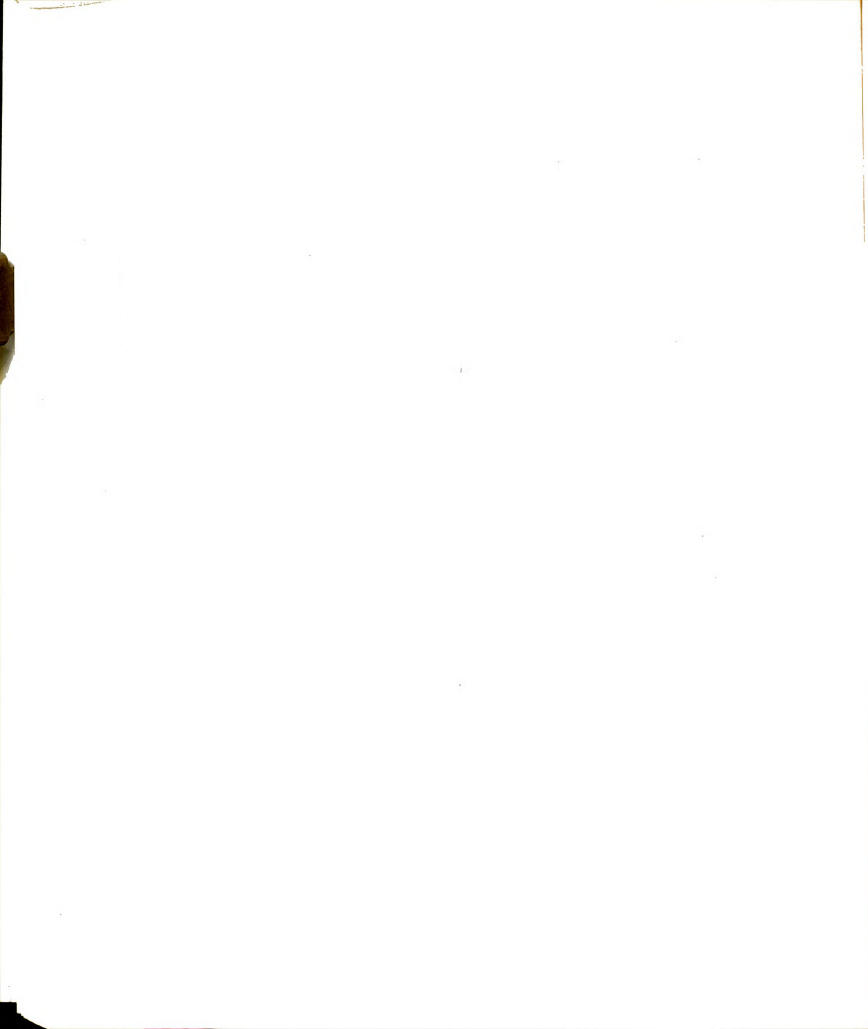
⁶Cf. Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition (New York, 1967), pp. 118-20, whose viewpoint on James as an American is very close to Van Wyck Brooks's; the quotation is from the Letters, I, pp. 242-43.

⁷The Bostonians (London, 1921), I, p. 31, quoted by Stone, p. 92.

⁸In fact, as the rest of Newman's description reveals, James characterizes his Americans much better with more abstract passages than he does with concrete detail. The essence of many characters, as he progresses, is contained in masterly touches of rather non-physical description. His problem eventually becomes his salvation.

⁹Cf. Prefaces, p. 281, on his being a "civil alien," needing to be "born again."

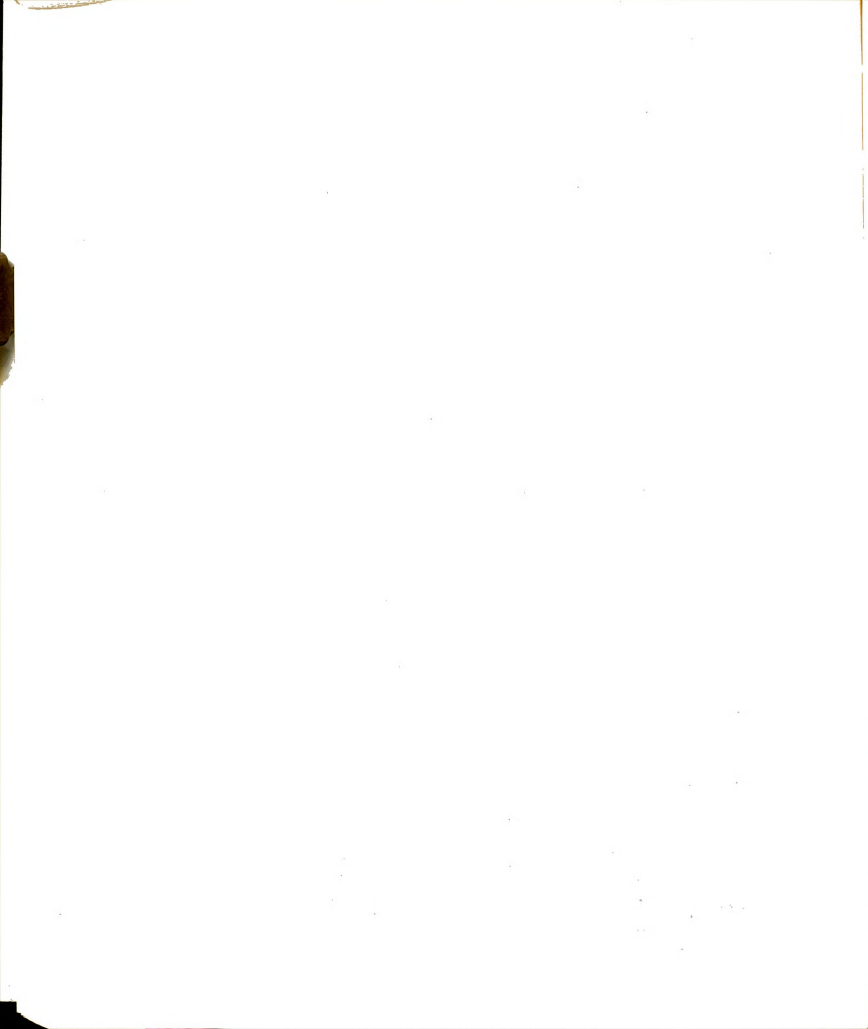
¹⁰"Verisimilitude" here is best understood in the sense that it is related to the reader's suspension of disbelief; if a fact seems credible within the work, it has verisimilitude. James may have tried for more, but he certainly did not need to, and just as certainly he did not succeed in creating more than the illusion.



3. The Major Phase (1901-1904)

During the years immediately following the turn of the century, James's optimism, like everyone else's, is at its highest. No cloud of the huge war to come has yet arisen, and while James is not particularly enthusiastic about American imperialism and considers Theodore Roosevelt "a dangerous and ominous Jingo," he is willing to watch an American empire grow if the positive benefits to his homeland will even approximate the social benefits Britain has derived from her empire.¹ McKinley's assassination is barbaric to him, and he dislikes and distrusts American politics intensely, but he is willing to remain politically neutral with the faith that the United States can only develop more civilized ways as she enters the larger world of international affairs. So with an eye uneasily averted from contemporary public affairs, James builds his novels on the assumption of future international social fusion on a personal level, gratefully acknowledging any public progress in that direction. When Sir George O. Trevelyan publishes the first volumes of his history of The American Revolution, James congratulates him mainly on contributing to the new Anglo-Saxon unity:

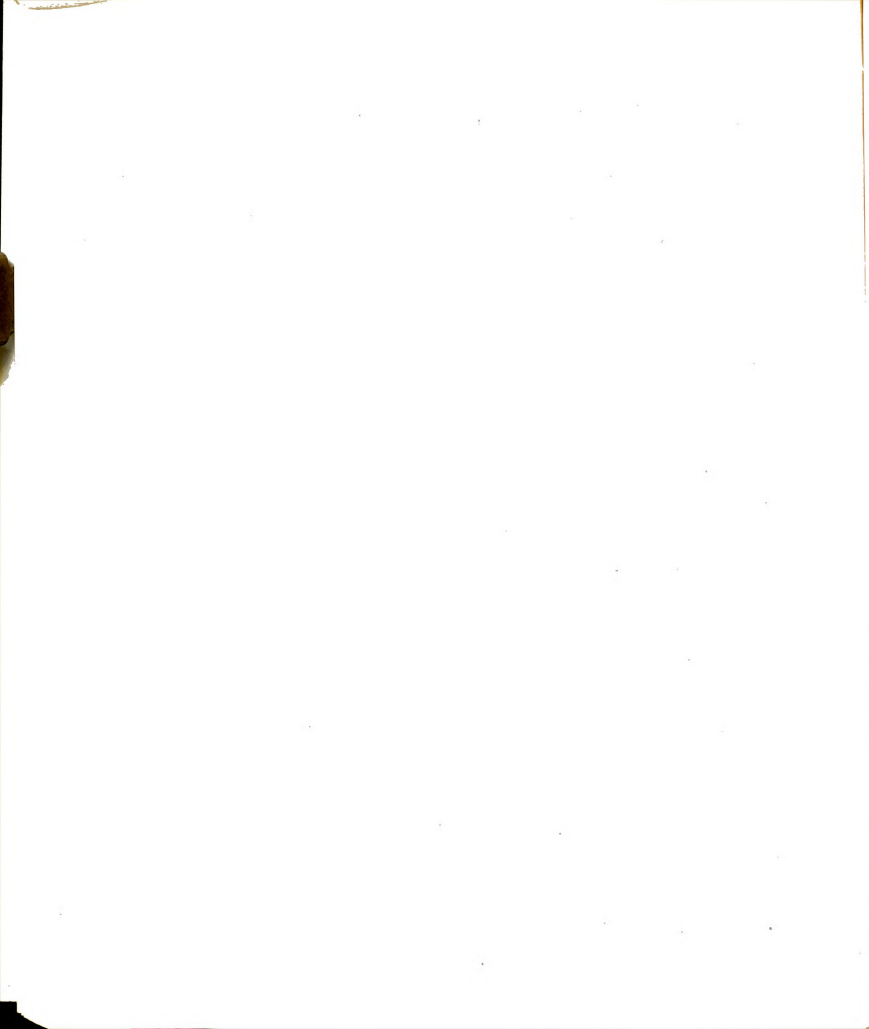
I doubt whether you know what a work of civilization you are perpetrating internationally by the very fact of your producing so exquisite a work of art. The American, the Englishman, the artist, and the critic in me--to say nothing of the friend!--all drink you down in a deep draught, each in turn feeling that he is more



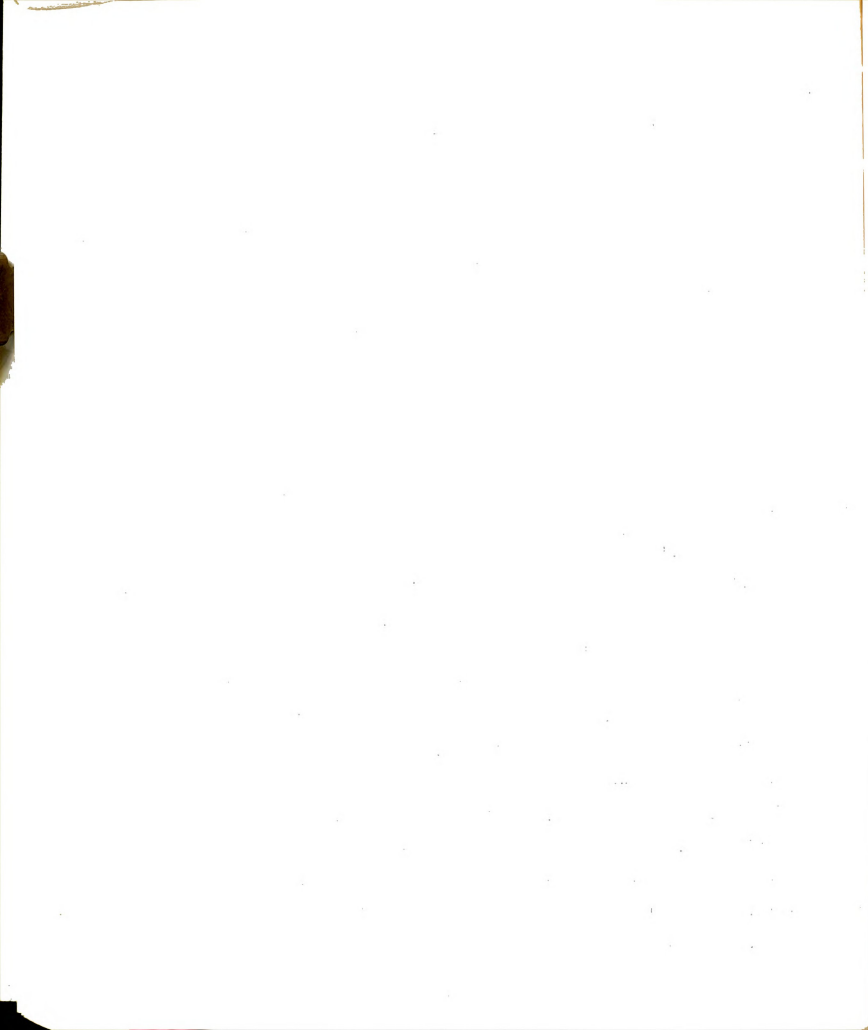
deeply concerned. But it is of course, as with the other volume, the book's being so richly and authoritatively English, so validly true, and yet so projected as it were into the American consciousness, that will help to build the bridge across the Atlantic; and I think it is the mystery of this large fusion, carried out in so many ways, that makes the thing so distinguished a work of art . . . (Letters, I, 432-33)

James himself, of course, had decided to further Anglo-American unity during his English period by ignoring the contrasts which had formed the early basis of the international theme. For a time he seems to forget America completely, though, rather than treat her as a more and more equal Anglo-Saxon community. But now that "human Anglo-Saxonism, with the American extension, or opportunity for it," is once more his greatest interest, James returns the artistic glance to the question of American character (Letters, I, 418).

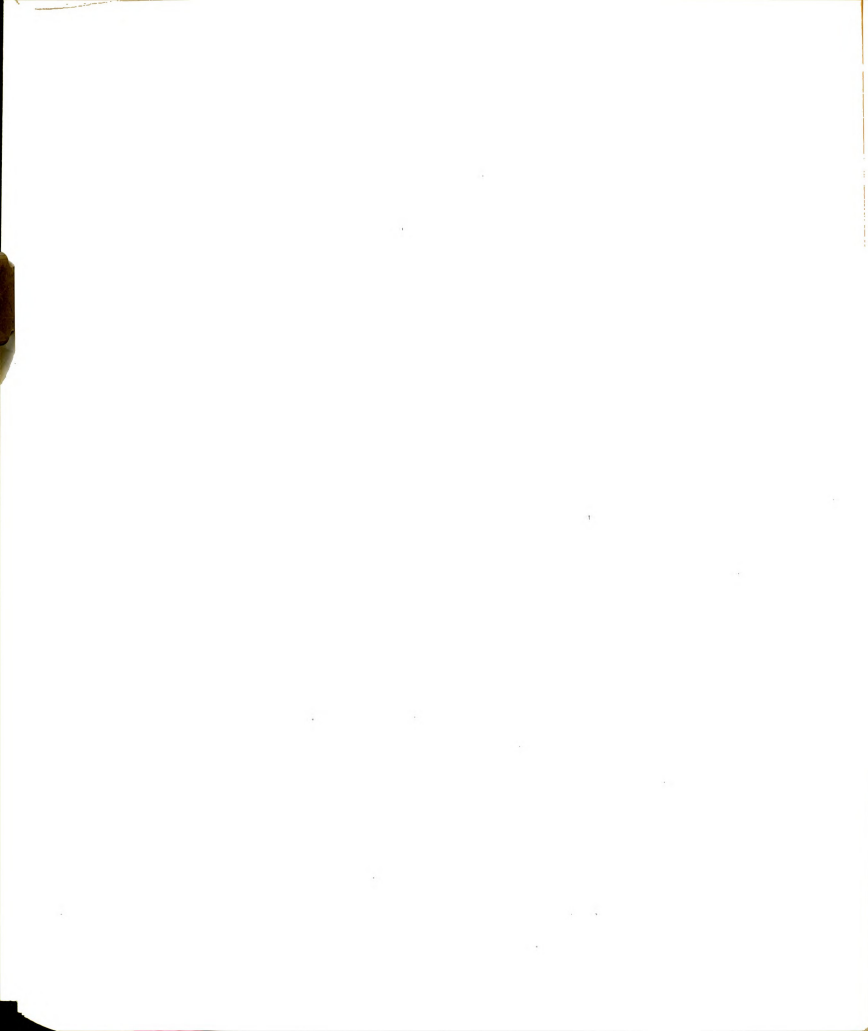
The social fact that America is still more an "opportunity" for the extension of Anglo-Saxon culture than an actual living example of it to James, should not obscure the corresponding fact that in his novels of this period the major Americans are already worthy of inclusion in civilized society. In fact Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, Maggie Verver, and even Lambert Strether are demonstrably courted by that society. The question posed by the international theme is no longer whether or not Americans can enter European society, but what effects they may have on it. Indeed, even this question is submerged by other preoccupations of the dramatist. For the more James assumes



social fusion, the more he can ignore it as a theme and simply use it as a basis for drama. Consequently James's warnings in the prefaces, written right after the major phase, must be carefully heeded to avoid distorting the international elements in the novels of his maturity--or even in some earlier novels. "There are cases," James remarks, "in which, however obvious and however contributive" the difference between "the distinctively American and the distinctively European outlook" may be, "its office for the particular demonstration has been quite secondary, and in which the work is by no means merely addressed to the illustration of it" (Prefaces, 198). In such works there is a condition of already "achieved social fusion . . . without the sense and experience of which neither 'The Wings of the Dove,' nor 'The Golden Bowl,' nor 'The Portrait of a Lady,' nor even, after all, I think, 'The Ambassadors,' would have been written" (Prefaces, 199). Consequently I think that Leon Edel's interpretation of The Portrait of a Lady as an international fable is a distortion of the major thrust of the work. Edel sees Isabel as an embodiment of American idealism--blind to history, but believing in freedom and equality--who refuses to try to reforge the bond with England (Warburton), finding it impossible to do so and remain free. She does not marry Goodwood due to fear of losing herself to commercialism--a valid parallel, to be sure, to James's feelings about the commercial American male.² But carrying the fable much further (or even this



far perhaps), while not impossible, seems less and less likely and appropriate. The Touchetts, Osmond and Madame Merle are hardly advertisements for social integration, and it seems unlikely that James would write a parable on the American refusal to reunite with England at the very time he feels America is coming closer and closer to a social synthesis with the mother country. True, he is dealing with the possibilities for integration, and it is possible to read the constant alternative marriage to Warburton as the ideal Isabel should follow. The lord may well be the "sun" designed to go along with all the "garden" imagery surrounding Isabel, as R.W. Stallman claims.³ Warburton is in a false position, owning an estate yet preaching radical economic change--a position Isabel argues against very conservatively, so perhaps the two would correct each other's faults. But there is little direct evidence in the novel that Isabel would have done best in marrying the Englishman; whom Isabel should have married, except Osmond, is not at all unambiguous. Certainly there are few encouraging combinations of America and England around. Mrs. Touchett is an independent cosmopolite with little else to recommend her. Ralph Touchett and his father are amusing but hardly productive Anglo-Americans, and neither can, as Ralph admits, overcome his American shortcomings. The marriage of Henrietta and Bantling is comical--and disappointing to Isabel, who thought Henrietta would choose better if she ever married. And Goodwood certainly comes

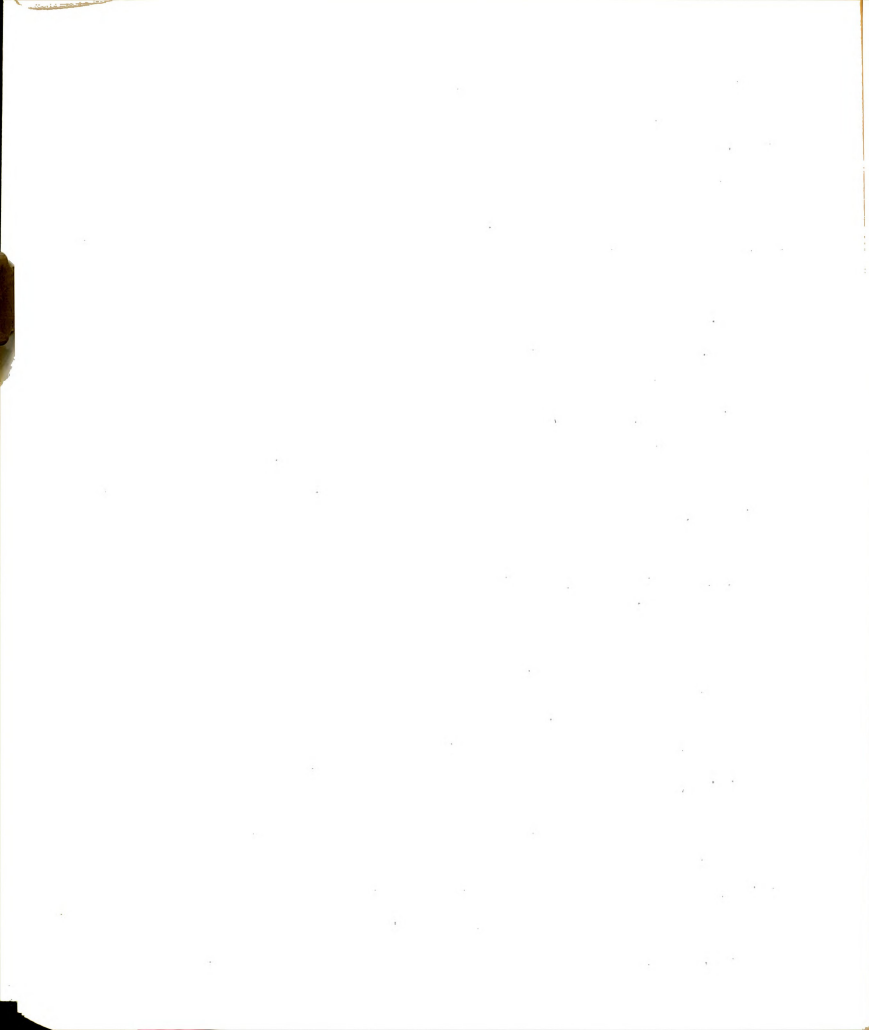


off as well as Warburton as a suitor. The point is that any attempt to trace a coherent fable breaks down because James's best novels are more than fables; they are dramas, situations created by James from his international materials but not governed by the theme. Isabel is American because a girl with the right romantic notions for the story can be most easily imported from America and supplied with a fortune. The work is not so much a critique of American idealism, as a broader critique of romantic temperament.⁴ James wants his heroine to be, as he says, like Shakespeare's Portia, "the very type and model of the young person intelligent and presumptuous" (Prefaces, 49). The international theme is a means to dramatic ends, not the end itself.

In the later novels this fact is more obvious:

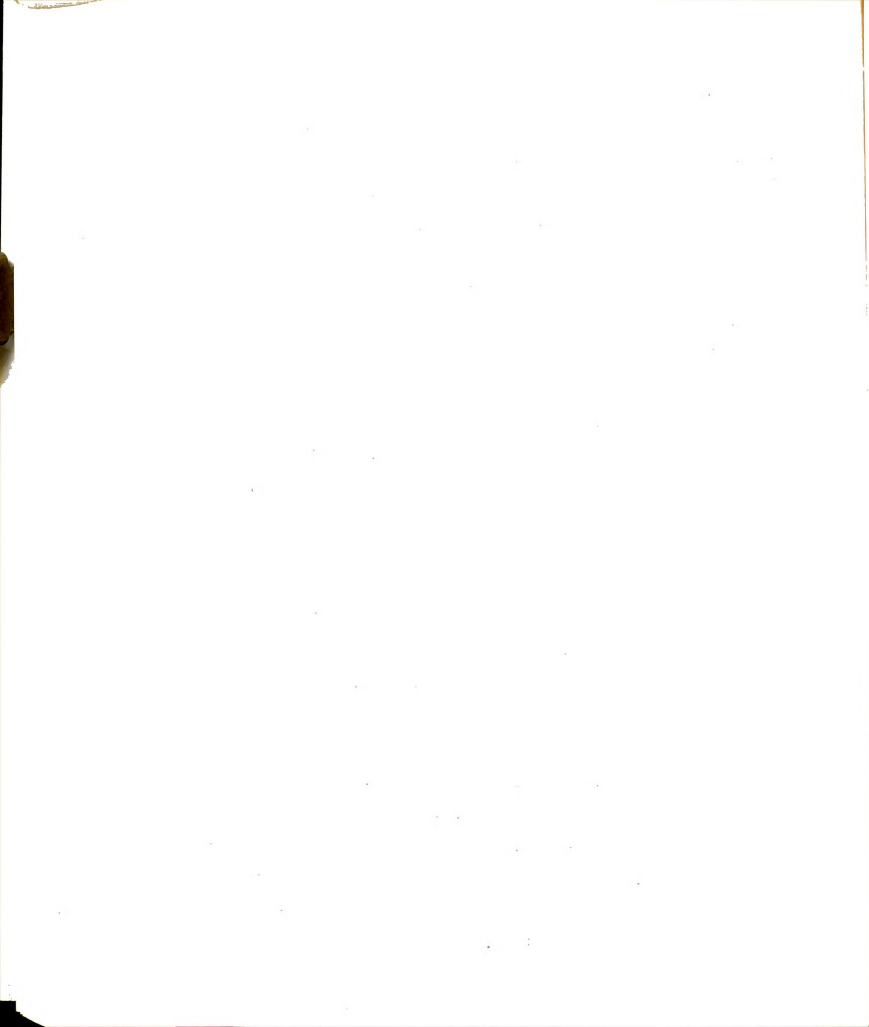
. . . for instance, the subject of "The Wings of the Dove," or that of "the Golden Bowl," has not been the exhibited behaviour of certain Americans as Americans, of certain English persons as English, of certain Romans as Romans. Americans, Englishmen, Romans are, in the whole matter, agents or victims; but this is in virtue of an association nowadays so developed, so easily to be taken for granted, as to have created a new scale of relations altogether, a state of things from which emphasized internationalism has either dropped or is well on its way to drop. . . . the subject could in each case have been perfectly expressed had all the persons concerned been only American or only English or only Roman or whatever. (Prefaces, 198-99)

James conceived many of these novels without Americans in them; Strether was almost an Englishman; Milly Theale became American only near the end of James's plotting in the notebooks. Prince Amerigo was originally French (Notebooks,



130-31). James decides on the locale and nationalities of his characters according to the economics of fiction, according to which setting and nationality will save the most "preparations," those concrete details needed to build up to the heart of a dramatic situation. It is easier to put Strether in Paris than anywhere else, and easier to make him American than any other nationality, in order to create the right moral outlook, tone of regret and feeling of lost time; similarly, it is easier to create a princess with a fortune and free of traditions and relatives by bringing one over from New York than by spending the pages necessary to extricate one from English family ties. Nationalities as such are essentially interchangeable in the late novels; they are conveniences to be used--this is the value to the dramatist of the social fusion James sees.

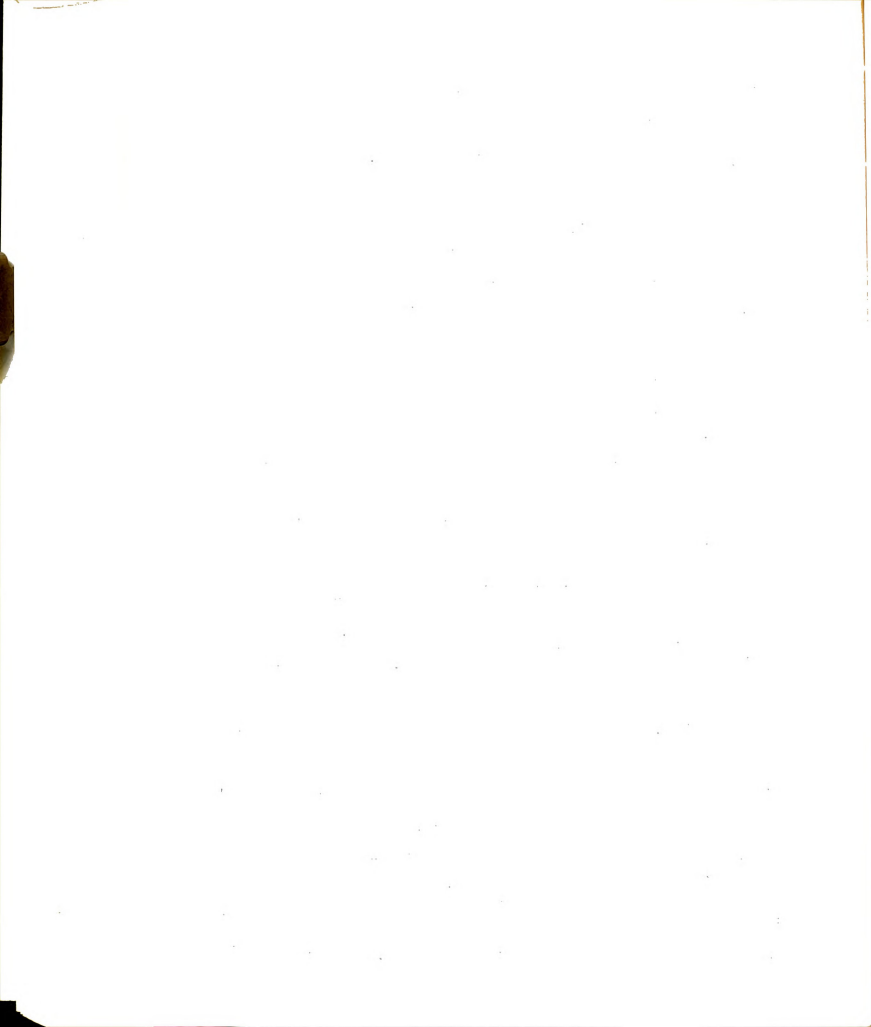
Such fusion consequently begins, to "the novelist sometimes depressed by all the drawbacks of a literary form overworked and relaxed," to "measure more and more as a portent and an opportunity" (Prefaces, 199). The realist tied to the narrow locale and the conventions of a single literature may begin to cross borders, to find many "odd and fresh phenomena," a "vast new province, infinitely peopled and infinitely elastic . . . annexed to the kingdom of the dramatist" (199-200). James begins to see the "mixture of manners," leading to the social synthesis which he had projected even in the early international tales, as "a happy instinctive foresight," as he explains in his most



important statement on the international theme:

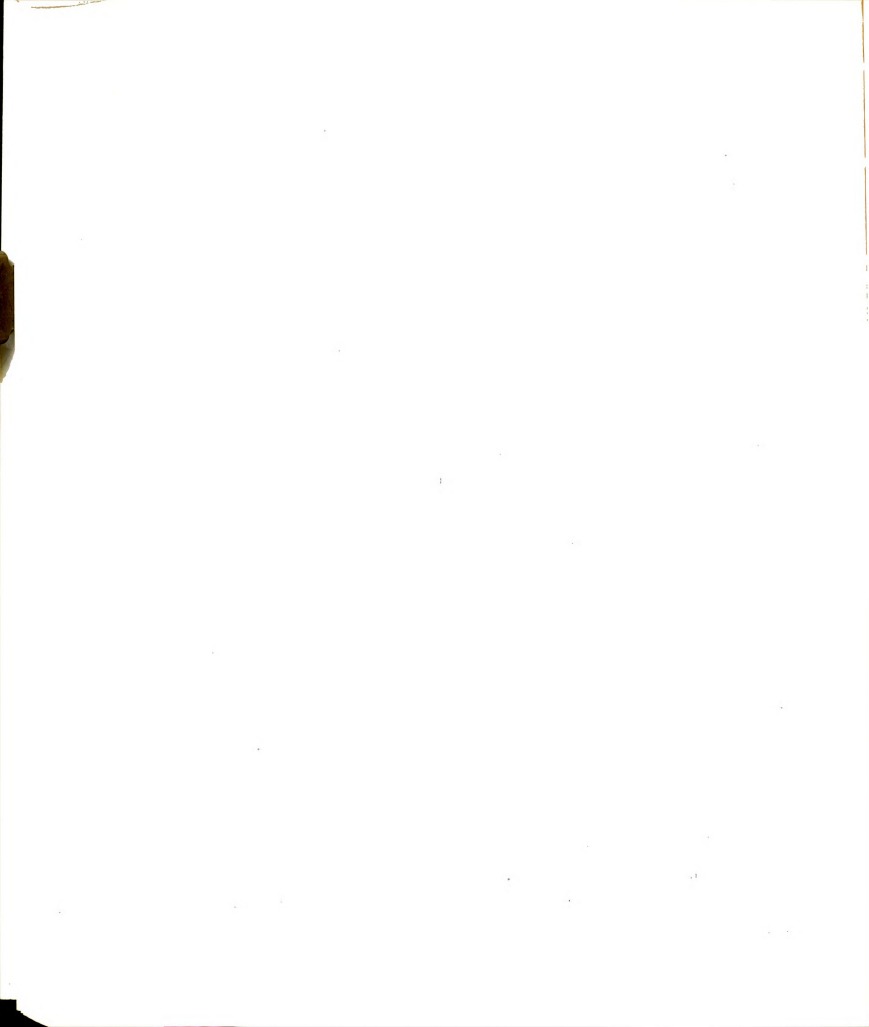
The mixture of manners was to become in other words not a less but a very much more appreciable and interesting subject of study. The mixture of manners was in fine to loom large and constantly larger all round; it was to be a matter, plainly, about which the future would have much to say. Nothing appeals to me more, I confess, as a "critic of life" in any sense worthy of the name, than the finer--if indeed thereby the less easily formulated--group of the conquests of civilisation, the multiplied symptoms among educated people, from wherever drawn, of a common intelligence and a social fusion tending to abridge old rigours of separation. . . . It is a question, however, of the tendency, perceptive as well as reflective too, of the braver imagination--which faculty, in our future, strikes me as likely to be appealed to much less by the fact, by the pity and the misery and the greater or less grotesqueness, of the courageous, or even of the timid, missing their lives beyond certain stiff barriers, than by the picture of their more and more steadily making out their opportunities and their possible communications. Behind all the small comedies and tragedies of the international, in a word, has exquisitely lurked for me the idea of some eventual sublime consensus of the educated; the exquisite conceivabilities of which, intellectual, moral, emotional, sensual, social, political--all, I mean, in the face of felt difficulty and anger--constitute stuff for such "situations" as may easily make many of those of a more familiar type turn pale. There, if one will--in the dauntless fusions to come--is the personal drama of the future. (Prefaces, 202-03)

The novels of the major phase deal with such attempts at social fusion, such gropings toward a sublime consensus, culminating in the beautiful marriage of The Golden Bowl. But they already presume that on the highest level much of the synthesis has already taken place; otherwise such harmony as Prince Amerigo and Maggie find--or the love that grows between Merton Densher and Milly Theale, or even the fine acclimation of Strether to Madame de Vionnet and Paris--would never have the opportunity to arise. The culminating



event in The Golden Bowl is not a marriage, the aim of so many early international tales. The marriage, symbol of union, is a foregone conclusion early in the novel. Rather, the climax of the work is a much deeper and more dramatic fusion of two people already married for some years. As James admits in the same preface, "the emphasis of the international proposition has indeed had time, as I say, to place itself elsewhere--if, for that matter, there be any emphasis or any proposition left at all" (211). The novels are therefore as much dramas on characters in archetypal roles as parables on social fusion--if indeed they are not much more drama than parable.

Consequently Christof Wegelin's interpretation of the major phase, while essentially correct from the old viewpoint of the international theme, is incomplete and skirts the most interesting development in the mature novels--the movement toward myth and archetype, a deeper if not entirely new sense of the past.⁵ Wegelin places so much emphasis on the nationalities of characters in the late novels because James consistently makes his native Americans moral and innocent and his Europeans amoral and experienced, only partly recognizing that James is consistent about nationality mainly because that consistency saves him dramatic preparations (87-88). James can most economically use the conventions he has developed. In contrast Wegelin sees "the consistency with which he arranged various nationalities in his moral dramas" as "neither incidental nor

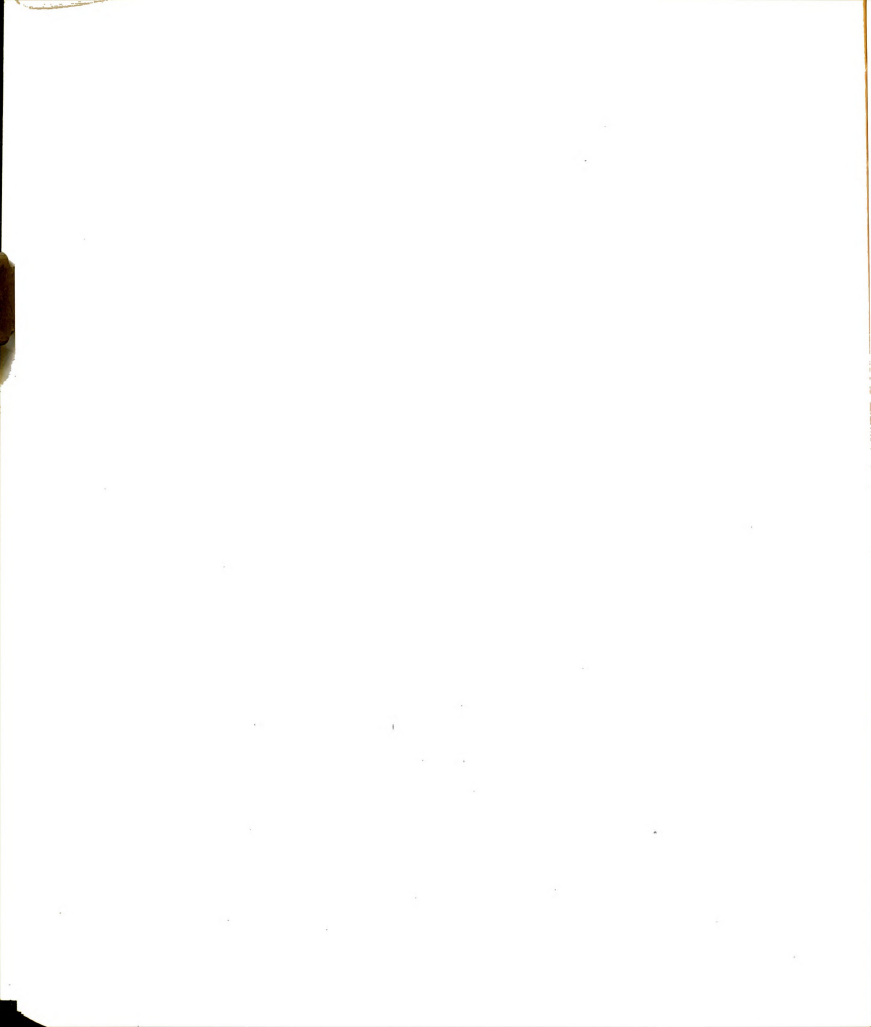


ephemeral":

Taken together, the three novels form a trilogy exploring the possibilities of two radically different systems of morality represented by America and Europe. And coming just before his return to America in 1904, which led him to re-adjust his focus, they constitute a climax in his lifelong attempt to define his sense of the fundamental differences between the two worlds. (88)

The Ambassadors gives Strether a lesson in "social beauty," an experience in the moral value of style, beauty and order, represented by Madame de Vionnet, who converts him away from the "moral absolutism" of Woollett (86; 99-101). Milly Theale, in The Wings of the Dove, is an American who gives Englishman Merton Densher a lesson in "spiritual beauty," converting him from the pragmatic empirical morality of Kate Croy (117, 121). Finally, in The Golden Bowl, Prince Amerigo wins Maggie to a sense of the value of social discipline and the preservation of appearances as she wins him to a sense of the value of moral beauty--a "double conversion" resulting in a "finally achieved harmony" between the two modes of life, American and European (121, 138-39): "On one level, then, The Golden Bowl is a fable emblematic of the achievement of the international 'social fusion' which James envisioned as the ultimate result of the increasingly intimate social relations between Europe and America" (125).

Wegelin demonstrates his thesis so well that there is little value in duplicating his effort. I would like to add to his view of the international theme, however, and outline the development of archetypal roles and characters in the



major novels as these arise from the elasticity of James's international materials. These works are fables on only one level, and that level may not be the most important one. Since I have already discussed The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors at length in the previous chapter, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl will serve better as the main examples in this one.

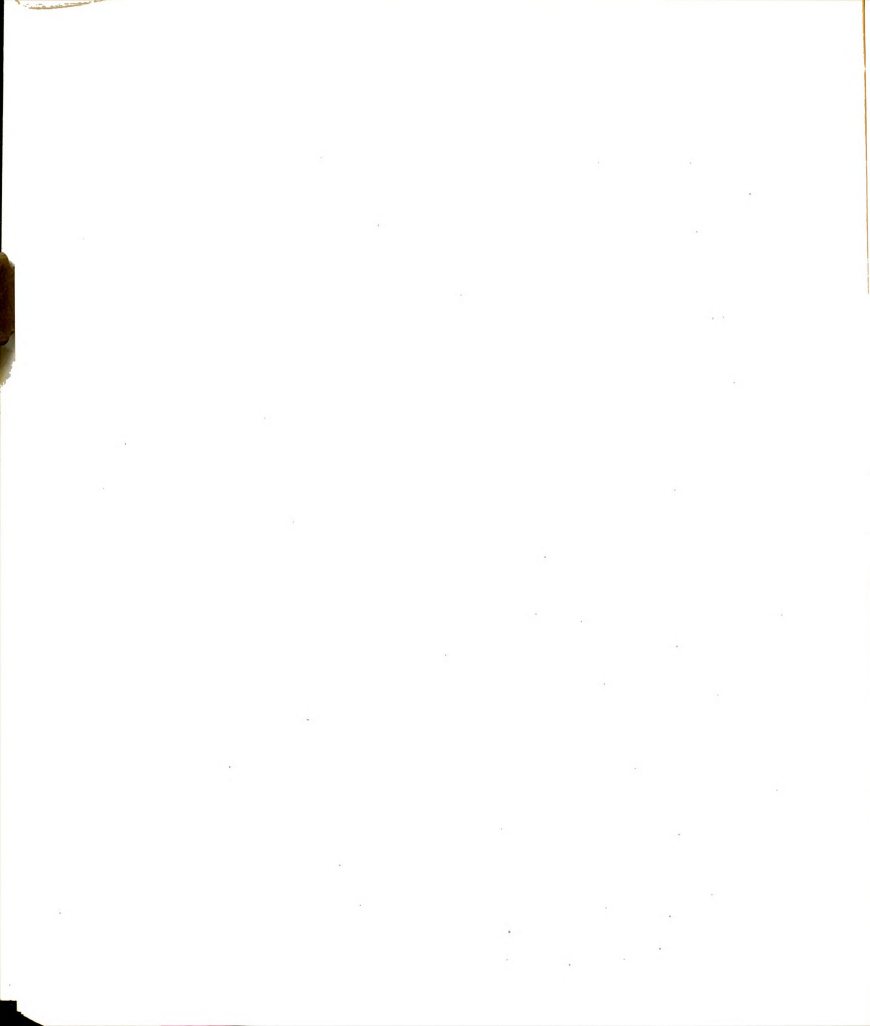
Milly Theale is much more than innocence and "spiritual beauty." She is the "potential heiress of all the ages" not simply because Susan Stringham says so, but because she is "one of the rarest . . . cases of American intensity" (XIX, 109, 116). She is a composite of nations, potential heir to all, free to borrow from all countries and all times. In itself this condition makes her a latent universal type. To be sure, Milly partakes of the old mania of the passionate pilgrim; she comes to England not for companionship but to realize an old conception:

It wasn't a question, in short, of the people the compatriot was after; it was the human, the English picture itself, as they might see it in their own way--the concrete world inferred so fondly from what one had read and dreamed.

(XIX, 135)⁶

And like Clement Searle and her earlier American cousins, Milly gilds with her preternatural alertness an already gilded lily, Lancaster Gate, as she attends her first gathering at Mrs. Lowder's overdone residence:

The very air of the place, the pitch of the occasion, had for her both so sharp a ring and so deep an undertone. The smallest things, the faces, the hands, the jewels of the women, the sound of words, especially of names, across



the table, the shape of the forks, the arrangement of the flowers, the attitude of the servants, the walls of the room, were all touches in a picture and denotements in a play; and they marked for her moreover her alertness of vision. She had never, she might well believe, been in such a state of vibration; her sensibility was almost too sharp for her comfort . . . (148)

James's New Yorker is still the most perceptive observer of Europe possible, but with the same tendency to idealize. So Milly's "American mind" and viewpoint break down before a sample of English society like Kate Croy. Kate is too dark and deep, part of a society too various, for Milly's initial perception (277). But she is growing. As in the fortunate fall theory, Milly matures because her innocence is pierced by an early initiation to evil. For even though she cannot yet sound the depths of Kate Croy, she has been able to fathom Lord Mark and some of the less devious socialites at that first gathering in Lancaster Gate: "she had, on the spot, with her first plunge into the obscure depths of a society constituted from far back, encountered the interesting phenomenon of complicated, of possibly sinister motive" (153-54).

Milly is more than an American outgrowing her provincialism; she is the archetypal innocent undergoing the inevitable initiation. And she is more than just an innocent, though Merton Densher and Kate Croy do not immediately perceive the fact. Densher, through whose eyes the reader views Milly in the second volume, does not notice right away that she is not the same girl he saw in the States.

To him the "Miss Theales" are just run of the mill American social phenomena (XX, 10).⁷ Kate does not understand the woman either, thinking that Milly is so innocent that she does not know what Lord Mark is--that she "has no natural sense of social values" (60). But unlike middle-class Kate, Milly is free of the necessity of recognizing rank. As a rich "princess," Milly has her own ticket into society. The Adamic innocent, as the novel develops, is not so much Milly as Densher, caught between a good and a bad angel, who only very slowly wakes up to Milly's grandeur and to Kate's sinister game. When he does perceive part of Kate's plan, he rationalizes just like Adam in Eden--since Kate has "brought the apple and asked him to bite," she is responsible for any consequences (91). Meanwhile Milly, visiting American friends abroad, senses that she is "already . . . queer and dissociated" from America (137). Even more important, being faced with a fate that clears her perceptions, Milly senses things that her English acquaintances have missed:

She saw things in these days that she had never seen before, and she couldn't have said why save on a principle too terrible to name; whereby she saw that neither Lancaster Gate was what New York took it for, nor New York what Lancaster Gate fondly fancied it in coquetting with the plan of a series of American visits. The plan might have been, humourously, on Mrs. Lowder's part, for the improvement of her social position--and it had verily in that direction lights that were perhaps but half a century too prompt . . . (137-38)

Milly perceives, that is, the fifty-year gap that must be filled before there is a true Anglo-American social synthesis on any broad scale. Just before Milly leaves the

scene of the novel in Book Eight, to be presented only indirectly thereafter, the reader sees how much she transcended her American identity. Through Densher's dazzled eyes, to which Milly now has a "confounding extension of surface," the reader sees her ability at the party in Venice to put on and take off at will her "American girl" personality, giving her complete social ease (215, 254-55).

The point is that, in spite of the truth in their arguments, Milly is more than Wegelin's "spiritual beauty"; she is more than wounded innocence; she is more, even, than R.W.B. Lewis's nearly archetypal Adamic American. In defining the more sophisticated "ironic temperament" of the elder Henry James as opposed to the "hopeful" Emersonian and "nostalgic" Longfellow temper, Lewis claims that it "was characterized by a tragic optimism: by a sense of the tragic collisions to which innocence was liable . . . and equally by an awareness of the heightened perception and humanity which suffering made possible."⁸ If the elder "James's entire intellectual effort . . . may be described as an immense salvaging of the American Adam" idea through his preaching of the necessity of a fall beyond innocence, Lewis claims that in the son's novels there is "a very comparable principle spelled out in extraordinary dramatic detail" (55, 62). Consequently the novelist portrays "innocent and metaphorically newborn heroes and heroines" in a "dialect of innocence and experience" which "was so obsessive and constant a theme for Henry James that one is

tempted to say it was not, finally, a theme at all: but rather the special and extraordinarily sensitive instrument by which James gauged the moral weather of the life he was imitating" (152-53). Lewis sees this drama of the American Adam developing from The Portrait of a Lady through The Wings of the Dove to, consummately, The Golden Bowl:

. . . the form which life assumed in James's fiction reflected the peculiar American rhythm of the Adamic experience: the birth of the innocent, the foray into the unknown world, the collision with that world, "the fortunate fall," the wisdom and maturity which suffering produced. The longer James lived abroad, the closer he moved toward a classic representation of the native anecdote. (153)

Like Wegelin, Lewis demonstrates his thesis well as far as he goes. Certainly The Portrait of a Lady and the three big novels of the major phase are recognizable variants on the pattern. Isabel Archer, Lambert Strether, and Milly Theale all mature through suffering or collisions with the world outside Eden. In The Golden Bowl, with its father named Adam and constant references to his and Maggie's innocence, the Adamic metaphor is explicit and to some degree, as Lewis argues, even central (153-54). Maggie "was n't born to know evil. She must never know it," says Fanny Assingham (XXIII, 78), and the Ververs are "so abjectly innocent" that they are "victims of fate" (391-92). They are so pure in thought that they assume the often-paired Prince and Charlotte will remain "in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall" (334). Like Milly, who seems "impossibly without

sin" to Kate Croy (XIX, 226), Maggie is initiated into a world of evil, and emerges with the wisdom and maturity of a very fortunate fall.

Nevertheless, having acknowledged this theme of Adamic innocence in these works, I think there is a good deal more than an Adamic archetype in many of the figures. As Lewis admits, "The Golden Bowl is a startling inversion of the Adamic tradition," for innocence turns aggressive and triumphs (154). The seams of the Adamic theory show even in Lewis's descriptions. In addition, James's American Adams have an exquisite sense of the past instead of the future, and a love of retrospection that is far from an Adamic quality. He uses the tradition of the Adamic American, but he does not mind violating even its central conventions. And as Lotus Snow perceives, James's characters do not undergo exactly the usual change from innocence to experience, but remain innocent in a sense at the end as they were in the beginning. Snow claims that several of James's characters "lack the principle of growth, the ability to deviate from the law of their being. The journey they take is not from innocence to experience but of innocence through experience."⁹ Those who have noticed Milly's and Maggie's growing awareness of evil and increasing complexity may dispute this description, but Snow is pointing to an important characteristic of James's later figures--that they do not "deviate from the law of their being," that they retain an aura of "innocence" or purity throughout

their experiences. What Snow has vaguely described, I think, is the underlying unchanging archetypal quality, not confined to the simple Adamic type, of James's most memorable late characters.

A number of other critics, even hostile ones, have touched on this trait of James's characters without fully realizing its value. R.P. Blackmur, who describes the late novels as "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," perceives Kate Croy as a representation of "philosophical or practical wisdom," Milly as "moral beauty," and Maggie as James's version of "divine wisdom," closely anticipating Wegelin. But he complains that these symbolic values interfere with the verisimilitude of characterization. Maggie Verver makes an incredible queen or princess, he says, even metaphorically, and Milly Theale is merely an overvalued creation of Susan Stringham.¹⁰ Marius Bewley voices a similar criticism of Milly, feeling that James indulges her as a character just as Hawthorne indulges Hilda in The Marble Faun. Inflated metaphors canonize the American girl, says Bewley, so she can purify the Old World.¹¹ Van Wyck Brooks, in his famous attack on James, also senses some interference with the old concrete verisimilitude in the later novels. "His people . . . grow dimmer and dimmer," Brooks complains, finally exploding that James's characters have a "dim visual image--no heart, no mind, no vitals. No interests, no attributes, no activities, no race, no philosophy. No passions, ambitions, convictions: no local

habitation--scarcely a name."¹² This exaggeration is so distorted that Brooks's legitimate perception is likely to be lost--that James finds ways to delineate character which are not concrete, and fills out the shape of his figures with the shadows of archetypes. This same misapprehension explains Granville Hicks's similar attack on the novels set in England, which he describes as increasingly divorced from concrete reality, and goes far, I suggest, toward explaining the roots of much negative criticism of James.¹³

James knows what he is doing. He had learned, perhaps through his re-perusal of such passages as the opening description of Christopher Newman in The American, that character is made up of less concrete items than hair, eyes, and clothes. Consequently his portraits of later characters are sometimes so non-concrete, as he strives to capture the essence of their nature and type, that concrete details get lost. Cissy Foy, for example, must ask Horton Vint if Graham Fielder even has physical attributes like eyes--for she cannot tell from his description (XXV, 174). This comic insertion proves that James is aware of his non-concrete technique. The reason these characters become more than concrete portraits is that James is striving for something both deeper and broader. Thus Graham Fielder of The Ivory Tower is exquisitely personalized with hardly a physical trait to his name, and then walks into a "fairy-tale or a legend" with his tremendous new wealth in a new world, feeling that he has just stepped "into the chariot

of the sun."¹⁴

Nearly as many critics, of course, have noted with favor James's movement toward fairy-tale figures, though perhaps only Matthiessen has done justice to the topic. Joseph Warren Beach, discussing the striking figures of speech in the late novels, notes that "many of them are used to build up an atmosphere of fairy-tale or dream."¹⁵ Edward Stone, examining women like Mrs. Beck of "Guest's Confession" (1872), who "might have been fancied a stray shepherdess from some rococo Arcadia" according to James, speculates on "the possibility that James's greatest preceptor was neither Balzac nor Turgenev nor George Eliot, but myth itself." He also notices that the grounds at Newmarch in The Sacred Fount are explicitly compared to those of fairy tales with enchanted castles, places in which "the strange 'came true'," and that Aurora Coyne in The Sense of the Past wants to marry "an adventurer--more or less of a returned discoverer of hidden gold, something of a modern Jason" (202, 206). Paull F. Baum had described "The Last of the Valerii," one of James's earliest stories, as a variation on the old theme "of a bridegroom pursued by a jealous divinity on whose finger he has slipped a marriage ring," and Lionel Trilling has traced some connections between Hyacinth Robinson and mythic tradition in The Princess Casamassima.¹⁷

But James's use of myth is even more widespread than most have noticed. In both "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871)

and "Flickerbridge" (1902) the anachronistic ladies are not just a century out of step, but explicitly suggest Sleeping Beauty. Miss Searle "was to the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood what a fact is to a fairy-tale, an interpretation to a myth" (XIII, 374), and Miss Wenham parallels the same archetypal figure (XVIII, 456--cf. Stone, 201). From early to late James was aware of and used mythic parallels. Euphemia's dressing in white and meeting with the witch-like old lady of the castle in "Madame de Mauves" (1874) is another familiar example (XIII, 228, 309-10). More generally, James's use of fairy godmothers is striking. Mrs. Touchett certainly acts as one to Isabel Archer, bringing her to a new world and helping endow her with a fortune. To Jackson Lemon of "Lady Barbarina" (1884), "Godmothers . . . were mainly associated with fairy-tales--he had had no baptismal sponsors of his own," but he discovers that godmothers do exist. He is blessed with a meddling facsimile in Mrs. Freer, and as "a young man with a great deal of gold who had suddenly arrived from a foreign country," he is himself "an apparition surely in a proper degree elfish" (XIV, 51). By the time of the late novels, such references are central to the works.¹⁸ Fanny Assingham of The Golden Bowl notes how much of a "fairy godmother" she has been to Prince Amerigo in arranging his marriage to the wealthy Maggie Verver (XXIV, 274-76). And while Mrs. Lowder is playing fairy godmother to Kate Croy, a neo-Cinderella in The Wings of the Dove, Susan Stringham performs a similar

service--though it backfires--in introducing Milly Theale to London as a princess.

The best discussions of myth in James published so far, though several theses have dealt with it, are by R.W. Stallman and F.O. Matthiessen. Stallman's interpretation of The Portrait of a Lady startled several critics, for he traced imagery in the novel connecting Isabel Archer with Diana the huntress, and the aggressive Goodwood with Mars the god of war (III, 220). The parallel explains the imagery of the moon that follows Isabel, including even the Palazzo Crescentini or crescent moon, and explains the explicit reference to her as a "goddess in an epic" (III, 45). Stallman also notes her symbolic wearing of black and white throughout the work, comparable to Milly Theale in The Wings of the Dove. Warburton is a "sun" to Isabel's moon and garden imagery, and Osmond, deriving from the French word, represents a form of the "world." Ralph compares him to a disgusted prince who has abdicated (III, 358), giving him further stature as a type. Pansy fits in as a pastoral "Dresden-china shepherdess," an "Infanta of Velasquez," perhaps an archetypal innocent beauty raised by beasts.¹⁹

But F.O. Matthiessen has dealt with the topic most fully in the major phase, and meets the questions raised by James's use of myth most directly. Beginning a fine analysis of The Wings of the Dove, the work in which fairy tale figures are used most obviously and extensively,

Matthiessen remarks:

. . . the more one scrutinizes the technique of this novel, the more one perceives that, despite James' past-masterly command over the details of realistic presentation, he is evoking essentially the mood of a fairy tale. He wanted to raise his international theme to its ultimate potentiality. (The Major Phase, 59)

Not just a treatment of social fusion, not just a variation on the American Adam motif, the international theme moves in these later novels toward the broader representation of myth. James's sense of past literature adds a dimension deeper than romance to his late works. The following examination of The Wings of the Dove, parallel to Matthiessen's but supplementing his description with more evidence, shows how important the conventions of fairy tale and myth are to the work. Just as romance serves as a background contrasting with realistic action to heighten verisimilitude in The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors, yet also increases the tension and emotion in these works, so myth and fairy tale provide fanciful comparisons to the figures and action in The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl, tying them more firmly to reality even while exalting the conflicts and confrontations and giving them broader significance.

Kate Croy, the first person introduced in the novel, seems totally realistic, coming from a rather sordid middle class background, with a hypocritical father and a poor married sister. James originally planned to have Kate's background play a strong role in explaining her materialistic motivations, and touches of that intention still

shine through late in the novel, particularly when Densher sees her in the last scene at the wretched Mrs. Condrip's house instead of in Venice or at Lancaster Gate (XX, 364, 370; cf. 383, 394). Densher perceives her predicament if she does not gain wealth. But other considerations submerge this portion of Kate's characterization, as James admits in the preface (Prefaces, 297-98). Kate immediately moves toward a rags-to-riches, Cinderella role when she is cut off from her past by Aunt Maud--the fairy godmother who will try to marry her to a lord if only she will forsake her father and promise not to see or communicate with him (XIX, 16). At the same time James makes Kate a typical "dark lady" by clothing her "altogether in black," including a "black closely-feathered hat," the "thick fall of her dusky hair" and the strange blue eyes which also seem almost black.²⁰

Her fiance is a similar realistic figure separated from his situation and made into a type. Merton Densher, although he is a newspaper writer, does not look like a member of his profession (47-48). Furthermore, he spent his early years abroad and was schooled in Switzerland and Germany by "migratory parents." When the reader learns that Densher is only "half a Briton" to Mrs. Lowder, he begins to suspect that Densher is one of those cosmopolitan figures--like Juliana Bordereau, Peter Sherringham, or his cosmopolitan princesses of mixed national ancestry, Christina Light, Claire de Cintre and Madame de Vionnet--

whom James does not restrict to a single national type so that he can make of him whatever he will. Such characters are prime evidence of the main value of "social fusion" to the novelist.

