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WISH-FULFILLMENT AS MORAL CRISIS

IN FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

by

HOWARD E. SALISBURY


A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

1962

Approved by   
(Chairman of Supervisory Committee)  
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Date: 6 November 1962

We have carefully read the dissertation entitled WISH-FULFILLMENT AS MORAL CRISIS  
IN FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

\_\_\_\_\_ submitted by  
Howard E. Salisbury \_\_\_\_\_ in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the degree of doctor of philosophy  
and recommend its acceptance. In support of this recommendation we present the following  
joint statement of evaluation to be filed with the dissertation.

Mr. Salisbury has written an acceptable dissertation on the theme of wish-fulfillment as moral crisis in certain selected works of Henry James. The committee has been impressed by the originality and insight of interpretation of his work and by his command of the James canon and of the literature on his subject. The dissertation is, in general, well written and reveals that Mr. Salisbury has a fine critical vocabulary.

In developing his thesis, Mr. Salisbury follows James through the three main periods of his creative development. Occasionally, as in Chapter V in which he spends too much time on the summary of the action of Washington Square, he finds it difficult to adjust his thesis to the work under discussion. The committee feels that more time than is necessary has been spent on the recapitulation of James's plots and that before proceeding to publication Mr. Salisbury should do some judicious pruning. There are occasional lapses into jargon.

Despite these objections, however, the committee recommends unanimously that the dissertation be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Mr. Salisbury has written a dissertation of fresh ideas which is a distinct contribution to Jamesian criticism. The scope of the work is adequate and the arrangement is logical. As a dissertation, this work meets the demands of the Graduate School for excellence; as a published book, it will be a well-accepted and useful addition to the critical bibliography of Henry James.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The fiction of Henry James is currently enjoying a phenomenal revival, a revival which its creator hopefully envisioned, as though he might have seen that half a century of critical involvement in his "systems of observation," to the neglect of his stories, would not be able permanently to impair his relationship with his readers. Mid-twentieth-century readers are not, generally, interested in such topical matters as American-European contrasts or in reflections of Emersonian transcendentalism; they are not interested in what happens to the "passionate pilgrim" as such. James was, of course, intensely interested in these matters, not only for their relevance in his own day but for their usefulness in inducing patterns of behavior revealing character in terms he found most significant. James must have foreseen that readers of another generation, when cultural contrasts across the Atlantic would no longer engage their attention--let alone their emotions--would want to see what happens to individuals as characters, not as types, especially those individuals brought round by the conjunction of their illusions and inexorable circumstances to confronting themselves. This

confrontation involves their responses both to the world of objects and people and to themselves, especially to themselves. A concern for the "self in relation to the self," in its most formal modern expression an existentialist preoccupation, is more patent than any system of observation in which the action of self-discovery is set. Modern Jamesian criticism, if it is to keep ahead of current reader interest, will need to discuss something closer to the center of action than contrasts in social and moral values, theories of art, or vestiges and modifications and repudiations of transcendentalism.

With all his preoccupations with international contrasts and so-called American and European types, James never--as so many of his critics persist in doing--confuses his "systems of observation" with the theme: the changing relation of the self to the self. His systems are incredibly elaborated and knowledgeable, so much so that it is easy to see in them more than a milieu. They do, in fact, serve as a broad outer complex of movement surrounding the inner drama of the individual. They furnish the modes among which individuality can become distracted or absorbed. James has paid dearly for the rich treat he served up to his reader in the form of complex cultural milieu which he knew so well and evaluated so justly. Complexity has deflected the critic from the real thing--the individual

consciousness at the moment of self-discovery, the power of the self to tear down and to rearrange its world as experience takes its moral measurement.

In an admirably perceptive essay introducing an edition of The Sacred Fount, Leon Edel finds in this novel common ground with The Turn of the Screw, What Maisie Knew, and The Ambassadors--the engrossed observer in the process of creating something which may be taken for reality: "Henry James's point in The Sacred Fount is not, as Follett argued, that 'life' destroys the artist's 'make-believe,' but that the 'make-believe' has a reality of its own. This James often said. His short story 'The Real Thing' is his best fictional statement of it."<sup>1</sup> The ability, indeed the tendency, of the mind--at least of some minds--to create from its conscious and unconscious wishes its own world of reality is dramatized not only in the novels Mr. Edel singles out but in most of James's major fiction, as the present study will seek to show. It will also attempt to show that "make-believe" which has a reality of its own is, in a James fiction, a betrayal of the self, an immorality practiced against the self. There is, of course, the human tendency to bring to pass unconsciously that which we try so hard consciously to avoid. Our anticipations seem at times to create the realization of our fears, as Isabel Archer on one level and Mrs. Gereth

on another prove. But James shows us a reality created from the world of make-believe which is vicious and altogether destructive. Excepting the remarkable achievement of Maisie, who of necessity creates a habitable world out of an impossible one contrived by her divorced parents, all instances of make-believe are vicious: they render the possessor insensible to the substantial moral values which wholesome experience in the world of actuality supports. Rejection of make-believe and acceptance of experience encountered outside the insecurity of fantasy and prejudice and pride are the beginning of rehabilitation of personality on sound moral grounds. The final encounter with the consequences of pursuing the wish consists, more often than not in a James story, of renouncing that which had been mistaken for reality and accepting the self in light-of-day experience.

It is usual with James to cast his narrator-character into the kind of temperament capable of achieving make-believe transference into private and personal reality. Unlike the protagonist in most of James's fiction, the first-person narrator is typed. He is over-cultivated, super-sensitive, fastidious, narrowly discriminating, and thus irresponsive to the warmly expressive manifestations of spontaneous and uninhibited human behavior. He lacks sympathy. He is wanting in the quality of imagination which

sees and feels emotive expressions of others on their own terms. Obsessional absorption in his own one-track pursuits bespeaks his egocentricity. Mrs. Gereth in The Spoils of Poynton and Dr. Sloper in Washington Square, outside the first-person narrator scheme, take off from the stereotype to become--through heightened or exaggerated characteristics of the type--fully rounded individuals in their own right. These people successfully turn make-believe into reality, and by this feat come under condemnation for standing outside life. From their safe remove they exercise hyper-critical powers on humanity by pronouncing cold and unalterable judgments. Their admixture of a certain critical acumen and a failure of true compassion often tests the reader's powers of discernment. It is not uncommon for a reader to turn villains into heroes and victims into villains or mere dupes. Since James refrains from explicit or, usually, even implicit moral judgment, one of his stories may serve as an effective trial of the reader's own sensitivity to moral values. He may be sure, however, that reality is always on the side of right. And rightness is always being confirmed in dynamic experience. The narrator has settled, long before the story begins, certain emotional decisions about life, and these operate automatically within the narrow range of his judgments. James posits this class of beings against

his representatives of "felt life" who, by their very vitality of dynamic self-expression, defy classification or typing. The course of a James novel often runs through the distance from futile wish, conjured up somewhere outside life, to "felt life," designated by the honorific, reality.

Tendencies of criticism in the past have been to deal with James's fiction in broad classifications along the lines of character types and cultural milieu. This approach has been encouraged, no doubt, by what appears to some a clear pattern involving naiveté, sophistication, and a clash of moral concepts. The outcome of the moral struggle, as evidenced by many misreadings of the stories, is at best dubious. A certain element of temperament demanding deeply personal honor--the preservation of self-respect--is juxtaposed with a wish for experience requiring violation of self. The true nature of the self is at the beginning obscured by fantasy and daydream. Pursuit of experience motivated by the wish is an indication of the lack of self-knowledge. Attainment of self-knowledge comes through crisis terminating in various forms of renunciation.

For the richest set of circumstances in which the self may be tested, found wanting, and corrected, James constructs situations in which his leading characters cross lines both of class and of culture and are taken by surprise

in the presence of unexpected complexities of behavior and by inexorably disparate value standards. The adjustment necessitated by confrontation with reality is radical.

Whether the critic is dealing with this behavior pattern or the socio-cultural fabric into which it is woven, the tendency is to apply categories often suggested by James in his notebooks and prefaces. It is not necessary to know the extent to which James looked at life experience through systems or categories. The question is whether or not these convenient classifications work in his total accomplishment. The naive American in Europe and the corrupted American expatriate, the "American Princess," and the "Heiress of all the Ages" are titles and terms inviting classification of individualities--a contradiction in terms--for the sake of organizing ideas implicit in the story. The problem then arises of keeping ideas in their context of felt life. James was determined to dramatize thoroughly his ideas, and he succeeded. A certain amount of glory attaches itself to heroes and heroines who attain the honor so liberally bestowed on them by criticism--that of belonging to a class. How to make Fleda Vetch and Catherine Sloper, especially the latter, partake of this glory with ease and comfort is a problem dealt with in criticism awkwardly at best.

Finally, the "system of observation," that medium through which personality is manifested, is too often

mistaken for theme. It is not difficult to find the critic hunting among the mazes of James's elaborate systems for a figure in the carpet. Criticism would be immeasurably helped if it could remember the care with which James developed always the striking individuality of his leading characters and the equal care with which he enriched their experience with a variegated referential environment:

Therefore it is that experience has to organize, for convenience and cheer, some system of observation--for fear, in the admirable immensity, of losing its way. We see it as pausing from time to time to consult its notes, to measure, for guidance, as many aspects and distances as possible, as many steps taken and obstacles mastered and fruits gathered and beauties enjoyed. Everything counts, nothing is superfluous in such a survey; the explorer's notebook strikes me here as endlessly receptive. This accordingly is what I mean by the contributive values--or put it simply as, to one's own sense, the beguiling charm--of the accessory facts in a given artistic case.<sup>2</sup>

James would have us make no mistake about the function of his carefully designed accessories--the italics are his--in setting up situations and circumstances suggesting real life. Here, as in many other statements, he makes certain that criticism will receive no encouragement from him in weakening his "solidity of specification" by conceptualizing.

Experience with the self is the aim and end of all James's art. To give it the best possible advantage he sets individualities in circumstances alien both to their conditioning and to what may be called their innate

moral sense. Most of his concern with freedom of independent action has little or nothing to do with philosophies of government or with liberties allowed by cultures or states or societies, but rather with the very fact of individuality. If James had notions about Victorian middle-class freedom, he succeeds in keeping them out of the way of his characters and situations. The desire of individuality to express itself in the choice of experience is supposed to be universal. James is simply portraying the expression of individuality and setting the stage for its revelation in choices possible to anyone in virtually any culture. The governess in The Turn of the Screw, Isabel Archer, Fleda Vetch, Daisy Miller, Maggie Verver, Millie Theale, Verena Tarrant, Maisie, Aggie, and Nanda, in widely varying situations and with special conditioning, project their wishes for self-realization into an expression of life with which they are either temperamentally or morally incompatible, or for which they are quite unprepared, or for which their environment has no disposition to accommodate.

Instead of trying to fit each leading character into conceptual schemes set up for types and stereotypes, criticism needs to examine the expression--sometimes fatal--of individuality through to the outcome of the wish. That form of meaning is amply illustrated in the canon from

which the present study draws its examples. Those selected here are a few of the many most frequently misread. They raise problems not encountered in such masterpieces as What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age. Each may be regarded as representative of a different problem of misreading, and all suffer from too much attention to general propositions, abstractions, and character categories.

Mrs. Gereth's formidable energy and resourcefulness exercised in the cause of preserving her treasures, Fleda's susceptibility to self-dramatization, and Owen's helpless confusion in his efforts to deal with his mother and Mona Brigstock all contribute to a tangle of values resolved only by understanding Fleda's role in the story. The resolution is certain to involve a moral decision, the nature of which cannot be understood until Fleda's temperament is understood. If James's purpose was to give the impression of felt life by confronting individuality with set and established modes of behavior fostered by obsession-ridden Mrs. Gereth, he has achieved it in bringing Fleda through to self-knowledge.

Perhaps the central problem in Washington Square arises from a contest between two villains for the life of Catherine Sloper. Because one is the protective father and the other a predatory adventurer, the natural response is in favor of the father. But Doctor Sloper is also a

villain, who receives harsh treatment at the hands of his creator. The skill with which James brings this off is evidenced by the desperate tendency of criticism to find in Doctor Sloper some saving grace. After all, there should be a hero in the novel, and the daughter Catherine is hardly of heroic proportion. As always, the problem is resolved through an understanding of Catherine's peculiar individuality and its expression in the strange circumstances in which it must operate. The apparent simplicity of this story is totally disarming. The issue of good and evil is obscured by the pervading tone of satire and by the traditional benign relationship accepted as existing between parent and child, especially in the face of an evil threat. The problem is compounded by Catherine's inexpressiveness. It is difficult to imagine a rewarding approach to this story except through an examination of personality.

For all her weaknesses Isabel Archer has the loving sympathy of her creator. Like Shakespeare's Falstaff, Isabel enjoys the blessings of both her creator and the reader. To reconcile her intelligence and charm with the enormity of her miscalculation, criticism must take the measurement of Isabel's imagination and find the cause in her individuated personality. For a young lady so full of expectancy about life to be burdened with so heavy a

responsibility as that involved in her free choice is to bring her story within the realm of tragedy.

Lambert Strether occupies one of James's longest novels in the exploitation of latent sensibility brought to life by his stay of a few months in Paris. To see this novel as something more than a lengthy ado about differences between New England and Parisian cultures or as an elaborated exhortation to experience life to its fullest is to miss the fine quality of Strether's imagination and the subjective-objective view he takes of it. This novel is about the quality of an imagination, a quality emerging clearly through ingeniously various contrasts and comparisons. The novel seen through Strether's imagination becomes a double experience--the exercise of Strether's imagination and that of the reader's at the same time. But this experience is missed unless it is acquired through Strether. It is possible to pay lip service to James's ingenious "point of view" strategies without actually taking advantage of it through sharing the experience with Strether and his moderator, Maria Gostrey.

An examination of James's fiction in terms of wish-projection and its inevitable consequence, moral crisis, is an examination of the quality of imagination. If it is true that the pleasure derived from seeing an author in his totality is the pleasure we get from contacting his quality of mind, it may also be said that the pleasure we

get from a James story is that which comes from sensing the peculiar quality of imagination exercised by the leading character. There is a wide range of difference between the quality of, say, Maisie's imagination and Miss Tina's, or of Christopher Newman's and Lambert Strether's. But each in its own way--in its own believable consistency--is an affirmation of those values which become the justification for taking life seriously and being charmed by it at the same time. Bitter disillusionment can be endured if it corrects and improves the imagination--the faculty of finding significant and interesting relationships among elements of experiences in the past, present, and future.

Some of the analyses included in the present study are necessarily detailed. The experiences of Isabel Archer and Lambert Strether are so much a work of their imagination that the processes of this faculty must be brought to bear on almost every element of their experience in order to lay open its peculiar nature and find the causes of their denouement in the self. To perform a comparable task in behalf of the leading characters in The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl would require a book-length study. In these novels we are dealing with imagination processes of several characters who succeed in evoking justified sympathy. To isolate Maggie Verver or Millie Theale and assess their responsibility in the light of those among whom

they perform their acts of the imagination is to distort these personalities and the stories which project them. It is evident that James achieves in these two novels a fullness of both technique and form

The present study will examine first-person character types as exemplified in three stories in which the reader is encouraged to generalize experience into propositions about art and criticism to the neglect of what happens in the story. The narrators in "The Real Thing," "The Figure in the Carpet," and The Aspern Papers are, in varying degrees, negative voices supporting inversions of sound, applicable principles. A fourth story, "The Birthplace," related by an impersonal narrator, presents the leading character in possession of a creative imagination capable of affirming sound principles of art. An approach to these stories through their leading characters instead of through ideas either explicit or implicit in action and circumstance will keep principles and experience in mutual support so that a discussion of one is inseparable from treatment of the other, and both are clarified at once. The first-person narrator is expendable as a character after he has been discovered to be other than the voice of Henry James and seen to be the eccentric judge pronouncing against positive values. His eccentricity becomes a backdrop against which true values are clearly

etched. The leading characters in James's successful fiction cannot be diffused into types without doing violence to the total experience. Meaning in a first-person story is the very identity of the protagonist. There would seem to be no other way of getting at the meaning than through the leading character.

The present study does not, of course, presume to say all there is to say about the fiction examined here. A study of technique as such yields a great deal, as does an examination of James's use of symbol. The most the present study claims to do is show the way the imagination works with experience to bring to pass the fulfillment of unrealistic wishes and the attainment of self-knowledge expressed in an act of renunciation.

This study attempts to deal not with James as an artist, in the sense of identifying certain patterns appearing in his fiction and finding their sources in his temperament or his theories of art, but with the art itself. James becomes in such a scheme one of the sources of opinion about his work. These opinions are offered in his notebooks, occasionally in his voluminous correspondence, and in his late prefaces to the novels and tales appearing in the New York edition. This latter source, though it comprises in its own right perhaps the best general critical material on the novelist's principles and

methods, is not always--or ever necessarily--a better source of explication than any other competent and responsive reading. As might be expected, James talked much about intention, at the same time disallowing that element as a factor in evaluation. Intention gets lost in the shaping processes of the imagination. It is not what was intended but what is accomplished that matters. It is not how fondly or how vividly Millie Theale suggests Minnie Temple, but how convincingly Millie Theale suggests herself. The reflections recorded in the Prefaces, fondling and caressing and intimately personal as they often are, tend to enhance the reader's alertness and sensitivity to the recorded experience becoming the story. The reader's own perceptivity is challenged by that of James as objectified in the latter's retrospections. The reader's respect is for James's admirable sense of experience and the sense of room he gives it more than for any critical light the Prefaces shed on the works to which they are attached. Fortunately, the sketches in his Notebooks, jotted down during the process of creation and therefore concomitant with the creative act, are brief. James wrote what he had to say in the novel and turned it into art usually of the highest order. Years afterward he could afford to talk all he wished about his work: the creative phase had passed with the recording, and the retrospections take their place as the best readings of perhaps the best critic

of his work.

Perhaps we do not need to explain Henry James, unless, of course, for purposes of a strictly biographical study. Even then the contribution justifying a study of the man is the contribution he makes to the world of imaginative literature. This thesis tries to show by means of a few examples that one of the central meanings in James's fiction is a meaning central to the human condition in reality: it has to do with the expression of individuality and its assertion in genuine personal experience. Individuality is expressed in the real world in manifest relation to its wishes and to its capacity or incapacity to fulfill those wishes. It is through the wish that the uniqueness of personality is revealed. James trains his whole art on the uniqueness of personality--its manifest individuality, its apparent defiance of classification, its impulsive refusal to be categorized. The vital differences comprising uniqueness of personality show not only in the self-deception implicit in the wish but in resolution through a renunciation following attainment of self-knowledge. This contribution to an understanding of the human condition is by itself sufficient to merit for James the honor of being one of the great creative writers of Western culture.

## CHAPTER II

## THE REAL THING

In three of his short stories, "The Real Thing," "The Figure in the Carpet," and "The Birthplace," Henry James offers sufficient admonition to the believing and perceptive reader to see him through the hazards of a critical reading of the whole canon--short stories, novella, and novels. All three stories deal with related critical principles receiving subtle dramatization in experience befalling artists and would-be artists and, in the case of "The Figure in the Carpet," critics. The situations and events becoming the crux of all three stories are prophetic of the critical fate into which James's fiction was to fall at the hands of certain critical schools. It is as though he could foresee the course which criticism, developing in his own day and invading his fiction, would run to its culmination. There was certain to be a confusion of art with life in situations in which both are made to signify so much. There would be a confusion of values between reality and make-believe and, perhaps more devastating, a confusion of creator with the art he creates. We do not need to worry whether or not the critical views implicit in these stories are those of their author. Only

the question of their validity in experience is of any value.

The narrator-artist in "The Real Thing" becomes the embodiment of abstractions and propositions removing him from direct experience with life. He is an illustrator. To impute to James the critical dicta practiced by this first-person narrator is either to misread them or to indict James. As will be shown, the latter sometimes happens at the hands of otherwise responsible critics.

In "The Figure in the Carpet" James so skillfully plays the critic's reductive approach against the life qualities of art that critics to this day are still trying to find the figure in the carpet, though, as Quentin Anderson summarizes in all seriousness, "It is therefore true, as most critics have concluded, that 'The Figure in the Carpet' gives no clue as to what the 'figure' was."<sup>1</sup>

In "The Birthplace" Morris Gedge, the new guide at Shakespeare's birthplace, discovers it is necessary to his own sense of morality to separate biographical data from the Bard's poetry in order to endow even the physical properties of the birthplace with importance enough to justify his showing them to bands of daily sightseers.

Essentially, all critical questions treated in these stories converge on the problem of appearance versus reality. Two of the three are related by first-person narra-

tors, whom experienced readers of James find to be confused on this important issue. The narrator of The Aspern Papers may be seen as a compendium of the obnoxious characteristics expressing their confusion.

