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MAJOR FICTION

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GOTHIC INFLUENCES IN HENRY JAMES'S MAJOR FICTION

by

Paul Rockwood Smyth

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

GOTHIC INFLUENCES IN HENRY JAMES'S MAJOR FICTION

by

Paul Rockwood Smyth

Henry James unquestionably knew the major works of the Gothic tradition well, and the influence of that tradition is apparent in fiction from every stage of his career. Although critics have thoroughly examined the Gothic elements of some of his most memorable tales--"The Turn of the Screw" and "The Jolly Corner," for example--little has been done with the obvious Gothicism of some of his major novels. James is most often regarded as an elite practitioner of the realistic novel, and to regard him in this way is quite naturally to obscure his relation to a tradition of popular fiction which was often highly sensational and unrealistic.

In the novels studied here, The American, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, both the character types and the thematic imagery are deeply rooted in the traditions of Gothic fiction. Furthermore, James's celebrated "international" theme may be seen as a late variation of the standard Gothic plot formula. James's heroes and heroines, like those of earlier Gothic fiction, embody the sentimental virtues; they believe in the freedom and sanctity of the individual. And like earlier Gothic heroes and heroines, James's cnaracters confront a world fundamentally hostile to such a belief. Yet it is in James's

deepest and most characteristic themes--the past, the interpenetration of art and life, the problem of evil--that his relation to the Gothic can be most convincingly established.

In order to understand this last point it is necessary to realize that if some of the earliest Gothic novels were sensational to the point of absurdity, they contained, nevertheless, a vision of terror and evil which was far more serious. As the tradition progressed from Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, through the works of Radcliffe and Lewis, to Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, terror and evil became associated less with exotic settings and villains and more with "home" and "civilized" personalities. James's use of the Gothic as he progressed from an early novel like The American to his last masterpiece, The Golden Bowl, follows precisely this pattern of development. As a result, James is best seen not as a realistic novelist who borrowed Gothic techniques and images for effect, but as a novelist whose work is very much continuous with that of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Bronte.

Chapter one of the dissertation is an attempt to define the essential generic characteristics of the Gothic as it was developed by its greatest practitioners. It is an attempt to define those aspects of the Gothic which endured and which constituted a living tradition which a writer like James could use and modify. Chapter two, then, uses the evidence of James's biography and his numerous critical writings to establish the fact that he was by

inclination and training an artist with a profound sympathy for the Gothic's essential statement and form. Taken together, these initial chapters establish a context for the next four chapters, devoted to readings of The American, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl respectively. A close reading of these texts shows how James moved, over a period of nearly thirty years, from the relatively crude Gothic effects of The American to the incomparable vision of civilized evil which is The Golden Bowl.

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For my grandmother, Gertrude Rockwood Smyth

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THE GOTHIC NOVEL: STATEMENT AND FORM

Ghost stories and stories of supernatural terror held a particular interest for Henry James, both as a reader and as a writer, throughout his career. His critical writings provide ample evidence that he read the works of Ann Radcliffe, the Bronte sisters, E.T.A. Hoffman, Poe, and, of course, Hawthorne with interest and attention. Then there is the evidence provided by his own stories, from early experiments like "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" (1868) to later masterpieces of horror like "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) and "The Jolly Corner" (1908). On the whole, the "Gothicism" of the tales has been thoroughly and interestingly explored.[1] The novels, however, are quite another matter. And in view of James's longstanding interest in this vein of fiction, it is interesting to discover how little has been done with the Gothicism of his major and most characteristic novels.

To be sure, the best critics have long been aware that James was something more than a realistic chronicler of upper-class manners. F.O. Matthiessen, for example, makes the following observation regarding The Wings of the Dove:

> But the more one scrutinizes the technique of this novel, the more one perceives that, despite James's past-masterly command over the details of realistic presentation, he is evoking essentially the mood of a fairy tale.[2]

Another eminent critic, Joseph Warren Beach, notes that James's novels have some of the primary audience appeal of the old romances:

> He stimulates our imagination like a drug. Our own experience is colored by this medium in which we are plunged so deep. For a long time after reading James, we find ourselves living in this romantic world . . . we are like the young ladies who used to read the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe or Mlle. de Scrudery, or the young men who still read "The Talisman," "The Last of the Mohican," and "The Count of Monte Cristo."[3]

Despite such acute observations, James's use of romance has most often been seen as an interesting but minor aspect of his fictional technique. Furthermore, most of those studies which have noted that James was in part a romancer have neglected altogether the romance form with which he was most familiar--namely the Gothic.

This is not to suggest, however, that the Gothic influences in James's novels have gone wholly unnoticed. For in addition to numerous passing references too inconsequential to warrant special mention, there are a number of studies which have much to offer the student who would know how and where James's novels are indebted to the Gothic tradition. Marius Bewley's study of characterization in The Bostonians and Patricia Merivale's study of narrative devices in The Sacred Fount are interesting demonstrations of James's debt to the Gothic in works that are otherwise very dissimilar.[4] More directly related to the approach

being developed here are studies done by William Veeder and Elsa Nettles which show how The Portrait of a Lady is indebted to well known Gothic works.[5]

Among the longer works, Leslie Fiedler's well known book, Love and Death in the American Novel is an obvious starting point for any discussion of James and the Gothic. Fiedler argues that the American literary tradition, in which he places James, found in the Gothic the prototype for its own characteristically dark mode of expression. Unfortunately, however, this work is only valuable in the most general sense as a guide to the Gothicism of James's major novels. Though brilliantly suggestive in parts, Fiedler's analysis of the Gothic is not, finally, adequate for discussing a writer of James's complexity; and his subsequent reading of James is not only superficial, but contains important errors of fact as well.[6]

Darlene Harbour Unrue's dissertation, "Henry James and Gothic Romance" is useful as a species of Gothic concordance to James's writings, but is short in interpretation. Unrue simply does not concern herself to any great extent with what the various Gothic themes and techniques mean, and does little, therefore, to show how they might be related to the important questions which James raises.[7] Martha Banta's work on James and the Gothic, published first in the Yale Review and subsequently revised in her book, Henry James and the Occult, is able but by no means exhaustive. She is, to my knowledge, the only critic to see that an understanding

of the Gothic is of crucial importance in reading the novels of the major phase. However, her approach is weakened somewhat by the fact that her understanding of James's use of the Gothic is not so much based on his obvious knowledge of the genre as it is based on his interest in the "occultism that forms much of the intellectual and emotional background for the late nineteenth century."[8] As a result, Banta focuses too exclusively on the "haunted" individual--Isabel Archer or Merton Densher, for instance--while largely ignoring the larger social and cultural implications which the Gothic inevitably entails. James, too be sure, was influenced to a degree by the occultism of which Banta speaks. But his interest in the "deeper psychology" undoubtedly came from the tradition of Gothic fiction as well. And it is in the fictional tradition, not in occultism, that we find strong parallels with his moral beliefs and his attitudes toward such things as culture and art.

Historically, there are a number of good reasons why the Gothicism of the major novels has not received the attention it seems to deserve. Chief among them, certainly, is James's role in the evolution of the novel. Implicitly in his fiction and explicitly in his critical prose James insisted upon the validity and importance of the novelist's art. He was among those most responsible for elevating the English novel from its popular beginnings to a fully conscious, elite art form. And it is, therefore, not surprising that a generation of critics trained to view James as

the quintessential elite novelist would be blind to any relationship between his novels and the earlier Gothic novels, many of which were overtly popular.

A second but perhaps equally important reason for this critical oversight may be recognized in the advent of literary realism and the resulting tendency to view presentations of everyday life as morally and artistically superior to the highly imaginative and fantastic productions of romance. Indeed an inclination to look upon the development of the novel as a fortuitous evolution in the direction of literary realism would act to obscure the fact that one of the great masters of the genre had nearly as much in common with Ann Radcliffe as he did with Balzac, Jane Austen or George Eliot.

It is, of course, fundamentally unreasonable to assume that the interest in the genre which his tales and critical comments suggest would not have carried over into the novels at all. But more than this, the influence of Gothic fiction is readily apparent on even the most superficial level of James's work. There are striking similarities between the great Gothic novels and some of his greatest works--The American, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl, for example. In James, as in, say, Ann Radcliffe, much of the interest and fascination of the plot is derived from a central confrontation between a sentimental hero or heroine and an evil world which his or her values are inadequate to comprehend. Indeed James's

characteristic and highly celebrated "European" theme can be looked upon as a late variation on the standard Gothic formula. Only in this instance Europe stands in the same relation to America as Italy had stood in relation to England in the early Gothic works--a correspondence which is perfectly fitting and appropriate since the idea of the new-world democracy is a political expression of the same values that gave rise to the heroes and heroines of Gothic fiction. Thus it is that figures like Emily St. Aubert, Valancourt, and Montoni stand behind and inform our apprehension of characters like Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, Maggie Verver, Gilbert Osmond, and Prince Amerigo.

Furthermore, what is true of character and plot is equally true of James's thematic imagery. Although James is consciously metaphorical in a way his predecessors were not, he relies, nevertheless, on a vast constellation of images which are part of the typical Gothic machinery. Ghosts are talked about with arresting regularity; there are references to ancestral castles and unmentionable sins buried deep in a dark and bloody past, and behind all of this stands that supreme figure of malicious authoritarianism--the medieval church.

On even the most superficial level, then, James's debt to the early Gothic romancers is evident enough. But his kinship with them runs much deeper than this. For what becomes increasingly clear when we read and reread novels like <u>The American</u>, <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u>, <u>The Wings of a</u>

Dove, and The Golden Bowl is that the world of the Gothic novels is James's world and his typical concerns are the same as those which have characterized Gothic fiction from the beginning. Surely no novelist not commonly associated with the Gothic tradition has ever written so penetratingly of the infinite danger that can lie beneath what appears familiar and safe. In his novels, James has not displaced the Gothic elements; he has, rather, used his greater artistic skill and more comprehensive intelligence to expand the insight into human nature which they always contained. Upon reflection, what had been a vague sense of identity between James and the Gothic novelists rapidly becomes a conviction of a consanguinity far more profound. And it is in James's richest themes--the uses of the past, the interpretation of art and life, and the relation of both of these to the problem of evil--that we feel this kinship most acutely.

At this point it seems safe to suggest that if the habit of looking upon James as an elite practitioner of the realistic novel has obscured his relation to the Gothic, there has been a corresponding failure to take the Gothic seriously. As Frederick Garber puts it:

> Our understanding of Gothic fiction has too often depended on a view that this mode is merely an extension of "sensibility," a grim silliness which grew to become the dark underbelly of the later eighteenth century.[9]

Professor Garber's essay makes clear that the typical Gothic paraphernalia are really the least interesting aspect of that genre. Much more important is the vision of life which emerges. And in the characteristic Gothic tendency to portray the terror of an isolated consciousness contemplating the ruins of a failed civilization we find a distinct anticipation of the modern consciousness. As a modern writer, James is best seen not as an outsider who could employ various elements of the Gothic tradition as they happened to suit his fancy, but as a writer whose work is very much continuous with that of Ann Radcliffe, M.G. Lewis and the Brontes. And while he does make increasingly subtle and sophisticated use of the Gothic, his is not the radical departure that one might at first suspect. His development of the Gothic was anticipated by other writers in the tradition. Nor, finally, does the tradition end with him; it comes down to us from him through writers as diverse as William Faulkner and John Fowles.

What has been presented thus far is only the barest outline of an argument. Before, however, the Gothicism of James's major novels can be studied in any complete way, it is first necessary to try to develop some clear sense of what the Gothic tradition was and is, as well as to understand why it has been so powerfully attractive to the literary imagination from the late eighteenth century to the present. This is not the easiest of tasks since the Gothic is a contradictory mode, designed in part to expose

the limitations and frustrations of rational thought. Then, too, the Gothic constitutes a tradition sufficiently broad to make any generalizations about it false to some degree. Although Gothic novels exhibit certain "formulaic" patterns which can be recognized, only the poorest of them appear to have been written by formula alone. And it is absolutely characteristic of the Gothic that these formulaic patterns do not remain in any stable relation to one another, but combine and recombine in ways which are both fascinating and startling.

Despite this real complexity, it is still possible to identify distinctive features. In doing this, it will be necessary to use several of the better known Gothic novels as paradigms or examples. James's early readings in the Gothic is a subject which will be dealt with more thoroughly in the second chapter; at this point, therefore, it is enough to say that he evidently knew the works of the major Gothic novelists--Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and the Brontes--well. What should be emphasized here is that it is not important to establish the extent to which James was influenced by any single Gothic novel. It is, rather important to develop a sense of the "Gothic ethos"--that way of perceiving the world which was characteristically Gothic and which constituted a tradition which James was able to make use of his most important novels.

The first and most obvious characteristic of Gothic fiction is its ability to portray and make the reader

experience a world which his conventional religious and social views have not conditioned him to expect. Central to the Gothic plot is an engagement with those things on heaven and earth which are not found in anybody's philosophy. Naturally, different critics have found different ways of describing this engagement. Gary Thompson describes it as an encounter with the "nameless other."[10] S.L. Varnardo, borrowing terminology from Rudolph Otto, sees the "numinous" or "man's underlying sense of fear, wonder and delight when he is confronted with the divine" as being basic to the Gothic experience."[11] Finally, Frederick Garber remarks that the "central form of the Gothic is a confrontation, led to and symbolized by the meeting of modes" in which various attitudes and ways of valuating experience meet in "pure, spontaneous surprise." As Garber goes on to point out, this meeting is not purposeful or meaningful in any easily recognizable sense, but seems, rather, to have "its point primarily in the fact of its presence."[12]

All of these descriptions contain something of the truth. Insofar as it is the most inclusive, Garber's is probably the most useful description of the tradition taken in its entirety. Yet in the end, the difference in the terminology used is less important than the fact that all of these critics see the Gothic as being intimately involved with realms of experience which are remarkably foreign to life as it is commonly perceived and experienced. In the specific historical context in which it developed, the

Gothic may be seen as primarily concerned with the dark and irrational aspects of life which the Augustans sensed but often chose not to explore. Yet as Devendra Varma notes, the early Gothic experiments contained the germ of something far more profound than might initially be expected. For if Gothic novelists chose to dwell on or flirt with the horrible, it was at least partially because they felt that this dark other world was potentially enriching as well. To quote Varma:

> Life became secure for the classical man; beautiful and joyous, but lacking the energy of fear, well devised but shallow, having no splendor nor depths of mystery.[13]

This is no more false than generalizations of this sort ever are, and it senses something truly important. For if a departure from what is safe and familiar is terrifying, it can also be enriching to the extent that it represents an escape from the confinements and restrictions of habit and received opinion. Surely one of the chief reasons that the Gothic was so immediately popular and has continued to be so to this day is that it embodied this paradox. In different ways and in different voices it insisted that there is an underlying affinity or identity between what is horrible and what is exalted. It insisted that the greatest of the mysteries surrounding Good and Evil is that while they are real they are often difficult to distinguish, and are, finally, related.

The visible symbol of this occurs in The Castle of Otranto where the horrors of Manfred's ancestral castle are connected to the church, the place of sanctity, by means of a hidden underground passageway. Lewis produces much the same effect in The Monk where a network of underground catacombs, dungeons, and passageways evokes the image of a bottomless pit yawning beneath the places of worship and meditation immediately above. These images are, however, just emblematic of the Gothic tendency to explore the startling contexts in which good and evil can occur. Heaven implies Hell. Sin can be educative. Religious exaltation can lead to intolerance and cruelty born out of superstition. Evil can be energetic and attractive. Order can be more dangerous than disorder. What is most civilized can be least humane. All of these are statements which Gothic writers make at various times and in various ways. In a tradition which comes down to us in literature from Spenser through Milton, the Gothic insists that a knowledge of true goodness implies a knowledge of its opposite, and insists, further, that one of the chief sources of evil is any attempt to deny the reality of its existence.

As readers of Gothic fiction, we participate in this dark paradoxical world largely through the experience of character. Of preeminent importance here is a fact that seems obvious enough but is often overlooked--namely that Gothic fiction depends for its emotional effect upon mimetic characterization. There are many important differences

between the Gothic and the realistic traditions, but they are similar to the extent that the characters of both are supposed to be recognizably like ourselves. Among modern critics, Francis Russell Hart is the clearest on this point:

> It is not normal in the world of Blithesdale or the Easter Rising for human personality abruptly to assume typological or sacramental force, any more than it is "natural" for characters in Gothic novels to find themselves thrust into the world of "romance." The shock is theirs. The mystery is the experience which they, in their humanity as characters, must cope with. To do so, they must exist for the reader basically as mimetic characters, characters to be understood in terms of psychological probability and process.[14]

Gothic characters are, certainly, akin to characters of traditional romance in certain important respects. This is particularly true in that Gothic characters, like the characters of traditional romance, do embody social values. The innocent heroines and untried heroes are the images of an established social order and code of conduct, while the villains and villainesses who oppose them represent everything that it is in the nature of those social values to exclude. Yet, if these characters are partially types, they are types with interesting inner lives. And it is the complexity of these inner lives and the resulting conflict between realistic psychology and social value which is the source of much of the Gothic's primary appeal. For the reader, part of the interest lies in the portrayal of an isolated consciousness dealing with dangers of the utmost

gravity; but to the extent that the reader and the character have common social values, much of the reader's uneasiness stems from an emerging awareness that his own values are on trial as well.

Yet as Professor Hart himself notes, there is nothing particularly remarkable or original about his insight since it merely points to what Horace Walpole had in mind when he gave the Gothic its essential generic qualities in the "Preface" to the second edition of The Castle of Otranto. After distinguishing between ancient romance in which "all was imagination and improbability" and modern romance in which "nature has cramped imagination," Walpole unveils his desire to create a new romance form which will synthesize the admirable attributes of the other two:

> The author of the following pages thought it possible to reconcile the two kinds. Desirous of leaving the powers of fancy to expatiate through the boundless realms of invention, and thence of creating more interesting situations, he wished to conduct the mortal agents of his drama according to the rules of probability; in short, to make them speak, think, and act, as it might be supposed mere men and women would do in extraordinary positions. He had observed that in all inspired writings, the personages under the dispensation of miracles, and witnesses to the most stupendous phenomena, never lose sight of their human character.[15]

The significance of this passage should not be overlooked, for it contains a formula for bringing into close proximity a mind whose strengths, weaknesses, and conceptual habits

are disturbingly like our own, and contain phenomena which lie wholly outside that mind's powers of comprehension.

After such a provocative preface, The Castle of Otranto itself is a distinct disappointment. Its greatest weakness is probably the fact that, as a novel, it never really develops beyond the embryonic stage. Neither the supernatural elements nor the characters who are forced to endure their presence are drawn with any great skill or imagination. And at the very instant when the most marvelous events are being enacted center stage, we feel that they are being controlled by a purposeful force hidden in the wings. There is no question of the characters changing, developing, or, indeed, even reacting in the presence of the supernatural, except in the most rudimentary and predictable fashion. For the most part these characters remain unwitting performers in a drama, the conclusion of which has been predetermined; and the purpose of the narrative is not so much to explore the confrontation between finite intelligences and infinite power and danger as it is to demonstrate the proof of the proposition that divine providence works in mysterious ways.

Walpole's own work did not, then, do justice to the vitality of his ideas. But as John Berryman observes in his "Preface" to the Grove Press edition of The Monk, the realization of what might be done is the next best thing to actually doing it.[16] In giving the Gothic its essential generic characteristics, Walpole succeeded in unveiling vast potentialities of imaginative experience and feeling. And

in the hands of more gifted artists such as Radcliffe, Lewis, Maturin, Shelley, and the Brontes, his plot formula became a means of exploring the psychology of terror to the point where it became necessary to modify traditional assumptions about human nature and the institutions of culture.

The writers mentioned here were all concerned with the confrontation between the "civilized" mind and a dangerous world of extraordinary occurrences. It seems, however, that prolonged exposure to this confrontation gave rise to startling changes in the mode of its presentation. More specifically, as the Gothic tradition matured, its chief practitioners became increasingly concerned with the origin of these supernatural occurrences. Here it is both useful and appropriate to introduce some of Samuel Holt Monk's ideas into the discussion. In his masterly work, The Sublime, Monk demonstrates how the concept of the sublime was modified during the eighteenth century. Whereas Longinus's interest in the sublime was rhetorical, the eighteenth century became increasingly concerned with its aesthetic and psychological implications. Longinus was interested in the techniques a speaker or writer could use to elevate the consciousness of his audience and hold it in a suspended state of intense emotion. The eighteenth century, by contrast, was most interested in the mind's complex interaction with the object of its perception. As Monk puts it, in reference to the eighteenth century, "the sublime is not a quality residing in an object, but a state of mind awakened by an object."[17]

That Monk's insight has important parallels with developments in the Gothic is immediately obvious. For in the hands of writers like Radcliffe, Lewis, Maturin, Shelley, and the Brontes, the typical Gothic machinery--the castles, vaults, portentious storms, etc.--ceased to be important as a rhetorical device, and instead became important for what it could tell us about the human spirit which created these images and was attracted to them. Over the course of time, the writers of the Gothic tradition came to see that the mysteries of the supernatural, particularly supernatural evil, were no more mysterious than the self. And perhaps most important, they came increasingly to see that civilized characters in civilized settings were as prone to these experiences as were exotic creatures in Apennine strongholds. Frederick Garber provides us with an admirable description of this process:

> Though the locals of malevolence had rarely been entirely outside (we have seen its uneasy multiplicity of place already in Walpole) it was moving, under Mrs. Radcliffe's relentless prodding, more fully within than ever. An exactly parallel shift of habitation was occurring at much the same time though with slower pace, as evil's home became less the cherished property of exotica such as Montoni and more a product of the home garden. Maturin, one step away, made his evil Irish. In Northanger Abbey Jane Austen turned the chauvinistic paraphernalia of early English Gothic quite around, and Emily Bronte finished the job. The fair-skinned Protestant jingoism of her earlier predecessors found its final belittling when Emily Bronte gave her seasoned

> version of dark malevolence a female counterpart from pure English stock. Gothic fiction was permanently internationalized with "I am Heathcliff." With those two parallel tendencies toward a movement from outside to within, Gothicism found its fullest statement and its clearest vision of the geography of evil, though it was never without the ambivalence that unsettled the mode from the beginning. Hawthorne and Dostoyevsky moved on from this point. At its end stood Auschwitz, which has not yet found its interpreter.[18]

The exotic trappings of the early Gothic were, from the first, highly evocative poetic images, hinting at very deep-seated human truths. Yet as long as these trappings existed in a world which was remote from ours in time and space their threat was muted. They could titillate the reader without wholly unsettling him; they could hint obliquely at different modes of reality without imposing upon him the necessity of changed perception. However, the greatest artists of the Gothic school, not all at once but with a consistency of development which is remarkable, continually conspired to show that this dark other world was inseparable from the human personality.

To say that these writers became increasingly aware of the banality of evil is to put the matter in its most abstract form. In reality, of course, evil generally makes its appearance in certain concrete situations and attitudes. Here again, in the way in which evil is presented and comprehended, the writers in the Gothic tradition exhibit a remarkable consistency. Like most novelists with roots in

the sentimental tradition, Gothic novelists believed in the sanctity of the human spirit and the ideal dignity of man. Although R.F. Brissenden is speaking specifically about sentimental heroes and heroines, his comments apply with equal force to their Gothic cousins:

> What distinguished the sentimental heroes and heroines was not only their highly developed awareness of their own process of discrimination, but also their belief in the sanctity and authority of their private judgments.[19]

What encouraged self expression, what affirmed the dignity and worth of individual feeling was good for both the Gothic and the Sentimental writer. Conversely, that which stifled or controlled free expression and that which threatened the authority of private judgments was evil. If, however, Gothic and Sentimental writers started with similar values, the presentation of those values in their works is markedly different. Sentimental writers glorified fine feelings and showed how they could become the basis of human understanding. The Gothic writers, by contrast, provide a virtual anatomy of the ways the self can be controlled and manipulated by forces outside the self. And whereas the Sentimental writers saw feeling as a basis for communication, the Gothic writers were only too aware that feelings could just as naturally be a source of terror in the form of hatred, jealously, and fear.

When, therefore, Gothic heroes and heroines like Emily and Valancourt in The Mysteries of Udolpho or Raymond and

Agnes in The Monk encounter evil, it is inevitably in the form of some powerful force which controls, manipulates, and otherwise uses them--a force, in short, which violates the sanctity and authority of their private judgments. Furthermore, there is a specific context in which this encounter with evil almost always occurs within the Gothic. As Howard Anderson explains, "in the Gothic novels, sexual passion is the locus of danger."[20] And indeed this characteristic melange of sex, violence, and danger goes a long way toward explaining the Gothic's immediate and continuing popularity.

It would, however, be a mistake not to see that love and the social and religious institution of marriage quite naturally involve an element of risk and danger to a person who takes his individual integrity seriously. On the one hand, marriage and its traditional association with sexual initiation signals a coming of age and the assumption of a certain role in the established social order. On even the most innocent level this involves a certain tension between personal inclination and social custom, between the remembered freedoms of childhood and the newfound responsibilities of the adult. Nor is there anything particularly sinister about this so long as one assumes that the existing social order is healthy and just, even if not perfect. The Gothic novelists, however, were keenly aware of the extent to which society is dominated by competition for status, wealth, and political power. Here they discerned an immense potential for evil in as much as there is an almost

inevitable conflict between private judgment and discrimination and their expression in love, and a world in which marriage is seen as an act with social, political and economic consequences. From this perspective, it is very easy to see how love can be thrown into close relation with all those things that most threaten its free expression. And it is easy to see as well the peril which a person insisting on the free expression of love is exposed to if this love conflicts with the forces of competition and greed.

Yet if sexual passion can arouse powerful external difficulties in the form of a conflict between the self and society, the difficulties it can arouse on an interior psychological plane should be equally apparent. Indeed, the external conflict parallels a ritual of confrontation which takes place internally. For with the arrival of adult feelings any simple sense of the distinction between good and evil must disappear forever. What is understood as evil or dangerous on a purely rational level may be strangely exhilarating and attractive to the paradoxical understanding of the heart. Thus, the most important "meeting of modes" in the Gothic may well be the internal confrontation between structured cultural codes and the dark energies of passion which are at once the energies of chaos and freedom. And it is between the poles of a rigid, deadening conformity to convention and the madness of complete freedom of passion that the perilous dialectic of growth takes place.

The prototype for this typically Gothic mixture of sexual passion, social and familial pressure, and terror is, of course, Richardson's Clarissa--a novel which, it is worth adding, has many largely unexplored resemblances to the nature work of Henry James. Clarissa is in many ways the wellspring of the Gothic. It made possible the Gothic flourishing toward the end of the eighteenth century, and in it we can examine certain typically Gothic preoccupations in full relief. On the simplest level, Clarissa is the story of a young girl of intelligence, delicacy, and virtue who is brought up under seemingly ideal circumstances, the darling of her parents and all those who surround her. When, however, the virtues she has been praised for and encouraged to develop cause her to reject the man her parents have chosen as her husband, the chapel of her drawing room retreat rapidly becomes a hell of confinement and parental tyranny. In the end she is forced into running off with Lovelace, a man who both repels and deeply attracts her. After numerous attempts at seduction, Lovelace drugs and rapes Clarissa with the result that she dies after a long renunciatory decline--a creature too good for this evil world.

This is the fairy tale--the story of innocence destroyed. Yet, as many commentators from Dr. Johnson on have noted, this is a simplistic reading. There is no doubt that the familial situation in which Clarissa finds herself is both terrifying and horrible, as is the social world in which this kind of behavior prospers. This awareness should

not, however, obscure the fact that, for Clarissa, the source of much of the terror is internal. If her upbringing has not prepared her for the world, it has not prepared her for certain aspects of herself either. To quote Ian Watt in one of the finer sentences written on the subject:

> . . . there is also more than a hint that what Clarissa cannot face is not so much what Lovelace has done or what the world may think about it, but the idea that she herself is not wholly blameless.[21]

What Clarissa cannot face is the fact that while her intelligence and moral discrimination tell her that Lovelace is evil and dangerous, there is another side of her which is powerfully and fatally attracted to him. Yet, as Watt goes on to point out, Lovelace's failure to "recognize the gentler elements in his personality" is the "exact complement of that which causes Clarissa's virtual suicide":

> . . . both their fates show the havoc brought about by two codes which doom their holders to a psychological attitude which makes human love impossible, since they set an impenetrable barrier between the flesh and the spirit. Clarissa dies rather than recognize the flesh; Lovelace makes it impossible for her to love him because he, too, makes an equally absolute, though opposite division: if he wishes 'to prove her to be either angel or woman', Clarissa has no alternative but to make the choice she does, reject her physical womanhood, and prove, in Lovelace's words, that 'her frost is frost indeed'. At the same time for him also the only possibility for salvation lies in the rejection of his

> own illusion of himself which, like Clarissa's, is ultimately a projection of a false sexual ideology. 'If I give up my contrivances', he writes in a moment of heart-searching, 'I shall be but a common man.' But, of course, he is, like Clarissa, so deeply attached to his own preconceptions of himself that he cannot change; the deadlock is complete, and, as he confesses, 'what to do with her, or without her, I know not.'[22]

There is no final doubt as to where evil lies in this particular instance. Clarissa's code entails only her right to her own feelings and to her own judgment--particularly in the area of marriage. Lovelace's code, on the other hand, requires that he use "contrivances"--requires that he use and manipulate other people. For him, self expression means nothing less than the domination of others. What makes Lovelace's evil nature particularly horrifying is the fact that he is human and possessed of real human virtues. He is intelligent, attractive, energetic, and brave--points on which he contrasts favorably with many of those around him, notably Clarissa's brother, James Harlowe. Yet all of these virtues are perverted because the vision by which he lives prevents him from extending toward others the liberties and privileges which he reserves for himself. There is, however, an even deeper sense in which Clarissa suggests that all codes of conduct are potentially a source of evil to the extent that inhibit growth, learning, and self expression. Thus, although Clarissa does not use people as Lovelace does, her lack of self awareness is inseparably

connected to the ensuing catastrophe. What we call virtues can have evil consequences when their possessor acts in ignorance.

The effect of this, moreover, is to underscore yet again the disturbing proximity of good and evil--to underscore how subtle the difference between them is and how much discrimination is needed to distinguish between them. Clarissa and Lovelace are wedded in that their fates are less the result of their respective natures than of the deadly chemistry which slowly and inexorably develops between them. To quote Watt:

> Clarissa and Lovelace are as completely, and as fatally dependent on each other as Tristan and Isolde or Romeo and Juliet; but in keeping with the novel's subjective mode of vision, the ultimate barriers that prevent the union of Richardson's star-crossed lovers are subjective and in part unconscious; the stars operate on the individual through varied psychological forces, forces which are eventually, no doubt, public and social, since the differences between the protagonists represent larger conflicts of attitude and ethic in their society, but which are nevertheless so completely internalized that the conflict expresses itself as a struggle between personalities and even between different parts of the same personality.[23]

Quite clearly the immense power of a novel like Clarissa stems from the fact that it reverberates on so many levels of cultural and psychic life. It suggests with subtle intensity that there are tensions between culture and the individual psyche as well as between various aspects of

that psyche which can be ignored only at great peril. Yet whether it is more proper to see the deadly dance in which Clarissa and Lovelace join as having its origins in the internalization of social and cultural values, as Watt suggests, or whether it is the reflection of a far more profound rhythm of freedom and compulsion in human nature, remains an open question and perhaps unanswerable.

With the exception of Wuthering Heights, none of the Gothic novels ever achieve the power, artistry, or intensity of insight of Richardson's Clarissa. But it is worth discussing this great novel in such detail precisely because Gothic fiction, at its best, partakes of many of its characteristic virtues. It took a good while for the Gothic writers to see how personal relationships could be a source of infinite danger even in a familiar setting; they were, however, continually pressing toward that vision. And, like Clarissa, Gothic novels saw sexual passion, the mythic encounter between a man and a woman, as the experience which most clearly revealed how good and evil are fatally intertwined and how each has its ultimate source in culture and in human nature.

What remains to be done, then, is to find a way of describing the nature and source of evil in a way which is sufficiently general to be of use in the maximum number of cases, yet sufficiently specific so as not to obscure the fact that the Gothic is a genre or type of literary experience. Here it is useful to examine the way in which the

Gothic employs two immense literary themes which can be distinguished but never wholly separated--namely, the uses of the past and the uses of art--to examine the still larger issue of cultural value. In Gothic fiction, no character is ever in so much danger as when he or she misunderstands the powerful realities which these two terms suggest. And it is when showing the dangers implicit in the past, particularly in its unacknowledged relation to the present, and the dangers of art, particularly literary art imperfectly comprehended, that the Gothic arrives at some of its most unsettling visions.

Much of the typical Gothic machinery--the castles, the moats, the gloomy Italian settings--is suggestive of the dark and bloody past of medieval Europe. Yet in many of the best Gothic novels, this antiquarian past is the past revealed in its most superficial and picturesque aspect; the most important past, as all of these novels show, is a living force exerting pressure on the present. Thus, in many of the best Gothic novels, the past with all of its evils is figured in the image of the present social world--a world which was established before the main characters were born and which continues to shape and control them in ways they can only dimly imagine. It is important to note here how closely and unmistakably evil is associated with the socially conventional throughout the Gothic tradition. Indeed social success seems to imply the worst kind of anti-social behavior. Different novelists, of course, have

different methods of expressing this. Mrs. Radliffe, for example, has a more or less sociological view of evil in that, as Garber observes, her villains and villainesses are motivated by traditionally recognizable vices such as ambition and greed.[24] Thus it is Emily's status-conscious aunt who marries the evil Montoni and initiates the action in The Mysteries of Udolpho. Similarly, in its sequel, The Italian, it is Vivaldi's socially prominent and ambitious mother whose social schemes serve to unlease Schedoni's innate depravity.

If Radcliffe tends toward a sociological presentation of evil, Lewis, in The Monk, is decidedly poetic in his presentation of it. Mrs. Radcliffe's characters have humanly comprehensible aims and humanly comprehensible strategies for accomplishing them. Lewis, by contrast, uses the devices of poetry to suggest that there is a deep affinity between the forces of evil and the forces of culture and the past. Perhaps the most forceful of the images which suggest this affinity is the figure of the "Bleeding Nun"--the vengeful spirit of one of Raymond de las Cisternas's dead ancestors--who rudely upsets his elopement with the heroine of the piece, his beloved Agnes. What the intrusion of this figure suggests in a powerful but indirect way is that, in eloping, Raymond and Agnes are playing too lightly with the fearful collective forces of society and the past. It is only when these forces have been recognized that they can be expelled, exorcised

even, and only then can life and love flourish. Again, much the same impression is conveyed by Lewis's vision of the geography of Madrid, the city founded upon the abyss. For beneath the visible symbols of tradition and cultural continuity, beneath the court, the monastery, and the convent, is the place of confinement and death. And the effect of all of this is to reinforce the impression that evil is not very far away; it may, in fact, be in the immediate vicinity, intimately attached to the most revered social institutions.