Milly Theale, of course, is the main archetype in the novel, the paradoxically perfect but frail, prized but vulnerable princess. She is the one who can feel a pea through a dozen mattresses and is always in danger of being snatched by a villain. In order to create a credible princess in the situation he desires, James selects an origin that detaches her from all relatives and embarrassing details while giving her the greatest possibilities: "She should be the last fine flower--blooming alone, for the fullest attestation of her freedom--of an 'old' New York stem" (Prefaces, 292). So that she may have "a strong and special implication of liberty, liberty of action, of choice, of appreciation," Milly must be rich and unattached, a princess with the utmost chance to live happily ever after. At the same time she must be exquisitely vulnerable--delicately sensitive, so tender she can be killed by rejected love, a staple condition of ballads and sentimental romances which James only scantily cloaks with the realism of Milly's dreaded but terribly vague disease. She is killed as much by the realization of Densher's hypocrisy as by tuberculosis or anything mundane. Furthermore, her connection with New York is only the vaguest. The reader never sees her there even by projection. As Edward Stone

points out, Densher's represented sense of the past time in New York with Milly does not fill in the episode concretely at all.²¹ Instead that period just becomes a hazy romantic era to Densher, further heightening Milly's stature as a princess. New York is so cosmopolitan to James that, except for its commercial qualities, with which Milly has only an indirect connection through her inheritance, New York can produce any kind of character. Its conditions in any case "provide better for large independence . . . than any other conditions in the world"--and also provide the novelist as much freedom as possible (Prefaces, 292). Milly gains her alleged New York identity mainly by repetition, not by any inherent New York qualities in her black dress of bereavement and striking red hair:

It was New York mourning, it was New York hair, it was a New York history, confused as yet, but multitudinous, of the loss of parents, brothers, sisters, almost every human appendage, all on a scale and with a sweep that had required the greater stage; it was a New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation, and, beyond everything, it was by most accounts, in respect to the mass of money so piled on the girl's back, a set of New York possibilities. (105-06)

With the stereotype of New York, or even more of Hollywood, wealth and isolation that has grown up, such a description might now pass as authentic concrete reference. But in this passage "New York" acts more as an incantation than as concrete description, and if the term is omitted the reader can perceive more readily, I think, what James is creating. Milly is the very typical heiress, glorified but just as vulnerable as the many other heiresses that have glittered

across the pages of fiction. James gets away with this vision of Milly by placing it in the eyes of a dazzled New Englander, Mrs. Susan Shepherd Stringham, who has just enough pastoral credulity in her rural Swiss and New England make-up, indicated by her maiden name, to think any rich girl from the big city is a princess. Consider, for example, Susan's further vision of Milly's background:

New York was vast, New York was startling, with strange histories, with wild cosmopolite backward generations that accounted for anything; and to have got nearer the luxuriant tribe of which the rare creature was the final flower, the immense extravagant unregulated cluster, with free-living ancestors, handsome dead cousins, lurid uncles, beautiful vanished aunts, persons all busts and curls, preserved, though so exposed, in the marble of famous French chisels--all this, to say nothing of the closer growths of the stem, was to have had one's small world-space both crowded and enlarged . . . This was poetry--it was also history--Mrs. Stringham thought, to a finer tune than even Maeterlinck and Pater, than Marbot and Gregorovius. (110-11)

After such an introduction, Milly could be anything. For to Susan, Milly is "the real thing, the romantic life itself" (107); she is always "a girl with a background," a romantic past, always "the potential heiress of all the ages" (107, 109). Ironically, since she is exploited like the typical heiress, Milly is the "heiress of all the ages" in the sense that she falls prey to the role as well. But Mrs. Stringham does not recognize her vulnerability at first; she sees only her possibilities. To her "When Milly smiled it was a public event--when she didn't it was a chapter of history" (118). Either way Susan sees Milly in charge, a princess in power and mien.

Susan herself is a beautifully drawn New Englander, a widowed short story writer "from Burlington Vermont, which she boldly upheld as the real heart of New England, Boston being 'too far south'" (106-07). She is well characterized by her "small neat memories and ingenuities, little industries and ambitions, mixed with something moral, personal, that was still more intensely responsive," by a felt Tyrolese hat and a fur boa, and by many explicitly enumerated acts of a provincial New Englander (107-08). She is "a mere typical subscriber, after all, to the Transcript" (109).²² Initially, then, she ties Milly to reality by her own provincial character even as she exalts her into a princess. But when Susan gets to Switzerland, her manner and type subtly change, transformed by her sense of the past: "Mrs. Stringham was now on the ground of thrilled recognitions, small sharp echoes of a past which she kept in a well-thumbed case, but which, on the pressure of a spring and exposure to the air, still showed itself ticking as hard as an honest old watch." She had gone to school in Switzerland, and has warm reminiscences, "sacred today because prepared in the hushed chambers of the past" (118). What Susan's sense of the past does is transform Switzerland into a paradise, a fairy land setting for Milly's further elevation. James is now able to palm off Mrs. Stringham as a "woman of the world" through her cosmopolitan past, and explicitly make Milly "a princess" (120). For Switzerland is literally a land of milk and honey and

youth, the pastoral heaven of the former Miss Shepherd:

The irrecoverable days had come back to her from far off; they were part of the sense of the cool upper air and of everything else that hung like an indestructible scent to the torn garment of youth--the taste of honey and the luxury of milk, the sound of cattle-bells and the rush of streams, the fragrance of trodden balms and the dizziness of deep gorges. (119-20)

Again, however, the effect is created primarily for Milly. She sits like a sculpture, rapt in thought. Even her wealth, which she cannot get away from, serves to exempt her from time and reality, showing "in the fine folds of the helplessly expensive little black frock . . . in the curious and splendid coils of hair, 'done' with no eye whatever to the mode du jour, that peeped from under the corresponding indifference of her hat, the merely personal tradition that suggested a sort of noble inelegance; it lurked between the leaves of the uncut but antiquated Tauchnitz volume" (121). Milly is independent of fashion and fad, a style and a tradition in herself. On the precipice of one of the Alps, she meditates, "looking down on the kingdoms of the earth" like Christ being tempted by Satan, but not looking "with a view to renouncing them" (123). As a princess, she will just claim the kingdoms as her due. This image captures for Susan all of Milly's "type, aspects, marks, her history, her state, her beauty, her mystery" (125). Dressed in black, Milly comes into a candlelit room with drawn white curtains, and Susan--full of the comings and goings of the inn--absorbs all as "reminders, for our fanciful friend, of old stories, old

pictures, historic flights, escapes, pursuits, things that had happened, things indeed that by a sort of strange congruity helped her to read the meanings of the greatest interest into the relation in which she was now so deeply involved" (133). The only note bringing this image down to earth is Susan's first glimpse of an additional shadow, sensed from the danger also symbolized by the precipice, that the future "was n't to exist for her princess in the form of any sharp or simple release from the human predicament" (125).²³

What is James creating? Clearly romance is backing up the realistic situation here just as in The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors. Adding to the combination of romance and realism, in which both the tension of romance and the credibility of realism are preserved, James is blending in elements of the fairy tale, with a similar symbiotic effect. The fusion is difficult, for the fairy tale is exempt from the requirements of time and reality, while the novel must be constantly concerned with both.²⁴ With parallels to fairy tales constantly in the background, the work takes on more and more dimensions of myth even as the events take place in conventional chronology. James is using the friction of the ideal possibilities and the all too real vulnerabilities of Milly to elevate her predicament in a manner similar to classical tragedy. Even as James justifies choosing a New Yorker for his princess, it is clear that he is more interested in the dramatic

consequences of the choice than in the rationale: "to be the heir of all the ages only to know yourself, as that consciousness should deepen, balked of your inheritance, would be to play the part, it struck me, or at least to arrive at the type, in the light on the whole the most becoming" (Prefaces, 292). But the result is broader than tragedy, like myth, and touches on the somber fact that the highest possibilities of man are always limited by his baser motives and bordered by the inevitability of death. As Matthiessen points out, "If James created the spell of a fairy tale, he did it, as the great fabulists have always done, for the sake of evoking universal truths" (74).

Milly combines, then, the aura of a princess with the humanity and vulnerability of a frail young woman. In order to satisfy Milly's social longings and desire to see England, Susan thrusts her into part of London society at the height of the season through her acquaintance with an old schoolmate, now Kate's aunt, Maud Lowder. Milly feels she is in a "really romantic" situation for the first time, a "fairy tale" produced by Susan's fairy godmother "wand," an impression echoed by Mrs. Lowder.²⁵ Here she meets equally romantic people, such as Lord Mark, whose age is so indeterminate that Milly could not tell "whether he were a young man who looked old or an old man who looked young" (151); and Kate Croy, the "handsome young girl from the heavy English house" who was like "a figure in a picture stepping by magic out of its frame" (171). With her mind

well prepared by English fiction, Milly sees Kate as the very type of the "London girl . . . with turns of head and tones of voice, felicities of stature and attitude, things 'put on' and, for that matter, put off, all the marks of the product of a packed society who should be at the same time the heroine of a strong story" (172). As in The Ambassadors, James first uses parallels from typical romances to deepen the effect of the novel:

Kate Croy really presented herself to Milly . . . as the wondrous London girl in person (by what she had conceived, from far back, of the London girl; conceived from the tales of travellers and the anecdotes of New York, from old porings over Punch and a liberal acquaintance with the fiction of the day).
(171; cf. 192)

But soon the romantic picture of Kate darkens almost imperceptibly; the romance deepens, and Kate begins to take on the traits of an age-old type for the reader. Miss Croy is more than a "London girl"; she has the ability "to show as a beautiful stranger, to cut her connexions and lose her identity, letting the imagination for the time make what it would of them" (212). What Milly will have to learn is that Kate is both more modern than the London girl of contemporary fiction and a much more ancient type--dating back in her variations to Lady Macbeth and Clytemnestra, and to the ubiquitous wicked would-be empresses of Oriental literature--the woman determined that her husband shall be rich or powerful, no matter what the cost in morals. Milly does perceive the possibly sinister motives underlying certain

behavior in romantic London society (153-54), and sees that Kate is "the least bit brutal" (181), but she is an adventurous heroine who enjoys rather than shuns the "abysses" and "labyrinth" of dangerous Europe (182, 186).

With the evil brewing so quickly, Milly reaches "a sort of magnificent maximum, the pink dawn of an apotheosis coming so soon" after her arrival in London (220). At Lord Mark's estate Milly is virtually transformed into a Renaissance princess, perhaps one of the Medici, by her resemblance to a Bronzino portrait.²⁶ Kate sees how "impossibly without sin" Milly is, like a Madonna, and Milly herself feels that she will "never be better than this" (221, 226). But as if to counterpoint Milly's perfection at its highest point, James now has her ask Kate to accompany her to the doctor, whose name (Luke) preserves the sense of old parallels through its Biblical association (228). After they go, Milly's apotheosis is not deflated, but made deeply poignant as James had planned; for just as Milly emerges most clearly as the "heiress of all the ages," she is cut down, "balked" of her "inheritance," by evidence of an incurably fatal disease (Prefaces, 292). She must forsake London society at the peak of her success, and she walks alone through the streets "duskiely draped, sable-plumed" with this knowledge, and even more, with the "great common anxiety" of death (245-50). Later, in a hotel, she paces "like a caged Byzantine" through "the queer long-drawn almost sinister delay of night," nevertheless liking the effect (256).

As the volume ends, she is retreating from life for "dips and dashes into the many-coloured stream of history (287), while the reader learns, ominously, that Kate Croy has always been virtually invulnerable to disease, and is always at her best late at night (258, 276).

As Matthiessen claims, Densher is "an important factor in preventing Susan Stringham's intensely 'literary' version of Milly as a princess from becoming merely silly" (74). He serves this function mainly at the opening of Book Six.²⁷ Densher's vision of Milly broadens, however, and he eventually idealizes her as much as Mrs. Stringham. As their acquaintance deepens, Densher recalls his scant time with Milly in America as more and more intimate, until it becomes like "one of those fabulous periods in which prosperous states place their beginnings" (79). Susan only makes Milly a princess; Densher eventually turns her into an angel. In transition between the two images, wearing a "big black hat, so little superstitiously in the fashion, her fine black garments throughout, the swathing of her throat . . . an infinite number of yards of priceless lace," Milly transforms her royal gown into a holy vestment, as, "its folded fabric kept in place by heavy rows of pearls," ancient symbols of purity, the gown "hung down to her feet like the stole of a priestess" (96). She will cover his sin with forgiveness; better still, she will transform his guilt into love. But Densher is still unaware of her value. He thinks he is in a high romance. Kate is playing her part

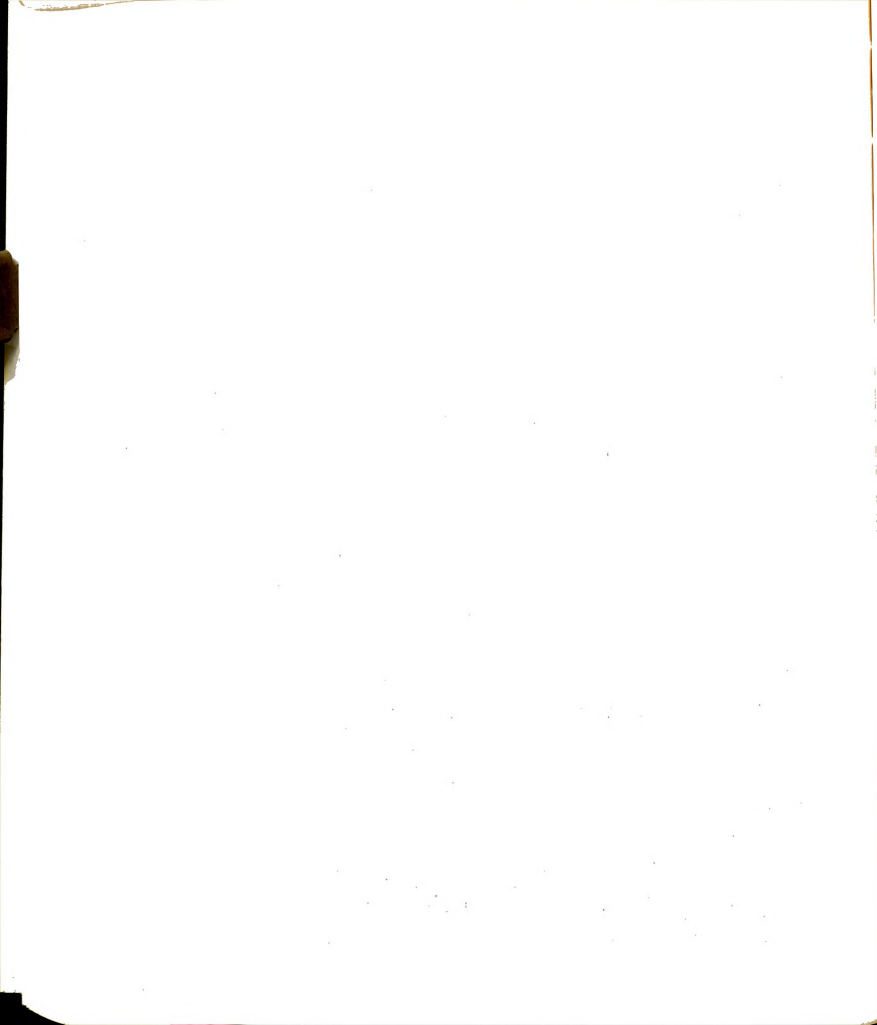
so well that the effect is "something like the artistic idea, the plastic substance, imposed by tradition, by genius, by criticism, in respect to a given character, on a distinguished actress" (34). Understanding neither Milly nor Kate yet, Densher fancies that he is involved in "one of those rare cases of exaltation--food for fiction, food for poetry--in which a man's fortune with the woman who doesn't care for him is positively promoted by the woman who does" (81). But the game is deeper and more sinister than romantic, as once again the elements of fairy tales deepen the effects of the romance.

For Milly is now in her fairy palace "all toned with time and all flourished and scalloped and gilded about" (132), the Venetian Palazzo Leporelli, where she is surrounded "with servants, frescoes, tapestries, antiquities, the thorough make-believe of a settlement," treasuring every residue of time as "the priestess of the worship" (134). As though she were a princess in a tower surrounded by a moat--the canals of Venice--as well as a priestess in a temple, Milly might be playing a role in a fairy tale or a Maeterlinck play, James remarks (139, 143). The allusion is apparently an attempt to connect further the romantic with the realistic elements in the situation, a technique Maeterlinck was known for.²⁸ She feels the "impossible romance" of living in the castle happily ever after, "to sit there for ever, through all her time, as in a fortress; and the idea became an image of never going down, of

remaining aloft in the divine dustless air, where she would hear but the splash of the water against the stone" (147). Milly is beginning to see that in order to live in a fairy tale, one's castle must be a fortress keeping out both dust and life. With Lord Mark urging her selfishly instead to hold a queenly court for her friends and come up and down the magnificent staircase in "Veronese costumes" (147), Milly also realizes how her bad health and money attract "admirers," and with this sober "judgment formed in the sinister light of tragedy," she rejects the suit of the designing Lord Mark (157-58). The fairy tale is turning very sordid. The lord whom Mrs. Lowder had intended to hook for Kate is drawn off by the bait she had hoped would attract Densher away from her niece. No wonder Milly senses that her apotheosis was "a hundred years ago" (153).

No one else really sees the tragedy coming yet--certainly not Densher. To him Milly's "palace--with all its romance and art and history--had set up round her a whirlwind of suggestion that never dropped for an hour. It wasn't therefore, within such walls, confinement, it was the freedom of all the centuries" (174). He is still blind to the reality under the fairy tale, and deludes himself about his own role as prince:

Behind everything for him was his renewed remembrance, which had fairly become a habit, that he had been the first to know her. This was what they had all insisted on, in her absence, that day at Mrs. Lowder's; and this was in especial what had made him feel its influence on his immediately paying her a second visit.



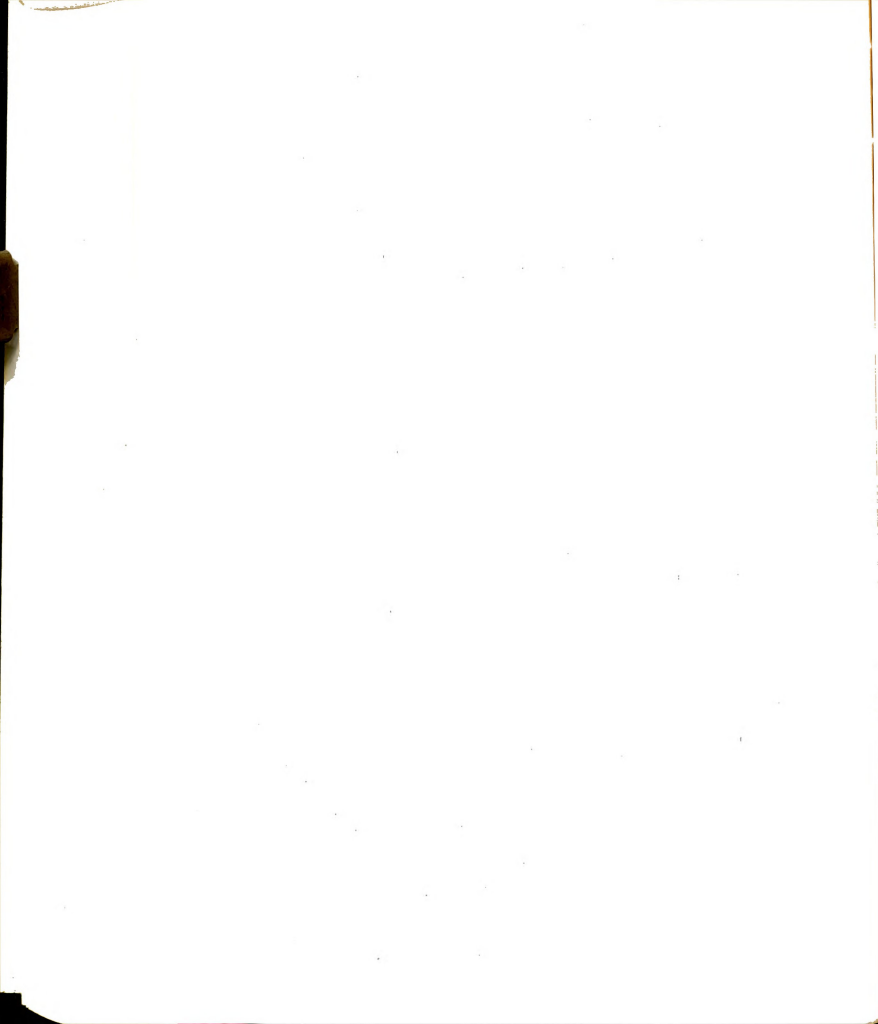
Its influence had been all there, been in the high-hung, rumbling carriage with them, from the moment she took him to drive, covering them in together as if it had been a rug of softest silk. It had worked as a clear connexion with something lodged in the past, something already their own. He had more than once recalled how he had said to himself even at that moment, at some point in the drive, that he was not there, not just as he was in so doing it, through Kate and Kate's idea, but through Milly and Milly's own, and through himself and his own, unmistakeably--as well as through the little facts, whatever they had amounted to, of his time in New York. (185-86)

Those "little facts" had in truth amounted to very little. His sense of the past is so willfully distorted that it becomes a fantasy-rationale for the real role he is playing.

Kate, of course, does not see Milly's situation as tragic, but as an opportunity. Susan Stringham, though she may perceive part of the sober truth, is suppressing her knowledge well (192-93), presumably to protect Milly. As the princess' preparations for holding court in the palace build up, however, Susan feels that Milly's most fitting setting is emerging, and she inadvertently pinpoints the negative part she has played while intending to be a good fairy:

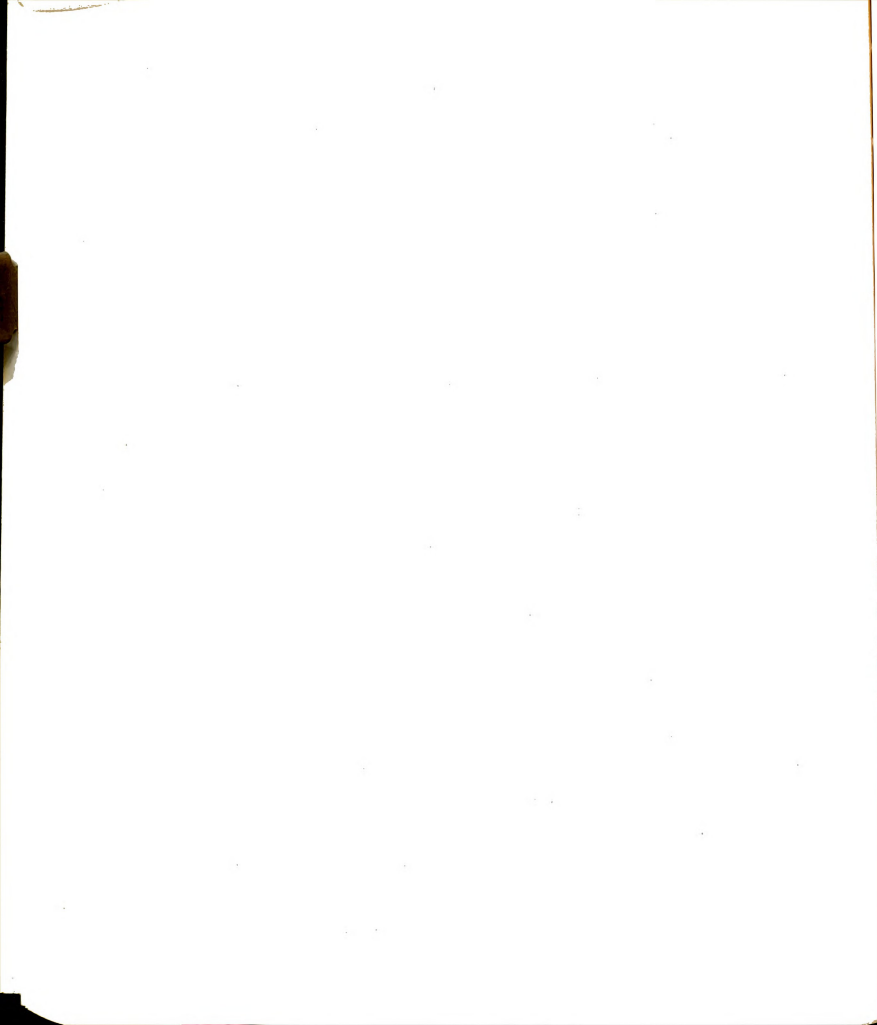
It's a Veronese picture, as near as can be--with me as the inevitable dwarf, the small blackamoor, put into a corner of the foreground for effect. If I only had a hawk or a hound or something of that sort I should do the scene more honour. The old housekeeper, the woman in charge here, has a big red cockatoo that I might borrow and perch on my thumb for the evening. (206)

Susan has joined, without intending to, the company of hunters, whose hawks will soon bring the dove to the ground. The mixture of sacred and fairy tale motifs, well known in

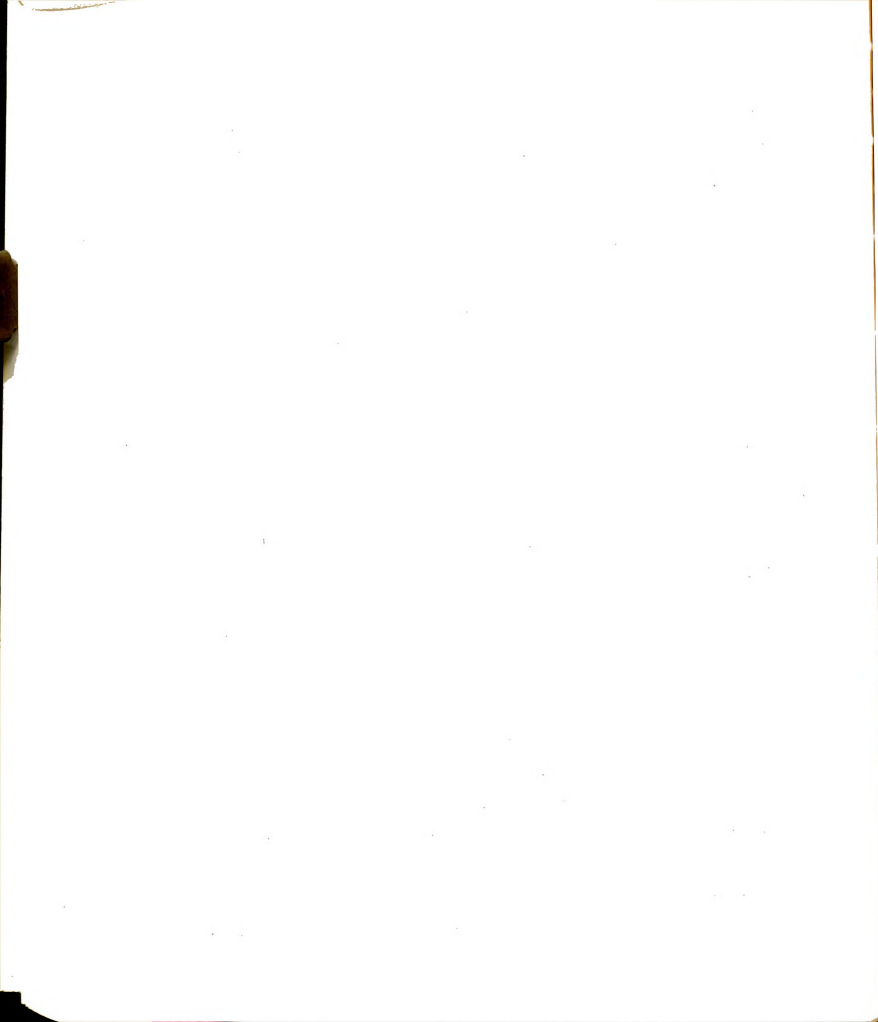


Veronese paintings, represents Milly's continuing priestess-princess image, and the danger being posed to it. Milly is being transformed through loving Densher, however, into the image of the dove that Kate Croy first compared her to (XIX, 283); a dove like those fluttering in the "bright historic air" of the Piazza San Marco, between the great church and the "Splendid Square, which had so notoriously, in all the years, witnessed more of the joy of life than any equal area in Europe" (XX, 293). She is torn between the protection of withdrawal--into her castle-fortress-temple, symbolically parallel to the church--and the joie de vivre in loving Densher, an extrovert act parallel to the "great social saloon" figured by the rest of the Piazza (189-90). Kate and Densher, walking from the church to the social center of the square as they discuss the whole situation, are responsible for drawing Milly in the same direction. Ready to propose to Densher, Milly appears at her fabulous party dressed in white for the first time instead of "her almost monastic, her hitherto inveterate black" (213-14). She is now fully the beautiful but vulnerable dove in the courage of flight--ready, unfortunately, to use the contemporary metaphor, to be shot down on the wing (218-19).

In the face of Milly's imminent proposal, Kate comes to Densher's rooms to seal their strangely tacit bargain. Milly had put her in the shade at the soirée, and Densher's appreciation of his dual conquest no doubt revealed to Kate that Milly might in fact be emerging as a rival. She is.

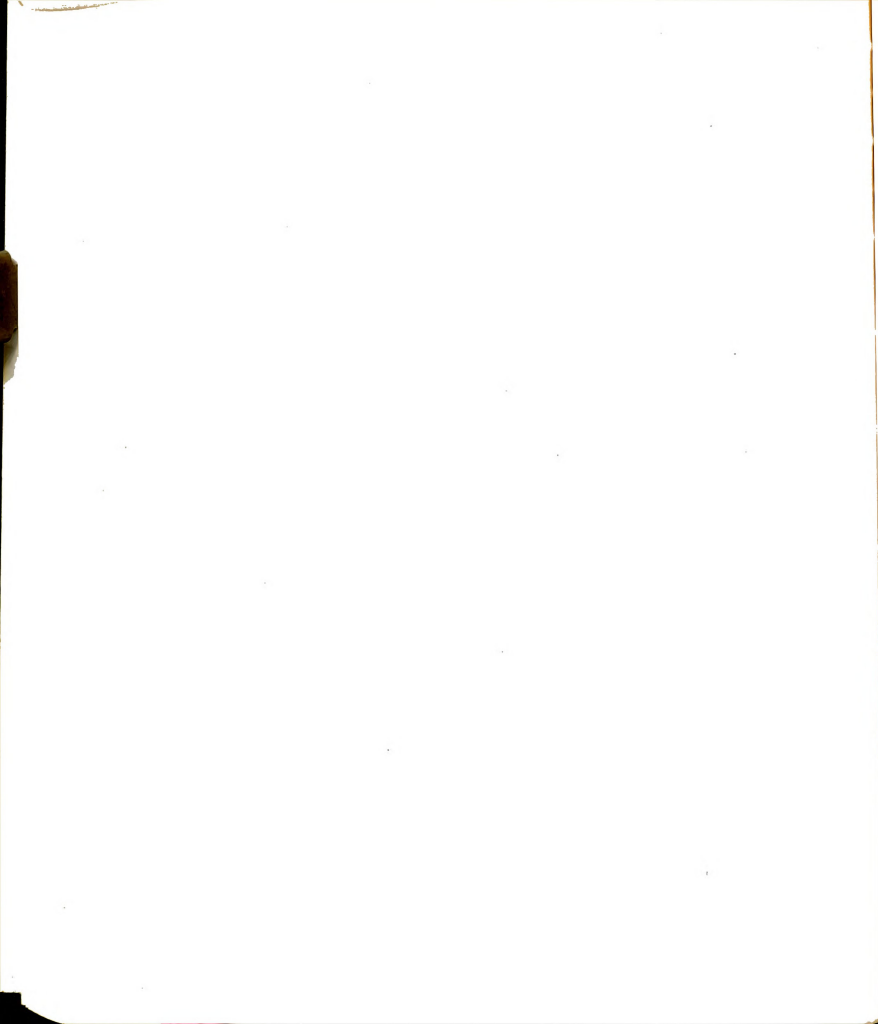


The "vague faint snatches, mere ghosts of sound, of old fashioned melancholy music," which Densher had sensed symbolically surrounding Milly, increase dramatically for him (184-85). He now realizes that if he disappoints Milly, he will kill her (252). Carrying this burden of responsibility as he goes to visit her, he is told by the gondolier that she is not receiving. Immediately Densher feels the tragedy upon them. The gondolier's face "would have been blank . . . if the term could ever apply to members of a race in whom vacancy was but a nest of darkness--not a vain surface, but a place of withdrawal in which something obscure, something always ominous, indistinguishably lived" (256). As in a fairy tale, everything turns black. The city seems "all of evil . . . a Venice of cold lashing rain from a low black sky" (259). When he goes to St. Mark's again, the storm is symbolically framed in the arcade by "the old columns of the Saint Theodore and of the Lion," suggesting martyrdom, and the piazza that represents Milly's social emergence seems "more than ever like a great drawing-room, the drawing-room of Europe, profaned and bewildered by some reverse of fortune" (260-61). Mrs. Stringham comes to tell him that the princess, like the Biblical king Hezekiah, "has turned her face to the wall," and the storm makes everything appear more grey and tragic than ever (274). The recent past seems disconnected and far away, just as the buildings across the channel from his apartment, "blurred and belittled, stood at twice their distance" (278).



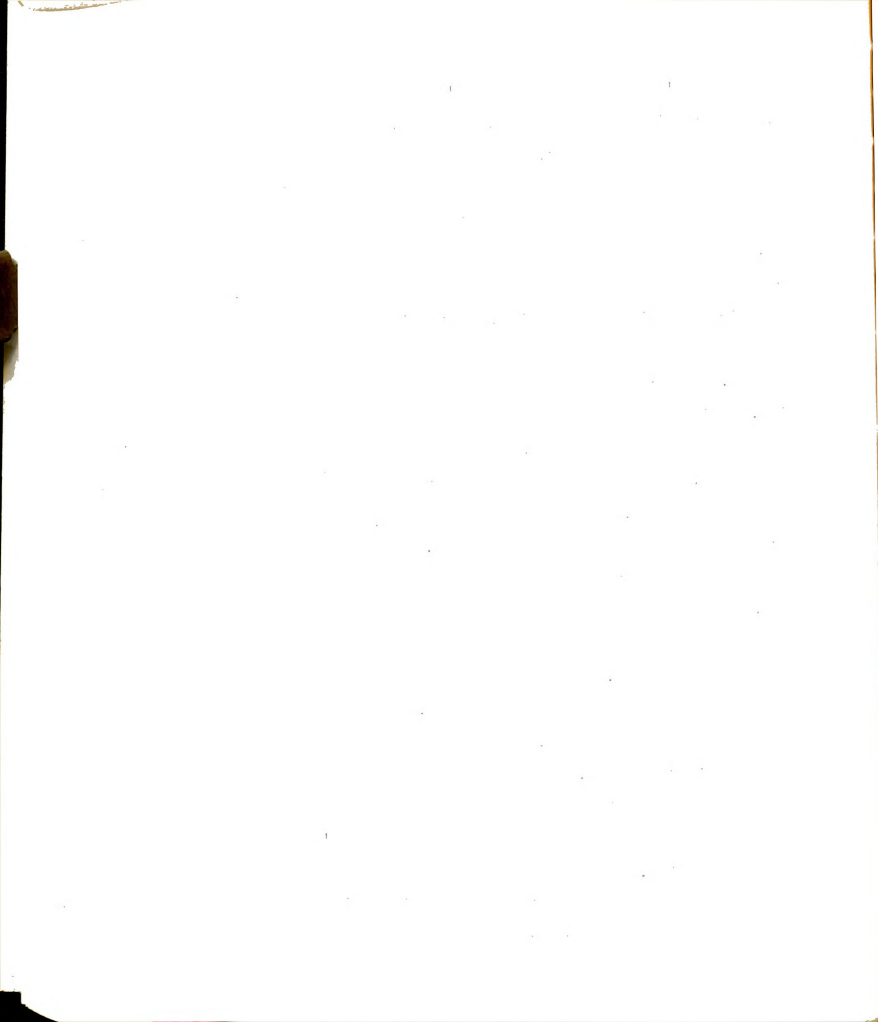
After Densher returns to Kate in London, she too seems far away. There is a gap between them, and "they met across it even as persons whose adventures, on either side, in time and space, of the nature of perils and exiles, had had a peculiar strangeness" (313). Milly has broken the spell for Densher. Both Kate and Densher talk as though she is already dead (340). Lesser realities like Lancaster Gate look "smaller now" to Densher, who is "a man haunted with a memory," a "sense of the presence" of Milly that is like "the page of a book" (342-44). After the dove "has folded her wonderful wings," he goes to church for monastic contemplation (356, 361-62). More than anything else, Kate now seems diminished, especially when he sees her at the lowly Mrs. Condrip's instead of in the grand piazza in Venice or even at Lancaster Gate (364). By reading the letters from Milly and her lawyers, Kate fails Densher's ideal test of delicacy, being neither princess nor priestess. Milly becomes a perfect memory, enhancing her archetypal stature through James's technique of not allowing her to appear directly for two full books--"all as if to approach her circuitously, deal with her at second hand, as an unspotted princess is ever dealt with" (Prefaces, 306).

Matthiessen concludes his examination of The Wings of the Dove by remarking that "though he came to work essentially in the genre of the fairy tale," James nevertheless "had not become conscious of the possibilities of dealing explicitly with myth." Consequently "When he groped his



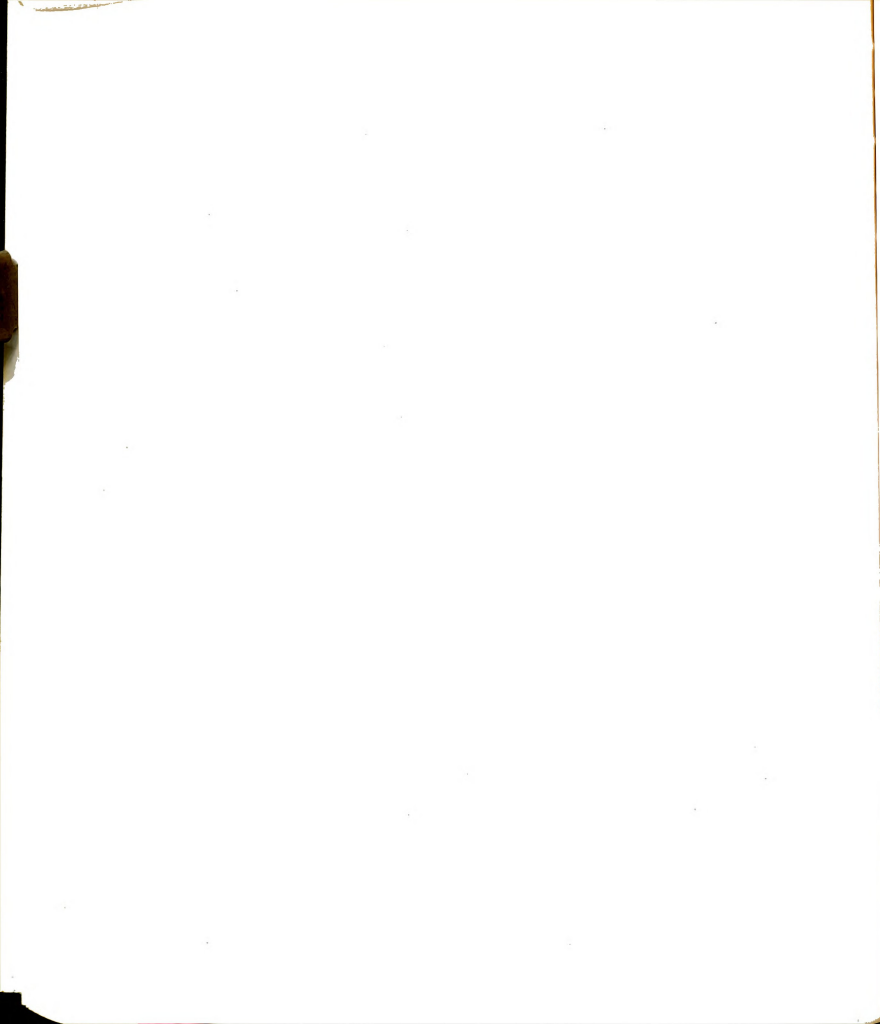
way back to 'the sense of the past', it was only to the dawn of the nineteenth century, for the sake of a contrast with later social manners. He was not to become aware of the obsessive presence of all times, of the repetition of primitive patterns in civilized life" (72-73). Perhaps not. Later writers would use The Golden Bough of Frazer to enter deeper caverns of the past. But with his use of romantic and fairy tale motifs, James gives a sense of the past to the reader that is deeper than the nineteenth century. His characters become both strangely exempt from time, moving like figures in fairy tales, yet fatally influenced by centuries of it, due to the dual nature of his archetypes. For an archetype is simultaneously so old that it seems timeless, and so recurring that it suggests a long successive line moving back into time. By using such figures James is surely at least moving in the direction of myth, and is deepening the shadow of the past on the present.

The Golden Bowl can also be treated as a fairy tale or drama of archetypes. Certainly the Prince and Princess are like their counterparts in fairy tales, ready to live happily ever after at the end, and some of the other characters are similar types. The Prince becomes a type partly by being the last direct descendant of a family that stretches back as far into the Roman past as Count Valerio's ("The Last of the Valerii"). That this long history serves more to typify the Prince than to give him a pedigree is shown by the fact that Maggie is also supposedly from "a braver and



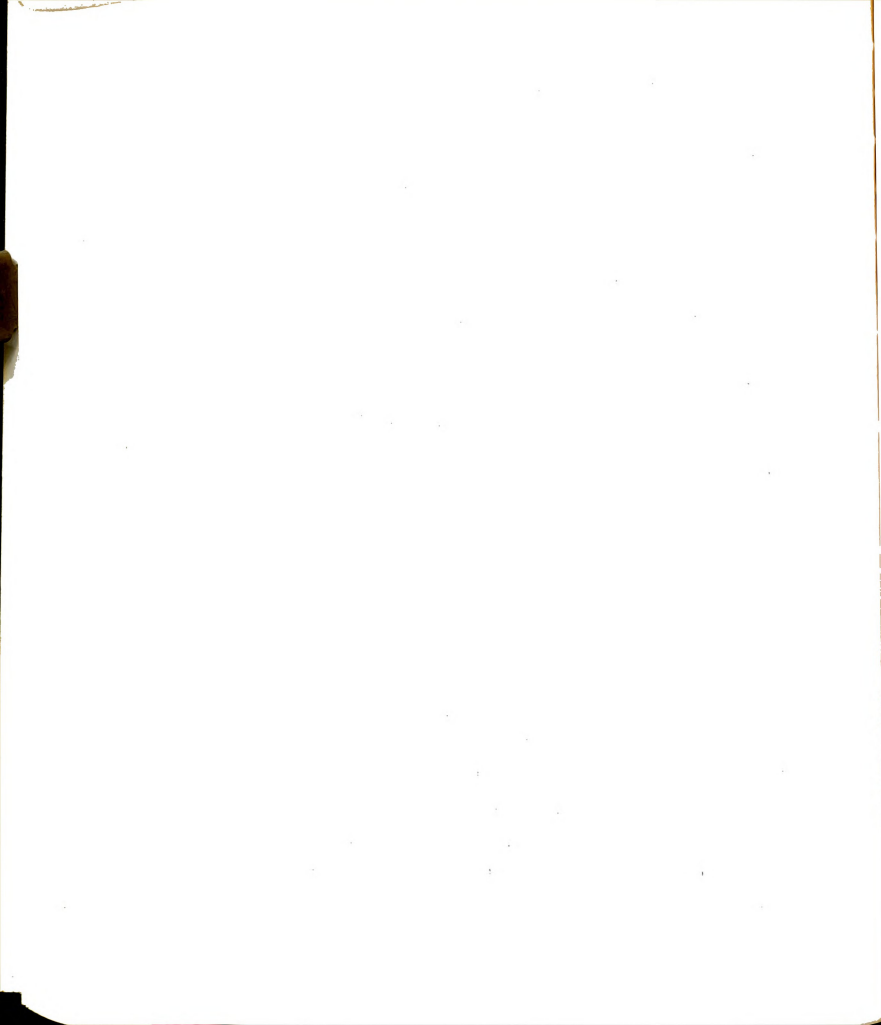
finer" age, and would have fit in well with "the cinquecento" (XXIII, 13).²⁹ With her money, the Prince's mythical and metaphorical "ship" of fortune is sailing in the "Golden Isles" (27). Charlotte Stant, the third point of the eternal triangle, is also a type, beginning as a cosmopolitan polyglot American. To the Prince, however, she has arms that "Florentine sculptors in the old time had loved," looks like a "huntress" from a distance (playing a Diana role similar to Isabel Archer's), and resembles a "muse" as she approaches (47).³⁰ Even Fanny Assingham, who is a ficelle and a fairy godmother, and is one of James's well-known Europeanized Americans, looks exotically Arabian or Jewish or Creole (34). Adam Verver of course has his own symbolic antiquity and taste for it. He views Maggie as a nameless statue "lost in an alien age," "mythological and nymphlike" (187), and adds the Prince to his collection of antiquarii "as if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, mediaeval, wonderful" (23; cf. 138-40).

The Prince and Charlotte are caught in a "magic web" (297), and when they go treasure hunting they find a golden bowl, a crystal gilded with "old fine gold" by "a lost art" practiced in "a lost time" (112-14). Adam and Charlotte find similar fairy treasure on their hunt, "Damascene tiles" with "the infinitely ancient, the immemorial amethystine blue of the glaze, scarcely more meant to be breathed upon . . . than the cheek of royalty" (214-15).

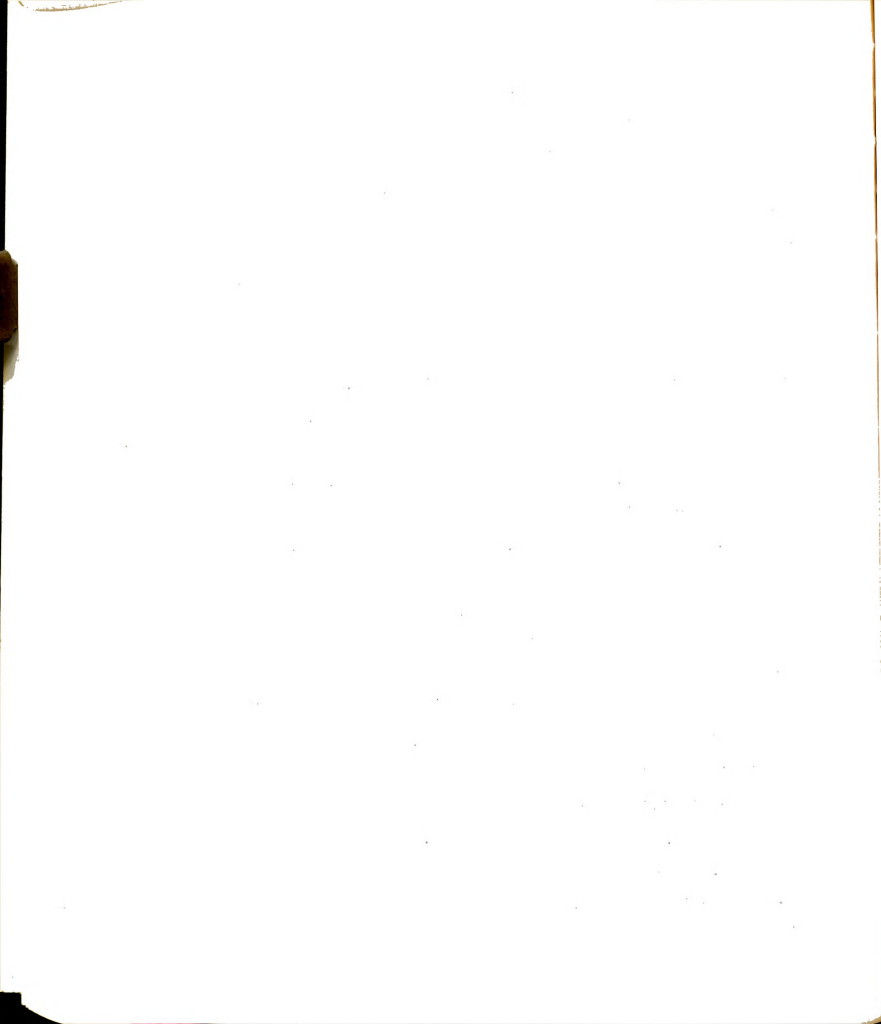


Even the buildings come from fairy tales and myth. Portland Place is explicitly compared to a castle (XXIV, 99, 306), and Fawns is compared to a temple (324), paralleling the development of the Palazzo Leporelli in The Wings of the Dove.³¹ The actions and roles of the characters often seem mythic as well. Maggie feels like the "scapegoat of old" expiating everyone's sins (233-36), and pictures Charlotte as "some echo of an ancient fable--some vision of Io goaded by the gadfly or of Ariadne roaming the lone sea strand" (307). At one point the Prince and Charlotte are pictured as lovers in a high Wagnerian opera (280), "interlocked in their wood of enchantment, a green glade as romantic as one's dream of an old German forest." When Fanny Assingham smashes the golden bowl, the Prince appears as if by magic. And these are only a few of the outstanding parallels to mythology and fairy tales that James uses in the work.

The Golden Bowl is also a fine example of the other central development of the major phase, the consummate portrayal of consciousness, and it is in this connection that I wish primarily to discuss the work. Interestingly enough, this representation of consciousness is intimately connected with the tendency of James's characters to lose concrete external attributes, and consequently to appear more as archetypes than individuals. John Henry Raleigh, in a finely perceptive essay on James's theory of consciousness, analyzes the identity of his figures very carefully.³² James's most striking characters do not impress the reader

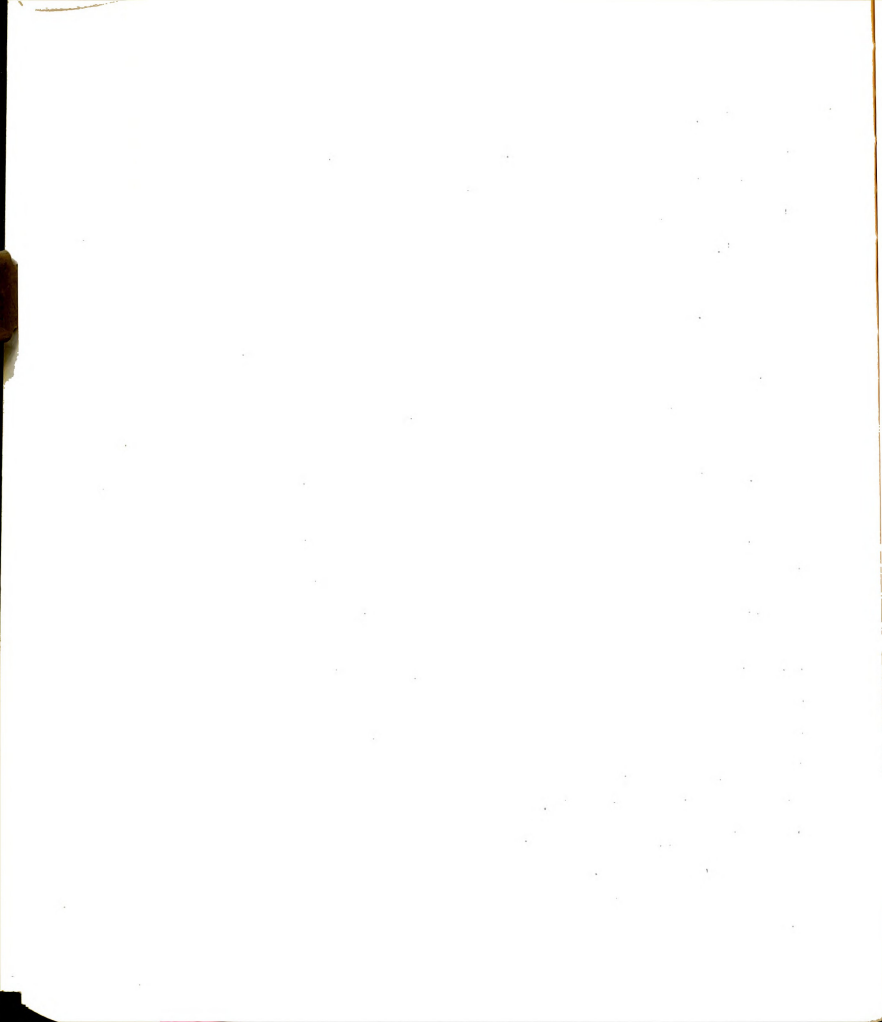


mainly as unique individuals, but as magnificent portrayals of consciousness--"those who most perfectly body forth his basic assumptions as to the nature of personality and experience" are the most memorable (Raleigh, 4). In the later novels of consciousness "Page after page is given to its exploration; characters are ranked according to how high or how low, in perceptiveness and subtlety, are their conscious minds; and the movement of the story progresses as various bundles of consciousness impinge upon one another, attracted or repulsed or drifting" (5). Consciousness becomes the only "knowable reality" in James, and character is presented as a "tabula rasa being written upon by experience, or sense impressions" (8-9). His finest American differs from others by being "morally superior, extremely sensitive, inordinately curious, a supreme gatherer of impressions, in short, a superior tabula rasa" (11). Each character, since consciousness is the only knowable reality, is fundamentally isolated: "the technique of the late works is an attempt to dramatize most effectively the essential ambiguity of these relationships within which the various characters are, paradoxically, both intimately intertwined and utterly isolated, and where each individual can know another only from moment to moment and then never completely" (18). As a result of this isolation, the characters take on the stature of types rather than individuals, figures defined by their roles or situations. Characters in the late novels do not differ in



their manner of perceiving, but only in the degree of their perception, which defines their awareness and ability to act more than their character. For this reason, even though the novel is turned deeply inward, toward consciousness, "'the bourgeois and individual passes into the mythical and typical'."³³

The sense of the past becomes a crucial faculty in such characters. For if the ability to absorb the bombardment of sense impressions as a superior tabula rasa is important, the ability to rework these impressions in retrospect in order to distill their essence is vital. A discriminating sense of the past formulates knowledge from such impressions, having no other source of reality and truth. As Raleigh describes the process in The Wings of the Dove "the characters of these novels are subtly and intimately interconnected in an eternally fluid relationship, coming together to shoot impressions at one another, drifting apart to rework the impressions into knowledge and coming together again in a different relationship" (21). This is exactly what happens in these late novels. A dramatic scene alternates with a chapter of non-scenic retrospection by Strether in The Ambassadors, preparing for a new dialogue or dramatic scene on a different basis. Or Maggie confronts Charlotte carefully in The Golden Bowl, letting her suspect only so much of her knowledge, then waits until Charlotte has time to talk with the Prince (projecting the probable conversation), and finally confronts the Prince to test her



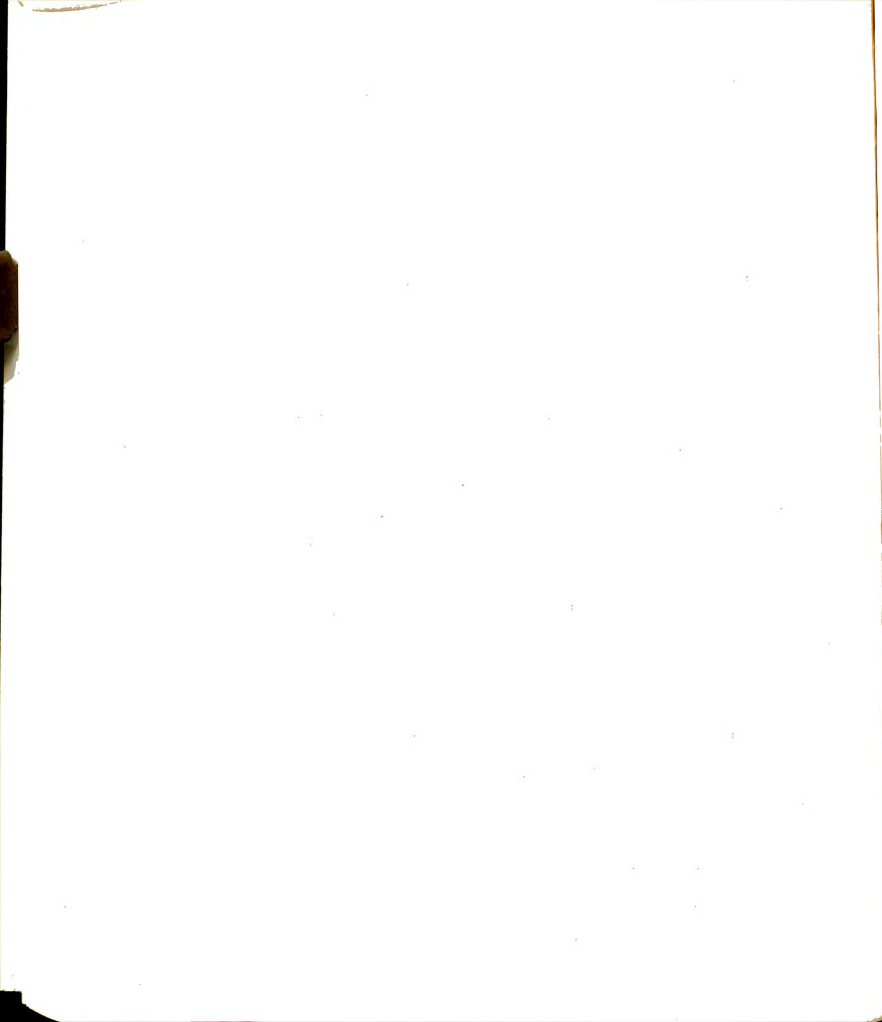
conclusions by observing any new reactions in him. All the time she is assimilating impressions and comparing them with her store of past experience. Strether gains his reputation for retrospection, Milly "was forever seeing things afterwards" (XIX, 155), Densher gradually senses where his actions have been leading, Prince Amerigo has "a certain persistent aftertaste" of important conversations (XXIII, 326), and Maggie has a "full after-sense" of events (XXIV, 20), because such a sense of the past is essential to mature consciousness and crucial to the proper apprehension of experience.

The Golden Bowl shows how finely James develops this form of the sense of the past in his late characters--and also reveals his cultivation of the reader's sense, as I hope to indicate with additional examples from The Portrait of a Lady and The Ambassadors. The Prince, whose viewpoint occupies the first half of the novel, is of course constantly aware of his familial past, and marries Maggie partly because her wealth can help retrieve his patrimony. As he complains to Maggie, "there are two parts of me . . . One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless betises of other people--especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me" (XXIII, 9).³⁴ The entire opening scene is an example of a more continuously present sense of the past; it is a reflection of the Prince's mind engaged in retrospection, "catching the echoes from his own thought" (11),



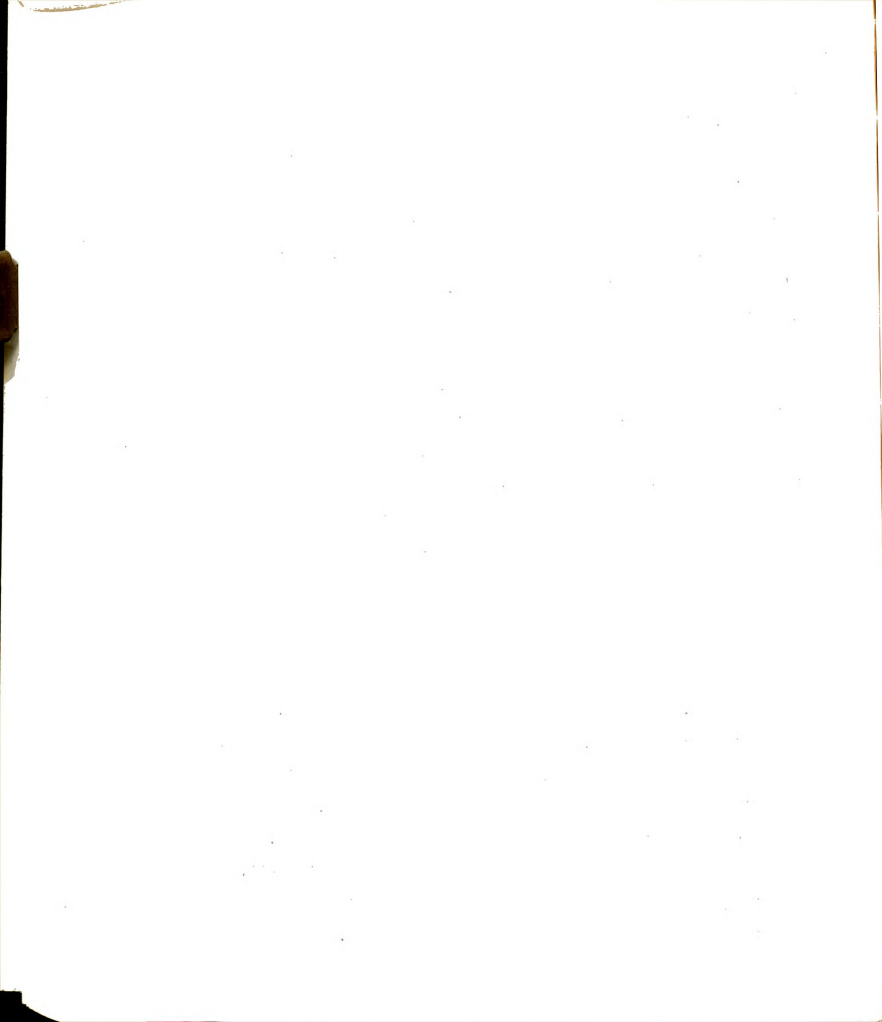
including previous events and conversations. He is thinking while on the way to the home of Fanny Assingham, whose own youth and "beauty were things more or less of the past" and whose marriage "dated from the twilight of the age, a primitive period" (20, 35), and is rendering both impressions of the past and judgments on it for the reader. At Fanny's he is to meet Charlotte Stant, whom he loved but could not marry due to a mutual lack of funds. She is consequently "already known" to his memory when he arrives; her features are like "items recognized, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been 'stored'--wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet" (46). His sense of their past together is therefore vibrantly alive as she once more enters his present consciousness.