Perhaps nothing in Jamesian criticism illustrates better the tendency to inflate, or reduce, an experience into an abstraction than comments on the story "The Real Thing." The story answers the question: What is real? with an incident which becomes the climax, as one would expect, in the narrator's experience. The anecdote turns out to be much better as a finished product than the sketch in James's notebook promises--an incident related by George du Maurier of "the situation--the little tragedy of good-looking gentlefolks, who had been all their lives stupid and well-dressed, living, on a fixed income, at country-houses, watering places and clubs, like so many others of their class in England, and were now utterly unable to do anything, had no cleverness, no art nor craft to make use of as a gagne-pain--could only show themselves . . ." <sup>2</sup>

In James's story such a couple appear at the door of the narrator's studio seeking employment as models. The narrator's reputation as artist has not yet been established, but his opportunity has come in the form of an invitation to submit sketches as illustrations for a de luxe edition of a series of novels by a prominent contemporary writer.

The artist sees in "the real thing" actual specimens of the type and class of people the novels create. But, as he discovers, ". . . in the deceptive atmosphere of art even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic."<sup>3</sup>

Major and Mrs. Monarch are the real thing. "Their good looks had been their capital, and they had good-humouredly made the most of the career that this resource marked out for them. It was in their faces, the blankness, the deep intellectual repose of the twenty years of country-house visiting that had given them pleasant intonations. . . . They looked so well everywhere; they gratified the general relish for stature, complexion and 'form.'" (123) But all this is liability and, though the Monarchs desperately need employment, they will not do:

I liked them . . . they were so simple; and I had no objection to them if they would suit. But somehow with all their imperfections I didn't easily believe in them. After all they were amateurs, and the ruling passion of my life was the detestation of the amateur. Combined with this was another perversity--an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I liked things that appeared; then one was sure. (124)

The narrator has no pressing need for models. A young freckled-faced Cockney, Miss Churm, comes regularly and can represent a gamut of classes and moods with remarkable facility. While the artist is still trying to compromise his art by accommodating the Monarchs' need, a young Italian ice-cream vendor comes, seeking employment. The

artist finds in him and Miss Churm sufficient plasticity of imagination and expression to serve for the entire project. This renders the Monarchs worse than superfluous--an annoying burden, a trial to the narrator's patience. The Monarchs are intolerant of the young models and are bewildered by the narrator's preference, choosing to believe at first that they are used only for the "vulgar" characterizations. At last the artist confronts the Monarchs with the real situation. They return, however, pleading necessity, and they ask to be used as house servants, to perform the tasks for which the young Italian had been employed originally. The climax of the story comes when Mrs. Monarch, standing behind the artist while her husband occupies himself with the "slops," interrupts what seems to the artist an excitingly suggestive pose struck by the pair of commoners:

Presently I heard Mrs. Monarch's sweet voice beside or rather above me: "I wish her hair were a little better done." I looked up and she was staring with a strange fixedness at Miss Churm, whose back was turned to her. "Do you mind my just touching it?" she went on--a question which made me spring up for an instant as with the instinctive fear that she might do the young lady a harm. But she quieted me with a glance I shall never forget--I confess I should like to have been able to paint that--and went for a moment to my model. She spoke to her softly, laying a hand on her shoulder and bending over her; and as the girl, understanding, gratefully assented, she disposed her rough curls, with a few quick passes, in such a way as to make Miss Churm's head twice as charming. It was one of the most heroic personal services I've ever seen rendered. Then Mrs. Monarch turned away with a low sigh and,

looking about her as if for something to do, stooped to the floor with a noble humility and picked up a dirty rag that had dropped out of my paint-box. (142-43)

Samplings of reviews and critical comments, necessarily excerpted in some instances at length, point up the problem in criticism of giving full attention, first and finally, to what happens in the story--to the experience through which its characters pass and to what they do with it and what it does to them. This is not to say that many uses cannot be made of a work of fiction. It may become an illustration of anything to which it will lend itself, and it may be used to indicate such matters outside its doings and its meanings as the development of the author's techniques and the variations and expansions of his theme. But whatever uses to which the story is put must, of course, be justified by the meaning contained in it.

James gives just prominence and importance to the felt life expressed by a rich and aware response, an enlivened awareness on the part of the presiding intelligence in the story. He chooses his anecdotes for their possibilities of demonstrating knowledgeable experience. The record of these anecdotes found in his notebook shows that his focus was fastened on the concrete situation, the event and circumstance for its own sake. His finished product is usually informed with delicacy and understatement; at

the same time it contains the action through which meaning is revealed.

Theme in a James fiction is more a matter of behavior than of idea, behavior consisting of knowledgeable action or action performed in ignorance and enlightened through the later processes of retrospection. Theme is, of course, what happens in and to the central characters in the story. Abstract principles of art, as expressed by the narrator, become rationalizations for his behavior. They must be taken with his behavior. Pursuit of implication is justified and its outcome valid only if the base of operation is the response by which characters commit themselves, response by which the self is revealed. The following excerpts will show the problem of maintaining close relationships between theme and character and theme and behavior in a James story.

F. O. Matthiessen finds "The Real Thing" an adequate vehicle for James's ideas about art:

The painter-narrator is touched by their [the Monarchs'] plight and reluctantly takes them on, but is immediately faced with a whole series of problems. He has a detestation of the amateur in art, and an awareness of the stultification involved in typecasting--indeed, he is very like James in his deep-rooted desire for character instead of types. Moreover, he confesses to an innate preference for appearance over reality, for "the represented subject over the real one."

Does this mean that his art is an escape, a hollow evasion of experience as Wells found James? The answer involves James' whole-hearted repudiation of realism as mere literal reporting. The painter's

regular model, Miss Churm, is anything but the real thing. She is a freckled Cockney, but a clever actress and so a constantly shifting challenge to fresh embodiment; whereas the Major's wife, a lady certainly, "is always the same lady" and soon comes to look "singularly like a bad illustration." The show-down occurs when a little Italian model turns up with the confident belief that he can pose for an English gentleman far better than the massive Major. He soon proves that he is as good as Miss Churm, "who could look, when requested, like an Italian." His brilliant mimetic gift illustrates the necessary doctrine of imitation for any branch of art. It tells the painter again what he already knew, that action must be heightened by stylization, if art is to convey the essence and not the accidents of life. And so he is forced to turn away the Monarchs, with James' experienced and now thoroughly anti-transcendental "lesson": "that in the deceptive atmosphere of art even the highest respectability may fail of being plastic."<sup>7</sup>

Mr. Matthiessen's comments on the story appear as part of his discussion of James's attitude toward art. Undoubtedly, his observations here cannot be taken as either complete or conclusive. Were he analyzing the story, certainly event would be given more attention than he gives it in this discussion. He calls attention to two attitudes on art, the first of which he attributes to James as well as to the narrator-artist: "He has a detestation of the amateur in art, and an awareness of the stultification involved in type-casting--indeed, he is very like James in his deeper desire for character instead of types." As for the second principle--preference for the represented subject over the real one--we are not certain whether Mr. Matthiessen attributes this view also to James. At

any rate, from the position of these two propositions, Mr. Matthiessen asks the following question: "Does this mean that his art is an escape, a hollow evasion of experience as Wells found James?" The question implies that the narrator is the voice of Henry James, that whatever the narrator-artist declares or affirms is the attitude of the author. If this were the case--if the narrator-artist is found to use his art for the purpose of escape, so does James.

Sean O'Faolain, though his attention is focused on structure, seems to have missed the one element of structure on which all others depend--the climax. If the climax is missed, so also is the theme. Mr. O'Faolain, himself an eminent writer of short stories, appears to be in search of something in this story to which his own creative imagination would be attracted as possibility for a story of his own:

Climax in, at any rate, the conventional sense has to be sacrificed to that deeper verisimilitude which is the conscience of the modern writer. In "The Real Thing" what climax there is suffices; indeed it is searing to find Oronte and Miss Churm posing successfully as a gentleman and a lady while Major Monarch and his wife wash up the tea things. . . .

The reader will observe that there is virtually no characterization--Major and Mrs. Monarch are little more than social types, nicely defined, though her kindness is evident, e. g., her rearrangement of the model's hair, . . . a nice and useful touch of character, and the loyal affection of husband and wife is also touching. . . . Situation is, as usual, necessary to fill in these light outlines, and the story is based on one of the happiest of

situations. We have, therefore, almost everything requisite. All that is needed is that construction should be added or merged with situation to give dramatic compression and eloquent form. This is the one thing missing. Henry James either would not or did not know how to construct his shorter tales into a satisfying form.<sup>8</sup>

The "satisfying form" the lack of which Mr. O'Faolain regrets, is contingent upon "situation," as he says, as well as "construction." The situation is culminated in what Mr. O'Faolain sees as "a nice and useful touch of character." The "conscience of the modern writer," it may be hoped, is not represented or dramatized by the narrator unless we are to see him as being at least as sensitive to human values as he is to abstract notions about art. That James had ideas about the conscience of the modern artist cannot be doubted, and he may have had these in mind as he wrote his story. A number of statements on relation of art to life and the responsibility of artists may be inferred from the story, but that James sacrificed climax or any other necessary element of structure for doctrinaire advantage is not likely. As a means of expressing the conscience of a modern writer, the speaker in this story is a failure.

Quentin Anderson, attacking the problem of persistent mis-reading, finds it in James's use of a strategy which achieves communication with two opposing views of art at the same time. If Mr. Anderson's somewhat abstruse comment is correctly understood, James is addressing readers who

accept H. G. Wells's opinion of him and those who take the position stated by James in his defense. If Mr. Anderson is right, the story accomplishes an extraordinary feat, and is far from being the "simple" story he supposes it to be. To support this conceptual burden he loads upon it would require extraordinary complexity.

In this little parable James dramatizes the relationship between morality and style explicitly stated by Gabriel Nash in The Tragic Muse. That so simple a story should be so widely misread is surprising. Yet James must have anticipated the misreading. He knew, that is, that his contemporaries were infatuated with the figure of the artist, and thought art a moral end in itself. He considered such a view of the artist an impiety and a horror, but he nonetheless threw the sops of apparent conformity to an audience which hungrily and blindly snatched them up. . . . James may be said to offer us an opportunity for salutary though vicarious moral transgression. We make much of the fate of the artist as such in "The Real Thing." The author apparently expected us to discover our error by experiencing its consequences. We have been slow to do so. In this story the two sets of models are inversions of one another. Major and Mrs. Monarch are, in a religious sense, "dead." Frozen into the forms prescribed by caste, completely generic and completely incapable of moral spontaneity, they are also, and by the same token, fixed, intractable pictorial "values." The man who collects fixed aesthetic values of this sort is a sinner just as the capitalist or the sexually acquisitive male is a sinner. The artist of the story sins until he dismisses the Monarchs, not simply against art but against himself. To prize Major and Mrs. Monarch is to prize an image of one's own self-righteousness. The cockney girl and the young Italian who comprise the opposed set of models represent the "ideal thing" because they are morally spontaneous. They may be used to illustrate dramatic situations because they are capable of love for others unlike themselves.<sup>9</sup>

As F. R. Leavis has noted at length, James is notoriously misread. The propositions singled out of many

published readings of "The Real Thing" would likely have been considered by James as "other men's commonplaces." Surely the many words employed in telling his story are wasted--Mr. O'Faolain finds it verbose--if they add up merely to what every artist knows, whether realist, naturalist, romanticist, or impressionist: that the ability to project imaginatively, either as painter or model, has no necessary reference to social status; that the end product of art is not photographic likeness, but likeness interpreted. The question of mimesis is not raised since it, as well as all other questions of aesthetics, is already settled by the narrator prior to the experience which makes the story. These matters are, however, involved in the experience in that they are brought to bear as supports, as rationalizations, for his reaction to and treatment of Mr. and Mrs. Monarch.

A close reading of the story with an eye on the narrator as a personality and character with distinct and individual preferences will show James to be using his character's point of view as a negative approach to a wholesome attitude toward art. That is, in the narrator's negative attitude lies an implication of its opposite--a wholesome one. James encourages the reader to correct the attitudes of the narrator-artist. The narrator's ideas about art, including his prejudices and preconcep-

tions, are his character. Incident serves as a means of articulating these ideas, but the ideas, in the end, serve the incident. The central incident--Mrs. Monarch's sudden flash of awareness--catches the narrator by surprise and repudiates his notions about both art and character. It is the incident itself, Mrs. Monarch's "noble" gesture, that makes the story memorable. The narrator, who has not been able to make up his courage, who vacillates over the issue of moral responsibility, is not perhaps capable of feeling completely the chastisement implicit in Mrs. Monarch's magnanimity.

To see the crucial gesture in the story as nothing more than a "nice touch of character" is to conclude with Mr. O'Faolain that the story lacks form. A great deal of attention has been given to the attitudes of the narrator-artist. The story must take its time. Because it has to do with a kind of artistic temperament which can be used to juxtapose negative and positive attitudes about art, it must treat subjectively the slow development of incident into climax for the purpose of revealing gradually and naturally the quality of the narrator's response. If the final effect is a repudiation of the narrator's view in favor of a position closer to real life values, the story may have served a purpose more worthy than Mr. O'Faolain demands of it. Yet the purpose it must serve will need to be expressed in terms of human behavior,

of values which must be dramatized in human event, not mere abstractions. The narrator suggests too many of the annoying characteristics of other Jamesian first-person narrators to qualify as either the voice of Henry James or any other first-rate artist. Everything in the story filters through his sensibilities, and the controlling irony is that his sensibilities are too small, too cramped, to receive the breadth of the experience. It is not difficult to imagine James's delight in annoying the sensitive reader with the last sentence of the story: "If it be true I'm content to have paid the price--for the memory."<sup>10</sup> James would not give the reader the satisfaction of hoping it might be more than a "memory." But it is too much to expect of the narrator that the experience might also be a lesson. The reader may gain some satisfaction in feeling his own perception of values to be superior to the narrator-artist's.

If it requires a long tale to reveal in a flash a manifestation of reality, it is all the more impressive tribute to the rare incidence of reality in human affairs. Preference for appearance over reality is the unfortunate preference most of James's first-person narrators make, as do many of his leading characters in the major works. Mr. Matthiessen is justified in singling out the "mimetic" issue as a burden of the story. A better purpose, however, is served by making due issue of the climax, not the emer-

gence of a proposition. To the responsive reader the climax is the dramatic revelation of differences along the scale of degrees of values of the insight gained by Mrs. Monarch; the staid fastidiousness of the artist; and the almost too facile adaptability of his commoner models. Mrs. Monarch's manifest realization of a fundamental and terrible difference between herself as a failure and Miss Churm as a workable model may have made of her the real thing--the only real thing in the story--rendering ironic the facility, the adaptability, the spontaneous readiness of Miss Churm and Oronte.

The Monarchs were never the real thing. They were not really members of the social class they had been used to adorn. Even as frequenters of country-houses and watering places, they were playing a role--a narrow and single one. Certainly the real thing, however it may be defined philosophically or psychologically, is only represented by the Monarchs under any circumstance. They were not being themselves; they had never discovered themselves. Their reference, like that of the artist, to their being the real thing, is the underlying irony. The genius of the story lies in the fact that two kinds of appearances are juxtaposed, one unsuccessful and the other successful. A third element--the convincing reality of Mrs. Monarch's final response--rearranges the entire value system and comes up in favor of reality.

It is difficult to know what to do with Mr. Anderson's interpretation of the story. He places a heavy burden of proposition on it, and there are intimations that he is using the story to support some philosophical or metaphysical or ethical argument which he chooses to find in the canon as a whole. In fact, grounds for the parabolic or allegoric would have to lie somewhere outside this story, presumably in other of James's fiction, which means that the story is not a self-existing entity. Aside from these considerations, however, is Mr. Anderson's misreading of the relationship between the artist and the Monarchs. As a painter under contract he is never anything more than tolerant toward them. It is not a question of casting them out, but one of using more "plastic" models. This the artist has no problem doing; there is never a question about the Monarchs' failure and Miss Churm's and Oronte's adaptability. What these latter two have to do with love remains a question for Mr. Anderson to answer.

But love as an abstraction is not the concern of a James story. Behavior in the form of a structured experience--an exemplification of a situation in real life--is James's concern. Abstractions may accrue from experience; in order to make propositions or axioms or even to affirm the validity of principles it is necessary to see them alive, to observe them in behavior. "The Figure in the Carpet" presents a situation emphasizing this necessity.

Hugh Vereker, a writer who has gained fame through his twenty volumes of fiction, chides the narrator and his fellow practitioners for reviewing his works without, apparently, recognizing the quality of actuality, of reality, which informs them and gives them validity and authority. The narrator has written a review of Vereker's latest novel and, a few hours after its appearance, overhears the author dismiss the review as another instance of minutia with which reviewers invariably become involved when writing about his work. Engaging Vereker in conversation, the narrator presses for a clue to the "secret" which has, according to the author, evaded the critics. Vereker accuses the critics of maintaining a stance outside experience, outside life:

To me it's exactly as palpable as the marble of this chimney. Besides, the critic just isn't a plain man: if he were, pray, what would he be doing in his neighbor's garden? You're anything but a plain man yourself, and the very raison d'etre of you all is that you're little demons of subtlety. If my great affair's a secret, that's only because it's a secret in spite of itself--the amazing event has made it one. I not only never took the smallest precaution to keep it so, but never dreamed of any such accident. If I had I shouldn't in advance have had the heart to go on. As it was, I only became aware little by little, and meanwhile I had done my work.<sup>11</sup>

This sets the narrator off on a search for the "secret." The notion of the "figure," which takes over the lives of the three major characters in the story belongs, to begin with, to the unimaginative narrator.

The novelist, playing along with the critic's naivete, matches reductive metaphor with reductive metaphor as he enjoys the typicality of his reviewer. The process of devolution plays back and forth ingeniously throughout the conversation between reviewer and reviewed.

Even as the story begins, the burden of irony is heavy. Corvick and his fiancée, Gwendolen Erme, whose "ardent response was in itself almost a pledge of discretion" (293), involved themselves more and more with the "secret," the "figure," and less and less with a life of their own. The engagement is broken--at least from Corvick's point of view--and he leaves on an assignment in the Far East. A few months and a few thousand miles away from the scene of his literary detective project give Corvick a fresh view, and he wires to Gwendolen that he has found the secret. The response of the narrator to this is characteristically naive. Gwendolen, herself a creative artist, corrects it:

"It's you, Miss Erme, who are a 'dear' for bringing me such news!"--I went all lengths in my high spirits. "But fancy finding our goddess in the temple of Vishnu! How strange of George to have been able to go into the thing again in the midst of such different and such powerful solicitations!"

"He hasn't gone into it, I know; it's the thing itself, let severely alone for six months, that has simply sprung out at him like a tigress out of the jungle. He didn't take a book with him--on purpose; indeed he wouldn't have needed to--he knows every page, as I do, by heart. They all worked in him together, and some day somewhere, when he wasn't

thinking, they fell, in all their superb intricacy, into the one right combination. The figure in the carpet came out. That's the way he knew it would come and the real reason--you didn't in the least understand, but I suppose I may tell you now--why he went and why I consented to his going. We knew the change would do it--that the difference of thought, of scene, would give the needed touch, the magic shake. We had perfectly, we had admirably calculated. The elements were all in his mind, and in the secousse of a new and intense experience they just struck light." She positively struck light herself--she was literally, facially luminous. I stammered something about unconscious cerebration, and she continued: "He'll come right home--this will bring him." (298-99)

From Rapallo, where he seems to have received confirmation of his insight from Vereker himself, Corvick writes to the narrator about a project already begun "for one of the quarterlies, a great last word on Vereker's writings, and this exhaustive study, the only one that would have counted, have existed, was to turn on the new light, to utter--oh so quietly!--the unimagined truth. It was in other words to trace the figure in the carpet through every convolution, to reproduce it in every tint." (303).

Corvick meets sudden death in an accident while he and Gwendolen are on their honeymoon. She escapes unhurt. In the spirit of the critical dicta implicit in this story, the death of Vereker's prospective biographer was a benign act of Providence. The threat of vivisection, even with the purported blessing of Vereker himself, is certain to forebode diminution. Such thoroughness as

Corvick promises would bleed the life out of Vereker's work. This is, of course, implicit in the description of Corvick's proposed definitive treatment.

Gwendolen had been stricken with another grief, that of the passing of her mother, prior to her marriage. Typical of the many death scenes--graphic and exquisitely controlled and coming at crucial phases in the lives of James's leading characters--it has heightened the meaning of life and endowed experience with what might be called a new spiritual dimension. The effect of Gwendolen's losses on her sensibilities seems to have intensified the meaning of her own life.