On the deepest level of all, however, the evil visitations of the past may be recognized in the moral and spiritual inheritance which a parent leaves a child. For clearly the response of the child to the world and the very habits that are necessary to comprehend it come partly from the culture at large, but more importantly from the child's parents. It is not overstating the case to suggest that Gothic novels are virtually obsessed with parent-child relationships, with education, and with the way both relate to the subject of comprehension, learning, and their effect on behavior. Although various Gothic novels work these themes out in various and interesting ways, they are alike to the extent that all examine the fact that spiritual and cultural values ill-prepare a child for the darker side of reality, and, paradoxically, help to create it. The Gothic writers, like so many writers in the Romantic tradition, are aware that "the child is father of the man" and that much of the evil in the world, the personal and

institutional failings, have their source in failures of early education. To study education in the Gothic, moreover, is to study one of the major methods that genre used to transform itself from a novel of adventure and incident to one of character; for nowhere else in the Gothic can we study the process by means of which the locale of evil moved from the outside to within in such detail.

Early educational experiences are not of much concern in Walpole's The Castle of Otranto--a novel in which there is very little character development. In The Mysteries of Udolpho, however, the interest in education is firmly established and readily apparent. M. St. Aubert's often-quoted deathbed lecture to Emily on the dangers of sensibility is a ready example of this:

> 'Above all my dear Emily,' said he, 'do not indulge in the pride of fine feeling, the romantic error of amiable minds. Those who really possess sensibility, ought early to be taught, that it is a dangerous quality, which is continually extracting the excess of misery, or delight from every surrounding circumstance. And, since, in our passage through this world, painful circumstances occur more frequently than pleasing ones, and since our sense of evil is, I fear, more acute than our sense, of good, we become the victims of our feelings unless we can in some degree command them.[25]

A similar message is repeated on a number of occasions throughout the novel. For instance, Laurentini di Udolpho urges "Remember . . . that the passions are the seeds of vices as well as virtues, from which either may spring."[26]

In words like these we can see the Gothic's characteristic tension when confronted with the doubleness of life. It is absolutely characteristic of the Radcliffean mode to want a world imaginatively rich enough to be satisfying, yet ordered enough to be safe. On the other hand, she feels that nothing can be hoped of an insensitive heart, while at the same time there is a corresponding wariness toward feeling and passion. Thus Radcliffe exhibits a distinctly "romantic" insistence on the importance of feeling and the inner workings of the mind, but at the same time certain conservative attitudes prevent her from exploring these matters in full detail.

The purpose of Emily's education is to teach her to achieve "rational Happiness"--a state in which reason and the passions exist in a comfortable stasis, a state where the passions are admitted but not indulged, and where the innocent expectations of youth are tempered by an engagement with the world. That supernatural terror is potentially a part of this world is hinted at a number of times in the book, but always such terror is associated with Emily's overwrought imagination.

This is, however, a distinct departure from the way in which the supernatural was portrayed by Walpole in The Castle of Otranto. Whereas Walpole had envisioned the supernatural as having its roots in the governing principle of the universe, Mrs. Radcliffe associates it with specific states of consciousness and mental unrest. Yet if the supernatural is portrayed as human and psychological, it is

also the sort of thing which a strong, well fortified mind can readily dismiss. Radcliffe does not explore the terror of such feelings beyond the point where they are recognizable as something to be avoided. The dark history of Laurentini does suggest where an indulgence in feeling could lead. Yet Emily is never forced to acknowledge that Laurentini's fate is potentially her own. Mrs. Radcliffe knew where madness lay and chose not to explore it. Thus, The Mysteries of Udolpho is, finally, less an examination of the roots of terror than a demonstration of how, through sound education, terror could be held at bay and a satisfactory life sustained in successive generations.

Within the Gothic tradition, the work of M.G. Lewis is as much a departure from the work of Radcliffe as hers was from that of Horace Walpole. For if Radcliffe was concerned with the way in which education could help temper and strengthen the mind in times of adversity, her successor, Lewis, was interested in the way in which education could be responsible for the ensuing terror. Sensibility, which Mrs. Radcliffe had seen as the "romantic error of amiable minds," becomes, in The Monk a source of potential corruption--a powerful but malleable force which could be modified by the circumstances of early childhood. Indeed, one of the most remarkable passages in The Monk occurs when Lewis reveals Ambrosio to be a man of feeling perverted by the circumstances of an unnatural childhood. It is long but well worth quoting in full:

It was by no means his nature to be timid: But his education had impressed his mind with fear so strongly, that apprehension was now part of his character. Had his youth been passed in the world, he would have shown himself possessed of many brilliant and manly qualities. He was naturally enterprising, firm and fearless: He had a warriors heart, and he might have shown with splendor at the head of an army. There was no want of generosity in his nature: The wretched never failed to find in him a compassionate Auditor: His abilities were quick and shining, and his judgment vast, solid, and decisive. With such qualifications he would have been an ornament to his country: That he possessed them, he had given proofs in his earliest infancy, with his Parents had beheld his dawning virtues with the fondest delight and admiration. Unfortunately, while yet a child he was deprived of those parents. He fell into the power of a relation, whose only wish about him was never to hear of him more; For that purpose He gave him in charge to his Friend, the former Superior of the Capuchins. The Abbot, a very Monk, used all his endeavours to persuade the boy, that happiness existed not without the walls of the convent. He succeeded fully. To deserve admittance into the order of St. Francis was Ambrosio's highest ambition. His instructors carefully repressed those virtues whose grandeur and disinterestedness were ill suited to the Cloister. Instead of universal benevolence He adopted a selfish partiality for his own particular establishment. He was taught to consider compassion for the errors of Others a crime of blackest dye: the noble frankness of his temper was exchanged for servile humility; and in order to break his natural spirit, the Monks terrified his young mind, by placing before him all the horrors with which superstition could furnish them.[27]

This passage emphasizes yet again how subtle the distinction between good and evil is in the Gothic novel. In the figure of Ambrosio we find not the remote and osbcure malevolence of a Manfred or a Montoni, but an evil which is humanly recognizable. That Ambrosio is evil is never in doubt; but like Richardson's Lovelace before him, he is also a human being with impressive gifts--gifts that more conventionally good characters often lack. Had he been brought up under different circumstances, his character might well have been labeled "noble."

What should be emphasized here is that the nature of the Gothic was greatly altered by Lewis's efforts in The Monk. Later novels in the tradition could never rest comfortably with easy assumptions about the locale of evil. In The Mysteries of Udolpho Radcliffe exhibits undeniable gifts as a storyteller. Her moral universe, however, contains little of this troubling mixture of good and evil. The "good" characters have all the genteel virtues of the sentimental hero and heroine, including an instinctive awareness of and sympathy for the feelings of others, a taste for art and poetry, and an attachment to natural landscapes. Since, moreover, Emily and Valancourt possess these virtues in abundance, we feel only the proper amount of suspense during their misadventures in Paris and at Udolpho. Evil in The Mysteries of Udolpho is embodied in the shadowy figure of Montoni--who hovers menacingly for a time only to disappear conveniently when his hour is rung. By contrast,

evil in The Monk is powerfully realized in the figure of Ambrosio, and in the history of the Gothic novel the publication of this novel marks the point at which the mystery of evil became inextricably related to the mystery of the self.

The effects of this change are immediately obvious in Mrs. Radcliffe's next novel, The Italian. There, the "good" characters are pale and insubstantial, while Schedoni, the figure of evil, has great intelligence and vitality. Ellena Rosalba, the heroine of the piece is uninteresting, much as Valancourt is uninteresting. Vivaldi, the hero, is somewhat more spirited, but Radcliffe, preoccupied with Schedoni, fails to invest him with the energy and life she had previously given Emily. As Frederick Garber observes: "she seems willy-nilly to compare the hero and villain in The Italian, much to Schedoni's favor."[28] Though Radcliffe never dwells excessively on Schedoni's virtues, she does portray him as a mixed figure in the tradition of Lovelace and Ambrosio. He has a certain clarity of thought, a certain self-perspective, which sets him apart from Vivaldi whose responses are blandly typical.

After the publication of The Italian, the problem of evil and its relation to character, cultural values, and early education becomes increasingly problematic. Good and evil, heroes and heroines, villains and villainesses, while real and ultimately distinguishable, become less distinct and have recognizable affinities. In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, for example, the evil "monster" contrasts

favorably at times with his creator. When the monster does turn vicious his reasons for doing so are psychologically believable. And the reader who would understand this strange, powerful, novel must try to develop a sense of how the idyllic upbringing of the hero, the very conventionality of his childhood in all its beauty and innocence, is intimately related to the danger and destructiveness that ensue. Quite clearly Frankenstein's conventionality, itself the product of his early education, has hardened into ideology. Instead of giving meaning, value, and coherence to his experience, the cultural values which he embraces unnecessarily restrict his perception of it. The revulsion which leads him to reject his creation is the result of a culturally induced selectivity of vision which blinds Frankenstein to vast areas of experience. He rejects the monster because his education has taught him to equate beauty with a thin and passionless virtue. The monster, with his wild and ungainly energy therefore became worthy of contempt. But as the undertones of the novel powerfully suggest, in rejecting all that does not correspond to his conventional sense of beauty, he is rejecting part of himself as well. The result is predictably disasterous.

In Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, to use one final example, these themes are more richly and complexly explored. Here the Gothic becomes unmistakably great art, and in the Gothic tradition Wuthering Heights is as much a watershed as is Clarissa, The Castle of Otranto, The Mysteries of

Udolpho, or The Monk. For while much of the danger in the earlier novels was the result of a general failure to recognize the fact that "civilized" people could have evil and destructive impulses, Wuthering Heights embodies a subtle shift in emphasis wherein the problem is less that of discovering that this is so than it is that of deciding what to do about it.

The world of Wuthering Heights is manichean. Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange represent the two poles of human nature, the romantic and the classical--with the former being the residence of natural energy and passion, and the latter that of an ordered civility which has been acquired at the expense of these qualities. Yet as the lives of the various characters show, these qualities are really and eternally mixed.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the working out of the lives of the two Catherines--identified here by their maiden names as Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Linton. When Catherine Earnshaw says "I am Heathcliff" she identifies herself with the dark forces which her male counterpart represents. That this is so is not a hidden fact or an alarming suspicion, but something to be acknowledged and and confronted. Yet even given this, Catherine Earnshaw is like her female ancestors in Gothic fiction in that she cannot reconcile the passionate and instinctual side of herself which she sees and acknowledges with the social values which have been imposed upon her and which she has

internalized. The careless freedom of her early life leads Catherine to experience all the beauty and wonder of the world by the time she reaches her fourteenth year. And the tragedy of her brief existence stems from an early education which prevents her from realizing that the very forces which imbue childhood with its wild and careless joy are themselves subject to radical transformation as the individual matures. For Catherine Earnshaw, there is no gradual maturing, no process of growth wherein the freedoms of the child become the basis of a rich adulthood. Instead there is an almost baffling reversal of roles wherein the "wild, hatless little savage" becomes in an instant the "dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver."

As was the case in The Monk, a bifurcation process sets in as Catherine matures, and does not suspend its operations until a life of social importance and a life of passion are revealed to be mutually exclusive. The problem is that, in adult life, the lighthearted schemes of childhood can and do become the basis for the kind of devilish destruction which Heathcliff's desire for revenge typifies; and if human beings are to live together on any kind of civilized basis, they must, in maturity, embrace values founded on an awareness of man's capacity for evil. Catherine Earnshaw's fatal innocence on this point leaves a gap in her life which is never bridged. She has a marriage without passion and a passion which is socially

unacceptable. When she dies giving birth to her first child, we are reminded of how far she is from discovering values which embody the full range of her nature.

If Wuthering Heights had been solely the story of Catherine Earnshaw, it would have enriched but not departed from the central themes of previous Gothic novels. Insofar, however, as it is the story of Catherine Linton as well as Catherine Earnshaw, it is a distinct and important development. In his book, The Disappearance of God, J. Hillis Miller observes that the young Catherine's life follows a pattern of development which is in many important respects the exact opposite of that witnessed in the life of her mother.[29] Whereas the early education of Catherine Earnshaw crippled her in her attempts to reconcile the disparate areas of her experience, that of Catherine Linton allows her to live a life both passionate and socially acceptable, in which personal desire and social restriction strike something approaching a harmonious balance. For the elder Catherine, adulthood meant the end of freedom and the restrictions of a stale conventionality. For the younger Catherine, by contrast, the future is a time of desire fulfilled. From her perspective, childhood is not an age of ideal freedom; it is, rather, a time when the child's desire to participate in the world is thwarted by parental protection and authority.

Nor is it proper to look upon Catherine Linton's maturity as the mere acceptance of the conventional. If

anything, Catherine Earnshaw is the more slavishly conventional--an interpretation suggested by the fact that she feels it would "degrade" her to marry Heathcliff even though, as she says, "he is more myself than I am." Catherine Linton, on the other hand, embraces values which are not rigid but flexible, humane, and consistent with her full awareness of the possibilities of human evil. She accepts Hareton Earnshaw, the chief victim and heir of Heathcliff's misanthropy, and, in so doing, evokes the realization that the process of civilization begins if it does not end with an awareness of man's capacity to do evil. Here is no renunciation of or retreat from the world in the fashion of Clarissa, Emily and Valancourt, and Raymond and Agnes. Here, rather, is the evil in human nature confronted, transcended and transformed through love.

The nature of the past is, then, richly and complexly explored in Gothic fiction; the same thing is true, however, for the nature of art. And art, like the past, is revealed as having an immense potential for both good and evil. As Darlene Unrue has shown, the fact that the Gothic novelists were aware of art as a living force is made clear by one of the most characteristic of the Gothic techniques--that of introducing portraits and statutes which either take on or seem to take on lives of their own.[30] Art may be good or bad, but it is never static. In defense of his method in The Romantic Agony, Mario Praz argues that the "Education of sensibility" in this period "came about through works

of art."[31] Since this is so, the issue of an individual's ability to develop a proper understanding of and response to art takes on vital importance.

Art is functioning properly when it is recognized as a mode of vision with the potential to change lives; it can stimulate a heightened awareness. Yet, correspondingly, it can become the source of great evil when it is improperly understood--when, that is, it ceases to be seen as a commentary on life and is instead equated with life itself. For art so considered restricts vision rather than enhancing it, petrifies passion rather than liberating it. There is, moreover, a vast grey area where art and cultural values merge; cultural values are, in the broadest sense of the term, artistic in that both are hypothetical orderings of experiences defined as much by what they exclude as by what they include--they imply, in short, a selective vision of life not an inclusive one. If Gothic villains and villainesses are typically refined, aristocratic types, closely associated with the socially conventional, one of the chief constituents of their refinement is an appreciation for things of beauty--a reminder that both art and culture can be at odds with individual expression. Yet the real sin of villains such as Montoni, Ambrosio, Frankenstein, and Lockwood lies deeper still. For them, the artistic vision is not just a code of personal conduct, but a way of dealing with other people. Other people exist for them merely as characters in their own limited imaginative fictions.

The confusion of art and life is, then, the source of much villainy within the Gothic tradition; but when this confusion takes place within the minds of the sympathetic characters, we have what amounts to a dangerous innocence. Everywhere within the Gothic, characters who feel that they are in possession of cultural and aesthetic ideals which are completely sufficient are a menace to themselves and others. In the dangerous and morally ambiguous world of the Gothic novel, innocence is not a virtue. To survive in this world, a character needs all the intelligence and self awareness that he or she can possibly possess. Above all, this includes an awareness of art's capacity to both inform and delude.

Where, moreover we see this theme being most conspicuously and interestingly worked out within the novels is in their treatment of literary art. For just as an entire tradition of Gothic heroes and heroines had to learn that the past is a living force, so, too, did they have to learn that art, and most particularly literary art, contains vital human truths. Art cannot be equivalent to life, but it does contain a vision of life which can be ignored only at great peril. Thus it is that within the Gothic tradition even the wildest of imaginative fictions have an eerie habit of coming true or of bearing some other direct relation to the present action. Emily St. Aubert thrills to the story of Laurentini's violent passion only to discover that it is intimately related to her own past and the conditions of

her life. In The Italian, it is the sight of a real assassin seeking refuge in a church which inspires the host to resurrect the story of Schedoni's bloody intrigues. Raymond and Agnes, the enlighted protagonists of the major subplot in Lewis's The Monk, amuse themselves with the legend of the "Bleeding Nun"--only to have that phantom carry Raymond off when Agnes tries to elope in her disguise.

As might be expected in a novelistic form where art constitutes a major theme, these considerations ultimately become self reflexive. For whatever is true of art in general must certainly be true of the novel, and if Gothic characters had to learn the power of art, there is a strong implication that we, as readers, must do likewise. The failings of the most grossly popular Gothic fictions stem from the fact that they invite detachment rather than discourage it. They are too persistently "escape reading"--designed, that is, to provide a thrill without demanding any serious engagement with the issues being raised. But the jump from popular fiction to good and even great fiction is not always very far, and the best novels in the Gothic tradition exhibit a variety of strategies, all tending to subvert the notion that a literary work is an object which can readily be put down and forgotten. As Robert Hume puts it: the "distinctive feature of the early Gothic novel is an attempt to involve the reader in a new way."[32] And, indeed, one of the most fascinating and least discussed characteristics of Gothic novels is that they tend to be

novels about reading novels; they explore the ways in which even the wildest fictions tell us something about life and about ourselves.

Different novels, of course, accomplish this in different ways. For the acute reader, the regularity with which fiction comes to life in the Gothic tradition might suggest that the fiction he is reading at any particular moment has similar potential. As early as The Italian, but most fully in later works like Frankenstein and Wuthering Heights, frame narratives are used to form a bridge between the fictional world of the novel and a world which is more or less recognizable as the world of the reading public. In the most extraordinary example of this technique, Melmoth the Wanderer, Maturin uses a wilderness of narrative mirrors to chart the devil's progress through worlds of space and oceans of time until he opens the door and walks into the room at the novel's conclusion--an event which seems perfectly natural as it occurs.

The most compelling technique which the Gothic novelists used to establish the relation between the "real" and the "fictional" world is, however, the restricted point of view. Sometimes this is accomplished through the use of a frame narrative where we become aware that the narrator's view of things is flawed and incomplete. At other times an impersonal third person narration is used in order to ensure that we see no more and know no more than the characters themselves. In both cases the reader is in the position

of trying to see reality as it is filtered through the consciousness of limited intelligence and imagination. Part of this, certainly, is the novelist trying to be interesting. And it does heighten the interest and suspense to be so intimately involved with a character's terror. But there is a more important philosophical issue involved here as well, for in using the restricted point of view the Gothic quite clearly anticipated one of the chief characteristics of modern thought--the idea that there are as many "realities" as there are people to receive impressions. And the terror of the Gothic world is essentially the terror of the modern world, a world where social, political, and religious institutions have become sources of the worst disorder, and where man is everywhere betrayed by his own inner life, his own limited mental habits.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

[1]Virginia Woolf's classic study "Henry James's Ghost Stories," in Granite and Rainbow (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1921) has been reprinted on a number of occasions. Other excellent studies include: Earl R. Miner, "Henry James's Metaphysical Romances," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 9 (June, 1954), 1-21; Pamela Jacobs Shelden, "Jamesian Gothicism: The Haunted Castle of the Mind." Studies in the Literary Imagination, 7 (Spring, 1974), 121-34. There have, of course, been a number of studies of the individual tales.

[2]F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 59.

[3]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 130.

[4]Marius Bewley, "James's Debt to Hawthorne (I): The Blithedale Romance and The Bostonians," Scrutiny, 16 (Sept., 1949), 178-195. Patricia Merivale, "The Esthetics of Perversion: Gothic Artifice in Henry James and Witold Gombrowicz," PMLA, 93 (1978), 992-1001.

[5]William Veeder, Henry James--The Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 120-121. Elsa Nettles, James & Conrad (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), pp. 101-107. Veeder finds parallels with M.G. Lewis's play, The Castle Spectre, Nettles with Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho and Le Fanu's Uncle Silas.

[6]Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966). For example, Fiedler refers (p. 303) to Osmond as a "European" when he is, of course, an American with European ideas--a distinction which matters a great deal from the point of view of James's development. Similarly, he refers (p. 302) to Madame Merle as a "counter-virgin" with "the traditional thick, dark hair and dark eyes." In reality, James characterization here anticipates Lawrence. It is Isabel, the passionate heroine who is dark, and the unfeeling Madame Merle who is light.

[7]Darlene Harbour Unrue, "Henry James and the Gothic Romance," Dissertation Abstracts International, 32 (Ohio State: 1971).

[8]Martha Banta, "The House of Seven Ushers and How They Grew: A Look at Jamesian Gothicism," Yale Review, 57 (October, 1967), 56-65. Martha Banta, Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1972). The quotation is from Henry James and the Occult, p. 6.

[9]Frederick Garber, "Meaning and Mode in Gothic Fiction," in Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture: Proceedings of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, 3, Racism in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1973), p. 155.

[10]Gary R. Thompson, "Introduction: Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition," in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. Gary R. Thompson (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 1974), p. iii.

[11]S.L. Varnardo, "The Numinous in Gothic Literature," in The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism, ed. Gary R. Thompson (Pullman, Wash.: Washington State University Press, 1974), p. 12.

[12]Garber, pp. 157-58.

[13]Devendra Varma, The Gothic Flame (London: Barker, 1957), p. 15.

[14]Francis Russell Hart, "The Experience of Character in the English Gothic Novel," in Experience in the Novel: Selected Papers from the English Institute, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 91.

[15]Horace Walpole, Preface to the second edition of The Castle of Otranto (1765; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 7-8. Samuel Taylor Coleridge says much the same thing about the supernatural elements in the Lyrical Ballads: "The incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real." Biographia Literaria, 1817; rpt. J. Shawcross, ed., 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), II, pp. 5-6.

[16]John Berryman, Introd., The Monk: A Romance by M.G. Lewis (New York: The Grove Press, 1959), p. 16.

[17]Samuel Holt Monk, The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England (1935; rpt. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), p. x.

[18]Garber, p. 169.

[19]R.F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 24.

[20]Howard Anderson, Introd., The Monk: A Romance, by M.G. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. x.

[21]Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (1957; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 233.

[22]Watt, p. 237.

[23]Watt, p. 238.

[24]Frederick Garber, Introd., The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents: A Romance, by Ann Radcliffe (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. xii.

[25]Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance (1794; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 79-80.

[26]Radcliffe, p. 647.

[27]Matthew Gregory Lewis, The Monk: A Romance (1795; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 236-37.

[28]Garber, Introd., The Italian, p. xiii.

[29]J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 206.

[30]Unrue, "Henry James and Gothic Romance," p. 168.

[31]Mario Praz, Preface to the first edition of The Romantic Agony (1930; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1978), Angus Davidson, trans., p. xxi.

[32]Robert D. Hume, "Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the English Gothic Novel," PMLA, 84 (1969), 284.

James's relation to these broader Gothic tendencies is readily provable, although some of the proofs are admittedly indirect. It would be convenient if we had more direct evidence of James's early reading habits, but, unfortunately, as Leon Edel points out, none exists.[1] It would be convenient as well if the Lamb House library contained a particularly compelling historical document, a copy of The Mysteries of Udolpho replete with James's marginalia, for instance. Unfortunately, if any such document ever existed it is no longer available. The library was partially destroyed by a German bomb in August of 1940, with the resulting loss of a number of volumes. Those books which survived the bombing were further dispersed following the death of James's nephew, Henry, in 1948.[2]

This lack of hard historical evidence should not, however, prove unduly disconcerting. Given the extreme popularity of Gothic fiction during the mid-nineteeth century, it is reasonable to assume that a literate, sophisticated, young man with an interest in fiction would have come across it in numerous variations. Furthermore, as James himself remarks "the historian wants more documents than he can really use,"[3] and we are not, after all, without evidence. We can make a shrewd estimate as to the extent

and nature of James's early readings from the references he makes in the numerous reviews he wrote as a young man. A number of commentators who have written on this aspect of James have found in his early reviews evidence of an enduring and profoundly influential interest in Gothic fiction. Take, for example, the following remarks by Leon Edel:

> He knew the world of goblins and demons and haunted houses, and he knew, too, the history of witchcraft in America. Certain critics have emphasized his saturation with Hawthorne's fantasies and allegories, his admiration for such tales as Rappaccini's Daughter and Young Goodman Brown which he considered "little masterpieces." But if he had read Hawthorne closely he had also read Poe; at eighteen or nineteen he had translated Merimee's tale of terror, La Venus de l'Isle, and was acquainted with the works of Balzac, including the French master's tales of the supernatural; and from his earliest days he had known the ghost stories of Charles Dickens. He knew Wilkie Collins and he considered Sheridan Le Fanu "ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight." He was a devoted reader of Blackwood's magazine and in its pages found some of the finest tales of terror of the time, by writers now long forgotten. He invokes in The Ghostly Rental the name of the German romance writer E.T.A. Hoffman, author of Phantasiestucke and Elixre des Teufels, whose tales inspired Offenbach's opera Les Contes d'Hoffman. He had read the Gothic romances. . .[4]

These observations were restated and extended a few years later by F.W. Dupee:

> To James in his extreme youth Balzac could be no more than a rather remote ideal. And to be influenced by

> Hawthorne meant to imitate his very subjects and tone, as in "A Romance of Certain Old Clothes," which begins, "Towards the middle of the eighteenth century there lived in the Province of Massachusetts a widowed gentlewoman," etc. For the rest, he could at least reach back as far as Hawthorne, as well as Poe, to the Gothic Romance and so to a common folklore stock of wonder and terror. This he did, and one group of his early tales is peopled with ghosts, alter-egos, and vampires in human form. Not very remarkable stories, they do nevertheless sound some of his characteristic themes; and he was to return to the Gothic note in the more sophisticated wonder tales of his maturity. Something, too, of the popular impulse survived even in the more realistic of his later novels, where the sudden windfalls of fortune, the initiations, prohibitions, and transformations, are often reminiscent of the fairy tale.[5]

William Veeder's excellent study of James's literary references demonstrates that the author specifically knew the work of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and the Brontes.[6] And James himself paid Clarissa Harlowe the supreme compliment of calling it "deeply interesting."[7]

James, then, was deeply immersed in Gothic fiction as it appeared in various ways in various places. Yet his relation to this genre may also be approached through reference to the details of his early upbringing. The members of the James family were, by all accounts, remarkable, and disposed to take their inner lives seriously. The key figure here is, of course, Henry James, Sr., the novelist's father, most particularly as he was involved in metaphysical speculation. Within the James family circle,

the life of the spirit was a constant topic of conversation. What is more, this interest extended to the spiritual reality of both good and evil. As C. Hartley Grattan remarks apropos of Henry James, Sr.:

> One of James's most characteristic notions was that without a profound idea of the reality of evil, one could not become a religious thinker. His own definition of the meaning and source of evil came to be radically different from that of the Calvinists, but he retained his belief in that fundamental constituent of human nature to the end.[8]

It was, moreover, precisely this emphasis on the reality of evil which distinguished the views of the elder James from the pallid optimism that characterized transcendentalism at its worst, and which impressed itself so vividly on the mind of his second son.

The virtue of this sort of early education is debatable. Although William and Henry James were eventually to enjoy brilliant careers, they were plagued at times by nervous ill health. The careers of the three younger Jamess, Garth Wilkinson, Robertson, and Alice were tragic to virtually the same degree as those of the elder brothers were renowned. As F.O. Matthiessen observes: "The question naturally arises, as we watch the unfolding record of his children's extraordinary education, of how much danger was latent in an atmosphere of such excessive mental and emotional stimulation."[9] One cannot help but remember at junctures like this M. St. Aubert's lectures to his daughter on the dangers

of sensibility. In any event, that there was danger lurking around and about the James family hearth is made abundantly clear by the fact that both Henry James, Sr. and William James were the victims of horrid "supernatural" visitations which left them devastated for a period of months and ultimately led to profound dangers in their lives. The written descriptions which these men provide of their experiences are vivid and arresting, and would, in fact, have every appearance of having come from a Gothic novel were they to be read out of context. Henry James, Sr.'s visitation occurred in 1844 and is described as follows in his Literary Remains:

> One day, however, towards the close of May, having eaten a comfortable dinner, I remained sitting at the table after the family had dispersed, idly gazing at the embers in the grate, thinking of nothing, and feeling only the exhilaration incident to good digestion, when suddenly--in a lightning flash as it were--'fear came upon me, and trembling which made all my bones shake.' To all appearance it was a perfectly insane and abject terror, without ostensible cause, and only to be accounted for, to my perplexed imagination, by some damned shape squatting invisible to me within the precincts of the room, and raying out from his fetid personality influences fatal to life. The thing had not lasted ten seconds before I felt myself a wreck, that is, reduced from a state of firm, vigorous, joyful manhood to one of almost helpless infancy. The only self-control I was capable of exerting was to keep my seat. I felt the greatest desire to run incontinently to the foot of the stairs and shout for help to my wife--to run

> to the roadside even, and appeal to the public to protect me; but by an immense effort I controlled these frenzied impulses, and determined not to budge from my chair until I had recovered my lost self-possession. This purpose I held for a good long hour, as I reckoned time, beat upon meanwhile by an ever-growing tempest of doubt, anxiety and despair.[10]

William James's experience, which occurred in 1869, is described as follows in The Varieties of Religious Experience:

> I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up against his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking positively non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. That shape am I, I felt potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was if something hitherto solid within my breast gave entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear.[11]

Even given the fact that William James probably had his father's passage in mind when he described his own experience, the coincidence is remarkable. And much of what we

would label "Gothic" in these passages stems, no doubt, from their suggestion that danger can be nearby even in a familiar and safe setting. Henry James, Jr. never experienced the sort of paralyzing fear to which these passages attest. Yet in the famed Galerie d'Apollon vision of his youth, a vision which he was to refer to in A Small Boy and Others as "the most appalling yet most admirable nightmare of my life," we find another version of the old Gothic terror:

> The climax of this extraordinary experience--which stands alone for me as a dream-adventure founded in the deepest, quickest, clearest act of cogitation and comparison, act indeed of life saving energy, as well as in unutterable fear--was the sudden pursuit, through an open door, along a huge high saloon, of a just dimly-descried figure that retreated in terror before my rush and dash. . . out of the room I had a moment before been desperately, and all the more abjectly, defending by the push of my shoulder against hard pressure on lock and bar from the other side. The lucidity, not to say the sublimity, of the crisis had consisted of the great thought that I, in my appalled state, was probably still more appalling than the awful agent, creature or presence, whatever he was, whom I had guessed, in the suddenest wild start from sleep, the sleep within my sleep, to be making for my place of rest. The triumph of my impulse, perceived in a flash as I acted on it by myself at a bound, forcing the door outward, was the grand thing, but the great point of the whole was the wonder of my final recognition. Routed, dismayed, the tables turned upon him by my so surpassing him for straight aggression and dire intention, my visitant was already but a diminished spot in the long perspective, the tremendous glorious hall, as I say, over the far-gleaming floor of which, cleared for the occasion of its great line of priceless vitrines down the middle, he sped for his life, while a great storm of

> thunder and lightning played through the deep embrasures of high windows at the right. The lightning that revealed the retreat revealed also the wondrous place. . . the Galerie d'Apollon of my childhood. . . . [12]

It is impossible to do strict justice to the resonance of this passage. As Leon Edel suggests, the French pronunciation of "Apollon" is similar to the pronunciation of "Napoleon", and the Greek god of poetry is thereby associated with the secular glory of the Second Empire.[13] Yet both of these words suggest "Apollyon," the "angel of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:11) who reappears in Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, a work James knew well, as one of the chief architects of Vanity Fair. And when, finally, all three of these words are associated with the repeated variations on the word "appall," the glories of the palace of art become ambiguous indeed. Are the accumulated treasures of history monuments to man's glory or to his vanity? And what of the triumph of the appalled over the "awful agent, creature or presence" a triumph over a tradition of Protestant distrust of art--the ghost which had haunted the Gothic novelists in their treatment of Europe? Or is it on the other hand a triumph over conscience and thus an infernal compromise with the architect of Vanity Fair?

James never resolves such questions, and the theme of the "appalled man turning out to be more appalling than the monster who confronts him" is, as Joseph Ward shows, one which haunted him to the end of his career.[14] It is most

conspicuous in "The Jolly Corner," but it is also clearly evident in "The Turn of the Screw" and in James's greatest novel, The Golden Bowl. Our point here, however, is that the remarkable coincidence of the father and his two sons having had such visitations raises them to the status of family heirlooms. As his father had done in theology, and his brother had done in psychology, Henry James tried to show through his art that experiences so vivid could be no less "real" than those of everyday existence. He had, as Graham Greene notes, a "sense of evil religious in its intensity."[15] And it is impossible to participate fully in James's fictional world without a sense of how close to the surface this primitive terror was at all times. To quote F.O. Matthiessen:

> . . .he kept throughout his life the sense of the abyss always lurking beneath the fragile surface. He expressed this kind of evil again and again, through a long series of characters. This is what Maggie Verver had called 'the horror of the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness.'[16]

As an artist, James portrayed his sense of the abyss imaginatively rather than rationally; these artistic portrayals will be dealt with. Here it should be emphasized that if James was an artist he was also a critic, and in his critical prose, most notably but not exclusively in the "Prefaces" to the New York edition, we find a rich investigation of many of these same matters. James's

status as a critic has been the subject of some debate in the past, but most now would probably agree with Rene Wellek's assessment:

> James to my mind is by far the best American critic of the nineteenth century who. . . is brimful of ideas and critical concepts and has a well defined theory and point of view which allow him to characterize sensitively and persuasively a wide range of artists.[17]

Of particular interest is the fact that many of the "ideas and critical concepts" which are so characteristically Jamesian have strong affinities to and are at least partially derived from the Gothic.