Fanny, who knows of the earlier romance, is given tremors by her sense of the past as well, flashing back for some pages on Charlotte's fling with the Prince. Her crowning worry is how this past can fit the present: "'That anything of the past', she broods, 'should come back now'" that the Prince is to marry Maggie is an acute embarrassment; "'How will it do, how will it do?'" (69-75). Everyone but the Ververs, in fact, is having such twinges of the sense of the past, and theirs will begin as their innocence recedes. Charlotte vibrates over mere marble floors: "they were a connexion, marble floors; a connexion with many things: with her old Rome, and with his; with the palaces of his past and, a little, with hers; with the



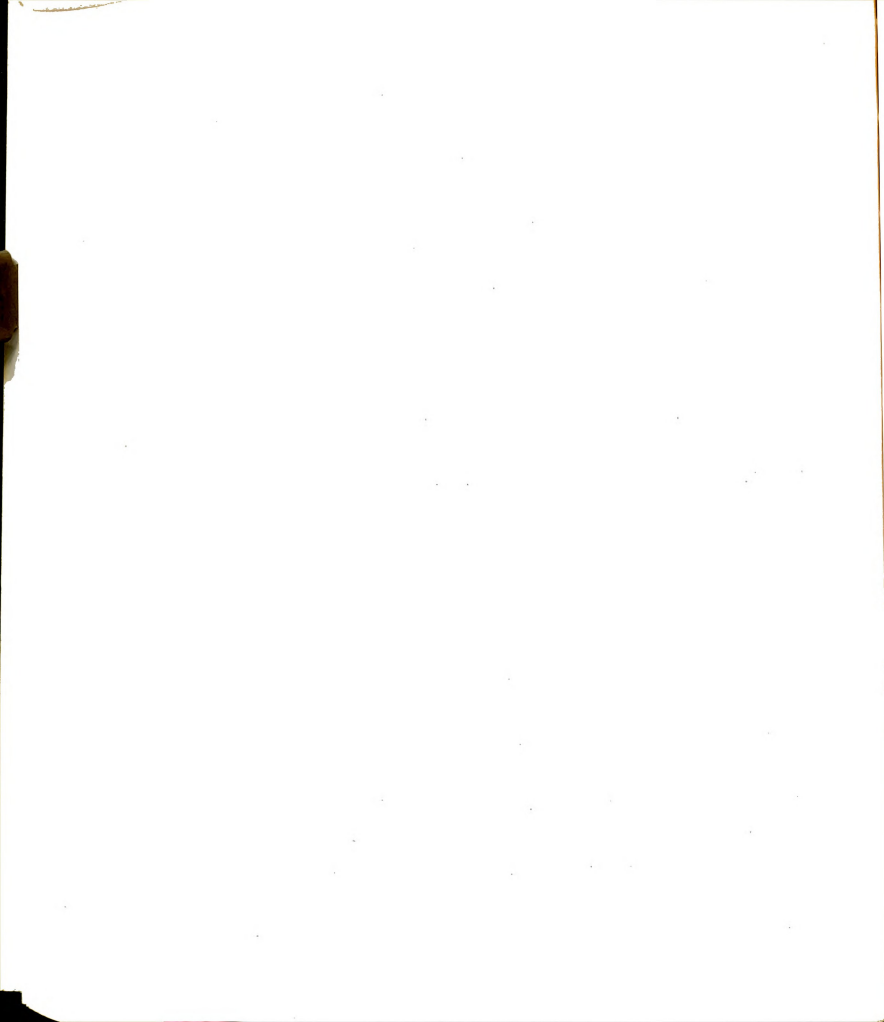
possibilities of his future, with the sumptuousities of his marriage, with the wealth of the Ververs" (116). For what she wants in asking the Prince to help her find a gift for Maggie's wedding is to renew some of her old romance: "To see you once and be with you, to be as we are now and as we used to be, for one small hour--or say for two--that's what I've had for weeks in my head" (96). But this renewal is exactly what Amerigo fears, and he hesitates to accompany her due to "the sense of the resemblance of the little plan before him to occasions, of the past, from which he was quite disconnected, from which he could only desire to be. This was like beginning something over, which was the last thing he wanted. The strength, the beauty of his actual position was in its being wholly a fresh start, was what it began would be new altogether" (94-95). He goes with Charlotte anyway, and discovers that he cannot outrun his personal past any more than his familial history. He is an "old Roman" in his manners and morals, a phrase he had used "as a pleasantry, in the other time" to explain his actions to Charlotte. He reverts to the same explanation now, and to the same mannerisms, with a very "old-Roman" shrug (110). His act is a preview of the fuller reversion which will come when his sense of the past is more deeply touched.

Adam Verver's sense of the past occupies Book Two. He is retrospective as well as a collector of "antiquarii," and his mind is filled with memories of Maggie's mother, memories preparing him now for another marriage. He recalls



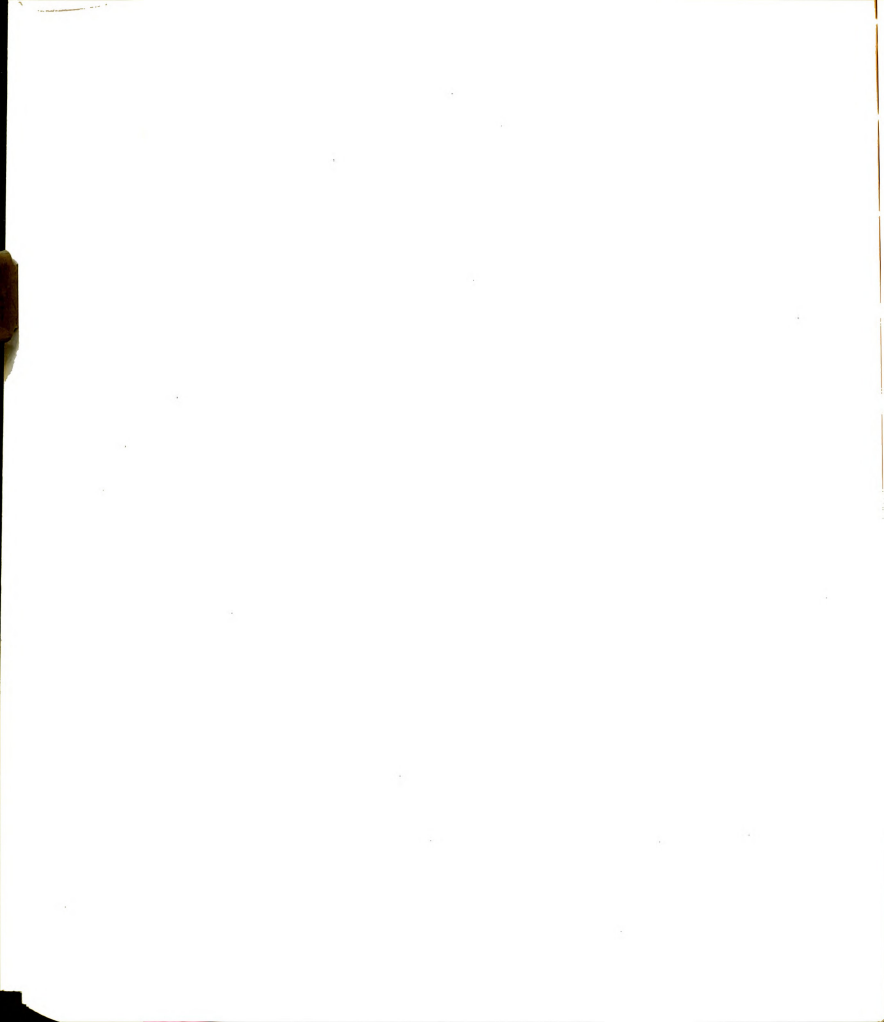
"wandering images, out of the earlier dusk, that threw her back for his pity into a past more remote than he liked their common past, their young affection, to appear" (142). She and Maggie are the bright spots in a deep past made up of "years of darkness" for him, years of time lost in money-making; though the money is useful now in collecting art for a museum project in America. He is pleased with his change in vocation, and "could live over again at almost any quiet moment the long process of his introduction to all present interests," a habit of mind that fills in the past for the reader very conveniently (149). Retrospection is his constant pastime and pleasure; "when he wished to feel 'good', as they said at American City, he had but to re-trace his immense development" (149).

He and Maggie have been idyllically close, even after her marriage to the Prince and the birth of their baby. "But time had finally done it; their relation was altered" by his own contemplation of marriage, a change that "marked a date" in their lives. Maggie senses the change and fears that he will be exploited by one of the old biddies fluttering around him, and suggests that their old friend Charlotte has been taken for granted and would be a fine candidate for his bride. This suggestion is apparently Maggie's first re-evaluation of the past (182). She and Adam walk "in the 'old' garden, as it was called, old with an antiquity of formal things, high box yew and expanses of brick wall that had turned at once to purple and to pink.



They went out of a door in the wall, a door that had a slab with a date set above it, 1713, but in the old multiplied lettering" to a bench beneath a great oak (159). (The numerals are Roman, of course!) This talk will remain a landmark in the memory of each, like so many scenes in The Golden Bowl.

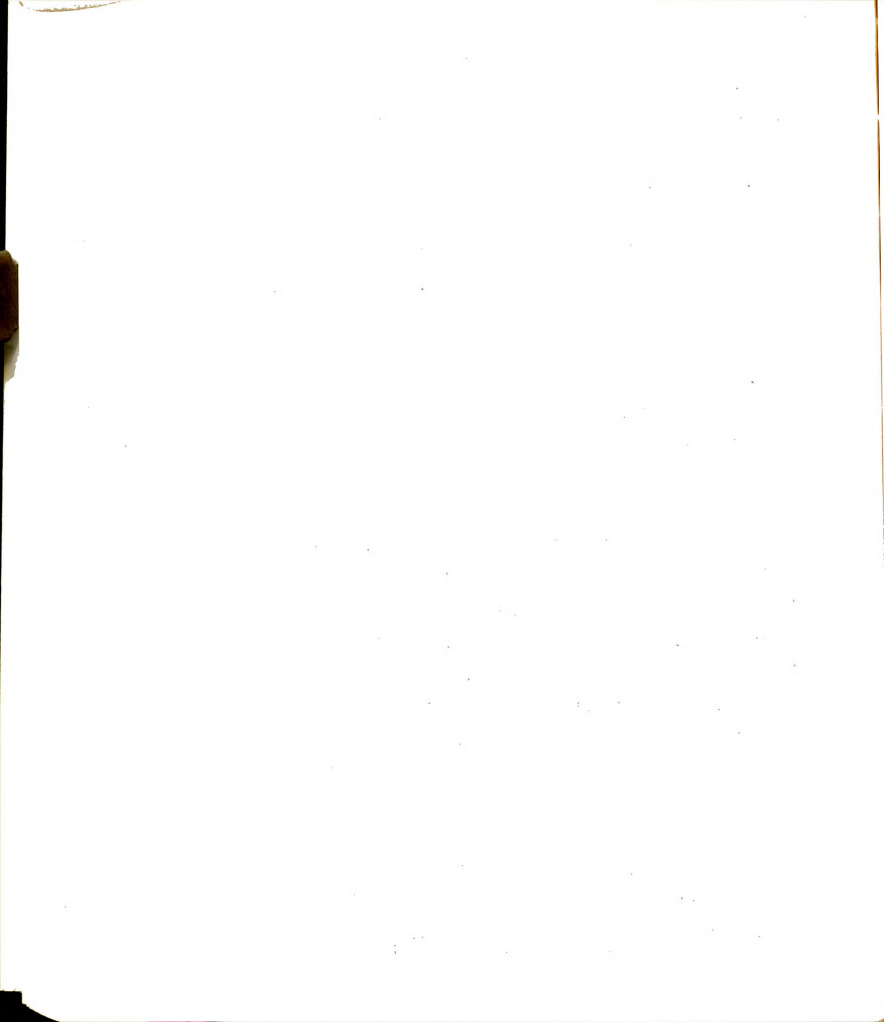
Another landmark scene, Adam's proposal to Charlotte, reminds him of yet a third important scene, in which he and Fanny had apparently discussed the Prince as a match for Maggie: "It was where he had walked in the afternoon sun with Fanny Assingham" that he takes Charlotte, "and the sense of that other hour, the sense of the suggestive woman herself, was before him again as, in spite of all the degustation we have hinted at, it had n't yet been" (203). The reader begins to see why Fanny Assingham feels so responsible and worried. Such retrospections allow James to fill in the past whenever and in whatever order he chooses. In addition the parallel scenes he creates reveal progressing consciousness, measuring the differences as well as the parallels. Looking for antiquated treasure with Charlotte as he had many times before, Adam finds himself for once not tending strictly to business. He had shopped with her often, "yet at what point of his past did our friend's memory, looking back and back, catch him, in any such place, thinking so much less of wares artfully paraded than of some other and quite irrelevant presence?" (214). The reader can see the force of Maggie's suggestion working



on him. He proposes to Charlotte, then for another half-hour recalls the scene "well in his memory's eye," revising his estimate of their past friendship continually (217). Later, in Paris, he has thoroughly romanticized his past with the once taken-for-granted Charlotte, praising her "extraordinarily fine eyes, as it was his present theory that he had always thought them" (230). Nevertheless, even after his marriage he and Maggie like to stay at home with each other "in make believe renewals of their old life" (252). Neither marriage has yet made any notable dent in their relationship.

While Maggie and her father restructure their sense of past relations somewhat, the others are doing the same. Charlotte is caught up in a fever of retrospection, and soon captures the Prince in memories as well. She comes to him in a hansom cab rather than Adam's carriage because "It makes me feel as I used to--when I could do as I liked" (299). She sits by the fire, enjoying the charm "of trying again the old feelings. They come back--they come back. Everything,' she went on, 'comes back'" (300). Everything comes back to the Prince, too, in spite of his resolutions and the fact that "no mention of their great previous passage was to rise to the lips of either" (301). Their past hangs like a huge unmentioned presence over all their conversation, and the Prince is entangled once again:

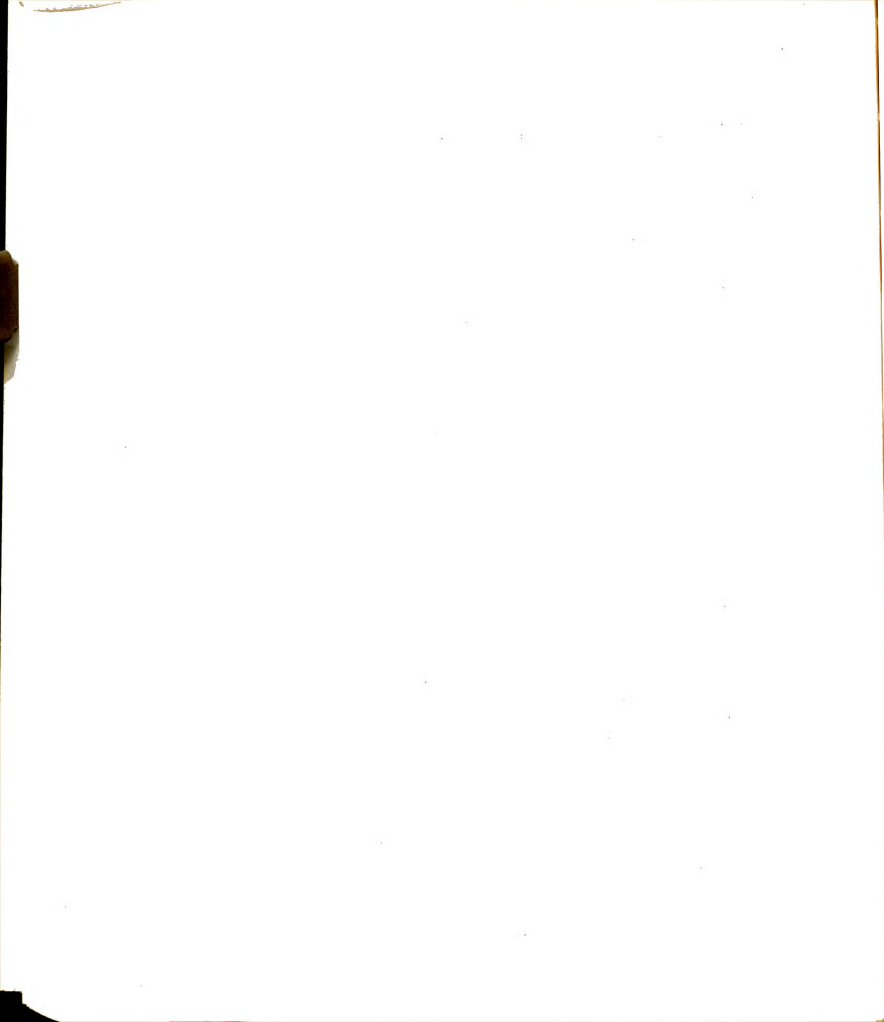
He couldn't have told what particular links
and gaps had at the end of a few minutes
found themselves renewed and bridged; for he
remembered no occasion in Rome from which the



picture could have been so exactly copied.
 . . . The sense of the past revived for him nevertheless as it had n't yet done: it made that other time somehow meet the future close, interlocking with it, before his watching eyes, as in a long embrace of arms and lips, and so handling and hustling the present that this poor quantity scarce retained substance enough, scarce remained sufficiently there, to be wounded or shocked. (297)

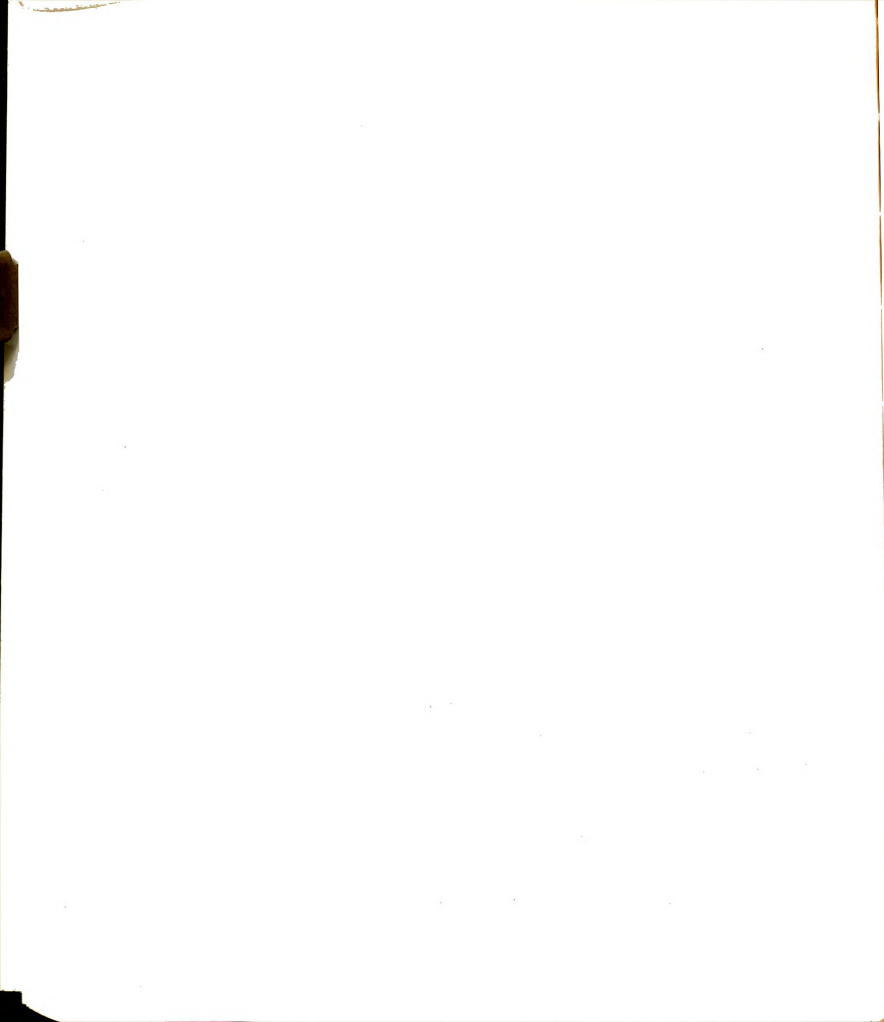
In short, "through steps and stages that conscious computation had missed," the Prince is seduced by his sense of the past.

Later, at a banquet in an English country house with Charlotte, the Prince is recalling the days of his engagement to Maggie. Fanny is there, in turmoil over what she may have wrought in bringing Maggie and Amerigo and Charlotte together, just as she had worried earlier: "For what she was most immediately feeling was that she had in the past been active for these people to ends that were now bearing fruit and that might yet bear a larger crop" (276). After all, poor innocent Maggie and Adam are in Eaton Square playing house, having pushed Amerigo and Charlotte to go to the English country estate of some friends in their place--a fantastic opportunity. Fanny talks with the Prince there before he returns to London to find Maggie suddenly changed, and his conversation with her "was substantially to underlie his consciousness of the later occasion." He will return and "live over inwardly" this talk with Fanny; for as James alerts the reader, "The main interest of these hours for us . . . will have been in the way the Prince continued



to know, during a particular succession of others, separated from the evening in Eaton Square by a short interval, a certain persistent aftertaste" (326-27). The customs of English society and the social responsibilities of marriage and friendship are causing him a schizophrenic, "restless play of memory and a fine embroidery of thought" (327). His "old Roman life" now seems vague and "thin" in comparison to this complexity (332). In spite of further complications, however, he stays an extra day at Matcham to take Charlotte through Gloucester, an occasion fitted for memory "as if the whole place and time had been a great picture, from the hand of genius, presented to him as a prime ornament for his collection and all varnished and framed to hang up" (350).

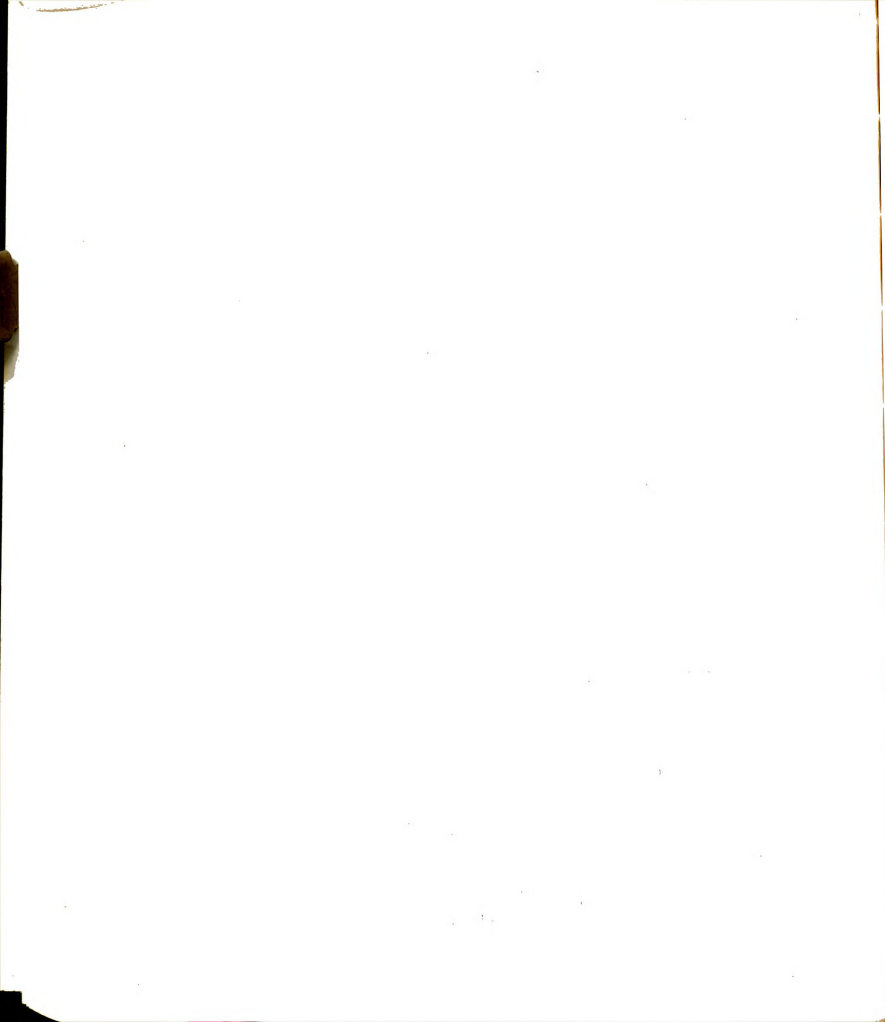
The whole country house episode sets Fanny Assingham in a "fever of retrospect" and conjecture (390). Her perception summarizes the past for the reader and predicts future events that are likely to occur on the basis of what she has seen. Her thinking is a tour de force of recollection and portentous "prophetic flare" (383). Since the reader has been unable to grasp Maggie's viewpoint through the Prince, James fills in its progression through Fanny's projections--that Maggie is waking up to the fact that she has never fully possessed the Prince, and must protect her marriage and her father's supposed ignorance of the problem (384, 388). With Fanny's great anticlimactic conclusion, that "Nothing--in spite of everything--will happen. Nothing has happened. Nothing is happening" because Maggie is



gaining control, the reader is ready to encounter Maggie's viewpoint directly, and see how she could possibly manage nothing so well (400).

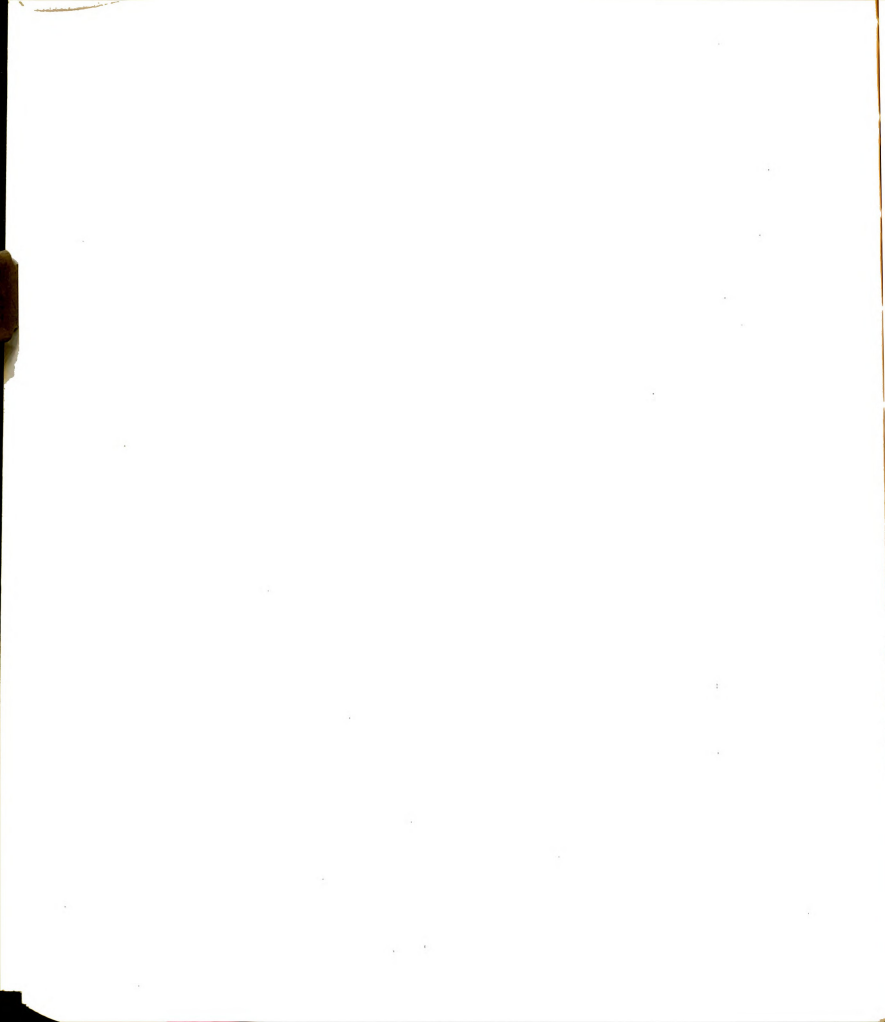
Central to the presentation of Maggie's viewpoint from Book Four to the end, and central to her increasing control over the situation, is her growing sense of the past and the resulting change in her evaluation of the present. She has a throbbing need "to know where she 'really' was" with the Prince (XXIV, 57).³⁵ When she looks at the "pagoda in her blooming garden," where she and her father have spent so many afternoons, it represents to her "the arrangement . . . by which, so strikingly, she had been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past" (5). But she is coming to see that her marriage must cause her to break with this past, or it may soon be no marriage at all. A long line of events is falling into place for Maggie. Thinking of her father, she recalls a conversation in which Fanny Assingham had charged that she and Adam were not living at all, and "there came back to her with it an echo of the long talk they had had together, one September day at Fawns, under the trees, when she put before him this dictum of Fanny's":

That occasion might have counted for them--she had already often made the reflexion--as the first step in an existence more intelligently arranged. It had been an hour from which the chain of causes and consequences was definitely traceable--so many things, and at the head of the list her father's marriage, having appeared to her to flow from Charlotte's visit to Fawns, and that event itself having flowed from the memorable talk. (22)



She sees how her father's marriage, more than hers, had changed everything; had changed especially "their old freedom, their never having had to think, where they were together concerned, of any one, of anything but each other (80).

The biggest change, however, has been caused by Maggie herself--by the simple but monumental act of waiting for the Prince at Portland Place, instead of at her father's home in Eaton Square, on his return from Matcham. Nothing, not even her acceptance of the Prince's proposal, had changed her style of life so much as this action. It has a "historic value" that keeps coming "back and back" to Maggie; "the whole passage was backwardly there, a great picture hung on the wall of her daily life for her to make what she would of" (10-11, 16). The repercussions of the event still hang in her mind. She recalls "two strangely unobliterated impressions above all"--the Prince's shocked look on returning from Matcham and Eaton Square, and Charlotte's "bold wavering glance" on the following morning (103). She had carefully compared Amerigo's and Charlotte's reactions, and "to make the comparison at all was, for Maggie, to return to it often, to brood upon it," recalling the impressions like looking at old portraits in a necklace medallion (35). What Maggie was asserting by her simple act was her determination to be the Prince's wife more than her father's daughter; "She wanted him to understand from that very moment that she was going to be



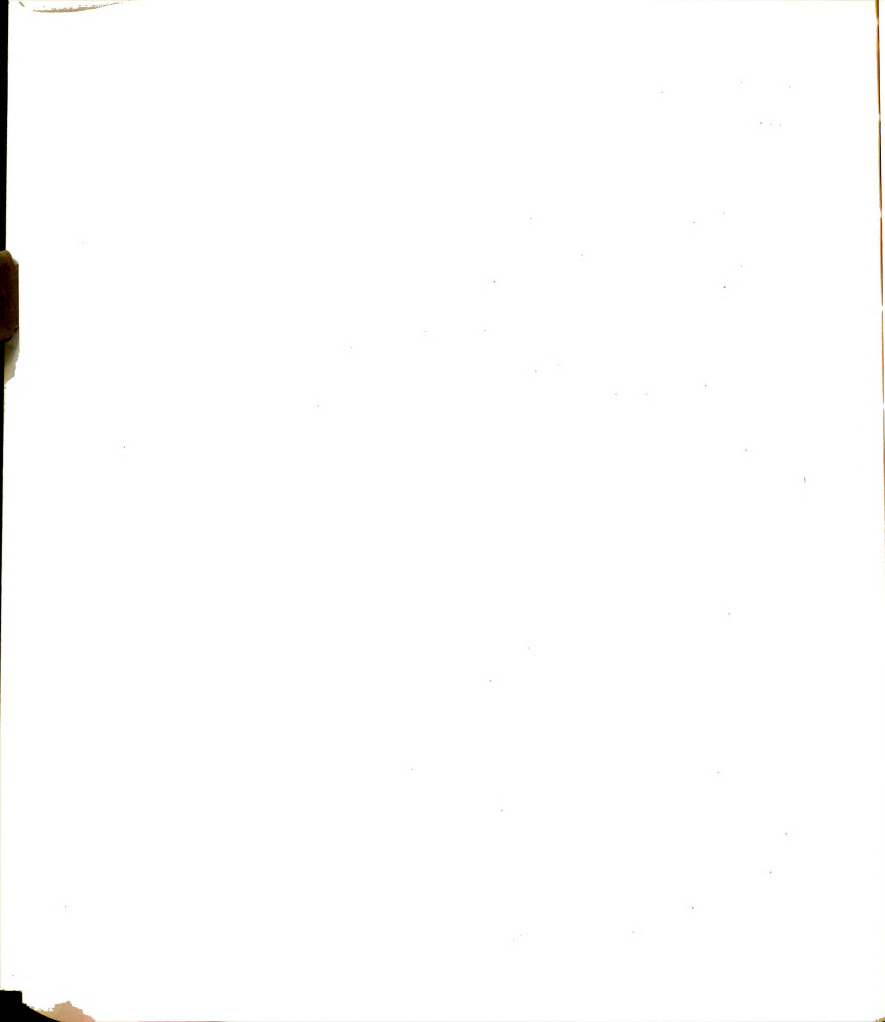
with him again, quite with them" instead of just with Adam (27).

Part of the result of her stand, interestingly, is the renewal of her old companionship with Charlotte before either was married, a perfect revival of the past:

The two young women, while the passage lasted, became again very much the companions of other days, the days of Charlotte's prolonged visits to the admiring and bountiful Maggie, the days when equality of condition for them had been all the result of the latter's native vagueness about her own advantages. The earlier elements flushed into life again, the frequency, the intimacy, the high pitch of accompanying expression--appreciation, endearment, confidence . . .

(37)

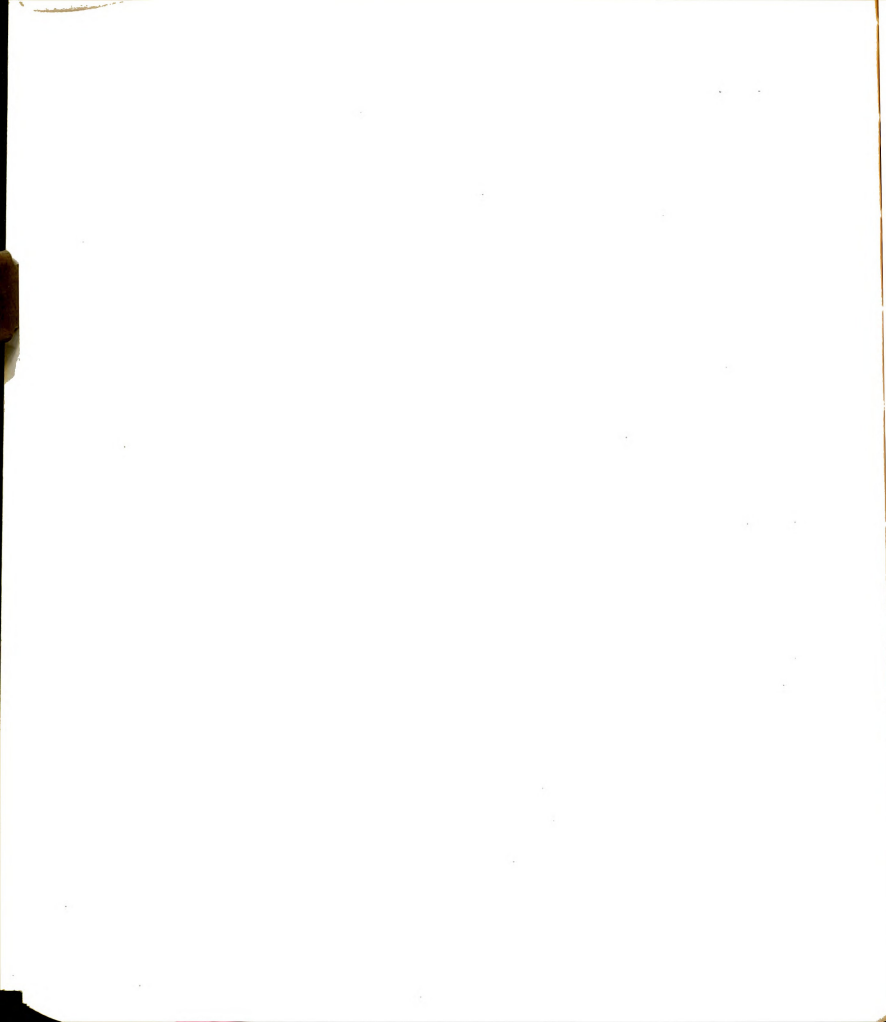
Maggie, who always figures things out afterwards (43), realizes that their new relation "has been quite as in old days" (58). Paradoxically, her action causes a reversion to the old idyllic relation with her father as well. Maggie wants to keep her father ignorant of her motives and her problems, yet must effectively change her relation with him in order to keep her husband. Her very fear that any noticeable change will alarm him, that "sombre ghosts of the smothered past" would "show across the widening strait pale unappeased faces" (74), causes her to compensate for her absence and carry on their relation in the old way. Yet the time of their closeness, "so strangely, already seemed far away" to her, and she knows its days are numbered (77). They had planned one last long trip without Amerigo or Charlotte, a trip Maggie must somehow tactfully cancel without arousing his suspicion:



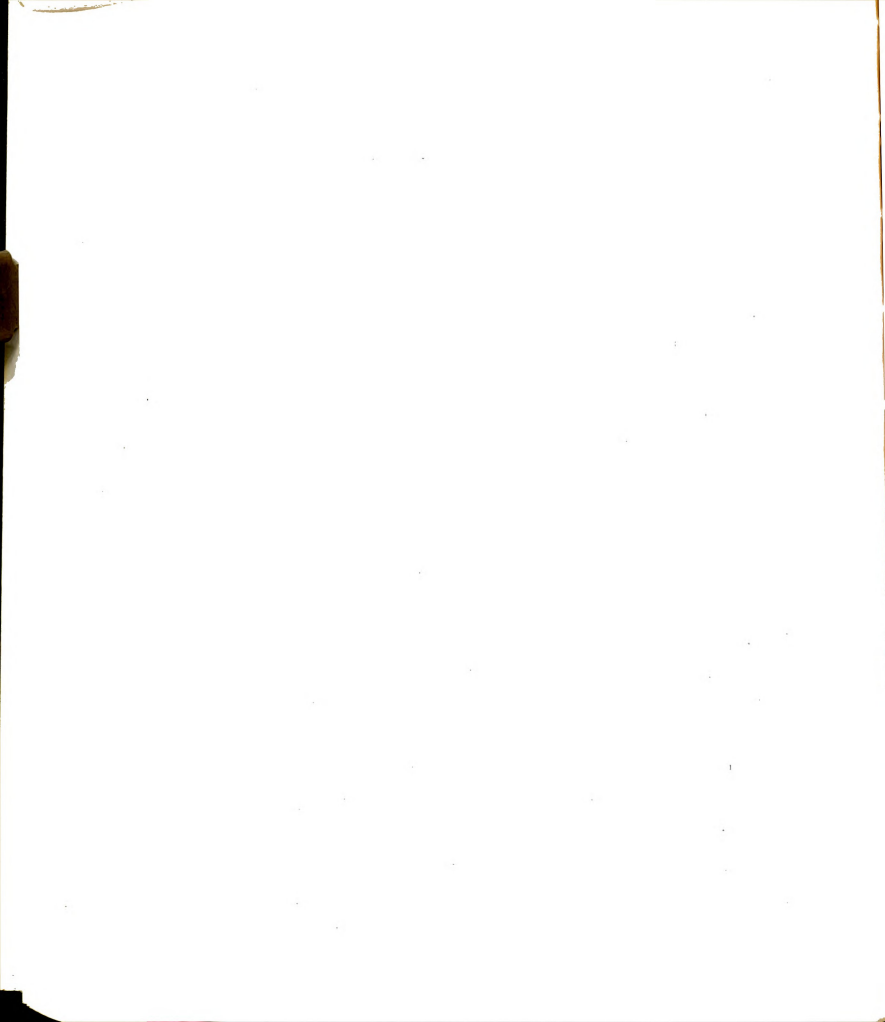
. . . setting herself the difficult task of making their relation, every minute of the time, not fall below the standard of that other hour in the treasured past which hung there behind them like a framed picture in a museum, a high-water-mark for the history of their old fortune; the summer evening in the park at Fawns, when, side by side under the trees just as now, they had let their happy confidence lull them with its most golden tone.
(85)

She is "humbugging" him for the first time, even with "the old pleasantness between them so candidly playing up there again" (79). She succeeds--or rather they both succeed--in submerging the felt difference between this talk and the old talk at Fawns, when his marriage had been the subject of discussion, "all the vibration, all the emotion of this present passage being precisely in the very sweetness of their lapse back into the conditions of the simpler time, into a queer resemblance between the aspect and the feeling of the moment and those of numberless other moments that were sufficiently far away" (82).

Having renewed the old relationship with Charlotte and Adam on the surface, Maggie tries to develop her relationship with the Prince. When he had returned from Matcham, he had been surprised to find her at home instead of with Adam, but assumed that a warm embrace would smooth over any problem (28); and while he is very sensitive to what Maggie is doing (39-40), he uses that embrace repeatedly to try to control and pacify her (55-56). Again she notices his technique mainly by retrospection: "There were hours when it came to her that these days were a prolonged repetition of that night-drive, of weeks before, from the other house to

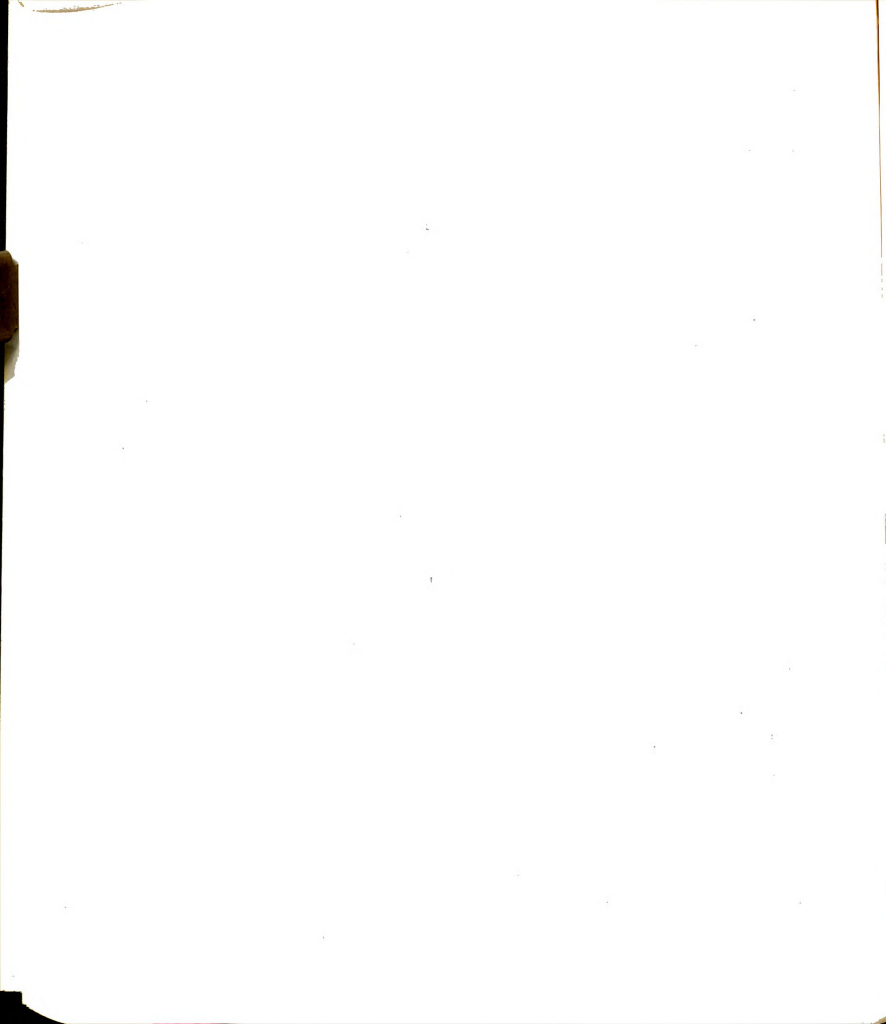


their own, when he had tried to charm her by his sovereign personal power into some collapse that would commit her to a repudiation of consistency" (139; cf. 28). She cannot shake him into treating her change seriously and directly. Only after prodding Fanny to tell her whether there is anything between Amerigo and Charlotte, "anything there shouldn't be, there shouldn't have been---all this time" (109), only after rummaging in the British Museum records of the Prince's family for some reassurance, and finally discovering by accident that Charlotte and Amerigo had been together alone just before her marriage, is Maggie able to disturb the Prince's imperturbability. She is confronting Fanny, who had lied before, with the evidence of the golden bowl and the anecdote the shopkeeper had recalled of the Prince and Charlotte. Fanny not only admits she has concealed the past, thinking it safely buried, but attempts to save trouble again by smashing the evidence. But the Prince, coincidentally, had appeared just as this particular moment, and Maggie can judge his startled facial expression by comparing it with her earlier observation of him after his return from Matcham (181). She sees that the bowl's fragments vaguely but disturbingly remind the Prince of something; his sense of the past is finally stirred (182). Maggie gives him time to recover, then gradually leads up to the bomb, her knowing of his "having for a long time had, two relations with Charlotte" (190). The Prince is gasping, groping for time to compose himself, to



assimilate this revelation and re-evaluate Maggie's past behavior on this new basis. His hesitation causes his affair with Charlotte, "the history of their confidence," to loom powerfully for Maggie (192). She is sure now that their relation has been deep. That confirmation of her new sense of the past is sufficient for the moment; ringing the bell for the maid, she "stopped everything for the present" (203).

Book Five opens, after this confrontation, with a period of reassessment. Maggie now measures her progress in terms of old landmarks in time, the old scenes at Fawns, old friends, crucial actions. Both she and the Prince have fought to reassimilate the past, to find out--almost a refrain in the novel--"where they are" (191; cf. 57, 215, 263). They are inevitably joined in this occupation by Adam and Charlotte. Part of Charlotte's doom will be never to know exactly where she stands, caged by frustration; part of Adam's mystery and possible greatness lies in the uncertainty of his knowledge and role. Nor does Fanny see how everything stands, nor how Maggie knows "where, as you say, you 'are'" (215). But Maggie does know, and feels in full control (233-36). When Mrs. Rance and the Lutches--who had alarmed Maggie as the first predatory women after Adam--return for a visit, the event "measured for Maggie the ground they had all travelled together since that unforgotten afternoon of the none so distant year, that determinant September Sunday when, sitting with her father in the park, as in

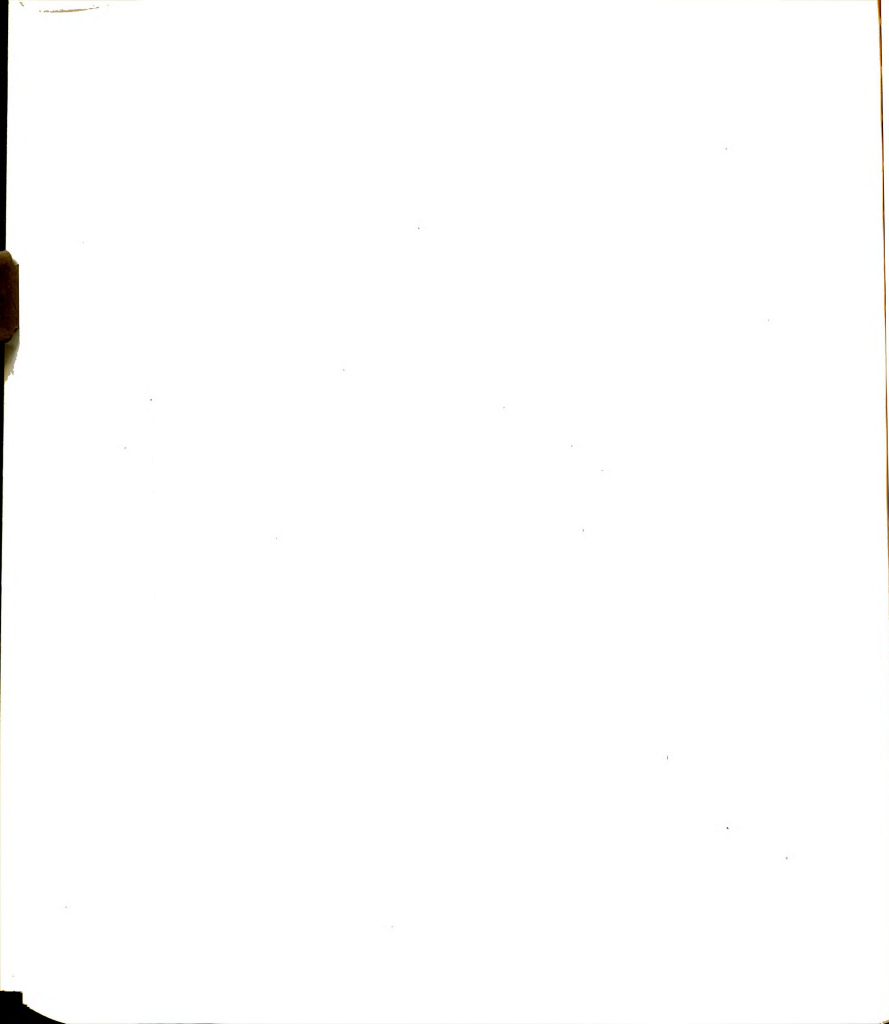


commemoration of the climax both of their old order and of their old danger, she had proposed to him that they should 'call in' Charlotte" (209-10). Such renewals of memory, shared with Adam, cause father and daughter to fall once more into the old style of conversation. Adam asks Maggie, apparently with a humorous implication, how Mrs. Rance and the Lutches affect her now:

. . . and the consequence of this enquiry had been for the pair just such another stroll together away from the rest of the party and off into the park as had asserted its need to them on the occasion of the previous visit of these anciently more agitating friends--that of their long talk on a sequestered bench beneath one of the great trees . . . /which/ Maggie had formed the habit of regarding as the 'first beginning' of their present situation. The whirligig of time had thus brought round for them again, on their finding themselves face to face while the others were gathering for tea on the terrace, the same old impulse quietly to 'slope'--so Adam Verver himself, as they went, familiarly expressed it--that had acted in its way of old; acted for the distant autumn afternoon and for the sharpness of their since so outlived crisis. (253)

The two can laugh at the "danger" once presented by these women because that threat is too far in the past to be a present danger, and Adam is now protected from these "spectres of their past" by his other marriage. His other marriage--there's the rub; they do not laugh at friends like the Castledeans, residing at Matcham, for that episode is too recent and represents still too tender a wound (253-54).

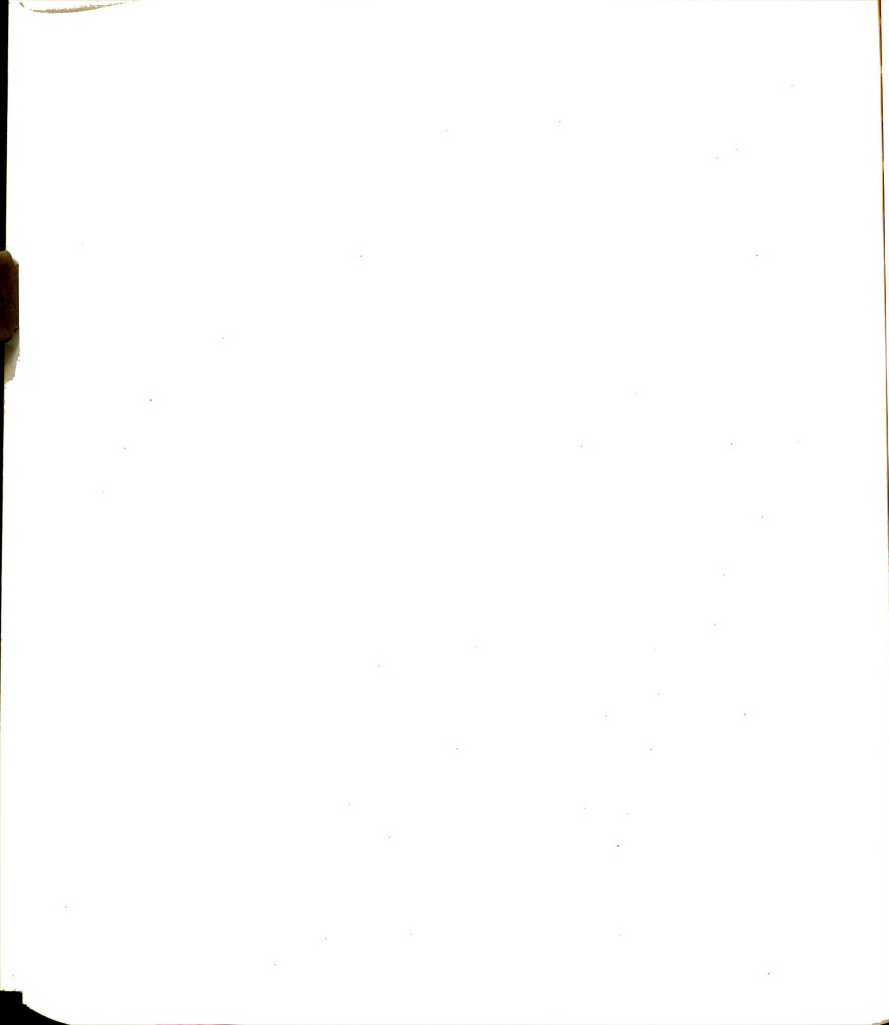
The scene is rendered the same as so many of their other talks; but James lets the reader know, by deliberate and explicit omissions, how different their father-daughter



relationship has become: "They were avoiding the serious, standing off anxiously from the real, and they fell again and again, as if to disguise their precaution itself, into the tone of the time that came back to them from their other talk, when they had shared together this same refuge" (257). Adam had not been married at their other meeting, and they both silently recall the issue that they had discussed--Charlotte (255-57). Their silent communication, so clear to the reader from all the parallels and reminders of the past that James sets up, is much more important than their audible conversation. Adam responds with a general "'Oh yes'" to Maggie, "'I remember the feelings we used to have.'" No further specification is needed; both understand. "Maggie appeared to wish to plead for them a little in tender retrospect," those old feelings, but "she changed the next instant that subject too":

She could only do so however by harking back-- as if it had been a fascination. She might have been wishing, under this renewed, this still more suggestive visitation, to keep him with her for remounting the stream of time and dipping again, for the softness of the water, into the contracted basin of the past. (258)

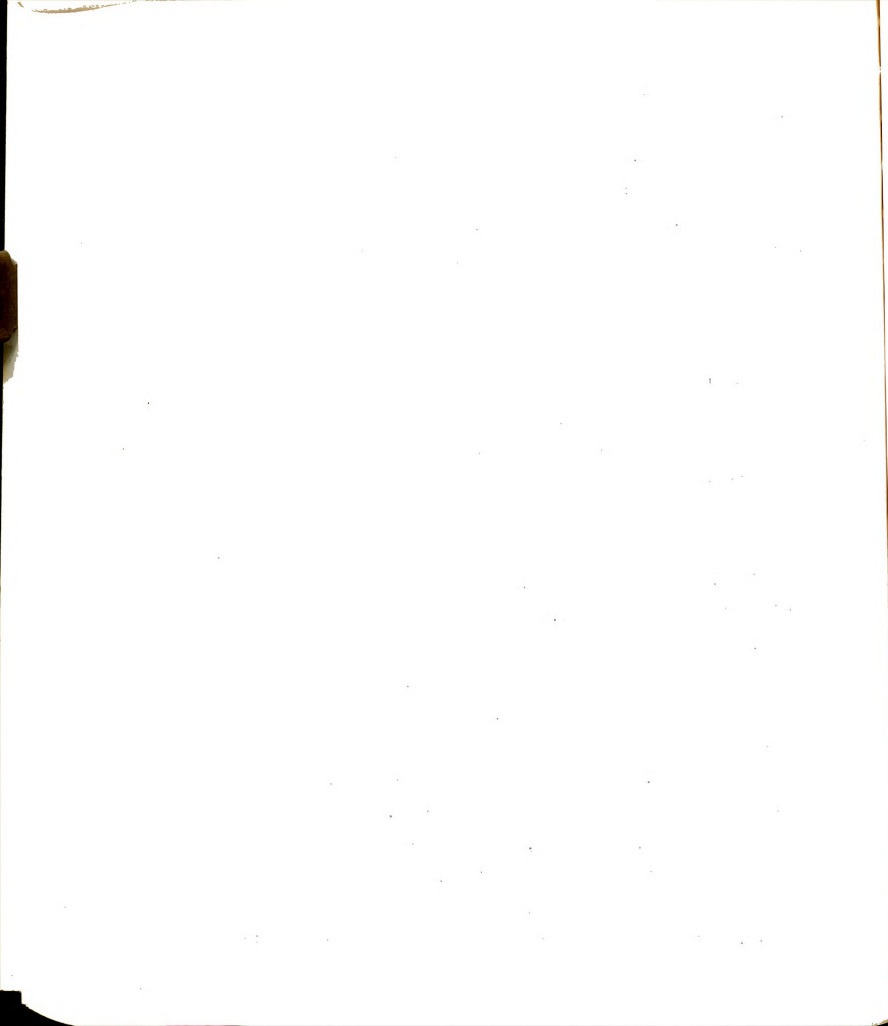
The past is now nostalgically golden, a golden bowl from which to dip strength for the present. For though they talk about the past, they are really communicating through it about the present. Drawn up short by this realization, Maggie asserts at one point to her father that "Besides, I'm speaking of what was." Adam "showed, however, after a little, that he hadn't been reached by this discrimination" (261). He feels so strongly how "without him nothing might



have been" (263), and Maggie knows from his exclamation of pain "what a past--still so recent and yet so distant--it alluded to" (270). They have reached a silent agreement; they must separate; and Adam offers to take Charlotte to America (271). Maggie knows that, silent as their communication on the real subject has been, "they would never return to it" (275).

This painful passage is made easier for Maggie by all the previous parallel scenes, and by her conviction that the Prince's old relation to Charlotte is effectively "a chapter of history" (221). Charlotte has been kept in a gilded cage by Maggie's circumspection (229-30), and by a climactic confrontation on the terrace in which Maggie lies rather than sacrifice "all past pretenses" and give Charlotte the satisfaction of an indignant showdown (242 f.). The Prince, she feels certain, has not told Charlotte how much Maggie knows (213-14). After the long walk with her father, then, Maggie feels how much the scene of hypocritical "making up" between her and Charlotte, to which the confrontation had apparently led, had helped her father and herself reach their decision to separate (277). All loose ends seem tied up, all relations smoothly changed, so the removal to America will not provoke a scene.