Eventually Gwendolen marries a rival reviewer, Drayton Deane, who after his marriage never again writes about the work of Vereker. Our narrator had expected to get through Deane what he had failed to extract from Gwendolen, namely the "figure." Gwendolen dies giving birth to her second child, and the narrator sees this as an opportunity to inveigle the secret out of Drayton Deane. It is significant that in their first encounter the narrator refers to Corvick's discovery of the secret as coming "in one of the happiest hours of his life, straight from Vereker." (293) To the narrator's surprise Deane is completely in the dark about any guarded secret. Through a series of sly innuendoes our narrator becomes certain of two things: that Deane actually is unaware of

any secret his late wife may have withheld from him, and that a seed of wretched suspicion concerning the completeness of his wife's love has been planted. The final irony in a story so elaborately composed of ironical circumstance and supposition exposes the characteristic insensitivity and egocentricity of a Jamesian first-person narrator:

He listened with deepening attention, and I became aware, to my surprise, by his ejaculations, by his questions, that he would have been after all not unworthy to be trusted by his wife. So abrupt an experience of her want of trust had now a disturbing effect on him; but I saw the immediate shock throb away little by little and then gather again into waves of wonder and curiosity--waves that promised, I could perfectly judge, to break in the end with the fury of my own highest tides. I may say that to-day as victims of unappeased desire there isn't a pin to choose between us. The poor man's state is almost my consolation; there are really moments when I feel it to be quite my revenge. (313)

The pattern throughout this remarkable story is that of preoccupation at least one remove from spontaneous engrossment in life. While Corvick and Gwendolen are absorbed in mere literary detective work, their own relations cool and become distant. Corvick, later confronted with the necessity of meeting the challenge of life on his own terms, in India, becomes qualified to see the real life, the reality which the aesthete, the fastidious connoisseur of experience, is unprepared to see. There is no "figure in the carpet"; there is only the real life reflected in the work. The reader who can labor in "other men's gardens" without having his own to cultivate is

incapable of experiencing life.

This is not to say that the critic is not justified in seeking and discovering in the works of a creative mind insights supporting and affirming values common to mature and serious experience. To contemplate the quality of a creative imagination and to probe interest and behavior in relation to it is a service to those who would find the fullness of meaning in life. In "The Birthplace" Morris Gedge, the newly-appointed guide at Shakespeare's birthplace, survives a moral crisis induced by the demands of interminable companies of tourists who, with their precious stores of biographical minutia, want to identify Shakespeare with the physical properties supposedly preserved at the estate. An empirical reconstruction of the poet has the effect of excluding the only life the world can know, the only life it needs to know--the poetry. In order to endure, Gedge becomes a creator in his own way by offering an imaginative reconstruction which invests his commentary with a kind of poetry and succeeds in evoking a feeling of awe for Shakespeare's genius.

It is a simple question of honesty. Quite certainly little that passes for authentic setting is likely to have been part of Shakespeare's surroundings. But tradition makes certain claims and the public is eager to accept legend as reality. The conscience of Morris Gedge balks at passing mere tradition off for truth. Worse,

Gedge sees that Shakespeare utterly escapes the curious and avid seekers after the "facts." He feels himself to be in the service of the poet, not in service to a myth about the poet. To serve the poet best he must offer his own imaginative reconstruction of the relationship of setting to genius. With admirable tact and gentleness Gedge couches his language in terms of supposition through which he can give exercise to his own poetic imagination. His sensitivity to the greatness of Shakespeare is capable of evoking a sense of the miracle of the master whose inspiration, rising from so quaint and diminutive a habitation, fills the whole world.

Gedge's presentation is frankly and openly a performance of the imagination. The conscience requires that that which is not real must be known for the make-believe it is. Gedge is not creating a new reality any more than any fiction is a creation of life. To be a real artist one must always know the difference. Gedge's insistence upon the real, his refusal to accept fantasy for reality, frees him for an act of the imagination which is sincere, valid, original, and expressive of himself. A statement in James's preface to The Portrait of a Lady comes to mind:

The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and the degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its ability to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or

weakly, the projected morality. That element is but another name for the more or less close connexion of the subject with some mark made on the intelligence.<sup>9</sup>

The acceptance of the real over the illusory is always a moral choice.

In the process of adjustment to his assignment, Gedge becomes gradually aware of the exchange of reality for appearance: "He had fallen into the harmless habit of speaking of the place as the 'Show' . . ." <sup>10</sup> Parrotting the running commentary accompanying tours through the birthplace had endowed the memorial with external qualities through which meaning could not penetrate. Gedge attributes the ability of his predecessors to go through the repetitive form to their ignorance. He plays around with the irony of the comparative situation between himself and his predecessors:

"They were kept straight by the quality of their ignorance--which was denser even than mine. It was a mistake in us from the first to have attempted to correct or to disguise ours. We should have waited simply to become good parrots, to learn our lesson--all on the spot here, so little of it is wanted--and squawk it off."

"Ah, 'squawk,' love--what a word to use about Him!"

"It isn't about Him--nothing's about Him. None of Them care tuppence about Him. The only thing They care about is this empty shell--or rather, for it isn't empty, the extraneous preposterous stuffing of it." (279-80)

In Gedge's experience appearance counters reality, stifling urgent demands of living poetry. "The Birthplace,"

as has already been observed, is not related by a first-person narrator. Its leading character asserts his intelligence and imagination in behalf of reality. His refusal to make the exchange becomes an impressive affirmation of the truth that reality is life itself: event and its meaning are one.

The Aspern Papers offers a clear example in the simplest terms of the confusion accomplished by the typically obsessed first-person narrator, who deals with the world of imagination without possessing imagination himself. The narrator is in pursuit of what he understands to be correspondence between a famous poet long since dead--"Aspern"--<sup>11</sup> and his lover, one Juliana, by now aged and in seclusion in Venice. The narrator is obsessed with the determination to possess this valuable collection of letters. There are implications that his urgency is motivated by a stronger and more personal incentive than one normally operating in a literary biography, and a detailed analysis of the story would lay open this facet of personality which James keeps in the background for the sake of larger issues.

Arriving in Venice, the researcher is gratified to learn that Juliana is still alive and, though she is very old, is still able to exercise her faculties rationally. Her seclusion is guarded by a niece, Tina, whose

life has been appropriated by this once famous lady for what may be assumed are exclusively selfish reasons. Whatever contact the narrator has with Juliana he must secure through Miss Tina. This lady, in early middle age, has withdrawn into the sequestration which protects her aunt. When the narrator finds her he is appalled by her timidity and her difficulty in communicating with him.

It is the narrator's good fortune to secure lodging in the dilapidated mansion where Juliana and Tina are domiciled. Cautiously and shrewdly, the narrator gradually wins the confidence of "Miss Tina." With certain reservations she consents to help him obtain audience with Juliana and suggests, at least to the biographer's eager mind, that she may be of help eventually in getting the papers into his hands.

Juliana is already fast failing in strength when she apprehends the presence of her daring tenant in her chamber long after the house has been darkened for slumber. It is supposed that the shock of this frightening intrusion hastens her death. Prospects are now more favorable that, considering the confidence won from Miss Tina, the rich autobiographical treasure may be secured, perhaps purchased with a sum far less than their actual worth.

The narrator has apparently been the crucial force

in bringing Miss Tina's personality into fresh bloom, though she remains unattractive in her restraint and her social isolation. On his next to last visit with her he is shocked and frightened by what is evidently a suggestion on the part of Miss Tina that he may procure the papers by marrying her. Though he has encouraged a friendship of rather cautious intimacy and though Miss Tina has shown some slight response, he is unprepared for such a development, and, in surprising lack of self-possession, he retreats from the house and refrains from further contact with her until he has had time to regain his poise and settle upon a suggested amount of money for the purchase of the papers.

The narrator's last visit at the close of the novel illustrates superbly the tricks played on the mind through obsessive and compulsive behavior. He is under the impression that her willingness to confer with him once more suggests the probability that she will expect a marriage proposal. Such an undertaking as marriage, to a lady of Miss Tina's total unattractiveness, is repugnant to the fastidious and super-cultivated literary detective. His manners in behalf of obsession he regards to be in no way a reflection upon his highly cultivated tastes. He is compromising for the sake of great art.

Throughout the novel the narrator has boasted of

his powers of perception, his subtle discernments. He has, therefore, prepared himself to grasp this "inference" as soon as he enters her presence. There is, however, something quite unexpected in Miss Tina's appearance:

"Poor Miss Tina's sense of her failure had produced an extraordinary alteration in her, but I had been too full of my literary concupiscence to think of that. Now I perceived it; I can scarcely tell how it startled me."

(123) The transformation seeming to have taken place in Miss Tina is nothing more than the inventive powers of the wish to create its own fulfillment out of the fabric of fantasy. The narrator has been powerless to anticipate the slightest difficulty in obtaining his long-sought treasure. He has come on this last visit with no thought that any obstacle might stand in the way of his procuring the papers after a summary negotiation. It is in the light of this unqualified expectation that he looks at Miss Tina:

She stood in the middle of the room with a face of mildness bent upon me, and her look of forgiveness, of absolution made her angelic. It beautified her; she was younger; she was not a ridiculous old woman. This optical trick gave her a sort of phantasmagoric brightness, and while I was still the victim of it I heard a whisper somewhere in the depths of my conscience: "Why not, after all-- why not?" It seemed to me I was ready to pay the price. Still more distinctly however than the whisper I heard Miss Tina's own voice. I was so struck with the different effect she made upon me that at first I was not clearly aware of what she was saying; then I perceived she had bade me good-bye--

she said something about hoping I should be very happy. (123)

This word goodbye, after its first affect of assurance and well-being, suggests an ominous note which prompts the "foolish" interrogation, "Good-bye--good-bye?" (124) Before Miss Tina has time to speak further, the narrator indulges once more in his smug sense of security: "She had never doubted that I had left her the day before in horror. How could she, since I had not come back before night to contradict, even as a simple form, such an idea? And now she had the force of soul--Miss Tina with force of soul was a new conception--to smile at me in her humiliation." But the ludicrous joke is on the narrator, and he is shortly to be overtaken by it. He is to learn in her next statement that she has destroyed the papers. His response of incredulity produces her quiet affirmation: "Yes; what was I to keep them for? I burnt them last night, one by one, in the kitchen." (124)

As the horrible truth floods through him and challenges his capacity to stand up to this most devastating announcement, something is happening to the hallucination:

When it passed Miss Tina was there still, but the transfiguration was over and she had changed back to a plain, dingy, elderly person. It was in this character she spoke as she said, "I can't stay with you longer, I can't"; and it was in this character that she turned her back upon me, as I had turned mine upon her twenty-four hours before, and moved to the door of her room. Here she did what I had not done when I quitted her--she paused long enough

to give me one look. I have never forgotten it and I sometimes still suffer from it, though it was not resentful. No, there was no resentment, nothing hard or vindictive in poor Miss Tina . . . (124)

The power of a wish to govern the total perceptics is a phenomenon the strength of which is equal to all but the stark force of reality. The enticing irony of the narrator's situation lies in the fact that the truth about Miss Tina is contained neither in the phantasmagoric transmutation nor in the disenchantment which follows close upon the devastating truth. The narrator remains hopelessly self-deceived. It is Miss Tina, with her "force of soul," who comes round to a right view of reality.

The literary biographer in The Aspern Papers, the guide at Shakespeare's birthplace, the reviewer in "The Figure in the Carpet," and the illustrator in "The Real Thing" are all confronted with polarity in human experience --a mere abstract of experience, a valueless generality extracted from specific instances of behavior and thereby divested of meaning; and its opposite, the direct involvement in life for its own sake as expression of the self, an unself-conscious awareness of values indivisible from actions and relationships revealing identities in their own right. Of these personages confronted with a choice, only one--Gedge, at Shakespeare's birthplace--chooses the real. By an idealizing act of the creative imagination

he breaks through the lifeless shell of data and approaches, with his honest suppositions and speculations, the real Shakespeare. Of the four Gedge is presented as the only one who does not relate his own story. Perhaps the kind of self-consciousness necessary to tell it would have made of it an unreal experience, disqualifying him as the others are disqualified.

## CHAPTER III

## THE INDIVIDUATED SELF

In his biography of Henry James, F. W. Dupee classifies and re-classifies characters in the fiction either according to some dominant characteristic or from hints dropped in the notebooks and prefaces. Two of his classifications are cited here to emphasize the necessity of first seeing James's characters as individualities definitely and distinctly and in their own right. Mr. Dupee identifies one group as people who "represent the conscience itself." His list includes Fleda Vetch, Miss Wix, the governess in The Turn of the Screw, and the narrator in The Sacred Fount. The latter, with Nanda in The Awkward Age, belongs "with a difference." He refers to this variety of characters as "outsiders," and observes that they are "capable of great love, although it is just their fate as embattled souls that they rarely inspire love in others and that they are sometimes absurd in their shy hankering after unobtainable persons." Mr. Dupee locates their extraordinary situations in their moral temperaments: "Their tempestuous virtue cuts them off; they have scarcely any relation to common life beyond their wish to 'save' others; they are very limited people."<sup>1</sup> These

comments appear in his treatment of Fleda Vetch as the leading character in The Spoils of Poynton.

Another group he organizes on the basis of "moral intelligence" by way of classifying Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Cassamassima:

He [Hyacinth Robinson] is supposed to be a type of moral intelligence like Newman and Isabel, James tells us in the preface--a document of great interest in which he also goes on to call the roll of his other intelligent protagonists, to name Lear and Hamlet as if they were analogous types, and to distinguish solemnly between "fools" and "heroes." These juxtapositions are unfortunate. They only tend to make clear how little the Jamesian chivalry has in common with the humanism of Shakespeare, whose protagonists are not less human for sometimes behaving like beasts, or less heroic for being on occasion fools.<sup>2</sup>

But James is insisting that any leading character in any drama be endowed with moral intelligence. Even the characters in Mr. Dupee's category of "outsiders" --excepting the first-person narrator in The Sacred Fount are "finely aware and richly responsible" in varying degrees commensurate with the role to which their creator assigns them. The passage on which Mr. Dupee comments actually achieves the opposite effect of categorizing. It provides the terms with which such diverse and unclassifiable persons as Christopher Newman, Daisy Miller, and Catherine Sloper can be discussed with the familiar Shakespearean characters:

This in fact I have ever found rather terribly the point--that 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 with it. But there are degrees of feeling--the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense, the complete, in a word--the power to be finely aware and richly responsible. It is those moved in this latter fashion who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get the most. Their being finely aware--as Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware--makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them. We care, our curiosity and our sympathy care, comparatively little for what happens to the stupid, the coarse and the blind; care for it, and for the effects of it, at the most as helping to precipitate what happens to the more deeply wondering, to the really sentient. Hamlet and Lear are surrounded, amid their complications, by the stupid and the blind, who minister in all sorts of ways to their recorded fate. Persons of markedly limited sense would, on such a principle as that, play a part in the career of my tormented youth; but he wouldn't be of markedly limited sense himself--he would note as many things and vibrate to as many occasions as I might venture to make him.<sup>2</sup>

Though James evidently took his characters seriously --even his fools--it is not likely he confused the proportions of Hyacinth Robinson and Christopher Newman with Lear and Hamlet. He is, rather, laying down the terms for a drama of the self, of which, incidentally, Hyacinth is not a very effective agent. The world gathering around an individual sensibility becomes the reflector for that sensibility. This may be said about all the leading characters in James's fiction. The reason Mr. Dupee's categories fail to catch and hold the individualities

James creates is that the whole host of them fits both compartments at once. There is a common denominator relating virtually all the leading characters in the canon. This elemental characteristic is, in fact, so consistent that it encourages over-simplification of character in a great many notable readings of James's fiction and seems to encourage criticism into the exploration of James's "systems" in terms of themes.

All of James's characters about whom the *donnée* assembles, including even the first-person narrators already characterized in the present study, may be termed with various degrees of accuracy "outsiders." They exist in a condition of individuation, and their story is their attempt to break through this condition and get inside life. It is not that they are unattractive or limited or dispossessed, but that they are blind to the differences between their true selves and the kind of life with which they seek identification. Mr. Dupee mentions the desire to "save" others. In all instances the desire is basically to save themselves. It is important that this pattern of wish-projection be seen for what it is, the organizing principle in James's fiction. Hyacinth's cumbersome sociological and political world, for all its accurate previsions, is too stubbornly itself to respond either to his sensibilities or to the terms on which James

has built his leading character. From the point of view of the social sciences the modernity of The Princess Cassamassima is a phenomenon of prevision. It holds together social and political cross-currents of ideology at least as relevant to our day as to the late Nineteenth Century. But it is not an accomplishment which follows the lines of James's primary interest. Hyacinth Robinson is, indeed, an individuated personality, but, unlike other such leading characters in James's fiction, the available modes through which he performs the action of his life are, for all their professed humanitarianism, impersonal and intractable.

Ostensibly, The Bostonians is, like The Princess Cassamassima, a novel of social or institutional theme. But for all the insight and accuracy with which James deals with the feminist movement and the boldness with which he portrays it, the dominant personalities--Olive Chancellor and Basil Ransom--take over and become much more than representatives of groups or causes. It is not often noted that the wide range of characters in the novel is their world. Representation of classes and conditions is designedly faint. The social milieu in which Olive and Basil find themselves, a milieu they help make, is the background appropriate to persons whose individuation is the social ailment. It is difficult to imagine a better

medium through which to watch personalities whose temperament demands that social adjustment be made toward themselves instead of yielding at least in a compromise. The essence of the causes to which both Olive and Ransom profess devotion and of which they regard themselves as representative is in a very real sense individuation to the degree of compulsion expressing itself in reformation and resistance. They are expatriates in their own society. Consciously and unconsciously they gather about them other generally misplaced persons who need identification without yielding their maladjusted selves. Basil Ransom is mistaken by many critical readers to be the voice of normality. While he and Olive hardly represent polarities, Ransom is himself adrift, an idler afflicted with ambition but frustrated by the disparity between his personal means and his ideal. His attempt to appeal to Verena Tarrant and rescue her from both the cause and its chief exponent, Olive Chancellor, is indicative of a somewhat wayward aim, a determination simply to prove his rightness, an assertion of personality in face of the feminist movement.

To pursue individuation one step further in The Bostonians, Verena begins as little more than an instrument in the hands of her charlatan father, a mesmerist. Through the course of the novel there are glimmerings of a possibility that Verena may develop a selfhood decently

independent of those who capitalize on her "gift." The pathetic truth is that Verena never wins personality, let alone any kind of individuation. She remains the instrument through which Olive Chancellor on one side and Basil Ransom on the other seek to assert themselves as agents of a cause. We are to understand in the end that Verena's situation is simply changed, circumstantially and not emotionally, from Olive's side to Ransom's. Actually, she could never surely be counted on either side. Hence the last sentences in the book:

"Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed. (464)

The world of The Bostonians is the world of sad or dangerous individuation. This is true to a lesser extent of The Princess Cassamassima, where malcontents come together because they want to think they are alike. The congregations of misplaced persons who gather and disperse periodically in The Bostonians are motley and nondescript--the very qualities which bring them together. The final grouping--the little gathering of women at Marmion on the Cape--is a fine dramatization of the tenuous liberality with which recalcitrant personalities manage a temporary mutual understanding. It is the impact of their

collective disparities that achieves the final devastating estimate of the movement which the novel so aptly satirizes.

If individuation takes over in a novel which James apparently designed to treat broad social issues, the pattern might be expected to stand out unmistakably among systems of observation arranged in relationships supporting individuals in search of self-fulfillment. Each leading character is seen in a peculiar relationship to reality. It is that of the dreamer to a world seen only through the distortions of a wish. A sense of reality is achieved when the hard facts of experience over-tax the resources of fantasy. When this happens self-knowledge squares the individual with the world, leaving intact and strengthened his own sound moral intelligence. Sometimes self-knowledge never gets a chance to come through. James's fiction ranges from the simplest possible solutions to the problem of reality to the hopelessly impossible. Mr. Dupee's term "outsider" must include, then, far more than a small group of "unattractive" characters expressing severe moral rectitude. It must include all those characters whose suspension or isolation from the society in which they move is more or less conscious and in varying degrees self-determined. Between their strong individualities and their individuated state on one side and

a natural but unconventional participation in life on the other, operates the mediating wish, the daydream, that unreality which assumes adjustment to be possible without personal change.

It should be apparent that individuation, by the very denotation of the word, precludes typing. The individuated personalities in James's fiction defy the critical categories which even his own commentaries suggest. Many critics who try to see progressive development in James's art trace the femme du monde, the adventurer, the artist, from early to late fiction, as though it were the same old story over again. There is, in fact, a tone of weary repetition in a great deal of criticism relying on this approach. On the other hand, some of the categories are ingeniously validated in the service of refreshing the theme, even at the cost of definition: R. P. Blackmur refers to Catherine Sloper as "the American Princess manque."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Sloper himself, unwittingly revealing his weakness in boasting of his powers, declares: "You see I am helped by a habit I have of dividing people into classes, into types."