One of the first questions to be addressed in this regard is James's relation to the tradition of fictional realism. Calling James a realist seems to involve no immediate difficulties. He did, after all, remark that "the only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life"[18]--a point which is amplified somewhat later on in the same essay when he states that the "air of reality. . . seems to me to be the supreme virtue of the novel--the merit on which all its other merits. . . helplessly and submissively depend."[19] This seems straightforward enough, but it is easy to be misled, particularly if one thinks that an "air of reality" is to be achieved by representing life in the manner of William Dean Howells, for example. James, himself, seems to recognize this danger:

> It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has myriad forms: the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odor of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair. It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience; to our supposititious aspirant such a declaration might savor of mockery. What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete: it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind.[20]

And in what is perhaps the most remarkable comment in this long essay, James goes on to note that "The moral consciousness of a child is as much a part of life as the islands of the Spanish main. . . ."[21]

James, then, was a realist to the extent that he took <u>real</u> human experience to be the proper subject of the novelist. But it is abundantly clear as well that his sense of the term "realism" is quite different from the sense in which it is commonly understood. Indeed the remarks which have been quoted here may be profitably compared with those of two well-known philosophers who were roughly his contemporaries. The first passage is from the work of the novelist's brother, William James, the second from that of Alfred North Whitehead:

> My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff "pure experience," then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its "terms" becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known.[22]

> For natural philosophy everything perceived is in nature. We may not pick and choose. For us the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of the nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon. It is for natural philosophy to analyze how these various elements of nature are connected.[23]

By juxtaposing these comments, I do not mean to imply a closer relationship between the Jameses and Whitehead than actually existed, nor, certainly, do I mean to imply that Henry James was strongly influenced by readings in the philosophy current at the time. Still, the similarities between his notion of the "real" and those expressed by his brother and Whitehead are striking. And taking note of this similarity allows us to place James in that community of modern artists and thinkers who saw reality as infinitely rich, various, and complex--a reality composed of both the natural world and the world of the spirit. Martha Banta, using some concepts worked out by Auerbach in Mimesis, provides a vivid description of this Jamesian world in its spiritual depth:

> To the Hebrews, God's influence acted like the sense of the human psyche to James; each power 'reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically unseparable.'[24]

What we see in James, then, is a rare coalescence of forces. He was not only familiar with tales of supernatural horror, but he was, by virtue of his own temperament and early education, disposed to take them seriously--disposed, that is, to see them as poetic representations of that other world which is subtly interfused with ordinary life. In the critical writings, we can see this as early as 1865 in a review of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Aurora Floyd:

> She has been preceded in the same path by Mr. Wilkie Collins whose "Woman in White," with its diaries and letters and its general ponderosity, was a kind of nineteenth century version of "Clarissa Harlowe." To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors. This innovation gave a new impetus to the literature of horrors. It was fatal to the authority of Mrs. Radcliffe and her everlasting castle in the Apennines. What are the Apennines to us, or we to the Apennines? Instead of the terror of "Udolpho," we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful countryhouse and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible. Mrs. Radcliffe's mysteries were romances pure and simple; while those of Mr. Wilkie Collins were stern reality. The supernatural, which Mrs. Radcliffe constantly implies, though she generally saves her conscience, at the eleventh hour, by explaining it away, requires a powerful imagination

> in order to be as exciting as the natural, as Mr. Collins and Miss Braddon, without any imagination at all know how to manage it. A good ghost-story, to be half as terrible as a good murder-story, must be connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life. The best ghost-story probably ever written--a tale published some years ago in Blackwood's Magazine--was constructed with an admirable understanding of this principle. Half of its force was derived from its prosaic, commonplace, day light accessories.[25]

In passages such as these, James gives evidence not only of his extensive reading of the Gothic, but also of his unusual responsiveness to it. He was, indeed, one of the earliest and most acute critics of that genre. Nowhere is this clearer than in his awareness that the literature of terror had ceased being remote and exotic and had become a part of what was familiar and ordinary. Of particular interest, too, is his suggestion that the only difference between the real and the romantic is that the former is more common and familiar--an idea he would examine in much greater depth at a later date.

It is not, however, until we come to the critical "Prefaces" that these typically Gothic concerns are treated with the fullness of his mature understanding. As always, James is interested in the past, the dead, and the supernatural, but always as they impinge upon our daylight sensibilities. In the "Preface" to The Aspern Papers, for example, he discusses how the theme of the past can be used by the novelist to achieve intensity and effect:

> I delight in a palpable, imaginable visitible 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. With more moves back the element of the appreciable shrinks--just as the charm of looking over a garden-wall into another garden breaks down when successions of walls appear. The other gardens, those still beyond, may be there, but even by use of our longest ladder we are baffled and bewildered--the view is mainly a view of barriers. The one partition makes the place we have wondered about other, both richly and recognizably so; but who shall pretend to impute an effect of composition to the twenty? We are divided of course between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar.[26]

What makes this particular past eerie and haunting is precisely the fact that it is not remote or exotic, but rather an aspect of each individual's experience. The mystery and fear it evokes is precisely the fear of mutability, the fear of changing and the passage of time.

The central document in this discussion is, however, the "Preface" to The American, most particularly the passages where James deals with the differences between the real and the romantic, the novel and the romance. I am aware of the importance Richard Chase places upon this preface, and of his admirable discussion of it in

The American Novel and its Tradition.[27] But I am willing to risk going over familiar ground if it serves to heighten our awareness of the extent to which James recognized the subtle penetration of the marvelous into everyday life, as well as the extent to which he believed it was the duty of the novelist to represent experience in its extremes.

For our purposes, the crucial aspect of this "Preface" is James's suggestion that many of the elements which he had previously seen as central to a good ghost story he now sees as central to the novel. James's attitude toward romance is ambivalent here as it is in much of his critical writing. On the one hand, he seems to feel that indulgence in romance forms is a species of aesthetic mistake, while on the other hand he recognizes that romances contain matter of enormous interest. This confusion can, I think, be alleviated somewhat if we remember that James is distinguishing between romance as it had commonly been used, and romance as it might be used by a skilled writer. Thus, for him, the historical treatment of romance was not so much wrong as it was guilty of partial insight--it failed to recognize that the marvelous events with which it was so much occupied were also the stuff of life properly comprehended. Historically, romance tended to be "a matter indispensably of boats, or of caravans, or of tigers, or of 'historical characters', or of ghosts, or of forgers, or of detectives, or of beautiful wicked women, or of pistols and knives."[28] Yet for James, the dangers of the romance

world differ from the dangers of ordinary life in degree but not in kind, and from the moral or spiritual point of view they are all more or less the same:

> There are immense and flagrant dangers that are but sordid and squalid ones, as we feel, tainting with their quality and the very defiances they provoke; while there are common and covert ones, that 'look like nothing' and that can be but inwardly and occultly dealt with, which involves the sharpest hazards to life and honour and the highest instant decisions and intrepidities of action. It is an arbitrary stamp that keeps these latter prosaic and makes the former heroic.[29]

The romantic world with all of its dangers is always a potential intruder into our world of experience, and life takes on its greatest interest when the "real" ("the things we cannot possibly not know, sooner or later") and the "romantic" ("things that. . . we never can directly know; the things that can reach us only through the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and desire") collide.[30] There are truths that we can know directly, and there are truths that we can only know by indirection--that is, metaphorically and symbolically through the offices of the imagination. Yet both of these "truths" are part of the current of our experience and therefore "real" in the most proper sense of the term.

Such a vision of experience clearly has broad implications for the novelist. For if he is to be faithful to the emotional experience of life, he must, "by the law of

some rich passion in him for extremes,"[31] find a place in his work for the romantic as well as the real. And fiction, like life, achieves its highest interest and intensity when the two worlds are simultaneously present:

> 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, if we wish so to put the matter, drag upon 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.[32]

If at this point we hear echoes of Walpole's "Preface" to the second edition of The Castle of Otranto, it is by design not accident--it being precisely my point that James came to mine a rich fictional vein, the possibilities of which Walpole could only dimly imagine a century and a half earlier. To fully participate in the terror which heroes and heroines like Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Maggie Verver feel when the "real" world of habit and convention becomes the other world of romance is to participate in the true Gothic terror.

Yet as we witness these innocent characters confronting the world of romance, we are aware of what Professor Garber has described as "two parallel tendencies toward a movement from outside to within." In a line of development which follows closely developments within the Gothic tradition, James came to see that the world of romance needn't inevitably appear in exotic settings. It is important to remember here that the "Prefaces" to the New York edition are a retrospective commentary on his own work. They were composed after the great novels of the major phase, and as a result, what he sees as important in them is closely related to his own late practice. The mature James may have been keenly aware of the dangers that could lurk in a civilized setting, but in his novels this is a perspective which gradually develops.

In The American, the earliest of the novels we will be discussing here, the action takes place in Paris at the very center of fabled French immorality. Similarly, much of the important action in The Portrait of a Lady and The Wings of the Dove takes place in Italy--a land which the English literary mind had associated with dark unmentionable deeds since at least the Renaissance. By the time we get to The Golden Bowl, however, very little of importance takes place on the continent. Rather, this last and perhaps the greatest of James's novels shows how very much at home evil is in the great country houses of "civilized" England.

Equally important is James's developing awareness of how evil might lurk in a civilized personality as well as

in a civilized setting. Here again the developmental sequence beginning with The American is instructive. In The American, as in an early Gothic novel like The Mysteries of Udolpho there is relatively little confusion as to where good and evil reside. But in The Portrait of a Lady, and increasingly in The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl, this issue becomes problematic. Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady retain many of the stock characteristics of the traditional Gothic tale, and their inner lives are not examined in great depth. In The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl, however, characters like Kate Croy and Merton Densher, Charlotte Stant and Prince Amerigo are not only seen as civilized but evil to the degree that they are so. In these novels James is as much interested in the inner lives and responses of his "evil" characters as he is in those of his heroes and heroines. As a result, evil takes on a human face and becomes inextricably associated with the mystery of the human personality.

We should not leave this subject without noting that while characters like the Bellegardes, Madame Merle, Osmond, Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant are, finally, evil, James heroes and heroines have in them the capacity to do evil as well. In Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer these tendencies are admittedly latent, though not wholly absent; in Milly Theale they are somewhat more pronounced, and in Maggie Verver they are surprisingly close to the surface. The result is an unsettling suspicion that the capacity to

do evil is universal. Here we can see that James fulfills the Gothic propensity for seeing good and evil as realities, but realities which are exceptionally difficult to distinguish, and for seeing the world as a theatre in which these forces collide in a baffling series of encounters. James gives a powerful description of this vision in the "Preface" to What Maisie Knew:

> No themes are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connexion of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling before us for ever that bright hard medal of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong. To live with all intensity and perplexity and felicity in its terribly mixed little world would thus be the part of my interesting small mortal; bringing people together who would be at least more correctly separate; keeping people separate who would be at least more correctly together; flourishing, to a degree, at the cost of many conventions and proprieties, even decencies, really keeping the torch of virtue alive in an air tending infinitely to smother it; really in short making confusion worse confounded by drawing some stray fragrance of an ideal across the scent of selfishness, by sowing on barren strands, through the mere fact of presence, the seed of the moral life.[33]

Although the sentiments expressed here are distinctly modern--compare, for example, the lines from T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion":

> Neither fear nor courage saves us. Unnatural vices Are fathered by our heroism. Virtues Are forced upon us by our impudent crimes.[34]

--we should not overlook the fact that the literature of terror was one of the chief means by which this vision of a "terribly mixed little world" was pushed into full consciousness in the twentieth century.

One place where we see immediate evidence of the strength of this vision for James is in the Jamesian style itself--that irreducible combination of prose and poetry, realistic detail and metaphor which is so characteristic of the late work. Indeed it would seem that the conflicting demands of realism and romance could not be fully satisfied by conventional prose, and that James therefore turned to the techniques of poetry to convey a sense of life fully comprehended. To a critic like Austin Warren, this late style is one of James's chief virtues:

> The distinctive masterly achievement of Henry James in his maturity is a series of "metaphysical" movels in which, working as a poet, not a philosopher, he incarnates the interrelations between the conscious and the unconscious.[35]

James felt that there was more on heaven and earth than could be conveyed by the logic of traditional prose. Yet unique though this style may appear to be, it has recognizable affinities with the styles of earlier Gothic writers. Mrs. Radcliffe and M.G. Lewis, to use just the most obvious examples, litter their prose with poetry--either their own or that of others; and while their use of poetry strikes as being clumsier and more intrusive than James's, their intent is much the same. John Berryman

has spoken provocatively of the "poetry" of the Gothic novel as it comes down to us through the works of Radcliffe, Lewis, and Emily Bronte;[36] and it is probably safe to suggest that James required a richly allusive style for similar reasons.

James's relation to the Gothic is, however, even more convincingly established by his conception of evil. As is to be expected in a writer firmly rooted in the sentimental tradition, James placed a supreme value on individual feeling, discrimination, and judgment. The eternal sanctity of the human spirit was an ethic deeply ingrained within him--it was central to his father's religious beliefs, and it was certainly at the heart of the works of a writer like Hawthorne. It followed from this, moreoever, that whatever interfered with, manipulated, or in any way devalued human feeling was evil. As Walter Wright puts it:

> As a novelist he was concerned with creative expression as the highest activity of the human mind and with the absolute sacredness of the human soul. Whatever prevented creativity or the development of sensibility, be it cynicism or whatever, he considered tragic. Whatever violated the sacred freedom of another soul--it inalienable right to self-respect and self expression--was supremely evil.[37]

Almost anything said here would apply with equal force to the great works of the Gothic tradition. And when characters like Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale and Maggie Verver encounter evil, they, like Emily and Valancourt

or Raymond and Agnes before them, encounter it in the form of some malevolent force which seeks to control or manipulate them.

Equally compelling in this respect is the seemingly exact parallel in the way these forces are portrayed by James and the Gothic novelists. James is different from his predecessors to the extent that his novels never involve imprisonment, murder, or the kind of charnel house scene of which a writer like Lewis was so fond. He was, however, taken by the suggestive power of the past. Medieval, Catholic, Europe is alluded to often in these novels. Yet in James, as in the Gothic novelists, this antiquarian past is the past in its most superficial aspect. For him, as for them, the past was most important as a living force exerting a subtle pressure on the present. Thus, here as well as in the earlier novels, the past and all of its evils is figured in the image of the present social world and a series of conventional characters, typified by Gilbert Osmond who describes himself at one point as "convention itself." Figures like Urbain de Bellegarde, Madame Merle, Osmond, Kate Croy, Prince Amerigo, and Charlotte Stant may be very different in certain respects, but they are alike in that they all represent culture in its most monolithic and threatening form. For these characters, as for a host of Gothic villains and villainesses, other people do not exist as free and independent beings worthy of dignity and respect;

others are, rather, creatures to be used as pride, ambition, greed, or aesthetic sense might dictate.

There is, then, danger in social institutions and in other people, yet James also recognizes the extent to which the most damnable constraints on individual self-expression and growth are internal. Here, also, the locus of all danger is sexual passion. Like the great Gothic novels, James's most characteristic novels, and certainly the novels of the major phase, have at their center a sexual intrigue. And it is as a result of this sexual intrigue that a hero like Christopher Newman, and heroines like Isabel, Milly and Maggie learn how they have been betrayed by their own values, their own culturally and aesthetically induced attitudes toward others and toward their own feelings. It is around this basic encounter between a man and a woman that these myriad conflicts and dangers coalesce.

None of this is to say, though, that there is no development of this theme in James's work. For him, none of the constraints are physical--they are, rather, social, conventional, and psychological. But given this, there is a definite development in his work which we can easily apprehend if we try to imaginatively grasp the distance which has been travelled between The American and The Golden Bowl. In the former, Christopher Newman is presented as a more or less innocent victim. An element of pride and egoism does motivate his actions, but on the whole he is the victim of the narrow class snobbery of the Bellegardes.

Maggie Verver, by contrast, is victimized by forces which are far more subtle, though no less powerful. In a sense, certainly, she is victimized by the passive scheming of her husband, Prince Amerigo, and the active scheming of her friend, Charlotte Stant. Yet there is a larger sense in which her own best values, her own desires to do what is right for everybody, are the source of the difficulty.

James, like the Gothic novelists, becomes involved in a curious double process wherein sentimental values are simultaneously criticized and affirmed; and perhaps what is ultimately at stake here is the status of true culture. When cultural values operate as received opinion--as stale custom--they cannot properly be said to operate at all. True culture, rather, survives in the shared insights of civilized life which can be passed on and which can be reinterpreted by each generation in light of its own experience. Thus, in the present instance, there is nothing wrong with the values Maggie brings to the problem of her life; it is just that these values have not been adopted with a full awareness of their limitations. They have not, in short, been adopted with an awareness of the terribly mixed nature of life, of the horrible ease with which evil can be the result of the best of motives acted upon in ignorance.

The Golden Bowl, therefore, occupies the same place in the James canon as Wuthering Heights occupies in the earlier Gothic tradition. For in both, evil is something

which must be gone through if society is to be redeemed. And we note in this respect that there is no gesture of renunciation in The Golden Bowl as there had been in The American, The Wings of the Dove, and The Portrait of a Lady; rather evil has been met on its own ground and overcome. And this is not achieved through a willful and rigid application of some system of belief or aesthetic vision, but through the mediating offices of imagination, sympathy, love, and, above all self awareness. Society is, after all, but a collection of individuals, and can only be regenerated to the extent that the individuals that compose it are. This, it will be readily seen, is a powerful answer to collectivism, for it is always necessary for the individual to set his own house in order--a process which begins with the often painful necessity of striking a just balance between personal inclination and social restraint, a process which involves placing oneself in some relation to time or history where, to use terms familiar to Freud and Eliot as well as James, the child meets the adult in some approximation of whole humanity. It is only when this occurs that the individual is free to affirm fully the freedom and dignity of others.

Considerations of this sort lead us, moreover, into a final and intensely interesting area of James's relation to the Gothic--namely his development of what has commonly been called the restricted point of view. In an account of literary history which I find to be essentially correct,

Darlene Harbour Unrue traces the development of this technique from the early epistolary novels like Clarissa Harlowe to the Gothic, and from thence to James's major fiction via the "ghostly tales."[38] Indeed there is plenty of evidence in the "Prefaces" to suggest that this is the case. In the "Preface" to The Princess Casmassima, James describes the literary virtues of the restricted point of view:

> . . .the figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion.[39]

Comments such as these echo provocatively some of his better known comments on the literature of the supernatural. Thus a similar note is struck in the "Preface" to "The Altar of the Dead" where James is discussing the technique of his Gothic masterpiece, "The Jolly Corner":

> The extraordinary is most extraordinary in that it happens to you and me, and it's of value (of value for others) but so far as visibly brought home to us. At any rate, odd though it may sound to pretend that one feels on safer ground in tracing such an adventure as that of the hero of "The Jolly Corner" than in pursuing a bright career among pirates or detectives, I allow that composition to pass as the measure or limit, on my part, of any achievable comfort in the "adventure story"; and this is not because I may "render"--well, what my poor gentleman attempted and suffered in the New York house--better than I may render detectives or pirates or other splendid desperadoes, though even

> here too there would be something to say; but because the spirit engaged with the forces of violence interests me most when I can think of it as engaged most deeply, most finely and most "subtly" (precious term!). For then it is that, as with the longest and firmest prongs of consciousness, I grasp and hold the throbbing subject; there it is above all that I find the steady light of the picture.[40]

Surely something similar must have been in James's mind when he disparages attempts to prove the existence of ghosts scientifically:

> Recorded and attested 'ghosts' are . . . as little expressive, as little dramatic . . . as is consistent with their taking the trouble . . . to appear at all.[41]

Or again in the "Preface" to "The Altar of the Dead" where he discusses the artistic merits of the ghost story:

> I am prepared with the confession that the "ghost-story," as we for convenience call it, has ever been for me the most possible form of the fairy-tale. It enjoys, to my eyes, this honour by being so much the neatest--neat with that neatness without which representation, and therewith beauty drops.[42]

James never states directly that his use of the restricted point of view has its origins in the literature of the ghostly, but in charting his progress we ourselves can see that, like the best of the early Gothic writers, he discovered that the techniques of terror could be most profitably used in the development of a novel of character.

And what he got from the literature of the supernatural was his sense of the essential interest of an isolated consciousness confronting the terror of experience.

Part of James's attraction, certainly, stems from his fidelity to the novelist's unceasing obligation to hold the attention of his audience. And it is interesting to watch a series of Jamesian heroes and heroines struggle through a labyrinth of unstable social forms with only their own limited sensibility to guide them. Part of it also is James receptiveness to the distinctly modern notion that reality is relative, and his attempt to portray it as such. For him there was no static world to be contemplated by disembodied intelligences; rather, as he says in "The Art of the Novel," "Humanity is immense, and reality has myriad forms." Reality is, in other words, the aggregate of what men perceive given the limitations of their own knowledge, circumstance, and mental disposition. Yet in the final analysis, James's use of impersonal forms of narration is fraught with moral implications as well. Although they are ungenerous to James's use of impersonal narration on aesthetic grounds, Scholes and Kellogg recognize the fact that there is a serious issue involved here. As they put it:

> We have suggested that James's avoidance of the multifarious aspect of omniscience was in some sense idiosyncratic, an elevation of his personal preferences and limitations into a principle of art. But his suspicion of the monistic and authoritative aspect of omniscience is another affair altogether. A cogent justification for James's reaction to

> this aspect of omniscience can be made though not without leaving the realm of esthetics, a departure he would doubtless deplore.[43]

While accurate in the main, some of this seems intolerably glib, for the aesthetic and moral realms are never really distinct in James, and what is at stake here, finally, is the moral status of art. James, like the Gothic novelists, was aware that art is a powerful aspect of culture, a living force with immense potential for both good and evil. And as Darlene Unrue shows, James was fond of the typically Gothic technique of bringing works of art to life throughout his career:

> Henry James was aware of the imaginative possibilities of the "living" portrait or statue, and as his fiction is full of allusions to the works of painters and sculptors, one can expect him to draw upon the "living" portrait for dramatic effect. His works are full of allusions to the phenomenon.[44]

What this technique suggests with varying degrees of subtlety is that art is one of the animated forces of our world. And what is true of the plastic arts is also true of literary art. It is not possible to dramatize this quite as effectively since characters do not step out of novels quite as readily as they step out of paintings. Literary art can, however, be seen as a living force in the psychology of James's characters. Isabel Archer, to use one obvious example, is immensely influenced by her early readings, and

her failure to perceive the truth which this "fictional" material contains is the source of much of the danger she encounters.

And if the status of art is of importance within the novels, it also has vast implications for the relation between the author and the reader. Here James's rejection of narrative omniscience may be seen as a fulfillment of what Robert Hume describes as the Gothic attempt to involve the reader in a new way. Although he was writing with explicit reference to James's ghostly tales, Earl Miner makes an observation which is equally valid in reference to the major fiction:

> James saw little intrinsic value or use in the ghosts themselves, but their effect upon one or more of the characters through whom the reader might participate in the horror was of prime artistic concern. The importance of the dramatic consciousness technique, which was essentially the reader's vicarious consciousness, cannot be overemphasized.[45]

Since James used art to discuss art, anything which he saw as true of art in general would be true as well for the particular art form he employed. For him, as for the earlier Gothic novelists, the danger of art comes when it obscures vision rather than enhances it--when, in short, it is a sterile object rather than a living force. Consequently he, like these earlier novelists, worked out elaborate strategies to prevent his novels from becoming useless artifacts on a junk heap of dead culture. Admittedly,

these strategies did not develop overnight. The American, for instance, is narrated from a traditional omniscient point of view. In The Portrait of a Lady, we can see glimmerings of James's late technique, particularly in the long passages where Isabel's thoughts and feelings are so vividly portrayed. In The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl, of course, these glimmerings become a strong clear light. And James has, in these novels, so perfected his technique with a restricted point of view that we come very close to having no more information than the characters themselves; we confront the dangers of the Jamesian world vicariously through characters whose limitations we share. As a result we feel with a particular intensity that the dangers of James's world are the dangers of our own.

Eminent critics have complained of this, complained, that is, of James's moral obscurity;[46] but it seems that in so doing they reveal only a partial grasp of James's fictional world. What they don't in particular recognize is how profoundly anti-authoritarian James is, and how deeply he felt that our best moral values could be threatening. In "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," Lionel Trilling makes some observations which, while intended to apply to novels in general, provide a powerful justification for James's technique:

> . . .we must be aware of the dangers
> which lie in our most generous wishes.
> Some paradox of our nature leads us,
> when we once have made our fellow men
> the objects of our enlightened interest,

> to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion. It is to prevent this corruption, the most ironic and tragic that man knows, that we stand in need of the moral realism which is the product of the free play of the moral imagination.
>
> For our time the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the last two hundred years. It was never, either aesthetically or morally, a perfect form and its faults and failures can be quickly enumerated. But its greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it.[47]

James is morally difficult not because his views were hazy, but because he realized how difficult it is to act morally given the Gothic text of life; and he realized, further, how moral views unaided by imagination and self awareness could become dangerous. Interestingly enough, there has been increased interest in both James and the Gothic writers since the end of World War II. Perhaps after the events of this century their vision of the geography of evil does not seem so hysterical or exotic. In their own way they sensed how culture, art, or political theory could harden into ideology and thereby become inhuman.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

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[2]H. Montgomery Hyde, Henry James at Home (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 294.

[3]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, Intro. R.P. Blackmur, (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 161. James dictated these prefaces between 1906 and 1908.

[4]Leon Edel, Introduction to The Ghostly Tales of Henry James (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1948), p. x.

[5]F.W. Dupee, Henry James (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1951), pp. 56-57.

[6]William Veeder, Henry James--The Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 120, 148, et passim.

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[9]F.O. Matthiessen, The James Family, Including Selections From the Writings of Henry James, Senior, William, Henry, & Alice James (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948), p. 72.

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[13]Edel. The Untried Years, p. 71.

[14]Joseph A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 159.

[15]Graham Greene, "Henry James," in Derek Verschoyle ed. The English Novelists: A Survey of the Novel by Twenty Contemporary Novelists (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), p. 231.

[16]F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 143.

[17]Rene Wellek, "Henry James's Literary Theory and Criticism," American Literature, 30 (1958), 293.

[18]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," (1884); rpt. in The Future of the Novel, p. 5.

[19]James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 14.

[20]James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 12.

[21]James, "The Art of Fiction," p. 23.

[22]William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism (1912; rpt. in Essays in Radical Empiricism/A Pluralistic Universe, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967), p. 4.

[23]Alfred North Whitehead, The Concept of Nature (1919; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 29.

[24]Martha Banta, Henry James and the Occult: The Great Extension (Bloomington: The University of Indiana Press, 1972), p. 75.

[25]Henry James, "Miss Braddon," The Nation, 1 (November 1865), 593. Regrettably, the title of the "best" ghost story ever written is not available to us.

[26]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 164.

[27]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), pp. 21-28.

[28]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 32.

[29]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 32-33.

[30]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 31-32.

[31]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 31.

[32]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 33.

[33]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 143.

[34]T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1971), p. 22.

[35]Austin Warren, "Myth and Dialectic in the Later Novels of Henry James," Kenyon Review, 5 (1943), 568.

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[39]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 62.

[40]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 257.

[41]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 174.

[42]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 254.

[43]Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 274.

[44]Darlene Harbour Unrue, "Henry James and Gothic Romance," p. 172.

[45]Earl Roy Miner, "Henry James's Metaphysical Romances," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 9 (1954), 18.

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[47]Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," The Liberal Imagination (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 215.

THE AMERICAN: EARLY EXPERIMENTS IN THE GOTHIC

The four novels selected for study here--The American, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl--are not the only James novels which have a strong affinity with the Gothic. On the contrary, it is possible to find Gothic themes, images, and techniques in works from every period of James's career. His first full length novel, Roderick Hudson, and the first great novel of the major phase, The Ambassadors, are for example, tales of passion set amidst the accumulated treacheries of the old world.[1] The very situation they embody is, therefore, a recognizable variation of the oldest of Gothic plots. Yet The American, The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl are the novels in which all of the characteristics of Gothic are most recognizably present. It is in these novels that his Gothic vision is the most sustained, and it is to them we must turn to find his most enduring contribution to the literature of terror.

These four novels are, first of all, quintessential examples of the international novel which Oscar Cargill describes as:

> . . .one in which a character, usually guided in his actions by the mores of one environment, is set down in another, where he must employ all his individual

> resources to meet successive situations, and where he must intelligently accommodate himself to new mores, or in one way or another to be destroyed. It is the novelist's equivalent of providing a special medium in a laboratory for studying the behavior of an organism, only here it is a device for the revelation of character.[2]

Each of the novels has the aura of a fairy tale about it. Each is a story about people who are rich and "free" and the interest is derived from a concern about what the characters will do with their wealth and freedom. Again, this is a variation on the basic Gothic tendency, exhibited in works from Clarissa to Wuthering Heights, to seek insight into the human personality by creating extreme conditions. R.F. Brissenden wrote the following about Clarissa but it is equally applicable to the novels being dealt with here:

> The social, economic, legal and familial sub-structure of the situation with which the book deals is firmly and meticulously established; and on this foundation Richardson is able to develop a narrative which is both a novel of ideas and something like a programmed experiment. The situation which he has built up enables him to test to destruction certain notions--such as man's innate humanity--which are basic to sentimental morality.[3]

There are, of course, variations in individual technique. In Clarissa, for example, the social "world" is far more powerfully and accurately realized than it ever is in James--at least in a sociological context. James, by contrast, was interested in the social world only to the

extent that it provided the conditions of freedom and culture in which the deeper, internalized, tensions and contradictions of freedom and culture could be effectively explored. Yet they are alike in that both seek to examine the adequacy of sentimental values in a world which is fundamentally hostile to them.

It is precisely this, moreover, which binds these four novels together. Their very status as "international" novels, as James developed that mode, is indicative of their Gothic roots, and provides, therefore, a convenient means of assessing James's relationship to the Gothic as it evolved over a period of some thirty years. Yet before this assessment can begin in earnest there is one preliminary difficulty which must be addressed--namely the status of the New York edition. Since the works in this edition are those which James most prized, and since they have been revised in accordance with his mature artistic standards, it is normal in James scholarship to use this edition wherever possible. When, however, the subject is James's artistic development, more care is indicated. The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl were written just a few years before James began work on the New York edition, and were, consequently, but slightly revised. The American and The Portrait of a Lady were, however, substantially revised, and it is necessary, therefore, not to ascribe qualities to the "earlier" James which the "later" James added.

There has been some critical debate about the importance and quality of James's revisions. Fortunately for our purposes, James's revisions have had very little to do with the Gothic elements of his texts. Although James never produced what we might call a truly "naive" Gothic novel, his earlier works, The American in particular and to a lesser extent The Portrait of a Lady, are recognizably less sophisticated in their treatment of Gothic themes than works like The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl--even in revision. Furthermore, the revised version of The Portrait of a Lady is notably more sophisticated in its use of Gothic techniques than the revised version of The American. To be sure, characters like Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer are more self aware, more inward, in the New York edition than they were in the earlier versions--reflecting the later James's interest in character as opposed to incident and social satire. And, of course, there are attempts to clear up the inevitable absurdities of serial publication. What is most remarkable, however, is that so much of importance remained unchanged. James may have been a passionate reviser, but he was equally interested in the creative process, and proves to be a remarkably detached and acute observer of his own earlier work. Royal Gettman puts it this way:

> It is wrong, then, to assume that James the Reviser mercilessly manhandled the works of James the First. As a matter of fact he regarded his novels as independent creations, as having an existence

> of their own. He respected them just as a scrupulous biographer or historian respects actual people and historical events.[4]

Now James's sense of good and evil did not change in substance from the early novels to the late ones. But his sense of the subtlety and complexity of the problem most assuredly did change. And the differences in imagery, setting, characterization, and narrative technique which James developed to accommodate this expanded vision remain observable in the novels of the New York edition.

As Elsa Nettles observes, The American is the closest James ever gets in his novels to naive Gothic fiction:

> Of all James's novels, The American, with its duel, its dark family secret, its ancient castle and convent, and its hero strong in the 'general easy magnificence of his manhood' is most indebted to the plots and motifs of Gothic romance.[5]

James's own remarks on the subject confirm this opinion. In the "Preface" to The American, he remarks "I had been plotting arch Romance without knowing it."[6] In another instance he describes his novel in terms which would apply equally well to The Mysteries of Udolpho:

> I recall that I was seated in an American 'horse-car' when I found myself, of a sudden, considering with enthusiasm, as the theme of a 'story', the situation, in another country and an aristocratic society, of some robust but insidiously beguiled and betrayed, some cruelly wronged, compatriot: the point being in especial that he 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 his own. What would he 'do' in that predicament, how would he right himself, or how, failing a remedy, would he conduct himself under his wrong? . . . this would be the question involved.[7]

Interestingly enough, moreover, this typically Gothic theme was one which he could adopt with the greatest ease and which freed him to write with the greatest confidence in his artistic powers:

> I seem to recall no other like connexion in which the case was met, to my measure, by so fond a complacency, in which my subject can have appeared to take care of itself.[8]

This passage is important because, as we shall see later, it is not unique. James is always the most confident in his artistic powers, the most filled with a sense of his own accomplished artistry, when he is immersed in themes which are recognizably Gothic.

It is probably just, from the outset, to state that The American is not nearly so important a novel as those with which it is here being compared. Although the "revised" Newman of the New York edition is more realistically rendered than the character that appeared in the original, he is still perilously close to being a cartoon figure. And if this is true of the hero, it is even more true of Claire de Cintre, the heroine, and the villains, Urbain

and Madame d'Bellegarde. Each of these is a "stock" character whose inner life is scarcely revealed at all.

Still, in the James canon, this is an important novel. For everything that is important in the novels of the major phase is present here in a nascent form. We clearly see James's interest in the past, in art, in culture, and in the relation of all of these to the problem of human perception and the still greater problem of good and evil. And we can appreciate James's later development all the more fully when we realize that he has not altered his basic concerns so much as he has approached them with greater subtlety, intensity and penetration.

The plot of this novel is simple and melodramatic, and the hero will seem familiar enough to anyone well versed in the conventions of Gothic fiction, although he is distinctly American. Indeed, like his Gothic forbearers, Newman is very much the innocent representative of his native culture caught up in an environment that is inalterably hostile to it. James is at great pains to establish this image of Newman in the very first pages of the novel:

> His physiognomy would have sufficiently indicated that he was a shrewd and capable person, and in truth he had often sat up all night over a bristling bundle of accounts and heard the cock crow without a yawn. But Raphael and Titian and Rubens were a new kind of arithmetic, and they made him for the first time in his life wonder at his vagueness.

> An observer with anything of an eye for local color would have had no difficulty in referring this candid connoisseur to the scene of his origin, and indeed such an observer might have made an ironic point of the ideal completeness with which he filled out the mold of his race. The gentleman on the divan was the superlative American.[9]

As Ellen Leyburn observes, the plot of The American lends itself to a curious, not always successful, blend of comedy and melodrama.[10] At times the humor is casual, even off hand, as when James remarks of Newman: "If he was a muscular Christian it was quite without doctrine" (p. 2). On another occasion we are told that Newman "was also greatly struck with the beautiful Gothic tower of the Hotel de Ville and wondered if they might n't 'get up' something like it in San Francisco" (p. 86). At other times, as in the following exchange, the humor is somewhat less tasteful:

> "'Ah, you're taking a holiday'," rejoined M. de Bellegarde. "'Loafing.' Yes, I've heard that expression."
>
> "Mr. Newman's a distinguished American," Madame de Bellegarde observed.
>
> "My brother's a great ethnologist," said Valentin.
>
> "An ethnologist?"--and Newman groped for gaiety. "You collect negroes skulls and that sort of thing?" (p. 189)

Yet for all this apparent comedy, the most important part of the novel from the perspective of James's development is the "melodramatic" quality as Leyburn calls it--or the

"Gothic" quality to use the terms we have developed here. It was this darker, more terrifying, quality which his original audience responded to and which formed the basis of the popular adaptation of this novel for the theatre. And to perceive the Gothicism of the novel, the scenes it entails and the images it evokes, is to be in touch with James's essential moral geography.