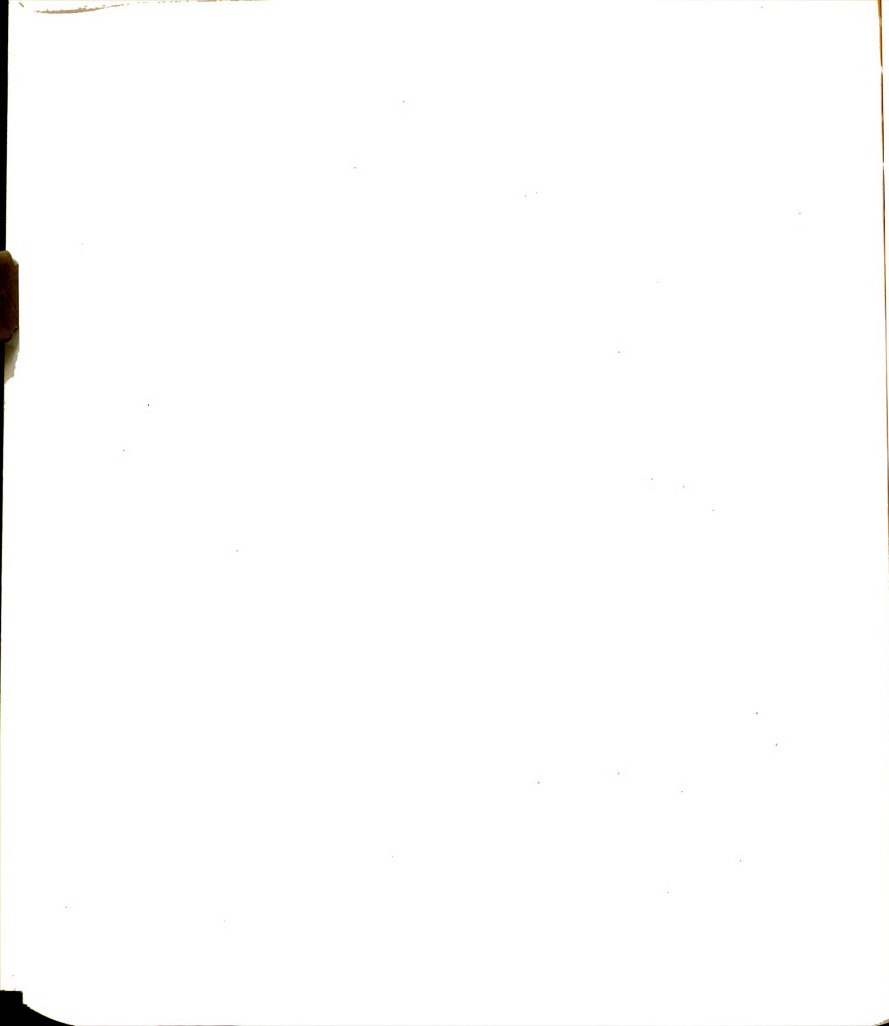
For Charlotte, of course, who had apparently been unable to get anything out of the Prince, the failure to pry something from Maggie on the terrace left her completely in the cold. After the confrontation "no ghost of anything it



referred to could ever walk again" (279). Charlotte has no material with which to cause a scene that would bring everything out in the open, cause a reconciliation, and result in the four staying on together. In a very ironic reversion, "she was thus poor Charlotte again for Maggie" (282). The terrace episode with Charlotte is another landmark scene for the princess, like the latest talk with her father: "Maggie lived over again the minutes in question--had found herself repeatedly doing so; to the degree that the whole evening hung together, to her aftersense, as a thing appointed by some occult power that had dealt with her" (278). Such reflections are surely evidence that the subconscious does operate in James's characters, for it has clearly governed Maggie during the terrace scene. The subconscious acts as a submerged but operative sense of the past guiding Maggie's feelings and responses to Charlotte.³⁶

One final scene with Charlotte, so ironic through its parallels to earlier scenes, ends Maggie's drama with her. Charlotte goes into the familiar gardens at Fawns for refuge, carrying a book as an excuse, just as Maggie had done. This time another confrontation occurs, one designed to salvage Charlotte's pride:

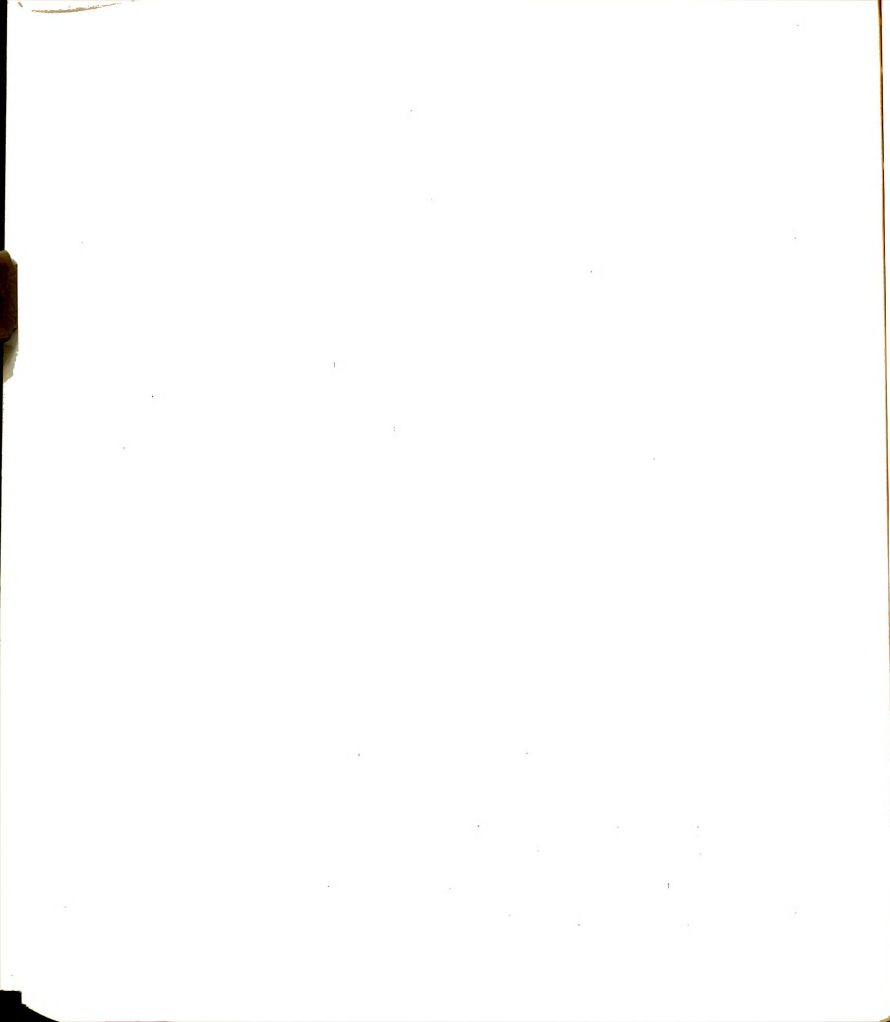
It was a repetition more than ever of the evening on the terrace; the distance was too great to assure her she had been immediately seen, but the Princess waited with her intention as Charlotte on the other occasion had waited--allowing, oh allowing, for the difference of the intention! Maggie was full of the sense of that . . . (309)



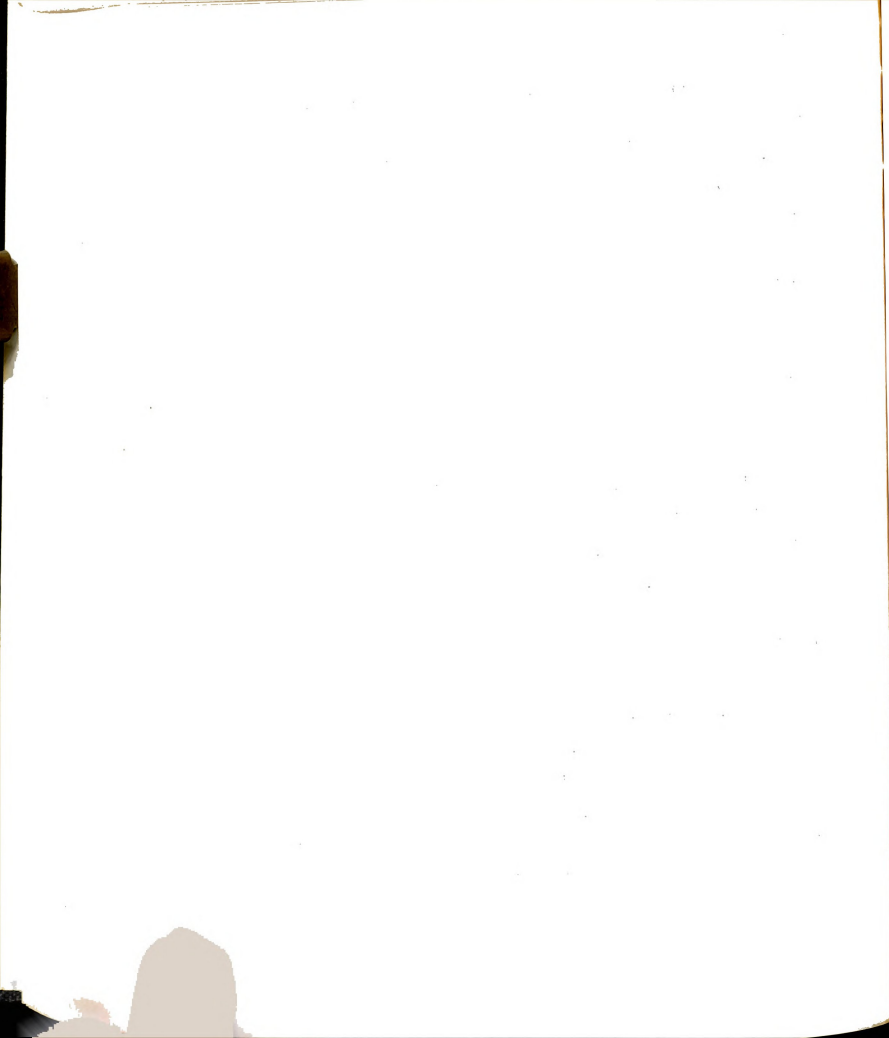
This is the real showdown, Maggie thinks, and makes a gesture intended to show Charlotte that she is, figuratively, unarmed for the battle--like the cowboys who throw up their hands to show that they "weren't carrying revolvers" (310-11). (Only James could get away with such a comparison.)

Charlotte is masterful. Cloaking her frustration in pride, she acts as though the two are fighting over possession of Adam, asking for "the definite break" between father and daughter: "And I wish it now" (315). Charlotte's exile to America thus becomes a paper victory for her, and Maggie admires the face-saving value of Charlotte's ingenuity.

Only the Prince remains, in the last book, to deal with. He is caged much like Charlotte, but Maggie wants terribly to let him out (338). She "found herself almost awestruck with yearning, almost on the point of marking somehow what she had marked in the garden at Fawns with Charlotte--that she had truly come unarmed" (339). Now a series of images and parallel scenes comes together for a tremendous culminating effect. In The Portrait of a Lady a similar framework of parallel scenes is provided by the garden scenes at the Touchett's, and by Isabel's recollection that she had said the same things during the proposals by Warburton, Osmond, and Goodwood. In The Ambassadors, the image of a man standing at different times of the day on the balcony of Chad's apartment in the Latin Quarter--first Little Bilham, then Chad, and finally Strether himself--

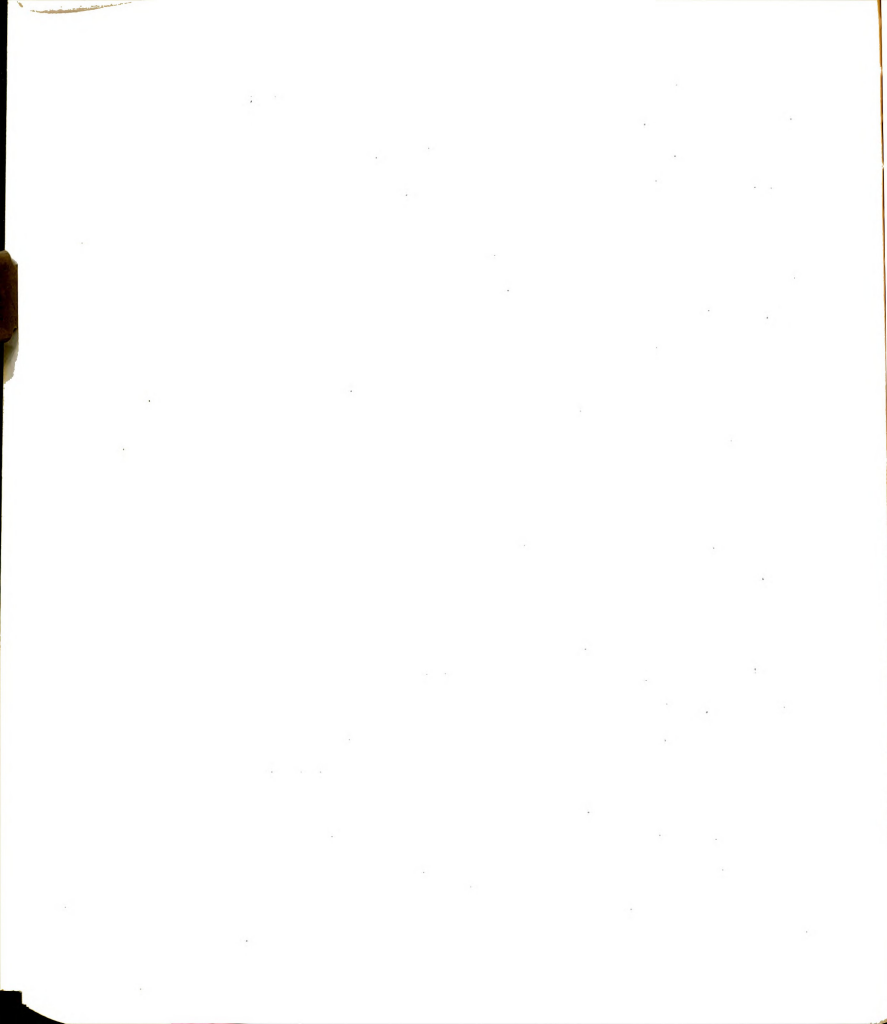


serves a similar telescoping and symbolic function, providing both parallels and crucial contrasts to mark development. Two series of images come together in The Golden Bowl to enhance the final scene. The first is a set of window images, possibly parallel to the many memories described as framed pictures throughout the work. Fanny Assingham had first turned her back to the Colonel and faced the dark window of her "dusky drawing-room," "the dim window which opened upon the world of human trouble in general and which let the vague light play here and there upon gilt and crystal and colour" (XXIII, 377-78). She is in tears with her overwhelming sense of moral responsibility for the Ververs' predicament, and after she cries, she and her husband find a foundation for serious and candid communication which had been lacking. The window is a place to withdraw to hide suffering, but it is also a place from which to view the sufferings of others. Next Maggie finds herself looking out her window in tears, like Fanny, with the Prince looking on rather helpless and unaware of her feelings (XXIV, 119-20), as she struggles to discover what is wrong and how to right it. Only the reader knows this scene is parallel to Fanny's, for there are no internal witnesses of both scenes. James is relying on the reader's sense of the past to put them together. After Maggie's discovery of the bowl and its significance, she talks earnestly with Fanny and goes to the "window as if still to keep something in her face from sight. She stood with her

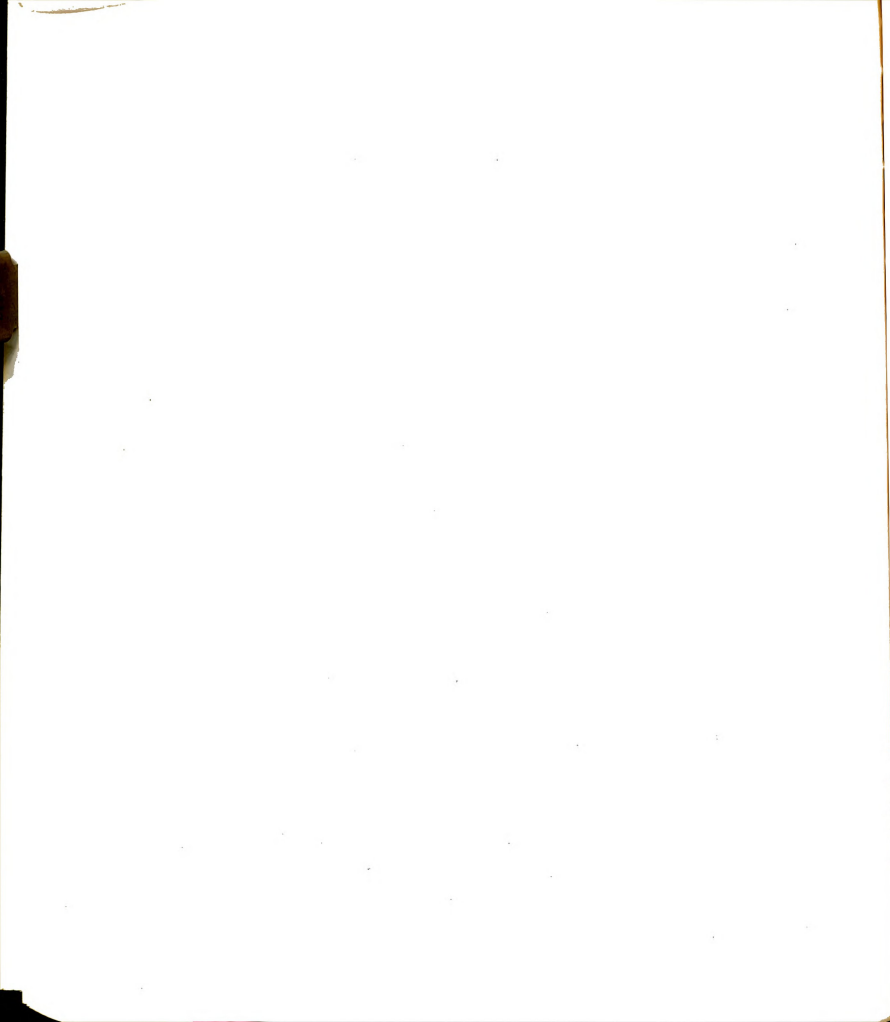


eyes on the street" and Fanny gazes with polite preoccupation at the bowl, fully aware of what Maggie is going through (176). Yet again, seeing Charlotte's doom and despair, and knowing her father must leave, Maggie takes her post at the window and "had turned suddenly to crying, or was at least on the point of it--the lighted square before her all blurred and dim" (292). Not just crying for herself, Maggie cries for what her father is going through and even has compassion for Charlotte. Finally, in the reversal that will make their reunion possible, Maggie tells the now ardent Prince that he must wait for full reconciliation until Adam and Charlotte have gone, so she will know his embrace is not just another attempt to control her; and the Prince turns this time and stares out the window, presumably with tears of expiating remorse (353).

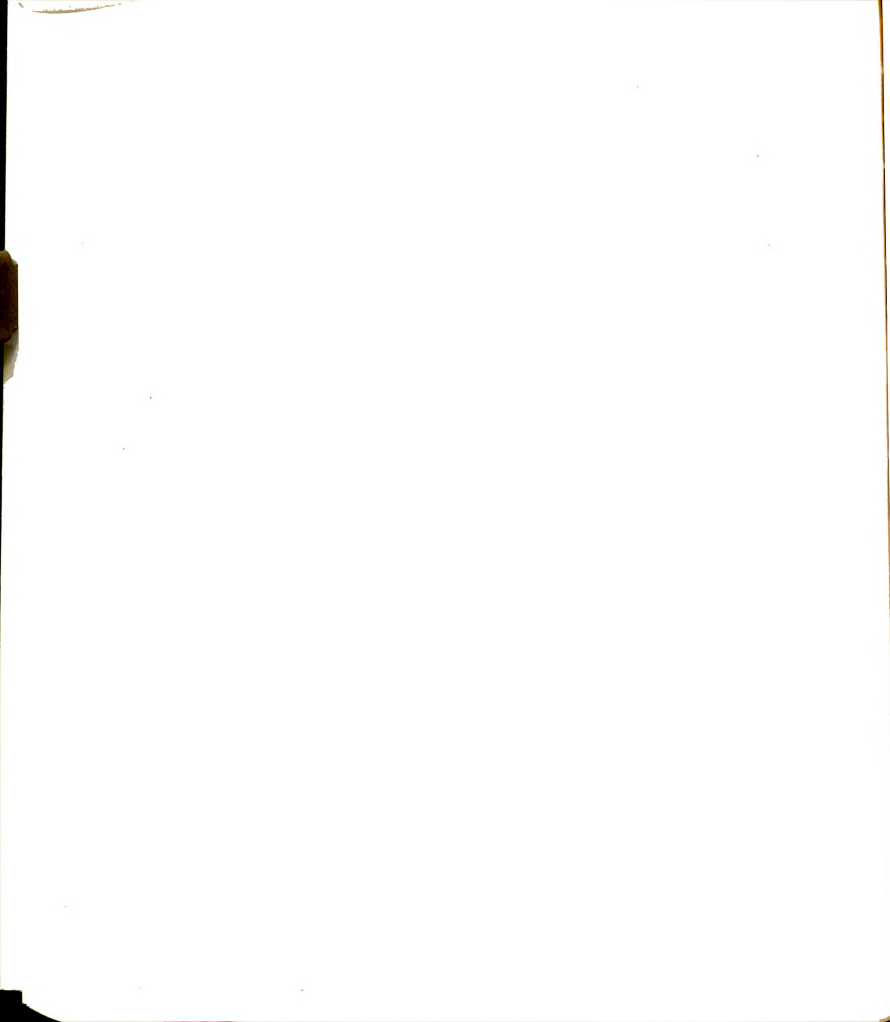
Another converging set of images and parallel scenes completes their reunion. At Fanny Assingham's home before Maggie's marriage, Charlotte and the Prince appear on a "balustrade, which was mounted on fine ironwork, eighteenth-century English" (XXIII, 92). When the Prince is most perplexed about English society at Matcham and is reminiscing over his Roman heritage, "he leaned on the old marble balustrade--so like the others that he knew in still more nobly-terraced Italy," and though he is alone Charlotte is very close by (350). She is soon framed by an "old grey window" and the Prince thinks the scene needs only "a moon,



a mandolin and a little danger to be a serenade" (356-57). Charlotte and the Prince occupy the romantic balconies in the early sections of the novel. The balcony-balustrade image next arises when Maggie sees the Prince and Charlotte looking like "truly superior beings" on the high castle-like balcony at Portland Place, at the end of her walk with her father just after her monumental act of waiting for the Prince there rather than in Eaton Square. She recalls the Christmas Eve when Amerigo had come out on the balcony to see the "dingy waifs" chanting for pennies, reinforcing the symbolic parallels of the Prince and Charlotte as current king and queen of the castle, and of Maggie and her father as waifs on the outside begging to be let in (XXIV, 99). But as Maggie begins to gain control, it is she who occupies the balconies and the balustrades, until the reader sees her, near her triumph, enjoying the royal view over the gardens at Fawns as if in a "castle-tower mounted on a rock" (306). Fittingly, then, the final scene takes place on "the balcony from which Maggie, in the springtime, had seen Amerigo and Charlotte look down together at the hour of her return from the Regent's Park" (355). For a time she and the Prince sit there like "a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud," a striking variation of the image (360-61). But not for long. With their sense of the past finally reconciled with the present, and the future looking very much happily-ever-after, they stand on the balcony overlooking a scene "coloured with the



odd sad pictured 'old-fashioned' look that empty London streets take on in waning afternoons of the summer's end" (362). The balcony and window image merge. And with perhaps too many parallels to lovers fading into the sunset, they melt into each other's eyes and arms. Their sense of poetic justice--and the reader's--has been fully satisfied by the turning of time.



Notes

¹Cf. Letters, I, pp. 309-11, 379, in which James's ambivalence is very clear.

²These remarks are taken from a paper read by Leon Edel at Michigan State University in 1969, entitled "James's Poem of America."

³The Houses that James Built, p. 26.

⁴See especially Stallman's assessment, ibid., p. 22.

⁵Wegelin recognizes that James uses the "fable or fairy tale" form in such works as The Ambassadors, and that the American girl, for example, "is merely the American variety of a type to which, quite independently of international contrast, he liked to assign the role of protagonist in the struggle which is central in his work, the struggle of the individual . . ."--The Image of Europe in Henry James, pp. 58, 88. But Wegelin ignores, for the purposes of his study, the role of myth and archetypes in the mature novels. When he states that The Golden Bowl is more a fable than a realistic novel (123), he means that it is a parable on the international theme rather than that it is a story moving toward fairy tale and myth.

⁶Page numbers in parentheses in this paragraph all refer to volume XIX of the New York Edition.

⁷All page numbers in this paragraph refer to volume XX.

⁸The American Adam, pp. 7-8.

⁹"The Pattern of Innocence Through Experience in the Characters of Henry James," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXII (April, 1953), p. 236.

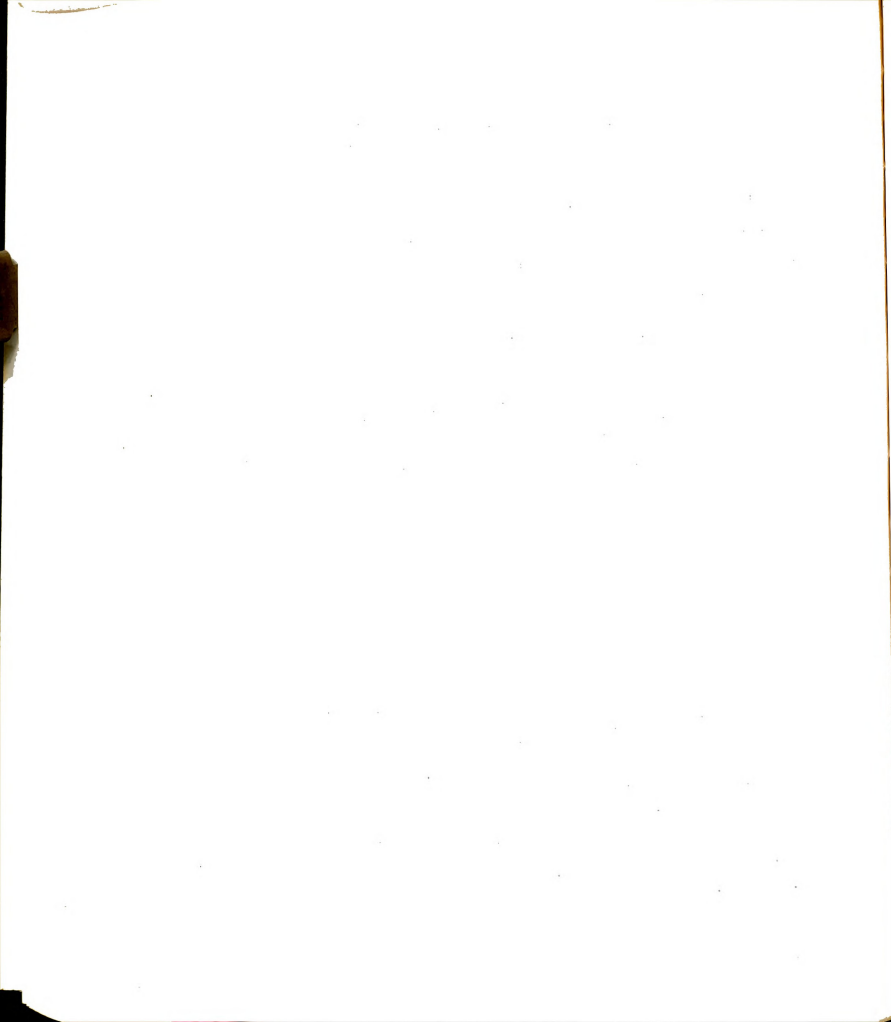
¹⁰The Lion and the Honeycomb, pp. 277-78, 283.

¹¹The Complex Fate, pp. 40-47.

¹²The Pilgrimage of Henry James, pp. 128, 138. Compare my tracing of "American faces of the clear strain" in the previous section, pp. 194-204.

¹³Hicks, The Great Tradition, pp. 116-18.

¹⁴Noted by Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase, pp. 122-23.



¹⁵The Method of Henry James, p. cviii.

¹⁶"Henry James and His Sense of the Past," pp. 88-89.

¹⁷Paul F. Baum, "The Young Man Betrothed to a Statue," PMLA, XXXIV (1919), p. 578, and Lionel Trilling, Introduction, The Princess Casamassima (New York, 1948), I, pp. xii ff., noted by Stone, pp. 115, 186n.

¹⁸In The Ivory Tower, however, some of the mythological comparisons seem to provide more humor through incongruity than deep thematic significance. Davey Bradham plays a Mercurial messenger for his wife Gussy, an "urgent Juno," a "bustling goddess" of the household (XXV, pp. 23-24). And as James ironically adds, he makes these comparisons with no intimation that the characters themselves could have thought of them.

¹⁹The Houses that James Built, pp. 4 ff. In another essay in the same collection, Stallman notes James's comparisons of characters with older types in The Ambassadors. Mrs. Newsome is Queen Elizabeth, Maria is Mary Stuart, and Madame de Vionnet is Cleopatra--to which Stallman promptly adds Chad as a parallel to Antony (pp. 50-51, n. 6).

²⁰XIX, p. 5. Cf. Matthiessen, p. 59, on Kate as dark and Milly as a light girl. But Milly is a redhead, not a typical blonde, and she too wears black until her unveiling in white in Venice. Page references are to volume XIX unless otherwise designated.

²¹Stone, pp. 45-49, thinks the passage is therefore a "dodge," not recognizing that keeping the time in New York vague increases its romance and enhances Milly's portrait as princess.

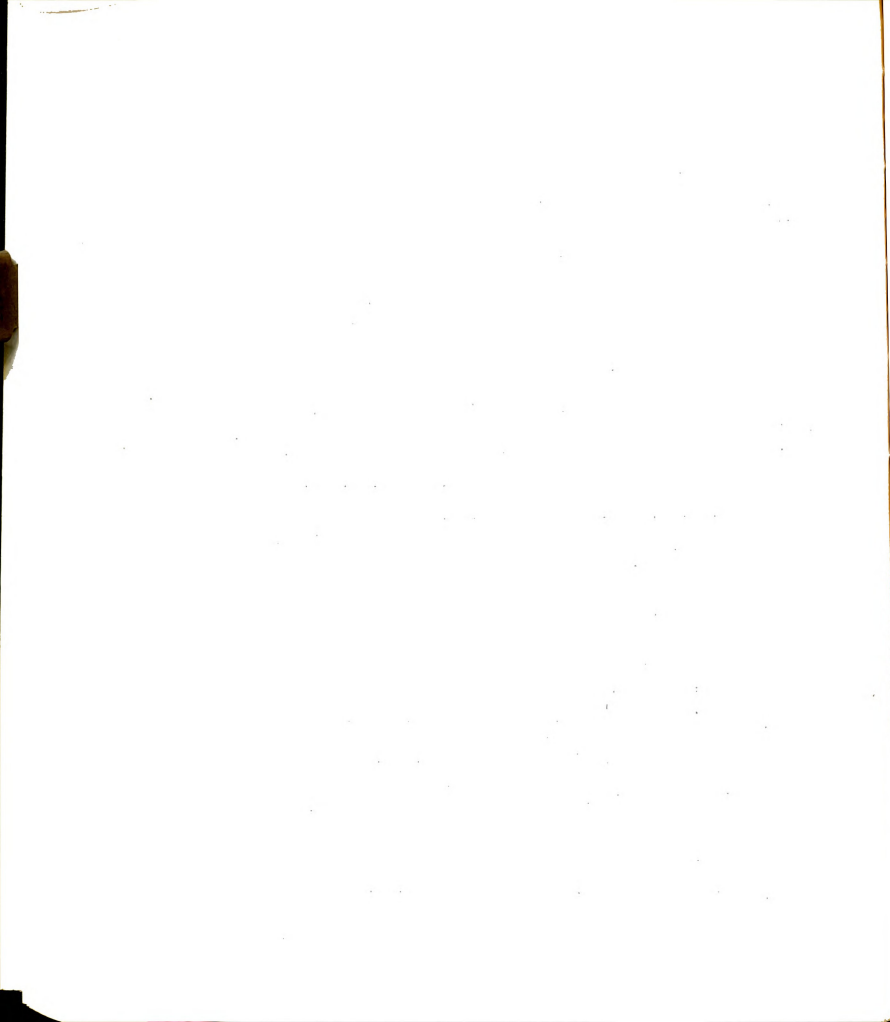
²²James's meaning here will be well understood by readers of T.S. Eliot's poem "The Boston Evening Transcript," in which the "evening quickens faintly in the street,/ Wakening the appetites of life in some/ And to others bringing the Boston Evening Transcript. . . ."

²³Cf. Stone, pp. 59-60, on James's "subtly insisting" on the "symbolic possibilities of Switzerland" here, and Matthiessen, p. 64.

²⁴Stone, p. 36.

²⁵XIX, pp. 145, 215. Cf. Matthiessen, p. 60, on Milly's "Eastern carpet."

²⁶Cf. Matthiessen, p. 65, and Cargill, pp. 341-43.



²⁷Cf. XX, pp. 10, 62, 87. The following page references are to volume XX unless otherwise designated.

²⁸Cf. Matthiessen, p. 71.

²⁹Page references are to volume XXIII unless otherwise marked.

³⁰Miriam Rooth of The Tragic Muse is the parallel of course.

³¹Page references in this paragraph are to volume XXIV.

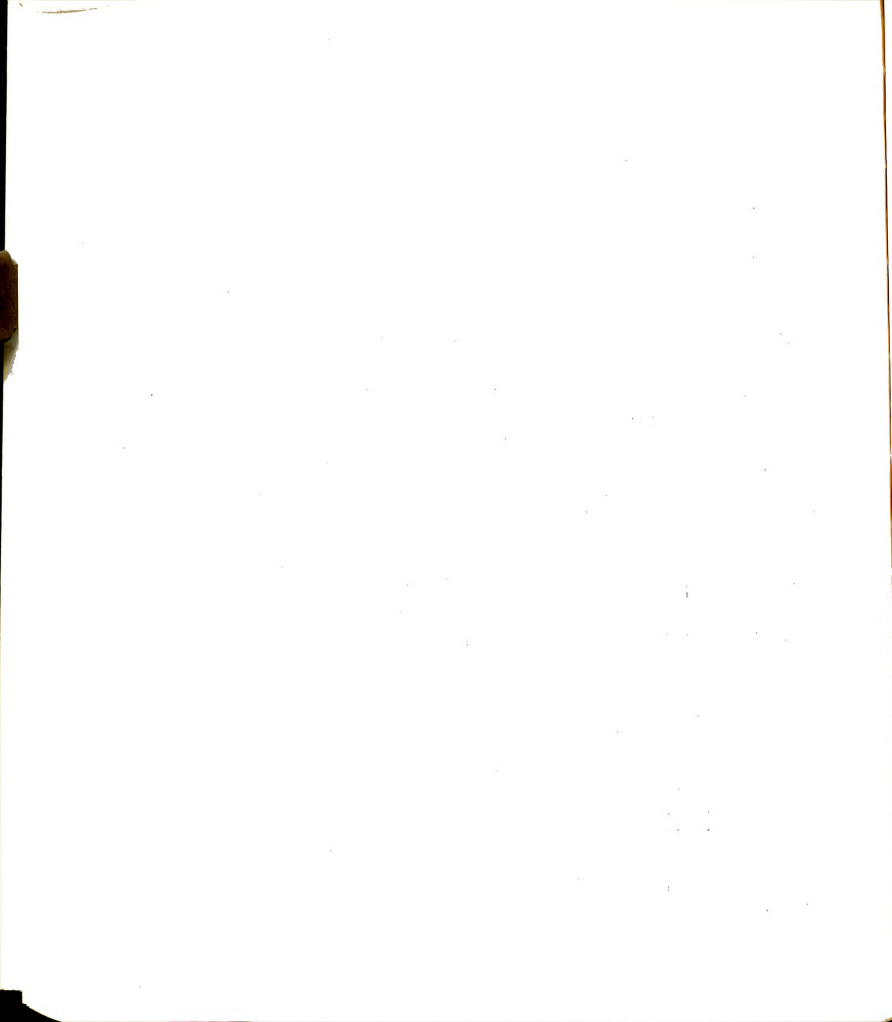
³²"Henry James: The Poetics of Empiricism," Time, Place and Idea: Essays on the Novel, pp. 1-22.

³³Thomas Mann, quoted by Raleigh in "The English Novel and the Three Kinds of Time," *op. cit.*, p. 54. Connecting Raleigh's description of consciousness in James with the appearance of his characters as types is my own idea, but Raleigh verges on the discovery. He treats the non-concrete representation of character, complained about by Brooks, Hicks, and others, at least by implication, explaining the reasons for such representation. And he notes another characteristic of James's figures which I discussed in describing them as archetypes, noting that it is not "merely coincidental that so many characters in James's novels are solitaires with only the vaguest of antecedents. Even the forthright Newman is given a past of hints and shades, and he, evidently, has no ties or connections. In what I regard as James's masterpiece, The Wings of the Dove, each of the principals is carefully introduced as an isolated figure."--p. 19. But Raleigh does not connect this characteristic with the tendency of James's figures to become archetypal; instead, he explains it as a result of his theory of consciousness.

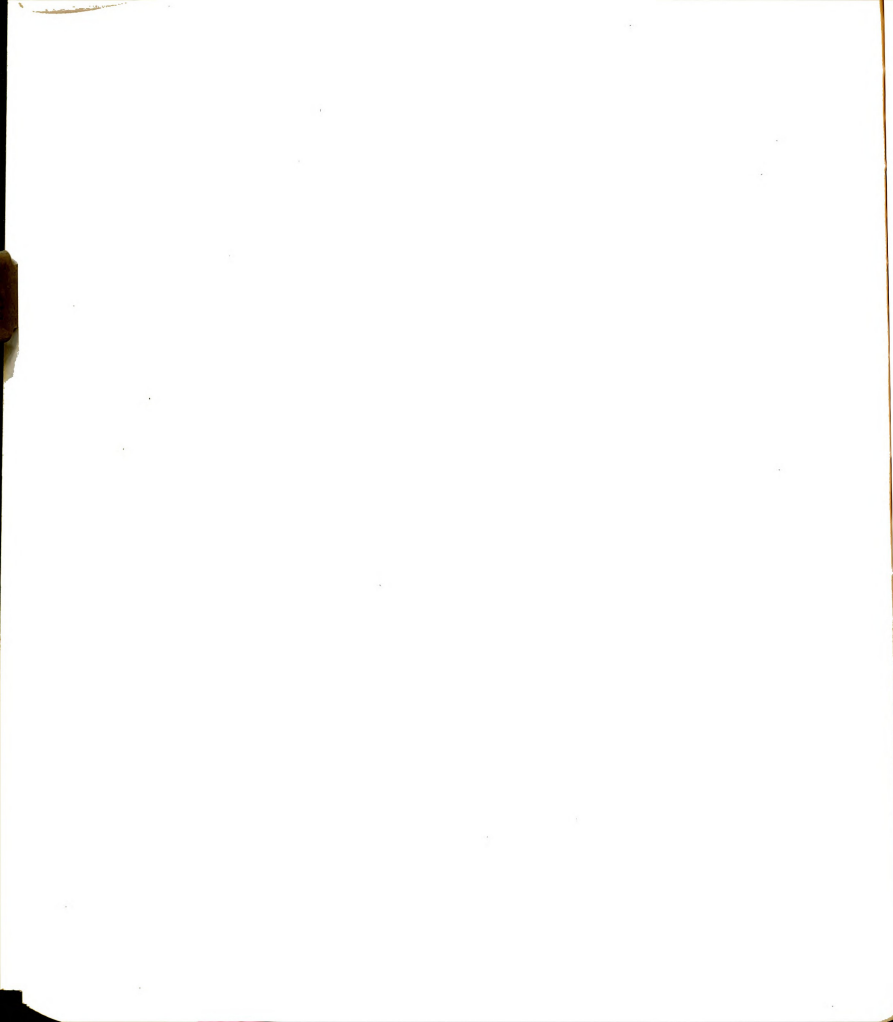
³⁴Again, page references are to volume XXIII until otherwise designated.

³⁵Page references following now refer to volume XXIV.

³⁶Andre Gide first made the claim that his figures have no subconscious, but later critics have generally agreed. See Raleigh, p. 15, on Gide and his views. These critics have apparently not noticed passages like the one quoted, in which the subconscious is metaphorically described as a force outside the person, nor the subconscious images that govern Strether's vision of Madame de Vionnet and the Lambinet scene, nor the fact that the image of Osmond and Madame Merle



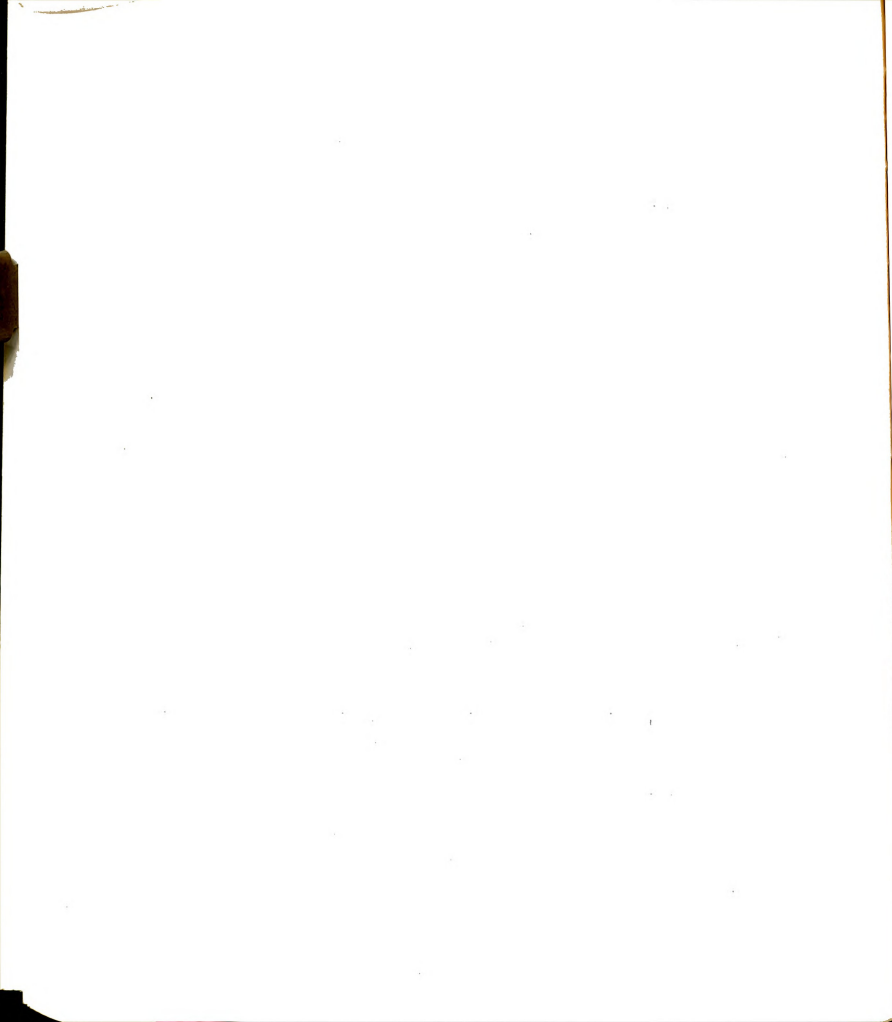
³⁶(Cont.) in the drawing room haunts Isabel's sub-conscious until she figures out why the scene disturbed her. Compare also the Prince renewing the bond with Charlotte "through steps and stages that conscious computation had missed"--XXIII, p. 297.



4. The Reassessment (1905-1914)

By the time The Golden Bowl appears in 1904, James is, not surprisingly, already in America. For the idealization of Americans in the novels of the major phase is a symptom not only of his desire to think well of his native country in spite of its political problems, but also of a desire to reestablish a direct contact with American life.¹ Doubts about the wisdom of his old choice of Europe as his home have been increasing in James's mind for some time. As early as 1899, while the American characters of the English period are diminishing in identity due to James's long estrangement from his native land, James begins to lament the apparent loss of his own American identity, and strongly recommends to his brother William that he keep his sons safe from expatriation:

What I most of all feel, and in the light of it conjure you to keep doing for them, is their being a même to contract local saturations and attachments in respect to their own great and glorious country, to learn, to strike roots into, its infite beauty, as I suppose, and variety. Then they won't, as I do now, have to assimilate, but half-heartedly, the alien splendours--inferior ones too, as I believe--of the indigestible midi of Bourget and the Vicomte Melchoir de Vogue . . . the beauty here is, after my long stop at home, admirable and exquisite; but make the boys, none the less, stick fast and sink up to their necks in everything their own countries and climates can give de pareil et de superieur. Its being that "own" will double their use of it. (Letters, I, 316)



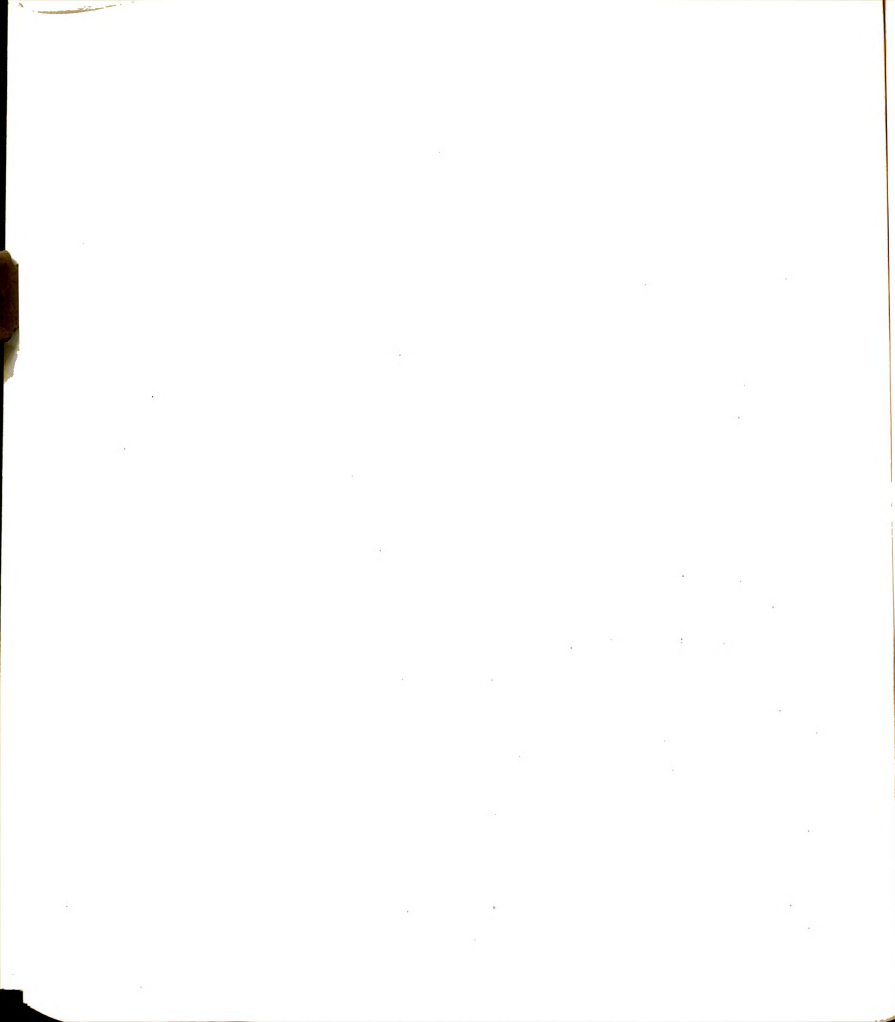
James is traveling in France and Italy to break his long stay at Lamb House and London, and must "suppose" and "believe" that the United States now has infinite beauty, variety, and superior splendours because he no longer knows what the country is like. The Continent is unsatisfying because it is not his "own" culturally, and because it is increasingly becoming modernized. Italy is a devastating disappointment for him, ruined by restoration. Lamenting the changes in Rome, James complains, "I can't remount /the stream of time/--but can only drift on with the thicker and darker tide: wherefore pray for me, as who knows what may be at the end?" (Letters, II, 104). James is beginning to feel alien in Europe and isolated from America, a man without a country.

Uncertain of his own national identity, he becomes very sensitive on the issue of expatriation. Not only does he advise William to keep his nephews home, but he writes a friend of Mrs. Wharton that "She must be tethered in native pastures, even if it reduces her to a back-yard in New York" (Letters, I, 396). He writes Mrs. Wharton personally much later in 1912, after she sets a novel badly in Paris, that "your only drawback is not having the homeliness and the inevitability and the happy limitation and the affluent poverty, of a Country of your Own (comme moi, par exemple!)" (Letters, II, 285). With such light yet serious irony James expresses his continuing ambivalence toward his expatriation, a condition he tries hard not to admit



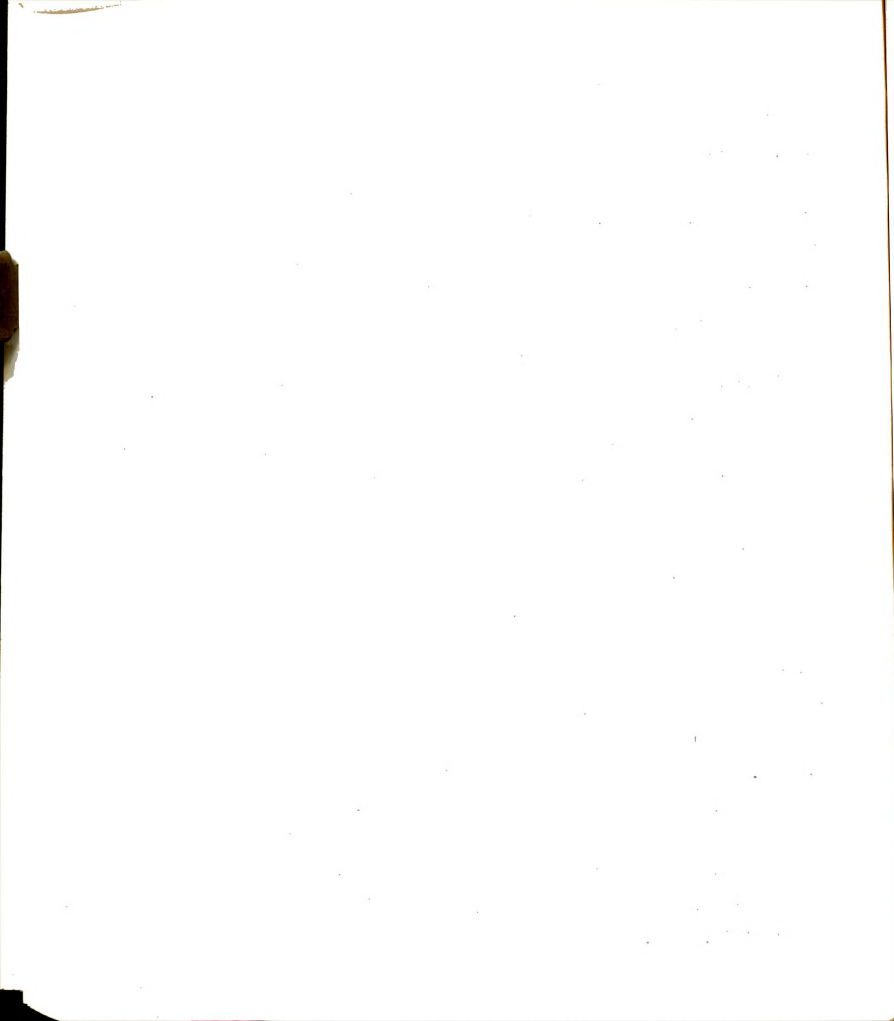
as final and which, while it helps him overcome the provincial limitations and cultural poverty of America, never provides him with a permanent national home. Lamb House is more and more a refuge from London than an expression of his national identity, a fact dramatically emphasized when restrictions on his travel to Lamb House as an alien during the war become a major factor influencing him to become a British citizen.²

Those who actually become expatriates, such as Robert Louis Stevenson, are not enhanced in James's eyes by their decision. James's objections to Stevenson's expatriation from Britain to the South Seas can be explained as a reflection of his attachment to England, but in the light of his comments about keeping Americans on their own side of the Atlantic instead of exporting them to England for acculturation, his position on Stevenson is more accurately traced to a rejection of all expatriation. James feels that Stevenson's writings, including even his letters, deteriorate after his departure (cf. Letters, I, 198, 208, 331). With the failure of his plays and the low popularity of his fiction, James may well have felt that his own work was declining due to his long expatriation. Even though the incident is hearsay, then, one can readily believe that James expressed to Hamlin Garland one nostalgic night in Dover the wish that he could have been an American, and that he could start over.³ Sometimes the nostalgia seems both wistful and detached, as in 1902 when he



sees a photograph of himself at age twenty and feels that "the image has a pleasing ghostliness, as out of the far past, and affects me pathetically as if it were of the dead--of one who died young and innocent. Well, so he did" (Letters, I, 407). He likes to call his life in America "the prehistoric existence" during these years (Letters, I, 375), a past that is gulfs away and cannot be recovered. Nevertheless, like Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner," James wonders what he would have been like had he stayed in America, and he wonders whether or not he can in fact go home again. Not astonishingly, he is soon ready to try.

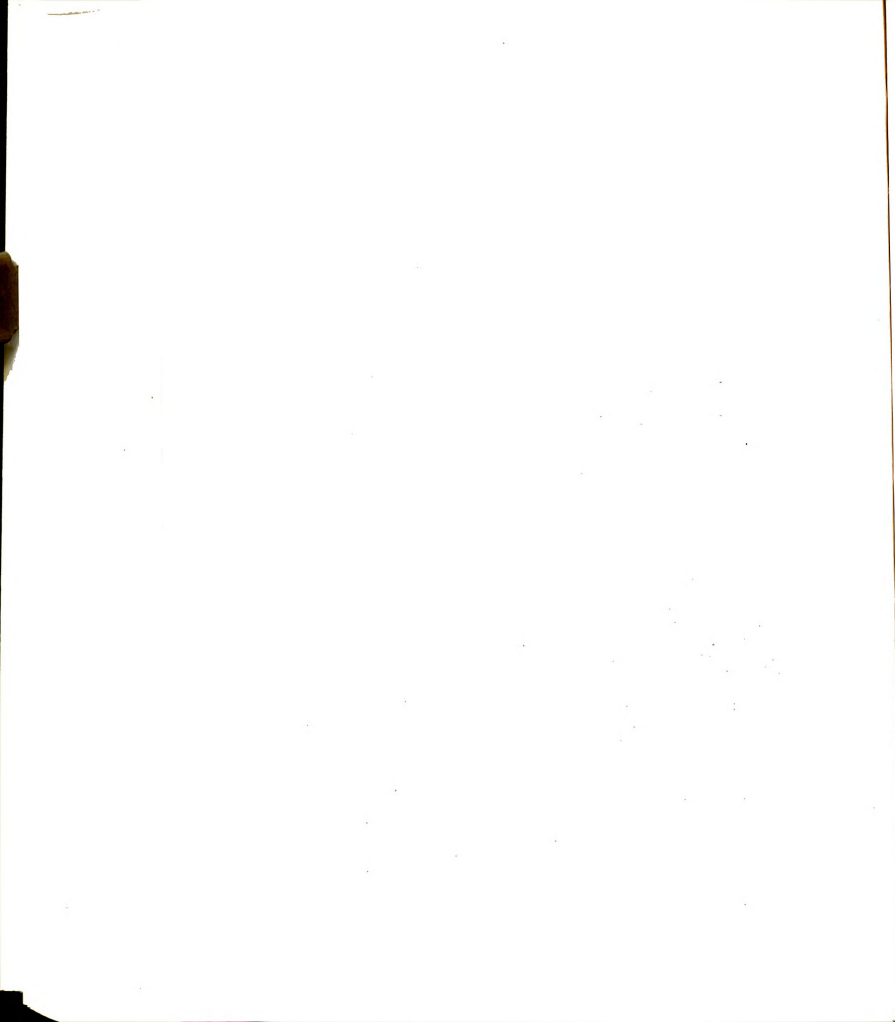
He begins to believe again, as he writes to Howells, that "the 'International' is very presumably indeed, and in fact quite inevitably, what I am chronically booked for" (Letters, II, 10), so he enters the major phase concentrating once more on the puzzle of American character as an offshoot of European culture. His trips to the Continent become "expensive and supererogatory, inasmuch as not resolving themselves into new material or assimilating with my little acquired stock, my accumulated capital of (for convenience) 'international' items and properties" (Letters, I, 418). He calls the theme "international" now only "for convenience," for it is no longer international. Instead of France and Italy "what now most interests me . . . is human Anglo-Saxonism, with the American extension, or opportunity for it, so far as it may be given me still to work the same" (I, 418). This central theme of the novels of the



major phase, then, becomes the impetus that sends him back to America after twenty years abroad.

James later explains the reasons for his return to America in The American Scene, with his characteristic clarity of vision when assessing his past:

It was "Europe" that had, in very ancient days, held out to the yearning young American some likelihood of impressions more numerous and various and of a higher intensity than those he might gather on the native scene; and it was doubtless in conformity with some such desire more finely and more frequently to vibrate that he had originally begun to consult the European oracle. This had led, in the event, to his settling to live for long years in the very precincts, as it were, of the temple; so that the voice of the divinity was finally to become, in his ears, of all sounds the most familiar. It was quite to lose its primal note of mystery, to cease little by little to be strange, impressive and august--in the degree, at any rate, in which it had once enjoyed that character. The consultation of the oracle, in a work, the invocation of the possible thrill, was gradually to feel its romantic essence enfeebled, shrunken and spent. The European complexity, working clearer to one's vision, had grown usual and calculable--presenting itself, to the discouragement of wasteful emotion and of "intensity" in general, as the very stuff, the common texture, of the real world. Romance and mystery--in other words the amusement of interest--would have therefore at last to provide for themselves elsewhere; and what curiously befell, in time, was that the native, the forsaken scene, now passing, as continual rumour had it, through a thousand stages and changes, and offering a perfect iridescence of fresh aspects, seemed more and more to appeal to the faculty of wonder. It was American civilization that had begun to spread itself thick and pile itself high, in sort, in proportion as the other, the foreign exhibition had taken to writing itself plain; and to a world so amended and enriched, accordingly, the expatriated observer, with his relaxed curiosity reviving and his limp imagination once more on the



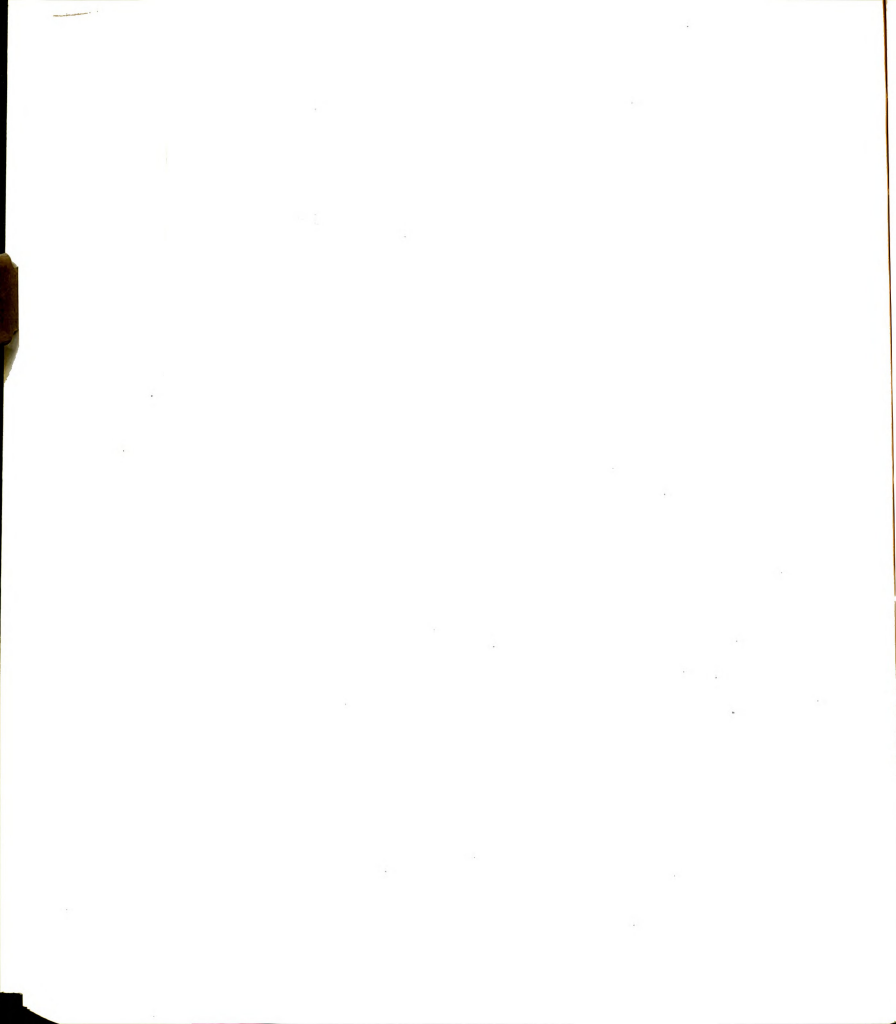
stretch, couldn't fail again to address himself. Nothing could be of a simpler and straighter logic: Europe had been romantic years before, because she was different from America; wherefore America would now be romantic because she was different from Europe. (365-66)

America is now the undiscovered country, the one which could possibly provide the essential background of freshness and contrast needed for his fiction. James wants to examine this "extension" of the Anglo-Saxon race--if that is still what America is--to see whether or not that study will give new life to the international theme:

My native land, which time, absence and change have, in a funny sort of way, made almost as romantic to me as "Europe," in dreams or in my earlier time here, used to be--the actual bristling (as fearfully bristling as you like) U.S.A. have the merit and the precious property that they meet and fit into my ("creative") pre-occupations; and that the period there which should represent the poetry of motion, the one big taste of travel not supremely missed, would carry with it also possibilities of the prose of production (that is of the production of prose) such as no other mere bought, paid for, sceptically and half-heartedly worried through adventure, by land or sea, would be able to give me. (Letters, I, 419)

Just as determined to visit America as he had been to live in Europe, James turns aside his brother William's warnings that twentieth-century America may be a shock to a prodigal son who departed in the eighteen eighties:

What you say of . . . the Vocalisation, of the Shocks in general, and of everything else, is utterly beside the mark--it being absolutely for all that class of phenomena, and every other class, that I nurse my infatuation. I want to see them, I want to see everything. I want to see the Country (scarcely a bit New York and Boston, but intensely the Middle and Far West and California and the South)--in

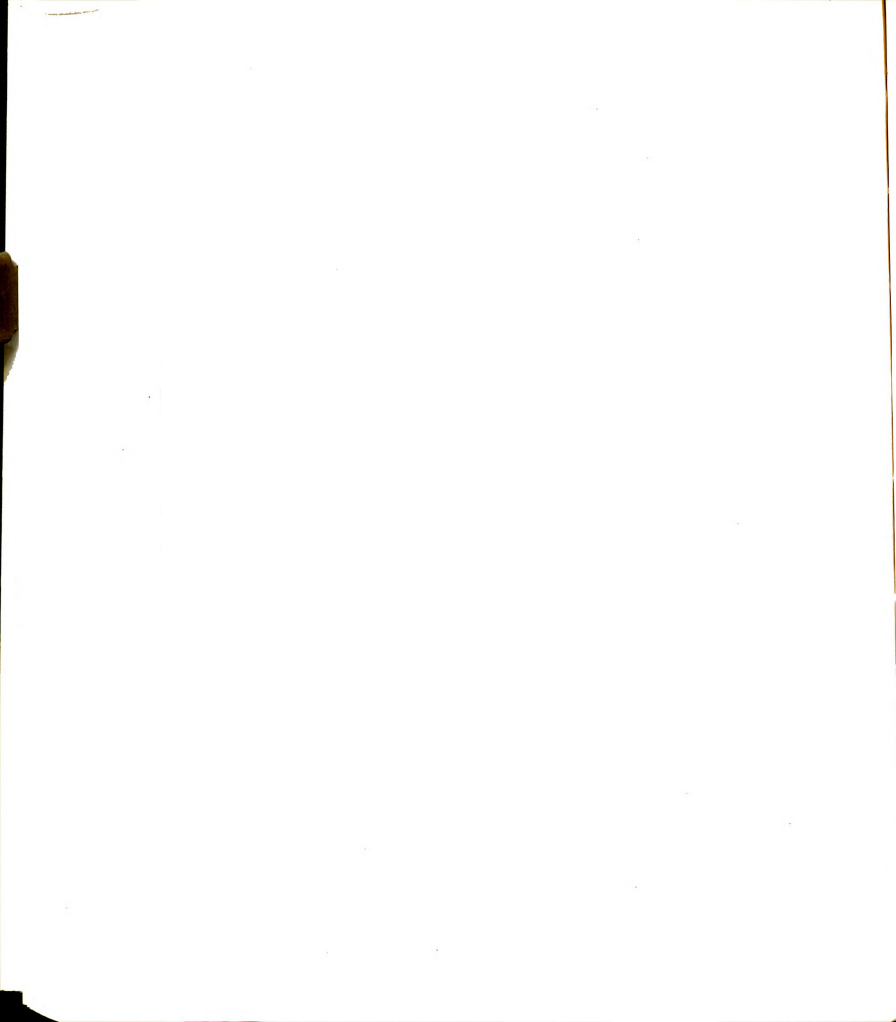


cadres as complete, and immeasurably more mature than those of the celebrated Taine when he went, early in the sixties, to Italy for six weeks, in order to write his big book.
(Letters, I, 420)

Enthusiasm so great can only be followed by huge success or dismal disillusion.