In the closing scene of one of James's most ingratiating novels, The Europeans, Mr. Wentworth observes: "I have always thought . . . that Gertrude's character required a special line of development." (376) The

occasion for this wistful reflection is the announcement --with Mr. Wentworth's faltering consent--of Gertrude's engagement to her cousin, Felix Young. This gentleman is a second-generation American expatriate on a visit with his sister to Boston. The sister, Eugenia, has motives in visiting the Wentworths not altogether filial. Felix's motives are simple: he is an artist who desires to sell sketches and portraits to his American cousins and is willing to be of whatever agreeable service he can to his sister.

At the beginning of the story Gertrude is enjoying her absence from Sunday School while the large house is emptied of its pious folk. She wanders about the garden, then from room to room of the typical New England home, and finally with a volume of Arabian Nights spends a quarter of an hour reading about a particular prince and his princess. When she looks up from the page on which her dream is feeding she sees standing before her her own prince--Felix. It all happens that simply and unnaturally. Gertrude is a dreamer; her dream comes true. This is not to say that even this charming story is so simple. There is the problem of Eugenia and her devices with Gertrude's cousin, Robert Acton. And there is the problem of Gertrude's less imaginative but quietly resourceful sister, Charlotte, with Gertrude's suitor, the Reverend Mr. Brand.

Robert Acton is also a dreamer, and what appears at first to be the entrance of his princess into his life turns out to be an illusion. Eugenia's sojourn in Europe has procured for her the morganatic title of baroness and has practiced her in the art of cultivated and sophisticated appearances. The title and the accoutrements are not, of course, the real thing, but their charm against the backdrop of New England setting shows exotic and appealing, especially to Robert.

The art which Felix practices is spontaneous and self-expressive. His sister's art is contrived and grossly functional. Gertrude's temperament answers to Felix's way of viewing the world. Its morality is in its uninhibited and honest expression of the self. It is the real thing, however suspect in the eyes of some of the Wentworth household. Robert unwittingly and unwillingly catches Eugenia in a lie, a discrediting lie. Reality breaks through appearances. Eugenia returns to Europe impatient with her failure to work her charms, and the last sentence in the novel reports that Robert marries "a particularly nice young girl."

This is all accomplished with a lightness of touch and a freedom from the very dark shades of human folly. The imposition of New England super-seriousness comes no closer to Gertrude than her father's melancholy reflection.

Awareness of international contrast, always taken good-naturedly or with a minimum of intolerance, is the source of sustained humor. Yet virtually all the elements of a James fiction are suggested in this fine story. Charlotte's timid and knowing manipulation in behalf of Mr. Brand's pursuit of Gertrude--a manipulation in behalf, actually, of herself; Gertrude's restlessness and self-searching; Eugenia's use of visual art as an instrument of intrigue; her practiced deception and exposure--these amount to a compendium of James's devices. All these elements are bound together time and again to produce a variety of situations partaking of experience as far away from stock situation as they are close to the felt life on which James focused.

The strand on which these devices are threaded is the individuation of the leading character--and often all important characters--in the story. Gertrude is set apart from the others by what she describes as a "restlessness." That she is not precisely inside the New England conventional world which seems to organize the lives of the Wentworth household is provocation for her father's fear that her character requires a special line of development. Ironically, he makes this declaration in bewildered protest to an arrangement which will develop her self along the lines consistent with who she really

is. Her choice and its fruition in a happy life with Felix is consistent with her self. Individuation is the crux of the novel.

But Eugenia, the cousin born and reared in Europe and now attempting exploitation of the Wentworth domain, is also set apart from the world peopled by other characters in the story. Her individuation is, unlike Gertrude's, more than a matter of temperament. She possesses a cultivated individuation, an aura at once exotic and cosmopolitan, and in no sense representative. A host of personages, each defying category, appear in James's fiction with one characteristic in common. They are all "finely aware and richly responsible." All do not, of course, face up to moral responsibility, but each is given full advantage within the terms of his personality by beginning his story from a position of disorientation, of individuation. This is a test. Can the protagonist cope with experience on his own limited terms? Can he realize his wish? The experience which makes his story is the test of his own reality principle.

Both the light and dark sides of wishful venture, the unrealistic pursuit of the wish, appear from one of the earliest novels, The American, through the entire range of James's fiction to Maggie Verver's ordeal in The Golden Bowl. The light side is touched with the tone of

gentle satire, and the dark verges on tragedy. The intensity depends on what happens as the leading character leaves self-deluded individuation and enters into life.

The novels treated in the following chapters come from the years of James's maturity as an artist--1881-1903. They were selected because the peculiar relation of the leading character to reality presents a suggestion of the rich source of character James found in a configuration so central to human behavior--wish-fulfillment as a way to self-knowledge. Implicit in the combination of these four works are contrasts which suggest the crucial part played by the imagination as a source of richness or poverty, truth or falsehood, dependency or freedom in the experience of the leading character. They are presented here in what appears to be an order of complexity, the nature and expression of the imagination in the encounter with experience progressing from the relatively simple problem of relationships with other characters to the more involved and intricate. This complexity is reflected in the widening range of critical comments from general studies of James's fiction. The problems simmer down finally to one basic problem: the competence of the protagonist to deal with reality. On this basis the extent of moral responsibility is determined and the nature and validity of renunciation seen for what they actually

are. It seems to the present writer that the novels singled out from the major fiction present, in combination, a good representation of the way James deals with the problem of reality.

## CHAPTER IV

THE SPOILS OF POYNTON

The problems in reading a James novel almost invariably turn out in the end to have to do with morality. This, as James seems to be saying throughout the canon, is one with the problem of reality. The moral issue becomes clarified and is solved when the leading character sees himself in his right relation to his self. The Spoils of Poynton is as straightforward an example as may be found in any of James's fiction. Criticism is not, however, disposed, apparently, to read the stories in this way. R. P. Blackmur draws the moral line where Fleda's imagination draws it--that is, until some very strenuous experience corrects her vision. ". . . The Spoils of Poynton contains as many ghosts or specters as The Turn of the Screw, and exhibits a witch, in the figure of Mrs. Gereth, as evil in what we call the 'sane' world as the poor governess was in the world of her possession."<sup>1</sup> One has the feeling that Mr. Blackmur should be talking about the world which Fleda Vetch peoples and occupies. He continues, "In this contest of adverse wills Fleda is weaker than Mona, than Owen, than Mrs. Gereth. If Mona has no morals and Owen merely craves morals, Mrs. Gereth

merely uses morals. That is the effect of turning her interest into disproportionate passion."<sup>2</sup> But Fleda is both weaker and stronger than her friends, the "adverse wills" against which she contends.

Edwin T. Bowden apparently sees the struggle as a "conflict between aesthetics and morality,"<sup>3</sup> from which both Fleda and Mrs. Gereth emerge triumphant. He regards Fleda as the unwitting means of bringing Mrs. Gereth to an acceptance of the loss of her treasures and to a release of her creative powers which the "spoils" had arrested.

But the problem for most readers is that of justifying Fleda's seemingly over-scrupulous insistence on a morality which destroys the possibility of happiness for everyone and destroys even the spoils in the end. To see Fleda's dilemma as James carefully constructs it, we must see her as in large part the maker of her own predicament. She is responsible not only for failing to resist the persuasions of her good sense to withdraw from a situation in which she had no proper concern, but also for having given way to the strong temptation to endow that situation with imaginary enticements beyond her power to resist. She is in other words the victim of self-delusion.

The real conflict, carefully detailed in the novel,

is that between Fleda and her self--the relation of the self to the self. Her wish, her dream, casts her in a role of melodramatic lineaments and eventually lays upon her the burden of relinquishing that role in favor of the real self. The story becomes that of a young lady with strong demands for self-dramatization coming in the end to see her right relationship to people and things and thus to her self. A serious flaw in the drama which Fleda's imagination creates is the disparity between her heroism and its provocation. Here Fleda's strong moral sense enters but then gives way under the demands of her drama. She sees things in their right proportions, asks the incriminating rhetorical question, then turns her back on the implied answer:

Nothing was really straight but to justify her little pensioned presence by her use; and now, won over as she was to heroism, she could see her use only as some high and delicate deed. She couldn't do anything at all, in short, unless she could do it with a kind of pride, and there would be nothing to be proud of in having arranged for poor Owen to get off easily. Nobody had a right to get off easily from pledges so deep, so sacred. How could Fleda doubt they had been tremendous when she knew so well what any pledge of her own would be?<sup>4</sup>

Fleda's strong moral position would seem to set her opposite from Mrs. Gereth. She is, however, "in her small way a spirit of the same family as Mrs. Gereth." (132) The difference between them is one of depth, of degrees of implication, and of involvement in life. A

great deal of attention is given to the portrayal of Fleda as a girl highly susceptible to flights of fancy. She is constantly dramatizing both herself and situations around her in an aura of melodrama. Very soon after their first meeting Fleda finds herself in league with Mrs. Gereth only, shortly afterward, to suffer qualms of conscience over it:

This young person had even from herself wonderful secrets of delicacy and pride: but she came as near distinctness as in the consideration of such matters she had ever come at all in now surrendering herself to the idea that it was of a pleasant effect and rather remarkable to be stupid without offense--of a pleasanter effect and more remarkable indeed than to be clever and horrid. Owen Gereth, at any rate, with his inches, his features, and his lapses, was neither of these latter things. She herself was prepared, if she should ever marry, to contribute all the cleverness, and she liked to think that her husband would be a force grateful for direction. She was in her small way a spirit of the same family as Mrs. Gereth. On that flushed and huddled Sunday a great matter occurred; her little life became aware of a singular quickening. Her meager past fell away from her like a garment of the wrong fashion, and as she came up to town on the Monday what she stared at in the suburban fields from the plane was a future full of things she particularly liked. (132)

This too sudden transformation of a young lady who at the beginning of the story has nothing to commend her but the peculiar circumstance that she "was dressed with an idea, though perhaps with not much else," (128) is certain to lead to moral equivocations which become difficult for the reader to unravel. Some of the problem

can be laid to the remarkable conjunction of two personalities which possess virtually the same temperament, one endowed with a great deal of experience in this world, and the other happily somewhat wary of the world's experience.

Mrs. Gereth has accumulated and possessed a collection of rare furnishings which fill her spacious home at Poynton. Her identity is completely absorbed by this priceless assemblage. The sure hand of the artist is evidenced in the impeccable taste which has achieved wonderful congruity among the rare pieces acquired from various periods of style and parts of the world. Mrs. Gereth is indeed a true artist. We get the impression, however, that all her discriminations and her sense of the exquisite have come to fruition and are now static. This impression is corrected later when Mrs. Gereth's artistic ingenuity is challenged. But it is in the phase of its stasis that the collection of objects traps poor Fleda. "She had commended Fleda's flair, and Fleda now gave herself up to satiety. Preoccupations and scruples fell away from her; she had never known a greater happiness than in the weeks she passed in this initiation." (140) The impossibility of Fleda's situation lies in the fact that her tastes are set in perilous opposition to her sense of moral values. This comes about by her

being ushered suddenly and by a woman whose temperament attracts her into the presence of this ready-made collection of priceless objects. Even her amorous interest in Owen, so qualified, so necessarily tolerant of a dullness contrary to her own nature, is incompatible with her self. Fleda is never able to dissociate in her conscience her qualified interest in Owen from her attraction to the "spoils." To inherit the spoils, though appreciation may be said to entitle her to possess them, would be to fill up the mould emptied by Mrs. Gereth's imminent departure. This would not be expressive of Fleda, but simply of Mrs. Gereth. It would amount to the misappropriation of Fleda's personality by her benefactor.

Mrs. Gereth on the other hand sees Fleda as part of the grand design to save the spoils. The obligation of friendship complicates the picture for Fleda. Mrs. Gereth is willing to sacrifice the identity of Fleda, an identity which includes a particularly vital moral sensibility, for the sake of her treasures. Fleda is saved only by circumstances beyond the control of Mrs. Gereth.

Before she begins to try to extricate herself from the "spoils" to which she has too easily surrendered, she lingeringly basks in their luxury, giving herself over irresponsibly to the designs of Mrs. Gereth. Not only does she identify herself with the treasures but also

with Mrs. Gereth's predicament:

What struck Fleda most in it was the high pride of her friend's taste, a fine arrogance, a sense of style which, however amused and amusing, never compromised or stooped. She felt indeed, as this lady had intimated to her that she would, both a respect and a compassion that she had not known before; the vision of the coming surrender filled her with an equal pain. To give it all up, to die to it--that thought ached in her breast. She herself could imagine clinging there with a closeness separate from dignity. To have created such a place was to have had dignity enough; when there was a question of defending it the fiercest attitude was the right one. After so intense a taking of possession, she too was to give it up; for she reflected that if Mrs. Gereth's remaining there would have offered her a sort of future--stretching away in safe years on the other side of the gulf--the advent of the others could only be, by the same law, a great vague menace, the ruffling of a still water. Such were the emotions of a hungry girl whose sensibility was almost as great as her opportunities for comparison had been small. The museums had done something for her, but nature had done more. (141)

Fleda's attachment to the spoils and her identification with Mrs. Gereth's dilemma render for a time at least her moral sensibility quite helpless. Instead of doing anything to save herself--she knows that nothing in her power can save Mrs. Gereth--she continues to dally in her dream while Mrs. Gereth, Owen, and Mona Brigstock each implicates her in the strife which gathers to a cataclysm at the end of the story. Even after she becomes aware of Mrs. Gereth's shrewdness in using her, of her own gradually dawning affections for Owen, and of Mona's suspicions of her as an agent for Mrs. Gereth, she persists

in dreaming:

The fact that from the moment one accepted his marrying one saw no very different course for Owen to take made her all the rest of that aching day find her best relief in the mercy of not having yet to face her hostess. She dodged and dreamed and romanced away the time; instead of inventing a remedy or a compromise, instead of preparing a plan by which a scandal might be averted, she gave herself, in her sensient solitude, up to a mere fairy tale, up to the very taste of the beautiful peace with which she would have filled the air if only something might have been that could never have been. (157)

This passage incriminates Fleda. It is not until she realizes how far her dream has carried her that she tries to recover. At this late date, however, the complications of her own making have a hold on her, and the moral stand she is forced to take may seem on the surface to be unrealistically rigid. Fleda must be seen as James shrewdly presents her: a young lady inexperienced, but far from naive, who is led by her illusions a long way on the pathway of self-deception. She is neither so naive nor so innocent as to have been incapable of foreseeing some inevitable consequences. A superficial reading of the story can easily make the moral struggle which follows her awakening seem prudish and at least unconsciously self-defeating. The reader may assent to Mrs. Gereth's brutal indictment:

"He's enough in love with me for anything!"  
 "For anything, apparently, except to act like a man and impose his reason and his will on your incredible folly. For anything except to put an

end, as any man worthy of the name would have put it, to your systematic, to your idiotic perversity. What are you, after all, my dear, I should like to know, that a gentleman who offers you what Owen offers should have to meet such wonderful exactions, to take such extraordinary precautions about your sweet little scruples?" (285)

In view of the responsibility which Fleda actually bears in the total complication, her struggle appears believably realistic and idealistic at once and indicates the depth of her earned insight, an insight exasperatingly slow in arriving but all the more illuminating when it comes.

Fleda's sensitivity to indisputable right and wrong makes of her an agent of confusion and misunderstanding regardless of whose side she is taking at the moment. Her own situation is complicated by her growing feelings toward Owen, attractions which are hardly compatible with his conspicuously unimaginative and immature behavior. She wishes to believe, of course, that Owen is maturing gradually as her association with him becomes increasingly personal, but in the end this also proves to be an illusion. As her blindness to the facts about Owen deepens, her necessity to take a moral position superior to her desires becomes more and more apparent. She knows the exact moment when her conduct will need to allow for an element of compromise, and she weakens to make the allowance. James makes explicit the steps by which Fleda almost imperceptibly shapes up her crisis, but all these

steps are taken under the guise of inexorable circumstance:

By the day's end it was clear to Fleda Vetch that, however Mona judged, the day had been determinant; whether or no she felt the charm, she felt the challenge: at an early moment Owen Gereth would be able to tell his mother the worst. Nevertheless, when the elder lady, at bedtime, coming in a dressing-gown and a high fever to the younger one's room, cried out, "She hates it; but what will she do?" Fleda pretended vagueness, played at obscurity and assented disingenuously to the proposition that they at least had a respite. The future was dark to her, but there was a silken thread she could clutch in the gloom--she would never give Owen away. He might give himself--he certainly would; but that was his own affair, and his blunders, his innocence, only added to the appeal he made to her. She would cover him, she would protect him, and beyond thinking her a cheerful inmate he would never guess her intentions, any more than, beyond thinking her clever enough for anything, his acute mother would discover it. From this dark hour, with Mrs. Gereth, there was a flaw at her frankness; her admirable friend continued to know everything she did; what was to remain unknown was the general motive. (145)

In the light of what is to happen references to "her intention" and "general motive" take on the character of ironic understatement. Fleda, like most of James's heroines, allows this compromise to become the issue of an intense moral struggle with herself.

From this point to the last developments of the story, a familiar pattern begins to emerge; Fleda unconsciously brings to pass that which she consciously avoids. She dramatizes her fears, filling out the form with details which belong to the most lurid melodrama but which fit the dreams of a young lady so smitten by the excitement

of adventure. She experiences the sensation of being at once a participant and a spectator. As participant she is filled with misgivings and self-incriminations; as spectator she is overwhelmed with eager anticipation:

It was a great relief to the girl at last to perceive that the dreadful move would really be made. What might happen if it shouldn't had been from the first indefinite. It was absurd to pretend that any violence was probable--a tussel, dishevelment, shrieks; yet Fleda had an imagination of a drama, a "great scene," a thing, somehow, of indignity and misery, of wounds inflicted and received, in which indeed, though Mrs. Gereth's presence, with movements and sounds, loomed large to her, Owen remained indistinct and on the whole unaggressive. He wouldn't be there with a cigarette in his teeth, very handsome and insolently quiet: that was only the way he would be in a novel, across whose interesting page some such figure, as she half closed her eyes, seemed to her to walk. Fleda had rather, and indeed with shame, a confused, pitying vision of Mrs. Gereth with her great scene left in a manner on her hands, Mrs. Gereth missing her effect and having to appear merely hot and injured and in the wrong. (165)

There are many such passages throughout the novel, two more of which ought to be quoted to show Fleda's real experience beside her fancied one. At the height of tension between Mrs. Gereth and Owen, the latter visits Fleda in London and goes shopping with her, after which they sit on a lawn in the park and converse. Fleda maintains the inhibitions she has always imposed upon herself in a strict rectitude necessary to keep her behavior in check and her moral sense inviolate. Her imagination proves to be beyond her restraint:

Fleda Vetch didn't suspect him at first of feeling differently to her, but only of feeling differently to Mona; yet she was not unconscious that this latter difference would have had something to do with his being on the grass beside her. She had read in novels about gentlemen who on the eve of marriage, winding up the past, had surrendered themselves for the occasion to the influence of a former tie; and there was something in Owen's behavior now, something in his very face, that suggested a resemblance to one of those gentlemen. But whom and what, in that case, would Fleda herself resemble? She wasn't a former tie, she wasn't any tie at all; she was only a deep little person for whom happiness was a kind of pearl-diving plunge. (172)

Fleda is sent for to visit Mrs. Gereth in the relatively small quarters which she has been forced to occupy, Owen's marriage looming in the near distance. She is overwhelmed at the sight of the "spoils" which her hostess has transferred from Poynton in violation of the will. This apparently fool-hardy gesture of Mrs. Gereth's reacts on Fleda to expose her weaknesses; her attachment to the spoils and her inclination to dramatize. "It had come to a question of 'sides,' Fleda thought, for the whole place was in battle array. In the soft lamplight, with one fine feature after another looming up into somber richness, it defied her not to pronounce it a triumph of taste. Her passion for beauty leaped back into life; and was not what now most appealed to it a certain gorgeous audacity?" (177)

After several notations bearing on Fleda's tendency to create in her imagination that which she eventually

brings to pass in reality, we get an explicit statement:

"This imagination of Fleda's was a faculty that easily embraced all the heights and depths and extremities of things; that made a single mouthful, in particular, of any tragic or desperate necessity." (223)

It is ironical that as Fleda begins to divest herself of the illusion, that is, shed the role of heroine, Mrs. Gereth commences to deck her out with all sorts of imaginary adornments:

Flede was not only a brilliant creature, but she heard herself commended in these days for new and strange attractions; she figured suddenly, in the queer conversations of Ricks, as a distinguished, almost as a dangerous beauty. That retouching of her hair and dress in which her friend had impulsively indulged on a first glimpse of her secret was by implication very frequently repeated. She had the sense not only of being advertised and offered, but of being counseled and enlightened in ways that she scarcely understood--arts obscure even to a poor girl who had had, in good society and motherless poverty, to look straight at realities and fill out blanks. (226)