If Newman's unfamiliarity with the conventions of European aristocratic life could occasion humor, it is also the basis for drawing broad moral distinction. Thus, in one particularly important passage we learn that:

> . . .the common traditions with regard to women were with him fresh personal impressions. He had never read a page of a printed Romance. (p. 39).

He is natural, untutered, and his attitudes and responses are free of the influences of art and convention. He is immensely wealthy in an unspecified way, and therefore "tolerably free" (p. 79)--free that is to "let up for awhile, to forget the whole question, to look about . . . to see the world, to have a good time . . . to marry a wife" (p. 24). Naturally, in order to suit the conditions of Newman's wealth and freedom, this wife must be a "pure pearl," "a shining statue crowning some high monument. She must be as good as she is beautiful and as clever as she is good" (pp. 48-49). This is so, moreover, because he is in Europe to "get the best out of it . . . to see all the great things and do what all the best people do"

(p. 29). He wants to have "the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get. People, places, art, nature, everything" (p. 33). He is, as Mrs. Tristram notes in a phrase evoking Whitman:

> the great Western Barbarian, stepping
> forth in his innocence and might,
> gazing a while at this poor corrupt
> old world and then swooping down on it (p. 45).

The extent of Newman's "swooping" is made amply clear by his own humorous description of it:

> Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Germany,
> Italy--I've taken the whole list as
> the bare backed rider takes paper hoops
> at the circus, and I'm not even yet out
> of breath. I carry about six volumes
> of Ruskin in my trunk. I've seen some
> grand old things (p. 103).

Newman evidently enjoys Europe, and, in fact, contemplates a journey still further east to "Damascus and Bagdad, Trebizond, Samarcand, Bokhara."[11] Yet in a moment of intuition that foreshadows passages in the later James, Newman comes to realize that the treats of all the world, the wonders, the delights, the dangers and the adventures are not so much to be found in the exotic east as they are to be found in Paris, with its culture, its art, and its history. Even more particularly, he senses that they are to be found in the "handsome tall lady" whose acquaintance he had made in Mrs. Tristram's drawing-room.

The relationship which develops between Newman and Claire de Cintre is itself the purest stuff of romance.

Both are, in their respective ways "types"--representatives, that is, of radically different cultural attitudes. Newman, as we have seen is an American, an orphan who has worked since he was a child, and who has subsequently survived the Civil War and the financial wars of an expanding New World. Claire, by contrast, is distinctly the product of the Old World:

> She gave him, the charming woman, the sense of an elaborate education, of her having passed through mysterious ceremonies and processes of culture in her youth, of having been fashioned and made flexible to certain deep social needs. All this, as I have noted, made her seem rare and precious--a very expensive article--and one which a man with an ambition to have everything about him of the best would taste of triumph in possessing. Yet looking at the matter with an eye to private felicity he asked himself, where, in so exquisite a compound nature and art showed their dividing line. Where did the special intention separate from the habit of good manners? Where did fine urbanity and fine sincerity begin? (p. 166)

And if it is this "grace born of art" which mystifies and enthralls him, she, for her part, is attracted by his very naturalness. The following is James's genteel version of "Othello" beguiling "Desdamona.":

> He told Madame de Cintre stories, sometimes not brief, from his own repertory; he was full of reference to his own great country, over the greatness of which it seldom occurred to him that everyone might n't, on occasion offered, more or less insatiably yearn; and he explained to her, in so discoursing, the play of a hundred

> of its institutions and the ingenuity of almost all its arrangements. Judging by the sequel, judging even by the manner in which she suffered his good faith to lay an apparent spell upon her attitude, she was mildly--oh mildly and inscrutably! --beguiled (pp. 243-44).

That his strangeness is the source of her attraction to him is made clear when she tells him:

> Your being so different, which at first seemed a difficulty, a danger, began one day to seem to me a great pleasure (p. 272).

Like so many characters in the history of literature, Newman and Claire are attracted to each other because of their differences, but because of these very differences they are ultimately fated to part. And it is in observing the internal and external contraints which make their marriage finally impossible that the reader becomes to come to grips with James's deepest sense of evil. Claire is never fully develoepd as a character, and it is, therefore, difficult to chart this process through her experience. In Newman's consciousness, however, we can witness without obstruction the encounter with evil. We witness him as he discovers the barbarity which resides behind the facade of art and civility. We witness him transformed from someone who believes he cannot be hurt unless he is killed by "some violent means" (p. 303), to someone who has learned to his cost that the most devastating pain is spiritual.

Perhaps the earliest warning to Newman, the earliest intimation that all is not as it appears or as it should be,

occurs when he wanders into the Fauborg St. Germain and discovers that this quarter, guarding as it does the most refined European culture, has more the air of a prison than of a palace of art:

> He walked across the Seine late in the summer afternoon and made his way through those grey and silent streets of the Fauborg St. Germain whose houses present to the outer world a face as impassive and as suggestive of the concentration of privacy within as the blank walls of Eastern seraglios. Newman thought it a perverse, verily a "mean" way for rich people to live; his ideal of grandeur was a splendid facade, diffusing its brilliancy outward too, irradiating hospitality. The house to which he had been directed had a dark, dusty, painted portal . . . it answered to Newman's conception of a convent (pp. 59-60).

And it is this encounter which makes Newman alive to the dangers and treacheries which can exist behind so much pretended brilliance. Indeed, the reference to the "convent" and to "Eastern seraglios" can only serve to create the impression that this fashionable quarter of Paris is a place where people are kept, and where individual freedom, growth and expression are stifled by a grim institutional conformity. This impression, moreover, is reinforced when Lizzie Tristram explains the European ethic wherein a legally independent woman like Claire de Cintre can be made to suffer at the hands of her mother and her relations:

> You may never say nay to your mother, whatever she requires of you. She may be the most abominable woman in

> the world and make your life a purgatory; but after all she's ma mere, and you've no right to judge her. You've simply to obey (p. 109).

Newman's response is to equate the world of the Bellegardes with the world of the popular melodramatic plays, or, to trace the source further back, to the Gothic novels:

> "It's like something in a regular old play," said Newman. "That dark old house over there looks as if wicked things had been done in it and might be done again."
>
> "They have a still darker old house in the country, she tells me, and there, during the summer, this scheme must have been hatched" (p. 111).

Particularly interesting is Newman's protest against this state of affairs. It is the first, but by no means the last, time that he echoes the key speech in The Italian where Vivaldi expresses his horror of the Inquisition. It is the speech of the sentimental idealist contemplating the reality of coercion and suffering:

> Newman, silent a while, seemed lost in meditation. "Is it possible," he asked at last "that they can do that sort of thing here? that helpless women are thumbscrewed--sentimentally, socially, I mean--into marrying men they object to."
>
> "Helpless women, all over the world, have a hard time of it," said Mrs. Tristram. There's plenty of the thumb-screw for them everywhere."
>
> "A great deal of that kind of thing goes on in New York," said Tristram (p. 111).

Just how much of this sentimental "torture" could go on in "civilized" Anglo-Saxon settings was something that James was to demonstrate in far greater detail in his later novels. At this point, however, it is enough to establish that James, like the earlier Gothic novelists, saw sexual passion as a source of danger. And as always it is the social expression of that passion in marriage which seems to invite the forces of darkness to stalk about.

Thus it is that Newman's real introduction to evil begins after he openly declares his passion for Claire and asks for her hand in marriage. As the innocent pilgrim, the moral adventurer, he is, of course, unaware of the dangers, the sin, the evil, the corruption, that surrounds him; but for the reader of earlier Gothic novels the moral topography of The American is only too apparent. That there is danger and treachery in the vicinity is made abundantly clear in this speech by Valentin, laden as it is with Gothic imagery and the hint of powerful but obscure evil:

> "I told you, you remember, that we're very strange people," his visitor pursued. "Well I give you warning again. We're fit for a museum or a Balzac novel. My mother's strange, my brother's strange, and I verily believe that I'm stranger than either. You'll even find my sister a little strange. Old trees have crooked branches, old houses have queer cracks, old races have odd secrets. Remember that we're eight hundred years old" (p. 162).

Presiding over this strange race is old Madame de Bellegarde, aided by her eldest son, the Marquis. And both are to home

in this closed world where the manner gesture governs free movement, where the polished aphorism governs free expression, where the acquired attitude governs spontaneity. And in this sense, they contrast not only with Newman, but with Valentin and Claire--characters who do feel and for whom, at times, the weight of convention is burdensome. The following passage, contrasting Madame de Bellegarde and her daughter is particularly revealing:

> Madame de Cintre's face had, to Newman's eye, range of expression as delightfully vast as the wind-streaked, cloud-flecked distance on a Western prairie; but her mother's white, intense, respectable countenance, with its formal gaze and its circumscribed smile, figured a document signed and sealed, a thing of parchment, ink, and ruled lines. "She's a woman of conventions and proprieties," he said to himself as he considered her; "her world's the world of things immutably decreed" (p. 183).

Urbain, the Marquis of Bellegarde, is, to Newman's view remarkably similar:

> He was "distinguished" to the tips of his polished nails, and there was not a movement of his fine perpendicular person that was not noble and majestic. Newman had never yet been confronted with such an incaranation of the maintained attitude (p. 188).

And it is from meeting these two and taking in the measure of his distance from them, that Newman begins to understand the intensity of the forces with which he will have to contend. Furthermore, Newman finds these forces, embodied

in the "civilized" figure of Urbain, disconcerting, even threatening:

> It was useless to shut his eyes to the fact that the Marquis was as disagreeable to him as some queer, rare, possibly dangerous biped, perturbingly akin to humanity, in one of the cages of a "show." He had never been a man of strong personal aversions; his nerves had not been at the mercy of the mystical qualities of his neighbors. But here was a figure in respect to which he was irresistibly in opposition; a figure of forms and phrases and postures; a figure of possible impertinences and treacheries (p. 219).

Again, in an exchange with Mrs. Tristram, Newman's thoughts turn to murder:

> "Well she's a bad, bold woman. She's a wicked old sinner."
>
> "What then has been her sin?"
>
> He thought a little. "I shouldn't wonder if she had done someone to death--all of course from a fine sense of duty. . . ."
>
> "And what has <u>he</u> done?"
>
> "I can't quite make out, but it's something very nice of its kind--I mean of a kind elegantly sneaking and fasticiously base; not redeemed as in his mother's case by a fine little rage of passion at some part of the business. If he has never committed murder he has at least turned his back and looked the other way while someone else was committing it" (pp. 246-47).

Of course these remarks turn out to be a precise description of what actually happened. Madame de Bellegarde and the young Marquis were guilty, if not legally then spiritually,

of having murdered the old Marquis in order to ensure Claire's marriage to M. de Cintre. And the melodramatic plays which turned Newman's mind to thoughts of murder prove to be an accurate interpretation of life in these circles. Yet while this "murder" is an excess, it is not entirely a piece of foolishness. For what James is suggesting is that social codes which deny the sentimental virtues can be the moral equivalent of murder.

From the standpoint of James's artistic development, however, it is important to note that the real terror of the novel has very little whatever to do with the murder. It stems, rather, from the vision of the evil residing behind cultivated appearances which is so characteristic of the later novels. The terror is particularly evident in the scene where it is finally revealed that Newman's much-desired marriage is off. James's rendering of it has the hauntingly evocative power of an old family portrait:

> In the middle of the room stood Madame de Cintre; her face was flushed and marked and she was dressed for travelling. Behind her, before the fireplace, stood Urbain de Bellegarde and looked at his finger-nails; near the Marquis sat his mother, buried in an arm chair with her eyes immediately fixing themselves upon the invader, as he felt them pronounce him. He knew himself, as he entered, in the presence of something evil; he was as startled and as pained as he would have been by a threatening cry in the stillness of the night. (p. 362).

On the surface, Madame de Bellegarde and the Marquis have merely forbidden a marriage--used "authority" as Madame de Bellegarde puts it. Yet there is something sinister in this power she has over her children; she and the Marquis elicit, in Claire particularly, but also in the other surrounding characters a sort of nameless dread. And it is a dread which is expressed in an eerie dream-like manner throughout the novel. Valentin, for example, is susceptible to the terrors of the familial past:

> "You're not afraid it may be rather a mistake for such an infuriated modern to marry--well such an old-fashioned rococo product; a daughter, as one may say, of the Crusaders, almost of the Patriarch?"?
>
> Newman, who had been moving about as they talked stopped before his visitor. "Does that mean you're worried for her?"
>
> Valentin met his eyes. "I'm worried for everything" (p. 303).

In another instance, Mrs. Bread urges Newman to make haste with his marriage because she is "afraid of everyone" (p. 274). Even the young Marquise is not immune to these terrors, for as she tells Newman:

> "I'm afraid of my husband; he's soft, smooth, irreproachable, everything you know; but I'm afriad of him" (p. 342).

All of these expressions of fear partake of the true Gothic uneasiness--the half-conscious suspicion that the institutions of culture imply their own contradictions, that

"civilization" can imply the most uncivilized behavior. In this novel, however, it is left for Claire de Bellegarde to give fullest expression to this vision. "I'm afraid of my mother" (p. 367), she tells Newman in an echo of what others have previously said. Somewhat later she elaborates:

> ". . . I've things to reckon with that you don't know. I mean I've feelings. I must do as they force me--I must, I must. They'd haunt me otherwise," she cried, with vehemence; "they'd give me no rest and would kill me" (p. 415).

Here we get a glimpse of the true nature of James's ghosts. After a few turns in the conversation she is even more explicit:

> "There's a curse upon the house; I don't know what--I don't know why--don't ask me. We must all bear it . . . Why do such dreadful things happen to us--why is my brother Valentin killed, like a beast, in the beauty of his youth and his gaiety and his brightness and all that we know and love him for? Why are there things I can't ask about--that I'm afraid for my life to know? Why are there places I can't look at, sounds I can't hear?" (p. 416).

That there may have been a real crime committed seems almost irrelevant after passages such as this. For rarely do we get, even in the classic Gothic novels, a more vivid image of the past feasting on the present. Since they are characters of feeling, Valentin and Claire, like Ambrosio before them, are crippled by their past. Their creative and expressive faculties are thwarted and what is left them is

not a fulfilled life but picturesque modes of dying and renunciation. Valentin expresses this predicament very clearly:

> "When I was twenty I looked round me and saw a world with everything ticketed 'don't touch' . . . . The only thing I could do was to go and fight for the Pope. That I did, punctiliously, and and received an apostolic flesh wound at Castelfidardo" (pp. 135-36).

Valentin dies in a duel over a "sad trifler"; his sister chooses what is for Newman a death in life, a choice which he finds unutterably monstrous:

> But still he hardly understood. "You're going to be a nun," he went on; "in a cell--for life--with a gown and a black veil?"
>
> "A nun--a blest Carmelite nun," said Madame de Cintre. "For life with God's leave and mercy."
>
> The image rose there, at her words, too dark and horrible for belief, and affected him as if she had told him she was going to mutilate her beautiful face or drink some potion that would make her mad (p. 418).

In a moment of more detached meditation, he comes to realize that her behavior is really all of a piece, that family custom reinforced by religious custom, creates a world where individual freedom is severely circumscribed:

> How had she meant that the force driving her was, as a thing apart from the conventual question, a "religion"? It was a religion simply of the family laws, the religion of which her implacable mother was the priestess. Twist the thing about as her generosity would, the one certain fact was that they had been able to determine her act (p. 423).

And how was this possible? Mrs. Bread is perfectly explicit: "They worked on her sentiments . . . they knew that was the way. She's a delicate creature. They made her feel wicked. She was only too good" (p. 438). Here, as everywhere in the Gothic, we sense the terrible paradox of sentimental virtues. For while they are the source of all that is good and human, they are also a liability. Thus it is that the final source of enslavement is internal and psychological--it is the ability of the heartless to prey upon those that feel and thereby control them. And Newman's reaction to this glittering world which "hardens one's heart" but "quickens one's wit" typifies the reaction of the Puritan consciousness to old, Catholic Europe:

> The Marquis gave a hiss that fairly evoked for our friend some vision of a hunched back, an erect tail and a pair of shining evil eyes (p. 489).

Here is one of those moments in literary history where we know exactly where we are. Through Newman's vision, James takes us back to writers like Bunyan, Milton, and Spenser and to the Book of Revelation. In this tradition, James looked upon life as a moral adventure in which evil was apt to be insolent, strong, and seductively attractive; and like them he saw the glittering attractions of "the world" as a threat to moral virtue. The tone here, moreover, is extremely important; for in the coercion of one person by another James saw not only pain and suffering but "supernatural" evil as it is operative in human affairs.

This, then, is the naive Gothic aspect of The American--the image of the innocent sentimentalist suffering at the hands of sinister old world villains. It is by no means, however, the whole story. James does provide us here with a feeling for his ultimate values--of his preference, that is, for freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness over the twin bondages of conformity and imitation. His moral geography, however, is not entirely stable, and any attempt to treat the novel as a simple moral dichotomy wherein Newman is good and the Bellegardes evil is not adequate. Newman is the sentimental hero, and he does change and grow, but this is not the same thing as saying he is an entirely innocent victim. He is an innocent, but this very innocence coupled with pride contributes greatly to his own suffering. And when that pride is injured, he becomes unsettlingly malicious.

We see instances of Newman's pride very early on in the novel. He is proud of his abilities and used to success, and he is by no means adverse to having the world acknowledge his preeminence. Therefore he naturally resents the Bellegarde's pretensions to superiority, and cannot help but delight in discomforting them in small ways. When, for example, he begins to sense the "forces" which the Bellegardes represent, we learn:

> He wished to make some answering manifestation, to stretch himself out at his own length, to sound a note at the uttermost end of his scale. It must be added that if this impulse was neither vicious nor malicious, it was yet by no

> means unattended by the play in him of his occasional disposition to ironic adventure. He hated the idea of shocking people, he respected the liability to be shocked. But there were impressions that threw him back, after all, on his own measure of proportion (p. 191).

This desire to express his own power, this desire, as we are told "to makes the heads of the house of Bellegarde simply feel that weight of his hand" (p. 282) manifests itself in various ways. The following attempt to belittle Lord Deepmere is a good case in point:

> "He is real Paddy!"--and Newman nodded in the direction of the visitor.
>
> His companion took it coldly. "His mother was the daughter of Lord Finucane; he has great Irish estates" (p. 267).

In as much as he must be wondering what choice racial epithets Newman would employ for French aristocrats, Urbain can hardly be comforted by this. Nor is this the only instance when Newman appears oblivious to distinction. At the party which the Bellgardes give in his honor he is forced to admit that he cannot remember those to whom he has been introduced, and tries to justify himself on the grounds that "all Chinamen--even great Mandarins!--look very much the same to Occidentals" (p. 318).

After we learn of Newman's fondness for "ironic adventure," it is difficult indeed to attribute all of these false steps to innocence. But still, if all Newman had been guilty of was a failure of discrimination, or at worst

of a few mild insults, his marriage might well have taken place. What the Bellegardes ultimately cannot accept is the publicity their relation to Newman will incur; and their uneasiness on this point is something Newman deliberately exacerbates. One of the most conspicuous instances of this occurs when Newman produces the congratulatory telegrams he has received for the express purpose of annoying the Bellegardes:

> he received . . . no less than eight electrical outpourings, all concisely humorous, which he put into his pocketbook and, the next time he encountered Madame de Bellegarde, drew forth and displayed to her. This, it must be confessed was a slightly malicious stroke; the reader will judge in what degree the offense was venial. He knew she would dislike his barabaric trophies, but he was himself possessed of a certain hardness of triumph (p. 281).

Surely it is this last sentiment or something very like it which causes Newman to lead Madame de Bellegarde about in triumph at the engagement ball--an act which has, for him, the disastrous consequence of making them feel the utter impossibility of an alliance with him. They could have borne a number of things, but they could not bear to be triumphed over before their friends.

What should be emphasized, however, is that what appears here as natural, perhaps even healthy self esteem, later becomes, under the pressure of betrayal and disappointment, malevolence. Indeed there is more than a hint that, while

Newman does acutely feel the disappointment of lost love, his strongest emotion is a desire to avenge himself upon those who have made a fool of him. This darker side of Newman's nature is fully revealed for the first time in his final conversation with the dying Valentin:

> "A secret!" Newman repeated. The idea of letting Valentin, on his deathbed, confide to him any matter sacredly intimate, shocked him, for the moment, and made him draw back. It seemed an illicit way of arriving at information and even had a vague analogy with listening at a keyhole. Then suddenly the thought of reducing Madame de Bellegarde and her son to the forms of submission became attractive, and, as to lose in any case no last breath of the spirit for which he had felt such a kindness, he brought his head nearer (p. 401).

Among the critics who have written about this novel, Joel Porte most clearly sees the full significance of Newman's conscious decision to partake of evil:

> Well might all nature (at least American nature) groan at the end of this scene, as it does in Paradise Lost when Adam falls, for the scene represents James's version of a truly Miltonic calamity--Newman's conscious accession to what he feels to be evil.[11]

The reference to Milton, and by extension to the Puritan tradition, is particularly felicitous because that tradition is used extensively by James to lay the moral foundation of the book. In fact, uses Milton to indicate in what light we are to view Newman's desire for vengeance.

Both of the following passages serve to characterize Newman's state of mind, and both echo very strongly Paradise Lost:

> "I want to bring them down--down, down, down! I want to turn the tables on them--I want to mortify them as they mortified me. They took me up into a high place and made me stand there for all the world to see me, and then they stole behind me and pushed me into this bottomless pit where I lie howling and gnashing my teeth!" (p. 442).

After Mrs. Bread has related the elements of the Bellegarde's guilty history to Newman, thus arming his vengeance, we are told the following:

> They had begun to descend the hill, and she said nothing till they reached the foot. He moved beside her as on air, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back while he gazed at the stars: he seemed to himself to be riding his vengeance along the Milky Way (pp. 461-62).

Here the symbolic correspondence is complete. For if Newman is, as Porte suggests, Adam, he is also, like Madame de Bellegarde and her son, Satan. His behavior, like theirs, is infernal.

Yet while Newman's desire for vengeance is evil, it is important to understand the weakness in his perception which helped bring this evil about. And here, as in the earlier Gothic, much of the mischief results from Newman's ignorance of the mysteries of art. Indeed, as Porte notes "James's comprehensive vision" of the novel is that "of his hero's adventure as a journey into the depths and

complexities of art . . . ."[12] And what this means, among other things, is that European culture must be taken seriously, for it is a valid and complex of mode of seeing which it is perilous to ignore:

> What Newman must learn is that for the Bellegardes there is no such dividing line: nature and art are one. He has entered "a strange corner of the world," where art is not merely an amusement, a leisure-time diversion, but a complex representation of reality. . . .[13]

In the early pages of the novel, Newman's innocence before the mysteries of art is comical: we are told that he preferred the copy to the original of Murillo's "moon-borne Madonna." Even here, however, there is a dangerous, or at any rate an unsettling, aspect of Newman's attitude. For the habitual reader of Gothic fiction a passage like the following is hardly reassuring:

> The world, to his vision, was a great bazaar where one might stroll about and purchase handsome things (p. 87).

Newman collects handsome things without any feeling for their inner meaning, integrity, and value. He sees only their surface value, oblivious to the realities they represent. And to the extent that this is true he prefigures, in a paradoxical way, such figures as Gilbert Osmond and Adam Verver, both of whom cause a great deal of suffering through the perversion of art.

Our sense of the dangerous innocence of Newman's attitude is only enhanced by his dealings with Benjamin Babcock, the minister from Dorchester, Massachusetts. Although Babcock is something of a pedant and a nuisance, he has "an intimate sense of the true beautiful in life," and accuses Newman of "a want of moral reaction" in the presence of Europe's artistic mysteries. In a subsequent letter, his criticism is even more acute:

> You appear to care only for the pleasure of the hour, and you give yourself up to it with a violence which I confess I am not able to emulate. I consider that I must arrive at some conclusion and fix my convictions on certain points. Art and Life seem to me intensely serious things, and in our travels in Europe we should especially remember the rightful, indeed the solemn message of Art. You seem to think that if a thing amuses you for the moment this is all you need ask of it (p. 97).

Despite Babcock's obvious absurdity, and despite the fact that he appears to have gotten himself in a hopeless muddle, his remarks hit home, and Newman is left feeling "rebuked and humiliated" and reflecting

> that there are mighty mysteries; that possibly he himself <u>was</u> indeed almost unmentionably "appalling," and that his manner of considering the treasures of art and the privileges of life lacked the last, or perhaps even the first refinement (p. 99).

In any event, Newman's response to the letter is curious and rich in meaning:

> He wrote no answer at all, but a day or two after he found in a curiosity-shop a grotesque little statuette in ivory, of the sixteenth century, which he sent off to Babcock without commentary. It represented a gaunt, ascetic-looking monk in a tattered gown and cowl, kneeling with clasped hands and pulling a portentously long face. It was a wonderfully delicate piece of carving, and in a moment, through one of the rents of his gown, you espied a fat capon hung round the monk's waist (p. 99).

How much of this is gentle teasing as opposed to malicious satire is, perhaps, an open question. It does, however, capture the peculiar nature of Newman's innocence. For as Porte observes, it is indicative of a sterotypic attitude toward European culture wherein that culture is seen as "essentially familiar and accommodating, and reducible to a joke."[14] How strange and treacherous that world could be is something he can only discover in time.

The effect of Newman's flawed vision is everywhere apparent in his relationship with the Bellegardes. He is quick enough to recognize the sterile artifice by which Madame and Urbain de Bellegarde live--a near perfect example of art pasturing on emotion. Yet he is, at the same time, oblivious to the positive aspects of art as they are expressed at various times and in various ways by Claire and Valentin. Urban de Bellegarde, in particular, approaches art, even the world of acknowledged masters, with the preformed prejudices of his class. He speaks, that is, about the "good taste of Sansovino," and has the following to say about Mozart:

> But we all know what Mozart is; our impressions don't date from this evening. Mozart is youth, freshness, brilliancy, facility--facility perhaps a little too unbroken (p. 339).

Claire and Valentin, by contrast, understand art to be a living force, a mode of vision and expression which can illuminate and dramatize deeper truths. In their relationship with Newman, they use art to try to educate him to the dark and intransigent human problems which confront him.

We see, moreover, that here, as in the older tradition of Gothic fiction, this theme is most fully worked out in the instance of literary art. For someone who is not fond of reading, Newman seems awfully aware of literary modes of expression. In fact, Newman so often sees a parallel between his experience with the Bellegardes and his literary experience that Joel Porte is led to remark that "his adventure with Claire figures as an introductory course in strange literature."[15] Yet Newman always trivializes his insight by refusing to consider whether the parallels which he perceives might allow him to unearth some deeper meaning. That he might <u>really</u> be a participant in these fictions, that his involvement might involve something more than amusement, are thoughts which simply do not occur to him. In the passages quoted above, for instance, Newman figures himself in the image of Milton's Satan without considering the possible light that sheds on his conduct.

Perhaps the most dramatic examples of Newman's limitations of moral intelligence occur when he fails to

understand the rich allusions and parables which Claire and Valentin employ to caution his ardor. The previously mentioned allusion to Balzac ought, perhaps, to have amply warned Newman. Valentin becomes even more explicit when he tells Newman that he and Claire are "such a brother and sister as haven't been known since Orestes and Electra" (p. 149)--allusion laden with undertones of patricide and familial guilt which begins to suggest the dimensions of the burden these sympathetic characters bear.

On another occasion Claire uses the story of Florabella--a heroine who "had suffered terribly" but ended by marrying a young prince "who carried her off to live with him in the Land of the Pink Sky"--as a none too subtle attempt to draw Newman's attention to their own situation. And it is hard to imagine any way she could make the point of the parable clearer. For after explaining to Newman that the story of Florabella is "great nonsense" but of "much more value than most of what we say in society," she goes on to give voice to her own weakness and forboding:

> "I've very little courage; I'm not a heroine . . . I could never have gone through the sufferings of the beautiful Florabella . . . not even for her prospective rewards" (pp. 217-18).

Taken together, these suggestive uses of literary art evoke the image of a brother and sister bound together by some obscure ancestral guilt. But more than this, it creates the image of a world where the past intensely matters, where

the past continues to live on in the fear and guilt of the present generation; and because the past has this internal dimension it is not something that can be easily overcome or dismissed. Yet Newman, proud of his self-sufficiency, and deaf to the appeals of art, persists in his quest and is at least partially blamable for the ensuing disaster.

The vision of life which emerges at the novel's end is, then, quite far removed from the naive Gothic. At its conclusion, we no longer feel that good and evil are so easily separable, or that one culture is clearly superior to another; we feel, rather, that it is all a matter of proportion. That the supreme evil in the novel resides in the heartlessness and narrow class prejudice of the Bellegardes is undeniably true; but Newman's egoism and failure of moral intelligence do contribute. If he is better than they, it is largely because his sins are the result of ignorance and passion rather than knowledge and cold hearted calculation. Immediately before taking the veil, Claire expresses this deeply pessimistic vision of life, a vision in which evil can spring full blown from even the best of motives:

> "Of course I'm hard in effect," she pitifully reasoned; "though if ever a creature was innocent, in intention--! Whenever we give pain we're hard. And we must give pain; that's the world--the hateful miserable world . . ." (p. 417).

While James is essentially in sympathy with this vision, or at the very least is capable of taking it seriously, he

does not approve of her renunciation of the world. For him, Claire's as well as Valentin's sacrifice is sterile. Yet his is not the simple minded anti-Catholicism of the earlier Gothic. James is undeniably Puritan in his solutions, in his insistence that evil must be confronted and lived through; his is, however, willing to grant Catholicism the dignity of a vision deeply felt. To quote Porte:

> For Claire, Roman Catholicism, like art, is a mysterious dramatization of human experience which she takes seriously.[16]

There is a real sense in which both Puritanism and Catholicism are revealed as having the defects of their qualities. Thus, the very symbolic imagination which alerts Claire to the dimensions of evil in human affairs, indissolubly weds her to the past and thereby paralyzes her. Similarly, the very energy and will which gives Newman his magnificent capacity for action is spawned in part by a moral obtuseness which renders his actions dangerous. Presumably, for James, the ideal lay somewhere in between, in a marriage of New World and Old World Culture in which life might be lived fully and intelligently through the offices of a rich symbolic imagination. For only in art does the past become usable, and only through art can we hope to avoid the terrible trauma of repeating history.

Putting these speculations aside for the moment, it is clear that the two cultures remain apart at the novel's end. James sees at that point no possibility of moral action,

only the possibility of moral knowledge characterized by a vision of life which, struck by the vehemence of Newman's desire for revenge, Mrs. Bread articulates very well when she says "Mercy on us, . . . how malicious we all are to be sure" (p. 441). This vision, moreover, explains the change in the ending which James made for the New York edition. In the original version, Newman, after hearing that the Bellegardes had gambled on his good nature and won, "instinctively" glances to the fire to see if the little paper, the instrument of his revenge, has been consumed. In the New York edition, by contrast, Newman has given up all taste for revenge, and it is Mrs. Tristram who laments the destruction of the evidence. Some critics, most notably, William Stafford, have expressed a preference for the original version on the grounds that is more consistent with Newman's earlier malevolence.[17] While there is more than a little justification for this view, it is readily apparent why James made the change. Quite simply, the mature James saw that any scene which depended upon the reality of the murder for its veracity could hardly be satisfactory. He saw, looking back over his past works, that his vision of a terribly mixed, morally ambiguous world had always been with him; and it was that that he chose to emphasize. That vision most clearly prefigured his later development.

As a final cautionary note, it should be emphasized that while The American does prefigure the great themes of the later novels it is still noticeably an immature work.

One thing which is immediately obvious in this respect, is that James has not, in The American, developed the kinds of techniques for emboding these themes which are present in the later novels. There are, for instance, ironic authorial intrusions of the sort James would never have tolerated in the later work; these serve to invite detachment on the part of the reader, and thereby undermine the moral seriousness of the work. Likewise, Newman's engagement with evil is never fully internalized, nor are the failings in his character which bring it about. We see the effect of evil in his outer demonstrations, but rarely, if at all, the subtle interpentration of the moral and the psychological which is so characteristic of the later James. And what is true of the hero is even truer of the villains, who, despite their portentous glances and vaguely sinister utterances, do not give evil a human face.

Finally, there is the setting, Paris, the notorious center of immorality; and it is on this point that we see James engaging in the eldest dodge of the Gothic novelist--that of placing the action in Catholic Europe so that the unsettling visions which emerge can be comfortably ignored. Yet here we can see James beginning to become restive with the convention, and in a stroke which is one of the first, but certainly not the last, times he "plays" with Gothic techniques, he has Newman take a trip to London. At that time, Newman meets up with M. Nioche and his daughter Noemie--his first acquaintances in Paris as well--and we

suddenly sense that the evil of Paris is quite at home in London, "that vaster dustier Babylon" (p. 514). It is as if James, at the end of the novel, sensed both the possibilities and the limitations of the Gothic, and began to see how the underlying characteristics of that genre might be the stuff of great art.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

[1]The Ambassadors was written before The Wings of the Dove though it was published after it.

[2]Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 204-05.

[3]R.F. Brissenden, Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 34.

[4]Royal Gettman, "Henry James's Revision of The American," American Literature, 16 (1948), 295.

[5]Elsa Nettles, James and Conrad (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), p. 89.

[6]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, introd. R.P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 25.

[7]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, pp. 21-22.

[8]Henry James, The Art of the Novel, p. 21.

[9]Henry James, The American (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), p. 2. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[10]Ellen Douglas Leyburn, Strange Alloy: The Relation of Comedy to Tragedy in the Fiction of Henry James (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 23.

[11]Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James (Middletown: Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 207. The remaining pages of the chapter are heavily indebted to this excellent study.

[12]Porte, p. 204.

[13]Porte, p. 200.

[14]Porte, p. 203.

[15]Porte, p. 199.

[16]Porte, p. 201.