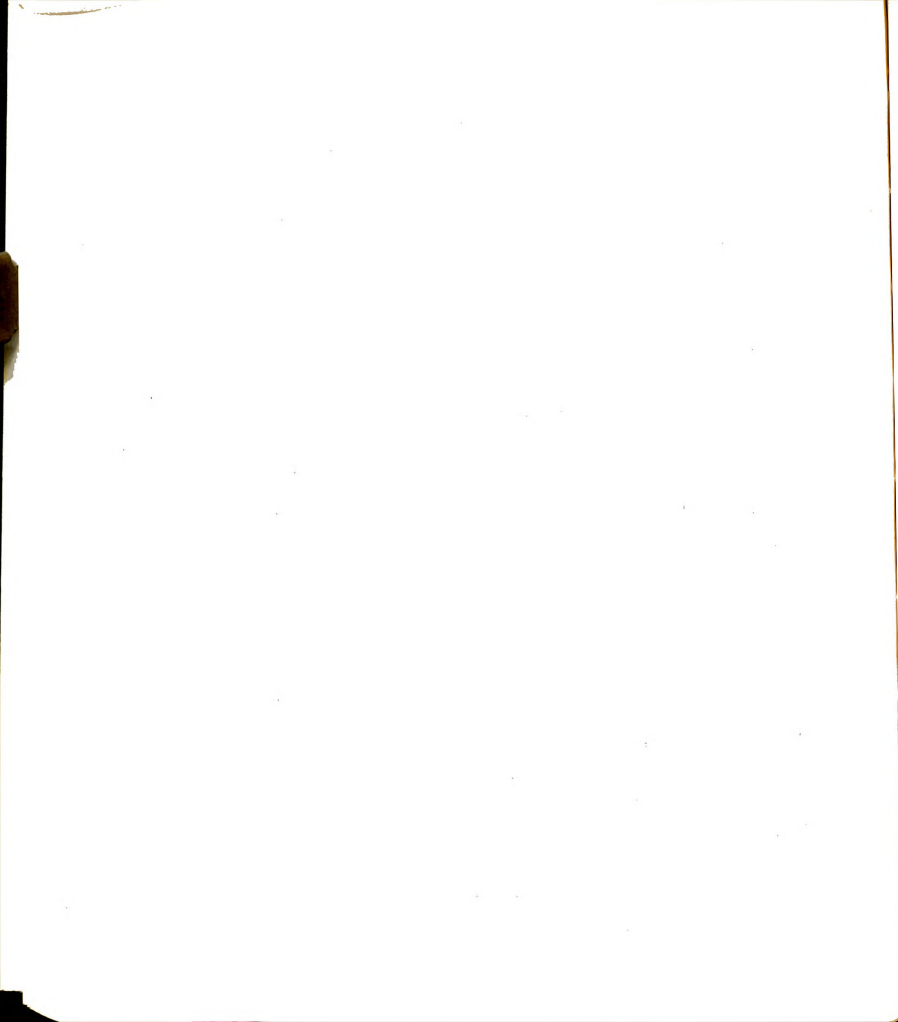
To be sure, the visit results in strong impressions, and a string of stories on American society. But the trip also cuts short the major phase, for James realizes how idealized the Americans of his long novels have been, and ultimately rejects the style and content of such works as The Golden Bowl.⁴ He sees much in America that he did not expect to see. What he had not counted on was the jolt his sense of the past would receive, especially after creating a myth of American character based on hopes and memories, when confronted with an almost all new society. In spite of his intention to travel mainly in the areas of America he is not familiar with, he is forced by shock at the vast changes to spend long agonized hours in New York and Boston, and when he reaches the exotic areas such as California that he wanted to see, he finds only "nature and climate, fruits and flowers; for there is absolutely nothing else, and the sense of the shining social and human inane is utter" (II, 33).

Gone is the blithe assumption of the inevitable synthesis of European and American society which pervades the major phase. The United States is "a living and breathing and feeling and moving great monster" to James (II, 20);



"the country is unlike any other--to one's sensation of it; those of Europe, from State to State, seem to me less different from each other than they are all different from this--or rather this from them" (II, 24). James is so disoriented that he wisely decides to unravel the mysteries of American life after he returns to England. He trusts his "after-sense," his sense of the past, to discriminate more carefully than his immediate perception (cf. Notebooks, 318-22). The result is The American Scene, a brilliant sociological analysis far greater than any of his earlier travelogues, and a series of tales on American life which record in effect the death of the old international theme.

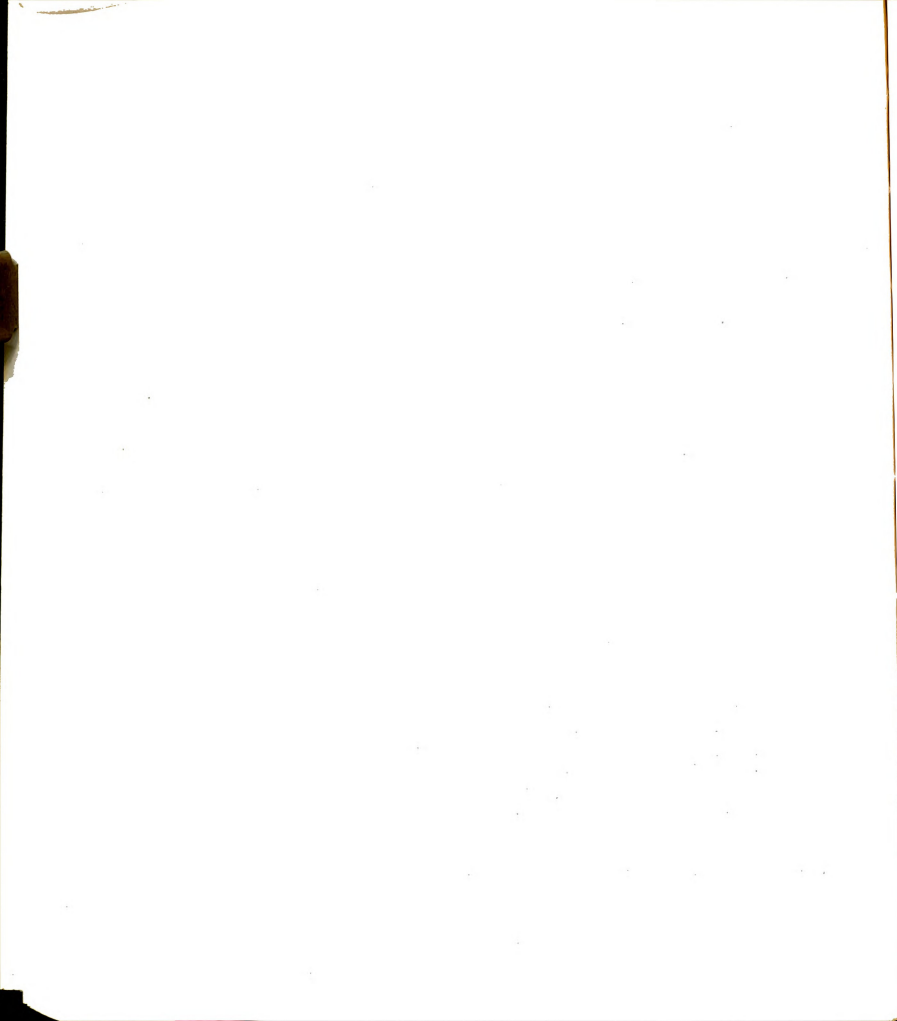
Even before The American Scene is published (1907), however, James's change in perspective begins to appear. Articles that will be chapters of the finished work are published while he is still in the States. And the preface to the New York Edition of his works, completed in 1906-07, reveal an interesting transition from the optimism of the major phase to the soberer view necessitated by his return to America. Reassessment begins immediately upon James's arrival, of course, but due to the tendency of his mind to assimilate experience slowly and carefully and to rely on "after-sense" for final judgment, that reassessment is not complete until the prefaces, The American Scene, and several tales have worked through the paradoxes and ambivalent feelings that harrow his mind when he confronts this strange new society.



One of the first old configurations to be re-examined, naturally, is the international theme. James fights hard to salvage his earlier impressions. In discussing the classic cases of international contrast of the seventies and eighties in the prefaces, James defends their essential accuracy for early twentieth-century America even while arguing that the contrasts are breaking down due to increasing social synthesis (cf. Prefaces, 207). The old types are still around, he rationalizes, it is just that they are no longer strictly American or strictly European figures: "The evolution of varieties moves fast; the Pandora Days can no longer, I fear, pass for quaint or fresh or for exclusively native to any one tract of Anglo-Saxon soil" (Prefaces, 271). More significantly, James begins to see that the allegedly growing social fusion may be in fact merely greater social con-fusion:

What has really happened, I think, is that the great international cases, those that bristle with fifty sorts of social reference and overflow, by the same token, with a hundred illustrations of social incoherence, are now equally taken for granted on all sides of the sea, have simply become incidents and examples of the mixture of manners, as I call it, and the thicker fusion: which may mean nothing more, in truth, but that social incoherence (with the sense for its opposite practically extinct among the nations) has got itself accepted, right and left, as normal. (Prefaces, 206-07).

And America seems to be the main source of disruption; the social and technological changes James has noticed slowly encroaching on his favorite cities in Europe have already revolutionized American society. Some changes, like the



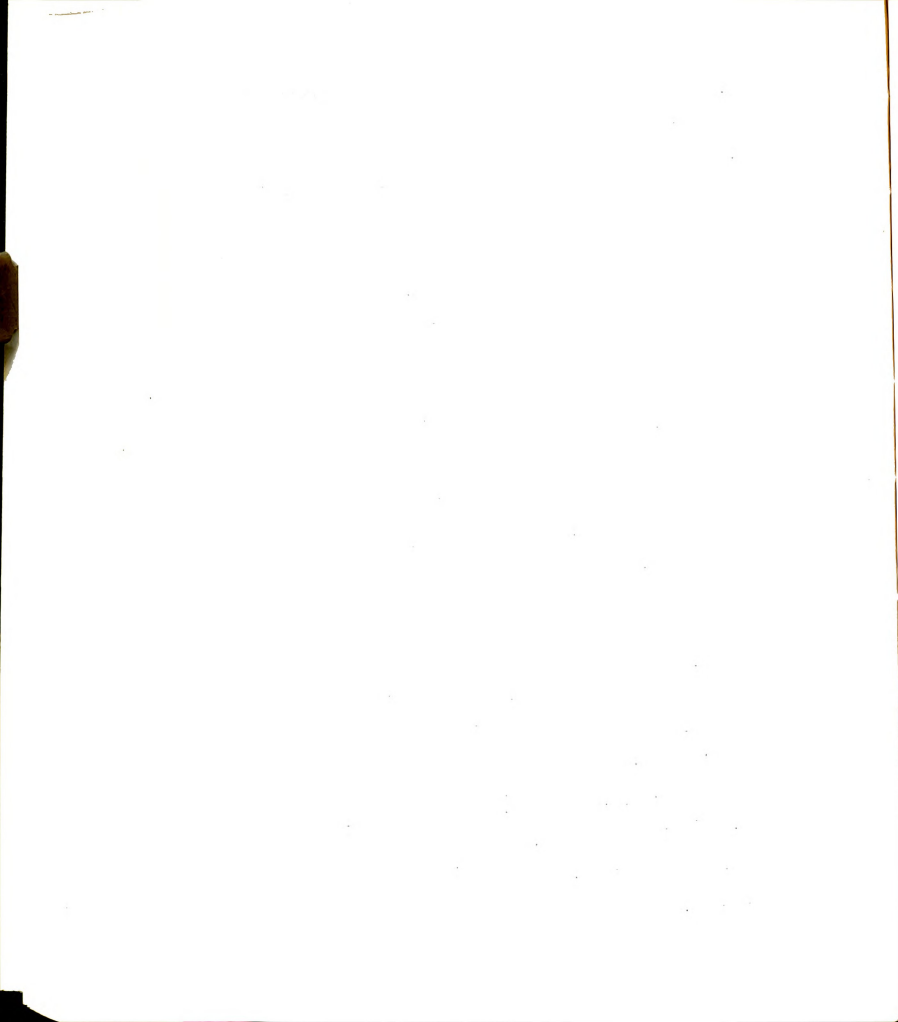
automobile, do not disturb James too much--they replace the privacy that they diminish with convenience or some other advantage. But the increasing social incoherence overcoming Europe serves only to deprive one of the last sanctuaries in the world of the stable factors needed to produce good fiction.

All the old assumptions are falling. Are these new Americans in any way still Anglo-Saxons, still the old Americans used for familial contrasts with Europeans in the international theme?:

I am careful to put it as a question, and all for a particular reason--the reason that, to be frank, I find myself, before the vast diluvian occidental presence in Europe, with its remorseless rising tide and its positive expression of almost nothing but quantity and number, deprived, on definite and ample grounds, of the precious faculty of confidence. This confidence was of old all instinctive, in face of the "common run" of appearances, the even then multitudinous, miscellaneous minor international phenomena, those of which the "short story," as contemporaneously practiced, could effect a fairly prompt and easy notation . . . (Prefaces, 207)

James is lost. What can be made of these new Americans? Now "one of those big general questions," once answered with assurance, destroys the master's confidence in the old international theme:

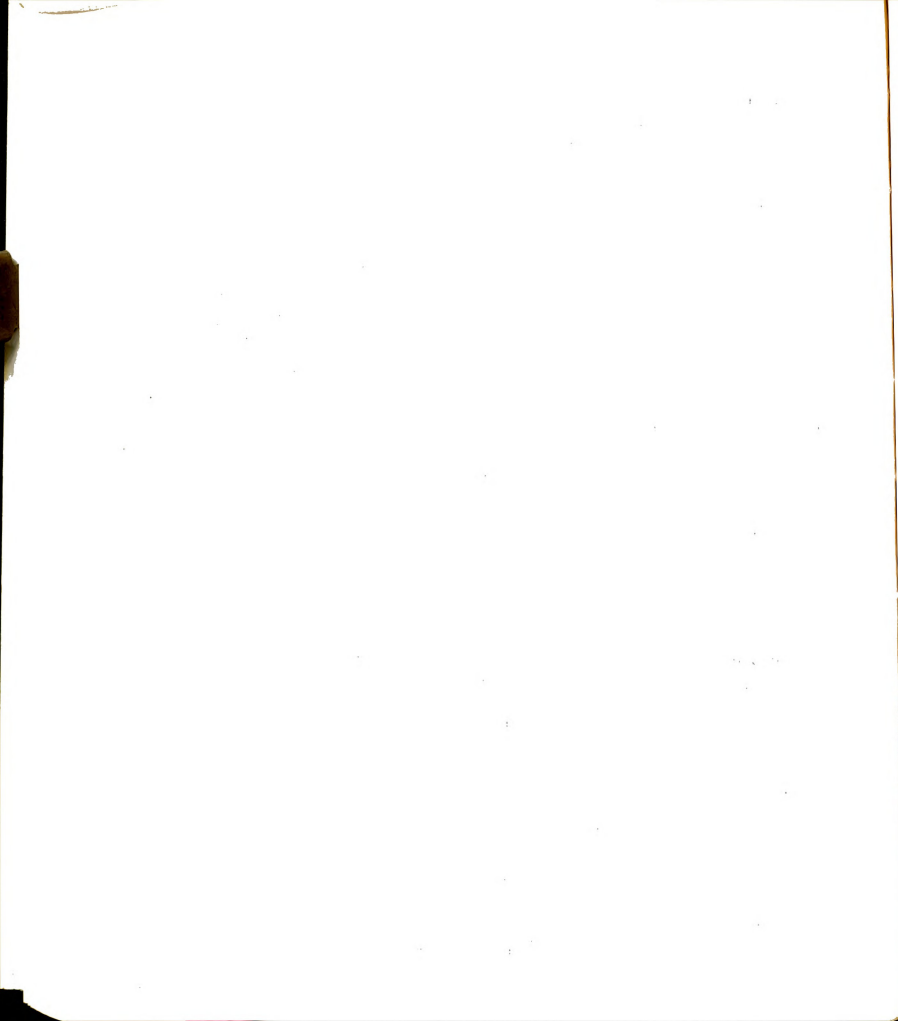
"Who are they, what are they, whence and whither and why?" the "critic of life," international or other, still, or more and more, asks himself, as he of course always asked, but with the actual difference that the reply that used to come so conveniently straight, "Why, they're just the American vague variety of the dear old Anglo-Saxon race," not only hangs fire and leaves him to wait and wonder, but really affects him as having for this act of deference (as to which he



can't choose, I admit) little more than a conscious mocking, baffling, in fact a just all but sinister, grimace. (Prefaces, 208)

The old Bowery Theatre, "nursed in the English intellectual cradle, and in the American of a time when the American resembled the English closely enough," is now filled by "representatives of the races we have nothing 'in common' with" (Prefaces, 196). In the old days hotel registers were filled with recognizably traditional Anglo-Saxon names; now the guest lists are inscribed with "alien syllables and sounds, representative signs that fit into our 'English' legend (as we were mainly conscious up to a few years since of having inherited that boon) scarcely more than if borrowed from the stony slabs of Nineveh" (Prefaces, 208-09). Clearly the old convention that an American is just an Englishman diluted a bit by the Atlantic would have to be extensively revised.

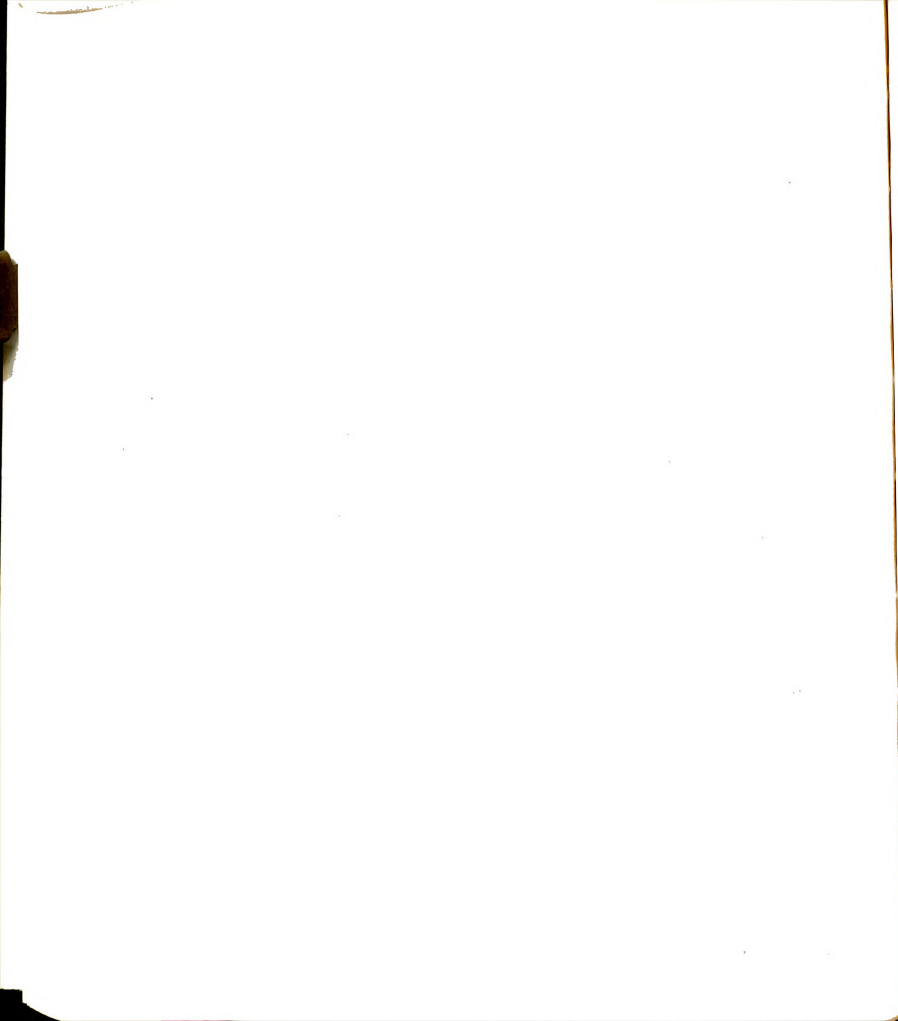
This "melting pot" condition in the United States is the most crucial change for James. Recording his impression of immigrants to America in his notebooks, James emphasizes the one overwhelming 'question that hangs so forever before one here, and more and more the more one sees: that of what the great Infusion (call it that) is going to be" (Notebooks, 317). In The American Scene James even questions whether or not "American" can be a specific designation after such an influx of immigrants: "What meaning, in the presence of such impressions, can continue to attach to such a term as the 'American' character?--



what type, as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such a hotch-potch of racial ingredients, is to be conceived as shaping itself?"⁵ James has observed the so-called "melting pot," but questions whether any cohesive alloy of these peoples is possible, or if so what quality of metal can be produced. Not being well acquainted with the Darwinian qualities of the economic world of the early twentieth century, James is astonished at the mutation of the jovial products of rich Italian culture and Mediterranean sunshine into competitive, anxious, time-ridden ditch diggers:

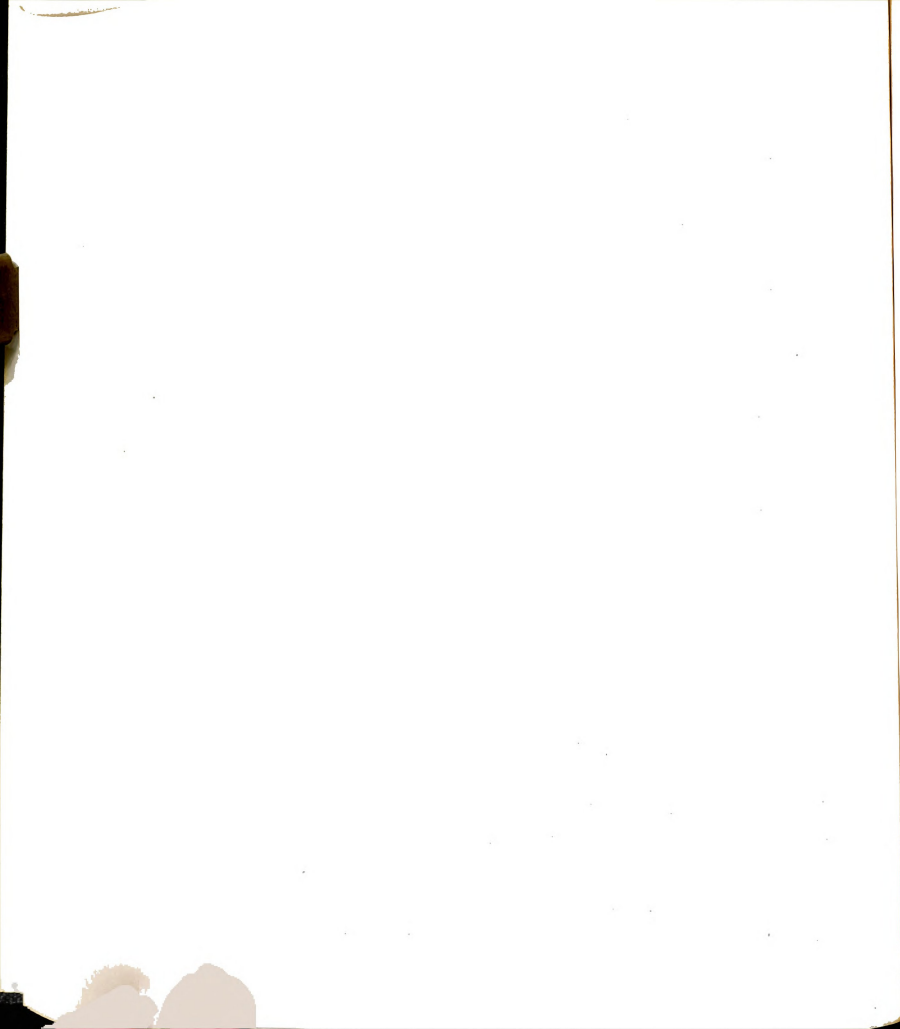
It has taken long ages of history, in the other world, to produce them, and you ask yourself, with independent curiosity, if they may really be thus extinguished in an hour. And if they are not extinguished, into what pathless tracts of the native atmosphere do they virtually, do they provisionally, and so all undiscoverably, melt? (129)

James is similarly disoriented when an apparently typical "native" from whom he asks directions in New Hampshire turns out to be an Armenian. Europeans are despoiled of their old manners, projecting "a tolerably neutral and colourless image" (127-28), as if the blankness noted in American faces of the English period in fact points to some peculiarly American abrasive that grinds away differences but leaves no positive character in their place. Again and again James tries to connect these new Americans with the old "international" types: "Do certain impressions there represent the absolute extinction of old sensibilities, or do they represent only new forms of them?" (146). But it is no use. These transplants are "disconnected from the



historic consciousness implied in their own type" (207). They have lost the sense of their past. Visiting Ellis Island, where immigrants pour into the States, James senses a mighty "clock that never, never stops--least of all when it strikes . . . some louder hour of our national fate than usual" (85). The clock moves eternally forward into the future. For the first time James becomes deliberately reactionary: "There was no escape from the ubiquitous alien into the future, or even into the present; there was an escape but into the past" (87).

Escaping into the past means returning to England, for America is obliterating her past as quickly as possible. The work of time in America is to erase the past, not to enrich it. Buildings are obsolete and torn down in a decade or so (cf. 87-88), and even the proud skyscrapers do not have "the authority of things of permanence or even of things of long duration" (77). "What was taking place was a perpetual repudiation of the past, so far as there had been a past to repudiate, so far as the past was a positive rather than a negative quantity" (53). Now everything in America has a "single thickness"--all present, no past; scenes in the States leave no "after-sense" (294, 298, 454). Like Henry Adams, James is deeply shaken by the fast change of the nineteenth century: " . . . ages do come out, as a matter of course, so far from where they have gone in. But it had done so, the latter half of the nineteenth century, in one's own more or less immediate presence" (79-80).

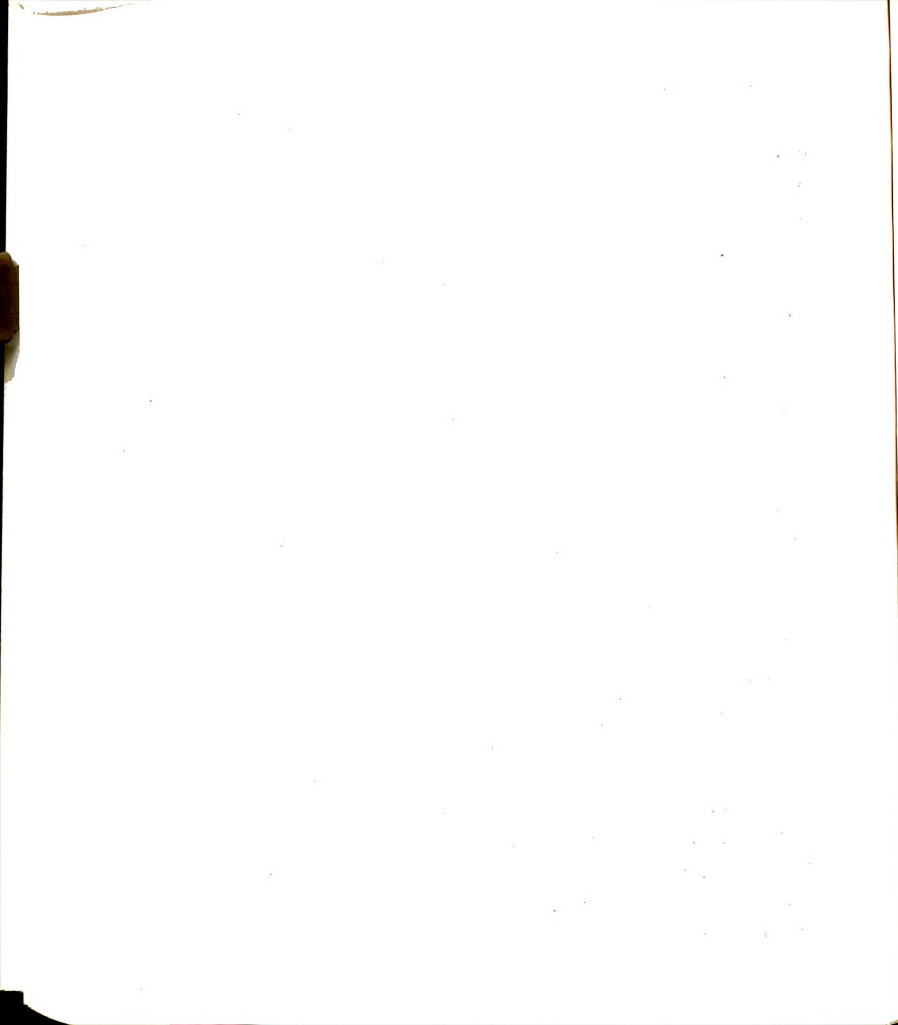


It was as though someone had completely switched both the sets and the characters during a short intermission in the play. James sees a completely new situation which seems to have almost no continuity with the old at all. His birth-place demolished, he feels "amputated of half his history? (91). To crown his sense of isolation, he is taken for a foreigner--an Englishman, significantly--in this new land of foreigners (423). There may be an American identity, James thinks, but it is not and probably cannot be his.

James's impressions of America clarify and turn more negative with time. As the ambivalence of his immediate perceptions battles in retrospection toward a single dominant image, his "after sense" counteracts the older nostalgic impressions by recalling mainly the intrusively new and undesirable facets of America. Consider, for example, this statement from a letter written in 1905:

I found my native land, after so many years, interesting formidable, fearsome and fatiguing, and much more difficult to see and deal with in any extended and various way than I had supposed. . . . It is an extraordinary world, an altogether huge "proposition," as they say there, giving one, I think, an immense impression of material and political power; but almost cruelly charmless . . .
(Letters, II, 48)

Time is curing both his nostalgia and his enthusiasm. There is no choice; he must return to England. Once back, he is not likely to try the trip again. As he writes Mrs. Henry White in 1908, "I have had to plead simple abject terror--terror of the pendulous life. I am a stopped clock--and I strike (that is I caper about) only when very much wound up"

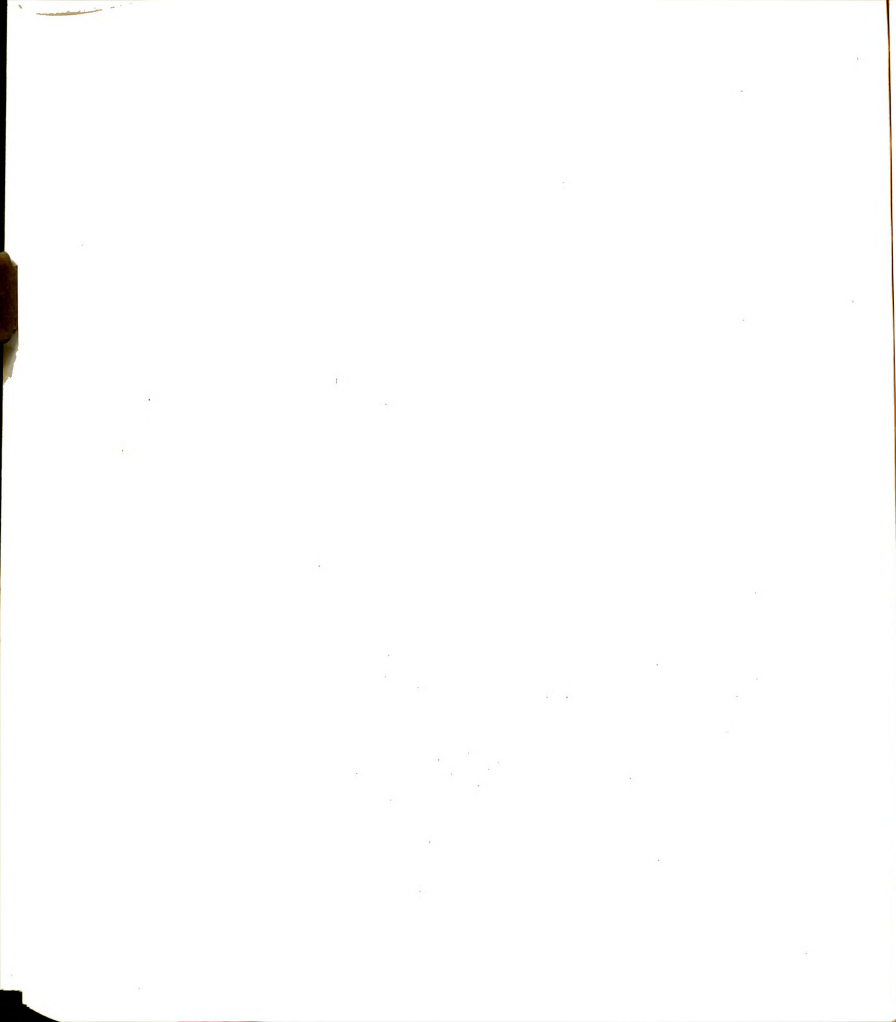


(Letters, II, 118). He cannot get into phase with the American clock that never stops; he is not about to get so wound up about America again, nor to swing once more across the Atlantic. Analyzing his impressions late in 1909, James has sifted his memories and been even more convinced by his sense of the past journey that the United States is a harsh and ruthless land:

. . . somehow the memory of what was fierce and formidable in our colossal country the last time I was there prevails with me over softer emotions, and I feel I shall never alight on it again save as upborne on the wings of some miracle that isn't in the least likely to occur. (Letters, II, 147)

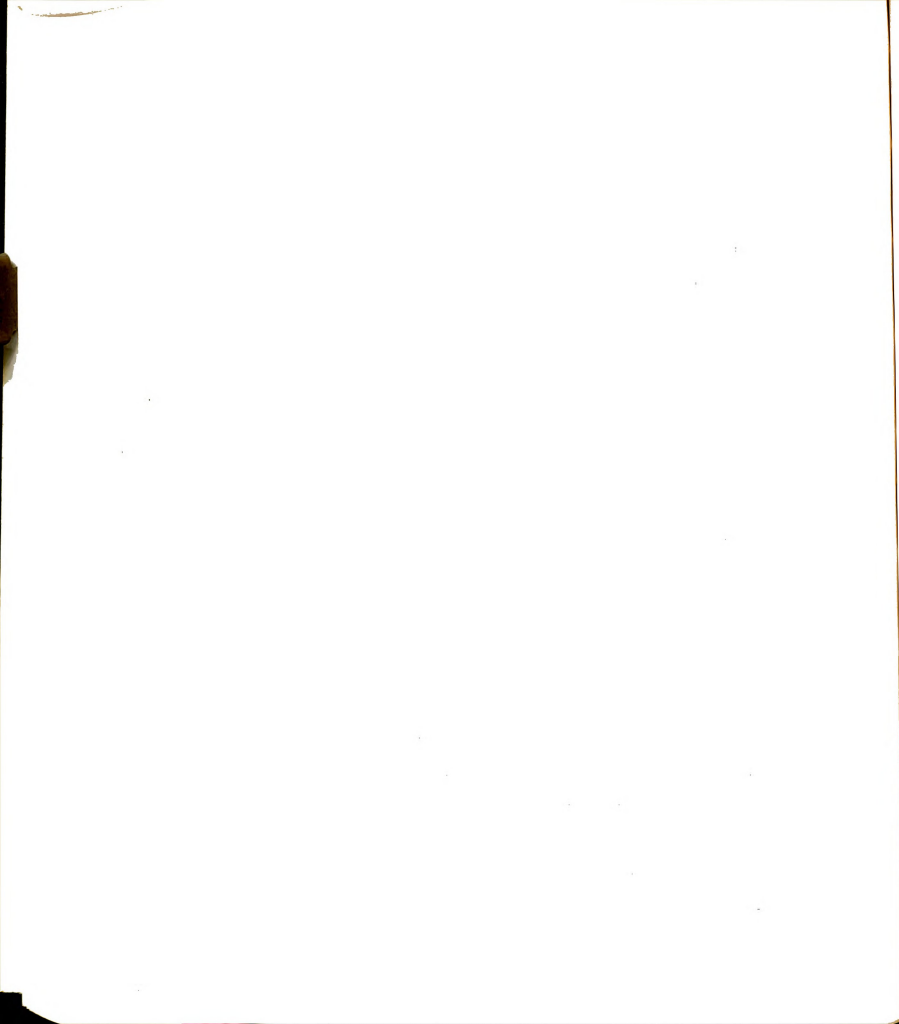
Not miracle but tragedy takes him back one last time in 1910, as he accompanies his desperately ill brother William back to New Hampshire to die. Suffering from his own declining health after returning to England in 1911, however, James is doubly determined not to be moved any more. William's widow Alice asks him to return in 1913, but he cannot:

Dearest Alice, I could come back to America (could come back on a stretcher) to die--but never, never to live. . . . when I think of how little Boston and Cambridge were of old ever my affair, or anything but an accident, for me, of the parental life to which I occasionally and painfully and losingly sacrificed, I have a superstitious terror of seeing them at the end of time again stretch out strange inevitable tentacles to draw me back and destroy me. . . . You see my capital--yielding all my income, intellectual, social, associational, on the old investment of so many years--my capital is here, and to let it slide would be simply to become bankrupt. (Letters, II, 306)



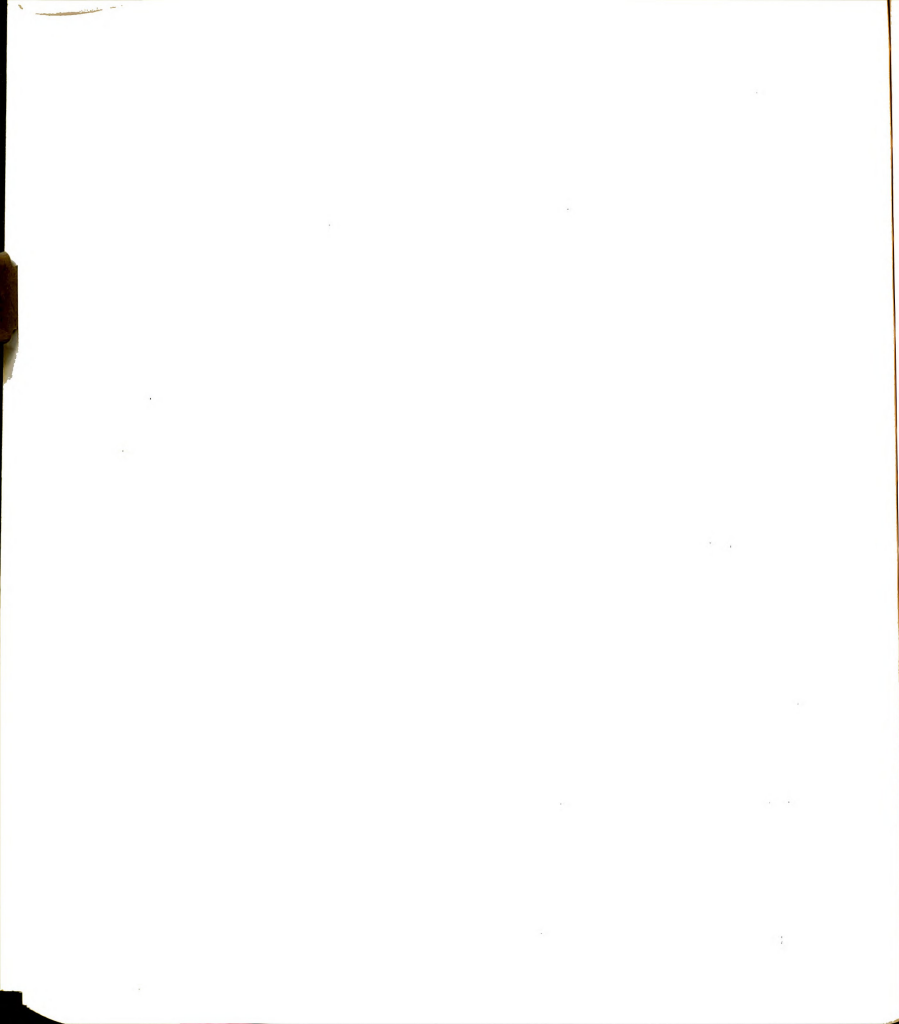
James knows that he must return to what is left him, some new "English period" or a much different version of the international theme. His sense of his American past can never be quite the same. With his last drop of nostalgia, he writes to Howells of the time when both were writing with confidence on American subjects as "those conditions in which, as 'quiet observers,' as careful painters, as sincere artists, we could still, in our native, our human and social element, know more or less where we were and feel more or less what we had hold of" (Letters, II, 224). Those times had passed irrecoverably for both. Nevertheless James is not finished with America. In the years immediately following his journeys in the United States, James reworks his reactions to the new society. And in nonfiction like The American Scene and in a string of new American tales, he expresses his final disillusion and disapproval unmistakably.

Even before embarking on the American tales, James shows growing disaffection with America and the international theme. "Fordham Castle" (1909), another attempt to picture "an up-town subject," however obliquely, conveys his rejection of the morals of that society. The "pair of little uptown identities" in the work appear only as the absent, insensitive, materialistic, social climbing wife and son of the two lonely characters left in the Swiss pension. The old "more or less mitigated, more or less embellished and disfigured, intensified or modernised



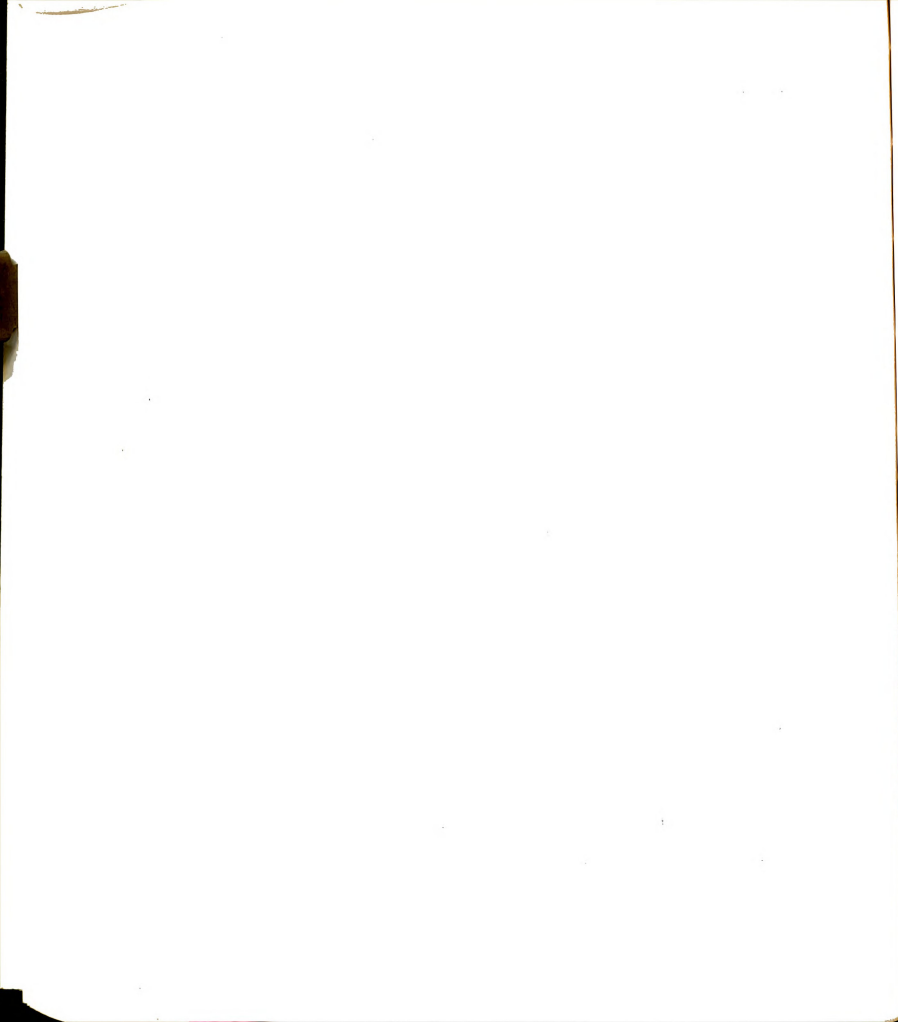
Daisy Millers" in the story for once "betrayed the conscious need of tricking-out their time-honoured case." James therefore gets away from "too unbroken an eternity of mere international young ladies" by focussing instead on the people they leave in their wake (Prefaces, 276-77). The result is not only a variation on the old international theme, but a condemnation of the degenerated Daisy Miller mentality worthy of the American tales that follow.

"Julia Bride" (1908) exposes the American girl and the society she dominates with much more acid than the earlier international tales about her. It portrays a girl who is far from the shining American princesses of the major phase and from the fresh and innocent Daisy Millers of the early period, though she is still related to each. Julia is much more caught in a web of social climbing and hypocrisy beyond her control than Daisy is; though the stories deal with similar social problems, "Julia" launches a more serious grievance against American society. James does not like the effects which the American courting customs depicted in "Daisy" have had since the eighties. So even though the story is "all tainted with the up-town debility" that plagued James (Prefaces, 264), not stretching downtown to criticize the heart of America, the story is tinged with naturalism and moves closer to social criticism than any of his earlier comedies. Julia is not just one more doll in the "too unbroken an eternity of mere international young ladies," for James is after bigger game:



. . . I really did n't take her for particularly important in herself, and would in fact have had no heart for her without the note, attaching to her as not in the least to poor little dim and archaic Daisy Miller, say; the note, so to call it, of multitudinous reference. I had had, for any confidence, to make it out to myself that my little frisking haunter, under private stress, of the New York public scene, was related with a certain intensity to the world about her; so that her case might lose itself promptly enough in a complexus of larger and stranger cases--even in the very air, by what seemed to promise, of the largest possibilities of comedy. What if she were the silver key, tiny in itself, that would unlock a treasure?--the treasure of a whole view of manners and morals, a whole range of American social aspects? (Prefaces, 263-64)

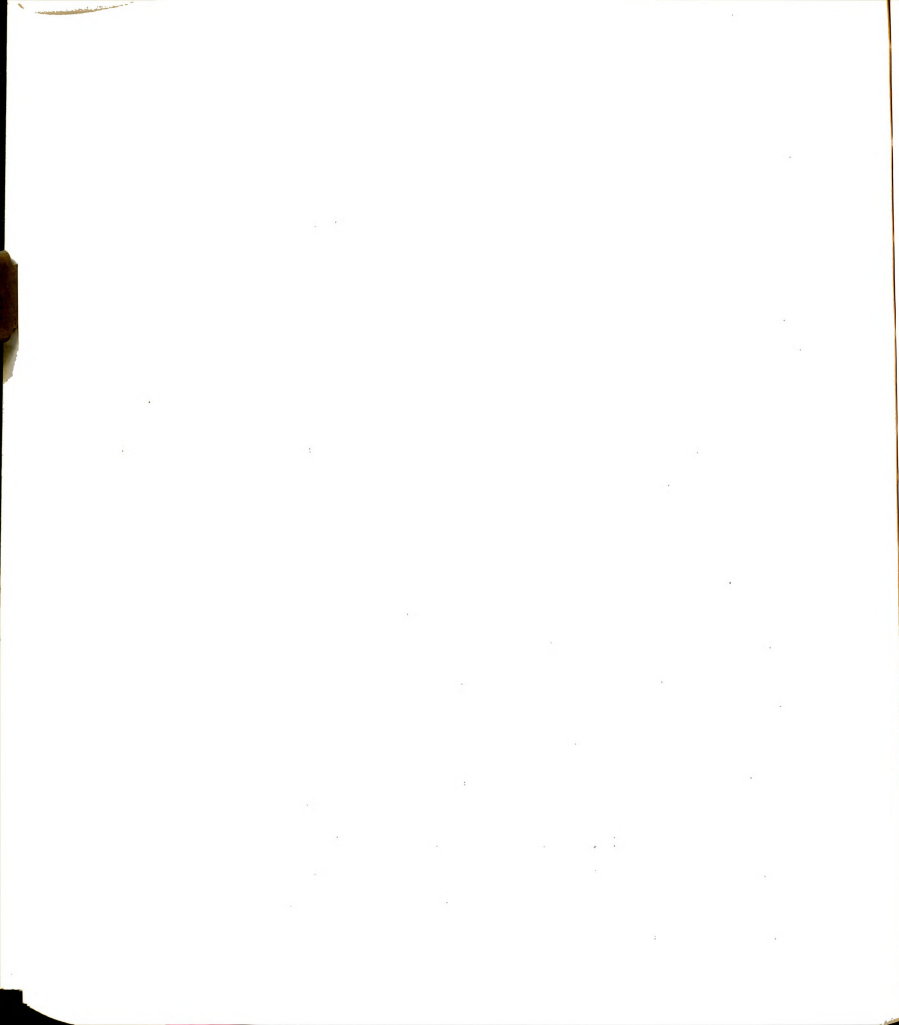
Something more documentary than the innocence of a Daisy Miller or a Francie Dosson is to be pictured, something with "consequences and remoter bearings," which reveals the effects on American society of the "freedom repeatedly to contract for the fond preliminaries of marriage which has been immemorially cherished by the American female young" (Prefaces, 264). "Presumably of the greatest . . . bearing on the social tone at large, on the manners, habits and ideals of communities clinging to it--of generations wedded, that is, to the young speculative exchange of intimate vows" (264), the practice of repeated engagement must "in some degree determine the mixture of elements in the young lady's consciousness and have much to 'say,' in one way or another, to the young lady's general case" (265). The custom may, in fact, have some causal relation to "that other almost equally prized social provision . . . the unrestricted freedom of remarriage in the lifetime of the parties, the



unhampered ease of rupture and repudiation for each" (265). Here is a fine perception of an early Hollywood-like morality. Julia Bride outdoes even Daisy Miller; she not only flirts with all, she gets engaged to them. The mother makes a career of three divorces; the daughter settles for six engagements.⁶

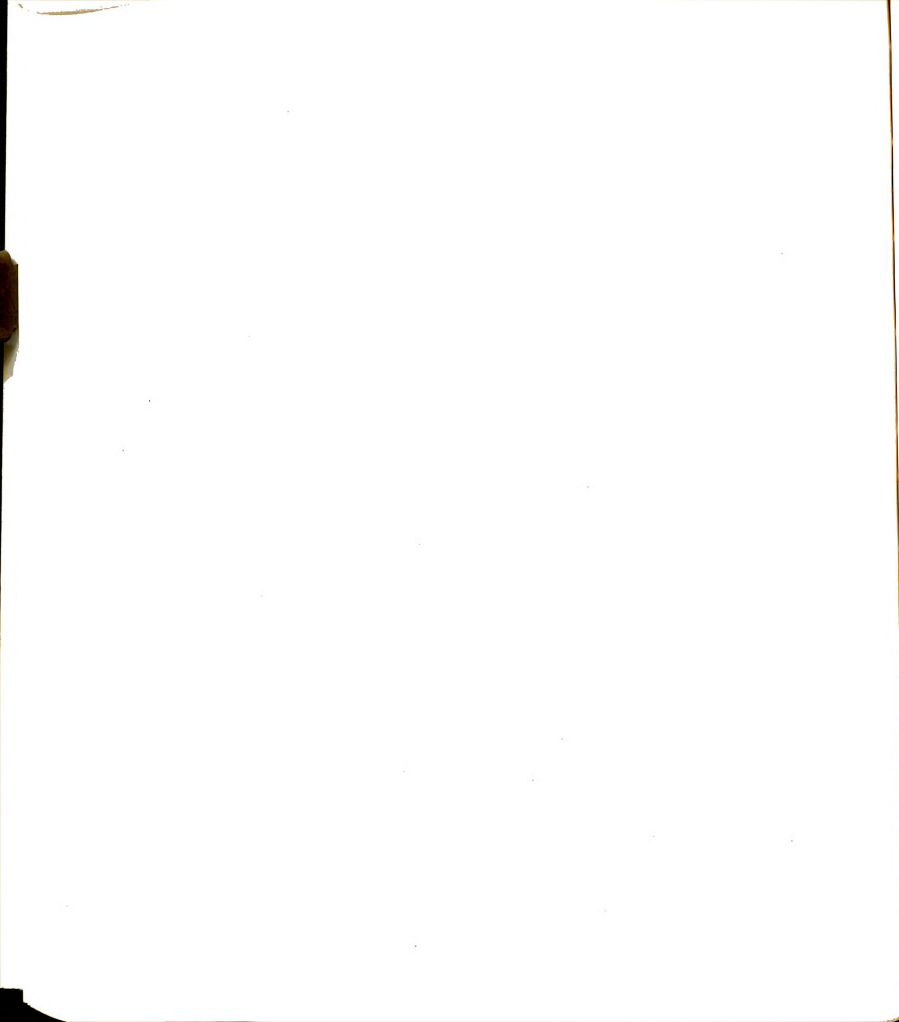
But this characterization of the story is not totally fair. In a way Julia is trapped by her mother's past. Since her mother has had three husbands, Julia has had three fathers; her past is a series of chunks of time with no continuity. To her the past is a shame she is forced to conceal and lie about. She senses the falsity of her mother's and her own position, but even though basically honest, she cannot avoid lying about the past for the benefit of others tainted by it--and in the hope of finally landing a suitor of her own. But in the end all she has left is memories, "ghosts" of former walks in the park and tours of the museum, for to old suitors like Murray Brush she "had ceased personally, ceased materially . . . to exist."⁷ She is a creature created by and caught in circumstances.

Except for Julia's beauty, which is a "primal curse" to her due to its social effect (158), only the worst of the conventional American characteristics in the old international theme remain. Mr. French, brought up in Germany, seems like "a high-caste Englishman" (160)--a combination almost as mixed in nationality as the Bordereaux. His main claim to Julia's consideration arises from his



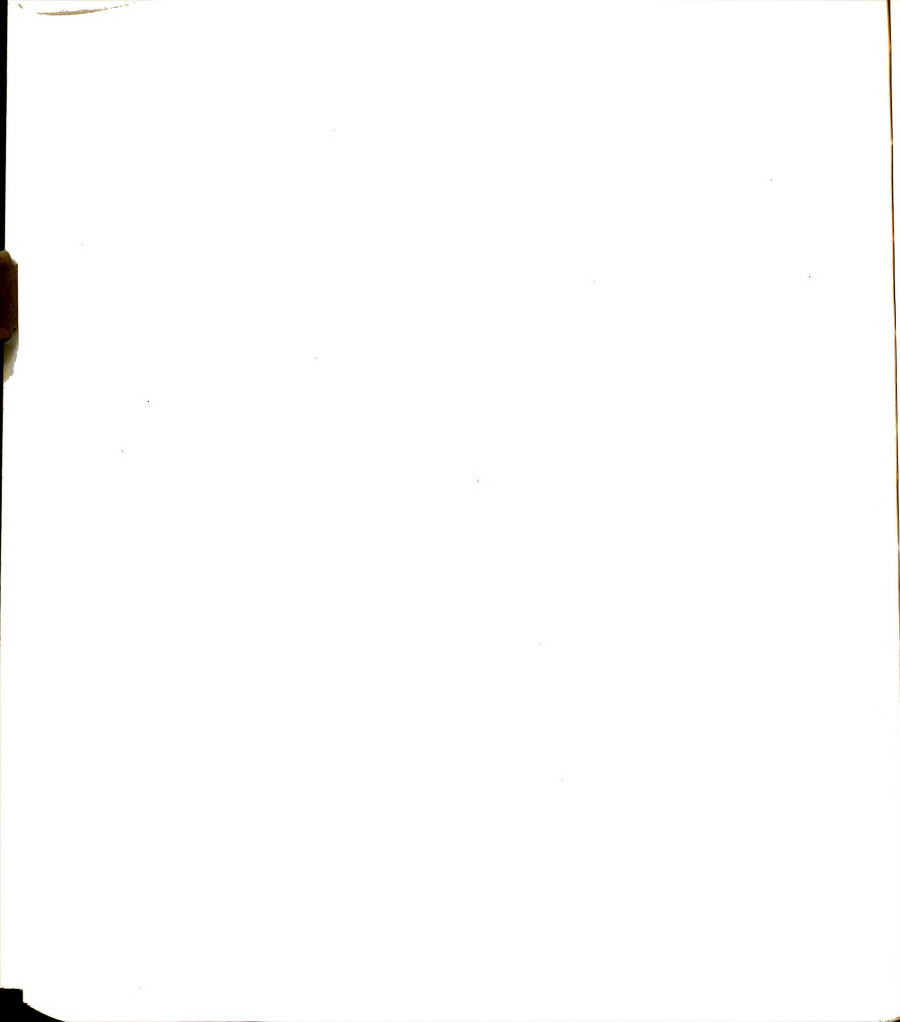
ability to inspire social climbing and grasping (191). Murray Brush, an American who went to Europe like so many others to find "the right sensibility" (176), returns still bristling with faults; he has only "intuition," not "understanding" and imagination (178). He is as common as his name. James is less optimistic now about the ability of the average compatriot to learn from Europe; American innocence shows a very negative side. Mrs. Drack, a huge woman with millions of dollars, is even worse, as her name suggests. Her face is a "featureless desert" worse than any blank American faces of the English period; she has an "innocent elephantine archness; she fairly rioted in that dimension of size" (171). Mrs. Drack is a parody of American worship of wealth and mere quantity.⁸

James uses his sense of past conventions of his international tales in order to construct such stores as "Julia Bride," reversing the conventions to contrast the old America with the new. But his personal sense of the past is much more evident in "The Jolly Corner" (1908) and "Crapy Cornelia" (1909), in which the agony of the main character is caused by the incongruity of the harsh present with the finer past he recalls. These stories combine criticism of the present with explicit comparisons to the past, and by focusing on the predicament of a character who wants to recover and preserve the past yet also adapt if possible to the present, the tales begin to formulate the problem to be faced by Ralph Pendrel in The Sense of the Past.