Flede had, indeed, "looked at reality and filled in the blanks," and it is this futile excursion into the realm of fancy from which she must retrieve herself. She had discovered on opening Owen's first letter to her the gaping difference between her fantasies and plain, simple reality:

Flede had awaited his rejoinder in deep suspense; such was her imagination of the possibility of his having, as she tacitly phrased it, let himself go on paper that when it arrived she was at first

almost afraid to open it. There was indeed a distinct danger, for if he should take it into his head to write her love-letters the whole chance of aiding him would drop: she would have to return them, she would have to decline all further communication with him: it would be quite the end of the business. (223)

Actually, the letter had "presented itself as a production almost inspired in its simplicity. It was simple even for Owen, and she wondered what had given him the cue to be more so than usual." (223)

This experience had produced an effect which dates the beginning of Fleda's return to reality: "Then she saw how natures that are right just do the things that are right. . . . His very bareness called her attention to his virtue. . . ." (223)

Now, even while Mrs. Gereth is reinforcing the role of heroine, Fleda is shedding it in favor of the simple truth of her self. Even her love for Owen, sustained in reality by his confession of love for her, contains a strong element of self-deception which, when forced, gives way to stark confrontation. Here the renunciation of the dream is by no means willing at first. Fleda wails, "You simplify far too much. The tangle of life is much more intricate than you ever, I think, felt it to be. You slash into it . . . with a great pair of shears, you nip at it as if you were one of the Fates!" Mrs. Gereth counters: "I do simplify, doubtless, if to simplify is to fail to comprehend the insanity of a passion that

bewilders a young blockhead with bugaboo barriers, with hideous and monstrous sacrifices. I can only repeat that you're beyond me. Your perversity's a thing to howl over. . . . I don't know why you dress up so the fact that he's so disgustingly weak." The response achieves the final release from delusion: "Because I love him. It's because he's weak that he needs me." (289)

In this confession Fleda opens a way for putting herself at last in her right relation to the spoils. Her love for Owen has no ulterior motive, though the exercise of a kind of "heroism" in countering his weakness with her strength may not, as Mrs. Gereth's experience has proved, be entirely wholesome. The treasures at Poynton undergo what might be called a spiritual transmutation under the impact of Fleda's awakening:

Thus again she lived with them, and she thought of them without a question of any personal right. That they might have been, that they might still be hers, that they were perhaps already another's, were ideas that had too little to say to her. They were nobody's at all--too proud unlike base animals and humans, to be reducible to anything so narrow. It was Poynton that was theirs; they had simply recovered their own. The joy of that for them was the source of the strange peace in which the girl found herself floating. (298)

In this light Fleda is capable of observing from the inside Mrs. Gereth's out-of-the-world fixation: "Fleda, on her side, in her silence, observed how characteristically she looked at Maggie's possessions before

looking at Maggie's sister. The girl understood and at first had nothing to say; she was still dumb while Mrs. Gereth selected, with hesitation, a seat less distasteful than the one that happened to be nearest." (299) As Mrs. Gereth sits among Maggie's poor things, Fleda sees the achieved difference between them: a difference earned, a difference which represented the painful distance through which her bitter involvement had brought her:

"We're together, we're together," said Mrs. Gereth. She looked helpless as she sat there, her eyes, unseeingly enough, on a tall Dutch clock, old but rather poor, that Maggie had had as a wedding-gift and that eked out the bareness of the room. To Fleda, in the face of the event, it appeared that this was exactly what they were not: the last inch of common ground, the ground of their past intercourse, had fallen from under them. (300)

Fleda's moral recovery is sound and appropriately expansive and generous: "Yet what was still there was the grand style of her companion's treatment of her. Mrs. Gereth couldn't stand upon small questions, couldn't, in conduct, make small differences. 'You're magnificent!' her young friend exclaimed. 'There's a rare greatness in your generosity.'" (300)

Fleda offers a last justification for holding Owen off until she lost him: "'That he has done it, that he couldn't not do it shows how right I was.' It settled forever her attitude, and she spoke it as if for her own mind. . . ." (301)

Mrs. Gereth has refurnished Ricks with its original pieces, and though they are few and lacking in the ornateness which characterized the Poynton treasures, her ingenuity and taste are apparent. Fleda's reaction is in keeping with her spiritual response to mere physical possessions: "If there were more there would be too many to convey the impression in which half the beauty resides--the impression, somehow, of something dreamed and missed, something reduced, relinquished, resigned: the poetry, as it were, of something sensibly gone. . . . 'Ah, there's something here that will never be in the inventory!'" (308) Continuing, the transmutation is made explicit:

"Does it happen to be in your power to give it a name?" Mrs. Gereth's face showed the dim dawn of an amusement at finding herself seated at the feet of her pupil.  
 "I can give it a dozen. It's a kind of fourth dimension. It's a presence, a perfume, a touch. It's a soul, a story, a life. There's ever so much more here than you and I. We're in fact just three!"  
 "Oh, if you count the ghosts!"  
 "Of course I count the ghosts. It seems to me ghosts count double--for what they were and for what they are. Somehow there were no ghosts at Poynton," Fleda went on. "That was the only fault."  
 (308)

Mrs. Gereth's abiding hatred of Mona and her durable contempt for Owen's weakness makes of the bitter lessons little more than failures. Her plight is hardly tragic, but pathetic. She had talked of the Maltese cross. Fleda had marveled that even the cross "of the great Spanish

period, the existence and precarious accessibility of which Mrs. Gereth had heard of at Malta years before, by an odd and romantic chance--a clue followed through mazes of secrecy till the treasure was unearthed" had with all the other treasures been rescued from Poynton by subterfuge. She had exclaimed, "And even the Maltese cross? My dear child, you don't suppose I'd have sacrificed that! For what in the world would you have taken me?" (178) Her devotion to this objet d'art is, of course, for its materiality, not for its spiritual significance. Though she can talk of "ghosts" it is with no notion of emanations or matters for the soul. "The mind's eye could see Mrs. Gereth, indeed, only in her fit, colored air; it took all the light of her treasures to make her concrete and distinct." (230)

Fleda, at the request by mail from Owen, leaves for Poynton with the intent--influenced by Owen's suggestion--to bring away the cross as a memento of the atonement from her deluded self and her rehabilitation on a sound moral basis: "She was capable of feeling it as an hour of triumph, the triumph of everything in her recent life that had not held up its head. She moved there in thought--in the great rooms she knew; she should be able to say to herself that, for once at least, her possession was as complete as that of either of the others whom it

had filled only with bitterness." (316) Her anticipation of this strange and sacred visit to Poynton, bereft for the time of its young and wretched possessors, offers a poignant contrast to her former imaginative flights in which she conceived of herself as a personage of necessarily heroic action.

This last visitation to Poynton, almost in time to see the splendid old mansion with all of its treasures climb the night sky in smoke and flame, is made bearable for Fleda by the renewal of her sense of values at the crucial moment in her relationship with Mrs. Gereth and Owen. It is like James to signify Fleda's moral renaissance by her quest for the Maltese cross. The reader's mind may hark back to Fleda's parting with Mrs. Gereth on the occasion of their recognized defeat: "Fleda had selected a third-class compartment: she stood a moment looking into it and at a fat woman with a basket who had already taken possession." (296) It is difficult to avoid an association of this explicitly detailed picture with Daumier's masterpiece "Third-class Carriage," in which a quiet dignity reposes in the bearing of an elderly woman holding a basket and, seated beside her, a younger fat woman with a baby asleep on her lap. Evocations of abiding values to which Fleda has returned give added richness to James's own pictorial art.

To summarize, the moral complications are largely of Fleeda's own making. The extraordinary attraction of the "spoils" together with their sponsor's aggressive, almost predatory, manipulations, conspire with Fleeda's strong tendency to create a world of fantasy into which she enters and is for a time lost. She possesses the remarkable ability to see her actions, though not her dreams, in relation to the moral demands which her strong character insists on honoring, but even in her insistence there is a coloring of equivocation. Her involvement as counselor and also as participant is in itself a morally untenable position. She knows this, of course, and her protest is always in these terms. Her knowledge of all this makes of her an unusually responsible agent, and her effective agency intensifies her own dilemma. When she realizes that Mrs. Gereth has worked against her by working for her, she sees herself as the creator of her own woes. This long-delayed understanding of her self, though it separates her from the possibilities of one kind of happiness, restores her fine sense of values into the world of reality where she may bring them to bear in a life of substance in place of a life of dreams.

## CHAPTER V

WASHINGTON SQUARE

The present study has stressed James's disdain for the portrayal of types. In Washington Square he draws from social and fictional categories and individuates two characters by turning their representational characteristics into idiosyncratic exaggerations. The result is the satirical treatment of the types from which these persons derive and a rendering of pathos, if not tragedy, in the presentation of a third character, the victim. The primary achievement is the creation of character which stands on its own individuality and fulfills itself on its own terms. A secondary result is social satire, always slyly lurking in the background and controlling the tone with which the narrative voice speaks. But the satire subserves the primary purpose and, though subtly pervasive, allows the development of an experience eminently humane, serious, and moving. The element of comedy--served by satire--gives way early in the story as the leading character comes into her own.

An analysis of Washington Square is essentially the analysis of character. The task is made unusually difficult by the extraordinarily close relationship of tone

to character. Nothing else in James's writings makes so consistent use of double entendre. Separating double meanings is to risk laboring the obvious. In the case of Washington Square there is always the public view, the appearances, acting as one with reality.

Much of the truth of this novel lies in what is not said. The critical task of saying it is by its very nature presumptuous. Yet problems of motivation--again, motive is character--justify an examination of the three principal contestants in a pattern of conflicting wishes. Wish-fulfillment in a triangular conflict is not uncommon in the James canon. In Washington Square the pattern is stripped down to the direct and determined assertion of personality demands, all unrealistic and self-deluding. The moral crisis arising from conflicting wishes produces a just--and unmerciful--judgment of moral character on Doctor Sloper, his sister, Mrs. Penniman, and his daughter, Catherine. The latter's apparent lack of personality is a void inviting the occupation of Doctor Sloper's cold empiricism and Mrs. Penniman's romancing. Catherine's personality comes into its own, and this unanticipated phenomenon becomes the means of revealing the three personalities for what they really are.

Doctor Sloper and Mrs. Penniman (Aunt Lavinia) create by the expression of their idiosyncratic natures

the environment, indeed the very circumstances, of Catherine's experience. Failure to read into the Doctor's machinations a dark piece of villainy is a tribute to the success with which James shrewdly combines elements of vice and virtue so that all appears virtue. The Doctor possesses knowledge of evil and practices it under the guise of informed good judgment and discernment. The attitude of superiority with which he exercises this judgment is taken by many readers to be well founded. In his estimate of Morris Townsend he is, after all, right, and an honest impulse to save his daughter from such a fate falls in readily with the sympathy of the reader. It will be seen as the following analysis proceeds that, occurring in the context of event, the attributes which under ordinary circumstances would appear to signify strength of character are really shameful weaknesses. The reader must learn not to take the narrator's word for it. As the father tells the daughter in the "watershed" moment of the story, he is not a very good man. Strange to say, evidence is required to this effect to convince many readers that Doctor Sloper's severely uncompromising insistence on being right covers far more serious weaknesses.

The tone the narrator takes throughout his dealings with Doctor Sloper is slyly compromising and playfully

sarcastic. The purposes of irony are served by his being treated by the narrator in the same tone as that in which Doctor Sloper addresses his daughter. As the Doctor himself says to Catherine: "Don't undervalue irony; it is often of great use. It is not, however, always necessary, and I will show you how gracefully I can lay it aside."<sup>1</sup>

Doctor Sloper is a "scholarly doctor," one of the "distinguished members of the medical profession" who combine the "practical" with the "scientific." He is handsome and proud, and above all clever--at least the New York society among which he moves regards him as "a clever man; and this is really the reason why Doctor Sloper had become a local celebrity." (1) Little of his cleverness gets into the novel. His introduction to the reader does, in fact, raise questions about this highly-rated attribute as well as about his competence and honesty:

He was very witty, and he passed in the best society of New York for a man of the world--which, indeed, he was, in a very sufficient degree. I hasten to add, to anticipate possible misconception, that he was not the least of a charlatan. He was a thoroughly honest man--honest in a degree of which he had perhaps lacked the opportunity to give the complete measure. . . . (2)

His pride stems in part from the relative ease with which he has built his selective clientele. His wife had been rich, and her "affiliation to the 'best people'" brought him a good many of those patients whose symptoms

are, if not more interesting in themselves than those of the lower orders, at least more consistently displayed."

(3) But his pride receives a series of blows from which it never truly recovers, though the Doctor makes pretenses to having recovered. His misfortunes come early in his career:

His first child, a little boy of extraordinary promise, as the Doctor, who was not addicted to easy enthusiasm, firmly believed, died at three years of age, in spite of everything that the mother's tenderness and the father's science could invent to save him. Two years later Mrs. Sloper gave birth to a second infant--an infant of a sex which rendered the poor child, to the Doctor's sense, an inadequate substitute for his lamented first-born, of whom he had promised himself to make an admirable man. The little girl was a disappointment; but this was not the worst. A week after her birth the young mother, who, as the phrase is, had been doing well, suddenly betrayed alarming symptoms, and before another week had elapsed Austin Sloper was a widower. (3)

Doctor Sloper's story from this beginning to the end of his life is one of pride irreparably damaged. Try as he will to assuage himself, he suffers from unrequited self-love--his failure to reproduce himself in a male offspring. Egocentricity, of which his pride is an expression, is satisfied in part by the exercise of certain paternal prerogatives which will eventually yield amusement. In the meantime, "though she was not what he had desired, he posed to himself to make the best of her. He had on hand a stock of unexpended authority, by which the child, in its early years, largely profited." He

would "have liked to be proud of his daughter; but there was nothing to be proud of in poor Catherine. There was nothing, of course, to be ashamed of; but this was not enough for the Doctor, who was a proud man, and who would have enjoyed being able to think of his daughter as an unusual girl." (8) Doctor Sloper never thinks of Catherine except in terms of her effect on him; it is for his pleasure or its opposite that she exists. He has an abhorrence for the "vulgar," (10) and the commonplace verges on the vulgar: "He had moments of irritation at having produced a commonplace child. . . . He was naturally slow in making this discovery himself, and it was not till Catherine had become a young lady grown that he regarded the matter as settled." (8) Reference to his being "naturally slow" carries scathing sarcasm; the Doctor takes inordinate pride in his realistic view of things. The idiosyncratic exaggeration is his boast of a grasp of reality. He makes a show of it.

Doctor Sloper's realistic approach to experience is opposed to his sister Lavinia's (Mrs. Penniman) temperament. She is an extreme romanticist. Left a widow at the death of her clergyman husband, she is tolerated in the Doctor's home where she presumes to be responsible for Catherine's rearing and education. The Doctor's diagnostics and prognostics spill over from his profession

into his relations with his sister and daughter. He foresees the consequences of Lavinia's influence in Catherine's life. In all instances but one he is right, and always ignorant of its significance. This prevision is only the first in a series of forecasts, which events almost monotonously prove true:

"When Catherine is about seventeen," he said to himself, "Lavinia will try and persuade her that some young man with a mustache is in love with her. It will be quite untrue; no young man, with a mustache or without, will ever be in love with Catherine. But Lavinia will take it up, and talk to her about it; perhaps, even, if her taste for clandestine operations doesn't prevail with her, she will talk to me about it. Catherine won't see it, and won't believe it, fortunately for her peace of mind; poor Catherine isn't romantic." (6-7)

It is noted that besides being a realist "the Doctor was a philosopher, but I would not have answered for his philosophy if the poor girl had proved a sickly and suffering person." (9) As it is, Catherine is healthy and robust. ". . . for fear of being unjust to her, he did his duty with exemplary zeal. . . . He satisfied himself that he had expected nothing, though, indeed, with a certain oddity of reasoning. 'I expect nothing . . . so that, if she gives me a surprise, it will all be clear gain. If she doesn't, it will be no loss.'" (8-9)

But this realist philosopher, with all his exemplary zeal, and with his grasp of the externals in which his pride is vested, is at best superficial, a devotee of

outward form. His response to Catherine wears the garb of filial attachment, underneath which his true feelings are only partially concealed:

You would have surprised him if you had told him so; but it is a literal fact that he almost never addressed his daughter save in the ironical form. Whenever he addressed her he gave her pleasure; but she had to cut her pleasure out of the piece, as it were. There were portions left over, light remnants and snippets of irony, which she never knew what to do with, which seemed too delicate for her own use; and yet Catherine, lamenting the limitations of her understanding, felt that they were too valuable to waste, and had a belief that if they passed over her head they yet contributed to the general sum of human wisdom. (17)

When Morris Townsend, a ne'er-do-well, a vulgar adventurer of about thirty, enters Catherine's life, the Doctor accurately sees the nature of the intrigue. Catherine is now twenty-two. Doctor Sloper is never so alarmed by possibilities of a marriage proposal and acceptance that he cannot find amusement in them. He assures himself he is always, finally, in control. He hopes for and expects marriage for Catherine, but Townsend, handsome and suave, besides possessing "powers of invention," (31) is too "knowing" (32) to be attracted to Catherine for honest and forthright reasons. The inheritance comes into the picture as a hazard. Doctor Sloper, who "prided himself on being something of a physiognomist," (31) sees the obvious. He has no ambition for Catherine beyond the commonplace: "The fortune she would

inherit struck him as a very sufficient provision for two reasonable persons, and if a penniless swain who could give a good account of himself should enter the lists, he should be judged quite upon his personal merits." (30) The Doctor is "very curious to see whether Catherine might really be loved for her moral worth." (31) But his interests are never more than amused curiosity.

The Doctor's other sister, Mrs. Almond, a happy medium between the extremes of her brother and sister, chides him for his aloof, amused response to Catherine's emotional involvement with Townsend:

"Physically," he said, "he's uncommonly well set up. As an anatomist, it is really a pleasure to me to see such a beautiful structure; although, if people were all like him, I suppose there would be very little need for doctors."

"Don't you see anything in people but their bones?" Mrs. Almond rejoined. "What do you think of him as a father?"

"As a father? Thank Heaven, I am not his father!"

"No; but you are Catherine's. Lavinia tells me she is in love."

"She must get over it. He is not a gentleman." (33)

His appraisal, the truth of which is easily apparent in Townsend's behavior, is represented by the Doctor as a matter for an experienced specialist to judge: "What I tell you is the result of thirty years of observation; and in order to be able to form that judgment in a single evening, I have had to spend a lifetime in study." (33)

With all the assurance with which the Doctor makes his judgment and forecasts developments, he is taken by surprise when Catherine asserts herself against his will. Realist though he is, he is incapable of allowing for the most realistic eventuality--the repudiation of his stubborn authority. Catherine has fallen in love with Morris Townsend and will counter her father's advice and even his stern counsel by continuing to see her suitor. He tells Mrs. Almond, amusedly: "She's going to stick, by jove! she's going to stick." (92) His superiority shines, much to the annoyance of his intelligent and sensible sister, Mrs. Almond:

"And shall you not relent?"

"Shall a geometrical proposition relent? I am not so superficial."

"Doesn't geometry treat of surfaces?" asked Mrs. Almond, who, as we know, was clever, smiling.

"Yes, but it treats of them profoundly. Catherine and her young man are my surfaces; I have taken their measure."

"You speak as if it surprised you."

"It is immense; there will be a great deal to observe."

"You are shockingly cold-blooded!" said Mrs. Almond.

"I need to be, with all this hot blood about me. Young Townsend, indeed, is cool; I must allow him that merit." (93)

Mrs. Almond's warmth and love are superior to the Doctor's vaunted scientific realism. She pretends to no

insight into Morris Townsend, but she proves to see deeper into Catherine than the poor girl's father is apparently able to do:

"I can't judge him," Mrs. Almond answered; "but I am not at all surprised at Catherine."

"I confess I am a little; she must have been so deucedly divided and bothered."

"Say it amuses you outright. I don't see why it should be such a joke that your daughter adores you."

"It is the point where the adoration stops that I find it interesting to fix."

"It stops where the other sentiment begins."