[17]William Stafford, "The Ending of James's The American: A Defense of the Earlier Version," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 18 (1963), 86-89.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY:
ISABEL ARCHER IN THE HOUSE OF TERROR

In general, Henry James was most confident when dealing with the international theme--which in his case is an indication of just how congenial Gothic plots were to his artistic imagination. Earlier we saw how he described his "complacency" with the "subject" of The American; if anything, his confidence in the subject of The Portrait of a Lady was even greater. As Leon Edel has shown, James's letters to family and friends during the period of The Portrait's composition reveal his belief that he was involved in a work of major proportions.[1] Most now agree with this assessment, and it is generally accepted that The Portrait is James's first masterpiece. Indeed, F.R. Leavis asserts that it was in The Portrait of a Lady that James's "genius functioned with freest and fullest vitality."[2]

While I cannot ultimately subscribe to this view, I am certainly in sympathy with some of the thinking behind it. James's concern for the dignity and worth of the human spirit is dramatized with an intensity, an eloquence, and a lucidity which the later novels never quite recapture. And for a critic like Leavis, whose interests are predominantly moral, even moralistic, this clarity of impact

can be all important. I will argue that the novels of the major phase are finally richer and more humane (and thus "moral" in the fullest sense of the term) in the vision of life they communicate than is The Portrait; but these gains have their attendant losses. Joseph Warren Beach describes the relation of The Portrait to the later novels this way:

> It has the open face of youth. There is a lightness and freshness of tone about it that never recures in the more labored work of later years. It is the first of his compositions entirely free from crudity and the last to show the unalloyed charm of ingenuousness.[3]

What should be emphasized for our purposes is that much of this "lightness and freshness of tone" is derived from the fact that here, as earlier in The American, James is writing arch Gothic romance. In fact, it is no exaggeration to suggest that while The American contains some of the more obvious Gothic extravagances and crudities, The Portrait of a Lady is more like some of the classics of the genre in important respects. Isabel Archer is, perhaps, a less frail version of the typical Gothic heroine, but she is a Gothic heroine all the same. Like Emily St. Aubert in The Mysteries of Udolpho, and like Ellena Rosalba in The Italian, Isabel is an orphan; and like them also she has symbolic dimensions as the representative of an "enlightened" culture who finds herself lost in a world which becomes progressively threatening and oppressive. Likewise the setting of The

Portrait is typically Gothic, moving as it does from the confines of civilization to the notorious Italian penninsula. And as always, it is sexual involvement, either feared or desired, which is at once the impetus to action and the source of infinite danger.

In his notebooks, James discusses the conception of The Portrait of a Lady. With appropriate modification, it is an excellent generic description of Gothic plots:

> The idea of the whole thing is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, natural, clear-sighted thing, finds herself in reality ground in the very mill of the conventional.[4]

Here, as everywhere in Gothic and sentimental fiction, moral virtue is associated with actual powerlessness. The sentimental virtues of freedom, generosity, and natural self-expression are extolled at the same time as they are being exposed as dangerous liabilities in a world governed by the conventional response.

The qualities which we have thus far enumerated are certainly Gothic in origin. Yet the Gothicism of The Portrait of a Lady may be found in other places as well. Here, for example, is the approach to Osmond's house on Bellosguardo as Isabel first sees it:

> Nothing could have been more charming than this occasion--a soft afternoon in the full maturity of the Tuscan spring. The companions drove out of the Roman Gate, beneath the enormous

> black superstructure which crowns the fine arch of that portal and makes it nakedly impressive, and wound between high-walled lanes into which the wealth of blossoming orchards over-drooped and flung a fragrance, until they reached the small suburban piazza, of crooked shape, where the long brown wall of the villa occupied in part by Mr. Osmond formed a principal, or at least a very imposing, object. Isabel went with her friend through a wide, high court, where a clear shadow rested below and a pair of light-arched galleries, facing each other above, caught the upper sunshine upon their slim columns and the flowering plants in which they were dressed.[5]

Such rich, leisurely paced, sensuous description recalls the pictorial elements of earlier Gothic fiction, and reminds us that James, like Mrs. Radcliffe was a writer of travel literature. We see, moreover, that this use of picturesque detail does for James what it always did. It contributes greatly to the sensation of heightened conciousness, of quickened sense of life, which it was always in the power of the best Gothic fiction to evoke. Equally revealing in this respect is the following passage describing one of the scenes of Isabel's girlhood--in the old house in Albany, New York:

> The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that it was secured by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent motionless portal opened into the street; if the sidelights had not been filled up with green paper she

> might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side--a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror. (I, 130).

Phrases such as "mysterious melancholy" and "region of delight or of terror" come straight from the deep well of Gothic fiction. Yet we should take especial care to see how these Gothic elements are employed in the passage. Certainly this image of Isabel as a child makes her character as an adult more intelligible. We see that, from an early age, she is an imaginative, headstrong, romantically inclined sort who becomes impatient with reality when it fails to correspond to her theories about it. There may, perhaps, even be a temptation to feel superior to her on these grounds. Yet greater care is needed, for James is not merely content to contrast the wild romantic dreams of his protagonist with the more or less common environment in which she finds herself. Isabel is romantic, and is innocent--surely. But her vision is not, therefore, wholly discredited. For James reality was romantic, and the world outside the window--be it the street, Albany, or the great capitals of Europe--is a region of delight and terror.

Such considerations, moreover, allow us to make a more precise description of James's use of romance in this novel. First, however, we must deal with some of Richard Chase's remarks in his classic work, The American Novel

and its Tradition. There Chase says the following about romance in The Portrait:

> The conscious assimilation of romance into the novelistic substance of The Portrait took place in two different ways. It was assimilated into the language of the book and produced a general enrichment of metaphor. It was also brought in in the character of Isabel Archer, the heroine, who is to a considerable extent our point of view as we read. Isabel tends to see things as a romancer does, whereas the author sees things with the firmer, more comprehensive, and more disillusioned vision of the novelist. Thus James brings the element of romance into the novel in such a way that he can both share in the romantic point of view of his heroine and separate himself from it by taking an objective view of it.[6]

There can be no quarrel with Chase's assertion that images taken from romance contribute to the metaphoric substructure of the book; nor can we seriously quarrel with the assertion that Isabel's innocence is characterized by strong romantic inclinations. The problem with Chase's analysis comes, however, when we ask ourselves what the author's "objective view" of the matter really is. And here we discover that, while James's view is distinct from Isabel's he is far from dismissing the projections of romance as mere silliness. Indeed, for him, romance, properly understood, is a rich and complex way of knowing. Thus the difference between the author and his creation is not so much that the former is "realistic" and the latter

"romantic"; it is, rather, that James understood romance to be a symbolic discourse of unparalleled suggestiveness, while Isabel, in her initial stages at least, understood it as a series of gestures and poses. James knew, if Isabel did not, that romance could educate the imagination to important truths.

An even clearer example of James's attitude toward romance occurs when Edward Rosier first looks upon the Palazzo Roccanera ("the Black Rock Palace"), the abode of the Osmonds:

> The object of Mr. Rosier's well-regulated affection dwelt in a high house in the very heart of Rome; a dark and massive structure overlooking a sunny piazzetta in the neighborhood of the Farnese Palace. In a palace, too, little Pansy lived--a palace by Roman measure, but a dungeon to poor Rosier's apprehensive mind. It seemed to him of evil omen that the young lady he wished to marry, and whose fastidious father he doubted of his ability to conciliate, should be immured in a kind of domestic fortress, a pile which bore a stern old Roman name, which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence, which was mentioned in "Murray" and visited by tourists who looked, on a vague survey, disappointed and depressed, and which had frescoes by Caravaggio in the piano nobile and a row of mutilated statues and dusty urns in the wide, nobly arched loggia overhanging the dark court where a fountain gushed out of a mossy niche. In a less preoccupied frame of mind he could have done justice to the Palazzo Roccanera; he could have entered into the sentiment of Mrs. Osmond, who had once told him that on settling themselves in Rome she and her husband had chosen this habitation for the love of local color. It had local color enough, and though he knew less about architecture

> than about Limoges enamels he could see that the proportions of the windows and even the details of the cornice had quite the grand air. 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. (II, pp. 100-01).

Like the passage describing Isabel's sanctuary and retreat this passage has a complex double purpose. In the first place, it serves to place Edward Rosier perfectly. He is a kind but unprepossessing young man; he is in love with Pansy, though his affection is "well-regulated," and does not, in any case, blind him to the quality of Osmond's possessions. Furthermore, he is evidently familiar with the conventions of Gothic fiction, and there is, perhaps, a temptation to smile at his fear that the sins of old Rome might revisit this colony of expatriate Americans. But here James's iron turns back upon itself for that is exactly what does happen. Pansy <u>is</u> shut up in the Palazzo Roccanera in order to keep her from her true love, Pansy is threatened with the convent if her affection for Rosier persists. In other words, Rosier's fears, which might at first seem foolishly romantic, prove to be prophetic. The Gothic terror proves to be quite at home in the modern world.

Nowhere, however, is James's Gothicism more apparent than in his presentation, on a subtle psychological plane, of Isabel's encounter with evil. And in this James has made a distinct departure from the method of the <u>The</u>

American. Newman is, finally, too crude a character, too bouyant and worldly, too lacking in moral imagination, to feel the real Gothic terror. Isabel, by contrast, deeply feels the horror to which she has been exposed. Furthermore, this change in the presentation of the subject matter has inevitably brought about changes in James's novelistic technique. In The Portrait, James has not wholly dispensed with the paraphernalia of the Victorian novel--the references to himself as a "biographer" for example. Yet as Leon Edel points out, we can see in The Portrait the first tentative steps toward what will later become his characteristic technique:

> His was a constant search for ways by which the story-teller might be, in Joyce's formulation, 'refined out of existence,' so that the story, like the play in the theatre, narrates itself. He had not yet developed these devices in The Portrait of a Lady, where he remained the omniscient author; but in allowing us to see the characters through each others eyes, and in Isabel's internal monologue, he is feeling his way toward the time when he will remove himself as far as possible from the narrative scene. . . .[7]

As noted earlier, the attempt to involve the reader in this new way is a development of some clearly recognizable Gothic techniques, and it serves much the same function here as it did in the earlier Gothic novels. On one level, it is a powerful method for involving the reader in the heroine's plight, and, indeed, it is Isabel's gradual

awakening to the evil around her which makes the chief interest of the book. The reader, who is privy to information unavailable to Isabel, can only watch in suspense as she falls prey to Madame Merle and Osmond's designs. Yet on a deeper level, James resorts to the restricted point-of-view technique because, quite simply, he is concerned with the morality of his art. He is aware that any attempt to interfere with the response of his reader could be as reprehensible as the attempts his characters make to interfere with one another.

Isabel Archer, when we first encounter her in the early pages of The Portrait of a Lady, reveals herself to be the self-reliant cousin of earlier Gothic heroines. "I'm very fond of my liberty" (I, 24) she tells Ralph Touchett on the occasion of their first meeting at Gardencourt. Of particular interest in these earlier stages is the way in which James, like Radcliffe, Lewis, and Mary Shelley before him, takes great pains to make clear the nature of the kinds of childhood experiences which led to the adult life he is exploring. For pages and pages we are given delightful glimpses of Isabel's early life--the hours spent in her grandmother's old house in Albany and the trip to Europe in which her father's indiscretion allows a situation to develop wherein his three daughters were "left . . . for three months at Neufchatel with a French bonne who had eloped with a Russian nobleman staying at the same hotel" (I, 43). In general, she had enjoyed

the kind of childhood which, by almost any standard, would be considered enviable:

> She had had everything a girl could have: kindness, admiration, bonbons, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, plenty of new dresses, the London Spectator, the latest publications, the music of Gounod, the poetry of Browning, the prose of George Eliot (I, 46).

From all appearances, this admirable upbringing has resulted in a remarkably charming and vital young woman. All of the characters in The Portrait are charmed by Isabel, and most readers are as well--at least by her character as it is revealed in the early pages of the novel. In fact, she would seem to embody all that is good in the sentimental ideal. She is, as was noted earlier, extremely self reliant; but more than this, she is curious and open to experience in healthy ways. We are told, for example, that even the irregular circumstances of her stay in Neufchatel did not share or unduly alarm her; she was, rather, inclined to view the whole matter as part of a "romantic episode in a liberal education" (I, 43). Later, Isabel is described in terms which are even more appealing:

> Her reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic; it was supposed to engender difficult questions and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. The poor girl liked to be thought clever but she hated to be thought bookish; she used to read in secret

> and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from showy reference. She had a great desire for knowledge, but she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life and was constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own soul and the agitations of the world. For this reason she was fond of seeing great crowds and large stretches of country, of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures . . . (I, 45).

Although her perception is colored by the naive romanticism of these activities, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, romantic though they may be, her intuitions are nearly always accurate and lead her in the direction of greater knowledge and fulfillment. She realizes, above all, that happy as her early life has been, it has been a cloistered happiness. She realizes that her growth as a person requires more knowledge of the world. In a moment of self examination which is both romantic and accurate, Isabel sees that the "unpleasant" has "been even too absent from her knowledge" and that it is potentially "a source of interest and even of instruction" (I, 42). It is not that she has any perverse desire to plunge into the murky depths; rather she senses that a knowledge of suffering and evil is somehow central to a full understanding of life. As the vagueness of the term suggests, she does not at first have a very clear idea of what the "unpleasant" might entail. She does, however, intuit that those things which make life

most worthwhile are inseparably associated with those things which most threaten it. Although she is alternately fascinated and repelled by the idea of danger, like most Gothic heroines she is fated to confront it.

Coupled with this image of Isabel as an alive, curious person is the simultaenous perception that she is possessed of fine moral instincts. By the same logic which causes her to require freedom and dignity for herself she is perfectly willing to extend these rights to others; and her greatest fear in the social arena is of hurting other people or using them unkindly:

> She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong. She had resented so strongly, after discovering them, her mere errors of feeling (the discovery always made her tremble as if she had escaped from a trap which might have caught her and smothered her) that the chance of inflicting a sensible injury upon another person, presented only as a contingency, caused her at moments to hold her breath. That always struck her as the worst thing that could happen to her. (I, 68).

What is presented here as a general code of conduct is particularly evidence in her attitude toward marriage, for it is there that the problem of evil becomes most focused and acute. Isabel has too much respect for herself and for the virtues of loyalty and trust to take marriage lightly. And it is this rather than any insuperable coldness which causes her to think that there is a "vulgarity" in "thinking too much" of marriage (I, 71). Quite simply, Isabel

believes that such powerful feelings ought to be taken seriously and treated with respect:

> Deep in her soul--it was the deepest thing there--lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little it ended in alarms. (I, 71-72).

Whether we attribute these alarms to a fear of passionate sexuality, or to a fear of surrendering sovereign choice scarcely matters--assuredly both play a role. What does matter is the way in which the passage serves to establish the depth of Isabel's feelings. And this, combined with her real moral depth, makes her admirable even with her faults.

As the following passage makes abundantly clear, James did not have an uncritical perspective on his heroine:

> Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better, her determination to see, to try, to know, her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal creature of conditions: she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and purely expectant (I, 69).

Isabel, like Emily St. Aubert, is guilty of the romantic error of amiable minds--she has, that is, the defects of

of her virtues. And really the contradictions implied here are all of piece in that they are only natural in a character who is at the same time committed to a free exploration of life and the preservation of certain cultural ideals.

The very vividness of James's characterization, moreover, forces us to try to make sense of what subsequently happens. After such promising beginnings, how are we to explain the disaster which follows? What is it that blinds Isabel to the evil around her and causes her to throw her life away? Part of the anwer, surely, is that her notion of evil is persistently abstract; she properly detests evil but has no clear notion of what it is or of the subtlety with which it works. However, it is pride as well as innocence which ultimately leads to her undoing. Everyone who is most concerned with Isabel, her "friends,"--the very people she should be most inclined to believe--deplore the possibility of a marriage to Osmond. Yet Isabel's good opinion of herself and her belief in her own moral sufficiency blinds her to a truth more experienced observers readily perceive.

Furthermore, Isabel's inability to accept valuable advice parallels her inability to take the lessons of art and history seriously. Increasingly as the action of the novel unfolds, our memory that she is a girl brought up reading George Eliot and Robert Browning proves unsettling. It seems inconceivable that a reader of Middlemarch should marry for an ideal or that a reader of The Ring and the Book should find the history of Catholic Europe "picturesque,"

yet this is precisely what Isabel does. She sees the gathering at Gardencourt as something out of a novel, and realizes that in novels girls are not always treated well, but fails to see how the universals of art could have any bearing on her own life. And in what is one of the cruelest ironies of the book she refuses Warburton at least partly because her literary experiences have caused her to believe that the ceremonial duties of the peerage will unduly confine her. In the end, of course, she marries someone whose love of ceremoney is even more oppressive.

Equally revealing are Isabel's attempts to sentimentalize the French revolution. "In a revolution," she tells the elder Mr. Touchett, ". . . I think I should be a high, proud loyalist. One sympathizes more with them, and they've a chance to behave so exquisitely. I mean so picturesquely" (I, 100). In context, Mr. Touchett's humorous rejoinder that behaving picturesquely means "going gracefully to the guillotine" (I, 101) has sinister implications. Then, too, Isabel's remark is fatuous on the face of it, for in the larger thematic scheme of the novel the loyalists stand for all those things which are most threatening to the sentimental virtues.

The instance which causes us to see danger in Isabel's remark is the same instance which leads us to distrust Madame Merle and Osmond, and to deplore Isabel's relation to them. After telling Isabel that there are sordid crimes hidden in her past--"when I've to come out and into a strong

light--then, my dear, I'm a horror!"--Madame Merle explicitly identifies her ways with those of Europe before the French revolution:

> I speak as if I were a hundred years old, you say? Well, I am, if you please; I was born before the French revolution. Ah, my dear, je viens de loin; I belong to the old, old world (I, 279).

The eerie repetition of the word "old" suggests Satan--the "old one"--and gives to this smooth Urbain woman the aura of some hideous visitor from the nameless past. When, by association, we recall Osmond's love of old things and his remark that he is "convention itself" we begin to glimpse the infernal depths which lie beneath what appears beautiful and highly cultivated.

For our purposes, however, the central scene of this discussion is the scene in which Isabel and Ralph Touchett discuss the nature of ghosts. A newly arrived, naive American, Isabel first looks at fine English country houses through glasses tinted by her readings in Gothic fiction. But instead of dark and forboding castles she finds only the pleasant and genteel Gardencourt, and instead of a dark, interesting villain, she finds only the fair and innocuous Lord Warburton. All of this disarms her and leads her to believe that the dangers depicted in these earlier novels were fictitious only, and thus properly an object of humor to a child of the enlightenment. Her cousin Ralph, however, quickly takes the measure of her innocence and tries to

correct her blithe sense of superiority:

> 'But I like you all the same,' his cousin went on. 'The way to clinch the matter will be to show me the ghost.'
>
> Ralph shook his head sadly. 'I might show it to you, but you'd never see it. The privilege isn't given to every one; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it.
>
> I saw it long ago,' said Ralph.
>
> 'I told you just now I'm very fond of knowledge,' Isabel answered.
>
> 'Yes, of happy knowledge--of pleasant knowledge. But you haven't suffered, and you're not made to suffer. I hope you'll never see the ghost.' (I, 64.)

It is through lines like these that we begin to comprehend James's transformation of the traditional, popular ghost story. Isabel is indeed safe enough if ghosts are only imagined as refined and stately apparitions serving some higher moral order. But clearly this is not what James has in mind. Like Mrs. Radcliffe, he views the supernatural as having its origin in man's inner experience, although, unlike her, he does not ascribe it to an overstimulated imagination. For here, as in so much of his fiction, ghosts are the children of partial knowledge, of unacknowledged but potent realities which return to exact terrible revenge for having been ignored. Ghosts do come to haunt Isabel as the result of her imperfect understanding of the personal and cultural past.

So Isabel proceeds magnificently, energetically, maddeningly toward her fate--like, to use her own figure, "a swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see" (I, 235). For the reader, who has the advantage of being about one step further down the road than Isabel, the effect is rather like that of watching a movie in which the heroine blunders through the corridors of a darkened mansion toward the discovery of some hideous secret.

Nowhere, perhaps, is James's sheer narrative ability more apparent than in the manner in which he depicts Isabel's gradual awakening to a world of horror. When Isabel first begins to feel disconcerted by Madame Merle, she can attribute it only to the fact that Madame Merle is "not natural" and that she is "too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be" (I, 274). From here Isabel progresses to the perception that Madame Merle is profoundly different from her, to the perception that she is similar to Osmond in many ways and from thence to the perception that there is something between Madame Merle and Osmond. Isabel's response at the moment in which she realizes that Mrs. Touchett had been right, that Madame Merle had married her, is quintessentially Gothic:

> As she went on Isabel grew pale; she clasped her hands more tightly in her lap. It was not that her visitor had at last thought it the right time to be insolent; for this was not what was most apparent. It was a worse horror

> than that. "Who are you--what are you?" Isabel murmured. "What have you do to with my husband?" (II, 326).

As the following passage suggests, the horror of this encounter continues to haunt Isabel, and she is forced to the recognition that she is in the presence of evil:

> On the afternoon I began speaking of, she had taken a resolution not to think of Madame Merle; but the resolution proved vain, and this lady's image hovered constantly before her. She asked herself, with an almost childlike horror of the supposition, whether to this intimate friend of several years the great historical epithet of wicked were to be applied. She knew the idea only by the Bible and other literary works; to the best of her belief she had had no personal acquaintance with wickedness. She had desired a large acquaintance with human life, and in spite of her having flattered herself that she cultivated it with some success this elementary privilege had been denied her (II, 329).

The final revelation, of course, is that Madame Merle and Osmond were previously lovers and that Pansy is their child. And it was in the hope that Isabel's wealth might ultimately benefit Pansy that Madame Merle had worked so hard to bring about the marriage. It is significant, however, that this illicit affair is not one of the true horrors in the novel. For James is no conventional moralist, and for him the sins of the body are not nearly so important as the sins of the spirit which engendered them. Madame Merle and Osmond are not evil merely because their passions

betrayed them at an earlier point in their lives; they are, rather, evil because they manipulate the feelings and natural impulses of others in order to achieve their own selfish ends. And in this they betray their relation to a whole tradition of Gothic villains and villainesses from Robert Lovelace and Montoni to Urbain and Madame de Bellegarde. Montoni and Madame de Bellegarde appeal to different feelings than does Osmond--that is they manipulate Emily and Claire by playing upon their fears, while Osmond manipulates Isabel through an appeal to her generous spirit. But all three commit the sin of treating human beings as means to an end rather than as an end in themselves.

When all is said and done--that is, when all past transgressions are aired and there is nothing left to discover--Isabel's objection to Madame Merle is summed up in a simple phrase: "She made a convenience of me" (II, 410). If this seems too much of an understatement, it is at least a reminder of how much evil can spring from mundane sources. Yet it is worth noting that, evil as Madame Merle is, she is not finally so evil as Osmond. For just as Madame de Bellegarde is more recognizably human than her son because she is more passionate, so Madame Merle's crimes are more forgiveable than Osmond's. When Isabel inquires if Madame Merle has a "wild side" which has yet to be discovered, she replies "Ah no, I fear my darkest sides are my tamest" (I, 278). This is a remarkable piece of self revelation, and the seeming paradox shows that Madame Merle is at least

aware of moral dimensions of her behavior. What she is saying, in effect, is that a passionate, instinctual side of her nature is the source of her virtue, while it is the poised social self which is to be feared.

All of this is made even more explicit in Madame Merle's last exchange with Osmond:

> He still had his head against the cushion behind him; the ankle of one foot rested on the other knee. So he sat for a while. 'I should like to know what's the matter with you,' he said at last.
>
> 'The matter--the matter--!' And here Madame Merle stopped. Then she went on with a sudden outbreak of passion, a burst of summer thunder in a clear sky: 'The matter is that I would give my right hand to be able to weep, and I can't!'
>
> 'What good would it do you to weep?'
>
> 'It would make me feel as I felt before I knew you.'
>
> 'If I've dried your tears, that's something. But I've seen you shed them.'
>
> 'Oh, I believe you'll make me cry still. I mean make me howl like a wolf. I've a great hope, I've a great need of that . . . . You've not only dried up my tears; you've dried up my soul.'
>
> '. . . Don't you know the soul is an immortal principle? How can it suffer alteration?
>
> 'I don't believe at all that it's an immortal principle. I believe it can perfectly be destroyed. That's what has happened to mine, which was a very good one to start with; and it's you I have to thank for it. You're very bad," she added with gravity in her emphasis.
>
> 'Is this the way we're to end?' Osmond asked with the same studied coldness.
>
> 'I don't know how we're to end. I wish I did! How do bad people end?--especially as to their common crimes. You've made me as bad as yourself.'

> 'I don't understand you. You seem to me quite good enough,' said Osmond, his conscious indifference giving an extreme effect to the words (II, 333-35).

This passage is long but worth quoting because it serves to give evil a human face as well as to dramatize Osmond's heartlessness. Madame Merle's difficulty in maintaining her self possession makes her the more sympathetic, even as it reminds us that she too, through her feelings, can be victimized by Osmond's coldness. And his "civilized" behavior, his "ecstasy of self control," characterized most fully by the cynical and mocking allusion to Donne, is made all the more hateful.

Of course what is clear to Madame Merle here is vividly portrayed much earlier in the novel in the remarkable scene where Isabel, alone by the dying fire, reflects upon her fate--a scene, it should be emphasized, which takes place well before any of the final revelations. What Isabel realizes at this point is that she has married a man who seriously tries to make his life a work of art and who looks upon his wife as a mere interesting addition to his collection:

> He had told her he loved the conventional; but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration. In that sense, that of the love of harmony and order and decency and of all the stately offices of life, she went with him freely, and his warning had contained nothing ominous. But when, as the months had elapsed, she had followed him further and he had led her into the mansion of his own habitation, then, <u>then</u> she had seen where he really was.

> She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind indeed seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. Of course it had not been physical suffering; for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers (II, 196).

Although Isabel is thinking, not speaking, this is the same shock of recognition which came to Vivaldi in the Inquisition and to Newman in the old house at Fleurieres; in the future it was to come to Milly Theale at Matcham and at the Palazzo Leporelli and to Maggie Verver at Fawns. It is the horror beneath and beyond what had seemed good. The imagery of the passage is, moreover, exquisite. The image of the serpent, for example, suggests Satan and is yet another indication of the infernal aspects of Osmond's nature. The house imagery is even richer and has its roots deep in the Gothic tradition. As R.W. Stallman observes, houses in James's fiction "represent the accumulated refinement and corruption of civilization."[8] In other words, James's use of houses parallels exactly the way in which earlier Gothic novelists used the haunted castle, and houses are as central

to his novelistic world as Railo found the haunted castle to be in the world of the Gothic novel.[9] For in a larger sense, of course, the houses in this novel--whether the old house in Albany, Gardencourt, or the Palazzo Roccanera--are haunted; they speak of the horrors of death and mutability as well as of the horrors of the past which live on and continue to menace the present. Thus Isabel's intuitive association of her husband's mind with a "house of darkness" has rich symbolic undertones. It suggests that the sinister confines of the Palazzo Roccanera are both the scene of her suffering and the image of the horrors of the past which live on in her husband's state of mind.

Yet magnificent as this long internal monologue is--James called it "obviously the best thing in the book"[10]--the most memorable passage for me comes later, immediately prior to Isabel's departure for England. For there, in a seemingly simple conversation between Isabel and Osmond concerning the fate of his daughter, James truly carries the torch to the back of the cave:

> He considered a while the picture he had evoked and seemed greatly pleased with it. And then he went on: 'The Catholics are very wise after all. The convent is a great institution: we can't do without it; it corresponds to an essential need in families, in society. It's a school of good manners; it's a school of repose. Oh, I don't want to detach my daughter from the world,' he added; 'I don't want to make her fix her thoughts on any other. This one's very well, as she should, and she may think of it as much as she likes.

> Only she must think of it in the right way.'
>
> Isabel gave an extreme attention to this little sketch; she found it indeed intensely interesting. It seemed to show her how far her husband's desire to be effective was capable of going--to the point of playing theoretic tricks on the delicate organism of his daughter. (II, 348).

If we desire to contemplate the true horror of the Osmond philosophy and all that it implies, we need go no further than this passage. Osmond, as he makes this "little sketch" is very much like the painter serenely at work in his studio; and by means of this image combined with the easy cultured rhythms of his manner of speaking, James succeeds in showing on yet another level how evil may reside in precisely the most civilized environment.

Madame Merle and Osmond are, however, conventional types. Consequently, while we are impressed by the subtlety with which James develops our sense of their evil, we are never too much troubled by its source. We expect conventionally evil characters to victimize the heroine. What we don't perhaps expect is what William Gass observes of Isabel's fate:

> . . .it is by no means true that only the "villains" fall upon her and try and carry her off; nor is it easy to discover just who the villains really are.

As long as we are comfortable with the assumption that evil comes about through the innocence of the heroine and the machinations of the villains the novel feels relatively

comfortable and safe. When, however, evil is set loose from these confines and difused throughout the whole social situation it becomes far more baffling and terrifying. As Gass goes on to show, this is precisely what happens in The Portrait:

> So many of his characters are "perceptive." They understand the value of the unmolded clay. They feel they know, as artists, what will be best for their human medium. They will take up the young lady (for so it usually is). They will bring her out. They will do for her; make something of her. She will be beautiful and fine, in short, she will inspire interest, amusement, and wonder . . . James knows, as his creations so often do not, that this manipulation is the essence, the ultimate germ, of the evil the whole of his work condemns, and it is nowhere more brutal than when fronted by the kindest regard and backed by a benevolent will.[12]

In The American, Lizzie Tristram's behavior has some of this terribly mixed quality. She takes up Newman and introduces him to Claire partly because she is genuinely fond of them both, but partly, also, because she senses that their interaction will be rich in dramatic possibilities. In The Portrait, by contrast, this sort of manipulation by friends is nearly universal. Caspar Goodwood, Isabel's aggressively masculine suitor, and Henrietta Stackpole, her friend, never tire of formulating projects for her career, though their motives for doing so vary. And as William Veeder is able to observe as the result of a brilliant piece of close critical reading, Lord Warburton's behavior partakes of a certain "paternal domination." This is true in his relation

to his sisters, and is particularly evident in the proposal scene where he gives "short nervous shakes to his hunting crop" (I, 154) as he begins to sense that his proposal is being met with resistance--a gesture which, as Veeder notes, is suggestive of the "lordly instinct" to "trash what will not submit to proprietorship." And when, much later on, Osmond exclaims of Rosier "he ought to be horsewhipped" (II, 115), the equation is complete. James can be seen to be "linking the apparently polar figures of conservative Osmond and radical Warburton, and linking the apparently polar roles of radical reformer and old-school authoritarian."[13]

What is true of these three characters is even truer of Mrs. Touchett and Ralph. Note, for example, Mrs. Touchett's explanation of why she has taken Isabel up:

> "It occurred to me that it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world. She thinks she knows a great deal of it--like most American girls; but like most American girls she's ridiculously mistaken. If you want to know, I thought she would do me credit. I like to be well thought of, and for a woman of my age there's no greater convenience, in some ways, than an attractive niece" (I, 56-57).

There is no need to exaggerate this, for surely Mrs. Touchett is not Madame Merle's malevolent equal. Like Madame Merle, though, she makes a convenience of Isabel. Mrs. Touchett's perspective on the possibility of Isabel's alliance with Lord Warburton also supports this point:

> 'Should you have liked me to marry Lord Warburton?' Isabel enquired.
>
> "Of course I should."
> "I thought you disliked the English so much."
> "So I do; but it's all the greater reason for making use of them" (I, 194).

This particular sentiment finds its parallel when Madame Merle is trying to interest Osmond in Isabel:

> "What do you want to do with her?" he asked at last.
> "What you see. Put her in your way."
> "Isn't she meant for something better than that?"
> "I don't pretend to know what people are meant for," said Madame Merle. "I only know what I can do with them" (I, 345).

It is by this simple device, this simple echoing of phrases, that James brings forth the failures of Mrs. Touchett's morality. Though she has virtues that Madame Merle does not have, her selfish use of Isabel is symptomatic of a moral climate where evil can grow and flourish.

Ralph Touchett's case is even more puzzling and disturbing. Often he seems to represent the author's point of view--that is his vision of things seems juster and less vulnerable to raids of irony than those of the other characters. He is humorous, kindly, possessed of moral imagination and taste, and oddly touching; furthermore, he is referred to, seemingly without irony, as an "apostle of freedom" (II, 245)--high praise in James's fiction. In view of this, it is one of the darkest twists of the story

that it is Ralph, not old Mr. Touchett as Isabel mistakenly believes, who is "the beneficent author of infinite woe" (II, 193). Of course this refers directly to Ralph's arranging for Isabel's inheritance; but when the matter is considered more closely it becomes apparent that this is just the supreme example of what Ralph's attitude toward Isabel really is. He may well love her, but he cannot forbear tampering with her life, and in so doing he denies her her own humanity and makes her subservient to his own limited vision. When, for example, he asks Mrs. Touchett what she intends to "do" with Isabel, Mrs. Touchett replies "Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico" (I, 59). The following example is even more chilling:

> If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious that she was an entertainment of a high order. "A character like that," he said to himself--"a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It's finer than the finest work of art--than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral. It's very pleasant to be so well treated where one had least looked for it. I had never been more blue, more bored than for a week before she came; I had never expected less that anything pleasant would happen. Suddenly I receive a Titian, by the post, to hang on my wall--a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney" (I, 86).

The error of Ralph's thinking should be abundantly clear in this passage. For after noting that a soul like Isabel's is finer than any work of art, he has, by the end of the

passage reduced her to an art object--a "Titian" or a "Greek bas-relief" fortuitously sent for his amusement.

Nor is this passage isolated; there is, in fact, enough evidence of Ralph's "artistic" interest in Isabel to make this one of the major motifs of the novel. On some occasions he is the playgoer absorbed in the unfolding drama of Isabel's life. "I content myself with watching you--with deepest interest" (I, 211), he tells Isabel in a remark which might profitably be compared with the following one by Madame Merle: "I want to see what life makes of you" (I, 268). At other times Ralph plays the dramatist, using his powers to arrange Isabel's life to his own satisfaction. The scene in which he convinces his father to make Isabel an heiress reveals both this attitude and the dangers inherent in it. As Gass notes, putting Iago's words in Ralph's mouth--"I want to put money in her purse" (I, 260)--casts his actions in a sinister light.[14] And old Mr. Touchett, the one character in the novel who sees and likes Isabel for what she is, has serious reservations about the wisdom and morality of Ralph's proposal. "You speak of it as if it were for your mere amusement" (I, 262), he says at one point. At another point he says "It seems to me immoral" (I, 264); and at still another point he asks: "Doesn't it occur to you that a young woman with sixty thousand pounds may fall victim to fortune hunters?" (I, 264-65). To which Ralph replies:

> "Decidedly. That's a risk and it has entered into my calculation. I think it's appreciable, but I think it's small, and I'm prepared to take it."
>
> Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness had passed into perplexity, and his perplexity now passed into admiration. "Well you have gone into it!" he repeated. "But I don't see what good you're to get of it."
>
> Ralph leaned over his father's pillows and gently smoothed them; he was aware their talk was unduly prolonged. "I shall get just the good I said a few moments ago I wished to put into Isabel's reach--that of having met the requirements of my imagination." (I, 265).