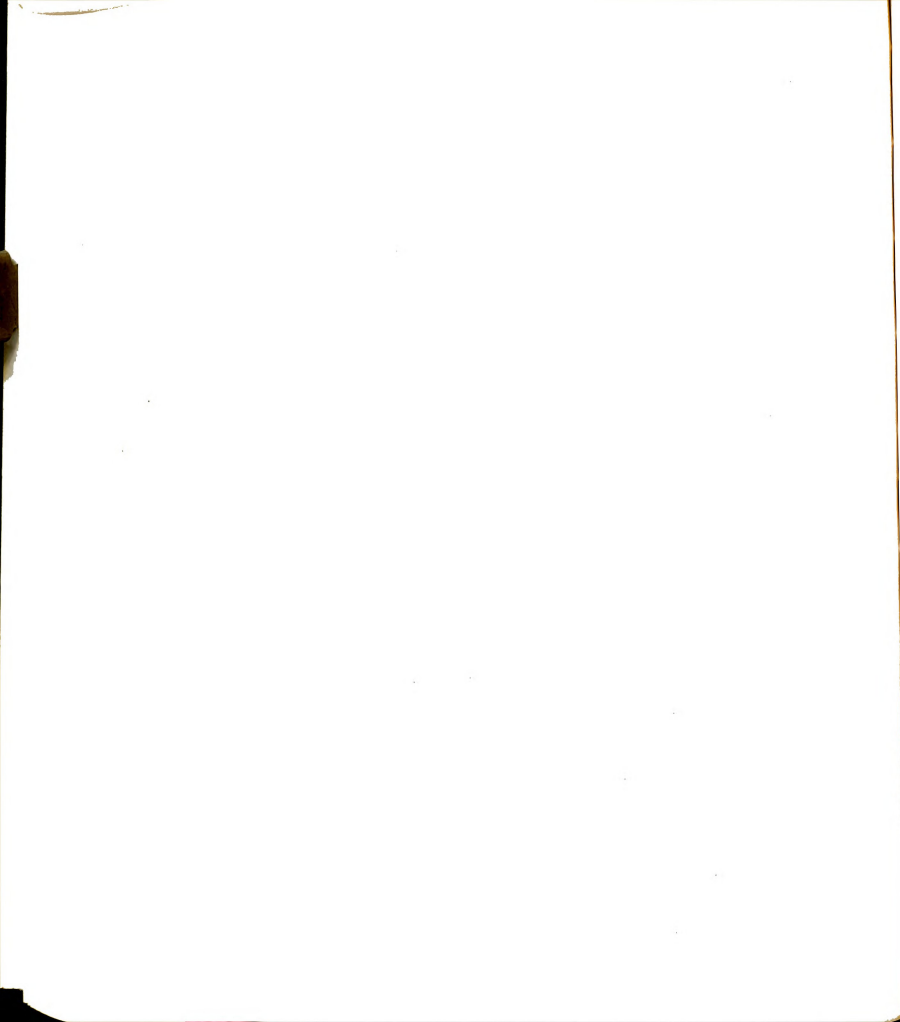
"The Jolly Corner" combines criticism of American society with a very interesting problem of identity. Rather clearly the situation of the hero, Spencer Brydon, parallels James's own position, so the possibility of a personal parable cannot be ignored. Although Leon Edel sees "no betrayal" in the tale, no sense in James that his country betrayed him by not evolving according to expectations, Edel finds evident "self doubt and questioning of his identity" by James in the work, and a resolution of that questioning in the rejection of American culture and reaffirmation of his cosmopolitan viewpoint.⁹ I shall essentially follow this interpretation in examining the sense of the past in the tale, though John Clair's interpretation is both intriguing and fruitful.¹⁰

Brydon has been away from America for thirty-three years (James had been away twenty) and is fifty-six when he returns (James was sixty). His reactions to America almost exactly parallel James's in The American Scene. His sense of the past had led him to expect something different; America seems too new, different, queer; it has changed too fast (Tales, XII, 193-94). Brydon feels fondness for the older homes still surviving, homes he once considered ugly, like James confronting the old brownstones once again. His sense of the past is so starved in the new America that anything old looks good, even "ancient" Alice Staverton, an unchanging landmark who is now an anachronism from the earlier age (196). Here "in the vast wilderness of the



wholesale, breaking through the mere gross generalization of wealth and force and success," Alice's home is a touch of frugality and tone. She is like Cornelia Rasch of "Crapy Cornelia," whose home is a refuge from the present to White-Mason. She is "a person whom nothing can have altered" (205), the essential landmark in time or static character, like Carteret of The Tragic Muse, who marks an era for the main character.

Just as James wonders what he would have been like had he stayed in the States, so Spencer Brydon tries to project his possible identity if he had remained in America, trying to reconcile his sense of the past with his apprehension of the present. He sees the "capacity for business and a sense of construction" in America, but "these virtues, so common all round him now, had been dormant in his own organism" (196). Henry Adams says he would have liked to help build the railroads if he had been able; Brydon begins to feel that he could have: "If he had but stayed at home he would have anticipated the inventor of the skyscraper." He had a "real gift," he thinks, and if he had only stayed home, he could have turned his gift into a gold-mine (197). James probably had no such delusions, but they do parallel his desire to start over and remain an American. The worlds of finance and technology were always foreign to his abilities, or so he professes, and even in his own field, he did not think that he and Howells had imaginations grasping enough to make much out of American materials. Nevertheless, he no doubt

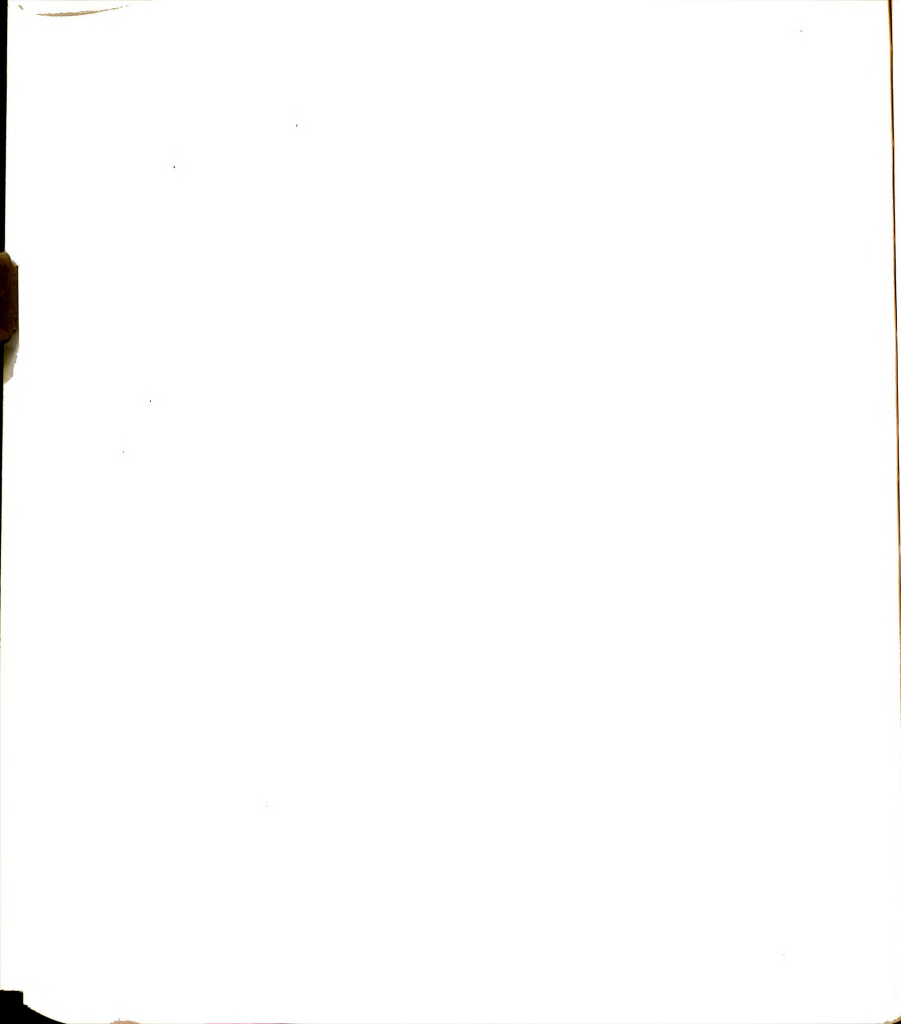


could not help wondering what he might have become, and "The Jolly Corner" seems to be a parable giving his own assessment of the probable consequence of having remained in America.

When Brydon returns to the States after his long stay abroad, only Alice Staverton and the boyhood house on the "jolly corner" in New York are left of his past, and the house is as much the haven of might-have-beens as of actual history. Inside it, nonetheless, his sense of the past quivers. The very doorknobs "suggested the pressure of the palms of the dead":

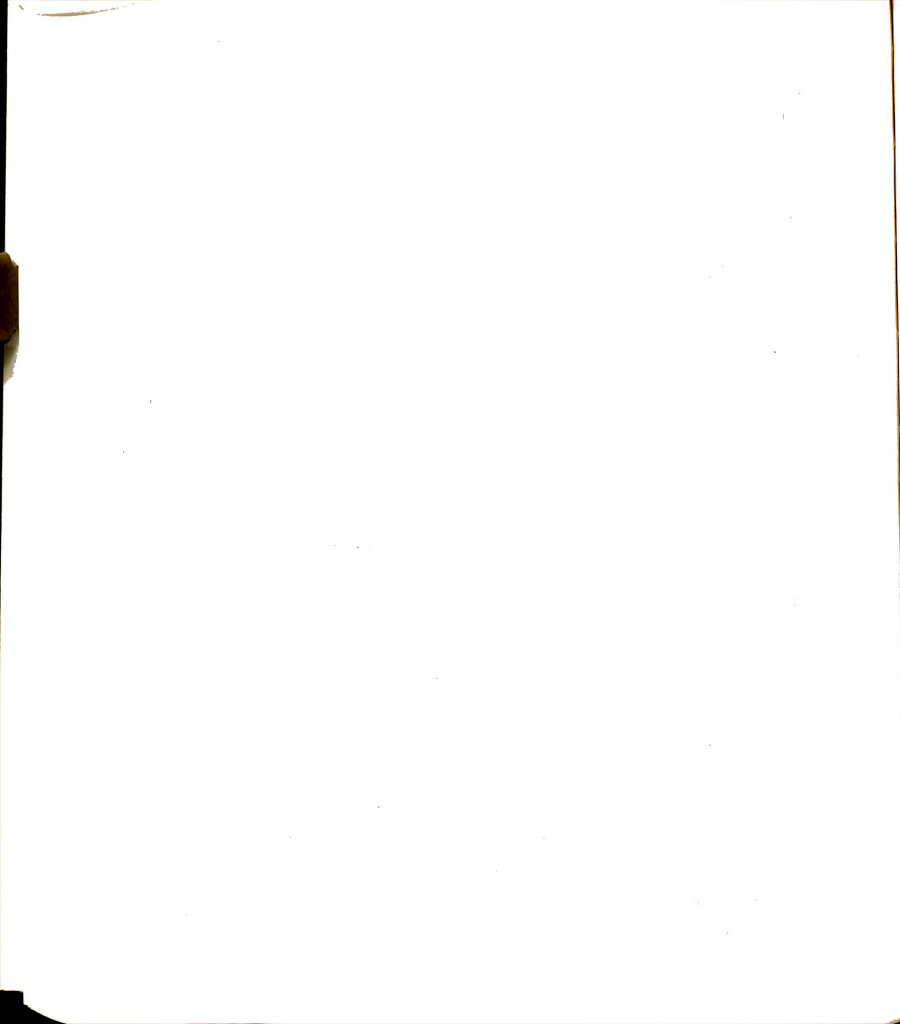
The seventy years of the past in fine that these things represented, the annals of nearly three generations, counting his grandfather's, the one that had ended there, and the impalpable ashes of his long extinct youth, float in the very air like microscopic motes. (201)

Somewhat like Ralph Pendrel entering his English house in The Sense of the Past to apprehend what it would have been like to live a century before, Brydon enters his house each night in quest of his old identity and some sense of what staying in America would have done to him: "What would it have made of me, what would it have made of me? I keep for ever wondering, all idiotically, as if I could possibly know!" (203). Brydon fears that he has "followed strange paths and worshipped strange gods" in going to Europe--the charge Granville Hicks and Van Wyck Brooks make against James--but hopes that eventually he can discover the "alter ego deep down somewhere within" him that is the essence of his American character (205).



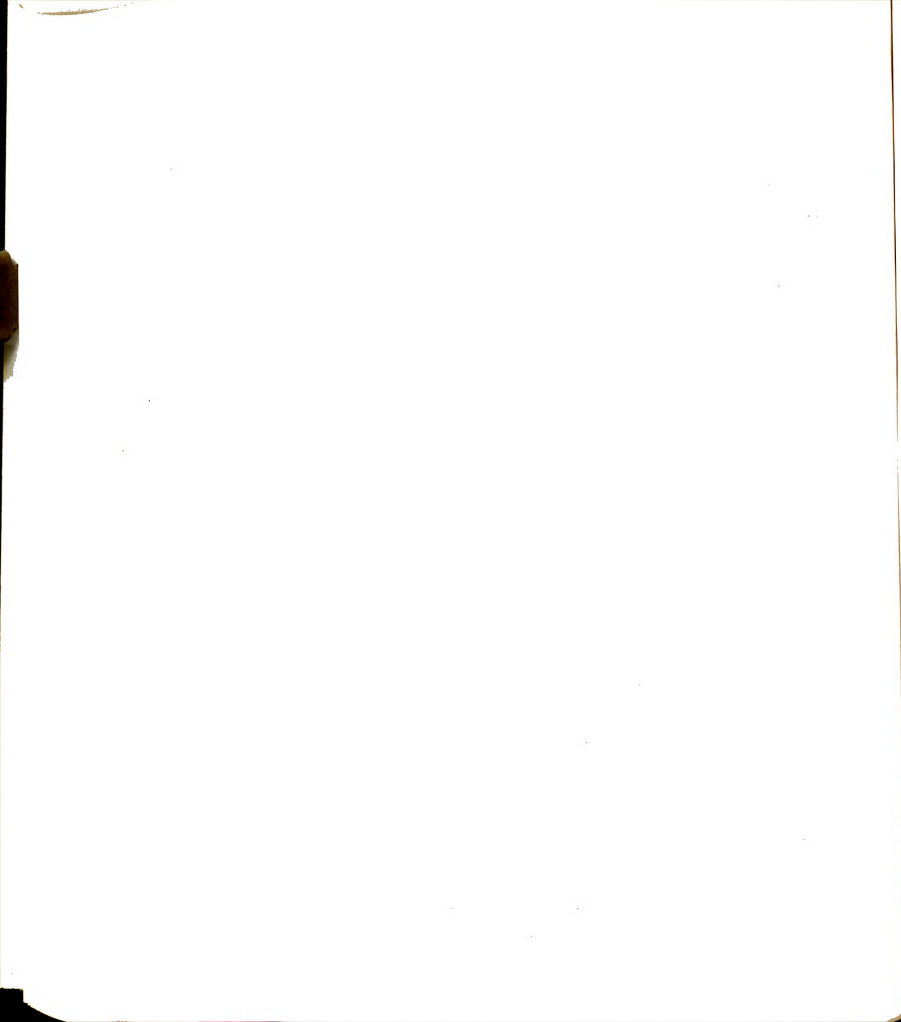
Almost like the pathological pilgrims to Europe of James's earliest stories, Brydon is so sensitive to the past that he is irrational at times.¹¹ There is just not enough evidence of the past left to justify his building the castles he builds. The quest becomes an obsession. Armed with a candle at first, then with nothing as his eyes grow accustomed to the dark, he haunts the house with alternating hope and despair, and finally with tense expectation. James makes it clear that the quest is pathological; when Brydon emerges in the mornings into the present outside world, the experience is compared to "the assault of the outer light of the Desert on the traveller emerging from an Egyptian tomb" (203). America may well be parallel to the desert, but Brydon is also being criticized--for being blinded to the quality of the present in America. He thinks he could have been great had he remained; he does not yet realize how sterile that doubtful greatness would have been.

At last, however, the quest is fulfilled, but with an illumination that Brydon does not expect. Thinking he has found the "ghost" of himself one night upon discovering a closed door which he is certain that he had left open, he flees from that door to a window to reconsider the confrontation he has been so ambivalently seeking. The opened window helps him break the spell, though not completely. He discovers that America is "hard-faced houses . . . Great builded voids, great crowded stillnesses" wearing "a sort of sinister mask" in the small hours of the night, a



"large collective negation" (220-21). When "he looked again at his watch," Brydon discovered "what had become of his time-value (he had taken hours for minutes--not, as in other tense situations, minutes for hours)" (221). His escapade had not intensified and broadened his perception of time, but had telescoped his vision, foreshortening the hours. Like the painter of the madonna of the future, he has been caught in a fantasy which has stolen his hours and made them seem only moments; like Ralph Pendrel and Marmaduke ("Maud-Evelyn"), he has run the risk of being trapped in a past of his own creation. Even after breathing fresher air from the window, Brydon is in danger: "His choked appeal from his open window had been the sole note of life, and he could but break off at last as for a worse despair" (221). Worried that he now has no choice, that his fate is determined, he is on the verge of suicide and of tearing the house down (222-23). His insanity is finally cured when he does encounter the man he might have been, finding dimly "the face of a stranger" and a hand with two fingers missing (224-26). He feels "sold," not because--as Clair maintains--the man is an impostor hired by Alice Staverton, but because he had expected his alter ego to be part of his repressed true self, and a gloriously desirable man. Instead he sees that he would have been crippled and insensitive, an identity created by social forces rather than a creative individual.

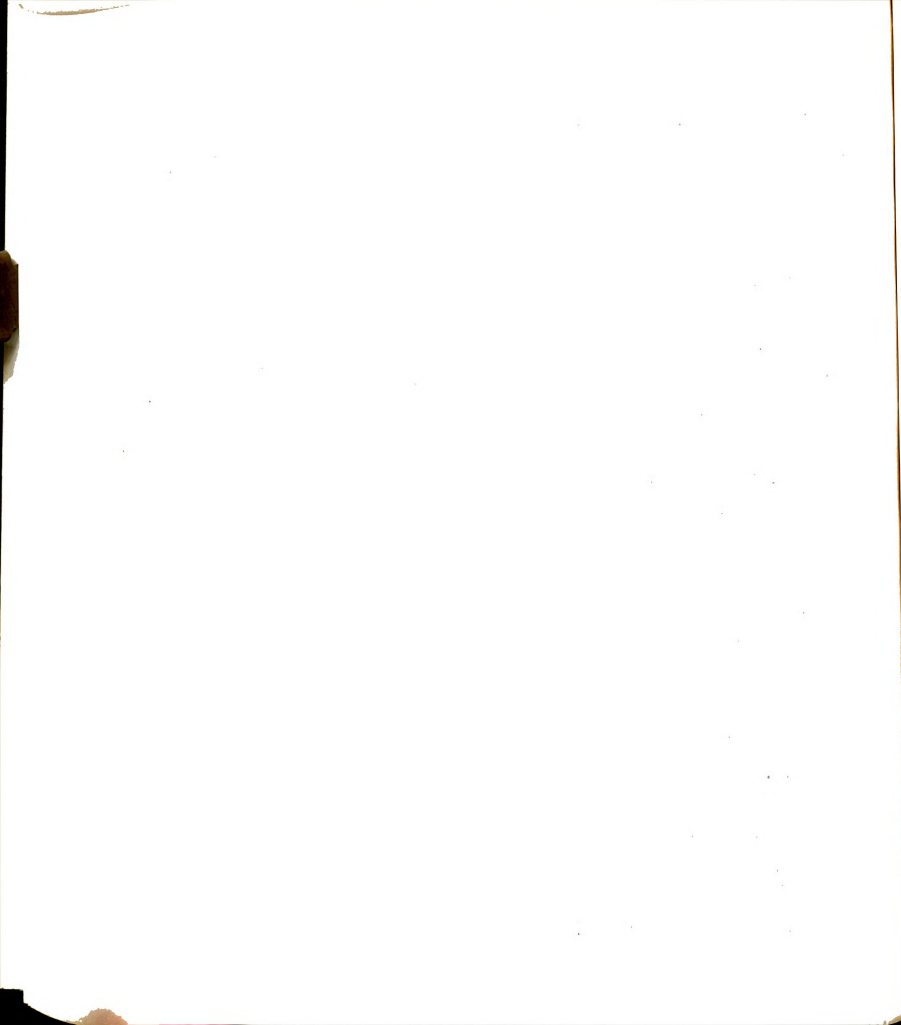
Fortunately Brydon has escaped the fate of being



captured by such an identity, just as James escaped by going to Europe. Like Ralph Pendrel, he has had a tremendous adventure: "He had come back, yes--come back from further away than any man but himself had ever travelled"; he has been "carried back . . . from . . . the uttermost end of an interminable grey passage" (227). Like James looking at the picture of himself as a youth, Brydon decides that "It must have been that I was . . . Yes--I can only have died" (228). James will let his American identity that might have been forever rest here in peace.

Another character faced with a choice between America's past and her present, a choice of the life style he will follow, is the hero of "Crapy Cornelia" (1909). White-Mason is a middle-aged New Yorker (forty-eight) who feels passed-by and out of place, having been turned down by three ladies he wished to marry. Now at last a lady, rich Mrs. Worthingham, seems to be leaning in his direction. The problem is that she represents an America not comfortable for White-Mason. Her house is terribly bright and new inside, and the lady herself seems to have "an iridescent surface, the shimmering interfusion of her various aspects" (Tales, XII, 338 f.). She has the "twenty superficial graces" of "high modernity":

She was "up" to everything, aware of everything--if one counted from a short enough time back (from week before last, say, and as if quantities of history had burst upon the world within the fortnight); she was likewise surprised at nothing, and in that direction one might reckon as far ahead as the rest of her

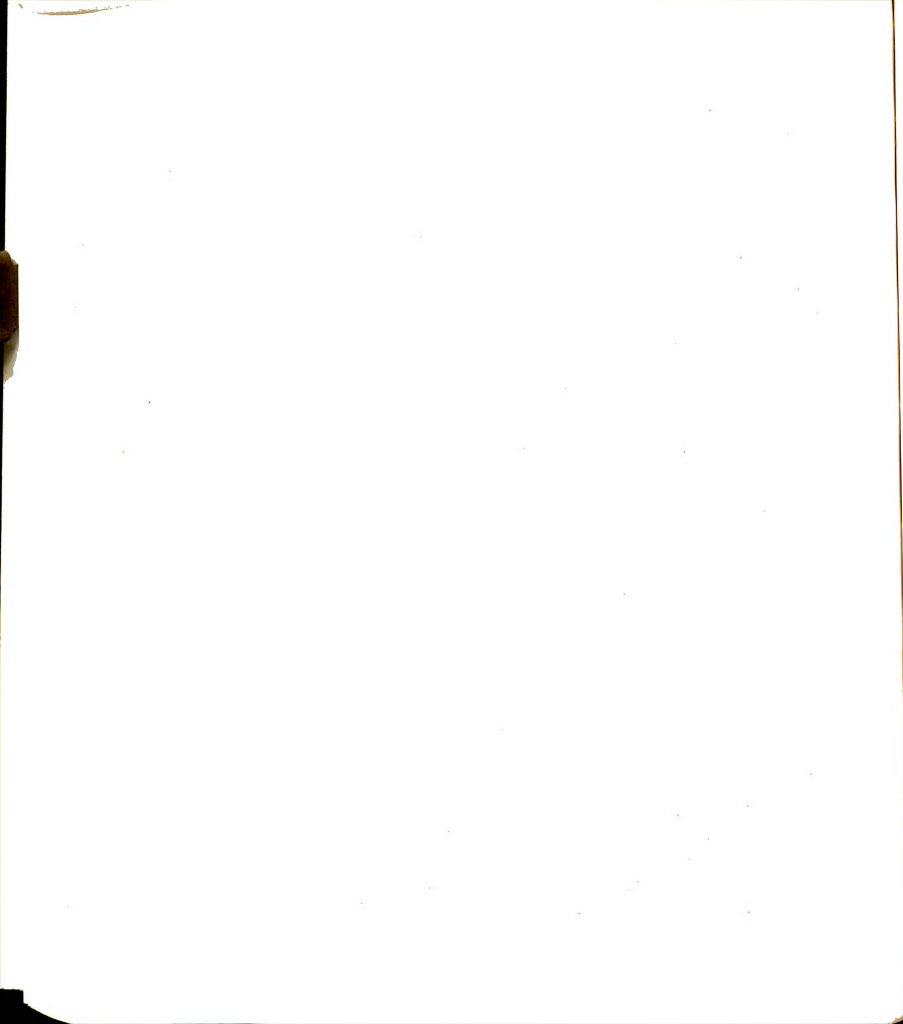


lifetime, or at any rate the rest of his, which was all that would concern him: it was as if the suitability of the future to her tastes was what she most took for granted, so that he could see her, for all her Dresden-china shoes and her flutter of wondrous befrilled contemporary skirts, skip by the side of the coming ages as over the floor of a ball-room, keeping step with its monstrous stride and prepared for every figure of the dance. (342)

Mrs. Worthingham is another American Adam newly created, without any past or any sense of it. She is a creature solely of the present and the future, like Dosson of The Reverberator, representing what James most dislikes about the new culture. His old "passionless pilgrims" are no longer nouveau riche nor even pilgrims; they are settled insensitive members of high American society.

White-Mason is attracted to her because he has "an ideal of adjusted appreciation, of courageous curiosity, of fairly letting the world about him, a world of constant breathless renewals and merciless substitutions, make its flaming assault on its own inordinate terms" (339). Like James planning his return to America, he wants to experience everything; he will try anything once. He is even willing to give up his old identity, which Mrs. Worthingham cannot recognize in any case:

That indeed . . . was of the very essence of the newness and freshness and beautiful, brave social irresponsibility by which she had originally dazzled him; just exactly that circumstance of her having no instinct for any old quality or quantity or identity, a single historic or social value, as he might say, of the New York of his already almost legendary past. (348)



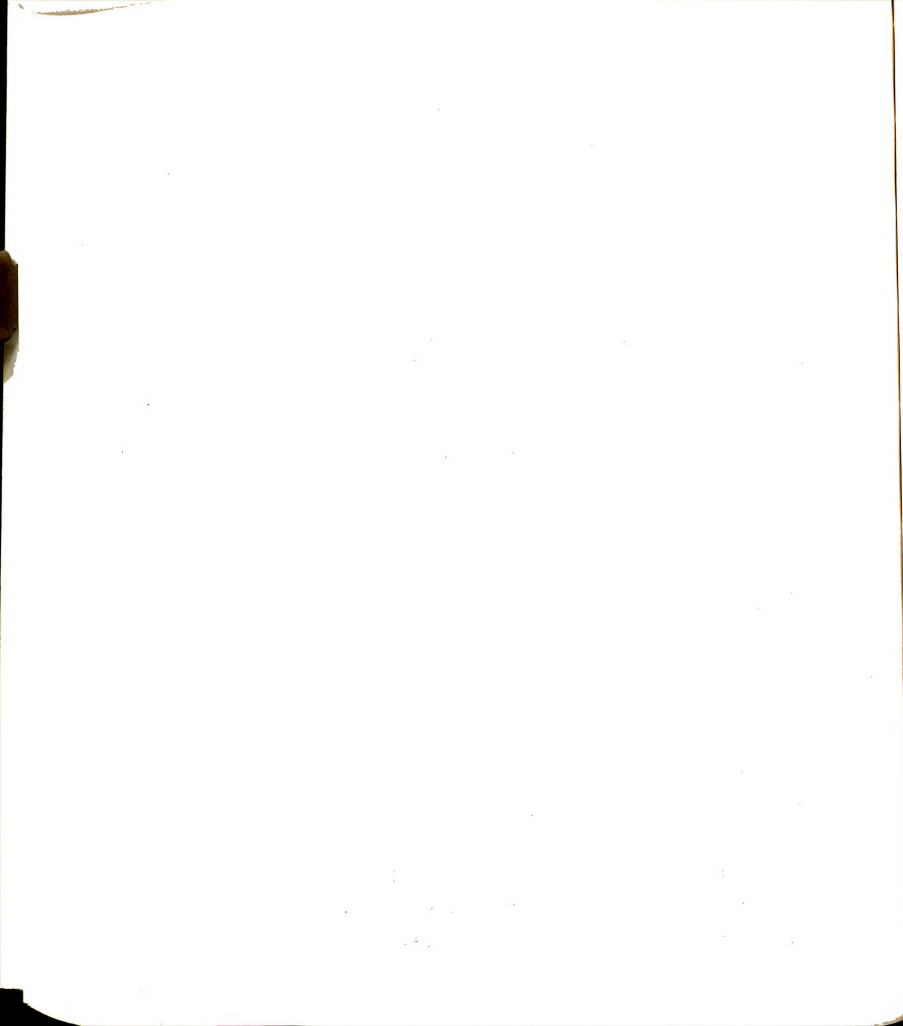
Nevertheless, his real preference is not the new at all; he just has no other choice. "The few scattered representatives of a society once 'good'--"rare men in a vast desolation" James adds in Latin--are completely dominated by impossible figures like Mrs. Worthingham (349). White-Mason's true preferences come out in passages like these:

The high pitch of interest, to his taste, was the pitch of history, the pitch of acquired and earned suggestion, the pitch of association, in a word; so that he lived by preference, incontestably, if not in a rich gloom, which would have been beyond his means and spirits, at least amid objects and images that confessed to the tone of time. (339)

Newness was value in the piece . . . if only because maturer tone was after all most appreciable and most consoling when one staggered back to it, wounded, bleeding, blinded, from the riot of the raw--or, to put the whole experience more prettily, no doubt, from excesses of light. (339-40)

White-Mason is partly blinded by the harsh light of contemporary American society, but he is not long blind to it, as Spencer Brydon is. He knows he must wear eyeshades to protect his vision of the past.

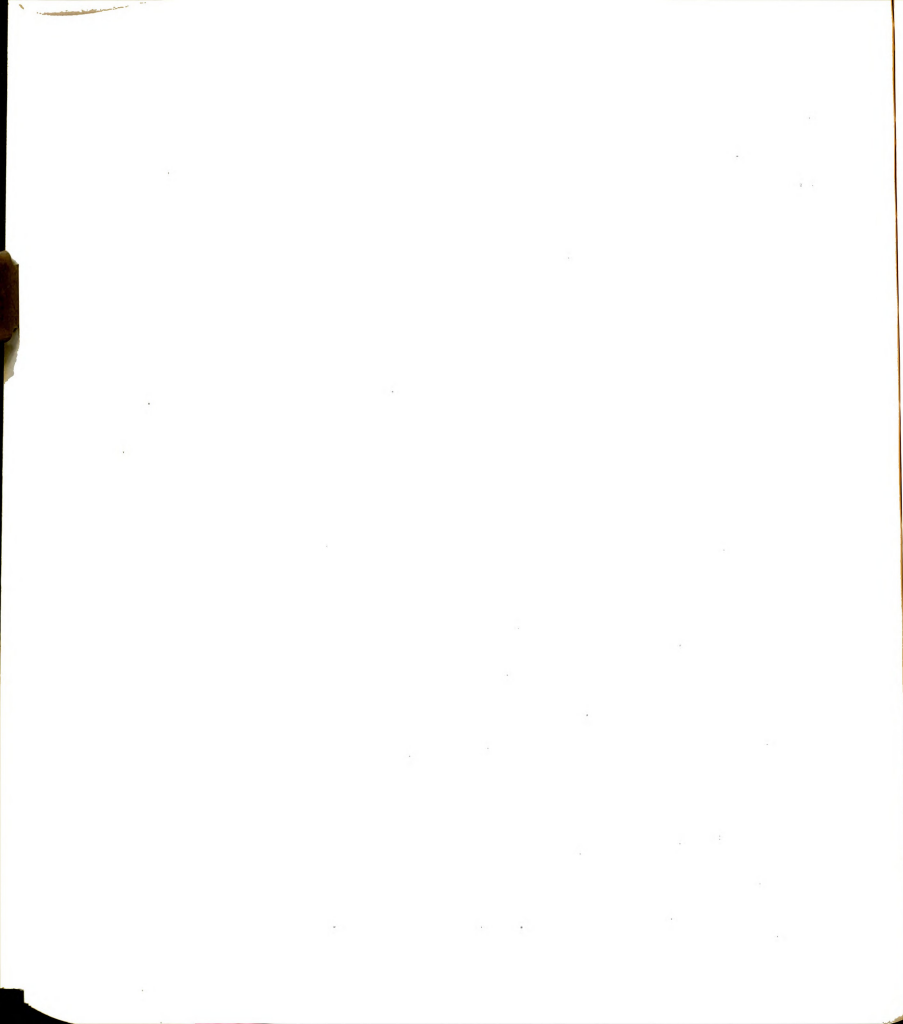
Images of light and dark, representing the harsh present and the more subdued past, surround White-Mason as he makes his choice. He wants Mrs. Worthingham for "lighting up his autumn afternoon of life," and "her outlook took form to him suddenly as a great square sunny window that hung in assured fashion over the immensity of life" (341-43). Mrs. Worthingham represents for him "the condition, so ideal, of being shut out from nothing and yet of having . . .



none of the burden or worry of anything"; she is social and economic security for the twilight years. But he does not marry her. A dark figure from the periphery of his past blocks his view of Mrs. Worthingham, a figure "rotund" and "oddly unassertive" but casting a shadow ages longer than the modern lady's (343-45).

Renewing acquaintance with Cornelia Rasch sours White-Mason on any marriage with Mrs. Worthingham. He recalls his old style of life as a conservative New Yorker, and even though Cornelia is not personally attractive, her quality and tone make Mrs. Worthingham seem the ultimate in incompatible social impossibilities. Like Strether when Jim Pocock recalls the late Mr. Newsome, White-Mason now shudders to think of "the doubtless very queer spectre of the late Mr. Worthingham" (349). And what had originally attracted him to her, the complete lack of a sense of the past, is now a detriment. Yes, she would marry him, as the other three would not, but she would bury his identity to do it; she could not appreciate him for what he was and is; only Cornelia can do that:

Mrs. Worthingham had no data . . . No data, he felt, for a conception of the sort of thing the New York of "his time" had been in his personal life--the New York so unexpectedly, so vividly, and, as he might say, so perversely called back to his senses by its identity with that of poor Cornelia's time; since even she had had a time, small show as it was likely to make now, and his time and hers had been the same. Cornelia figured to him while he walked away as by contrast and opposition a massive little bundle of data . . . wherever he might touch her . . . he would . . . recognize some small extrusion of history. (352)



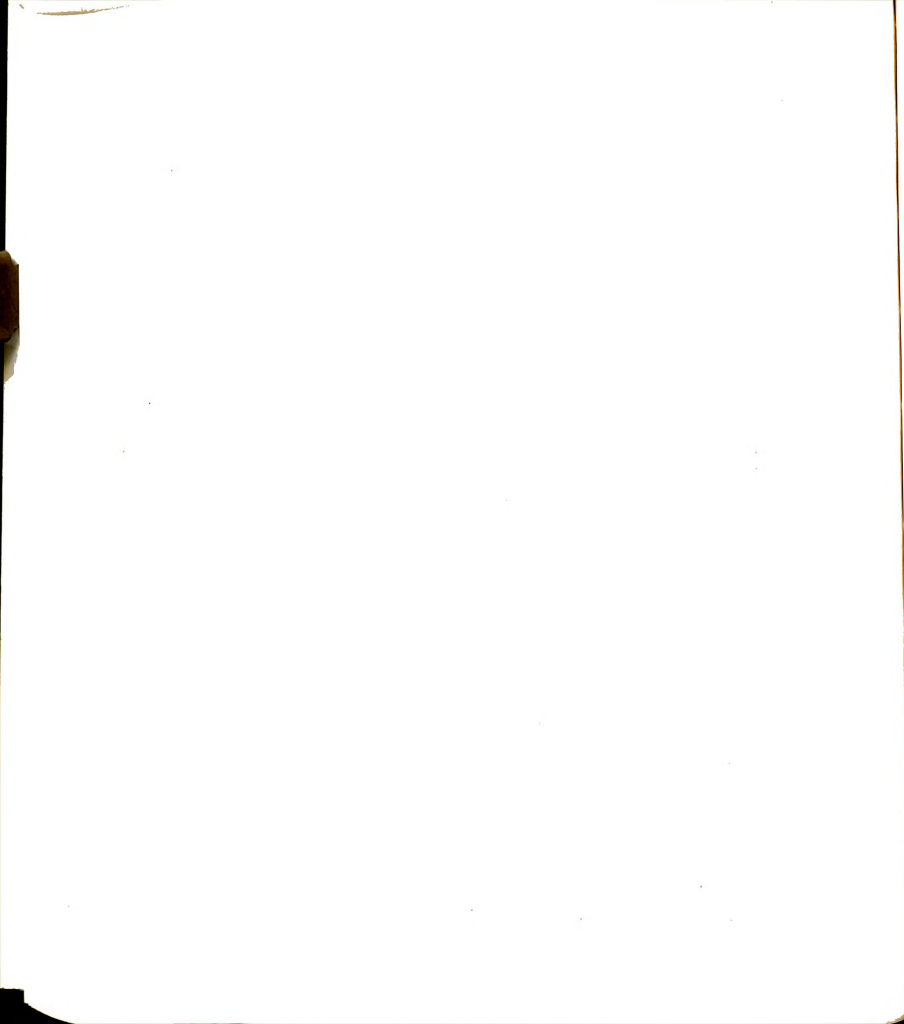
Even the poorest representatives of the earlier time have more to offer than the finest of the new. Proudly, White-Mason refuses to give up the little that is left. Mrs. Worthingham not only has no past, she has no delicacy and no manners. She condescends to Cornelia so badly that White-Mason savagely attacks the future society of America:

This was clearly going to be the music of the future--that if people were but rich enough and furnished enough and fed enough, exercised and sanitated and manicured, and general advised and advertised and made "knowing" enough, advertis enough . . . all they had to do for civility was to take the amused ironic view of those who might be less initiated. In his time, when he was young or even when he was only but a little less middle-aged, the best manners had been the best kindness . . . (348)

Social polish is a very superficial and commercial article in the new American culture.

"Crapy Cornelia" is a simple, nostalgic tribute to a slightly finer American past. White-Mason knows his era is gone; "the last nail in the coffin of the poor dear extinct past had been planted for him by his having thus to reach his antique contemporary through perforation of the newest newness." He and Cornelia are in a "rare little position . . . as conscious, ironic, pathetic survivors together of a dead and buried society" (353). Pitiably, all that is left is a thin veneer of the past, which they must eke out as best they can:

But we can't afford at this time of day not to help each other to have had--well, everything there was, since there's no more of it now, nor any way of coming by it except so; and therefore



let us make together, let us make over and recreate, our lost world; for which we have after all and at the worst such a lot of material. (357)

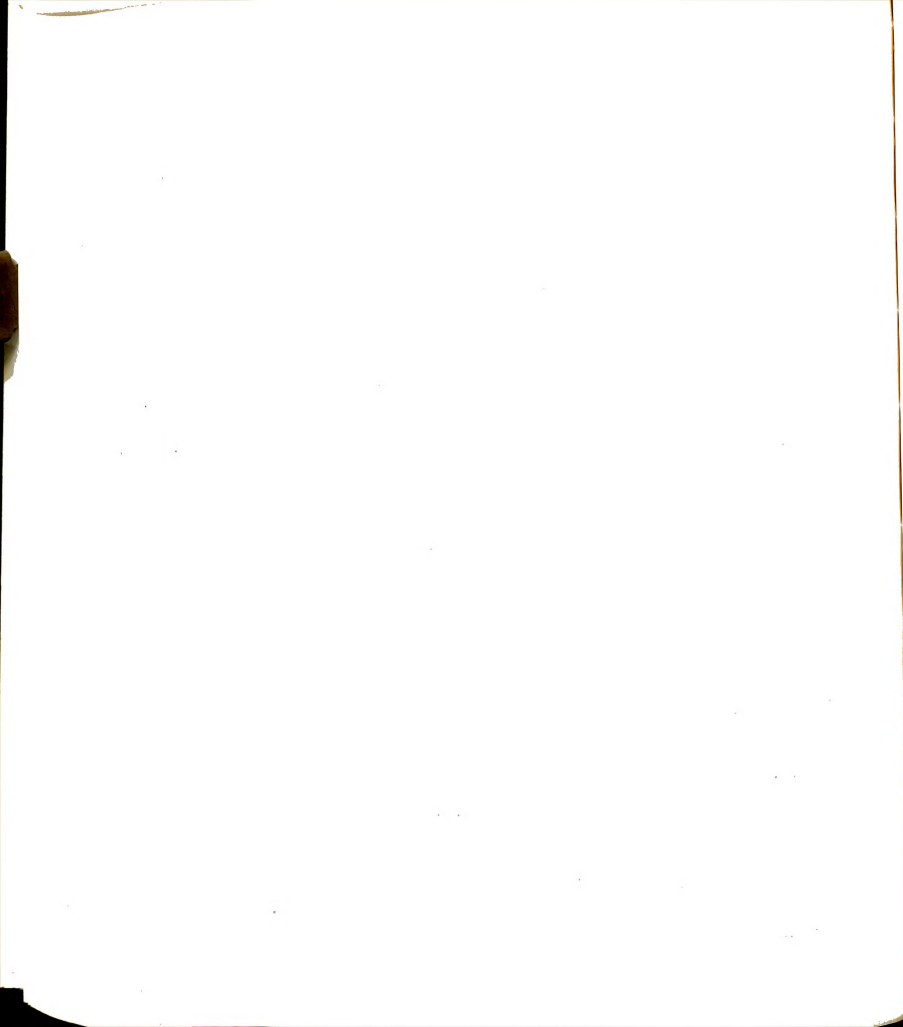
The nostalgia is not so thick that it obscures how thin even the America of twenty years before was to James; it is only when compared with "the new, the latest, the luridest power of money" that "the ancient reserves and moderations and mediocrities" seem so valuable:

These last struck him as showing by contrast the old brown surface and tone as of velvet rubbed and worn, shabby, and even a bit dingy, but all soft and subtle and still velvety--which meant still dignified; whereas the angular facts of current finance were as harsh and metallic and bewildering as some stacked "exhibit" of ugly patented inventions, things his mediaeval mind forbade his taking in. (354)

Such passages inevitably remind the reader of James's own "mediaeval" mind, his and Henry Adams's bewilderment before machinery of a technological age, and James's failure to "crack" the downtown New York world of finance. And White-Mason's reminiscences of the area "south of Thirtieth Street and north of Washington Square," not far from James's vanished home, sound like nostalgic passages from The American Scene:

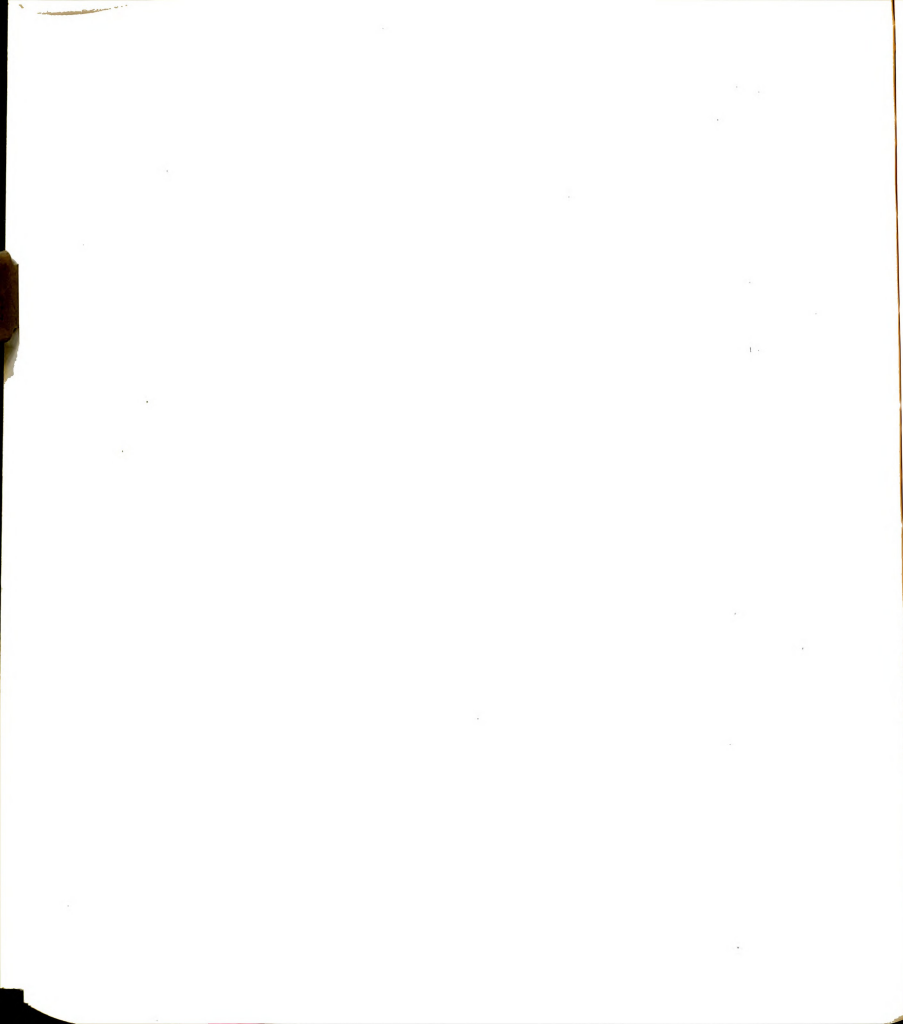
. . . those days, those spacious, sociable, Arcadian days, that we flattered ourselves we filled with the modern fever . . . were so different from any of these arrangements of pretended hourly time that dash themselves forever to pieces as from the fiftieth floors of sky-scrapers. (357)

Nostalgia lies thicker than the dust on Cornelia's relics. White-Mason is enthralled: "'Do you mean you can tell me



things--?' It was too beautiful to believe. 'About what really was?'--Cornelia finishes the hopeful sentence (364). She can help him live with "these modern wonders--such as they are!" (365). Both she and White-Mason feel old, left behind by the fast pace of what is called progress (366-67). White-Mason has decided that the present is not worth keeping up with. In Cornelia's flat, even with its bright fire, he needs no dark glasses to filter out glare. For Cornelia's light has the tone of time; and if her crepe and his inertia suggest death as well as age, the tale is not criticizing these figures so much as recognizing that their mellow old world is dead and deserves commemoration. For James, also feeling old, has turned for a final warm parting with a more compatible past before returning to a cold new world that seems not so much brave as utterly ruthless.¹²

James's criticism of America continues right up to the war. "A Round of Visits" (1910) portrays Mark Monteith returning to America after being swindled by an American friend left in charge of his affairs. Mark's renewal of his old acquaintances is far from happy; Florence Ash is about to be divorced from her husband, and Newton Winch (a casual acquaintance) turns out to be a swindler similar to the one who disrupted his life abroad. Winch redeems himself by his sensitivity in perceiving Mark's troubles, but his only expiation for his crimes is suicide--hardly an optimistic solution for American society to follow.

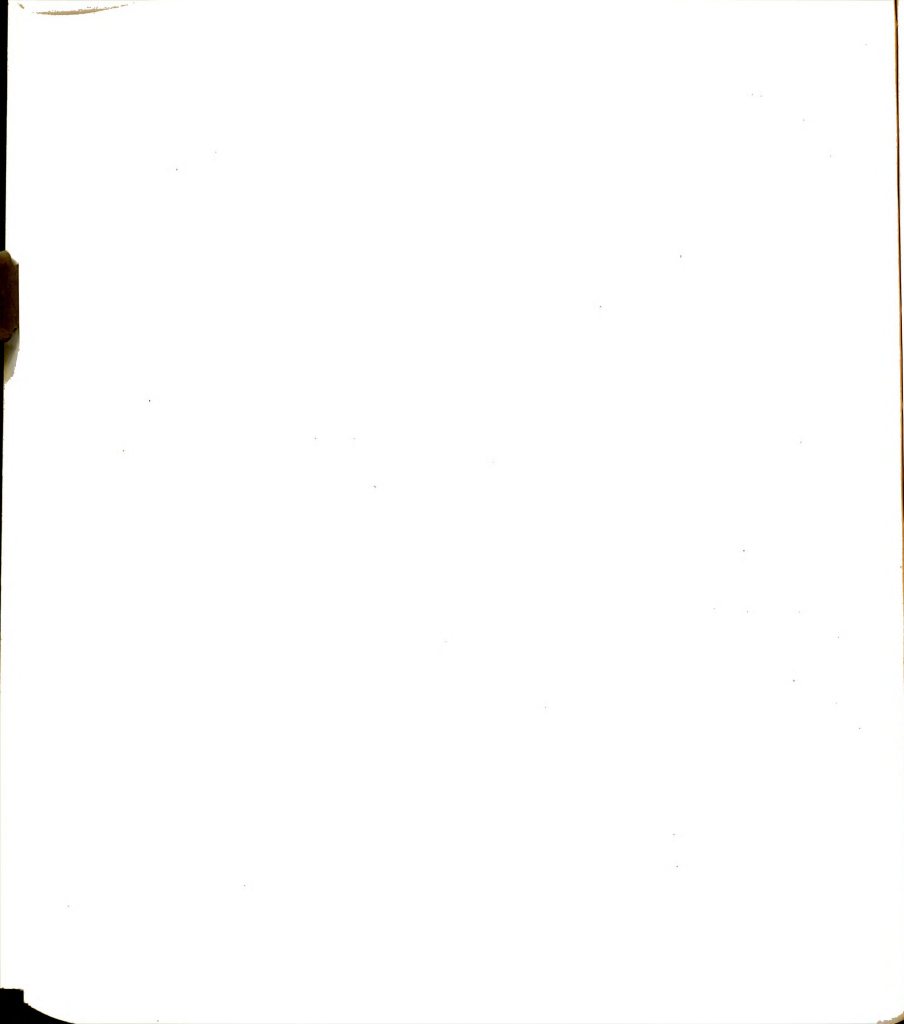


The Outcry (1911) is no more flattering to America.

Breckenridge Bender, the American collector who has come to buy the painting at stake in the work, is a poor successor to Adam Verver, and belongs in the line of blank American faces lately disgraced by Mrs. Drack:

Fortune . . . had simply overlooked and neglected his vast wholly-shaven face, which thus showed not so much for perfunctorily scamped as for not treated . . . at all. Nothing seemed to have been done for it but what the razor and the sponge, the tooth-brush and the looking-glass could officiously do; it had in short resisted any possibly finer attrition at the hands of fifty years of offered experience. It had developed on the lines, if lines they could be called, of the mere scoured and polished and initialled "mug" rather than to any effect of a composed physiognomy; though . . . its wearer carried this featureless disk as with the warranted confidence that might have attended a warning headlight or a glaring motor-lamp.¹³

Not until the war years will James review the positive side of America, trying to put together the pieces of the international theme one more time to see what he can make of them--the artist eternally reassimilating the past to relate it to the present and the future. The picture he formulates, unfinished when he dies but carefully outlined, frames the final section of this chapter.



Notes

¹Cf. Letters, I, pp. 309-11.

²Letters, I, p. 338; cf. II, 477-78.

³Garland's evidence, recorded in Roadside Meetings (New York, 1930), p. 461, and quoted by Bewley, pp. 70-71n, is hearsay, but the testimony rings true: "He became very much in earnest at last and said something which surprised and gratified me. 'If I were to live my life over again,' he said in a low voice, and fixing upon me a somber glance, 'I would be an American. I would steep myself in America, I would know no other land. I would study its beautiful side. The mixture of Europe and America which you see in me has proved disastrous. It has made of me a man who is neither American nor European. I have lost touch with my own people, and live here alone. My neighbours are friendly, but they are not of my blood, except remotely. As a man grows old he feels these conditions more than when he is young. I shall never return to the United States, but I wish I could.'" Garland's memory may distort some sentiments, but overall the passage parallels scattered sentiments in James's letters remarkably well.

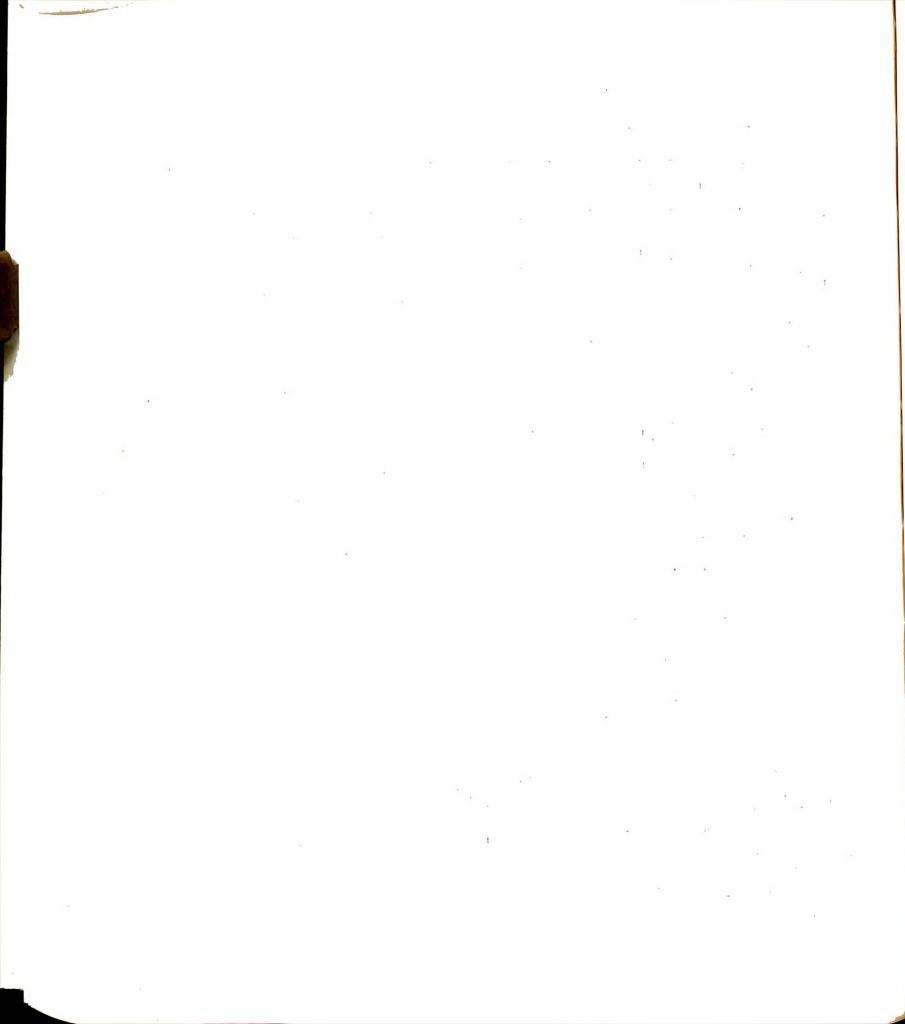
⁴James writes to Mrs. Wharton, for example, November 19, 1911, that The Golden Bowl now seems an "arduous and thankless task," and its "vague verbosity" no longer pleases him so much as the "steel structure of the other form," plays. --Letters, II, p. 209. Volume and page references in the following paragraphs are to the Letters.

⁵AS, p. 121; cf. p. 64. Page references in parentheses now refer to The American Scene.

⁶Cf. Wegelin's treatment, p. 159.

⁷Tales, XII, pp. 177, 187-88. Page references following are to this edition.

⁸How differently James can feel about representatives of American wealth in the final years is suggested by a comparison of Mrs. Drack with Rosanna Gaw of The Ivory Tower, who parallels her in physical size but not at all in character; or by comparing her with Aurora Coyne of The Sense of the Past, whom Cargill interprets from her name as a representative of America's "rising millions." James still rejects the ugly commercial sources of American wealth and the predatory tycoons like Abel Gaw in The Ivory Tower, but finds some wealthy Americans a bit more tolerable than Mrs. Drack, if not quite so admirable as the heiresses of the major phase.



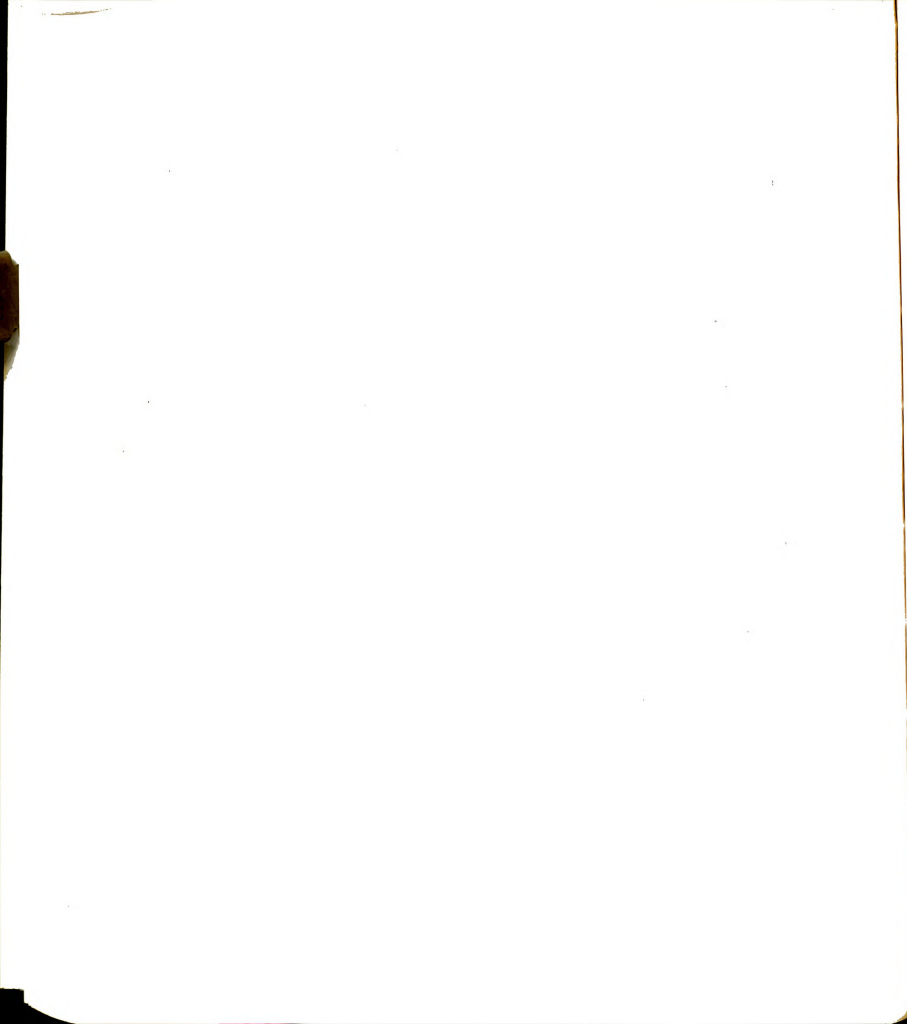
⁹Introduction, Tales, XII, p. 8. Page references are to this volume.

¹⁰I have not yet ascertained the accuracy of Clair's remarks on the tale, in The Ironic Dimension in the Fiction of Henry James (Pittsburgh, 1965), pp. 17-36, which make Brydon's sense of the past more subject to pathology than parable, but the interpretation makes no essential difference to my argument. Even if Alice Staverton is a schemer as Clair argues, then modern American society is still reprehensible, and she becomes an example of what happens to Americans who--unlike Brydon--remain in America most of their lives: they become amoral exploiters.

¹¹See p. 202, and cf. Clair, pp. 19, 27.