"Not at all; that would be simple enough. The two things are extremely mixed up, and the mixture is extremely odd. It will produce some third element, and that's what I'm waiting to see. I want with suspense--with positive excitement; and that is a sort of emotion that I didn't suppose Catherine would ever provide for me. I am really very much obliged to her." (93)

Doctor Sloper is determined to find more in Catherine for himself than irritation: "He knew perfectly well what he was about, and this was part of a plan." He takes advantage of Catherine's timidity by leaving the burden of discussing Townsend entirely to her. His strategy is cold silence, making her approach to the subject more fearsome for her: "He was interested, as we know, in seeing how, if she were left to herself, she would 'stick.'" (98)

When Catherine shows her determination to hold on

to Townsend, to whom she becomes engaged, and declares to her father, "But if I don't obey you, I ought not to live with you--to enjoy your kindness and protection," the Doctor is taken by surprise: "This striking argument gave the Doctor a sudden sense of having underestimated his daughter; it seemed even more than worthy of a young woman who had revealed the quality of unaggressive obstinacy. But it displeased him--displeased him deeply, and he signified as much." (100)

He takes her to Europe with the avowed intention of remaining six months. The time is extended to a year. During this time no perceptible change takes place in Catherine. Her adamant, silent, inexpressive behavior breaks through her father's self-possessed exterior and, in a crucial scene one evening in the Alps, he almost threatens her with physical harm. He can no longer pretend perfect intelligence and wisdom and control: "You try my patience . . . and you ought to know what I am. I am not a very good man. Though I am very smooth externally, at bottom I am very passionate; and I assure you I can be very hard." (107) Catherine has the courage to ask:

"Why has it taken you so suddenly?"

"It has not taken me suddenly. I have been raging inwardly for the last six months. But just now this seemed a good place to flare out. It's so quiet, and we are alone."

"Yes, it's very quiet," said Catherine, vaguely looking about her. "Won't you come back to the carriage?"

"In a moment. Do you mean that in all this time you have not yielded an inch?"

"I would if I could, father; but I can't."

"The Doctor looked round him too. "Should you like to be left in such a place as this, to starve?"

"What do you mean?" cried the girl.

"That will be your fate--that's how he will leave you." (107)

On returning from Europe the Doctor discusses Catherine with Mrs. Almond. He observes that his daughter had remained detached from all the sights covered by the tours and has come back unchanged. Mrs. Almond, who, without realistic, philosophic, scientific attitudes and knowledge and years of scholarly observation, can sense Catherine's situation, sympathizes: "How could she notice? She had other things to think of; they are never for an instant out of her mind. She touches me very much." (120)

His response reveals a great deal about Doctor Sloper:

"She would touch me if she didn't irritate me. That's the effect she has upon me now. I have tried everything upon her; I really have been quite merciless. But it is of no use whatever; she is absolutely glued. I have passed, in consequence, into the exasperated stage. At first I had a good deal of a certain genial curiosity about it; I wanted to see if she really would stick. But, good Lord, one's curiosity is satisfied! I see she is capable of it, and now she can let go." (120)

But there remained a few satisfactions for the

Doctor. When Morris leaves her, Catherine is agonized by the cruel suddenness with which she is left alone to come to understanding. Her father observes her distress, though he is oblivious to her need:

When it had grown dark, Catherine went to the window and looked out; she stood there for half an hour, on the mere chance that he would come up the steps. At last she turned away, for she saw her father come in. He had seen her at the window looking out, and he stopped a moment at the bottom of the white steps, and gravely, with an air of exaggerated courtesy, lifted his hat to her. The gesture was so incongruous to the condition she was in, this stately tribute of respect to a poor girl despised and forsaken was so out of place, that the thing gave her a kind of horror, and she hurried away to her room. It seemed to her that she had given Morris up. (133)

It becomes apparent shortly that estrangement has taken place:

"The thing has happened--the scoundrel has backed out!"

"Never!" cried Mrs. Penniman, who had bethought herself what she should say to Catherine, but was not provided with a line of defence against her brother, so that indignant negation was the only weapon in her hands.

"He has begged for a reprieve, then, if you like that better!"

"It seems to make you very happy that your daughter's affections have been trifled with."

"It does," said the Doctor; "for I had foretold it! It's a great pleasure to be in the right."

"Your pleasures make one shudder!" his sister exclaimed. (135-36)

Early in Catherine's attachment to Townsend her

father had--in the manner of deprecating her abilities--noted that she "will never have the salt of malice in her character." (6) The weeks following Townsend's disappearance are dark and terrible for Catherine, but it is her nature to bear the loss silently. It is not from malice that she avoids communication with her father. At last his determination to remain aloof breaks down; he is overcome with curiosity. He complains: "It doesn't seem to me that you are treating me just now with all the consideration I deserve . . ." (143) Unintentionally, Catherine makes his effort difficult. Finally she lies to him:

"I have asked him to leave New York, and he has gone away for a long time."

The Doctor was both puzzled and disappointed, but he solved his perplexity by saying to himself that his daughter simply misrepresented--justifiably, if one would, but nevertheless, misrepresented--the facts; and he eased off his disappointment, which was that of a man losing a chance for a little triumph that he had rather counted on, by a few words that he uttered aloud.

"How does he take his dismissal?"

"I don't know!" said Catherine, less ingeniously than she had hitherto spoken.

"You mean you don't care? You are rather cruel, after encouraging him and playing with him for so long!"

The Doctor had his revenge, after all. (144)

He has, indeed, his revenge, but his punishment is in being left on the outside, knowing only what the external can reveal. His are the limitations of a severly empirical

philosophy. He cannot even know that Catherine has suffered and endured it in solitude:

We know that she had been deeply and incurably wounded, but the Doctor had no means of knowing it. He was certainly curious about it, and would have given a good deal to discover the exact truth; but it was his punishment that he never knew--his punishment, I mean, for the abuse of sarcasm in his relations with his daughter. There was a good deal of effective sarcasm in her keeping him in the dark, and the rest of the world conspired with her, in this sense, to be sarcastic. (144-45)

The Doctor theorizes: "The marriage would have been an abominable one, and the girl had had a blessed escape. She was not to be pitied for that, and to pretend to condole with her would have been to make concessions to the idea that she had ever had a right to think of Morris." (145) His speculations are close to the facts, though to his death he remains unaware of it:

"I am by no means sure she has got rid of him. . . . There is not the smallest probability that, after having been as obstinate as a mule for two years, she suddenly became amenable to reason. It is infinitely more probable that he got rid of her." To Mrs. Almond's appeal that "her poor little heart is grievously bruised," (146) Doctor Sloper's retort is that of the detached diagnostician, yet with a touch of the petulant, even the vindictive:

"Handling bruises, and even dropping tears on them, doesn't make them any better! My business is to see she gets no more knocks, and that I shall

carefully attend to. But I don't at all recognize your description of Catherine. She doesn't strike me in the least as a young woman going about in search of a moral poultice. In fact, she seems to me much better than while the fellow was hanging about. She is perfectly comfortable and blooming; she eats and sleeps, takes her usual exercise, and overloads herself, as usual, with finery. She is always knitting some purse or embroidering some handkerchief, and it seems to me she turns these articles out about as fast as ever. She hasn't much to say; but when had she anything to say? She had her little dance, and now she is sitting down to rest. I suspect that, on the whole, she enjoys it." (146)

Doctor Sloper, then, regards Catherine as a blotch on the image he has made of himself for himself. He meddles in her life for the sake of self-perpetuation, a self which is nothing more than the role into which a particular society, in its superficial expressions, has cast him. His embarrassment over Catherine, concealed under the show of dispassionate understanding and insight, is a comment on the high regard with which he holds the image. His true self is revealed to Catherine in secret, in a single gesture of confession.

Even his prognosticated death is a planned pretense. He had told Catherine: "But some day I shall take a bad cold, and then it will not matter much what any one hopes. That will be the manner of my exit . . ." (150) It happens as he had foreseen:

He came home with an ominous chill, and on the morrow he was seriously ill. "It is congestion of the

lungs," he said to Catherine; "I shall need very good nursing. It will make no difference, for I shall not recover; but I wish everything to be done, to the smallest detail, as if I should. I hate an ill-conducted sick-room, and you will be so good as to nurse me, on the hypothesis that I shall get well." He told her which of his fellow-physicians to send for, and gave her a multitude of minute directions; it was quite on the optimistic hypothesis that she nursed him. But he had never been wrong in his life, and he was not wrong now. (152)

Mrs. Penniman, "whom every one knew to be a woman of powerful imagination," (24) provides the only straight and sustained humor in the novel, and she provides it abundantly, howbeit unwittingly and to destructive ends. To call her a fool, as Mark Van Doren does, is to take her too seriously. She is not wise enough to qualify for fool. James lets everyone--characters in the novel and reader--see through her easily. Almost always she annoys her brother; Catherine is apparently indifferent to her. Mrs. Penniman plays her role--the real and the imaginary one--requiring a minimum of attention. She is satisfied to be her own audience; her world of fantasy is too private and erratic to be shared. Though the direct means of so sinister a force in the life of her niece, Aunt Lavinia herself is irresponsible and inconsequential. There is no ambiguity or complexity in her character, and her motives are sometimes freely admitted--the satisfactions of her own imagination. The quality of her imagination is definitively set down early in the story as though it is one of the necessary conditions of the plot; it turns out to be so:

Mrs. Penniman was a tall, thin, fair, rather faded woman, with a perfectly amiable disposition, a high standard of gentility, a taste for light literature, and a certain foolish indirectness and obliquity of character. She was romantic; she was sentimental; she had a passion for little secrets and mysteries --a very innocent passion, for her secrets had hitherto always been as unpractical as addled eggs. She was not absolutely veracious; but this defect was of no great consequence, for she had never had anything to conceal. She would have liked to have a lover, and to correspond with him under an assumed name, in letters left at a shop. I am bound to say that her imagination never carried the intimacy further than this. (6)

Mrs. Penniman is, in fact, a parody of the romantic imagination. Morris Townsend perceptively calls it "mock romanticism." (35) She finds an outlet for its expression in manipulating the affair of Catherine and Townsend. The real importance of her part as meddler in the actual development and eventual failure of the romance is dubious. Catherine assigns crucial importance to it. But Mrs. Penniman's purpose--identification with romantic situations--is most satisfyingly achieved. She is incapable of being quelled or curbed by request, command, threat, or insult. The protestations of her brother, for selfish reasons, and of Catherine, for legitimate ones, leave her undaunted. Her imagination turns obstacles into the very stuff of romance, all nebulous, all excitement for excitement's sake, and all free from bothersome moral reference.

She identifies herself alternately with each party in the affair, sometimes with alarming completeness: "'I may almost say I have lived with him,' [Morris Townsend]

Mrs. Penniman proceeded, while Catherine stared." (110) Townsend is interesting to her because he "was an object on which she found that her imagination could exercise itself indefinitely." (20) Townsend, as is abundantly clear to Doctor Sloper and the reader, is a scheming, shiftless parasite, however externally cultivated. But on her way to becoming, with him, the maligned and rejected lover, she sees him as her ideal:

Morris Townsend had struck her as a young man of great force of character, and of remarkable powers of satire --a keen, resolute, brilliant nature, with which one must exercise a great deal of tact. She said to herself that he was "imperious," and she liked the word and the idea. She was not the least jealous of her niece, and she had been perfectly happy with Mr. Penniman, but in the bottom of her heart she permitted herself the observation, "That's the sort of husband I should have had!" He was certainly much more imperious--she ended by calling it imperial--than Mr. Penniman. (25)

In the beginning of the association, Mrs. Penniman plays Catherine's part. Her sister, Mrs. Almond, is perplexed: "Lavinia is most excited; I don't understand it. It's not, after all, Lavinia that the young man is supposed to have designs upon. She is very peculiar." (27) Though Townsend comes "ostensibly for both ladies," his motives are transparent to the Doctor, who needs no counsel from his sister. Nevertheless, she pretends there is a necessity for secretiveness: "There was to be no crudity in Mrs. Penniman's treatment of the situation; she had become as uncommunicative as Catherine herself. She was tasting of the sweets of

concealment; she had taken up the line of mystery." (35)

Sometimes her imagination edges Catherine out of the scene entirely, leaving herself and her hero alone together:

Mrs. Penniman delighted of all things in a drama, and she flattered herself that a drama would now be enacted. Combining as she did the zeal of the prompter with the impatience of the spectator, she had long since done her utmost to pull up the curtain. She, too, expected to figure in the performance--to be the confidante, the Chorus, to speak the epilogue. It may even be said that there were times when she lost sight altogether of the modest heroine of the play in the contemplation of certain great scenes which would naturally occur between the hero and herself. (44)

Active as she is in pandering, she is regarded by Catherine as of no help at all. She "took too much satisfaction in the sentimental shadows of this little drama to have, for the moment, any great interest in dissipating them. She wished the plot to thicken, and the advice she gave her niece tended, in her own imagination, to produce this result." (68)

Mrs. Penniman's offense, though committed with no evil intent, is her use of Catherine's affections to serve her own romantic dreams. Morris Townsend is a cad, and his appeal is superficial. His devices are transparent. In the face of Catherine's plainness and simplicity his motives are self-seeking and entirely materialistic. His effort to make a convenience of her is the desperate connivance of a fly-by-night. Townsend's cheap trick to win Catherine's inheritance lends itself perfectly to Mrs. Penniman's fantasies. Yet

he feels only contempt for her wild daydreams: "It would have gratified him to tell her that she was a fantastic old woman . . ." (70) But for his cause no scruple must stand in the way. Before intrigue has played out, whatever sense of honor of which Mrs. Penniman had been capable is inactivated: "In the first place, Morris must get the money, and she would help him to it. In the second, it was plain it would never come to him, and it would be a grievous pity he should marry without it--a young man who might so easily find something better." (124)

By the time Catherine and her father have returned from Europe, it is apparent that Mrs. Penniman can be interested in the match only because it feeds her fantasy. She is not concerned for Catherine any more than is Doctor Sloper. And, like her brother, she is incapable of learning, of changing her attitude toward Catherine in light of Catherine's surprising self-assertion. At the close of the novel Mrs. Penniman is still seeking fulfillment of her romantic wishes through her niece. While Catherine is in the depth of grief over the loss of Morris, Mrs. Penniman insists on staying in the act: "Your pride is my pride, and your susceptibilities are mine. I see your side perfectly, but I also . . . see the situation as a whole!" (137)

Catherine may be seen as caught between the frustrated and resigned aspirations of her father and the frustrated but romantically determined fantasies of her aunt.

The meddling of both--the sour irony of the Doctor and the sentimental intrigue of Mrs. Penniman--make of Catherine a pawn, a counter, played by both for selfish reasons.

The emptiness of Catherine's personality--the void filled by the wishful maneuvers of her frustrated father and aunt--is the inexpressiveness for which the failure of love is responsible. She is not loved--she is only used. We wonder at Mark Van Doren's observation that Catherine is witty. Pursuing the point James makes that Doctor Sloper is witty, he adds: "It was ironic of James not to tell us that Catherine was witty; he expected us to discover it, as with some difficulty we do. But once we do, the entire outline of the novel becomes manifest. It is a firm outline, finely conceived. James, even in his latest masterpieces, was never to do anything better."<sup>2</sup> If meaning in the story is contingent upon the reader's discovery that Catherine is witty, the story is meaningless. She is, in fact, almost totally inexpressive. The narrator takes pains to make it clear:

Catherine was decidedly not clever; she was not quick with her book, nor, indeed, with anything else. She was not abnormally deficient, and she mustered learning enough to acquit herself respectably in conversation with her contemporaries--among whom it must be avowed, however, that she occupied a secondary place. (7)

She is said to possess "a plain, dull, gentle countenance." She is "extremely modest," having "no desire to shine, and on most social occasions, as they are called, you would

have found her lurking in the background." (7) She compensates for her plainness by exercising

a lively taste for dress: a lively taste is quite the expression to use. I feel as if I ought to write it very small, her judgment in this matter was by no means infallible; it was liable to confusions and embarrassments. Her great indulgence of it was really the desire of a rather inarticulate nature to manifest itself; she sought to be eloquent in her garments, and to make up for her diffidence of speech by a fine frankness of costume. But if she expressed herself in her clothes, it is certain that people were not to blame for not thinking her a witty person. (9-10)

The issue made of Doctor Sloper's wit and Catherine's lack of it develops into irony enough without needing the extra claim that Catherine is either clever or witty.

Pains are taken to establish Catherine as apparently irresponsible only because she is inarticulate:

At this time she seemed not only incapable of giving surprises; it was almost a question whether she could have received one--she was so quiet and irresponsible. People who expressed themselves roughly called her stolid. But she was irresponsible because she was shy, uncomfortably, painfully shy. This was not always understood, and she sometimes produced an impression of insensibility. In reality, she was the softest creature in the world. (9)

She is, indeed, "the softest creature in the world," by which is meant that for all her inexpressiveness she is deeply impressionable, though it must be added she is also indiscriminating. Her father impresses her deeply; she mistakes his egocentric authoritarianism and even his ironic tone as manifestations of love. His cold pretenses impress her as "the sum of human wisdom," as evidences of brilliance and fine dignity, though she is reverentially mystified by

his manner toward her. When "love" comes into her life through the advent of Morris Townsend, we are told she is happy; we see nothing of it in her behavior, and we never hear her express it. She does not, in fact, discriminate between the love she assumes her father holds for her and the attention Townsend pays her. They are merely expressed differently. She experiences new feelings, but their very nature calls for inarticulate inward devotion expressive only to herself:

The girl was very happy. She knew not as yet what would come of it; but the present had suddenly grown rich and solemn. If she had been told she was in love, she would have been a good deal surprised; for she had an idea that love was an eager and exacting passion, and her own heart was filled in these days with the impulse of self-effacement and sacrifice. \* \* \* Love demands certain things as a right; but Catherine had no sense of her rights; she had only a consciousness of immense and unexpected favors. Her very gratitude for these things had hushed itself; for it seemed to her that there would be something of impudence in making a festival of her secret. (34-35)

When her father's self-centered objections begin to complicate her life, she "said nothing, either tacitly or explicitly, and as she was never very talkative, there was now no especial eloquence in her reserve." (66) Her response to her father's lightly contemptuous reaction to her engagement is matter-of-fact and completely dispassionate because his charges against Townsend seem to her plainly in error. Doctor Sloper has, like Townsend, used the self-pity device in order to persuade her. Because he will not consent to

receiving Townsend as a son-in-law, he testily speculates that the marriage will impatiently await his death:

"Your engagement will have one delightful effect upon you; it will make you extremely impatient for that event."

Catherine stood staring, and the Doctor enjoyed the point he had made. It came to Catherine with the force--or rather with the vague impressiveness--of a logical axiom which it was not in her province to controvert; and yet, though it was a scientific truth, she felt wholly unable to accept it.

"I would rather not marry, if that were true," she said.

"Give me a proof of it, then; for it is beyond a question that by engaging yourself to Morris Townsend you simply wait for my death."

She turned away, feeling sick and faint; and the Doctor went on: "And if you wait for it with impatience, judge, if you please, what his eagerness will be."

Catherine turned it over--her father's words had such an authority for her that her very thoughts were capable of obeying him. There was a dreadful ugliness in it, which seemed to glare at her through the interposing medium of her own feebler reason. Suddenly, however, she had an inspiration--she almost knew it to be an inspiration.