The requirements of Ralph's imagination prove to be very different from Isabel's. She proves a smaller, more timid, less insightful figure than he had imagined. His calculations go awry and Isabel marries the "sterile dilletant" Osmond. Ralph is properly "shocked and humiliated" (II, 61) by this turn of events, and realizes that "he had played the wrong card, and . . . lost the game" (II, 141). But even when faced with the catastrophe his meddling has helped bring about he cannot give up his interest in Isabel's career:

> What kept Ralph alive was simply the fact that he had not yet seen enough of the person in the world in whom he was most interested: he was not yet satisfied. There was more to come; he couldn't make up his mind to lose that. He wanted to see what she would make of her husband--or what her husband would make of her. This was only the first act of the drama, and he was determined to sit out the performance (II, 147).

Even when Isabel comes to him in obvious pain and in need of comfort, his pride in his superior knowledge overcomes his sense of decency. Despite the fact that Isabel would find it humiliating, Ralph has "an almost savage desire to hear her complain of her husband." And in the fact of her obvious reluctance to do so "he tried and tried again to make her betray Osmond; he felt cold-blooded, cruel, dishonourable almost" (II, 251-52). Having failed in his calculations about Isabel, Ralph would still have her acknowledge that his calculations about Osmond had been correct.

Even Isabel herself is guilty on occasion of profaning the mystery of human beings just as she profanes the mysteries of history and art. We are told, for instance, that the word "specimens . . . played a considerable part in her vocabulary" (I, 89). And when Ralph tells her that Lord Warburton is a "specimen of an English gentleman" (I, 90), she feels that that tells her all she needs to know about him. Lord Warburton senses this and, with a great deal of justice, accuses her of a certain dangerous superficiality:

> "You judge only from the outside . . . you don't care . . . . You only want to amuse yourself" (I, 112).

If Isabel rejects Warburton partly because he is a known type, she accepts Osmond at least partly because he isn't:

> He resembled no one she had ever seen . . . . There were other people who were, relatively speaking, original--original, as one might say, by courtesy--such as Mr. Goodwood, as her cousin Ralph, as Henrietta Stackpole, as Lord Warburton, as Madame Merle. But in essentials, when one came to look at them, these individuals belonged to types already present to her mind. Her mind contained no class offering a natural place to Mr. Osmond--he was a specimen apart (I, 375-76).

The fact that she is willing to extend the courtesy title "original" to these acquaintances hardly obscures the fact that by reducing them to types she is not granting them full humanity. But ironically, though Osmond is of a type she had not previously encountered, and is of a type she comes to wish she never had encountered, it is in her dealings with him that Isabel is the most blameable. As Lyall Powers puts it:

> There is another aspect to Isabel's weakness: she was herself touched with the evil so eminently incarnate in Osmond--the evil of emotional cannibalism. Her coming to him with "charged hands" was the equivalent of purchasing him.[15]

What is more, Isabel realizes her complicity. She realizes that, in part, she had "married on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with her money" (II, 193). She had wanted to "launch his boat for him," and to be "his providence." (II, 192).

Thus, Isabel finds herself in a world where evil is deeply interfused in the social situation. She is betrayed by those who love her as well as those who are more

recognizably her enemies; and in the final summing up she is betrayed by herself. It is, moreover, with these facts firmly in mind that we must approach the question of what Isabel's final gesture--the decision to return to Rome and Osmond--means. During their final interview, Ralph asks Isabel if she intends to return to her husband, and she replies "I don't know--I can't tell" (II, 415). Yet after her final encounter with Caspar Goodwood these doubts are cleared up:

> She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path (II, 436).

Evidently, then, something happened in this final scene which crystalized things in Isabel's mind and allowed her to see what her proper course of action was. The key passage here is the one in which her impression of his final embrace is described in detail:

> He glared at her a moment through the dusk, and the next instant she felt his arms about her and his lips on her own lips. His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread and spread again, and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So had she heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free (II, 436).

In interpreting this passage, we must resist the temptation, typified by these lines by William Bysshe Stein, to see the matter wholly as a question of Isabel's fear of mature sexual involvement:

> More than anything else, in the manner of James's usual handling of coarse innuendoes, this passage emphasizes the animalistic sexual virility of Goodwood. It in Isabel's mind is associated with brutal rape; and as the analogy of drowning so eloquently argues, it is a forshadowing of death. This means that for Isabel to give herself voluntarily in an act of love would be to lose the sense of deluded innocence by which she identifies herself. In the freedom which she attains for herself she succeeds in her rebellion against maternity. . . .[16]

The problem with this kind of reading is that it so thoroughly violates the delicate moral sub-structure of the novel. To be sure, Isabel does not have a sexual appetite to match Goodwood's "animalistic sexual virility"; but her rejection of this crude form of sexual engagement does not justify the suggestion that she is rejecting all forms of adult sexuality. We see, moreover, that in a larger sense the purely sexual element is secondary. Perhaps most American girls would have married this successful businessman. Isabel, however, is not like most American girls--she expects more out of human relationships--and this fact signifies greatly. For what Isabel sees is that there is no question of her giving herself to Goodwood "voluntarily in an act of love"; it

is, rather, all a question of "possession" on his part. If, furthermore, Isabel associates Goodwood's embrace with "rape", it is because the association is just. Goodwood may not be a rapist, but he is determined to have his will of Isabel despite the obvious fact that she chooses not to marry him. And, to this extent, his behavior partakes of the brutality which, as she knows, poisons human relationships.

Isabel can see well enough what happens to women who seek to escape the confines of a bad marriage. Her examples are the Countess Gemini, a figure at once spiteful and sad, and Mrs. Touchette whose withdrawal from life and its complications will leave her "an old woman without memories" (II, 407). Even more threatening is Madame Merle, a figure who, according to Gass' rich insight, is distressingly akin to Isabel:

> Isabel Archer is thus free to try her wings. She is thrown upon the world. She becomes the friend of Madame Merle . . . at bottom, like Isabel, identically betrayed; like Isabel again, seeking out her own ruin to protect Pansy . . . . It is irony of the profoundest sort that "good" and "evil" in their paths should cross so closely.[17]

To this we might add that Madame Merle, when young, was like Isabel a woman of strong feelings. In Isabel's development the parallel becomes even more obvious. For just as circumstances caused Madame Merle to put her feelings "in order" and to become the perfect social

creature, so, under Osmond's blighting tutelage, does Isabel pass from a "free, keen girl" to a "fine lady who was supposed to represent something" (II, 143). Here, as in Wuthering Heights, we are reminded what a fearful expense of spirit worldly self assurance can expect.

Close though they may be in many respects, Madame Merle and Isabel are finally very far apart; and what distinguishes one from the other is that Isabel suffers and learns, not as in the case of Madame Merle to accommodate herself to the social world, but to establish her superiority to it. As Isabel sees in her long fireside meditation:

> But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it forever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard (II, 197).

We see, then, that Isabel's decision to return to Rome is the sign of her superiority to this "base, ignoble world." Moreover, what James is unmistakably saying through Isabel's gesture is that we are most human in our capacity for moral growth--which implies, of course, both freedom and choice and the acceptance of the results of these choices. Thus, Isabel comes to see that no matter how Madame Merle and Osmond have schemed against her, it was her choice which ultimately determined her act. Paradoxically, it is only by returning to the house of bondage that

Isabel can assert her freedom and her humanity. Or in Dorothy Van Ghent's more elegant phrasing:

> Isabel, still seeking that freedom which is growth, goes back to Osmond's claustral house, for it is there, in the ruin where Pansy has been left, that she has placed roots, found a crevice in which to grow straightly and freshly, found a fertilizing, civilizing relationship between consciousness and circumstance.[18]

Isabel's life will doubtless not be pleasant, but it will, at all events, be her life--the life she has freely chosen.

Yet it would be a mistake, finally, to suppose that The Portrait closes on a note of unrelieved gloom and intimations of stern duty fulfilled. For as Isabel discovers in her deathbed conversation with Ralph, love is a powerful concomitant to her moral growth. Significantly, when the Gardencourt ghost does appear it is in the mild, kindly figure of Ralph:

> She heard no knock, but at the time the darkness began vaguely to grow grey she started up from her pillow as abruptly as if she had received a summons. It seemed to her for an instant that he was standing there--a vague, hovering figure in the vagueness of the room. She stared a moment; she saw his white face--his kind eyes; then she saw there was nothing (II, 418).

It has indeed taken some "miserable knowledge" for this spirit to appear, but it, in itself, is benign not malign. Through difficult experience Isabel has learned to feel as well as to think, and in this knowledge lies the

possibility of spiritual regeneration. Ralph tells her that she will "grow young again," and she senses that there is something "deeper" (II, 416) than her pain. It is partly for love of Pansy that Isabel returns to Rome, and it is love which allows her to pity and forgive Osmond and Madame Merle. But beyond these attitudes toward specific individuals, Isabel's experience points toward a more general truth--namely that freedom and moral growth are only possible through the offices of love, expressed as a deep respect for the integrity of human beings. In what has enormous implications for his later novels, James is here suggesting that it is only through love that the endless cycle of coercion and manipulation can be broken.

It is important, by way of conclusion, to attempt to arrive at a just appreciation of what James has accomplished in The Portrait of a Lady. This is not easy to state precisely since James did not radically alter his essential Gothic themes as he moved from The American, through The Portrait of a Lady, to The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl; he deepened them, rather. The moral universe of The Golden Bowl is familiar to the reader of The American, and the development in the intervening novels does not involve dramatic departures and reversals so much as it involves a gradual shift in emphasis and degree. Thus, while The Portrait of a Lady is a magnificent novel in its own right, it is not the sophisticated tale of terror that the later novels are.

The Portrait of a Lady develops the Gothic elements of The American in at least two important ways. First of all, Isabel Archer, while recognizably akin to Christopher Newman and ultimately to such pursued maidens of Gothic fiction as Emily St. Aubert and Ellena Rosalba, understands her complicity in her fate as they do not. And she uses her new understanding, her understanding that the Gothic terror is really the terror of the world, as the basis of an attempt to transcend the wretchedness of her condition. In this sense she anticipates and makes possible the incomparably subtle versions of the Gothic heroine which occur in the later novels. Similarly, the ambiguous social situation of The Portrait, wherein the "good" characters are the source of much of the evil, anticipates the "machinations" of pity and consideration which are among the chief horrors of The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl. If, however, The Portrait of a Lady develops the Gothic, it also maintains some of the Gothic's instinctive conservatism. For while there is a prelude to terror at Gardencourt, the terror itself is still firmly seated in the Mediterranean south; and what is true of the setting is equally true of the conventional figures of evil. Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle do anticipate figures such as Merton Densher, Kate Croy, Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant, but they are more strongly reminiscent of the Bellegardes. Again this is largely a matter of tone, but Osmond and Madame Merle are too stylized to be taken seriously in the way that Kate Croy and Charlotte

Stant must be taken seriously. When, in the later novels, James set his tale of terror firmly on British soil, and imbued his conventional figures of evil with the same intelligence and vitality with which he imbued Isabel Archer, he completed his own internationalization of the Gothic.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

[1]Leon Edel, Introd., The Portrait of a Lady, by Henry James (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp. vii-viii.

[2]F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. New York: University Press, 1967), p. 127.

[3]Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918), p. 211.

[4]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (1947; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 15.

[5]Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (1908; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 364. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition.

[6]Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 119.

[7]Edel, p. xvi.

[8]R.W. Stallman, The Houses that James Built (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1961), p. 16.

[9]Eino Railo, The Haunted Castle: A Study of the Elements of English Romanticism (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1927), p. 7.

[10]Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, Intro., R.P. Blackmur (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 57.

[11]William H. Gass, "The High Brutality of Good Intentions," Accent, 18 (1958), 65.

[12]Gass, 66-67.

[13]William Veeder, Henry James--The Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 149.

[14]Gass, 68.

[15]Lyall H. Powers, "The Portrait of a Lady: 'The Eternal Mystery of Things,'" Nineteenth-Century Fiction 14 (1959), 149.

[16]William Bysshe Stein, "The Portrait of a Lady: Vis Inertia, Western Humanities Review 13 (1959), 190.

[17]Gass, 69-70.

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

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE: THE TERROR OF CIVILIZED EVIL

The Wings of the Dove, published in 1902, contains all of the Gothic elements which are central to The Portrait of a Lady. What had, however, changed in the intervening two decades was James's sense of the potentialities of his subject. And in this sense, The Wings of the Dove develops and refines the Gothicism of The Portrait of a Lady every bit as much as that great novel had developed and refined the Gothicism of The American.

The Gothic elements of The Wings of the Dove parallel almost exactly those found in the earlier novels. For instance, the plot of this novel, in which two young Europeans conspire to deceive a dying girl and thereby obtain her fortune, uses the same sinister characters as had the earlier works. Kate Croy and Merton Densher are quite recognizably the scheming female and passive male which are found in the paired figures of Madame Merle and Osmond, Madame de Bellegarde and Urbain. Similarly, the ultimate act of betrayal, the ultimate transgression, takes place, as it always does in Gothic fiction, in the world of Catholic Europe.

Yet given these parallels it is, nevertheless, obvious that important changes have taken place. Venice, notorious

at least from the time of the Renaissance as a setting for vice, luxury, and intrigue, may be the scene of Milly's betrayal, but the source of this evil is in the society of contemporary London. Indeed, the "descent" to Venice, to use Merton Densher's charged term, serves as a rich symbolic counterpoint to the London action; it is James's way of making clear how the sins of the British capital are identical to those of fabled Venice. Much the same is true of Kate Croy and Merton Densher. While they are quite properly seen as the literary descendants of a host of Gothic villains, they are also quite obviously products of a particular civilization. Thus, what James saw with renewed vigor in the composition of The Wings of the Dove is that real evil is at home in everyday life, and that the devices of the literature of terror, fully explored, are an adequate means of portraying contemporary reality. The relation of a novel like The Wings of the Dove to the earlier Gothic tradition is not one of analogy, but one of identity. The evil of the Gothic world is the evil of The Wings of the Dove.

Nothing, perhaps, makes the subtlety and sophistication of James's treatment of evil more apparent than the fact that there is a problem deciding whose story The Wings of the Dove is. The most obvious answer is that it is Milly's story, in the same way that The Portrait of a Lady is Isabel Archer's story and The American is Christopher Newman's. But this is only partly true, for Milly's

experience is foreshortened. We don't get glimpses of her childhood as we did in the case of Isabel Archer, nor do we get any direct intimation of her final understanding of her fate, her reaction at finding herself in the presence of evil. We simply are not witness to her final interview with Densher, and her letter is destroyed by Kate unread.[1] Significantly, however, it is the experience of the evil characters, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, which James chooses to analyze in detail.

While James is concerned with Milly, he is equally concerned with Kate and Merton and their increasing awareness of the horrible situation they have helped to create. Thus we find in The Wings of the Dove an increased use of the restricted point of view which was prefigured so brilliantly in Isabel Archer's fireside meditation. Only here James uses the technique far more democratically, according to what he calls his law of "successive centres."[2] Not only do we see this dark drama through Milly's eyes, but through the eyes of Kate and Densher as well. And even though the treachery of this pair is finally inescapable, the fact that we have witnessed them trying to make their way through the moral fog of London society makes their failings human failings. As Joseph Ward notes, this is a distinct departure from the way the evil characters are portrayed in The Portrait of a Lady:

> Taken singly, the 'villains' of The Wings have nothing of the absolute

> malignity that James finds in persons like Gilbert Osmond, who is driven to an absolute degree and ruthless in his tyranny. Nothing of the same can be said of the malefactors in The Wings, whose actions and inactions are caused by common human failings. . . .[3]

As readers, we can no longer distance ourselves from the source of evil. The recognition that evil in The Wings of the Dove is not freakish or bizarre but, in fact, ordinary, makes us realize that it is potentially our evil as well. For these reasons, furthermore, The Wings of the Dove occupies in the canon a position roughly analogous to that occupied by Lewis's The Monk in the earlier Gothic tradition. It is the first novel in which he exhibits a fully developed awareness that the self is the ultimate source of the true Gothic horror and that real evil can exist in people who remain in important ways admirable.

In attempting to explore these problems in more depth we should begin if not end with a discussion of Milly since she is the impetus to the thematically significant action. As is so often the case, James's own critical remarks provide a useful avenue of approach to the novel. In the following passage from the Preface to The Wings of the Dove James is discussing Milly's impact on those around her:

> Somehow, too, at such a rate, one would see the persons subject to them drawn in as by some pool of a Lorelei--see them terrified and tempted and charmed; bribed away, it may even be, from more prescribed and natural orbits, inheriting

> from their connection with her strange difficulties and still stranger opportunities, confronted with rare questions and called upon for new discriminations.[4]

In other words, Milly functions as a prime mover in the novel. She is the one, through her money, her freedom, and her vulnerability who adds the element of danger and romance to the stale and stifling air of London society. It is her presence which brings about the possibility of a deeper moral conflict in the lives of the people she touches. As was the case in The Portrait of a Lady, everybody in The Wings of the Dove has an "interest" in the heroine--and everybody thereby reduces her to the status of an object.

Kate and Merton Densher, from this perspective, are not horrible because they are socially deviant; they are, rather, horrible because they are typical. Their "plot" is really just another version of what others have in mind. Lord Mark would marry Milly for her immense wealth. Aunt Maude would have Milly marry Densher in order to clear the way for Kate's marriage to Lord Mark and his title. Even Susan Stringham, who is in many important respects Milly's most purely devoted friend, is attracted to her because her predicament has such rich "literary" overtones as the fabled "romantic life itself."[5] And, of course, Susan inadvertently furthers the plot Kate and Densher have hatched by encouraging Densher's attentions to Milly on the grounds that it could give her something to live for.

Such considerations of Milly's predicament should not, however, lead us to see her as more of a persecuted maiden than she really is. The temptation to do so is natural enough given the powerful literary tradition of heroines dying because they are too good for a tainted world. If anything, this temptation is strengthened by the realization that Milly is a character whose source is in James's biography. She is, as he put it, the "ghost" of his cousin Minny Temple wrapped in "the beauty and dignity of art."[6] Admittedly, too, there is a strong element of the pathetic in the story. Like Clarissa Harlowe, Milly does "turn her face to the wall" when the world, in the figure of Merton Densher, reveals its ugly face. Yet for all this, Milly is far from pathetic; and though she is victimized ultimately, it is because her decision to embrace life before dying entails inevitable risks.

The details of Milly's circumstances quite clearly establish her relation to earlier Gothic heroes and heroines. Her illness is, of course, romantic to a high degree. And like many characters in Gothic fiction, including Christopher Newman and Isabel Archer, she is an orphan. She is the "final flower" of a "luxuriant tribe" which included "free-living ancestors, handsome dead cousins, lurid uncles," and beautiful vanished aunts" (I, 111). Such general desolation suggest the presence of some powerful curse whose obscure poison is still at work. The practical effect of all of this, moreover, is that she is not constrained by the kinds

of practical difficulties most people labor under. Her illness, her immense wealth, and her lack of immediate family give her a large measure of freedom. It is the sort of laboratory situation which makes it possible for her to pursue the things in life which are most worth knowing and most worth experiencing.

Like the earlier Gothic heroines, Milly is "free" if that term has any meaning whatever. But even more important she, like them, actively pursues her fate. Cautious, sensitive, properly decorous, Milly always acts, nevertheless, in ways which lead to greater self awareness and knowledge of the world. And like all the heroines out of Gothic fiction she discovers that the greatest excitement, the greatest danger, greatest intensity of feeling, are derived from one's relationship with other people. When the last curtain has been drawn aside and the innermost recesses of the castle explored, there is still the mysterious elemental confrontation between the self and others.

In contrast to Isabel Archer, Milly seems to grasp this truth readily, even intuitively. Whereas Isabel had to learn that there were harsh human realities behind picturesque art, Milly sees from the beginning that the truths most worth knowing are to be found in human relationships. Thus, it is significant that when we first meet Milly she is seated high in the Swiss Alps, the quintessential cliche of picturesque art:

> The whole place, with the descent of the path and as a sequel to a sharp turn that was masked by rocks and shrubs, appeared to fall precipitously and to become a "view" pure and simple, and a view of great extent and beauty, but thrown forward and vertginous. Milly, with the promise of it from just above, had gone straight down to it, not stopping till it was all before her; and here, on what struck her friend as the dizzy edge of it, she was seated at her ease (I, 123).

Here is the Europe of ruined castles and magnificent scenery--the Europe, in short, which had been fabled in the guidebooks. And a generation of romantics and post-romantics had looked to the Alps as the symbol of heightened consciousness, of interest, and of danger. Yet with Milly, we get the impression that she is taking in the scene only as a means of taking the measure of its magnificent emptiness. Indeed, her immediate reaction to all of this magnificence is to decide to foresake it in favor of the social magnificence of London:

> The girl brought it out in truth as she might have brought out a huge confession, something she admitted herself shy about and that would seem to show her as frivolous; it had rolled over her that what she wanted of Europe was "people," so far as they were to be had, and that if her friend really wanted to know, the vision of this same equivocal quantity was what had haunted her during their previous days, in museums and churches, and what was again spoiling for her the pure taste of scenery. She was all for scenery--yes; but she wanted it human and personal, and all she could say was that there would be in London--wouldn't there?--more of that kind than anywhere else (I, 134).

It is in the juxtaposition of passages like the two quoted directly above that we get a sense of how fully James learned to exploit the Gothic formula. Milly is perhaps the first heroine in the tradition to consciously realize that a passion for the rich and the strange needn't involve long voyages or exotic landscapes. She realizes that everything which is rich and strange can ultimately be found in the self and in others. Although Milly does not at this point name Merton Densher as a possible reason for going to London (Susan Stringham is forced to bring his name up), it subsequently becomes clear that for Milly, much of the romance of London life resides in his person.

Milly's progress in London is very much like Newman's progress in Paris or Isabel Archer's progress at Gardencourt or in Italy. While she is fascinated and intrigued by the glitter and display of social convention--as a "romance" or "fairy-tale" is the way she figures it--she is simultaneously aware that beneath it are dangerous depths begging to be explored:

> Susie had an intense thought and then an effusion. "My dear child, we move in a labyrinth."
> "Of course we do. That's just the fun of it!" said Milly with a strange gaiety. Then she added: "Don't tell me that--in this for instance--there are not abysses. I want abysses" (I, 186).

This brief exchange accurately defines the world in which Milly finds herself as well as her motive for remaining

there. Indeed, the prolonged description of Milly's initial stay at Lancaster Gate serves as an adequate introduction to the labyrinths and abysses of London life. When, for example, she tells Lord Mark that "she scarce even then knew where she was," his reply takes the form of the statement that "there was no such thing, today in London, as saying where anyone was" (I, 150). In another phase of the conversation Lord Mark as much as tells her that she has been a success in London because of her money. "Nobody here," he tells her "does anything for nothing" (I, 160). As a result, there can be little wonder that Milly begins to suspect the possibility of a "sinister motive" in the "obscure depths of a society constituted from far back" (I, 154).

Milly's immediate distrust of Lord Mark and all his brutal and stupid superciliousness is quite understandable. It should be noted, however, that though Kate is far subtler than Lord Mark, Milly's distrust extends to her as well. Milly is attracted to Kate and grateful for her attentions, but is never entirely free from the notion that Kate's handsome face and figure hide something unpleasant, possible sinister. When Milly first meets Kate she finds her to be a "nicer" version of "the wondrous London girl. . . conceived from the tales of travelers and the anecdotes of New York, from old portraits over Punch and a liberal acquaintance with the fiction of the day" (I, 171). The comparative degree is important here because it suggests that while Kate is "nicer" than the wondrous London girl,

she is not quite nice. And as her conversations with Susan Stringham show, Milly suspects Kate of having "some secret, some smothered trouble, besides all of the rest of her history" (I, 172). It is, moreover, precisely Kate's attitude toward Mrs. Stringham which begins to transform Milly's uneasiness into the kernel of real suspicion. She realizes that a world where Susan Stringham is a potential threat is very much different indeed than her own world:

> There were more dangers, clearly, round about Lancaster Gate than one suspected in New York or could dream of in Boston. At all events, with more sense of them, there were more precautions, and it was a remarkable world altogether in which there could be precautions, on whatever ground, against Susie (I, 182).

Such intimations of "secret smothered troubles," of "history," danger, of suspicions and precautions, help to create the underlying sensation of terror which is so much a part of the Gothic appeal of this novel.

Although she exhibits little of Isabel's energy and recklessness, Milly, like Isabel, is anything but a helpless victim. It is her fate, and one which she actively embraces, to seek out and confront the danger which she senses. To this process she brings admirable resources. She is resourceful, intelligent, and a close observer of people. Furthermore, Milly, like everyone else, has her own strategy for getting along in society. As the following passage indicates, Milly's "dove-like" nature is in many respects

an artful pose contrived to forestall embarassing inquiries about her health and her conduct:

> It gave her straightway the measure of the success she could have as a dove: that was recorded in the long look of deep criticism, a look without a word, that Mrs. Lowder poured forth. And the word, presently, bettered it still. "Oh, you exquisite thing!" The luscious innuendo of it, almost startling, lingered in the room, after the visitors had gone, like an oversweet fragrance. But left alone with Mrs. Stringham Milly continued to breath it: she studied again the dove-like and so set her companion to mere reporting that she averted all inquiry into her own case (I, 284).

So Milly continues to charm those around her, using her meekness, her innocence, and her selflessness as a means of furthering her ends. This is not meant to suggest that she is in any sense a malicious schemer; but her active complicity in her fate does suggest that she is a stronger, and hence more tragic figure than is commonly allowed.

Although Milly's awakening to the world of horror is a step-by-step, page-by-page process, it is a process which can be effectively charted through special attention to three important recognition scenes. Significantly, each of these scenes involves the richest of Gothic devices--the old house or building which speaks so powerfully of the accumulating influences of the past, and the mysterious work of art.

The first of these recognition scenes occurs when Milly confronts the magnificent Bronzino at the "great

historic house" at Matcham. Milly's mood is exalted; she is enjoying "all the freshness of response of her young life, the freshness of the first and only prime" (I, 209), when Lord Mark, much as if he were inquiring if she had seen the castle spectre, asks "have you seen the picture in the house, the beautiful one that's so like you?" (I, 217). Their progress it suggests very much a pleasant and beguiling journey through a labyrinth of history and art:

> She got with her companion into the house; they brushed, beneficiently, past all their accidents. The Bronzino was, it appeared, deep within, the long afternoon light lingered for them on patches of old colour and waylaid them, as they went, in nooks and opening vistas (I, 219).

The charm is powerful. Matcham draws round Milly its "mystic circle" and "things melted together--the beauty and the history and the facility and the splendid midsummer glow: it was a sort of magnificent maximum, the pink dawn of an apotheosis coming so curiously soon" (I, 220). Yet when Milly does finally come into the presence of the Bronzino she is overwhelmed by the realization that the beautiful subject of the painting is "dead, dead, dead" (I, 221). Death haunts the palace of art; the beast of the heart of the labyrinth is a masterpiece which reminds Milly of her own mortality. She sees that the beauty and splendor of European culture is at once a monument to human achievement and the tombstone of lost generations.[7]

An equally important, though unarguably less dramatic scene is the one in which Milly takes sanctuary in the National Gallery. She has learned from Sir Luke Strett that her situation is grave, and her interest in Merton Densher and his possible involvement with Kate are troubling subjects to her mind. There "among the Titians and the Turners" (I, 287) in the "quiet chambers, nobly overwhelming, rich but slightly veiled," she seeks to escape "the personal question" (I, 288). Yet the personal question comes back to her rather violently when she recognizes Mertin Densher and even more violently when she sees that he is accompanied:

> She was unable to think afterwards how long she had looked at him before knowing herself as otherwise looked at; all she was coherently to put together was that she had a second recognition without his having noticed her. The source of this latter shock was nobody less than Kate Croy--Kate Croy who was suddenly also in the line of vision and whose eyes met her eyes at their next movement. Kate was but two yards off--Mr. Densher wasn't alone (I, 293).

The three of them are, of course, "sublimely civilized" (I, 295), and Kate soon manages to make Milly "provisionally take everything as natural" (I, 293). In subsequent interviews Kate is even able to convince Milly that she doesn't love Densher. The moment has had its effect, however, for Milly's imagination has been alerted to the fact that the cultural treasurers of Europe may be intimately associated with the basest and most common arrangements and deceptions.

Perhaps the most sinister recognition scene takes place in the Palazzo Leporelli, the Venetian counterpart to the haunted house at Matcham and a later version of the Palazzo Roccanera and the house at Fleurieres:

> Palazzo Leporelli held its history still in its great lap, even like a painted idol, a solemn puppet hung about with decorations. Hung about with pictures and relics, the rich Venetian past, the ineffaceable character, was here the presence revered and served . . . (II, 135).

It is in this setting that Milly is once again beset by Lord Mark, and in this setting also that she begins to understand how her immense wealth and precarious health could make her an attractive target for a fortune hunter. The occasion is a particularly lovely summer day when Venice and the Palazzo Leporelli show themselves to advantage. Milly is charmed by the scene in that it suggests the possibility of a richer more exalted life, but she also realizes that her vision is an "impossible romance" a "poetry" (II, 147) which will never be hers to possess. And instead of being charmed by her titled companion, she senses in his obvious intent to propose and in his tasteless inquiries about her health the possibility of some darker design:

> With that there came to her a light: wouldn't her value, for the man who should marry her, be precisely in the ravage of her disease? She mightn't last, but her money would. For a man in whom the vision of her money should be intense, in whom it should be most of the ground for "making up" to her, any prospective failure on her part to

> be long for this world might easily count as a positive attraction. Such a man, proposing to please, persuade, secure her, appropriate her for such a time, shorter or longer, as nature and the doctors should allow, would make the best of her, ill, damaged, disagreeable though she might be, for the sake of eventual benefits; she being clearly a person of the sort esteemed likely to do the handsome thing by a stricken and sorrowing husband (II, 149-50).

All of this should be sufficient to complete the portrait of Milly as an alert young woman with an imagination richly alive to the possibilities of evil. She sees that making a convenience of others is the morality of Europe, and she is capable of imagining the kind of plot which Kate and Densher set afoot. Consequently, her blindness to what they are up to is really the result of a sort of willed innocence; she refuses to believe of them what she could readily believe of Lord Mark. She sees, and this is of the essence, that a life without love and trust, where human relations are reduced to a game of ploy and counter-ploy, is finally unendurable. Her decision, then, to leave her money to Densher even in the face of his betrayal is an affirmation of the triumph of the spirit over a blighted social world.

Milly's highly developed sense of evil, her ability to imagine the specific forms treachery could take, sheds new light on her relationship to earlier Gothic heroines. For unlike earlier Gothic heroines, particularly those of Mrs. Radcliffe, Milly maintains her sentimental faith even

after a deep personal involvement with the reality of human treachery. By contrast, Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of Mrs. Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho, returns from her adventure with her sentimental faith not only intact but essentially unchallenged. Evil in The Mysteries of Udolpho remains in recognizable places and persons and can be counted on not to stalk about at random. Consequently, the ultimate adequacy of her sentimental idealism is not something Emily is forced to deal with. Even Isabel Archer's experience may be profitably contrasted with Milly's on this point. As her decision to return to Rome indicates, she is able to maintain her faith in the integrity of individual human judgments even though they may result in profound uneasiness. Yet this is made the easier because Isabel's fate, as she herself comes to realize, is intelligible if not deserved. It is difficult, however, to say anything like this about Milly Theale. Her innocence is not the relatively simple romantic innocence of Isabel Archer, but far closer to the innocence which any person of high intelligence would necessarily have in an unfamiliar social setting. Thus, the heart of darkness as it appears in The Wings of the Dove is not overt anti-social behavior nor gross, easily recognizable, failures of perception; it is, rather, social and ordinary in the highest degree. And Milly is, finally, less an innocent victim than an idealist who maintains her vision in a world fundamentally hostile to it.

Yet if Milly is a deeper, subtler, more intelligent version of the typical Gothic heroine, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the real development of the Gothic in this novel is to be found in the characters of Kate Croy and Merton Densher, two handsome, intelligent, and sensitive young people whose fate it is to discover in themselves a real capacity for evil. Indeed, one of the chief interests of the novel is the process wherein these two move from the innocence and playfully sensual charm of their early walks (Kate compares herself to "the housemaid giggling to the baker") to a point where they can scarcely bear to look each other in the face.

It is only a slight exagerration to say of Kate Croy what Professor Garber has said of Catherine Earnshaw--to say, that is, that she is a "seasoned version of dark malevolence . . . from pure English stock." The exagerration is, in any event, justified if it serves to establish the point that Kate is a further domesticized version of the archetypal Gothic villain. For unlike Catherine Earnshaw, Kate is no child of the Yorkshire moor; she is, rather, distinctly a London girl with all the social attitudes and attachments which that term implies. Any judgment we make of her actions must, therefore, be founded on the realization that the evil she embodies is civilized rather than uncivilized in origin. The Gothic villain, it would seem, can be female as well as male, and

can be the product of English drawingrooms as well as castles in the Apenines.

That James is greatly concerned to show Kate to be a product of the London life is evident from the amount of time he spends analyzing her background, particularly her impossible family situation. In fact, one of the more telling characteristics of this novel is that we really know more about the villain than we do about any other character. The situation in The Portrait of a Lady was, of course, quite the reverse; it was the relationship between Isabel's early upbringing and later course of her career which was examined in detail. Here, however, James has posed himself a different species of problem altogether. Here he is concerned with the kind of past which produces a Gothic villain. And what we immediately perceive in this regard if that Kate, like Milly, lives under the shadow of an ancestral curse which she feels most acutely:

> Her father's life, her sister's, her own, that of her two lost brothers--the whole history of their house had the effect of some fine florid voluminous phrase, say even a musical, that dropped first into words and notes without sense and then, hanging unfinished, into no words nor any notes at all. Why should a set of people have been put in motion, on such a scale and with such an air of being equipped for a profitable journey, only to break down without an accident, to stretch themselves in the wayside dust without a reason? (I, 4).

The most immediate manifestation of this ancestral curse is, of course, Lionel Croy, Kate's horrid father. As the opening

scene in his "vulgar little room" makes abundantly clear, he is perfectly odious. His greed, the deceptions he is willing to stoop to, and his evasions make Kate, wicked though she might later turn out to be, seem noble. And Kate knows only too well that the "dark disasters of her house" (I, 66) and the unrelieved wickedness of her father are not the sort of past which can be easily buried and forgotten. Witness, for example, this chilling but insightful exchange between Kate and Merton Densher:

> "Well then," said Kate, "he has done some particular thing. It's known--only, thank God, not to us. But it has been the end of him. You could doubtless find out with a little trouble. You can ask about."
>
> Densher for a moment said nothing; but the next moment he made it up. "I wouldn't find out for the world, and I'd rather lose my tongue than put a question."
>
> "And yet it's part of me," said Kate.
>
> "A part of you?"
>
> "My father's dishonor." Then she sounded for him, but more deeply than ever yet, her note of proud, still, pessimism. "How can such a thing as that not be the great thing in one's life?" (I, 68).