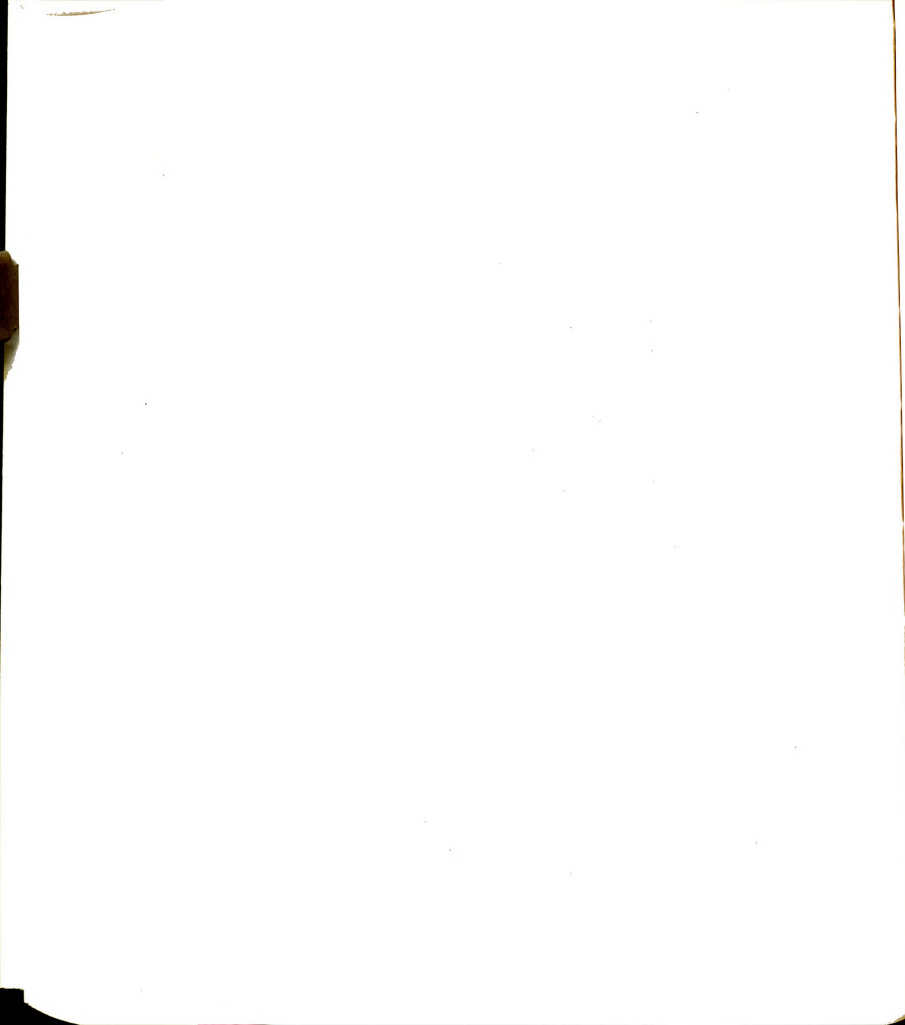
¹²James compares himself to White-Mason, for example, in a letter to Miss Henrietta Reubell, October 19, 1909, Letters, II, pp. 139-40: "I have great occasional bouffées of fond memory and longing from our dear old past Paris. It affects me as rather ghostly; but life becomes more and more that, and I have learnt to live with my pale spectre more than with my ruddy respirers. They will sit thick on the old red sofa. But with you the shepherdess of the flock it will be all right. You are not Cornelia, but I am much White-Mason, and I shall again sit by your fire." This attitude, as Bewley points out, makes the reader wonder whether "his forty-eight-year-old hero, White-Mason, doesn't overcome the grandiose temptation of luxurious irresponsibility in the present by submitting to an equally pernicious sentimentalization of the past."--p. 77n. If James had remained in White-Mason's position, and had not criticized American society even as he recalled it with nostalgia, this charge would also fit the author himself.

¹³The Outcry (New York, 1911), pp. 24-25, quoted by Stone, pp. 83-84.



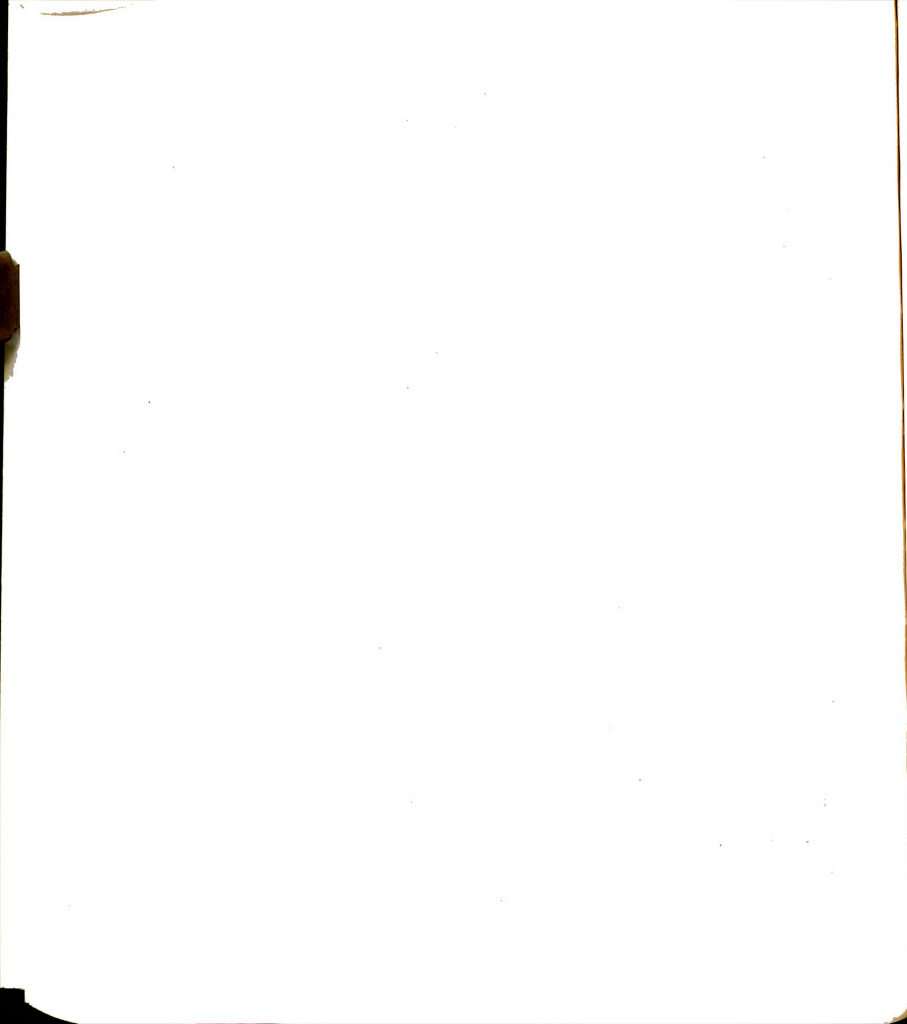
5. The Final Years (1914-1916)

As though telescoping and re-living his life, James forsakes America again in favor of England, writes short fiction until 1908, then returns to writing plays just as he had from 1890 to 1895; finally, after similar discouraging experiences with these plays, and after his long illnesses and William's death, he once more composes long international fiction just as he had in the major phase. What caused the repeated pattern, and more particularly, what caused the resurrection of the international theme? The failure of the New York Edition to sell accounts for his return to writing plays, for he had worked long and hard on the edition, and was tired and bitter at its indifferent reception. Late in 1915 he writes Edmund Gosse that his "poor old rather truncated editon, in fact entirely frustrated one . . . has the grotesque likeness for me of a sort of miniature Ozymandias of Egypt ('look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!')--round which the lone and level sands stretch further away than ever" (Letters, II, 497). The edition "has never had the least intelligent critical justice done it," he continues, and "I am past all praying for anywhere; I remain at my age . . . and after my long career, utterly, insurmountably, unsaleable." So he returns to plays for a time. A few years of repeated failure to achieve popular success in the theatre would



again explain his return to fiction. But if his fictional capital, as he explains to Alice James, is all invested in England, why should he write about America and the international theme once more? The theme will not stay buried; both The Ivory Tower and The Sense of the Past are resurrected from old sections of his notebooks. The fact that international stories had been easy to write and had been his only financial and popular success in the past could explain his writing short tales during years of lean production, but not the long novels he planned.

One major reason for trying long fiction once more is simply the challenge of it. If popularity and financial success are denied, art has its own rewards, and James cultivates them. The Sense of the Past, the old international ghost story he was writing for Howells in 1900, particularly intrigued him due to its difficulty. But James is not merely immersing himself in art to escape his personal troubles or the cosmic disturbances of the age. Granted James is disillusioned with America, but the tales of American life that he writes deal with that disillusion; they do not try to avoid it; and The Ivory Tower is far from the least of these works. In addition he suffers a disillusion with Europe far greater than any shock America could give him. Europe, heart of western civilization, not only crumbles from the tide of Americanization, but disintegrates from within to the barbaric condition of total war. But James does not ultimately run from this disillusion either.

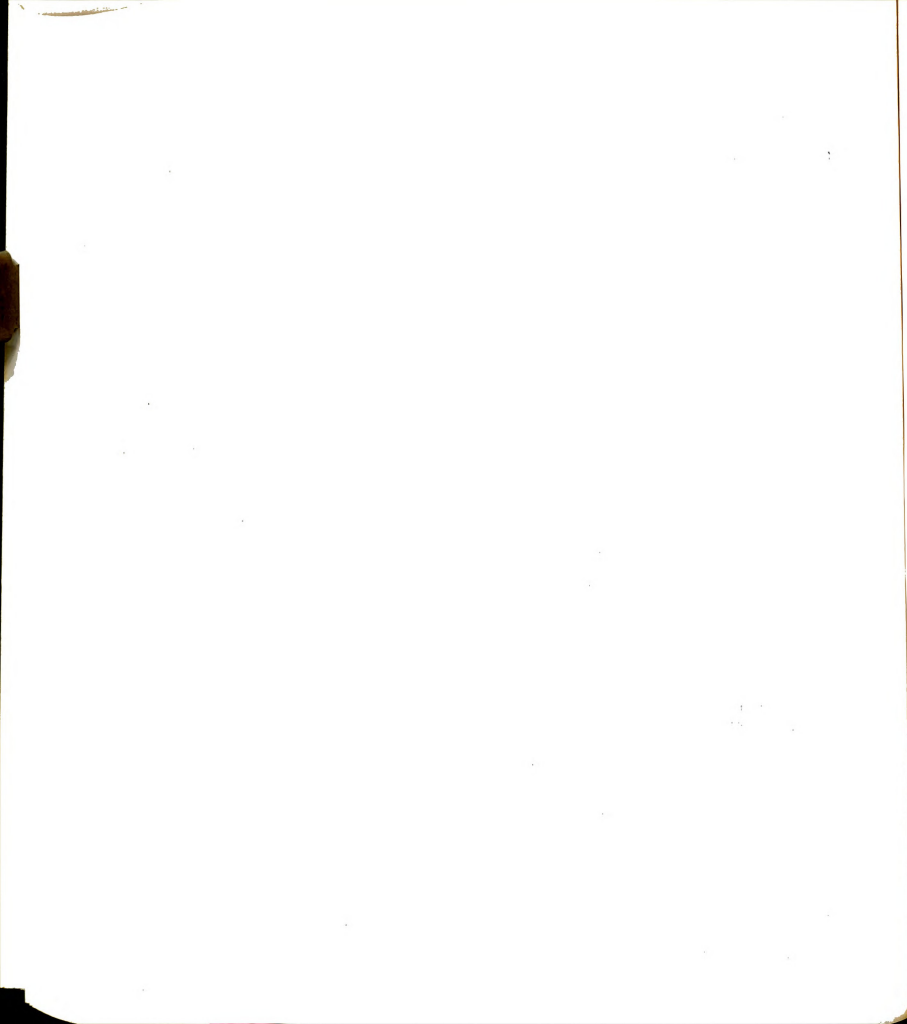


His return to the international theme in The Sense of the Past is no escape. Through utter despair he moves to renewed hope, salvaging what can be salvaged, and makes clear that however precious the sense of the past may be, the only viable place to live is in the present.

The war upsets James's sense of the past more than his trip to America. His jarring visit to the States helps make the war even more disastrous to him, though, by making him value England so much more in comparison. Faced with loving America less, James must love Britain more. When he returns and sees the "old-world nooks and corners and felicities" of rural England, he feels protectively "(in the thick of revolution) that anything that happens--happens disturbingly--to this wonderful little attaching old England, the ripest fruit of time, can only be a change for the worse" (Letters, II, 196). Unfortunately such sequestered places are not universal in the country. Like New York, London has become much more urban and commercialized, as he writes to Mrs. Henry White in 1913:

But it's another London, this old Chelsea of simplifications and sacrifices, from the world in which I so like to feel that I for so long lived more or less with you. I feel somehow as much away from that now as you and Harry must feel amid your new Washington horizons--and it has of itself, for that matter, gone to pieces under the sweep of the big broom of Time, which has scattered it without ceremony.
(Letters, II, 297)

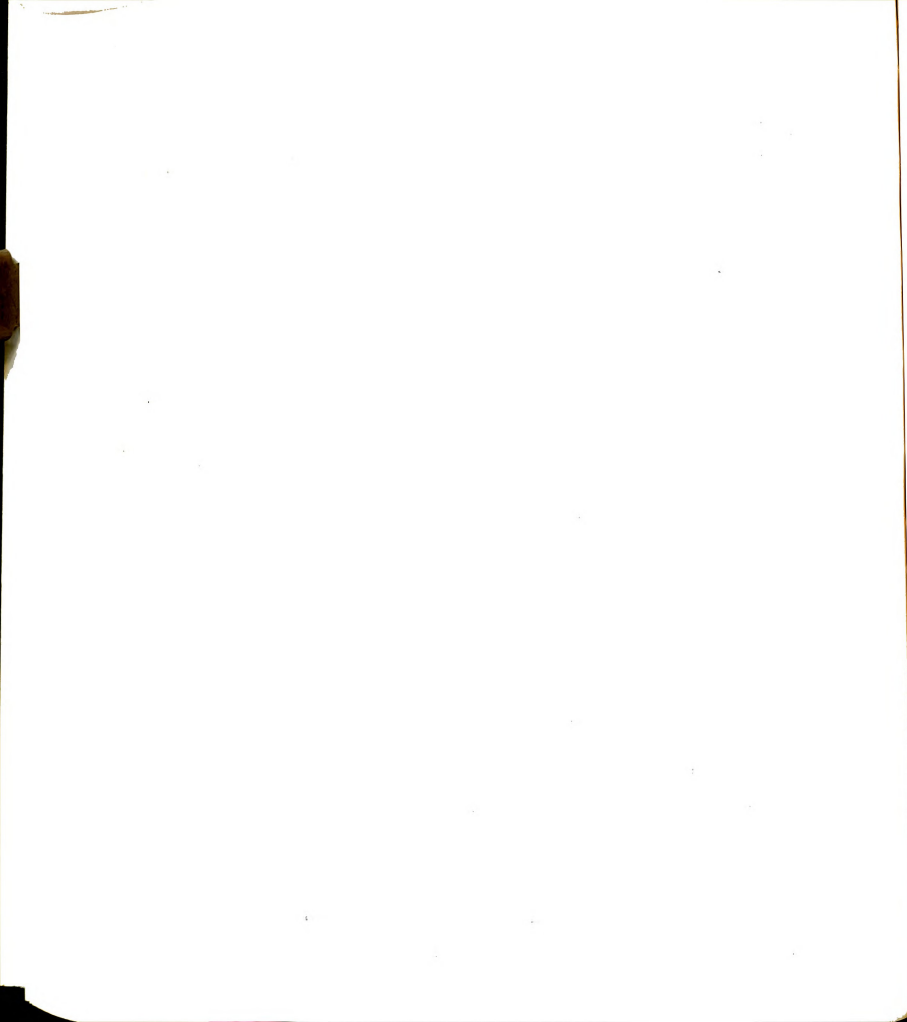
If James wants to enjoy old England, he must stay at Lamb House and hope the outside world will not break in. He alternates solitude at Lamb House with company in London,



growing admittedly fonder of the former. He is clearly, however, no monk nor reactionary. Right up to the eve of the war, James is primed for life in the present, and refuses to succumb to the horror of fast change. In a letter marking his difference in temperament from Henry Adams even more than his fiction, James tries to encourage Henry to live in the twentieth century:

I have your melancholy outpouring of the 7th, and I know not how better to acknowledge it than by the full recognition of its unmitigated blackness. Of course we are lone survivors, of course the past that was our lives is at the bottom of an abyss--if the abyss has any bottom; of course, too, there's no use talking unless one particularly wants to. But the purpose, almost, of my printed divagations was to show you than one can, strange to say, still want to--or at least can behave as if one did. Behold me therefore so behaving--and apparently capable of continuing to do so. I still find my consciousness interesting--under cultivation of the interest. Cultivate it with me, dear Henry--that's what I hoped to make you do--to cultivate yours for all that it has in common with mine. Why mine yields an interest I don't know that I can tell you, but I don't challenge or quarrel with it--I encourage it with a ghastly grin. You see I still, in presence of life (or of what you deny to be such), have reactions--as many as possible--and the book I sent you /Notes of a Son and Brother/ is a proof of them. It's, I suppose, because I am that queer monster, the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility. Hence the reactions--appearances, memories, many things, go on playing upon it with consequences that I note and 'enjoy' (grim word!) noting. It all takes doing--and I do. I believe I shall do yet again--it is still an act of life. (Letters, II, 360-61)

On the very precipice of the apocalypse, he can write Alice James that "the political atmosphere here is charged to explosion as it has never been--what is to happen no man knows; but this only makes it a more thrilling and

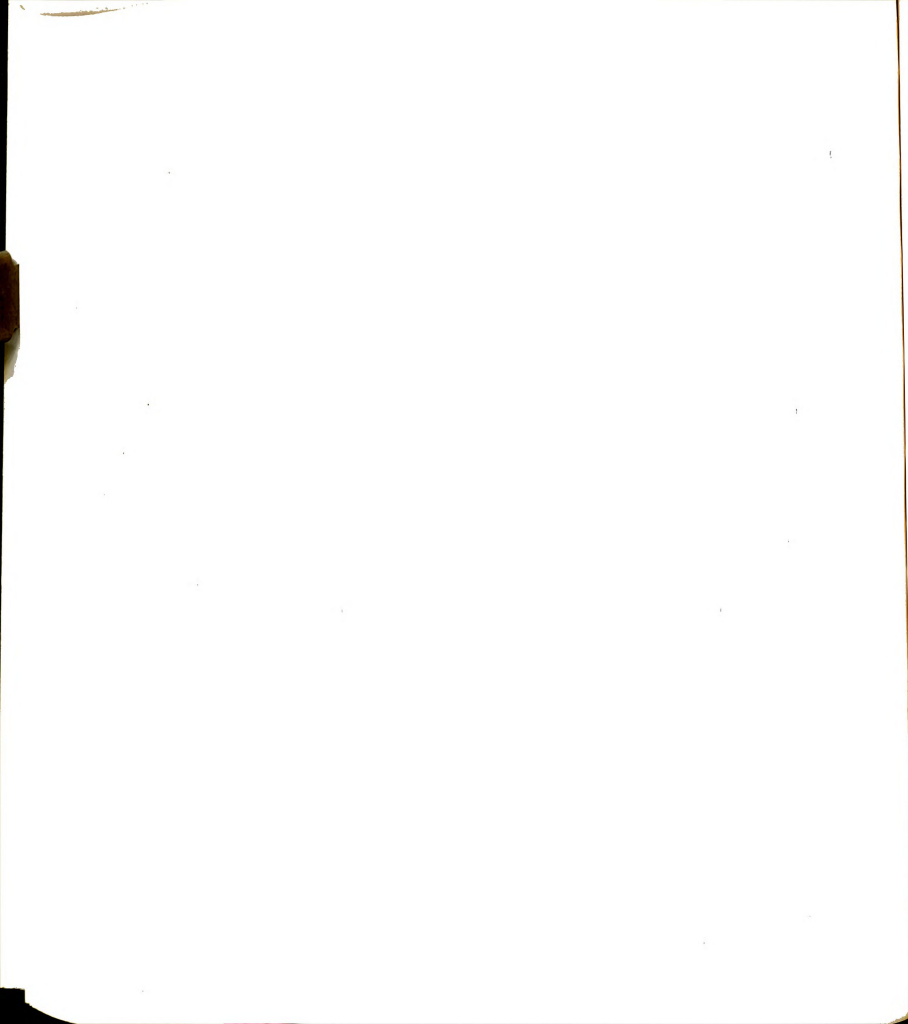


spectacular world. The tension has never been so great" (Letters, II, 363). As in the case of his rising enthusiasm for going to America in 1904, James's appetite for experience is building him up for a fall. It is this bravery, this insatiability for impressions of all kinds, that James loses with the onset of the war, and he will have a long war within himself to recover it.

In that first month or so after the outbreak of hostilities, James is utterly devastated. Suddenly the past seems no longer relevant at all to the present; George Sand's autobiography is just "ancient prattle (heaven forgive me!)" (Letters, II, 387); and worst of all, his own works now appear to be wasted portraits of a world that never was or never mattered. All is undone. Excerpts from James's effusions to his friends show his grief and disorientation better than any rhetoric I could summon:

. . . it's vain to try to talk as if one weren't living in a nightmare of the deepest dye. How can what is going on not be to one as a huge horror of blackness? . . . The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness by the wanton feat of those two infamous autocrats is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words. (Letters, II, 383)

Everything is of the last abnormalism now, and no convulsion, no historic event of any such immensity can ever have taken place in such a turn-over of a few hours and with such a measureless rush--the whole thing being, in other words, such an unprecedented combination of size and suddenness.



The pace of change in America cannot even compare with such torrents. James has no faith now in either past or future, for the two seem hideously disconnected. The future, laments James, "looks to me as the past already looks":

I mean the recent past of happy motor-runs . . . : disconnected and fabulous, fatuous, fantastic, belonging to another life and another planet. I find it such a mistake on my own part to have lived on --when, like other saner and safer persons, I might perfectly have not--into this unspeakable give-away of the whole fool's paradise of our past. It throws back so livid a light--this was what we were so fondly working for! (II, 387-88)

James's sense of the past is totally disrupted; his whole conception of the past must be revised. He writes Rhoda Broughton in August, 1914:

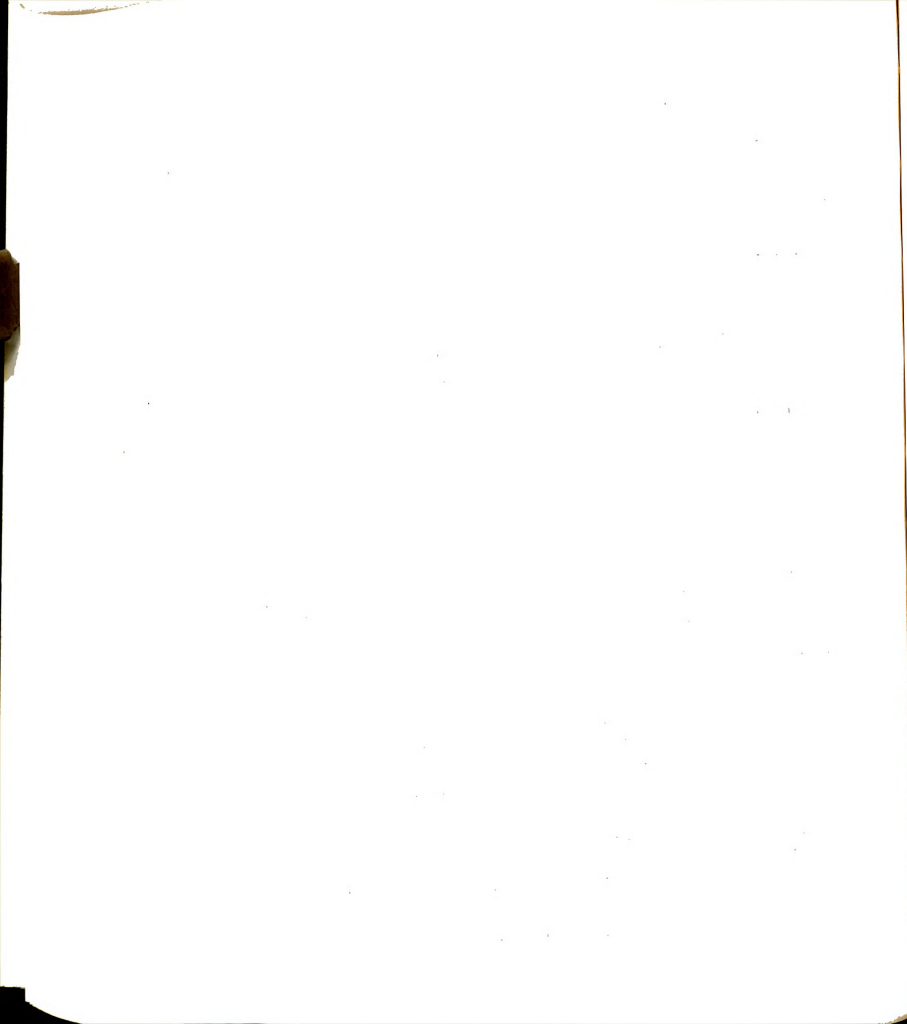
You and I, the ornaments of our generation, should have been spared this wreck of our belief that through the long years we had seen civilization grow and the worst become impossible. The tide that bore us along was then all the while moving to this as its grand Niagara . . . It seems to me to undo everything, everything that was ours, in the most horrible retroactive way . . . (II, 389)

William James receives this expression of disjunction:

The extraordinary thing is the way that every interest and every connection that seemed still to exist up to exactly a month ago has been as annihilated as if it had never lifted a head in the world at all. (II, 395)

To an admirer of Notes of a Son and Brother, James writes:

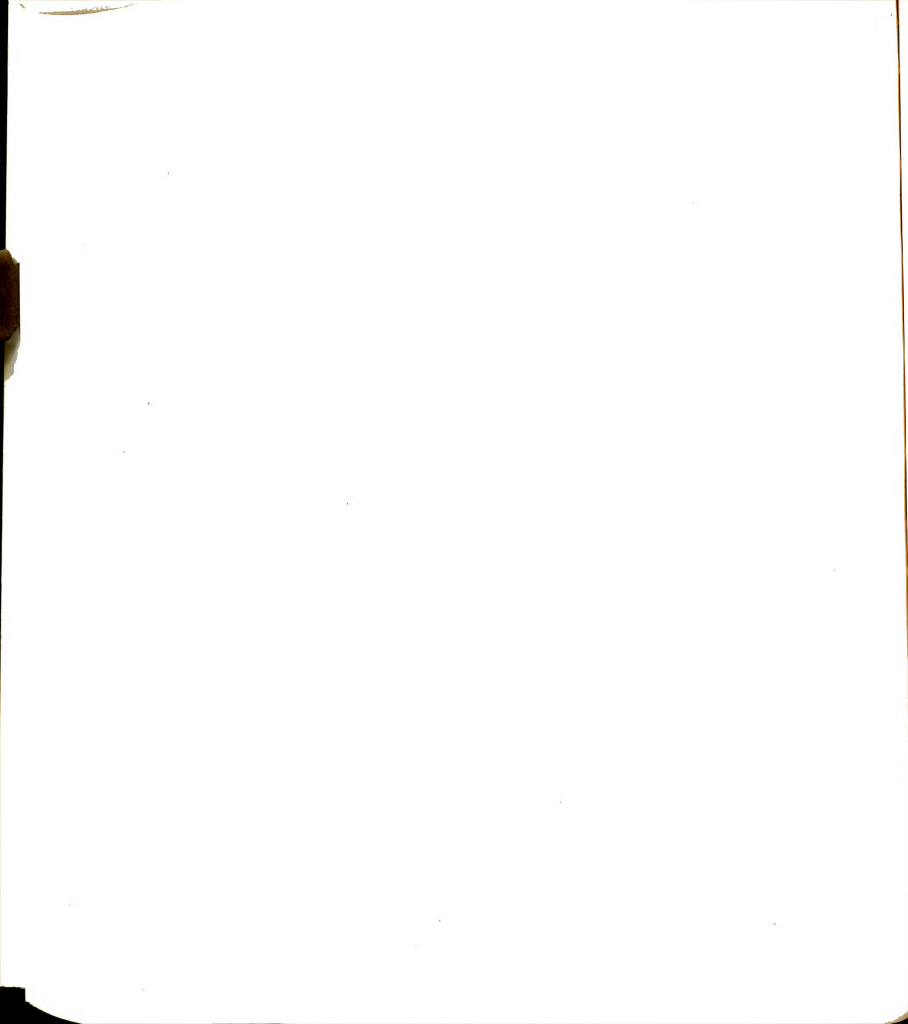
One of the effects of this colossal convulsion is that all connection with everything of every kind that has gone before seems to have broken short off in a night, and nothing ever to have happened of the least consequence or relevance, beside what is happening now. Therefore when you express to me so beautifully and touchingly your interest in my 'Notes' of--another life and



planet, as one now can but feel, I have to make an enormous effort to hitch the allusion to my present consciousness. (II, 401-02)

His whole sense of the past is undone. James no longer trusts his foresight, for it did not warn him at all of the cataclysm coming; in fact, it projected peace and social fusion. He is living entirely in the disastrous present; and while he raises an occasional "vive the old delusion" (II, 388), he feels that his old assumption of social synthesis is in fact a delusion. Like the American Civil War and the French Revolution, both of which he recalls as parallels when his sense of the past returns (II, 401; 390, 410), World War I will mark the end of one age and the beginning of another for James. The problem, somewhat like White-Mason's in "Crapy Cornelia," is whether to live out one's life in a sequestered nook of the older era or move into the tide of the new one.

James balances for a time between hope for the future and grief for the past. He expects the "old systematic organisation" to survive in some form, of course, and hopes to remain a part of it (II, 395). As he writes Rhoda Broughton in August, 1914, "I do believe that we shall be again gathered into a blessed little Chelsea drawing-room-- it will be like the reopening of the salons, so irrepressibly, after the French revolution" (II, 390). For his initial shock and despair are almost immediately turning to hope:



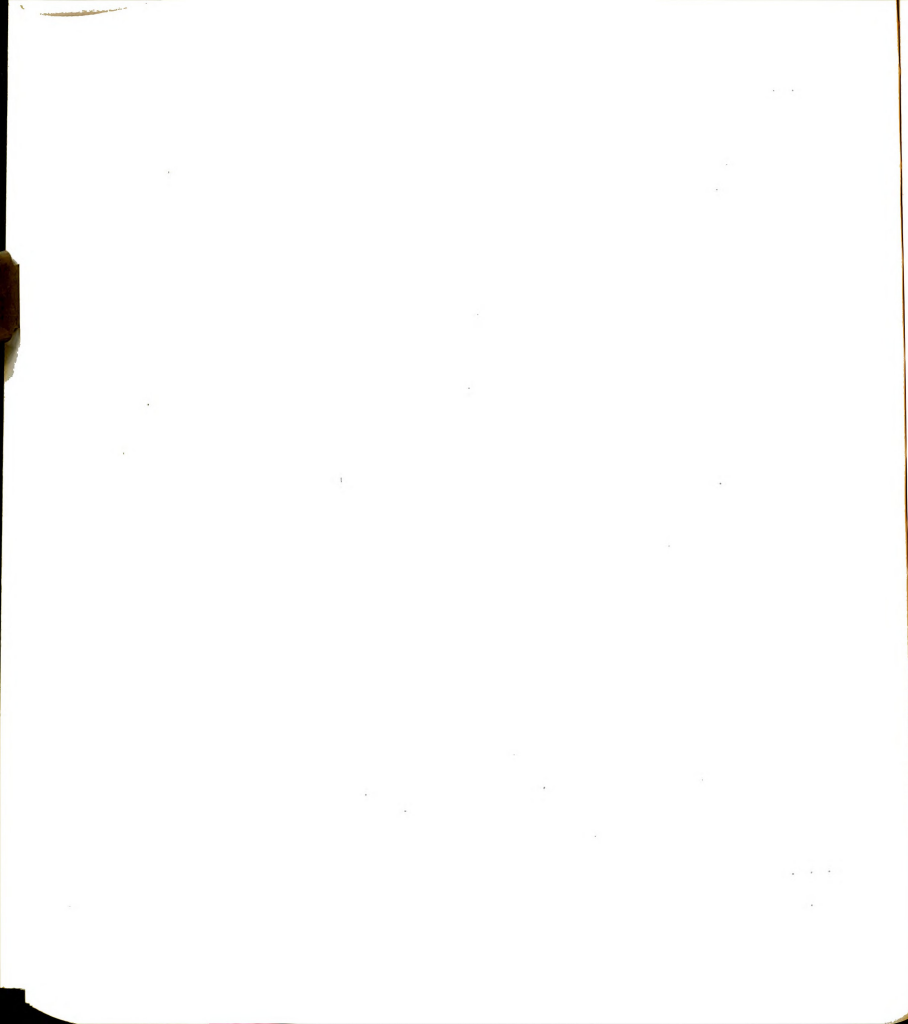
. . . one sees everything without exception that has been a part of past history through the annihilation of battle smoke if of nothing else, and all questions, again, swoon away into the obscure. If you have got something to do, stick to it tight, and do it with faith and force; some things will, no doubt, eventually be redeemed. (II, 403)

His sense of the past is very intimately and sensitively dependent on his sense of the present. As the notion rouses itself, James begins to see the war as a purge and a challenge which will renew England's past greatness by calling forth "certain parts of herself again that had seemed for long a good deal lost" (II, 409; cf. 416-17). Like Henry Adams, he complains that "the proportions of things have so changed and one's poor old 'values' received such a shock." But James does not stop with Adams' despair: "I say to myself that this is all the more reason why one should recover as many of them as possible and keep hold of them in the very interest of civilisation and the honour of our race; as to which I am certainly right--but it takes some doing!" (II, 411). He is fighting a paralysis of hope and despair:

Strange as it may seem, there are times when I am much uplifted--when what may come out of it all seems almost worth it. And then the black nightmare holds the field again--and in fact one proceeds almost wholly by those restless alternations. They consume one's vital substance, but one will perhaps wear them out first. (II, 443)

James notices the change in himself and welcomes it:

". . . I live partly in dark abysses and partly in high and, I think, noble elations" (II, 446). The ship is still rolling, but is beginning to ride the waves.

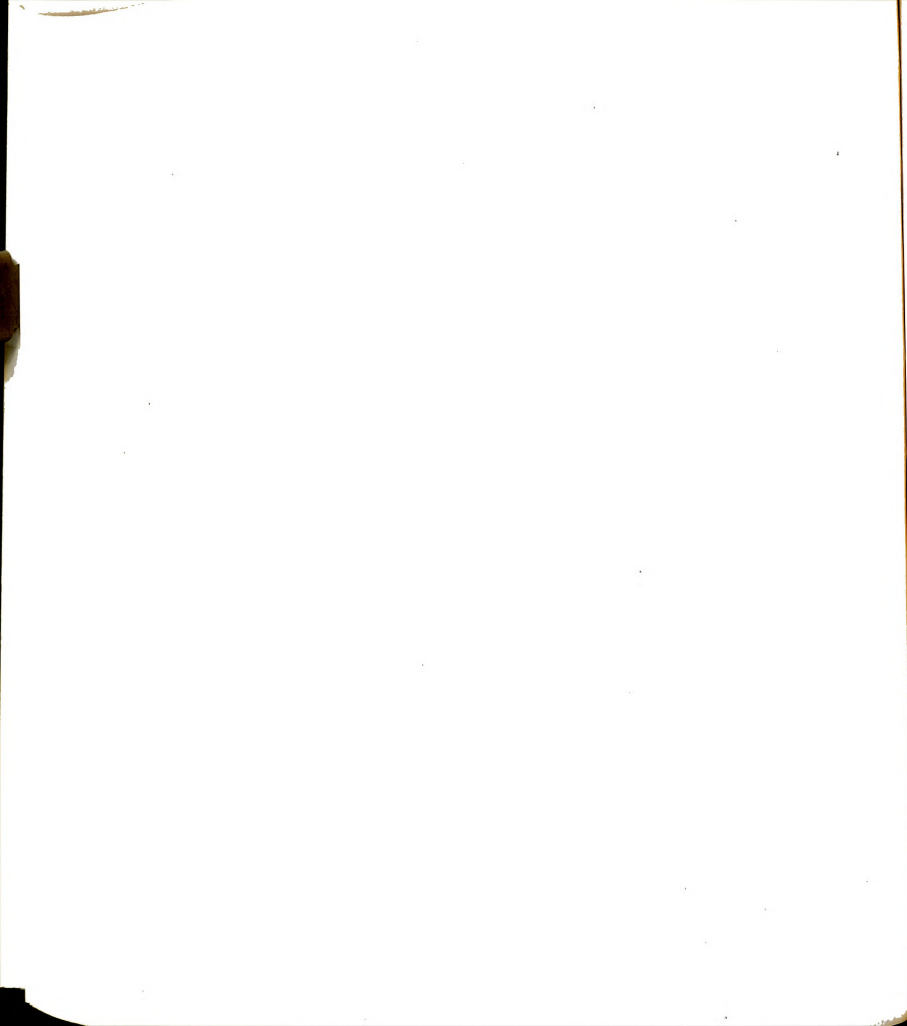


One major symptom of James's recovery from the shock of the war is his taking up reading and writing once again. Though he does not feel like finishing The Ivory Tower at this time, he has "got hold of something else," The Sense of the Past, and he finds "the effort of concentration to some extent an antidote" to continual consciousness of the war (II, 392). Percy Lubbock explains James's preference for working on this novel as a form of escape from the present:

The Ivory Tower had to be laid aside--it was impossible to believe any longer in a modern fiction, supposed to represent the life of the day, which the great catastrophe had so belied; but he took up The Sense of the Past again the fantasmal story he had abandoned for its difficulty in 1900--finding its unreality now remote enough to be beyond the reach of the war.¹

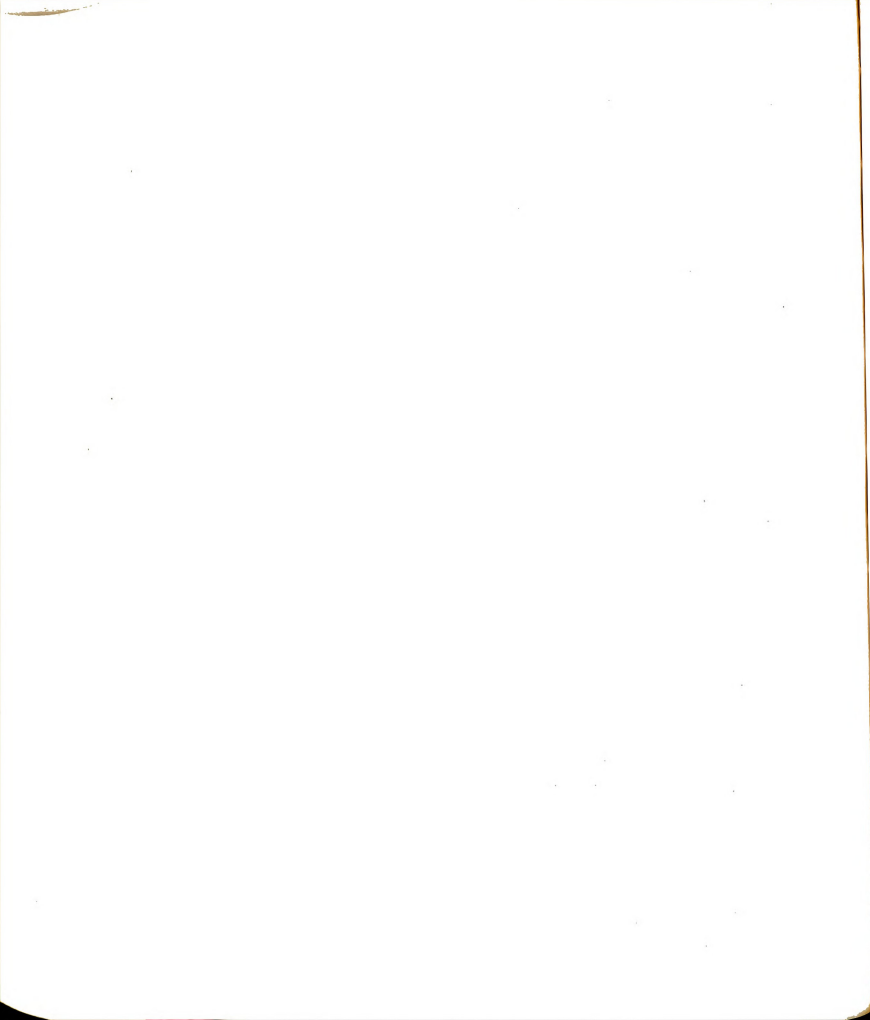
In other words The Ivory Tower is not enough of an ivory tower for James--he needs The Sense of the Past to provide the distance from the present desired. I disagree with this interpretation of both novels. There is evidence that James occasionally wanted to get away from it all, of course. He writes Thomas Sergeant Perry for a volume on "the American theatre of my infancy" so he can immerse himself in the "ghostly little facts" of the past:

I ask with a queer dim feeling that they might, or the fingered volume might, operate as a blest little diversion from our eternal obsession here. I have reached the point now, after eight months of that oppression, of cultivating small arts of escape, small plunges into oblivion and dissimulation; in fact I am able to read again--for ever so long this power was almost blighted--and to want to become as dissociated as possible from the present. (II, 460)



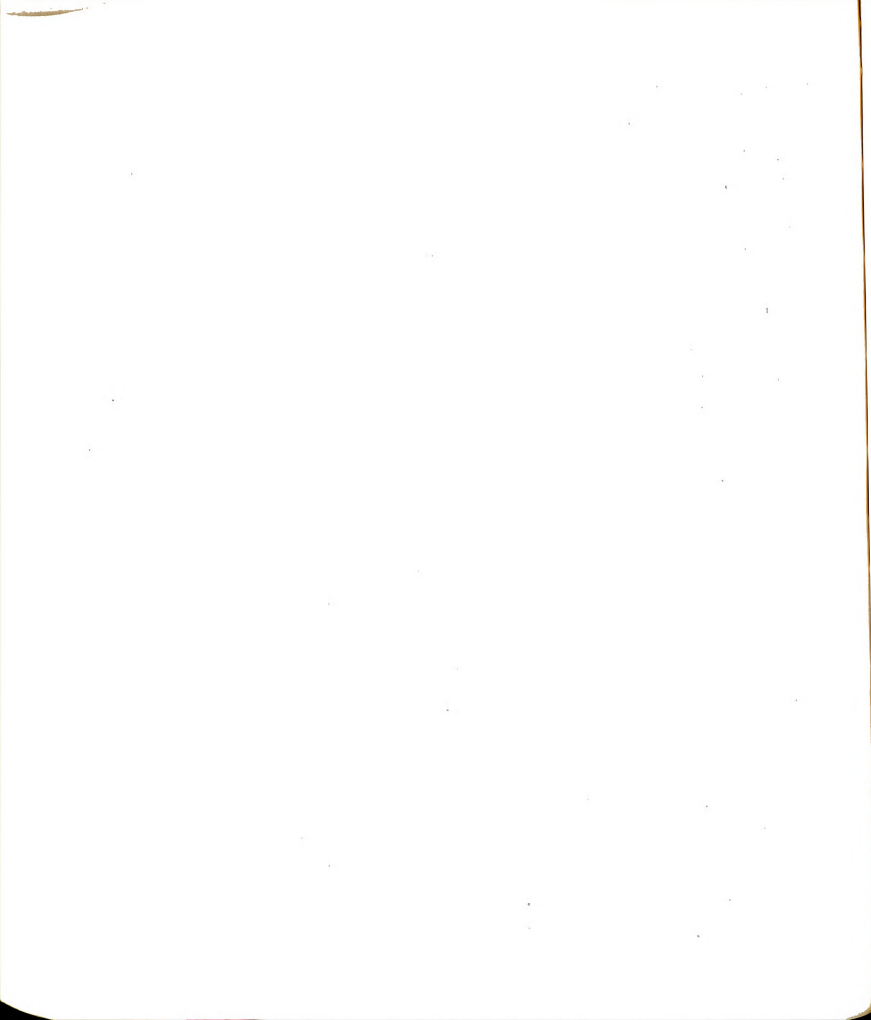
But to infer from the fact that James diverted his mind with "small arts to escape" once in a while, that his novels are just more extended diversions, is to overlook the reality with which those novels deal, and the negative attitude James had toward his past fiction because he felt it had not diagnosed the problems of the age. He writes to Compton Mackenzie that the "violence of rupture with the past" caused by the war "makes me ask myself what will become of all that material we were taking for granted, and which now lies there behind us like some vast damaged cargo dumped upon a dock and unfit for human purchase or consumption" (II, 476). The war damaged James's fiction in his own eyes by making it seem a deficient portrait of his time. He is not likely to write new works he considers more deficient.²

The Ivory Tower was in fact set aside at the outset of the war (see Letters, II, 392), which Lubbock explains by assuming that the work seemed unreal to James as the representation of a society that could bring on the war, so he discarded it as a novel not relevant enough to merit completion at that time. Even if this interpretation is true, however, the possibility immediately comes to mind that James set aside The Ivory Tower to work on a more relevant novel rather than a pure fantasy. James may well have felt that by not prophesying the war or picturing its causes in the social fabric, he had been outside the main stream of European history. But that conviction would not negate the



value of The Ivory Tower even while prodding James to work on something else. For The Ivory Tower is a criticism of American life in the twentieth century, and America had very little to do with the causes of World War I. James may have felt that he had neglected Europe too long in his composition on primarily American subjects. His desire "to try and get back to some form of work adjustable in a manner to one's present state of consciousness" (Notebooks, 361), may be partly a wish to escape, but it may also lead to a more direct confrontation with the problem. Some criticism of Europe is clearly in order, or some more truly international work placing the two hemispheres once more in perspective. Consequently The Sense of the Past portrays a crude, materialistic England of the fairly recent past--the counterpart of the contemporary "exhibition that has gone on so long of their huge materialized stupidity and vulgarity," the "enormous national sacrifice to insensate amusement, without a redeeming idea or a generous passion" for which James fears the English will have to pay in the course of the war (Letters, II, 377).

But before defending The Sense of the Past, I would like to attack the idea that The Ivory Tower is unreal and irrelevant. It would indeed be ironic if a work dealing explicitly with the theme of isolation from reality, revealed in fact the isolation of its author from contemporary society--ironic and unlikely. For The Ivory Tower is not an ivory tower. No mere extension of the optimism of the major



phase nor nostalgic attempt to regain the old illusion, the novel is one of James's clearest critiques of American society. His trip to America leaves an unmistakable mark, for the negative side of American culture is turned toward the reader much more often than in earlier works. Abel Gaw is a very predatory descendant of Adam Verver, a greedy vindictive shrunken retired tycoon (XXV, 3-4). Horton Vint and Cissy Foy are latter-day parallels of Merton Densher and Kate Croy, or perhaps Gilbert Osmond and Selina Merle, "well-nigh the crudest and most typical, the most 'modern'" in their refusal to marry each other without wealth (XXV, 302). Gussy Bradham is stupid; her "straight cold radiance" has an "emphasis that was like the stamp of hard flat feet" (49). Her "extraordinary perfections of neatness, of elegance, of arrangement" strike Rosanna Gaw as either "a supreme attestation of care" or, more likely, as "the clear truth of her essential commonness"; she is "an advertisement of all the latest knowledge of how to 'treat' every inch of the human surface and where to 'get' every scrap of the personal envelope" (50). Other American characters do not even have the envelope, as the old pale-faced American who dominates the English period and deteriorates after the major phase finally reaches his nadir. In the business world there is "a kind of generalised or, as they seemed to be calling it, standardised face, as of sharpness without edge" (248). Representing the professions is the lawyer Mr. Crick, dry as a desert, with no personal identity

and a mind full of dead facts (241-42, 244):

The refusal of his whole person to figure as a fact invidiously distinguishable, that of his aspect to have an identity, of his eyes to have a consciousness, of his hair to have a colour, of his nose to have a form, of his mouth to have a motion, of his voice to consent to any separation of sounds, made intercourse with him at once extremely easy and extraordinarily empty; it was deprived of the flicker of anything by the way and resembled the act of moving forward in a perfectly-rolling carriage with the blind of each window neatly drawn down. (245)

And there is the ubiquitous Miss Mumby, "a vessel of the American want of correspondence" to anything. She is "ample, genial, familiar and more radiantly clean than he had ever known any vessel, to whatever purpose destined," takes everything for granted, and has "a kind of dazzling aura, a special radiance of disconnection" (78). Always dressed in white in her role as trained nurse, Miss Mumby nevertheless seems to Graham Fielder a "violent repudiation of type," for she could be "a youngish mother perhaps, a sister, a cousin, a friend, even a possible bride" (79). Like earlier Americans of the international theme, she has been abroad, but with hardly any visible results:

Miss Mumby had been to Europe, and he saw soon enough how there was nowhere one could say she hadn't gone and nothing one could say she hadn't done--one's perception could bear only on what she hadn't become; so that, as he thus perceived, though she might have affected Europe even as she was now affecting him, she was a pure negation of its having affected herself, unless perhaps by adding to her power to make him feel how little he could impose on her. (81)

She is the epitome of colorless American "society," since it was "already attested that the Miss Mumbys (for it was

evident there would be thousands of them) were in society, or were, at any rate, not out of it, society thereby becoming clearly colossal" (82-83). And true to The Reverb-erator but with a more caustic criticism, Gray notes that "the newspaper interest only fed the more full . . . from the perfectly bare plate offered its flocking young emissaries" (249).³

Such Americans, of course, have absolutely no sense of the past--and America provides no past for them to sense. Unlike in such early tales as "A Passionate Pilgrim" the main characters are not as a mere matter of course exceptional perceptrors of the residues of time. Instead their relation to the past and perception of it serve as a very refined measurement of their maturity and development of consciousness. In fact the sense of the past becomes more and more, as the mounting evidence traced in this chapter implies, the most reliable index of development in James, and it is dangerous to interpret his characters without consulting their personal sense of it. Many of his characters, from Isabel Archer to Maggie Verver, have intelligence and fine perception; but the stage of their progress at any given point is often most clearly revealed by the state of their sense of the past. Similarly, characters who do not change are evaluated according to their perceptions of time. Horton Vint, who represents what Graham Fielder might have been had he accepted the chance to live with Mr. Betterman (290), is constantly glued to the future. When he discusses the

coming of Graham Fielder with Cissy Foy, his eyes are "fixed" on projecting what the event may mean to them, envisioning only what is to come (161). He and Cissy are ready to exploit their past relationships with Gray for their own selfish futures, much as Kate Croy and Merton Densher try to exploit Milly Theale. To Vint, Gray represents "something like his entire personal future" (197). Consequently his total sense of time is distorted. When he talks with Graham about the past, he is completely disoriented; time seems to him to stop, and he is startled by the amount of time elapsed when he re-emerges to a consciousness of it (229-30). He is a yes man to Graham, who wishes instead that Vint "would only go on bristling as he promised with instances and items, would only consent to consist at the same rate and in his very self of material for history" as he had when Graham first talked with him (256).

Abel Gaw, of course, is unredeemable, as his perverted and frustrated sense of the past reveals. He lives with one purpose, an obsessive "hunger to learn to what extent he had anciently, to what degree he had irremediably, ruined his whilom associate" Mr. Betterman (93). When he is thwarted in trying to establish that knowledge, and Betterman appears to be recovering, Gaw dies.

His daughter Rosanna is much finer than he is, and more perceptive and less selfish than Horton Vint, but she too lacks a truly mature sense of the past. Her problem is an

inability to assimilate the past properly; she just lives it over, rehearsing it, trying to control it through retrospection. Unburdening her sense of responsibility for Graham's career to Davey Bradham, Rosanna likes "the comfort of having it well out, and yet of keeping it . . . well within her control, more and more operative" (33). She feels uneasy about her part as a young girl in influencing Graham not to come to America, and tries to make up for his resulting loss of a fortune by interceding with Mr. Betterman on his behalf. She has a good memory for some things. Smoking to relax, after she has "recovered the sense of the past," Rosanna tells Davey of feelings that "come back to me as if from yesterday," especially that "half an hour that I recover vividly, recover, I assure you, quite painfully still" in which she virtually determined Graham's future. But her memory is not always so good. She cannot recall the origin of the ivory tower (147-49), and is apparently unaware of the way to get out of the ivory tower she has created for herself (215).

Rosanna is always struggling rather unsuccessfully for objective distance, for perspective. She is as nervous when meeting Gray for the first time after his return to America as she was when they met as adolescents in Europe, and her use of a fan to hide behind is ludicrous (142-46). Likewise she has never fully recovered from Horton Vint's proposal of marriage to her. Gussy Bradham has just mentioned Vint in connection with Gray:

Well, the next moment at any rate she knew, and the more extraordinary then than anything was the spread of her apprehension, off somehow to the incalculable, under Gussy's mention of a name. What did this show most of all, however, but how little the intensity of her private associations with the name had even yet died out, or at least how vividly it could revive in a connection by which everything in her was quickened? (54)

Rosanna is suddenly on pins and needles; "here withal was association, association unquenched" (55). Yet she had turned down Vint with calm decision, so she cannot imagine why she still vibrates on the subject: "Something there was, something there had to be, if only the marvel, so to say, of her present, her permanent, backward vision of the force with which they had touched and separated" (58). Her consciousness is distorted by such renewed experiences; she feels that days have passed, in effect, and wants to detach herself to gain perspective "if only of mere space and time" (67).

Rosanna obviously has sensitivity and great potential for fine consciousness; James refers to her sometimes as "our young woman of feeling" (61). But he also calls her "poor brooding Rosanna" (44), indicating that she is caught too much in her retrospection. The clearest indication that Rosanna is not fully mature, however, is Graham's impression of her after so many years:

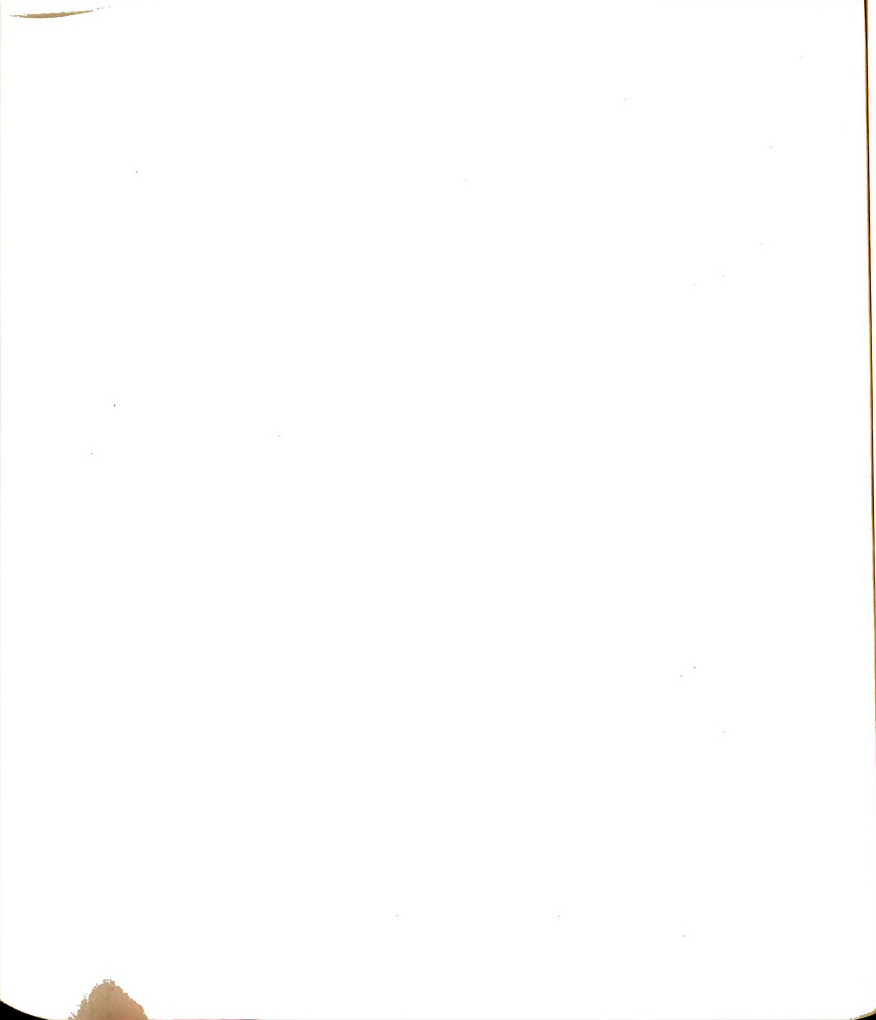
. . . though there was even more of her in presence than he had reckoned there was somehow less of her in time; as if she had at once grown and grown and grown, grown in all sorts of ways save the most natural one of growing visibly older. Such an oddity as that made

her another person a good deal more than her show of not having left him behind by any break with their common youth could keep her the same. (130)

Rosanna has prodigiously put on space (she looks like a walking pagoda under a parasol--p. 1), but like even the buildings in the clear social air, she has not taken on the tone of time. She has not assimilated the past in beautifully documentary wrinkles or features; thus her face, so important in revealing persons with a character and a past in James, remains very much the typical blank American sheet.

Graham Fielder is of course the most perceptive character in the work.⁴ He is a native-born American who has been in Europe during the most productive years of his development but was exposed to America enough in early childhood to pick up a strong impression. Consequently he now returns as the most exquisite observer of America possible--a variation on the older Jamesian convention of the American as the finest observer of Europe. Instead of being some innate national faculty as in the early works, the sense of the past is a function of early childhood impressions and later development of consciousness. Graham's return to America provides a strong exhibition of his sense of the past and his projections of what he would find in America after so many years:

He recognized--that was the secret, recognised wherever he looked--and knew that when, from afar back, during his stretch of unbroken absence,



he had still felt, and liked to feel, what air had originally breathed upon him, these piercing intensities of salience had really peopled the vision. He had much less remembered the actual than forecast the inevitable, and the huge involved necessity of its all showing as he found it seemed fairly to shout in his ear. (74)

Not just the sense of the past, but the whole "life of the intelligence had its greatest fineness in Gray Fielder," a fact that is never more clear than when he is with Horton Vint, in whom the reader has "a more or less apprehensive foretaste" of what a life of intelligence means to a mind bent on exploitation (216). Even Vint sees how superior Graham is--"tremendously 'cultivated' and cosmopolitanised . . . extra-refined and ultra-perceptive"--yet how elegantly simple (192), sees how "endowed with every advantage, personal, physical, material, moral, in other words, brilliantly clever, inordinately rich, strikingly handsome and incredibly good" Graham is (200). When the two men are together, silences deepen their conversations for Graham and the reader, but Vint remains relatively puzzled. He cannot usually figure out Graham's fine shades of meaning, though he is impressed with their presence (221). During one special silence of several minutes "Horton, truly touched now . . . waited unmistakably for the sign of something more important than his imagination, even at its best, could give him, and which, not less conceivably, would be the sort of thing he himself hadn't sign, either actual or possible, for" (201-02). Graham's "choicest silver scales" of consciousness make him the frank and simple American of

the old international theme raised to a new height, make his simplicity "a different affair from the crude candour of the common sort" (192). Vint even finds his own simplicities being "allowed for an deferred to" by Graham (193).

Graham's superior awareness is not enough to protect him from Vint's exploitation at first. He is caught like Rosanna in the sense of his past relationship with Vint, in which Vint saved his life: "'I should be without a head to-day if you hadn't seen so to my future, just as I should be without a heart, you must really let me remark, if I didn't look now to your past'" (231). This event is constantly alluded to by Graham, is always present in his mind (289-90). When Graham gets caught up with emotionally charged associations, his retrospection swells immeasurably, causing him to lose his sense of the passage of time just as Vint and Rosanna do. Here is Graham's mind, for example, after the bedside visit with Betterman: "His after-sense of the scene expanded rather than settled, became an impression of one of those great insistent bounties that are not of this troubled world" until "he looked at his watch and saw how the time had passed" (123-24). As he becomes better acclimated, his ability to assimilate experience refines and accelerates. The intense conversation with Vint after Betterman's death becomes a kinetic rather than a static part of his consciousness:

That concentrated passage between the two men
while the author of their situation was still
unburied would of course always hover to memory's

eye like a votive object in the rich gloom of a chapel; but it was now disconnected, attached to its hook once for all, its whole meaning converted with such small delay into working, playing force and multiplied tasteable fruit. (250-51)

In order to avoid an ivory tower like Rosanna's, Graham needs to bring his sense of the past up to date--to recognize that old buddy Horton Vint is now the amoral American Graham might have become, that both Abel Gaw and Frank Betterman won their fortunes through exploitation, and that the America he once knew is not quite the America now bristling before him. Betterman wants to use Graham as "a perfect clean blank" untainted by commercialism to expiate his own past (77, 112), and Graham wants to think that America is still the perfect clean blank of his childhood. Both are wrong--Graham has been subtly shaded by Europe, and America has been darkly undermined by the claws of men like Abel Gaw.