"If I don't marry before your death, I will not after," she said. (82)

Believing Townsend to be sincerely interested in her for her own sake, Catherine sees herself as the cause of unhappiness in both her father and her lover. Townsend takes advantage of her simple trust in the intentions of the two who mean everything to her. He, like Doctor Sloper, pretends to be injured: "He told her that she had been very cruel, and had made him very unhappy; and Catherine felt

acutely the difficulty of her destiny, which forced her to give pain in such opposite quarters." She meets her dilemma with the first hint of verbal protest, though again the reader gets it through the narrator instead of directly from Catherine: "But she wished that, instead of reproaches, however tender, he would give her help; he was certainly wise enough and clever enough to invent some issue from their troubles. She expressed this belief, and Morris received the assurance as if he thought it natural . . ." (88)

There have been "dissemblances" from the first, petty enough to accentuate her forthright honesty. Her father's proposal to take her to Europe cannot, of course, dissuade her from her courtship. She wants to feel that by consenting to go, she is fulfilling an obligation and thereby freeing herself to see her lover at will and with a clear conscience. Her reasoning reveals the complexity of which her feelings have become capable and a determination with which she intends to assert herself:

Her father's displeasure had cost the girl, as we know, a great deal of deep-welling sorrow--sorrow of the purest and most generous kind, without a touch of resentment or rancor; but for the first time, after he had dismissed with such contemptuous brevity her apology for being a charge upon him, there was a spark of anger in her grief. She had felt his contempt; it had scorched her; that speech about her bad taste had made her ears burn for three days. During this period she was less considerate; she had an idea--a rather vague one, but it was agreeable to her sense of injury--that now she was absolved from penance, and might do what she chose. She chose to write to Morris Townsend to meet her in the Square

and take her to walk about the town. If she were going to Europe out of respect to her father, she might at least give herself this satisfaction. She felt in every way at present more free and more resolute; there was a force that urged her. Now at last, completely and unreservedly, her passion possessed her. (101)

Catherine's "passionate" sense of freedom from her father's domination does not mean, however, that she is less respectful of his "greatness." Immediately after the crisis in the Alps she reflects on the frightening scene and exercises the presence of mind to conclude that his referring to himself as "not a very good man" could certainly not be taken literally:

The strangest part of it was that he had said he was not a good man; Catherine wondered a good deal what he had meant by that. The statement failed to appeal to her credence, and it was not grateful to any resentment that she entertained. Even in the utmost bitterness that she might feel, it would give her no satisfaction to think him less complete. Such a saying as that was a part of his great subtlety--men so clever as he might say anything and mean anything; and as to his being hard, that surely, in a man, was a virtue. (108)

Even after the European trip when she faces a truth hitherto unimaginable--"He is not very fond of me"--(117) she imputes neither evil nor limitation to her father:

"I wouldn't say such a thing without being sure. I saw it, I felt it, in England, just before he came away. He talked to me one night--the last night--and then it came over me. You can tell when a person feels that way. I wouldn't accuse him if he hadn't made me feel that way. I don't accuse him; I just tell you that that's how it is. He can't help it; we can't govern our affections. Do I govern mine? Mightn't he say that to me? It's because he is so fond of my mother, whom we lost so long ago. She

was beautiful, and very, very brilliant; he is always thinking of her. I am not at all like her; Aunt Penniman has told me that. Of course it isn't my fault; but neither is it his fault. All I mean is, it's true; and it's a stronger reason for his never being reconciled than simply his dislike for you."  
(117)

Her ability to deal logically or philosophically with affairs of the emotions is on the way toward a capability with which she will eventually face reality. Such an ability seems to her a wonderfully complex, elusive phenomenon. Townsend's break with her--the meeting which ends their "courtship"--produces "almost the last outbreak of passion in her life." With fear, which for all Townsend had said or done might have been groundless, she senses--though still without understanding--the deception practiced on her:

". . . she felt a wound, even if he had not dealt it; it seemed to her that a mask had suddenly fallen from his face. He had wished to get away from her; he had been angry and cruel, and said strange things, with strange looks. She was smothered and stunned; she buried her head in the cushions, sobbing and talking to herself." (132) The questions she asks, her bewildered probing, bring into meaningful relationships impressions accumulating through the years. For the first time the possibility of confusion concerning the reality of experience occurs to her. She reflects on the scene with Morris: "That perhaps was an hallucination; he was mistaken, she was jealous; people didn't change like that from one day to another. Then she knew that she had had doubts

before--strange suspicions, that were at once vague and acute --and that he had been different ever since her return from Europe . . ." (132)

Considering the portrayal of a sensibility so simply and plainly devoted to honest and legitimate experiences of life, the terms used to describe her perplexity are ironic: "All the evening, alone, she questioned herself. Her trouble was terrible; but was it a thing of her imagination, engendered by an extravagant sensibility, or did it represent a clear-cut reality, and had the worst that was possible actually come to pass?" (133) Catherine manages to conceal her turmoil from the observation of her father and aunt: ". . . she indulged a desire, natural to a timid person, that the explosion should be localized. So long as the air still vibrated she kept out of the way." (134)

With Catherine's disillusionment, the significance of her own life in relation to her father and Mrs. Penniman is partly clarified, though she never completely understands its nature. What had before been restrained but persistent intimation now becomes for her a terrifying actuality. Aunt Lavinia's strange role in Catherine's deeply personal experience had operated as a destructive force and was responsible, Catherine believed, for its miserable conclusion. Her ability to communicate this realization with an emotion commensurate with its significance is an indication of the change made possible by Townsend's dubious advent into her life.

But the commanding irony of the story is that Catherine, who has passed through an experience she had supposed to be romantic love, comes round to the realization that there has been no love at all in her entire life. Her father has never loved her. She had taken for granted and had deeply trusted his love. At no time during their conflict over her attachment to Morris Townsend had her father appealed to her on the basis of his own regard for her. It is always the money and, in the same category of values, the appearance before society. In her downright plainness Catherine is incapable of perceiving the gross nature of her father's appeal.

Out of the same honest but unimaginative impulse Catherine accepts the solicitations of Morris Townsend. At this stage of her life she is not so self-deceived as to fail at least to suspect her limitations. She says to him: "You know how little there is in me to be proud of. I am ugly and stupid." Townsend avoids taking issue with this frank self-appraisal by murmuring "nothing articulate but an assurance that she was his own dearest." (43) She is neither ugly nor stupid, but neither does she express those qualities which ordinarily attract. Hereafter, Catherine sets about to deceive herself for the sake of preserving an impossible wish. After Townsend walks out on her and her Aunt Lavinia has finally come round with a little knowledge heretofore withheld from Catherine, her self-deception is strengthened by an effort to find a reason outside herself for her lover's

desertion:

"Is it you, then, that has changed him and made him so unnatural?" Catherine cried. "Is it you that have worked on him and taken him from me? He doesn't belong to you, and I don't see how you have anything to do with what is between us! Is it you that have made this plot, and told him to leave me? How could you be so wicked, so cruel? What have I ever done to you? Why can't you leave me alone? I was afraid you would spoil everything: for you do spoil everything you touch! I was afraid of you all the time we were abroad; I had no rest when I thought that you were always talking to him." (139)

In this display of rage Catherine demonstrates how far she has come along the range of articulated passion from her mute beginnings. Equally revealing is the irony of her words--Mrs. Penniman has, indeed, meddled in the affair, but that she has been an important factor in Townsend's behavior is, of course, not true. Likely, Townsend would only have brought the deception off more neatly and brutally without the meddling of Catherine's aunt. The narrator's comment following her outburst is significant: "Catherine went on with growing vehemence, pouring out, in her bitterness and in the clairvoyance of her passion (which suddenly, jumping all processes, made her judge her aunt finally and without appeal), the uneasiness which had lain for so many months upon her heart." (139)

During the intervening years between her loss of Townsend and his brief appearance at Washington Square fifteen years later, Catherine has other chances to marry. We are given the impression that her lack of interest in

these possibilities comes from her having expended all her desires for romantic love in a single and, for her, daring adventure. That this is true is evident in her reaction to Townsend's last visit at the end of the novel. She tells him: "I can't begin again--I can't take it up. Everything is dead and buried. It was too serious; it made a great change in my life. I never expected to see you here." (161)

Of Catherine's situation R. P. Blackmur observes: "She has given everything for the lover who has deceived her and has now deserted her; but at the same time she has given nothing to anybody, anytime, least of all to herself. As the others have tampered with her, so she has learned to tamper with herself."<sup>3</sup> Mr. Blackmur speculates that "for the rest of her life she cries out to herself, and makes herself unnatural. I take it this is the meaning of the last sentence: 'Catherine, meanwhile, in the parlor, picking up her morsel of fancy-work, had seated herself with it again--for life, as it were.'" Mr. Blackmur is wisely cautious in offering this interpretation. He qualifies it: "This is perhaps not what James thought that he meant. Renunciation, as Emily Dickinson's poem says, is a piercing virtue; one seldom knows its scope, or with what hideous weakness the apparent strength of renunciation is informed."<sup>4</sup>

But what James thought he meant may be closer to the truth of the human condition than what Mr. Blackmur thinks he meant. It is a truth not told but woefully implied,

and it may be that the bleakness of this implied truth is really what disqualified Washington Square from inclusion in the New York edition.

Catherine's situation cannot be described in terms of strength and weakness in an act of renunciation. She has nothing to renounce, any more than she has anything to give. Her father, whose "science" is supposed to have opened the shallow secret of her self and kept her so unmercifully in his power, believes he has done far better by his daughter than the real circumstances would indicate: "Limited as her intelligence may be, she must understand perfectly well that she is made to do the usual thing." (148) His "uncomfortably, painfully shy" daughter, who sometimes "produced an impression of insensibility," is not even capable of doing the usual thing. Before the advent of Morris Townsend she had no opportunity. Her understanding and sympathetic aunt, Mrs. Almond, with a generosity calculated to balance her brother's matter-of-fact judgment--"Catherine is neither pretty nor lively"--suggests: "The reason Catherine has received so little attention, is that she seems to all the young men to be older than themselves. She is so large, and she dresses so richly. They are rather afraid of her, I think; she looks as if she had been married already, and you know they don't like married women." (29) Catherine's pathetic understatement to Townsend on the brief occasion of his return reveals her condition since his

desertion: "It was too serious; it made a great change in my life." Barren as this statement is it speaks eloquently for the sorry failure of verbal articulation testifying of her "dullness."

Catherine's moral crisis--a singularly brief but, in her simple life, a complex experience--suggests both the attainment of self-knowledge and some degree of moral responsibility. Mr. Blackmur has been cited as attributing to Catherine's "renunciation" a degree of culpability. The narrative voice deals with the question of Catherine's moral responsibility in a tone suggesting she is not to be held really very responsible. This is consistent with the facts of her life. Circumstances largely controlled by Doctor Sloper, Mrs. Penniman, and Morris Townsend bring Catherine's personality briefly into its own--long enough for her to see that her unattractive self is incapable of appealing to the love impulse--then shuffle her off to live with her meagre self for the remainder of her life.

Moral responsibility implies a degree of choice. Catherine's area of freedom is extremely confined. The impersonal narrator takes this into account, and early in the story begins to keep tally of her petty deviations from consistent rectitude. When her cousin Marian asks her what she thinks of Townsend, after their first encounter, Catherine replies, "'Oh, nothing in particular,' . . . dissembling for the first time in her life." (16) After this first insigni-

cant infraction there follow others of the kind, indicating Catherine' instinct to preserve a growing sense of personal dignity. The tone in which the narrator reports these trivia is almost facetious. By the time she has reached the end of the only significant experience in her life, she has become capable of grosser misrepresentation. Yet the narrator's tone could hardly be called serious: "'I am not in any trouble whatever, and do not need any help,' said Catherine, fibbing roundly, and proving thereby that not only our faults, but our most involuntary misfortunes, tend to corrupt our morals." (134) Catherine's morality shows, as has been indicated, in her sensitivity to the tension between her father and Townsend and, as the plot thickens, between her father and herself. Her sense of moral obligation to her self--a newly discovered entity, a sensibility emerging through the powers of love--is short-lived. Her demands for self-expression are satisfied by inexpressible confidence and trust, by naive and unquestioning acceptance. When the basis for trust is seen to be an illusion, nothing is left to express.

After all, what obligation remains? With the failure of the three in her life who had tried to use her, there seems to be no alternative but for her to lapse into passivity, back within the safe limits of her old inhibited self. Catherine is objectified in this novel only through the uses to which she is put by those from whom she rightfully expected

love. She never fully reveals herself as an expressive agent in her own right. Perhaps this is why the title of her story is simply Washington Square.

## CHAPTER VI

THE AMBASSADORS

In his preface to the novel to which we now turn, James wrote: "Nothing is more easy than to state the subject of 'The Ambassadors'. . ."<sup>1</sup> He lays the whole burden of the subject on one scene:

The whole case, in fine, is in Lambert Strether's irrepressible outbreak to little Bilham on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden, the candour with which he yields, for his young friend's enlightenment, to the charming admonition of that crisis. The idea of the tale resides indeed in the very fact that an hour of such unprecedented ease should have been felt by him as a crisis, and he is at pains to express it for us as neatly as we could desire.<sup>2</sup>

This is simple enough, so simple, in fact, that many readers find a lengthy novel dealing with so slight an observation suspicious of the charge against The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl--proliferation. F. R. Leavis, who makes short shrift of the novel, is perhaps a representative voice for this estimate:

The Ambassadors too, which he seems to have thought his greatest success, produces an effect of disproportionate 'doing'--of a technique the subtleties and elaborations of which are not sufficiently controlled by a feeling for value and significance in living. What, we ask, is this, symbolized by Paris, that Strether feels himself sufficiently inquired? Is it anything adequately realized? If we are to take the elaboration of the theme in the spirit in which we are meant to take it, haven't we to take the symbol too much at the glamorous face-value it

has for Strether? Isn't, that is, the energy of the 'doing' (and the energy demanded for the reading) disproportionate to the issues--to any issues that are concretely held and presented?<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to ignore the strong polemics and fine insights Mr. Leavis brings to James's fiction. But Strether's experience, as objectified in the novel and analyzed in the present study, will show that Mr. Leavis misunderstands the perspective achieved by Strether through the development of the story.

Leon Edel makes no apologies for what he considers James's supreme masterpiece. Certainly one of the most comprehensive and appreciative essays on this novel is Mr. Edel's introduction to the Riverside edition.<sup>4</sup> Its worth may be ascribed partly to his refinement of Percy Lubbock's authoritative treatment of Strether as "point of view."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, his comments on the novel are relatively free from the usual preoccupations with conflicting ideologies, with cultures and morals at variance, and with the host of other distractions often deflecting attention from the one exclusive concern--Lambert Strether. The word exclusive is used advisedly. Everything in the book is contingent on the imagination of its leading character, an imagination which gives a highly subjective rendering of experience. The lyric quality--albeit dramatic--cannot support the heavy weight of conceptual scheme.

Locale could, from time to time, easily take over,

Paris possessing as it does those inimitable qualities evoking the lyric mood in a man of Strether's temperament. James was aware of this danger, the intrusions of place on the domain of idea. His preface, written some years after the publication of the novel, reflects on this hazard:

The revolution performed by Strether under the influence of the most interesting of great cities was to have nothing to do with any betise of the imputably "tempted" state; he was to be thrown forward, rather, thrown quite with violence, upon his lifelong trick of intense reflexion: which friendly test indeed was to bring him out, through winding passages, through alternations of darkness and light very much in Paris, but with the surrounding scene itself a minor matter, a mere symbol for more things than had been dreamt of in the philosophy of Woollett. Another surrounding scene would have done as well for our show could it have represented a place in which Strether's errand was likely to lie and his crisis to await him. The likely place had the great merit of sparing me preparations; there would have been too many involved--not at all impossibilities, only rather worrying and delaying difficulties--in positing elsewhere Chad Newsome's interesting relation, his so interesting complexity of relations. Strether's appointed stage, in fine, could be but Chad's maison luckily selected one.<sup>6</sup>

The present study of The Ambassadors concurs with Mr. Edel's estimate. It will deal with a matter unmentioned in his essay but seeming to be the pivot on which the novel turns. Lambert Strether will be shown, as James presents him, as dramatist and artist--painter as stage craftsman--in the production of his own experience in Paris. Strether dramatizes a personal situation the foundation of which is the submerged desires of his earliest manhood. He sets the stage and aligns the performers for the projection and

fulfillment of erstwhile wishes. The language and the perspective of Strether suggest the mode of drama, an appropriate form for make-believe to assume.

Thus the novel begins with Strether's arrival in Europe. He is connected with the Newsome family as trusted official in the family interests and special friend of the widowed Mrs. Newsome. His mission is to recover young Chad Newsome from his attachments to what is deemed in the New England town of Woollett a sophisticated and corrupted culture, Paris. Chad's absence from the family business has been suspiciously prolonged, and there are indications that his reluctance to return forebodes something like permanent separation from a direct interest in the maintenance and expansion of the family fortune.

Almost at once Strether observes with extraordinarily keen awareness the differences between plain, barren life in Woollett and the various and richly-cultivated life in this old world city. The contrast itself is a commonplace, and Strether is perfectly cognizant of it. There is no tiresome laboring of the obvious fact that the two worlds are diametrically opposed. This opposition becomes, in fact, the subject of light humor free from satire. It is Strether's reaction to this difference in terms not of ideologies or even systems of morals but in terms of himself that makes the novel the masterpiece James believed it to be.

It is important to note, as both Mr. Lubbock and Mr. Edel observe, that immense advantage is gained by putting the reader inside Strether's mind without making Strether the first-person spokesman. The reader is never, or seldom, further away from Strether than elbow length, both in his reflections and in his conversations. From the beginning the reader is aware of all the terms because he has the feeling of being a member of the company. Ingeniously, Maria Gostrey, a charming and capable confidante, works as a second party throughout the story, her role diminishing gradually as the experience becomes more deeply personal and therefore ineffable to Strether. Maria Gostrey's intuition combines with Strether's imagination--the former in the guise of logic and sound reasoning, the latter in the freedom of uninhibited speculation--to produce what the responsive reader is certain to regard as an enviable awareness of the multiple levels of experience. Waymarsh, an associate with Strether in this European assignment, operates on the least perceptive of four levels. The reader never knows for sure where he himself rates. His vacillation on the scale of perception is the essence of his suspense.

The product of this combination--the three characters in a series of colloquies--does not always come up with the interpretation of what is happening entirely acceptable to the reader. The reader finds himself participating on special grounds, improving the vision, modifying the prevision,

correcting the conclusions. This activity takes place largely without the help of dramatic irony, of which until the closing scenes there is a relative scarcity in this novel.

But there is an abundance of dramatic means serving the cogitations and reflections and manipulations engaged in by Strether. The novel takes on the organization expressive of gradual, systematic self-discovery. The tone, of which much is to be made both by the participants in the experience and by the author, selects the emphases, the relative values. Tone becomes the discriminator.

Early in the story, chapter one of Book Second, Strether is accompanied to the theatre by Maria Gostrey. His "fancy" is set in motion much as a dramatist's: "All sorts of things in fact now seemed to come over him. . . . It came over him for instance that Miss Gostrey looked perhaps like Mary Stuart: Lambert Strether had a candour of fancy which could rest for an instant gratified in such an antithesis." (43) Strether's sensations throughout the stage performance suggest an identification disciplined and controlled, which becomes the means of the dramatic artist: "It was an evening, it was a world of types, and this was a connexion above all in which the figures and faces in the stalls were interchangeable with those on the stage." There is a hint that Strether's experience here in the London Theatre, just prior to his launching his career as "ambassador"

serves as his orientation into his career as playwright and producer of his own inner drama; the scene serves as a transition between Strether's general reactions to his entrance into the old world and his turning attention to the specific terms of his mission: "He felt as if the play itself penetrated him with the naked elbow of his neighbor. . . . He had distracted drops in which he couldn't have said if it were actors or auditors who were most true, and the upshot of which, each time, was the consciousness of new contracts." (44) From this sensation comes the next inevitable step:

However he viewed his job it was "types" he should have to tackle. Those before him and around him were not as the types of Woollett, where, for that matter, it had begun to seem to him that there must only have been the male and the female. These made two exactly, even with the individual varieties. Here, on the other hand, apart from the personal and the sexual range--which might be greater or less--a series of strong stamps had been applied, as it were, from without; stamps that his observation played with as, before a glass case on a table, it might have passed from medal to medal and from copper to gold. It befell that in the drama precisely there was a bad woman in a yellow frock who made a pleasant weak good-looking young man in perpetual evening dress do the most dreadful things. Strether felt himself on the whole not afraid of the yellow frock, but he was vaguely anxious over a certain kindness into which he found himself drifting for its victim. He hadn't come out, he reminded himself, to be too kind, or indeed to be kind at all, to Chadwick Newsome. Would Chad also be in perpetual evening dress? He somehow rather hoped it--it seemed so to add to this young man's general amenability; though he wondered too if, to fight him with his own weapons, he himself (a thought almost startling) would have likewise to be. This young man furthermore would have been much more easy to handle--at least for him--than appeared probable in respect to Chad. (44-45)

Even at this early stage in the story the reader becomes aware of the drama gathering in Strether's imagination, the matter of which is the fresh experience at hand. It is a drama with main and subordinate plots. Strether, as protagonist, constructs a make-believe world containing the fulfillment of his youthful wishes. The subordinate plot is Chad's, with Strether as a supporting member of the act. In Strether's modest mind the importance of the two plots is reversed.

Stated in this manner outside the action of the novel, this way of describing how Strether's imagination works seems reductive: his imagination would appear to operate over too wide a range and with too subjective a sensibility to be cast into such a scheme of dramatic structure. Yet these are the terms Strether employs throughout his European experience to bring into significant relationship the various sensations and discoveries composing a series of pictures, cumulative in a total effect he terms the "grand finale." Between scenes take place the interludes--in the wings and foyer, so to speak--during which Strether and Maria Gostrey discuss the performance. The play on the stage and the performance of Chad Newsome take the spectator-performer, Lambert Strether, in and out of reality. Which is which? Strether does not always know, but in one important matter only is his confusion of a dangerous kind; in all other instances it is willful and wholesome. While at best he knows the

difference and at worst he understands the nature of his confusion, Strether's observations and experience produce light comedy. When the confusion involves matters of deepest import, the play turns to tragedy.