In this case, the father has doubly cursed the daughter. For not only has he left her in financial distress, but he has also left her with the kind of imagination which can never be satisfied with cramped quarters and meagre budgets. And worst of all, he has left her an inheritance of pessimism; she is hopeless that life can really be better.

Temptation for Kate is represented by the figure of Maude Lowder--an elderly and wealthy aunt who wishes to

parlay Kate's handsomeness and vitality into a socially advantageous marriage for the family. In this scheme she is aided by Mr. Croy and Kate's sister, Mrs. Condrip, both of whom hope that any success Kate might have through Aunt Maude will eventually benefit them. Kate, however, sees quite clearly that living with Aunt Maude on Aunt Maude's terms is inconsistent with being morally virtuous. She sees that she will, in effect, be selling herself--not in the common, vulgar sense--but in the sense that her most intimate personal attachments will ultimately be determined by social considerations. At one point she figures herself as a "tembling kid" about "to be introduced into the cage of the lioness" (I, 29). On another occasion she has this remarkable insight into what Aunt Maude is and what she represents:

> She was a complex and subtle Britannia, as passionate as she was practical, with a reticule for her prejudices as deep as that other pocket, the pocket full of coins stamped in her image, that the world knew her best by. She carried on, in short, behind her aggressive and defensive front, operations determined by her wisdom. It was, in fact, we have hinted, as a besieger that our young lady, in the provisioned citadel, had for the present most to think of her, and what made her formidable in this character was that she was unscrupulous and immoral. So, at all events, in silent sessions and a youthful off-hand way, Kate conveniently pictured her: what this sufficiently represented being that her weight was in the scale of certain dangers--those dangers that, by our showing, made the younger woman linger and lurk above, while the elder, below, both militant and diplomatic,

> covered as much of the ground as possible. Yet what were the dangers after all, but just the dangers of life and of London? Mrs. Lowder was London, was life--the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray (I, 32).

Kate's reflections at this point anticipate James's later comments in the Preface to The American. She realizes that the dangers and terrors she faces are inextricably bound up in the social life of London, and that while they may "look like nothing," they "involve the sharpest hazards to life and honour."

Furthermore, it is in Kate's early deliberations that we recognize her identity with a figure like Richardson's Lovelace, in so many ways the progenitor of the typical Gothic villain, as well as with more obvious examples of the type such as Father Schedoni and Melmoth. Like these earlier characters, Kate is possessed of a certain intellectual honesty. She understands very well the principles on which the world operates, and is able to assess her own situation clearly and realistically. She sees that the "world was different . . . from her rudimentary readings" and that "material things spoke to her" (I, 28). It is, moreover, a world where "the more you gave of yourself the less of you was left" (I, 33). Kate "had seen the general show too early and too sharply" (I, 65), but instead of being horrified by the world's ugly face she quite consciously decides to plunge in and swim with the current.

In the following passage Kate's thoughts reveal her attitude toward the "monster" of London society:

> . . .it might on some sides be a strange and dreadful monster, calculated to devour the unwary, to abase the proud, to scandalize the good; but if one had to live with it one must . . . learn how (I, 277).

It is clear, then, that Kate embarks on the adventure of her life with a keen appreciation of the issues involved. Yet it would be a mistake to see her as entirely cynical and debased. If nothing else, Kate is loyal to her family--so much so, in fact, that she offers to live with them in poverty rather than dishonor herself by moving in with Aunt Maude:

> "But you have offered to live with your sister?"
> "I would in a moment if she'd have me. That's all my virtue--a narrow little family feeling. I've a small stupid piety--I don't know what to call it." Kate bravely sustained it; she made it out. "Sometimes, alone, I've to smother my shrieks when I think of my poor mother. She went through things--they pulled her down; I know what they were now--I didn't then, for I was a pig; and my position compared with hers, is an insolence of success. That's what Marian keeps before me; that's what Papa himself, as I say, so inimitably does. My position's a value, a great value, for them both"--she followed and followed. Lucid and ironic, she knew no merciful muddle. "It's the value--the only one they have" (I, 71).

What becomes apparent from all of this is that Kate's pride, her love of material things, her very real sense of honor,

and her family loyalties create a prison of conflicting demands from which she cannot easily extricate herself. She doesn't want to live with Aunt Maude, for that would be dishonorable, yet she cannot live with her family because they, desiring the financial benefits of her attachment, won't have her. Immediate marriage to Densher is out of the question because they haven't (she thinks) sufficient means and because her family would disapprove. Thus trapped, Kate settles on intrigue as the best way to harmonize the chaotic elements of her life--an intrigue which involves the manipulation of all those around her: most particularly the rich young heiress, Milly Theale.

Like most villains in the Gothic tradition, Kate succeeds beautifully for a while. Through her "infernal cleverness" she manages to hold Densher's love while convincing Aunt Maude that she feels nothing for him; she manages, also, to keep the odious Lord Mark at bay. Above all else, she manages to persuade Densher to give the impression that he is reciprocating Milly's obvious love for him. Yet Kate is also like most Gothic villains in that her plan is doomed to failure--not, it should be emphasized, because of any failure of energy or will on her part, but because the whole conception is flawed. Long before the final scene with Densher, the multiplying ironies of Kate's condition alert the acute reader to the fact that all is not going well. She is, for example, forced to prostitute herself to her lover in order to keep

her sceme going. And it is significant that it is Lord Mark, the most debased and stupid character in the novel, who first sees through her plans--a clear indication of just how sordid they really are. But the greatest irony of all is that, materially, she gets almost exactly what she wants. Milly does fall in love with Densher and does leave him the money, but it is the fact that she does so despite their scheme not because of it that makes all of the difference.

The one thing which Kate cannot accurately predict is the spiritual change which Milly's action brings about in Merton Densher. Nowhere is this clearer than in the scene where Densher, just back from Venice, urges her to marry him immediately, before they learn the contents of Milly's will, in order that their scheming will appear as only "an ugly madness . . . a bad dream" (II, 348). Kate's reply to this is "I don't see, you know, what has changed" (II, 348). Because, of course, from her purely material point of view nothing has changed. Milly was going to die anyway and had no heirs with a greater claim to her fortune, so there could be no harm in Densher being "kind" to her. The fact that such machinations deny Milly her humanity and reduce her to the statue of an object does not seem to matter to her. Similarly, Kate destroys the letter to Densher in which Milly explains her final actions--destroys, that is, Milly's spiritual testament--but has no scruple about opening the letter from New York which gives the

monetary details of Milly's bequest. The quality of Milly's experience does not count for Kate, and she thereby stands indicted of furthering her own ends by manipulating the feelings of others--the classic mark of the Gothic villain.

Like Ambrosio, for instance, Kate is a character of immense intelligence, vitality, and will. Densher, and through him James, does her the justice of taking note of what a remarkable person she might have been in other circumstances:

> What a person she would be if they had been rich--with what a genius for the so-called great life, what a presence for the so-called great house, what a grace for the so-called great positions (II, 394).

The fact that Kate's crimes are indicative of wider social failings does not, finally, exonerate her. It does, however, serve to remind us how incompatible the great life is with moral virtue. And to that extent it is an effective answer to those critics who argue that James is an apologist for the social class she portrays.[8]

Merton Densher is in many respects the passive male most characteristic of James's fiction. He seems at least slightly out of his depth in a world controlled by women. There are subtle nuances of behavior and conversation which go over his head, and he seems always to be in the embarassing position of having to have even the most basic of social truths spelled out to him. Yet as Christof Wegelin notes, his very passivity renders him a species of everyman,

the protagonist of a "morality play" in which the "good and bad angel" vie for possession of his soul.[9]

Densher's personal qualities render him James's single most effective device for involving the reader directly with the evil at the center of the novel's action. Like Densher, most readers of James feel themselves to be literate and sophisticated, and perhaps like him enjoy a certain smug satisfaction in being more aware of the difficulty of moral problems than is the greater mass of humanity. And to the extent that we share Densher's perspective we are fooled as he is fooled. We too get lost in the moral labyrinth of James's world only to discover in the end that the world is a much more dangerous place than we could have imagined, and that our imaginations are much less adequate to deal with it than we could ever have believed.

The great irony of Densher's life is that he is aware of so many things. He is intelligent--as intelligent, in fact, as anyone in the novel, but even this can't save him. It is Densher, for example, who first shows signs of possessing the fine literary eye which can perceive the horrors which are concealed behind the external opulence of Lancaster Gate:

> It was the language of the house itself that spoke to him, writing out for him, with surpassing breadth and freedom, the associations and conceptions, the ideals and the possibilities of the mistress. Never, he flattered himself, had he seen anything so gregariously ugly--operatively, ominously so cruel.

> He was glad to have found this last name for the whole character; "cruel" somehow played into the subject for an article--that his impression put straight into his mind. He would write about the heavy horrors that could still flourish, that lifted their undiminished heads, in an age so proud of its short way with false gods (I, 78).

The effect here is quintessentially Gothic. Densher, a child of the enlightenment, feels superior to the "false gods" his age continues to worship. Yet, ironically, he too is fated to suffer spiritual desolation at their altar. Though Aunt Maude's drawingroom is far removed from the castle of Lindenberg in Lewis's The Monk, Densher's attitude toward the "heavy horrors" he sees parallels the attitude of Raymond and Agnes toward the Bleeding Nun. Raymond and Agnes draw cartoons of the Bleeding Nun and treat her, on the whole, as an amusing local legend. In the end, of course, the Bleeding Nun is revealed as the wrathful spirit of a dead ancestor who carries off the pair and holds them in bondage until atonement is made. Similarly, Densher belittles these horrors, sees them in fact as the "subject for an article," only to discover in the end that he too has been swept away by the brutal materialism which is the ancestral curse of his culture.

Much later in the novel it is Densher who realizes that there is evil precisely in the elegance of Venice. Take, for example, the following passage from the period when Densher is last in Venice:

> There were stretches of the gallery paved with squares of red marble, greasy now with salt spray; and the whole place, in its huge elegance, the grace of its conception and the beauty of its detail, was more than ever like a great drawing room, the drawing room of Europe, profaned and bewildered by some reverse of fortune (II, 261).

As readers we are now capable of passing over an imaginative bridge of Densher's construction. For it is Densher who first senses the symbolic identity of Venice, "the drawing room of Europe," and Aunt Maude's own drawing room. This sense of identity is only confirmed when we consider that Lord Mark, and all that he represents, is associated with the Piazza San Marco, the very center of Venice; the symbol of St. Mark, the evangelist, is the lion--which in turn suggests Aunt Maude, the "lioness" of Lancaster Gate. Yet Densher's vision is only partial; he is sensitive to the imagery of crass and crushing materialism which surrounds him, but he fails to realize the extent to which he himself has been corrupted. When, after Milly refuses to see him, the revelation does come, it is predictably humiliating. He is forced to see that he, who had always prided himself on his sophistication and moral acuity, is in reality a vulgar fortune hunter who has repayed love with ruthless deceit. And Venice, the city of beauty, of arrangements, of art, shows it hidden ugly face as all of nature rebels:

> It was a Venice all of evil . . . a Venice of cold lashing rain from a low black sky, of wicked wind ranging through narrow passages . . . (II, 259).

Densher had felt that he could know evil without really being touched by it. That this is not so is made clear to him only in retrospect when he begins to reflect upon the kinds of grim games they have all been playing with Milly's life:

> He had not only never been near the facts of her condition--which had been such a blessing for him; he had not only, with all the world, hovered outside an impenetrable ring fence, within which there reigned a kind of expensive vagueness, made up of smiles and silences and beautiful fictions and priceless arrangements, all strained to breaking; but he had also, with everyone else as he now felt, actively fostered suppressions which were in the direct interest of everyone's good manner, everyone's pity, everyone's really quite generous ideal. It was a conspiracy of silence, as the cliche went, to which no one had made an exception, the great smudge of mortality across the picture, the shadow of pain and horror, finding in no quarter a surface of spirit or of speech that consented to reflect it. "The mere aesthetic instinct of mankind----!" our young man had more than once, in the connection, said to himself; letting the rest of the proposition drop, but touching again thus sufficiently on the outrage even to taste involved in one's having to <u>see</u>. So then it had been--a general conscious fool's paradise, from which the specified had been chased like a wounded animal (II, 299).

Here as everywhere in the Gothic the "mere aesthetic instinct of mankind," the source of so much grace and beauty, can become a source of terror when it is used to control and limit the possibilities of human life--when, that is, it

becomes a means of ignoring "the great smudge of mortality across the picture."

From this we see that Densher is finally both a villain and a victim. He has, of course, "made a convenience" of another human being, and his villany is, therefore, inescapable. Yet he is a victim in that the evil he commits is not the product of conscious malice alone, but of human frailty, a far deeper and subtler failure of perception as well. What is more, Densher partakes of a larger dignity in that he makes no effort to diminish the seriousness of what he has done. Significantly, he does not reject Kate out of hand. He would marry her without the money in the hopes that through love they might "bury in the dark blindness of each other's arms the knowledge of each other that they couldn't undo" (II, 392). To marry with the money is, however, unthinkable; it would deny the importance and validity of what, at enormous cost, has been learned.

A final assessment of this novel reveals that it is greater far than The Portrait of a Lady and incomparably greater than The American. And to a large extent this is so because the Gothic terror of The Wings of the Dove is far more real, far less easy to put aside than it had been in the earlier novels. Kate Croy's humanity and her association with the forms and conveniences of our culture make her a more unsettling figure than had been Gilbert Osmond or Madame Merle--to say nothing of the Bellegardes. And in the experience of Merton Densher we get a chilling

glimpse of the possibility that the real Gothic terror may reside in a terrible gulf between perception and knowledge which sits at the dark heart of human affairs. Yet for these very reasons it is inaccurate to say, as F.O. Matthiessen does, that The Wings of the Dove is James's masterpiece.[10] The problem is, precisely, that The Wings of the Dove is James's most pessimistic novel. What he was to call the "Medusa head of life" appears to have been most threatening to him at this point.[11] Although Densher does assert his moral superiority to the general show, we are aware that, as so often occurs in Gothic and sentimental novels, he is simultaneously acknowledging his weakness in the face of the evil he perceives. That the moral imagination held within it the possibility of redeeming society as well as of establishing one's superiority to it was something James could not at this point conceive. It remained for James's true masterpiece, The Golden Bowl, to demonstrate how the old Gothic terror might be traced to its last hiding place and therein be overcome.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

[1]In his Preface to The Wings of the Dove, James speaks of the second half of the novel as being "false and deformed," as a result of a regrettable but necessary "economy of composition." Aesthetically there might be something to this in that the foreshortening of Milly's experience in the second volume does transgress the tight rounded structure of which James was so enamored. From our point of view, however, it is far more interesting to note how the problem of evil, as portrayed in the figures of Kate Croy and Merton Densher, could so warp and distort the novel's aesthetic structure. See: Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, Intro., R.P. Blackmur) 1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), pp. 302-306.

[2]The Art of the Novel, p. 296.

[3]Joseph A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 129.

[4]The Art of the Novel, p. 291.

[5]Henry James, The Wings of the Dove, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 107. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition.

[6]Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (1914; rpt. London: W.H. Allen, 1956), p. 544.

[7]Although the context is different, the discussion here, as well as the subsequent discussion of Lord Mark and Milly at the Palazzo Leporelli, follow closely F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 65-66.

[8]See Maxwell Geismar, Henry James and The Jacobites (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).

[9]Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 107.

[10]Matthiessen, p. 43.

[11]Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, eds. F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (1947; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 321.

THE GOLDEN BOWL: THE GOTHIC TEXT OF LIFE

James's characterization of Merton Densher suggests a useful method of approaching the richly complex problems of his greatest novel, The Golden Bowl. Any inclination to feel superior to Densher, to feel that the evil in which he becomes embroiled is somehow easily recognizable and easily avoidable, is suppressed by the realization that he is literate sensitive and informed. In The Golden Bowl, James has carried the whole process one step further. For if the reader contemplates Densher's fate, he participates in the fate of the Prince and Maggie; and by placing the terrors of experience in the respective consciousnesses of this pair James succeeds in making them more acutely real. Little can be gained by pretending that the novel does not thereby become difficult, but it is difficulty with a purpose--not the product of James's senility as F.R. Leavis asserts.[1] It was, above all James's intention to portray the difficulty of acting morally when imperfect perception is a reality of the human condition.

Thus, the reader of The Golden Bowl becomes an active participant in the moral drama which it embodies; and the densities of James's prose are but the reflection of his attempt to recreate the moral labyrinth of ordinary social life. The effect of the opening passage depicting the

shaded faces and "huge beribboned hats" of London's Bond Street is that of immersing us directly in the action. It is August, just before the last of the fashionable would leave London for the summer, and Prince Amerigo is taking a solitary ramble through one of the city's most fashionable districts. From this point on, whether the perspective is Amerigo's or Maggie's, we share the bafflement of the character. We must struggle to employ our intelligence and moral sense even as they struggle to employ theirs. As a result, we see with an immediacy not otherwise possible how difficult it is to function morally in a complex civilization.

Gone are the simple Gothic polarities of The American, The Portrait of a Lady, and, even, of The Wings of the Dove, and in their stead we find a far more sophisticated version of the old terror. For in the world of The Golden Bowl good and evil are often appallingly alike. Indeed, a review of the critical literature reveals that there is by no means a universal agreement as to who the villains in this novel are.[2] Nor is this mere critical perversity. For while I will argue that good and evil are finally distinguishable in The Golden Bowl, it is with the awareness that, as was the case in The Portrait of a Lady, the "good" characters have evil characteristics, and have, consciously or unconsciously, helped to create a situation where villainy can flourish. Here, however, this theme is treated with a sophistication which makes Ralph Touchett's "artistic"

interest in Isabel's life seem almost crude. And in the end the villainy appears less the product of malevolence or inhuman scheming than the product of flawed human beings, with inevitably flawed perception, operating in a morally ambiguous setting. As Joseph Ward puts it: "It is the human situation itself which produces the intense moral evil."[3]

Adam Verver's role is particularly relevant here. As F.O. Matthiessen quite accurately remarks, "the character most comparable to Adam Verver in James's earlier work is Christopher Newman, in The American."[4] And, indeed, the innocence suggested by their respective names, coupled with their status as self-made millionaires from the American west, makes this comparison valid. Yet insofar as Adam is figured as a "pirate" or "plunderer" whose intention it is to "rifle the Golden Isles" his character is somewhat sinister; and when, as in the case of Amerigo, he makes human beings part of his collection, he suggests Gilbert Osmond. And for the reader familiar with the specific forms of Osmond's fiendishness, the following remark by Maggie to the Prince can only be unsettling:

> "You're at any rate a part of his collection," she had explained--"one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you--you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a morceau de musee."[5]

Maggie and Adam feel comfortable with Amerigo because they feel they know everything there is to know about him; but, as always in the novels we have been discussing, the attempt to impose one's limited imagination upon others has evil consequences.

In her own way, Fanny Assingham is guilty of this same kind of "collecting." Fanny is in many respects a sympathetic character. Though slightly ridiculous, she is warm and highly intelligent, and her practical instincts do, finally, help redeem the situation. However, her "irrepressible interest in other lives" (I, 254) suggests Ralph Touchett and the kind of evil he had helped set afoot. Fannie prides herself on having "made" the Prince's marriage and decides to try to do the same for Charlotte--all because it is "great fun" (I, 88). Yet intelligent as she is, her calculations fail and the situation goes badly awry.

What Fanny couldn't calculate was how Maggie, through her innocent efforts to do so much for Charlotte and her father, could help to create the sort of unnatural situation where evil could flourish. As Fanny observes with respect to Maggie, "her feverish little sense of justice" brought Charlotte and Amerigo together "as her grossest misconduct couldn't have done" (I, 396). What begins to emerge, then, is the distinct impression that it is this particular configuration of characters in this particular place which leads to the creation of evil, not any one character alone. To quote Fanny once again:

> "It's their mutual consideration, all round, that has made it the bottomless gulf; and they're really so embroiled but because, in their way, they've been so improbably good" (I, 394).

There is great evil at work in the world of The Golden Bowl, but it is subtler than we have been accustomed to, and it is probably the product of a conflict between habits of mind and certain culturally induced attitudes rather than someone's terrifying will.

These difficulties become the more apparent when we consider a character like Prince Amerigo. As the Gothic formula dictates, he is an Italian nobleman with a family history which connects him with the accumulated horrors of the past. Yet as the following passage suggests, James is aware enough of the literary conventions he is in touch with to be able to manipulate them for his own purposes:

> A sobriety that might have consorted with failure sat on his handsome face, constructing regular and grave, yet at the same time oddly and, as might be, functionally almost radiant, with its dark blue eyes, its dark brown moustache and its expression no more sharply "foreign" to an English view than to have caused it sometimes to be observed of him with a shallow felicity that he looked like a "refined" Irishman (I, 4).

Nor, really, is there any good reason why the Prince should be out of place in London. His English is perfect to the point that "no note of strangeness remained." It is the language he finds "convenient, in life, for the greatest number of relations . . . oddly, even for his relation

with himself" (I, 5-6). As the opening paragraph of the novel makes clear, furthermore, London is the modern metropolis which most nearly approximates the glory, the grandeur, and the cruelty of ancient Rome:

> The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him; he was one of the Modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on the legend of the City to which the world payed tribute, he recognized in the present London much more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case. If it was a question of an Imperium, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner (I, 3).

The greed and ambition of Gothic villains such as Montoni or Schedoni are paralleled here by this pleasant young Italian's easy, even unconscious assumption that a large measure of the world's material comfort is his birthright.

As F.O. Matthiessen originally noted and Joel Porte develops at some length, The Golden Bowl is at least partially the story of Prince Amerigo's journey into uncharted waters--his journey in discovery of the New World.[6] For if he is comfortable with the old European ethic, embodied now in London, he finds his American friends to be strange phenomena indeed. Significantly, the very "whiteness" of their innocence reminds him of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Poe's eerie variation of the Gothic:

> He remembered to have read, as a boy, a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman--which was a thing to show, by the way, what imaginations Americans could have: the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole--or was it the South?--than anyone had ever done, found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet the color of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to a great white curtain (I, 22).

As Matthiessen remarks, Amerigo is "used to curtains of black and doesn't know what to expect in Maggie's realm of moral innocence where the existence of evil seems to be lost in a shroud of 'white mist.'"[7] What all of this suggests is the possibility that the Gothic formula is susceptible to interesting turns and reversals, and that the old world "villain" can be the victim of people and attitudes he cannot understand. In another remarkable passage Amerigo hints that if the moral sense of old Europe can be figured as the "tortuous stone staircase" of an old castle, the American moral sense can be figured by the "lightning elevator" of an office building:

> "I should be interested," she presently remarked, "to see some sense you don't possess."
>
> Well, he produced one on the spot. "The moral, dear Mrs. Assingham. I mean, always, as you others consider it. I've of course something that in our poor dear backward Rome sufficiently passes for it. But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase--

> half ruined into the bargain!--in some castle of our quattrocento is like the "lightning elevator" in one of Mr. Verver's fifteen-story buildings. Your moral sense works by steam--it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that--well that it's as short, in almost any case, to turn round and come down again" (I, 31).

In underlying suggestion, of course, is that from the perspective of Europe the moral sense which works by steam can generate its own terror and awe. And the Gothic reversal becomes complete when we see Amerigo pine for the "lost paradise" of the "big black palace" which he familiarly calls the "Palazzo Nero" (I, 164).

One characteristic of Maggie's moral sense is that she cannot imagine that there are others--and this contributes greatly to the precariousness and falsity of the Prince's position. What, indeed, is he supposed to do with the innocence of a family in which "duplicity, like 'love,' had to be joked about. It couldn't be 'gone into'?" Amerigo tries to tell Maggie that he has depths beneath the public self with the charming historical name which so enthralls her--but instead of warning her this only serves to make him more attractive. Amerigo comes to see that while the Ververs value him as a fine specimen of old European nobility, they don't realize that the subjects they so fear, love and duplicity, are intimately associated with the qualities they so value:

> There were situations which were ridiculous, but that one couldn't yet help, as for instance when one's wife chose, in the most unusual way, to make one so. Precisely here, however, was the difference; it had taken poor Maggie to invent a way so extremely unusual--yet to which, none the less, it would be too absurd that he should merely lend himself. Being thrust, systematically, with another woman, and a woman one happened, by the same token to exceedingly like, and being so thrust that the theory of it seemed to publish one as idiotic or incapable--this was a predicament of which the dignity depended all on one's own handling. What was supremely grostesque, in fact, was the essential opposition of theories--as if a galantuomo, as he at least constitutionally conceived galantuomini, could do anything but blush to "go about" at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verver in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the fall (I, 335).

The opposition of theories is complete, for whereas the Ververs would find even the hint of illicit relations grounds for shame and embarassment, the Prince is embarassed to have it generally supposed that his relation to Charlotte is innocent. In his more sexually mature world it is far more normal for handsome young men and women in their degree of social intimacy to be physically intimate as well. We see, finally, that Amerigo's association of the Verver's innocence with the prelapsarian innocence of Adam and Eve is highly significant. The Verver's innocence is, as Joseph Ward notes, "a kind of evil in itself" in a "fallen world."[8]

None of this should be taken to suggest that James is condoning adultery; nor should it be taken to suggest that James was unaware of the dubious nature of the Prince's

moral view--that of "doing the best for one's self one can--without injury to others" (I, 31). What James does, however, see in this novel, and see more clearly than ever before, is that even the most moral code of conduct can be the source of evil when it is imposed in ignorance of the conditions of life as it is commonly lived. And as will subsequently become clearer in the discussion of Maggie, the Prince's philosophy is not wholly corrupt. If it contains the potential for selfishness and moral laxity, it is also the product of long and rich social experience. Properly understood, the Prince's philosophy can be a guide to civilized, if not perfect conduct.

Though Charlotte Stant proves to be more villainous than Amerigo, and is, in fact, the closest James gets in The Golden Bowl to creating a conventional figure of evil, she, like him, is to a certain extent a victim of circumstances. She doesn't so much plan the ensuing evil as drift into it. And there is a very real sense in which her guilt lies merely in not having taken extraordinary trouble to avoid being thrown into a close relation to the Prince. Here again the root of the problem is the unnatural set of circumstances which the Ververs create. It is difficult to imagine what physical and emotional satisfactions married life can have for Charlotte when her husband treats her "as of less importance to him than some other women"--Adams interest in his daughter being "the greatest affection of which he is capable" (I, 262). Like Amerigo,

Charlotte has a spouse who ignores her; hence the note of exasperation in the following speech is perfectly understandable:

> "What do they really suppose," she asked, "becomes of one?--not so much sentimentally or morally, so to call it, and since that doesn't matter; but even just physically, materially, as a mere wandering woman" (I, 305).

Husbandless, childless, bored, and thrown by perverse circumstances into the company of a man she exceedingly likes, Charlotte quite naturally falls from the grace of her married state.

The naturalness and sincerity of the passion Charlotte and the Prince feel for one another is a subject worthy of some added emphasis. Particularly worth noting is the way in which their relation can be contrasted with the relation between Kate Croy and Merton Densher in The Wings of the Dove. Although, Kate and Merton do display a plaful, youthful eroticism early in the novel, sex is finally for them a means of manipulation. Sex is the price Merton exacts and Kate pays to keep their sordid scheme going. By contrast, sex between Charlotte and the Prince is the result of passion not policy. Their involvement is the result of giving in to a strong and long-felt passion in a situation which makes it only too easy to do so. Thus their "adultry," while a betrayal, is the result of feeling and thereby innocent of the sin of cold hearted calculation. The scene where Charlotte comes to the Prince

with her "handsome rain-freshened face" is particularly revealing of their deep sensual attraction. The sight of her with her casual dress and her air of happy freedom evoke for Amerigo and the almost overpowering memories of youthful love:

> The sense of the past revived for him nevertheless as it hadn't yet done: it had 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 remained sufficiently there, to be wounded or shocked (I, 298).

Admittedly, this is the Prince's impression, but there is no evidence to suggest that it is a vision of things Charlotte does not share. Consequently, whatever conclusions we want to draw about the conduct of this pair, it should be apparent that it contained little if anything that was truly loathsome.

It can be instructive to compare and contrast Charlotte Stant and Kate Croy in other ways as well. Kate is quite obviously the Jamesian villainess Charlotte most resembles. Both are dark, handsome, marvelously energetic women. Though we know little of Charlotte's family, we do know that she, like Kate, has been brought up with an imagination too rich to be satisfied by impoverished means. Like Kate also she is willing and able to face the fact that the material world speaks to her insistently. Yet despite these obvious similarities

of character and attitude, Kate and Charlotte do differ in important ways. Whereas Kate quite consciously embarks on an ugly intrigue, Charlotte cautiously searches for the safe path. Unlike Kate, whose sole virtue is a small family feeling, Charlotte shows signs of real moral awareness. In the scene where Adam Verver proposes to her, she is really quite scrupulous.

> "I won't pretend I don't think it would be good for me to marry. Good for me, I mean," she pursued, "because I'm so awfully unattached. I should like to be a little less adrift. I should like to have a home. I should like to have an existence. I should like to have a motive for one thing more than another--a motive outside myself. In fact," she said, so sincerely that it almost showed humour, "in fact, you know, I want to be married. It's well,--it's the condition."
>
> "The condition--?" He was just vague.
>
> "It's the state, I mean. I don't like my own. 'Miss', among us all is too dreadful--except for a shop girl. I don't want to be a horrible English old maid."
>
> "Oh, you want to be taken care of. Very well then, I'll do it."
>
> "I dare say it's very much that. Only I don't see why, for what I speak of," she smiled--"for a mere escape from my state--I need do quite so much."
>
> "So much as marry me in particular?"
>
> Her smile was as for true directness. "I might get what I want for less."
>
> "You think it so much for you to do?"
>
> "Yes," she presently said, "I think it's a great deal" (I, 219-220).

There is the temptation here to think that Charlotte's comments are based on a lack of physical attraction to Adam. Indeed this is precisely how he himself understands them:

"Of course, yes--that's my disadvantage: I'm not the natural, I'm so far from being the ideal, match to your youth and beauty." But to all this Charlotte gives "a slow headshake that made contradiction soft--made it almost sad" (I, 220). It is not the age difference which most troubles Charlotte--it is, rather, her suspicion that relations founded on abysses of ignorance are likely to prove threatening to life and honor.

Like Amerigo, Charlotte tries to warn her prospective spouse that there are hidden depths to her personality. "Do you think you've 'known' me?" she rather pointedly asks. But Adam, like his daughter finds the possibility of unknown dimensions in Charlotte intriguing, not troubling. In fact, his reply to her question echoes strongly Maggie's response to a similar question posed by Amerigo:

> "What is it then--if I accept it--but as strong a reason as I can want for just learning to know you?" (I, 221).

Not even Charlotte's ominous reply--"when it's a question of learning, one learns sometimes too late" (I, 221)--can dismay such aggressive innocence.

Charlotte's honesty appears in other places--most notably when she gives Adam the opportunity to read the strange ambiguous telegram from Amerigo which would most likely have put an end to their relationship. And in the face of these very real admirable qualities it is worth asking wherein the source of Charlotte's villainy lies.

As a necessary concomitant to that question one must ask wherein her villainy exceeds that of the Prince. The answer requires the subtle moral intelligence which Christof Wegelin exhibits on this point:

> If Amerigo's lack of sharp corners, as Mr. Verver has put it to him, and the ease, too, of his moral accommodations are the result of long social experience, what seems the same social expertness in Charlotte is really a wholly different matter--the result not of slow and perhaps incomplete growth but of a recent corruption. The same conduct, or what appears to be the same conduct, has different foundations in him and her; the same appearances hide realities different because they are conditioned by different civilizations. To draw once more on The Portrait of a Lady, this difference forms a parallel to the difference between Warburton and Osmond, who constitute similar threats to Isabel Archer's moral existence, but whose different antecedents nevertheless give them motives of wholly dissimilar moral values. The difference between Amerigo and Charlotte, too, is that his tact, although it serves to cover his own freedom, is motivated very largely by an alert sense of social responsibility, a sense of the needs of others, hers by a sense of her own needs.[9]

While Charlotte is possessed of a moral sense, it is not immorality which most concerns her; it is rather the public appearance which is threatening. It is her "doom" to "arrange appearances," and when she becomes convinced that appearances can be kept up--when she becomes convinced that the moral innocence of Adam and Maggie put them at her mercy--she agrees to the marriage. Her relationship with Amerigo becomes inevitable after that.

That Charlotte's immorality is the immorality of all Gothic villains is clear enough if we are alive to the nuances of James's language and thematic imagery. Thus, while Amerigo, the Italian, is figured as a "refined Irishman," Charlotte, the American, has an almost unnatural "felicity in the use of Italian" (I, 54); and as Wegelin points out, her convent education and her "birth in Florence" to parents "themselves already of a corrupt generation" (I, 55) is "pointedly reminiscent" of Gilbert and Pansy Osmond.[10] At another point, she tells Adam that "it is I that am old. You are young" (I, 218), thereby suggesting her relation to Madame Merle who, as we recall, said virtually the same thing to Isabel Archer. When, finally, Charlotte and Amerigo decide to consummate their long standing passion in Gloucester, she associates it with age-old images of oppression and betrayal--with "cloisters or towers or something . . . or the tomb of some old king" (I, 358).

Anyone who is seriously inclined to exculpate Charlotte should pay close attention to the fifth chapter of the second book of volume one where Charlotte comes to stay with the Ververs, and effectively drives off Miss Lutches and Mrs. Ranch, the shameless fortune hunters who are already in residence. Much as Lord Mark recognized in Densher a superior adversary, so the Miss Lutches and Mrs. Ranch recognize that Charlotte has them overmatched:

> "she 'acted'--as the Borgia wine used to act. One saw it come over them--the extent to which, in her particular way, a woman,

> a woman other, and so other, than themselves, could be charming. One saw them understand and exchange looks, then one saw them lose heart and decide to move. For what they had to take home was that it's she who's the real thing" (I, 195)

Charlotte's charms are subsequently made abundantly clear, but with nuances of language which unmistakably connect her to the evil of the Gothic tradition. "Every evening after dinner" she plays Adam Verver his "favorite things" on the piano with "practiced passion" and "a felicity that never failed" (I, 202). Later she is revealed as "mistress . . . of the regulated, the developed art of placing him high in the scale of importance" (I, 204-205). Charlotte's felicity, charms, and comparative poverty suggest no one so much as Madame Merle. And indeed it is suggestive to consider that Charlotte is as Madame Merle would have been had she succeeded in making the "great" marriage she always dreamed about. But at any rate, the accumulation of detail is such that it is impossible not to associate Charlotte with the manipulative skills of the Gothic villain.