Graham does grow in awareness, of course; the plot essentially turns on the development of the main character, as in the novels of the major phase. Graham's growing suspicion that Vint is using his money for himself while acting as his financial agent is the central fact Graham is to discover and deal with in the incomplete sections of the novel, a fact that will help him realize the full meaning of his first strong impression of America--an image James took pains to place early in the novel--that of Abel Gaw sitting predatorily in his chair, gnawing vindictively on his memories. Graham's early expectation of a new American identity,

a "fresh start," a "broken link," and a "promise of purification" (76), is not disappointed in the manner he presumed disappointment might come. For American identity does not finally consist, as in the English period, in "their consistently having none--than which deficiency nothing was more possible" (75). Rather, it is characterized by pragmatism so complete that the natural American morality of the old international theme is being destroyed. Abel Gaw is the son of the American Adam.⁵

Graham is to discover the nature of American character partly as a result of his indirect relationship to Cissy Foy through old Northover "dans le temps" in Europe. Exactly how James will work out this relationship is unclear, though a transferral of Cissy's affection from Vint to Graham similar to Densher's switch from Kate to Milly seems likely. Cissy perceives that Gray is "the one person within her reach who would constitute a link with the delightful old hero of her European adventure," with "her romance" (263). Gray himself finds "every aspect of their so excellent time together reviving now in a thick rich light" (262), and even though Gray "felt no jump in him at the chance to discuss so dear a memory in an air still incongruous" (264), James is clearly planning a scene in which the two renew their sense of that European episode. Apparently Cissy will fall in love with Gray, perhaps leaving Vint a choice like Kate Croy's--the money or a mate, but not both. Or Cissy may be left with the choice, or Gray himself.⁶

Since James never exactly parallels two of his plots, and since Cissy is not fully developed, the reader must remain unsure of her role. James would undoubtedly break more conventions of the old international theme in developing her part. She is explicitly not the American girl of the early works, just as the rich but not at all beautiful Rosanna is far from the old type: "'I've notoriously nothing in common with the creature you mention,'" Cissy tells Davey Bradham. "'I loathe,' she said with her purest gentleness, 'the American girl.'" (188). Cissy imitates the American girl's manner even as she denies that identity. Davey replies by facing Cissy "an instant more as for a view of the whole incongruity . . . 'Well, you do of course brilliantly misrepresent her. But we're all'--he hastened to patch it up--'unspeakably corrupt.'" With that sentence Davey captures much of the essence of the novel. Like "Julia Bride," The Ivory Tower reverses the old international theme and its conventions, often with exquisite irony, to reveal how American society has been corrupted. Instead of two Europeans swindling a moral native American, as in The Wings of the Dove, James portrays what now seems a more likely event, two Americans swindling one of their own, who is moral through his background in Europe. American innocence is no longer necessarily moral, nor is morality necessarily innocent. James wanted the story to be "absolutely current" and modern in its minutest details (cf. 353-55). In spite of the emphasis on Graham's sense

of past America, the novel's modernity and relevance are difficult to deny.

Nor is James's last novel an escapist document, though it treats the theme of escape from the present explicitly. Contrary to Lubbock and Cargill, The Sense of the Past is a direct resolution of an issue James was facing as a result of the war, whether to give up on the modern era entirely and die, or reaffirm the present and live.⁷ For the main message of the work is that while the past may be a fine place to visit, it is no place to stay. Escape is not the main reason James gives for returning to work on the novel, as he explains to Edith Wharton:

I have got back to trying to work--on one of three books begun and abandoned-- . . . as perhaps offering a certain defiance of subject to the law by which most things now perish in the public blight. This does seem to kind of intrinsically resist--and I have hopes. (Letters, II, 426)

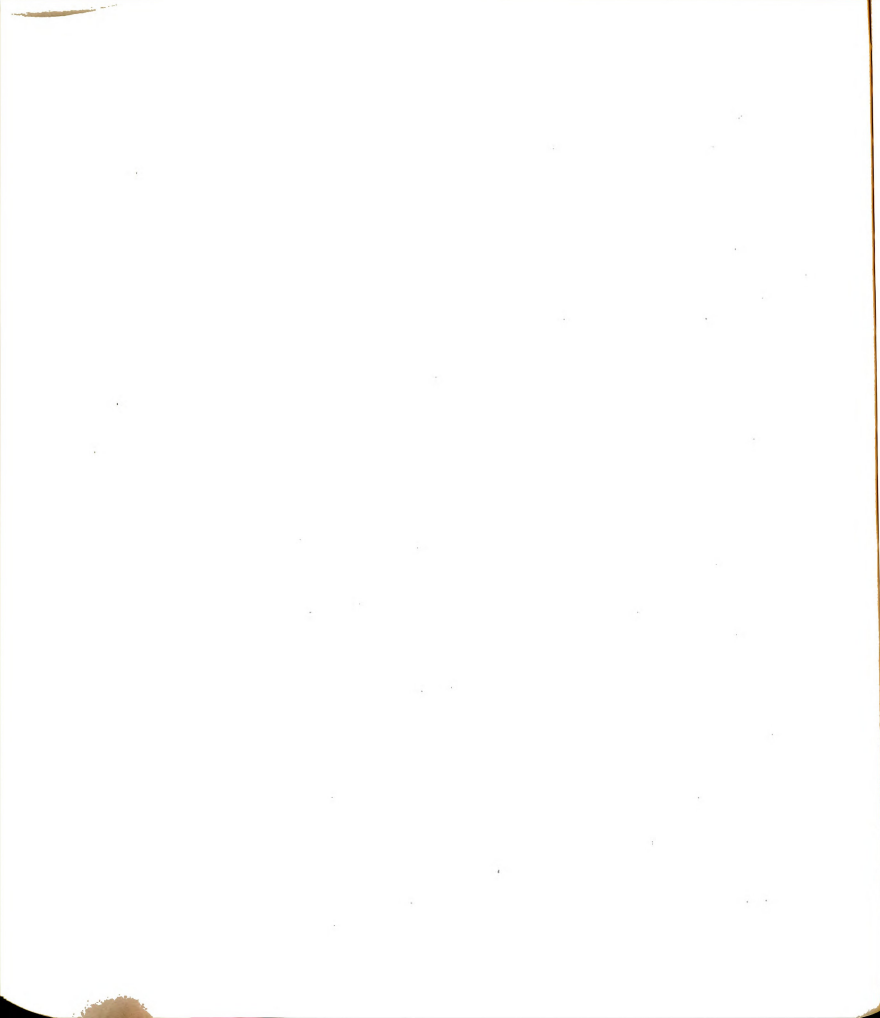
There may be escapism in trying to avoid a prevailing trend, in this case the tendency of the past and all creative work to be obliterated by the war, but James's intention seems more positive than escape. He is repudiating the movement toward anarchical revolution and the arbitrary rejection of the past. If James were interested mainly in avoiding reality, he would not wrestle so hard with it:

I have in a manner got back to work--after a black interregnum; and find it a refuge and a prop--but the conditions make it difficult, exceedingly, almost insuperably, I find, in a sense far other than the mere distressing and depressing. The subject-matter of one's effort has become itself utterly treacherous and false --its relation to reality utterly given away

and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of this--and how represent that horrific capability, historically latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand not represent it either--without putting into play mere fiddlesticks? (II, 446)

Clearly James is still struggling to connect the past he knew with the present he is learning to know--to link civilized society with the disaster that had left so few clues to explain its generation. He is not simply escaping the present; he is searching for its seeds in the past.

A novel may be hopeful without being escapist. As he writes The Sense of the Past, James feels that he should be salvaging as much as possible, and that the war will leave at least some redeeming residue. If he cannot take social fusion for granted, he can fight for it, hope for it, or at least re-examine the possibilities of it. The one silver lining James sees in the war is the growing closeness of the allied nations, particularly France and Britain. For the English to appreciate the French valor in the war and report it in the press "seems to me of the highest international value and importance," James declares, optimistically feeling that the two nations are again enjoying a "feast of friendship" (Letters, II, 428-29, 454). It is an "extraordinary luxury that that whirligig of time has turned up for us [England] such an intimacy of association with France and that France so exquisitely responds to it . . . (I do wish to goodness we [U.S.A.] were in it," James writes to Mrs. Thomas Sergeant Perry, identifying



himself with both Great Britain and the United States on the same page (II, 429). He fully expects and desires the United States to join the allies. In becoming a British citizen, James calculates the weight his act may have in setting an example for his native country to follow (II, 478-79, 491). He believes even right after his decision to be naturalised that "all the while . . . the tide of American identity of consciousness with our own, about the whole matter, rises and rises, and will rise still more before it rests again--so that every day the difference of situation diminishes and the immense fund of common sentiment increases" (II, 479).

The Sense of the Past has a similarly hopeful assumption implied in the central situation, the assumption that both Britain and the United States have progressed to a more civilized state since 1820, which will ultimately make reconciliation possible. The novel is "an excursion into the British past by an American, symbolic of the 'shared instincts and ideals, of a communion of race and tongue, temper and tradition,' of the English and the Americans" (Cargill, 490). But although the ancestors Ralph visits are good specimens, they are not up to modern standards. Mrs. Midmore, the "very finest woman of her age possible" (XXVI, 143), represents "by the aid of dress the absolute value and use of presence as presence" (145). Her costume and speech and manners are part of a clear tradition (148). But the Midmores' refinement suffers from the vulgarity of

the old "money patronage" system. Ralph, being wealthy, discovers "extraordinary readiness . . . in everyone to profit by this, the want of delicacy and dignity, by our modern measure, in the general attitude toward pecuniary favors" (316). Perry Midmore is stupid, so his blundering for a handout is the worst, but the whole family is rather crude about money (156, 274-75). In fact compared with moderns of similar social standing, the Midmores (as their name reflects) are only half-developed in manners and morals--the discovery Ralph must make to cure his distorted evaluation of the past. The point is that an American of 1910 is much more refined than an Englishman of 1820, which is no small progress, considering the Americans of 1820, toward a synthesis of the two cultures. "The contrast between the civilization from which Ralph comes and the more brutal one into which he penetrates is at any rate more a contrast between present and past than America and Europe."

Ralph Pendrel is a 1910 Yankee, however, with the initial sense of the past of an earlier variety of American in the international theme. He is parallel in attitude to Clement Searle ("A Passionate Pilgrim"), whose mania for the past also blinded him to the value of the present. Ralph has Searle's natural passion for the old, in spite of the fact that there is still little in America to account for that passion or to develop it (17, 23). A New Yorker in the succession of Searle, Jackson Lemon, and Milly Theale, Ralph somehow becomes cosmopolitan without

ever leaving the country. James is apparently still using his version of the American Adam, the fresh New Yorker as the intellect best able to comprehend Europe (cf. 31). Quoting from Ralph's "An Essay in Aid of the Reading of History," Aurora Coyne is amazed at the insight Ralph has achieved "in this place, which denies the old at every turn and contains so few such objects or surfaces" (34). The essay, read by his English cousin, wins him a fine old London house in Mansfield Square for an inheritance. Ralph decides to live in it to cultivate a sense of the past. When Aurora exclaims that "the sense of the past is your sense," denying his need to develop it further, Ralph replies that his perception lacks intensity in America. He must go abroad (32-33).

If Ralph goes to England, however, he will leave Aurora behind, for she has had some mysterious experience in Europe which prevents her return (15). She has decided to be an American; for her, going to Europe was a "fool's errand" (26). So she and Ralph make a covenant with each other: he will go to England, she will stay in the States; and if either crosses the sea again, he must not violate his true self to do it (3536). James has set up two extremes which are both at fault--Ralph the passionate pilgrim worshiping Europe and the old, Aurora the modern devotee of America and the adventurously new--and will proceed to reconcile them in the remainder of the novel. A parable is clearly in the making.⁹

So far Ralph's interest in the old seems unusual but not quite obsessive. His sense of the past reflects James's general concern with consciousness in the late fiction. When Ralph reaches Europe, however, the "backward vision" he is noted for (34) begins to take on tones of perversion.¹⁰ Wanting to "recover the lost moment" may be just nostalgia, but wanting to "feel the stopped pulse" of his ancestor has a touch of the morbid (48). Ralph is verging on necrophilia when he voices such sentiments, including philosophical ones like the following: "It was when life was framed in death that the picture was really hung up" (48).¹¹ He has the obsessive's passion for detail. In London he wanted to sense "the very smell of that simpler mixture of things that had so long served; he wanted the very tick of the old stopped clocks," the hour of daily events, the "temperature and the weather and the sound, and yet more the stillness, from the street . . . and the slant on the walls of the light of afternoons that had been," and even "the unimaginable accidents" that documents never contain (48). Somewhat like the historical novelists James criticizes so strongly, Ralph wants the impossible, to sense the past as if he had lived it.¹² He yearns to be "contemporaneous and present" with the past, to be taken by the "old ghosts" for one of themselves (49). Like Spencer Brydon in "The Jolly Corner," he lurks at night outside the house he has inherited, avoiding the light which is symbolic of the present: "The streetlamp was a disfavour to the dark

backward into which Ralph loved to look" (52). All the "founts of romance" are loosed in his soul. Like Isabel Archer he wishes the house were haunted (53), and in his fervor he mistakes the hall for Jacobean, much older than it actually is (63). He virtually worships when he is in the holy of holies, the third and innermost drawing room, "the most consecrated corner of the house," featuring a portrait of his ancestor (75). Gradually he begins the dangerous practice of looking inward rather than out, and James uses subtle descriptions of light and air to convey the fine changes in his perception:

He looked out only to look in again under the charm of isolation and enclosure, of being separated from the splashed Square and its blurred and distant life much more by time than by space; under the charm above all of the queer incomparable London light--unless one frankly loved it rather as London shade--which he had repeatedly noted as so strange as to be at its finest sinister, and which just now scattered as never before its air over what surrounded him. However else this air might have been described it was signally not the light of freshness and suggested as little as possible the element in which the first children of nature might have begun to take notice. Ages, generations, inventions, corruptions had produced it, and it seemed, wherever it rested, to have filtered through the bed of history. (65)

The "children of nature," the old American Adams, would not inhabit such a place, but Ralph is far beyond these. He feels as though he has found a "conscious past, recognizing no less than recognized" (65), and senses the "animating presences" of a palpably visitable past, one far enough away to be strange but close enough to be still imaginable:

They were of an age so remote and yet of an imagery so near. None of the steps were missing and the backward journey took no turns. It wasn't for Ralph as if he had lost himself, as he might have done in a deeper abyss, but much rather as if in respect to what he most cared for he had never found himself till now. As the house was his house, so the time, as it sank into him, was his time. (66)

He is imbibing the influences that will make possible his backward transmigration into an ancestor situated at the dawn of the modern era (77).¹³ He is so ultra-sensitive that he vibrates at "a mere panel in a wainscot, a mere seam in a curtain." For the first time he realizes that if he dips all the way into his obsession, he may not emerge again at all (70).

Ralph's sense of the past is improving--he knows now that the hall is not Jacobean (85), and he feels that he has outgrown his essay (93)--but his sense of the present is disappearing. He looks at his watch at intervals, but nothing happens (80). He is gaining his sense of the past at the price of his sense of reality and the present. In order to gain a complete sense of the past, Ralph must lose his identity. As he explains to the American ambassador, whom he visits just before disappearing into the past for six months, "'The point is that I'm not myself. . . . I'm somebody else'" (97). He is strangely lucid about the whole matter, recognizing his obsession: "I have been ridden all my life . . . by the desire to cultivate some better sense of the past than has mostly seemed sufficient even for those people who have gone in most for cultivating

it" (103). He thinks he has caught his ancestor in the act of yearning for the prophet's vision, which is the reason for the figure in the portrait facing the wrong direction. Ralph is clearly a "victim of the sense of the Past," and his ancestor is a "victim of the sense of the Future" (112). As Ralph enters his house after taking leave of the ambassador on the steps, his sense of time goes through one more obvious distortion:

Our young man was after that aware of a position of such eminence on the upper doorstep as made him . . . see the whole world, the waiting, the wondering, the shrunkenly staring representative of his country included, far, far, in fact at last quite abysmally below him.

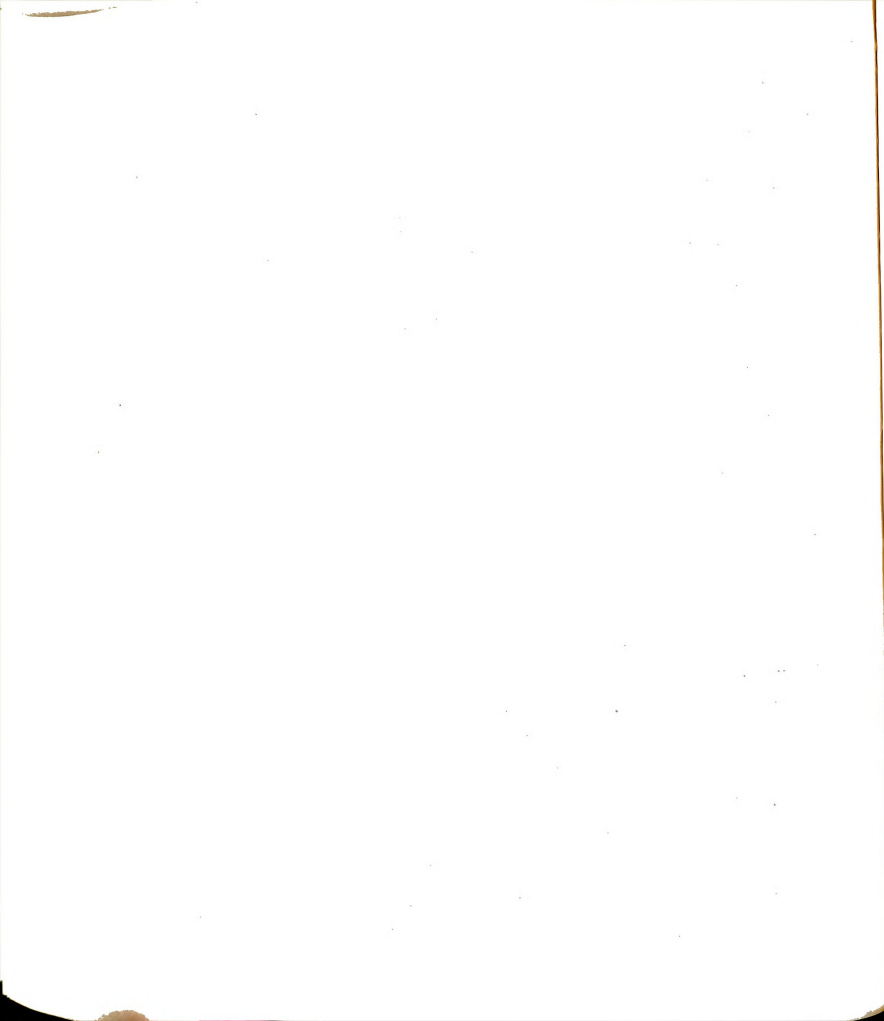
Ralph's recession into the past is represented by his warped sense of distance, like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. James continues to record the distortion:

Whether those had been rapid or rather retarded stages he was never really to make out. Everything had come to him through an increasingly thick other medium; the medium to which the opening door of the house gave at once an extension that was like an extraordinarily strong odour inhaled--an inward and inward warm reach that his bewildered judge would literally have seen swallow him up; though perhaps with the supreme pause of the determined diver about to plunge just marked in him before the closing of the door again placed him on the right side and the whole world as he had known it on the wrong. (114-15)

In his notes James plots a revision of this passage which will show Ralph using the knocker instead of the latch key, to allow "a minute's further intensity of focussing" (303). James is trying to catch the minutely changing quality of

Ralph's consciousness as his sense of the present recedes into the past. Ralph has apparently lost all his old identity, having exchanged places with his ancestor (cf. 302), and mistakenly believes that he has the right perception of time and the rest of the world is in the wrong.¹⁴

Once inside, however, Ralph is gradually disenchanted, for he has not left all his old identity behind. True, the family history "emerged to distinctness" for him for the first time (133), and impressions strike his quivering sensibility readily enough, but something is wrong. At one point, when one of his comments loses them, the Midmores seem "some mechanic but consummate imitation of ancient life, staring through the vast plate of a museum" (213). Again like the historical novelist, Ralph has enough modern identity left to make the introduction of anachronisms inevitable, which falsifies the effect he wishes to produce.¹⁵ His modern identity is weird to the Midmores. Every time he speaks, they all listen with rapt attention (239-40). Something about him is haunting them, is causing a strange malaise (cf. Notebooks, 300). Part of the problem is "some disparities between his and their connection with the past"; he has a generalized knowledge reinforced by books, while "they had the advantage of their perch upon accumulations and continuities more substantially and above all more locally determined" (283). He is working by "inspiration" rather than experience (187), a particularly unsettling faculty when it envisions a vase in a house that



Ralph has not yet visited (247)!

More important is Ralph's growing awareness of his schizophrenia. Part of him remains incurably modern, breaking into his perceptions until he is "at last fairly dizzied by a succession of perspectives" (238). Once again he loses his sense of time; during one interval in his consciousness, he is totally unaware of what transpires (268). In addition "certain passages of his recent past were affecting him by this time as almost superlatively ancient" (284). He finds that he likes the wrong girl, the one that strikes him as "modern, modern!" (280), rather than the one his ancestor would have preferred. The idea of being trapped into marrying the other girl shakes him, and he begins to consider how to get out. In the notes to the unfinished work, James explains the feeling that will ultimately develop in Ralph as "the horror of the growing fear of not being saved, of being lost, of being in the past to stay, heartbreakingly to stay and never know his precious Present again" (294). On this reversal of feeling rests the main moral of the work and the main plot structure. His modern self won't leave the 1820 identity alone. He "finds his identity, the one he wears for the occasion," fairly well, but is always "at the same time watching himself . . . being both the other man and not the other man, being just sufficiently the other, his prior, his own, self, not to be able to help living in that a bit too" (300). This "watchful and critical" self grows and grows. In fact

little by little by little he begins to live more, to live most, and most uneasily, in what I refer to as his own, his prior self, and less, uneasily less, in his borrowed, his adventurous, that of his tremendous speculation, so to speak--rather than the other way round as had been the case at first. When his own, his original, conquers so much of the ground of that, then it is that what I've called his anguish gets fuller possession of it . . . (300)

For Ralph has an "ineffaceable margin of independence," a "clinging taint of modernity," that causes him to deviate "of necessity, from what would have happened in the other fellow's place and time" (322). He naturally prefers Nan to Molly, "it being by his fine modern sense that the exquisite, delicate, the worthy-herself-to-be-modern younger girl has affected him, in utter defiance of any capacity on the other fellow's part to appreciate or conceive any such value in her" (322-23). Soon Ralph realizes that he is more refined than his forbears, more distinguished, more clever, better mannered, and even better toothed (295). His preferences are reversed; now the future he left is "ripeness, richness, attraction and civilization, . . . virtual perfection" compared to the world of the past (337).¹⁶

James planned to have Ralph come out of his six-month plunge just as Aurora comes to Europe, having undergone and overcome a similar psychological stress. Ralph has cured his worship of the past, Aurora has renounced her repudiation of it. Clearly, even with the strain of the war, James is no reactionary. Living in the past is still far less

attractive to him than living in the present. He does not waste his final years with despair and nostalgia. His time perspective is balanced once agin, just as it had been in the previous century.

Notes

¹Lubbock's comments preface the final group of letters in his edition, Letters, II, p. 380, from which I am quoting James's reactions to the war.

²Matthiessen, p. 133, thinks Lubbock's judgment of The Ivory Tower is shallow, but agrees that The Sense of the Past "constituted a mode of escape." Stone, with some arguments similar to mine even though he is dealing with the theory of relativity at work in the age, disagrees with Lubbock on both novels, pp. 219-20.

³For a similar symbolic treatment of bland American architecture, see pp. 23, 42, 75-76.

⁴Among the many evidences of this fact, consider the references to him on pp. 74, 123, 192-93, 200, 216, 226, 248, 258.

⁵Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1951), pp. 725-26, describes the novel as an exact counterpart of The Sense of the Past, "a study of maladjustment in the present, placed in an American setting" comparable to Ralph's maladjustment in the past placed in a European setting. For the hero of The Ivory Tower, "life in the world he knows (the modern world) is so wanting in significance that he becomes inert in the midst of a corruption he can neither conquer nor condone." Consequently the work is a strong protest against contemporary American society.

⁶But consider, Wegelin, p. 165, who sees the novel in terms of the growing social fusion of Europe and America: "The Europeanized Fielder is balanced by Rosanna Gaw, the last of James's American girls; and the novel was to close, apparently, on a union of the two, representing a wisdom uniting culture and idealism, the virtues of Europe and America."

⁷See Cargill, pp. 479, 486.

⁸Wegelin, p. 192, indicating an important change in the focus of the international theme.

⁹Cf. Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art, p. 171, and Matthiessen, p. 135. Wegelin, p. 192, n. 20, feels that "Ralph and Aurora are latter-day variants of the passionate pilgrim and the social critic of an earlier day; and their story was to dramatize, apparently, a reconciliation of the two familiar American attitudes toward Europe--a purpose

⁹(cont.) which receives emphasis from the fact that James employs a modification of the old theme of the American claimant." Wegelin's description clarifies the important change in emphasis in the international theme from a reflection of Americano-European relations to an attempt to resolve the differences between the old passionate pilgrim and the critic. The argument takes place totally among Americans, pro-European "reactionaries" and pro-American "progressives." To James, of course, both are at fault. Bewley, p. 71, stresses the connection of the novel with the old international theme: ". . . the nature of the double identity belonging to Ralph Pendrel belongs equally to the present and the past, to America and to Europe. It is nothing less than a symbol into which the whole American problem under the two aspects that have been considered here is compressed." In fact, as I argue, James is still criticizing both Europe and America.

¹⁰Pointed out by Andreas, p. 104, among others.

¹¹Cf. David W. Beams, "Consciousness in James's 'The Sense of the Past,'" Criticism, V (1963), pp. 160, 166.

¹²Cf. James's comments to Sara Orne Jewett in Edel, Letters, pp. 234-35.

¹³The time Ralph returns to is not the eighteenth century, as some critics have mistakenly presumed, but the nearer past of 1820. As James remarks in the Notebooks, pp. 365-66, "Turning it over I don't see why 1820 shouldn't respond to my need without the complication of my going further back. I want the moment of time to be far enough off for the complete old-world sense, and yet not so far as to be worrying from the point of view of aspects, appearances, details of tone, of life in general; accordingly if I see my 'present' hour as really recent, as of 1910, say, I get upwards of a century of 'difference,' which is in all conscience enough--with the comparative nearness so simplifying certain apprehended difficulties." The Sense of the Past is not a violation of James's preference for a "visitable" past not far distant from the present. Among the erring critics is Wright (p. 170); among the more careful, Cargill (p. 487).

¹⁴Beams points out, p. 150, a very interesting change in technique at this point: "As Ralph enters the house of the past, James enters Ralph's mind dedicated to the past. As Ralph comes into relation with the portrait James forsakes the scenic for the 'picture' technique, involving the more radical center of consciousness. Past and present are thus sharply discrete in method."

¹⁵Wright, p. 173, notes of Ralph that "His situation is not basically different from that of a novelist, who, if he is sincere, may find himself living in a fictional world which refuses to bend to his will." Cargill, in fact, p. 487, thinks James is implicitly attacking historical novels: "The main object of his attack, however, was the widespread veneration of the past, any past, as evidenced by the enormous popularity of historical fiction at the turn of the century."

¹⁶Cargill, p. 483.

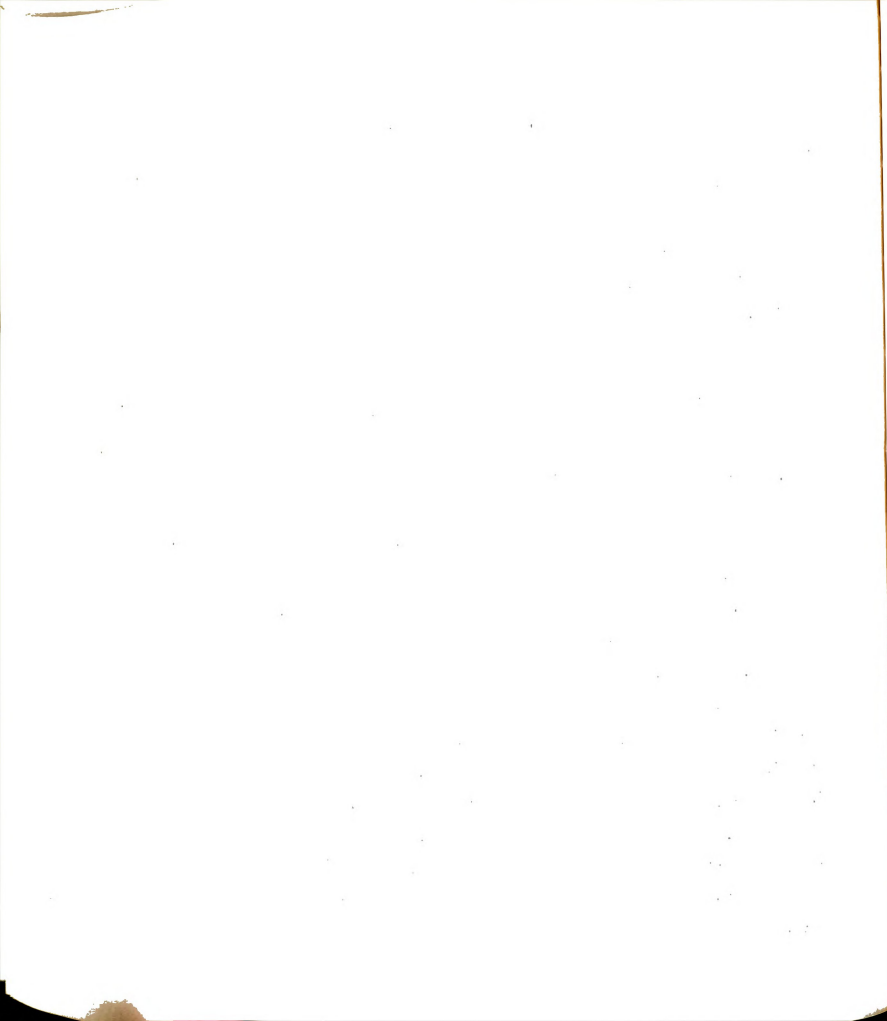
Conclusion

The superficial similarity of "A Passionate Pilgrim" and The Sense of the Past, the two poles of this chapter, cannot obscure how far James has traveled in his international wanderings. Since the two are so dissimilar in the use of point of view and portrayal of experience, the parallels in the plots only highlight the contrasts. James is still concerned with the proper attitude an American should take toward Europe in order to inherit its value without pawning his critical intellect, and the dangers of failure are evident in each story. But the significance has broadened over the interval. The issue becomes the stance a modern man should take toward all human history, how he should envision reality and live it. Bewley's old formulation of the international theme as "Europe versus America" and "past versus present" should be a description of the development of the theme rather than a description of concurrent emphasis. Likewise James's techniques in portraying the sense of the past, first as the sense of external detail and then as a function of consciousness, have made great progress. The following summary of the development of this chapter should clarify my conclusions and their implications.

Early versions of the international theme like "A Passionate Pilgrim" are based on the sense of the past as the proper perception of local color--usually formulated

as whether the American can find his true heritage in old rural England or can truly appreciate Paris. In a few cases the plots resemble those of the worst romances: can a rich young man from a little mining town in the West find happiness with a poor but noble Frenchwoman? But the cosmopolitan James cannot long remain limited by the romance and implied nationalism of these narrow international stories. Though Europeans may be dulled to their heritage, having lost the truly appreciative sense of their past, they are nevertheless products of that past, and perhaps the major value of the fresh and Adamic American is that he can wake up Europeans to a proper sense of their culture. Such Americans contribute most not by cutting themselves off from the past in pristine independence, but by incorporating the best of all nations and times into their characters, and by working toward an intelligent social synthesis. James saw himself as one of these Americans.

Combating the opposite American tendency to worship the past, however, just as he fights the movement to reject it entirely, James argues against the dilettantes who import all wisdom from the Old World, or who, like some historical novelists even at the turn of the century, find value only in the past. He feels both urges within himself, but tries to balance, temper, and reconcile the two. Just as he fights the literary conventions of romance, so he fights the romantic American temperament in his early fiction, and the sense of the past becomes the ability to distinguish



what is valuable and real in customs and conventions from what is sentimental and false. Soon, in the English period, a fine sense of the past becomes a model for all nationalities, a natural step in the development of a perceptive, mature consciousness accompanied by and inseparable from the development of moral and aesthetic sense. The past changes from a matter of ruins, monuments, and provincial customs, to part of a continuous stream of time and culture influencing the present and building the future.

Having perceived this organic relation between the present and the past, James cultivates it in as many ways as possible, such as by mildly satirizing distortions and lacks of the sense of the past, and by testing the chances for its proper development through widespread growth of a cosmopolitan sense of the past. He begins to take for granted the growing unity of educated people in all cultures, the similarity in their perceptions of the past and its value. Consequently the international theme begins to transcend its national elements, and becomes a portrayal of comparative development rather than an exploitation of contrast. Soon the theme is so much part of the background that "theme" is an inaccurate name for the elements at work. All is subsumed into the portrayal of maturation, and a fine sense of the past is both an evidence and a necessary accompaniment of maturity. Awareness is all. The major external social thrust of the old ~~international~~ theme is thus parried by the growing importance of the portrayal of

consciousness. The theme has developed so consistently that James has a sense of its conventions being brittle, made to be broken, and he begins to treat it like romance--as a calcified portion of the past which has outlived its usefulness and needs to be revived through imaginative variation.

The result of these tendencies in the international theme is most apparent in the major phase. Nationalities become interchangeable parts; external traits of character give way to internal traits of consciousness; until eventually James's characters, seen from the outside, have fewer qualities of type than of archetype. The old attempt to define American and European character blurs, and his figures become idealizations woven from strands of literature as much as from direct observation. Partly because James's sense of the American past is fading, he generalizes the sense and his American characters. Nationality becomes an expedient rather than a subject in its own right, and the past becomes less the past of history than the vast conceptual realm of the infinite number of moments which have always preceded the present. The resulting depth of the past in the major novels is remarkable. For while James portrays directly only a "visitable" past, a thin veneer of time chosen to reveal the utmost continuity, he now gives the reader a sense of greater depth in time, a sense that what he is witnessing is an age-old pattern of human activity. Though perhaps not exploiting the full implications of his archetypes, James nevertheless moves

in the direction of myth.

Furthermore, his characters become nearly consummate observers of the past, heirs and heiresses of all the ages, the most perceptive consciousnesses possible. The reader learns to judge James's characters by their sense of the past, for it becomes the touchstone of maturity, culture, and virtue. In the finest examples of the portrayal of consciousness, the character's personal sense of the past plays a crucial role in producing awareness and, consequently, in determining behavior. Fine consciousness becomes the ability to assimilate immediate impressions, compare them with past experiences, and generate viable assessments of the nature of the present and one's relationships in it. The past is continually reinterpreted in the light of present events and vice versa; the past is constantly present in the mind for comparison and contrast.

James also manipulates the reader's sense of the past in his finest novels, setting up parallel scenes and mnemonic devices that only the reader can perceive. Consequently the alert reader's superior knowledge, controlled by the author, influences his continuing assessments of the characters. The reader observes growing awareness, revisions in the characters' sense of the past and the present; and must make similar amendments of his own sense as the work progresses. The ability of the mind to romanticize, rationalize, and otherwise distort the past becomes abundantly clear. Both the conscious and the subconscious

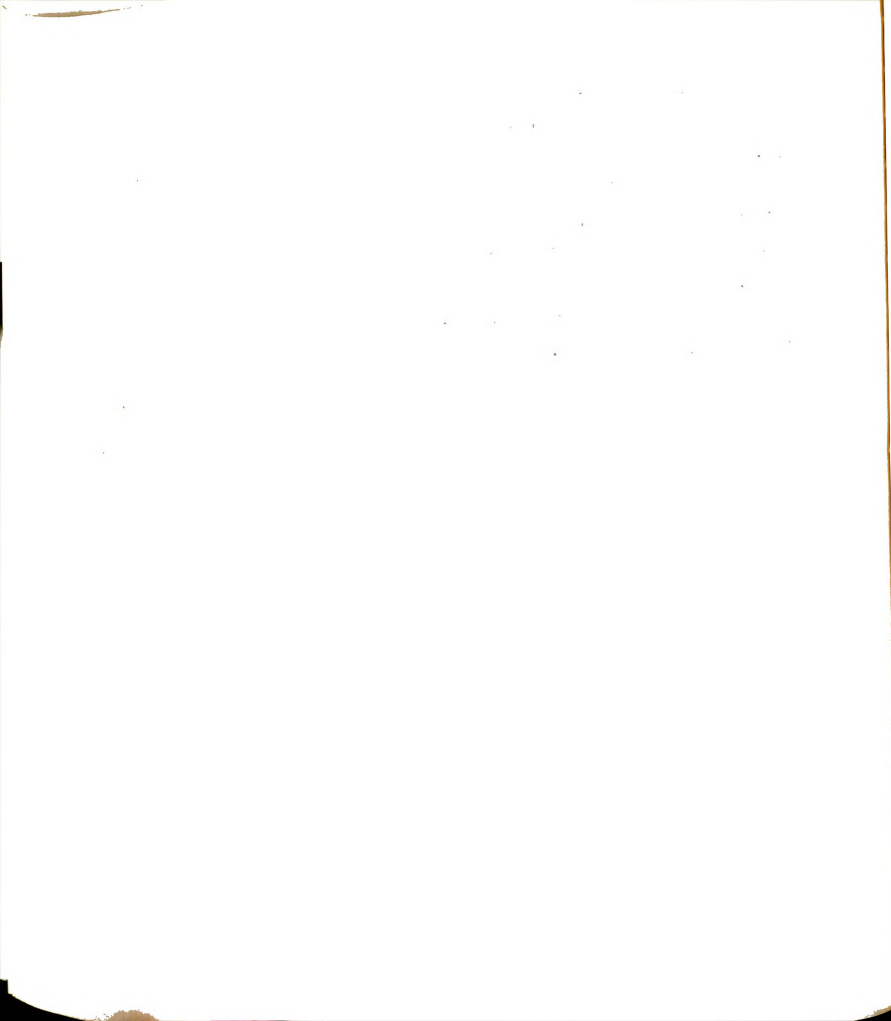
effect of the past on the sense of reality are exposed to the reader, as striking scenes are recalled or worked through explicitly and implicitly again and again by the major characters, each time with a fuller significance. Finally, since these parallel images remain in the reader's mind, carrying strong thematic and psychological significance, the recurrent imagery becomes nearly symbolic in the complex web of associations James builds.

The end of the major phase, caused by his return to America, is triggered by the cultural shock James feels in comparing twentieth-century America to the country he knew twenty years before. He feels betrayed by his old memories, idealized by time. The discontinuity is more than his sense of the past can quickly accommodate, and he works through several tales and The American Scene before his reassessment of the past fits his experience of the present. He portrays this shock in the alienation of certain Americans from their country, in stories revealing how a man may be expatriated by time just as surely as by distance. The tales criticize the present by comparing it with the past, and by using characters who want both to preserve the past and adapt to the present, the tales establish the groundwork for James's final treatment of the sense of the past as a philosophical and psychological problem. James indulges in some nostalgia and might-have-beens, but then once more reaffirms his cosmopolitan identity and a recorded sense of the past. After virtually burying the old

international theme as an irrelevant pursuit, he regains enough of the confidence of the major phase to work out a revised version of it. He is continually reassimilating the past and adapting it to the present--which is a fair definition of the artist's new responsibility.

But just after he gets into a major novel on this new basis, the European half of the international theme is pulled out from under him. His personal sense of the past is once more upset as the culturally mature continent he has known erupts in barbaric war. James now confronts the spectre of despair, and writes the work which gives its title to this study, making explicit as a topic the faculty which has formed so great a part of his work for so long. Involved in his struggle is the value of his fiction and even the value of intelligence, for if his sense of the past has been so wrong, then most of his work must be irrelevant and useless as the picture of his age which he had hoped to create. He could give up and return to the safety of past illusions, or simply wallow in despair; but he decides to make the sense of the past his subject as well as his method, judging its worth even as he portrays it. Leaving one revision of the international theme, The Ivory Tower, in which he had attempted to come down from the idealized heights of the major phase, James tackles the deepest issue in his mind: is life worth living in the present, or is it tolerable only through the fine vicarious re-creation of a secure past? Once again his struggle to unite past and present

conquers the disjunction. The sense of the past is worthless unless tied to the present. In spite of its previous errors, James reaffirms the sense of the past, for while it is imperfect and fallible, that faculty is the only major assimilator of knowledge, the only faculty which can give any order at all to the infinite chaos of immediate experience. However painful, the only life that can be lived is the present; however fallible, the only guide to it is the sense of the past.



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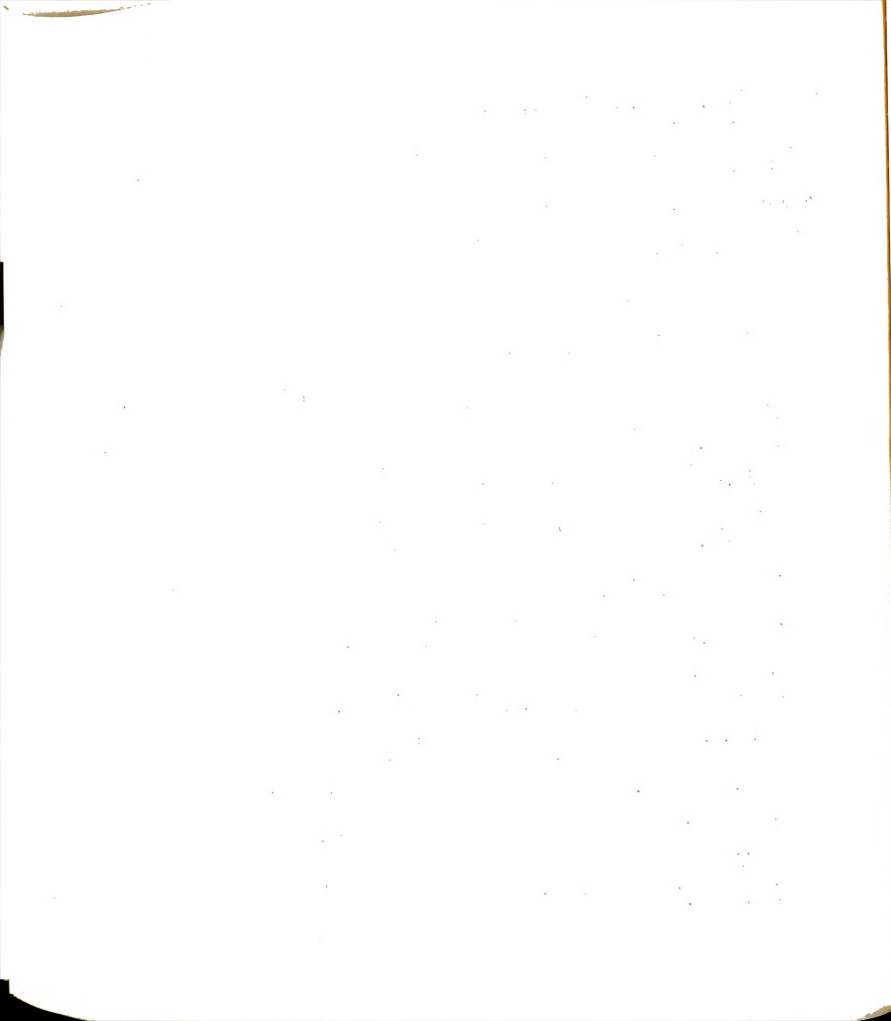
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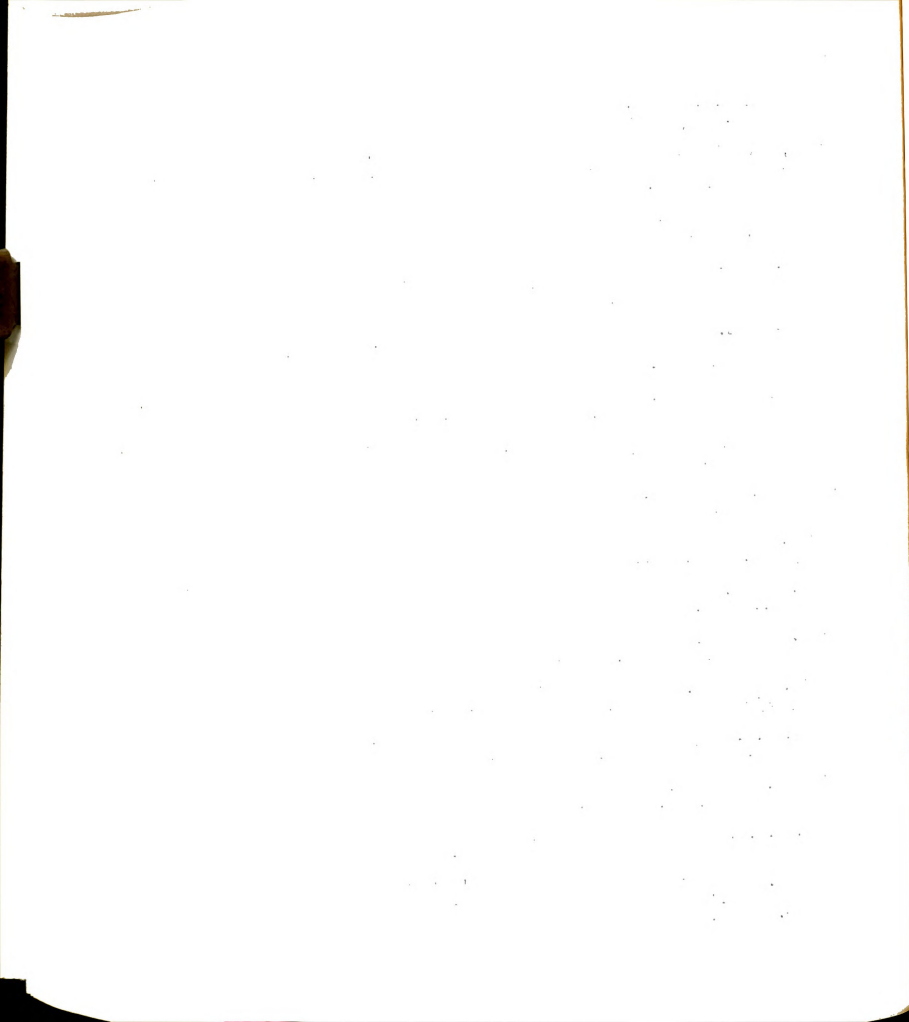
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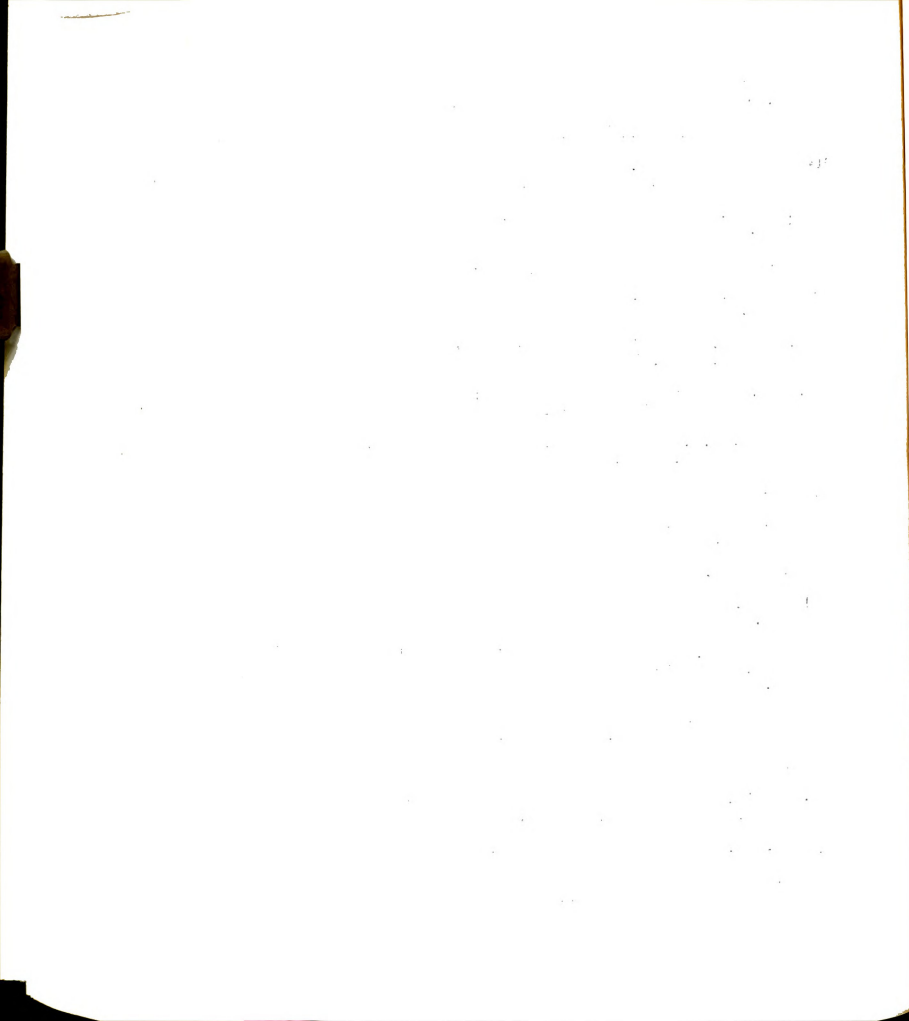
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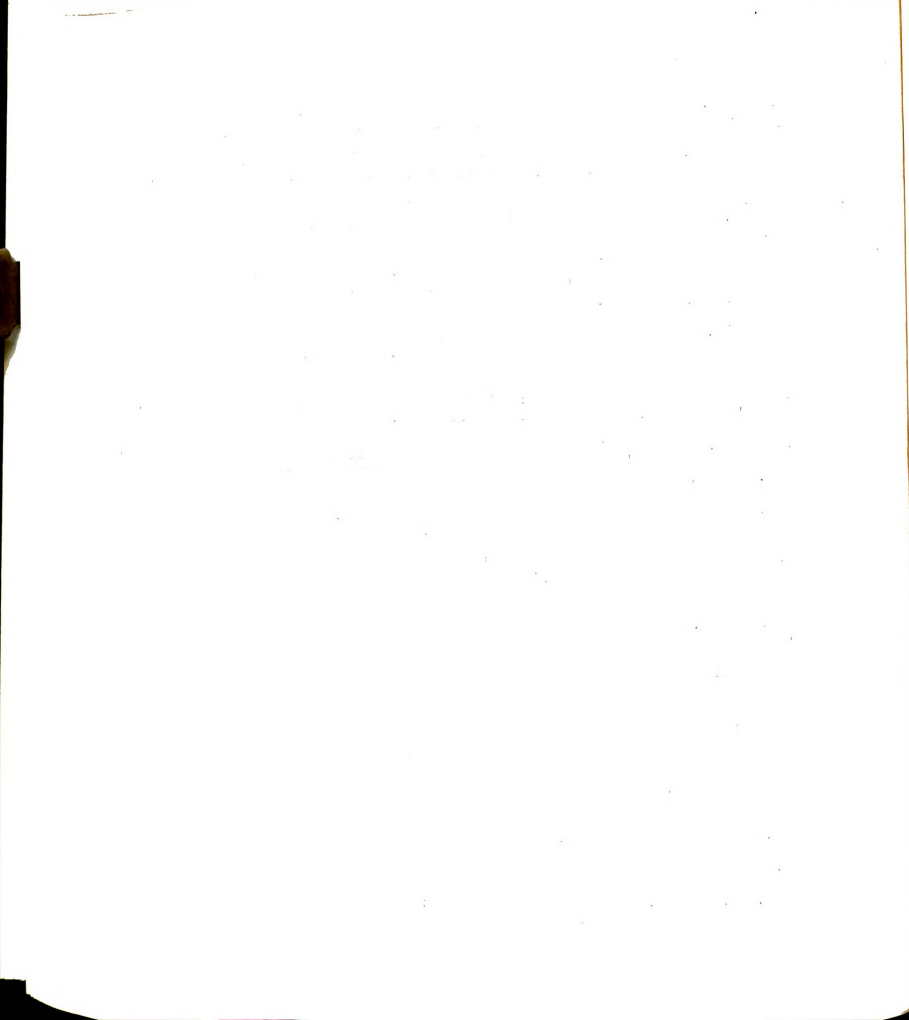
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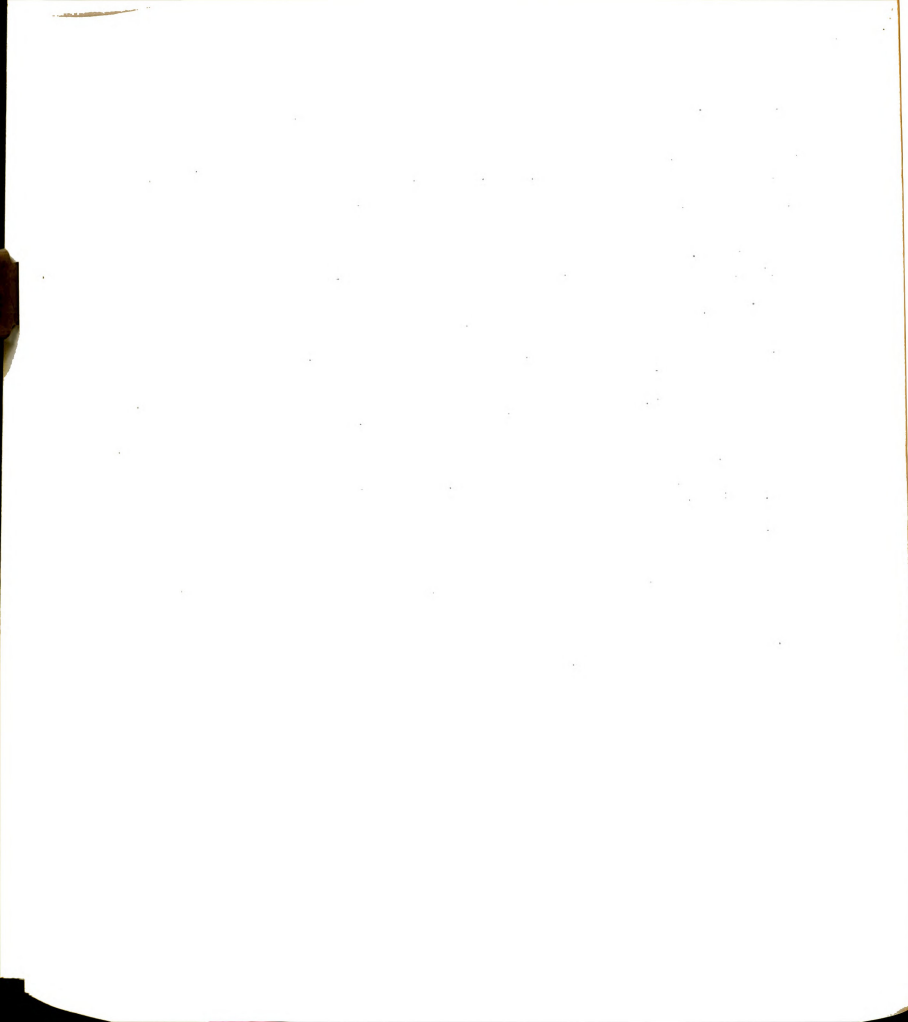
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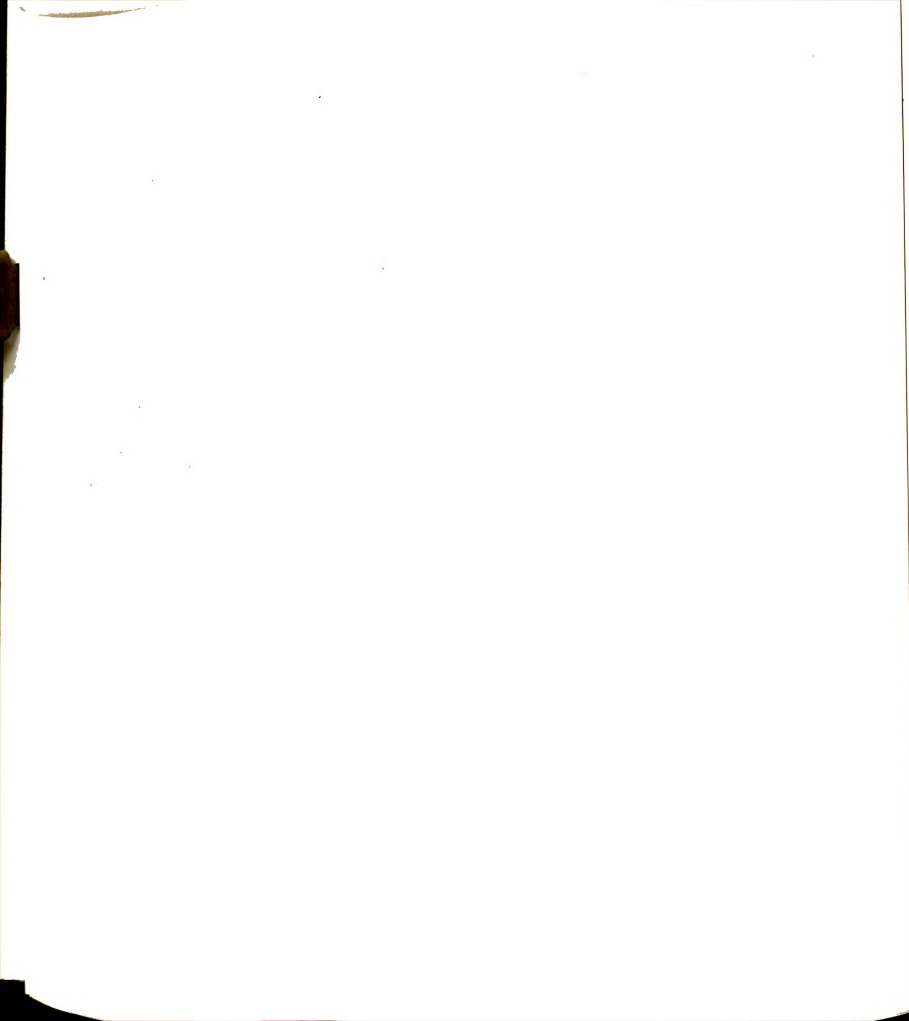
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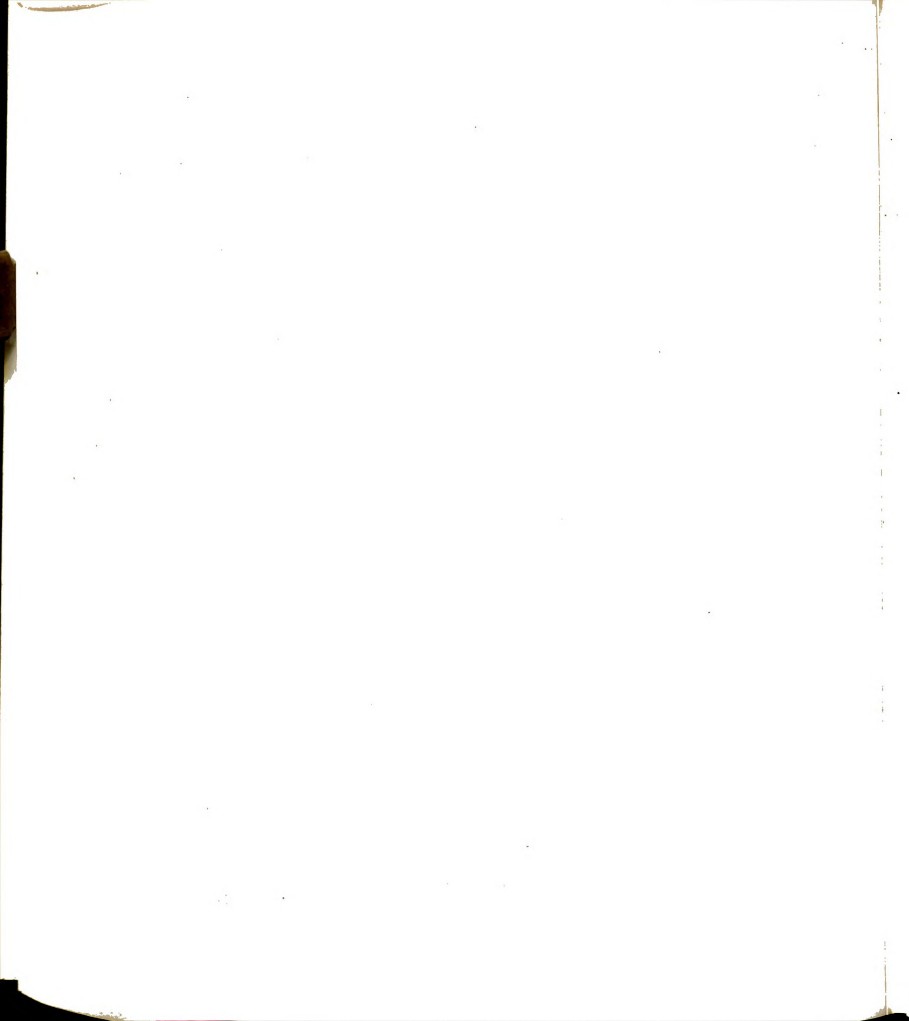


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