Yet the scene in which Charlotte's character is most tellingly revealed has none of these lurid overtones though it is perhaps even more sinister in effect. The occasion is the Ambassador's ball, and in the conversation between Charlotte and Fanny which takes place there we witness Charlotte subtlely tormenting the old friend who has literally done so much for her. Fanny is understandly concerned that the seeds of her clever scheming might bear

evil fruit. And what cannot be escaped is that Charlotte, quite cruelly and with a positive delight, enjoys manipulating or "fixing" Fanny. By acknowledging her illicit relations with Amerigo she ensures Fanny's silence--for they both know that any ensuing scandal will inevitably cast the older woman in the role of the evil procuress. The irony, of course, is that while Charlotte does succeed in silencing the one person who knows of her previous relation with Amerigo, and thus succeeds in her present relation for a time, she is ultimately a victim of the same process. No one is so thoroughly fixed as is Charlotte at the end of the novel--compelled as she is to give up all that is dear to her without a murmur of protest.

It is good to remind ourselves at this point that James knew how to create an Osmond and a Madame Merle; that he chose not to here is indicative that he had something else in mind when he created his villains. Charlotte and the Prince are not fiendish, nor are they "purely selfish"--they are, rather, more or less recognizable social types. And James highlights their relation to Osmond and Madame Merle, and from thence by extension to a host of Gothic villains, in order to remind us that the evil of the Gothic novels still flourishes. Nor is this evil necessarily a matter of murder or intrigue, though murder and intrigue are certainly among its more sensational manifestation. But whether we are talking about Charlotte's conscious egoism and selfishness, or Amerigo's blander more

instinctive variety, the two are alike in that they help perpetuate a world where "making a convenience" of others is the poison of social relations.

It is, however, Maggie Verver who is finally the most interesting and most important character in the novel; and through her experience we see how the culminating work of James's career is also the rich culmination of his use of the Gothic. For in the terms that we have been using, Maggie is the Gothic heroine who triumphs over the forces of evil. Historically, one of the characteristics of Gothic fiction was that while the heroes and heroines triumph on a moral plane, the evil of the world was left distressingly intact and unredeemed. A few characters, after great suffering, manage to find way-stations of grace in a chaotic world, but while they are superior, they are so in seclusion or death. Maggie, by contrast, begins as the girl who "wasn't born to know evil" (I, 78) only to have her sense open "to what's called Evil--with a very big E. . . . To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it . . . to the harsh bewildering brush, the daily chilling breath of it" (I, 385). Yet instead of being paralyzed or defeated, Maggie uses her imagination and intelligence to meet evil where it lives and achieve a measure of triumph over it.

As is typical in the Gothic romance, Maggie's initial innocence is associated with early reading experiences. These experiences are quite general here; nothing so specific

as Robert Browning or George Eliot is mentioned--rather we see that Maggie is intrigued by tales of the "wicked Pope" (I, 10). Still, the point is much the same. Maggie is at play in a world far more dangerous than she realizes. She and her father are "like a pair of stage pirates," collecting the beauties of Europe, sublimely unconcerned with the greed, treachery, and violence which made this beauty possible. Similarly, she is attracted to the Prince because of his romantic name and romantic background, but fails to consider that the interesting sins of his ancestral past may yet live in him. Bob Assingham, with a more realistic understanding of the meaning of Amerigo's past, slyly refers to the illustrious ancestor for whom he was named as "the old one" (I, 80). Maggie, however, fails to see that one's family history, intertwined as it is with one's personal history, is something one never quite escapes. And when she gaily remarks "Oh I'm not afraid of history" (I, 9), we are instantly aware that this too is an innocence that can only end in some miserable knowledge.

From the first, then, James takes pains to show us the serious limitations of Maggie's vision. And the chief interest of the story lies in participating in the slow but inexorable process of Maggie's awakening to a world of evil. While it is true that Maggie's most important realizations take place in Book II, they are well prepared for by events which take place early on. In particular, the birth of the baby boy, the Principino, gives ample

occasion for thought because of the peculiar strain it puts on natural familial affections and arrangements:

> It was of course an old story and familiar idea that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mama and a grandpa. To Principino, for a chance spectator of this process, might have become, by an untoward stroke, a hapless half-orphan, with the place of the immediate male parent swept bare and open to the next nearest sympathy (I, 156).

At this point it is doubtful that Maggie could have any real sense of the dangers which this could all set afoot. For like the mythical child in the nursery, the husband and father can come back to exact revenge for having been ignored. Yet it is certainly the memory of this sort of gentle transgression which comes back to haunt Maggie when she begins to reflect on the "funny form" of their life.

In any event, what is presented here as a vague uneasiness hardens into real suspicion in Book II when the narrative passes from the Prince's consciousness into that of Maggie. In the process we can see Maggie passing from a state where, in Charlotte's words, she adores her husband but "doesn't think of him" (I, 257) to one in which she both adores him and thinks of him very much. Significantly, Maggie's first real insight comes about even as the Prince and Charlotte are alone in Gloucester. She is thinking about her life, and what occurs to her is that there is something wonderfully symmetrical though distressingly

outlandish about the arrangements they seem to have communally arrived at. Her figure for it is:

> a strange, tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, colored and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled ever so charmingly when stirred by chance airs (II, 3).

On the question of the meaning of this elaborate symbol James is uncharacteristically direct:

> The pagoda in her blooming garden figured the arrangement--how otherwise was it to be named?--by which, so strikingly, she'd been able to marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past (II, 5).

The pagoda is pure, frail, and beautifully crafted, but it is also lifeless and the slightest bit unnatural. As such, it may perhaps serve as an adequate symbol for the chaste love between father and daughter, but as a symbol for an arrangement including her husband it can only be ghastly. It is a monument raised to high artificiality at the expense of natural instinct. Significantly, these intimations that something is very wrong come to Maggie at a time when she is beginning to feel anew her love for her husband, and is beginning to feel that such a total lack of turbulence of any sort is unnatural:

> She had lived long enough to make out for herself that any deep seated passion has its pangs as well as its joys, and that we are made by its aches and its

> anxieties most richly conscious of it. She had never doubted of the force of the feeling that bound her to her husband; but to become aware, almost suddenly, that it had begun to vibrate with a violence that had some of the effect of a strain would, rightly looked at, after all but show that she was, like thousands of women, every day, acting up to the full privilege of passion (II, 7-8).

In reading such a passage we recall that within the Gothic tradition it is passion which simultaneously leads to enlightenment and danger. How much Mrs. Radcliffe's characters see and feel is admittedly open to question; but beginning with Lewis's The Monk and continuing on in such works as Frankenstein, Melmoth the Wanderer and Wuthering Heights this is undoubtedly the case. Maggie Verver, like Milly Theale, Isabel Archer, and Christopher Newman before her, begins to move out of the coccoon of her initial innocence when she begins to understand passion as a potent reality rather than as a rhetorical pose. Her first gesture of renewed passion--her "knock" on the pagoda wall--is to simply wait up for the Prince's return from Gloucester. And it is the oddity of the Prince's reaction--his visible sensation that there is something to be considered or measured in what is, after all, a very natural act--which alerts Maggie to the possibility of a more sinister underlying reality. Furthermore, as Maggie's suspicions grow, the imagery of her associations becomes progressively more violent. She sees that even with this small timid act she has ceased to be a stage pirate:

> She had put her thought to the proof, and the proof had shown its edge; this was what was before her, that she was no longer playing with blunt and idle tools, with weapons that didn't cut (II, 9).

Having acknowledged passion as a motive in herself, Maggie can begin to understand how it might motivate others; and the intensity of her own feelings alerts her to the kinds of dangers which might lurk beneath the apparent tranquility of their marital arrangements. Yet the subsequent description of Maggie as a "timid tigress" (II, 10) coupled with this imagery of weapons proves upon reflection to be even more unsettling. For the image of Maggie as armed for battle suggests no one so much as it suggests Maude Lowder, the "lioness" of Lancaster Gate. As eventually becomes clear, the equation of Maggie with Aunt Maude is not the least inappropriate; for the innocent girl is rapidly becoming a passionate woman with formidable resources to bring into the social arena.

Once Maggie's moral imagination is heightened by a new capacity for passion and perception, revelations follow quickly. Most immediately, she notices that every change in her own behavior brings about an immediate coordinated response from Charlotte and Amerigo. She sees that, for them, relations with her are a matter of policy--that they are "<u>treating</u>" her--"proceeding with her"--and that they have a common "view of her situation, and of the possible forms her own consciousness of it might take" (II, 41-42).

Yet if this vision is in some sense threatening, it is also a stimulus to further perception:

> This new perception bristled for her, as we have said, with odd intimations, but questions unanswered played in and out of it as well--the question, for intance, of why such promptitude of harmony should have been important. Ah, when she began to recover, piece by piece, the process became lively; she might have been picking small shining diamonds out of the sweepings of her ordered house (II, 42).

Though by no means obvious, there are nuggets of value, of meaning, about for those with the quick poetic eyes to see them. Maggie now has such eyes, and as she begins to discover, they are an enormous resource in this sort of domestic warfare. Her knowledge that Charlotte and Amerigo are acting in tandem gives her a sense of her own power over them:

> It wasn't that she wished she had been the remembered party and possessed herself of its secrets; for she didn't care about its secrets--she could concern herself at present, absolutely, with no secret but her own. What occurred was simply that she became aware at a stroke, of the quantity of further nourishment required of her own, and the amount of it she might somehow extract from these people; whereby she rose of a sudden, to the desire to possess and use them, even to the extent of braving, of fairly defying, of directly exploiting, of possibly quite enjoying, under the cover of an evil duplicity, the felt element of curiosity with which they regarded her. Once she was conscious of the flitting wing of this last impression--the perception, irresistible,

> that she was something for their queer experience, just as they were something for hers--there is no limit to her conceived design of not letting them escape (II, 49-50).

Just as Milly Theale came to realize that there was a power in being dove-like, so Maggie realizes that there is power in being a Princess. And it should not escape us that the powers of a Princess are of a worldly rather than of a spiritual variety. Thus Maggie's desire to "possess and use" Charlotte and Amerigo "under the cover of an evil duplicity" establishes her connection to the traditional Gothic villain.

Throughout the remainder of the novel we have on yet another level the curious experience of seeing the traditional Gothic formula reversed, or at least twisted to the point that there is a real ambiguity as to who is the prosecutor and who the victim. In some respects Maggie is the traditional Gothic heroine wandering in a world fraught with supernatural evil. At one point in her passage, for example, her situation is likened to "some strange shore to which she had been noiselessly ferried and where, with a start, she found herself quaking at the thought that the boat might have put off again and left her" (II, 41); such imagery suggests, of course, Charon, the ferryman, and the "strange shore of Hades." At another point, when Maggie feels that Charlotte is too much involved with her and with Amerigo, Charlotte ceases to be "Charlotte" or "Mrs. Verver" and becomes instead the evil "stepmother" by whom Maggie is "menaced" (II, 75). But this image of Maggie is

tempered by the concurrent realization that she enters quite willingly into the spirit of this evil world. She is like a "spying servant" (II, 43) who plies "her art" (II, 54) upon her companions.

In the labyrinthine world of The Golden Bowl knowledge is power, is everything. To the extent that Amerigo and Charlotte are in the unenviable position of not knowing what Maggie is up to, they are her potential victims. Her innocence, which had originally blinded her to their relation, has now become a mask which prevents them from seeing how far her cogitations have taken her. Maggie has, in Joseph Ward's words, become a "deceiver, aggressor, and mistress of intrigue to gain her victory."[11]

It is not necessary or really possible to rehearse all of the details which lead to Maggie's full awareness of the kind of relationship Amerigo and Charlotte have enjoyed. Her fear of and fascination with knowledge, her love of her father, and her passion for her husband all push her toward the final revelation. Yet it is worth noting how this revelation comes about. In what is by now recognizable as one of James's favorite techniques, Maggie decides to "wander a little wild" through the crowded streets of London. In their agony and confusion, both Isabel Archer and Milly Theale lose themselves in the streets of London. So Maggie, too, embarks on a little romance which has the effect of putting her more closely in touch with her own humanity. Gone are the precious discriminations

of the drawing room to be replaced by a world of simple vitality where the emotions are closer to the surface. Thus it is appropriate that it is here, in the midst of common humanity, that Maggie learns that her husband and her old friend have engaged in the commonest form of betrayal.

The important scene in which Maggie reveals her knowledge of the golden bowl and all of its implications to Fanny and Amerigo immediately follows this little adventure. As important, however, as this scene is, it is only a stage in the process of unfolding revelations. For Maggie, the question of what her husband and Charlotte have done is fairly well settled. The question for her now is that of deciding what to do about it. As Laurence Holland suggests, it is this problem which is the source of the terror in the second volume and is the greatest threat to life and honor:

> The second volume is tense with terror while measuring the cost in beauty, integrity, and suffering which is exacted in the process of breaking with the past and redeeming it, while discovering that the bowl must not only be gilded to salvage the past but that it must be broken, it must be sacrificed in order to create even the promise that the reality it symbolizes may be transformed.[12]

As Fanny Assingham predicts, Maggie does not act like the conventionally wronged woman. Her desire to keep the symbol of her husband's guilt before his eyes lasts but a little while, and is immediately superseded by "her desire to spare him" (II, 185). Maggie seeks a new arrangement for

her life, but it must be one in which her past is redeemed and made usable by her new knowledge. The symbol of such a new arrangement can never, therefore, be "the golden bowl--as it was to have been" (II, 216), for as an image of human relations the bowl must be flawed no matter how skillfully wrought it appears on the surface. A more fitting symbol, rather, is the broken bowl which in Maggie's hands "might still quite beautifully, a few steps away, have passed for uninjured" (II, 182-183). For in it, potentially, the beauty of the arrangement is achieved with the full knowledge of the cracks, and it becomes a monument not to human perfection but the image of perfection which can be achieved in a flawed world.

The immediate consequence of Amerigo's brief conversation with his wife over the wreckage of the golden bowl is that he begins to take a new interest in her. As a result of that they begin to act in tandem against Charlotte. Maggie recognizes that Amerigo will have lied to Charlotte by denying to her that he has any new knowledge of what his wife knows, and that now the situations are wholly reversed. It is Charlotte who is "the haunted creature" trapped in the cage of a "deluded condition" (II, 229).

It is in this state of relations that the party moves on to Fawns where the "crisis . . . hovered for them, in the long passages of the old house, after the fashion of the established ghost" (II, 211). Significantly, James chooses the British summer house, the sumptuous expression

of so much rich civilization, as the scene for his most powerful presentation of terror. For Fawns is James's final and most fully domestic version of the archetypal Gothic castle. Like the castle at Udolpho, Fawns is cut off, isolated, from civilization; but like Udolpho it is also potently suggestive of all that that civilization represents. Though vastly different in outward appearance, Udolpho and Fawns are alike in that each is the characteristic architectural expression of an age. The cruelties and superstitions which are intimately associated with the Gothic castle are different from the insolence and power with which the British summer house is associated, but both are equally terrible.

That James saw Fawns as part of a continuous tradition going back to the earlier Gothic is obvious from the way in which his use of houses changes in the four novels studied here. In The American, the locus of terror is the summer house at Fleurieres, a structure which dates from the sixteenth century and greatly resembles a medieval castle. In The Portrait of a Lady and The Wings of the Dove, however, the historic Italian palace is paired with the historic British summer house in such a way that they inevitably appear related. The Palazzo Roccanera, the site of Isabel's incarceration, is associated with Gardencourt where she makes many of her crucial decisions; The Palazzo Leporelli, where Milly is confronted with Densher's treachery, is associated with Matcham, where she first senses the

primitive horror which can lie behind beautiful things. In The Golden Bowl this pairing ends, and only Fawns remains. But the development of James's use of houses makes it clear that Fawns, is Fleurieres, is Udolpho. As the action at Fawns progresses, the atmosphere gets progressively eerie and the imagery violent. Maggie, like generations of Gothic heroines before her, is exploring the house of terror.

The scene which I take to be the most important one in the book occurs after all of the involved parties--Maggie, Amerigo, Adam and Charlotte Verver, Fanny and Colonel Assingham--are reassembled. The scene is a simple one. The members of the party have dined and are enjoying their large leisure. Charlotte and Amerigo, as partners, sit down to a game of bridge with Adam Verver and Fanny Assingham. Bob Assingham retires to a desk at one end of the room to write some letters, while Maggie tries to concentrate on the lifeless abstractions of a literary journal. But something in the arrangement of the participants unsettles Maggie and leads to this extraordinary vision of horror.

> She saw at all events why horror itself had almost failed her; the horror, that foreshadowed in advance, would, by her thought, have made everything that was unaccustomed in her cry out with pain; the horror of finding evil seated, all at its ease, where she had dreamed only of good; the horror of the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life, to touch at all

> or to be touched; it had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon . . . (II, 237).

Here is the sort of subtle terror, the terror of not knowing whether everything or nothing is wrong, which can rival anything evoked at Bly in "The Turn of the Screw." As the history of the Gothic proves, the terror is the greatest when it seems to arise out of familiar and safe circumstances. And in placing the seat of horror in England rather than in a notoriously corrupt Latin setting, James internationalizes his Gothic vision in much the same way that Wuthering Heights had internationalized the earlier Gothic. The parallels with Emily Bronte's great novel run even deeper than this, however. For if The Wings of the Dove is in one sense James's version of The Monk--a work, that is, which belies a preoccupation and fascination with an energetically evil character, The Golden Bowl, like Wuthering Heights, undertakes the far greater demonstration of how the encounter with evil is the necessary basis for the establishment of civilized values.

Yet it is precisely this parallel, suggestive as it is of important similarities between the two novels, which make clear their important differences. In Wuthering Heights, the evil of the social code is to be found in the narrow notion of civility which leads Catherine Earnshaw to reject Heathcliff on the grounds that he would degrade her, or

which leads Lockwood to take such a detached and superior view toward the passionate story he hears from Nelly Dean. And the idea of civilization in Wuthering Heights involves a rational accommodation with the rough, often violent, vitality of life--a view which suggests the views of an eighteenth-century humanist like Henry Fielding.

In The Golden Bowl, as in the other novels discussed, contact with the rough vitality of life humanizes the characters and enriches their understanding; it is the image of poor unaccommodated men which must not be absent from the elegant geometry of civilized values. But for James the narrowness of a particular middle or upper class code--exemplified, say, by Amerigo's inability to notice anyone beneath his social station--is a relatively minor source of evil. The real source of evil is a far more deep seated problem of perception , the problem of how even in our most virtuous interpretations of life we often reduce other human beings to the status of objects. The relationship Ralph Touchett bears to Isabel Archer is an early manifestation of this problem, but it is less developed and cruder than the presentation here; further, Ralph's realization, such as it is, comes only in retrospect, and has none of the complexity of the tense internal drama wherein Maggie comes to see what has happened to her, and, significantly, how she must act given that knowledge. For in the figure of Maggie Verver we have not just the typical Gothic heroine whose fate it is to gain some miserable

knowledge, but a heroine who triumphs over evil by refusing to assert the superiority of her own vision in public.

What is particularly significant in this light is that Maggie's protest, the Gothic protest from time immemorial of the "thing hideously behind" is mute. To the assembled gathering she shows only a "vague mild face." Maggie is aware of the evil seated all at its ease, but she is simultaneously aware that to feel about the assembled group "in any of the immediate, inevitable, assuaging ways, the ways usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed, would have been to give them up . . ." (II, 237).[13] Maggie is aware of this, moreover, because of a superiority of imagination and artistic insight. While she hovers on the terrace outside of the smoking-room in the "outer darkness" the people within appear as "figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author" (II, 235). Moments later the vision is transformed into a still richer vision of the power she now possesses:

> She walked to the end and far out of the light; she returned and saw the others still where she had left them; she passed round the house and looked into the drawing-room, lighted also, but empty now, and seeming to speak the more in its own voice of all the possibilities she controlled. Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up (II, 236).

Here is the artistic imagination being used to enrich and preserve life. Such knowledge as Maggie possesses could be used for the worst of selfish purposes, but in her it awakens a sense of responsibility toward those around her. But still the question remains. She cannot not act. Should she preserve the apparent "serenities and dignities" of the seated group or should she expose the deception behind these appearances and bring "terrors and shames and ruins?"

The answer arises out of the next scene in which Maggie confronts Charlotte, "the splendid shining supple creature" who is "out of the cage" and "at large" (II, 239). Marius Bewley, who calls the scene "one of the most astonishing things James ever wrote," beautifully describes the Gothic horror which it evokes:

> The very words on the page seem paralyzed in an apprehension of disaster, and an atmosphere of dread is evoked from circumstances which, innocent in themselves, loom through the summer darkness in sinister outline. The action, the movements of Charlotte and Maggie, occur with ritualistic slowness and economy, and the confrontation scene has a density of symbolism that presents the conflict between Maggie and Charlotte as a showing forth of those deeper conflicts between appearance and reality, truth and falsehood, that always lie at the heart of James's deepest meaning.[14]

Unsurprisingly, since she is the mistress of arranging appearances, Charlotte, too, has the artistic eye to see meaning in the arranged scene:

> They presently went back the way she had come, but she stopped Maggie again within range of the smoking-room window and made her stand where the party at cards would be before her. Side by side for three minutes they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the positive charm of it and, as might have been said, the full significance--which, as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more after all than a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter. As she herself had hovered in sight of it a quarter of an hour before, it would have been a thing for her to show Charlotte--to show in righteous irony, in reproach too stern for anything but silence. But now it was she who was being shown it by Charlotte, and she saw quickly enough that as Charlotte showed it so she must at present submissively seem to take it (II, 244).

There is rich ambiguity here, but some care is needed for it is not the ambiguity of moral relativism. James is not saying that the possible arrangements that Charlotte could imagine are of the same status morally as what Maggie might see. It is, rather, as Wegelin notes, an ambiguity arising out of a "conflict between absolute and pragmatic morality."[15] From an absolute standpoint Maggie should seek retribution from those who wronged her. Practically, however, this would be immensely difficult and the result uncertain. As Bewley suggests, Charlotte would be at her element in any ensuing "scene."[16] Adam does love his wife more than is commonly allowed, and Maggie's lack of "proof," in a legal sense, would make it exceedingly difficult for him to choose between the testimony of his daughter and his wife. Such a scene would be painful all around, and might even help

further the present arrangement. Adam could, under such circumstances, agree to a separation of the parties only if he believed his daughter.

There is, moreover, another "interpretation." What Maggie sees and sees again through the open window is a group of people living "more or less" decently. If the dark beast of human evil is not wholly absent from the premises, it is, at least, at bay. There is not moral perfection, but there is harmony and consideration. And for Maggie to destroy this would be to risk being wrong in her every goodness. It would be to risk being the perpetrator of the old Gothic evil, that of imposing one's absolute vision on others. It would be to deny others the necessary fiction by which they live.

Thus, Maggie intuitively senses that if the situation is to be redeemed, if the unnatural foursome is to be separated without a violent and painful breach, she must violate another tenet of her morality--she must consciously and purposefully lie. The "right," she comes to see, "was only a question of not by a hair's breadth deflecting into the truth" (II, 250). Therefore, to Charlotte's direct question, she denies upon her honor that she has any grounds of complaint against her. Bewley's reading of this passage is worth quoting both for what is so right about it and what is so wrong:

> the sinister quality, that air of pervasive unlocalized evil that is characteristic of James, is due to an inversion of ordinary

> human values, and even of appearance and reality itself. It is as if the old traditional moral vessels that had long held our sense of evil had been cracked, and evil itself had seeped through the whole fabric.[17]

If by "traditional moral vessels" is meant any particular code of moral absolutism this is no doubt true; it does not follow, however, that because evil has seeped through the fabric of life chaos is come again. James still, as always, is a serious moralist and seeks to preserve life and dignity in the face of what threatens it. But he was acutely aware of how freedom and dignity could be most threatened by traditional notions of what is right, and how minor virtues must sometimes be violated to preserve the major ones. Thus, Maggie allows herself to be guilty of, in Bewley's words, "the finer hypocrisies" precisely because she has a finer conscience. Yet if the evil is, finally, the unavoidable evil of life, it is real evil nevertheless, and the kiss which seals Maggie's cold "conscious perjury" has the air of a witches' pact.

In the final rearrangement which sends the Ververs back to American City while the Prince and Princess remain in London absolute justice is not, as Ward quite accurately notes, done.[18] Amerigo suffers very little for what he has done, while Charlotte, in the end, suffers horribly. Perhaps nothing establishes more firmly Maggie's moral depth than the sympathy with which she views the suffering of this friend who had so cynically betrayed her. She knows that

separation from Amerigo and from the grand life of Europe will be "like a knife in her heart" (II, 311). It is, moreover, her sympathy for Charlotte which leads to an exchange between her and Amerigo which embodies in so many respects the fullness of James final vision:

> "It's terrible"--her memories prompted her to speak. "I see it's always terrible for women."
>
> The Prince looked down in his gravity. "Everything's terrible, cara--in the heart of man. "She's making her life," he said. "She'll make it" (II, 349).

Here again we have the subtle but important contrast between the Princess's quick moral sympathies and the Prince's more worldly view. Maggie sees the spiritual suffering and humiliation which Charlotte must go through, while Amerigo, from his materialistic perspective knows that suffering ends and that life goes on.

When, therefore, at the novel's end, Maggie turns and embraces her husband, it is an act which symbolizes the union of all that they represent. It is, of course, the culmination of James's international theme, which Wegelin quite rightly sees as the "concrete image" of the "idea of some eventual sublime consensus" which James speaks about in one of the prefaces.[19] Wegelin then goes on to say:

> For just as the subject of The Golden Bowl reaches beyond the international situation, so the closing scene represents more than a social fusion. It is in fact a symbolic climax of the

> mutual interfusion of two virtues--of the discipline of Maggie's spiritual energy by Amerigo's form, the quickening penetration of his form by her spirit. . . .[20]

A note of caution should, perhaps, be introduced since if both are virtues they are not necessarily equal. James always and to the end valued the spiritual acuteness symbolized by Maggie above the charm and grace of Amerigo. But Wegelin is certainly right in emphasizing the extent to which James was trying to lay the groundwork of understanding for a trans-Atlantic culture.

In the context which we have been developing here the embrace carries still wider significance. For Maggie is probably the first heroine in the Gothic tradition to embrace the Gothic villain in the full consciousness of what she is doing. To be sure, this is exaggerating somewhat for effect and does scant justice to Amerigo. It is justified, however, if it serves to make the terrors which must be overcome and the grave difficulties which must be braved in order for this embrace to take place. In other words, it would be absurd to suggest that <u>The Golden Bowl</u> ends on a note of unrelieved optimism. Maggie does not redeem the world, though she does, through energy, will, intelligence and love redeem her own small corner of it; she does put her own house in order. But the fact that this redemption took such immense effort, costing, really, not less than everything, and involved such a deep compromise with evil, is indication enough that if

James did not find virtue helpless he found it always in distress. He could have had few illusions that the old Gothic evil and the old Gothic terror, emanating as they do from the past, from institutions of our own making, from others, and, finally, from ourselves, would not have been insolent and strong in the modern world.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

[1]F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; rpt. New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 126.

[2]See: Walter Wright, "Maggie Verver: Neither Saint Nor Witch," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 12 (1957), 59-71. Wright's excellent summary of the various positions taken in this debate make it redundant to attempt such a summary here.

[3]Joseph A. Ward, "Evil in The Golden Bowl," Western Humanities Review, 14 (1960), 47.

[4]F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James, The Major Phase (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 88.

[5]Henry James, The Golden Bowl (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 12. All subsequent references to the text are to this edition.

[6]Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), pp. 217-218.

[7]Matthiessen, p. 87.

[8]Joseph A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 149.

[9]Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 130.

[10]Wegelin, p. 123.

[11]"Evil in The Golden Bowl," p. 56.

[12]Laurence B. Holland, The Expense of Vision: Essays on the Craft of Henry James (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 381.

[13]Though he quotes different evidence, Wegelin makes essentially this same point. Wegelin, 135.

[14]Marius Bewley, "Appearance and Reality in Henry James," Scrutiny 17 (1950), p. 98.

[15]Wegelin, p. 136.

[16]Bewley, p. 99.

[17]Bewley, p. 100.

[18]Imagination of Disaster, p. 154.

[19]Wegelin, p. 140. James's phrase is from the Preface to "Lady Barbarina." See: The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, Intro. R.P. Blackmur (1934; rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 203.

[20]Wegelin, p. 140.

CONCLUSION

With the writing of The Golden Bowl James finally realized the fictional possibilities of the Gothic which he had discussed with such intelligence some forty years earlier in his review of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Aurora Floyd. For the terror of The Golden Bowl, the almost supernatural dread which it evokes, is "connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life." It is the terror of the "cheerful countryhouse and the busy London lodgings;" and it is, therefore, "infinitely the more terrible." If, as Professor Garber suggests, Emily Bronte "internationalized" the Gothic in Wuthering Heights, Henry James can be said to have permanently domesticized it in The Golden Bowl. And the old Gothic terror seems especially dreadul when comfortable distinctions between what is safe and what is dangerous begin to fail.

Though stressing James's relationship to this older romance tradition is unusual, it should be not construed as posing a threat to his literary reputation. As the examples of Chaucer and Shakespeare show, James is not the first great literary artist to be heavily indebted to a popular tradition. The four novels studied here are far greater than any of the early Gothic novels, The Castle of

Otranto, The Mysteries of Udolpho, and The Monk, for example. It should, however, be emphasized that focusing on James relation to the popular tradition of the Gothic provides a convenient yardstick for measuring his achievement. To a large extent his greatness resides in his success in transforming the conventions of the literature of terror into a far more subtle, far more humane vision of human life.

Yet even framing the whole issue in this fashion runs the risk of stressing James's uniqueness unduly. To say that The Golden Bowl is an incomparably greater novel than The Monk is merely to state the obvious. But it does not follow from this that the early Gothic novels were nothing more than a kind of macabre foolishness. Virtually from the first, the Gothic embodied a germ of literary experience, a complex mode of seeing, which was far more serious. The novel which began the Gothic tradition, Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, was in many respects a light, even whimsical flight of fancy. However, Walpole's basic plot situation provided a rich source of poetical images which had the power to evoke, as poetry always does, a deeper understanding of experience.

Radcliffe and Lewis, almost in tandem, took the essential situation which Walpole had imagined and transformed it into a far more sophisticated form of fiction. Neither writer was quite willing to face the full implication of what they sensed. Both preferred to center their dramatic action in remote exotic settings, and both developed rather

contrived strategies for explaining away the terror they evoked--Radcliffe provided common sense explanations for her horrors while Lewis assigned them to the workings of the devil. Yet in their differing ways both Radcliffe and Lewis managed to suggest that the deep underlying horror was both natural and human. Through a character like Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of The Mysteries of Udolpho, Radcliffe suggests that innocence may be most threatened by its own failures of perception. Similarly, it is through the figure of Ambrosio, the title character of The Monk, that M.G. Lewis suggests that human malevolence may be the effect of a perverse education. Thus, even some of the earliest practitioners of the genre were aware of the terrible mixture of good and evil in human affairs. They saw that "evil" villains could have admirable human qualities and that "innocent" heroines could participate in the creation of evil.

Later novelists like Emily Bronte picked up this essential insight and developed it further. And as evil became more associated with "civilized" personalities, it became more associated as well with the civilized world. Yet, the more this process is considered, the more it becomes apparent that it is arbitrary to restrict the term Gothic to those novels which came earliest in the tradition. In other words, the typical Gothic stage properties, the isolated house or castle, the ghosts, the creaking chains, were in themselves the least important

aspect of the tradition. Much more important was the way in which these images and techniques, in numerous variations, could be brought in to examine certain philosophical and moral assumptions. At its core, the Gothic is a novelistic tradition which uses the romance form to test the adequacy of sentimental ideals. Though every novelist properly seen as part of the Gothic tradition uses the typical images and devices in one way or another, they are all characterized by a dread of those things which threaten to control the free individual.

It is in this sense that Henry James's relation to the Gothic tradition becomes very relevant indeed. Graham Greene suggests that in order to properly appreciate any writer it is necessary to go beyond technical achievements "to track the instinctive, the poet writer back to the source of his fantasies."[1] When this is done with James, it is apparent that there is an extraordinary consistency in the makeup of James's moral universe. Although Graham Greene does not have the Gothic specifically in mind when he discusses James's moral consistency, his remarks do reinforce what has been said here about the nature of James's artistic development:

> No writer has left a series of novels more of one moral piece. The differences between James's first wroks and his last are only differences of art. . . . In his early works perhaps he rendered a little less than the highest kind of justice; the progress from The American to The Golden Bowl is a progress from a rather crude and inexperienced symbolization of truth to

> truth itself: a progress from evil represented rather obviously in terms of murder to evil in propia persona, walking down Bond Street, charming, cultured, sensitive--evil to be distinguished from good only in the complete egotism of its outlook.[2]

Nothing which Greene says is intrinsically at odds with the argument that James, in his most characteristic novels, is employing a literary mode which is recognizably Gothic. On the contrary, the perception of James's essential Gothicism adds depth to Greene's remarks by placing them in a proper relation to literary history. For when an attempt is made to characterize James's fictional world, to describe what it is that produces the indelible impression that there is consistency of vision and response in his work, it is apparent that this impression stems from the realization that he is working in a familiar literary tradition.

James knew the conventions of Gothic fiction well, and when he was in the process of composing his most characteristic novels, he instinctively turned to them as a means of giving coherence to his experience. He, like all Gothic novelists, achieved his greatest emotional effects by examining what dangers are inherent in sentimental notions about the nature of freedom and the nature of feeling; and like all Gothic novelists he was keenly aware of the myriad forces, both sociological and psychological, which could menace the individual. Yet from the standpoint of literary history, nothing, perhaps, is so interesting as the fact

James's development of the Gothic both parallels and fulfills the development of early Gothic.

In The American the typical Gothic stage properties are rather crudely and obviously employed; but beginning with The Portrait of a Lady, his first masterpiece, and continuing in The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl, his last completed novels, these elements are progressively refined. It is important to note, however, that these novels are refinements not radical departures; the essential literary material remained the same. And if in The Golden Bowl James has gone beyond anything to be found in the earlier Gothic, his achievement in this the first great modern novel is very much continuous with the earlier Gothic and would not have been possible without it.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER VII

[1]Graham Greene, "Henry James," in Derek Verschoyle ed. The English Novelists: A Survey of the Novel by Twenty Contemporary Novelists (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), p. 231.

[2]Greene, p. 232.

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