What, asks Strether, is the nature of Chad's performance? Maintaining the metaphor of the stage, Strether uses the evocations of the theatre--the Paris opera--to reflect again on the nature of his own drama and from there to the drama of Chad:

There were "movements" he was too late for: weren't they, with the fun of them, already spent? There were sequences he had missed and great gaps in the procession: he might have been watching it all recede in a golden cloud of dust. If the playhouse wasn't closed his seat had at least fallen to somebody else. He had had an uneasy feeling the night before that if he was at the theatre at all--though he indeed justified the theatre, in the specific sense, and with a grotesqueness to which his imagination did all honour, as something he owed poor Waymarsh--he should have been there with, and as might have been said, for Chad. (65)

Metaphor passes back into literal statement as Strether, in the same active contemplation, considers the question of Chad's moral behavior:

This suggested the question of whether he could properly have taken him to such a play, and what effect--it was a point that suddenly rose--his peculiar responsibility might be held in general to have on his choice of entertainment. It had literally been present to him at the Gymnase--where one was held moreover comparatively safe--that having his young friend at his side would have been an odd feature of the work of redemption; and this quite in spite of the fact that the picture presented might well, confronted with Chad's own private stage, have seemed the pattern of propriety. He clearly hadn't come out

in the name of propriety only to visit unattended--equivocal performances; yet still less had he done so to undermine his authority by sharing them with the graceless youth. Was he to renounce all amusement for the sweet sake of that authority? and would such renouncement give him for Chad a moral glamour? The little problem bristled the more by reason of poor Strether's fairly open sense of the irony of things. (65)

The tone of Strether's own comedy is determined, of course, by the issue involved. His mature years have been consumed in service to the Newsome family and its fortune. His early dreams, blighted by the death of his young wife and, a few years later, of his little boy, had involved the world of material things used as means of intellectual and spiritual aspiration. Now, released for a time from his bondage to the Newsomes, he experiences the "process of feeling the general stirred life of connexions long since individually dropped. Strether had become acquainted . . . with short gusts of speculation--sudden flights of fancy in Louvre galleries, hungry gazes through clear plates behind which lemon-coloured volumes were as fresh as fruits on the tree." These objects in real life recall his early frustrated wishes: "He remembered for instance how he had gone back in the sixties with lemon-coloured volumes in general on the brain as with a dozen--selected for his wife too--in his trunk; and nothing had at the moment shown more confidence than this invocation of the finer taste." He muses: ". . . but what had become of the sharp initiation they represented? They represented now

the mere sallow paint on the door of the temple of taste that he had dreamed of raising up--a structure he had practically never carried further." (64) On the very threshold of an experience releasing him from the pressure under which he has been held by the Newsomes, he attains the true perspective:

Strether's present highest flights were perhaps those in which this particular lapse figured to him as a symbol, a symbol of his long grind and his want of odd moments, his want moreover of money, of opportunity, of positive dignity. That the memory of the vow of his youth should, in order to throb again, have had to wait for this last, as he felt it, of all his accidents--that was surely proof enough of how his conscience had been encumbered. If any further proof were needed it would have been to be found in the fact that, as he perfectly now saw, he had ceased even to measure his meagreness, a meagreness that sprawled, in this retrospect, vague and comprehensive, stretching back like some unmapped Hinterland from a rough coast-settlement. (64)

Strether's drama, then, becomes the conflict between the mature years of his past dominated by the Newsomes, the symbol of which is Mrs. Newsome herself, and the revived aspirations of his youth. Mrs. Newsome, though not personally but the "pressure" she represents, becomes the antagonist, and Strether is, of course, the protagonist. It is in these terms that he speaks and thinks throughout the novel in dealing with the exclusively subjective aspect of the experience. As regards himself he is never out of touch with reality. He frankly and freely brings up the wish from his past and fulfills it in the limited time and within the

limited range remaining to him. His conscious regression to youth--a reversion inspired by the sight of a young man standing on Chad's balcony, viewed by Strether from the street--is an indulgence acceptable in terms of self-dramatization: "He was young too then, the gentleman up there--he was very young; young enough apparently to be amused at an elderly watcher, to be curious even to see what the elderly watcher would do on finding himself watched. There was youth in that, there was youth in the surrender to the balcony, there was youth for Strether at this moment in everything but his own business." (71)

Paradoxically, Strether's "own business" is Chad, and Chad's drama is somewhat more complex. Early in the venture Strether takes for granted that as the agent of the Newsome industry he is, perforce, Chad's antagonist. Something is holding Chad in Paris; Strether must pry him away. If there is a woman in the drama, the issue is Chad's attachment. Though it may be a stiff challenge for the antagonist, the female factor is likely simple. The greater obstacle appears from an unexpected quarter, the rich Parisian world of things, things enjoyed in leisure, in the luxury of bright conversation with amiable and intelligent friends. Almost before seeing Chad for the first time, Strether senses his own disqualification to deal with such an obstacle. Its persuasions are not materialistic; they suggest a richness and variety of experience appealing to his own sensitive tempera-

ment.

It is at the opera that Chad makes his first appearance, coinciding with the rise of the stage curtain. Strether and Maria Gostrey are speculating about him when he makes his dramatic entrance into the box and is announced with a flourish by Miss Gostrey, who has never before seen him:

But quite as she spoke she turned, and Strether turned; for the door of the box had opened, with the click of the ouvreuse, from the lobby, and a gentleman, a stranger to them, had come in with a quick step. The door closed behind him, and, though their faces showed him his mistake, his air, which was striking, was all good confidence. The curtain had just again risen, and, in the hush of the general attention, Strether's challenge was tacit, as was also the greeting, with a quickly-deprecating hand and smile, of the unannounced visitor. He discreetly signed that he would wait, would stand, and these things and his face, one look from which she had caught, had suddenly worked for Miss Gostrey. She fitted to them all an answer for Strether's last question. The solid stranger was simply the answer--as she now, turning to her friend, indicated. She brought it straight out for him--it presented the intruder. "Why, through this gentleman!" The gentleman indeed, at the same time, though sounding for Strether a very short name, did practically as much to explain. Strether gasped the name back--then only had he seen. Miss Gostrey had said more than she knew. They were in presence of Chad himself. (91)

Strether is absorbed, "during the long tension of the act," by the most glaring and unexpected development. With all his speculation and his questioning of Chad's friend, little Bilham, his imagination had not allowed for the change he sees in Chad:

It had faced every contingency but that Chad should not be Chad, and this was what it now had to face

with a mere strained smile and an uncomfortable flush. He asked himself if, by any chance, before he should have in some way to commit himself, he might feel his mind settled to the new vision, might habituate it, so to speak, to the remarkable truth. But oh it was too remarkable, the truth; for what could be more remarkable than this sharp rupture of an identity? You could deal with a man as himself--you couldn't deal with him as somebody else. (92)

Strether is superbly, greatly aware of a truth central to sane and fruitful human intercourse: identity must be established in the strong light of reality. The separate identities of real life and make-believe must be certain and absolute. Life and an imaginative projection of it must at all times be differentiated. It is Strether's incomparable conformity to this principle that makes his imagination the charming functionary it is. His emphatic enunciation of this principle at the outset will serve later to underscore the tragic depth of his own delusion: "A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, didn't care if they didn't. From the moment they cared if they didn't it was living by the sweat of one's brow; and the sweat of one's brow was just what one might buy one's self off from by keeping the ground free of the wild weed of delusion." (95)

The one thing of which Strether becomes certain, through the authority of his own sound observations, is that Chad has changed, very much for the better, and that not Paris alone can explain it. Something or someone else has been a factor in it. Before seeing Chad for the first

time he gains the assurance through little Bilham that Chad's particular female attachment about which little Bilham is so enthusiastic is responsible. Strether presses questions about the moral nature of the association and little Bilham assures him it is a "virtuous attachment." This first-hand testimony plus the favorable impression Madame de Vionnet later is to make on Strether is assurance enough. On this most important matter--to Strether it is of prime importance--he is at ease. He feels, in fact, sufficiently assured by the word of little Bilham to put all suspicion away for good. Disposing of the issue so simply and finally fits into the imaginative picture Strether is composing in the happiest manner.

Strether and Maria Gostrey, in a rare comic scene, speculate on the details. The manner in which they banter with the phrase "virtuous attachment" has the effect of setting the moral issue aside, a condition necessary to the uninhibited comic spirit. The full effect can be gained only from the long scene, but a portion of it will show the process by which this issue is comically resolved:

A look, over it all, passed between them, and the next minute he had come back to good humour. "I don't meanwhile take the smallest interest in their name."

"Nor in their nationality?--American, French, English, Polish?"

"I don't care the least little 'hang,'" he smiled, "for their nationality. It would be nice if they're Polish!" he almost immediately added.

"Very nice indeed." The transition kept up her spirits. "So you see you do care."

He did this contention a modified justice. "I think I should if they were Polish. Yes," he thought-- "there might be joy in that."

"Let us then hope for it." But she came after this nearer to the question. "If the girl's of the right age of course the mother can't be. I mean for the virtuous attachment. If the girl's twenty--and she can't be less--the mother must be at least forty. So it puts the mother out. She's too old for him."

Strether, arrested again, considered and demurred. "Do you think so? Do you think any one would be too old for him? I'm eighty, and I'm too young. But perhaps the girl," he continued, "isn't twenty. Perhaps she's only ten--but such a little dear that Chad finds himself counting her in as an attraction of the acquaintance. Perhaps she's only five. Perhaps the mother's but five-and-twenty--a charming young widow."

Miss Gostrey entertained the suggestion. "She is a widow then?"

"I haven't the least idea!" They once more, in spite of this vagueness, exchanged a look--a look that was perhaps the longest yet. It seemed in fact, the next thing, to require to explain itself; which it did as it could. "I only feel what I've told you--that he has some reason."

Miss Gostrey's imagination had taken its own flight. "Perhaps she's not a widow."

Strether seemed to accept the possibility with reserve. Still he accepted it. "Then that's why the attachment --if it's to her--is virtuous."

But she looked as if she scarce followed. "Why is it virtuous if--since she's free--there's nothing to impose on it any condition?"

He laughed at her question. "Oh I perhaps don't mean as virtuous as that! Your idea is that it can be virtuous--in any sense worthy of the name--only if she's not free? But what does it become then," he asked, "for her?" (120-21)

Strether had come to Paris under the assumption that Chad needed moral rehabilitation, necessitated by his prolonged stay in Europe. Now Strether takes the opposite view. Nothing could attest the value of this rich Parisian experience better than the new Chad: "What could it be, this disconcerting force, he asked himself, but the sense, constantly renewed, that Chad was--quite in fact insisted on being--as good as he thought? It seemed somehow as if he couldn't but be as good from the moment he wasn't as bad." (112) Strether had anticipated "violence," a word he uses with characteristic exaggeration again and again to describe the contrast between his anticipations and the lavish attention and warm friendship Chad shows him.

Just prior to his meeting Madame de Vionnet for the first time, Strether reflects again on the influence his different surroundings, the visual beauty--both natural and artistic--are having on himself: "Our friend continued to feel rather smothered in flowers, though he made in his other moments the almost inference that this was only because of his odious ascetic suspicion of any form of beauty. He periodically assured himself--for his reactions were sharp --that he shouldn't reach the truth of anything till he at least got rid of that." (123) The Newsome materialism had only quelled an impulse which would easily rise again with the stimulation his new experience offered: "Strether, in contact with that element as he had never yet so intimately

been, had the consciousness of opening to it, for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather grey interior drink in for once the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography." (125)

Chad is the means through which so glittering an experience is possible, and Strether's artistic imagination creates of each encounter a thing of set-apart beauty:

"Chad was a kind of link for hopeless fancy, and implication of possibilities--oh if everything had been different!" (126)

The lavish setting in which Madame de Vionnet appears for the first time is excelled in brilliance only by her own appearance. Strether "composes" the occasion with the exquisite arrangement his imagination suggests, but all the while his own drama inclines to yield to that of Chad which, Strether supposes dutifully, is his "business." With his first brief moment alone, at this, Gloriani's party, when Strether has time to probe significances, he wonders:

"Was there in Chad, by chance, after all, deep down, a principle of aboriginal loyalty that had made him, for sentimental ends, attach himself to elements, happily encountered, that would remind him most of the old air and the old soil?"

(135) Strether is not insistent enough in pressing this question. He gives way too soon in favor of the way he would like things to be. To this point Strether had been generous to himself, abstaining from self-criticism and remorse. He

has not incriminated himself with painful conclusions, though he has been courageous in facing the "failure" of his life so far. But now a touch of gloom begins to set in. Madame de Vionnet has dazzled him; Gloriani, the great sculptor, has filled him with awe; the whole "community" of Chad's acquaintances and friends have overthrown Strether's erect composure; and when little Bilham approaches, he is ready to decline the young man's offer to introduce him to other guests. He produces an inadvertent excuse; actually, he cares for nothing more, having met the ravishing Madame de Vionnet: "He didn't want to be introduced; had been introduced already about as far as he could go . . . having nothing at all to say and finding it would do beautifully as it was; do beautifully because what it was--well, was just simply too late." Little Bilham picks it up: "Better late than never!" And from Strether's sharp answer "Better early than late!" (137) follows the counsel which, as James wrote in his notebook, is the subject of the novel. The immense importance of the passage is underscored by its strategic position in the course of events which compose the novel. At this point Strether intensifies his identification with Chad in what, as James writes further in his notes, amounts to "a little super-sensual hour in the vicarious freedom of another."<sup>7</sup>

Shortly after the Gloriani party an important transaction takes place between Strether and Chad. The former,

like, apparently, the latter, has succumbed absolutely to Madame de Vionnet's charms. She is known now to be the chief source of Chad's phenomenal transformation, a change so fundamental and impressive as to warrant continued association. Strether finds himself now definitely on the opposite side of the cause. Far more important to Chad's life than stagnation in Woollett is the possibility of fulfillment under the aegis of wonder-working Madame de Vionnet in Paris. To Strether's surprise and bewilderment Chad had from their first meeting expressed his ready willingness to return with him to America. He wished only for Strether to meet Madame de Vionnet before their departure. The meeting having taken place, Strether urges Chad to remain. He experiences something resembling a cancellation of his own character in favor of Chad's. His sense of negation makes his defection from Mrs. Newsome's cause complete:

The moment really took on for Strether an intensity. Chad owed Madame de Vionnet so much? What did that do then but clear up the whole mystery? He was indebted for alterations, and she was thereby in a position to have sent in her bill for expenses incurred in reconstruction. What was this at bottom but what had been to be arrived at? Strether sat there arriving at it while he munched toast and stirred his second cup. To do this with the aid of Chad's pleasant earnest face was also to do more besides. No, never before had he been so ready to take him as he was. What was it that had suddenly so cleared up? It was just everybody's character; that is everybody's but --in a measure--his own. Strether felt his character receive for the instant a smutch from all the wrong things he had suspected or believed. The person to whom Chad owed it that he could positively turn out such comfort to other persons--such a person was

sufficiently raised above any "breath" by the nature of her work and the young man's steady light. All of which was vivid enough to come and go quickly; though indeed in the midst of it Strether could utter a question. "Have I your word of honour that if I surrender myself to Madame de Vionnet you'll surrender yourself to me?"

Chad laid his hand firmly on his friend's. "My dear man, you have it." (149)

In his first private meeting with Madame de Vionnet Strether's artistic imagination conspires with this lady's personal charm, composing an utterly disarming picture. Under its influence Strether becomes an active agent in behalf of what had, in the absence of evidence on either side, yet remained a dubious relationship. The identification is, for the time being, however, strictly on the side of Chad, as though it required both Strether and Chad to hold on to something so precious:

. . . what had he by this time done but let her practically see that he accepted their relation? What was their relation moreover--though light and brief enough in form as yet--but whatever she might choose to make it? Nothing could prevent her--certainly he couldn't--from making it pleasant. At the back of his head, behind everything, was the sense that she was--there, before him, close to him, in vivid imperative form--one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met, whose very presence, look, voice, the mere contemporaneous fact of whom, from the moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere recognition. \* \* \* "Of course I suit Chad's grand way," he quickly added. "He hasn't had much difficulty in working me in." (156-57)

This "betrayal," as Strether will refer to it, leaves him "living almost disgracefully from hand to mouth." (178) . . . He could only wait, and his waiting seems to be a kind of

suspense: "He might have been a student under the charm of the museum--which was exactly what, in a foreign town, in the afternoon of life, he would like to be free to be."

(179) Maria Gostrey will be away, in Montone [sic], for a while. Strether's contemplation of her gives the key to the nature of his entire experience, from his debarkation in London to his disenchantment at the end. This passage does, in fact, put the finger on the crux of Strether's approach to his total experience and will be seen at the end to explain his renunciation: "She [Maria Gostrey] reminded our friend--since it was the way of nine-tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined --of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation." (180)

While still in the "museum mood" Strether sits in a chapel "trying with head thrown back and eyes aloft, to reconstitute a past, to reduce it in fact to the convenient terms of Victor Hugo . . ." (180) And it is in this mood that an unexpected encounter takes place with Madame de Vionnet, here in the chapel to which she "often comes."

(181) They will have lunch together at the Chablis, and Strether will find himself now not interested for Chad's sake,

or for his own, but for Madame de Vionnet's. Henceforth, Chad's interests are, in Strether's imagination, subservient, though still vitally important, to those of Madame de Vionnet:

What had come over him as he recognized her in the nave of the church was that holding off could be but a losing game from the instant she was worked for not only by her subtlety, but by the hand of fate itself. If all the accidents were to fight on her side--and by the actual showing they loomed large--he could only give himself up. This was what he had done in privately deciding then and there to propose she should breakfast with him. What did the success of his proposal in fact resemble but the smash in which a regular runaway probably ends? The smash was their walk, their dejeuner, their omelette, the Chablis, the place, the view, their present talk and his present pleasure in it--to say nothing, wonder of wonders, of her own. To this tune and nothing less, accordingly, was his surrender made good. (185)

The "blue scrap of paper," come to reactivate the cause of Woollett by the announcement that the Newsomes had embarked for Europe, takes its place as substance of the drama, with Strether more than ever spectator-actor:

It was the evening hour, but daylight was long now and Paris more than ever penetrating. The scent of flowers was in the streets, he had the whiff of violets perpetually in his nose; and he had attached himself to sounds and suggestions, vibrations of the air, human and dramatic, he imagined, as they were not in other places, that came out for him more and more as the mild afternoons deepened--a far-off hum, a sharp near click on the asphalt, a voice calling, replying, somewhere and as full of tone as an actor's in a play. (190-91)

Freedom for Strether is an illusion, and he knows it. Yet for whatever fulfillment there remains for him, the illusion must be pursued as if it were real, always remember-

ing the inevitable lapse into reality. For his own part Strether is constant in facing up to this hard fact. This constancy is his charm and strength, both for the other characters in the story who love him and for the reader. He knows this richly sensuous life is for him at best tenuous and tentative. He tells Maria Gostrey: "It's quite true. I'm extremely wonderful just now. I dare say in fact I'm quite fantastic, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if I were mad." (200)

His view of Chad's freedom is another matter. Strether has been more determined that Chad should stay than is Chad himself. He writes all the facts regularly to Mrs. Newsome, but somehow they appear in the light of the "new reasons--new as the facts themselves" (202) to be fantastic: ". . . but he was of course always writing; it was a practice that continued, oddly enough, to relieve him, to make him come nearer than anything else to the consciousness of doing something: so that he often wondered if he hadn't really, under his recent stress, acquired some hollow trick, one of the specious arts of make-believe." (203-4) Mrs. Newsome is as present an antagonist as if she were physically in Paris: "He knew it for the clearest of adventures--a circumstance capable of playing such a part only for Lambert Strether--that in Paris itself, of all places, he should find this ghost of the lady of Woollett more importunate than any

other presence." (205) With his intentions and his grasp of reality, at least as regards his own relationship to present events, perfectly clear, he will stand up to the adversary:

I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But nevertheless I'm making up late for what I didn't have early. I cultivate my little benefit in my own little way. It amuses me more than anything that has happened to me in all my life. They may say what they like--it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth. One puts that in where one can--it has to come in somewhere, if only out of the lives, the conditions, the feelings of other persons. Chad gives me the sense of it, for all his grey hairs, which merely make it solid in him and safe and serene; and she does the same, for all her being older than he, for all her marriageable daughter, her separated husband, her agitated history. Though they're young enough, my pair, I don't say they're, in the freshest way, their own absolutely prime adolescence; for that has nothing to do with it. The point is that they're mine. Yes, they're my youth; since somehow at the right time nothing else ever was. What I meant just now therefore is that it would all go--go before doing its work--if they were to fail me. (207)

Strether understands also that he is now on the defensive personally. This is added upon his necessity to justify Chad: "From the moment he actively pursued the charming associate of his adventure, from that moment his position weakened, for he was then acting in an interested way." (211) Chad's comment on the attitude of the Woollett position, with particular reference to the Woollett deputation on its way to Paris, is ironic in the light of what is yet to happen: "They're children; they play at life!" (214)

Strether's position, though beguiling and absorbing, is untenable only for the reason that the Newsome family cannot

possibly discern the significance of Chad's transformation. Perhaps they will not even see the change. Has there been a change? Strether, so careful to keep his make-believe where it belongs, begins to wonder. Sarah Pocock, Chad's sister, and her husband, Jim, will be blinded by the "old reasons." But the problem of reality is compounded: "Wouldn't it be found to have made more for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and Jim?" (223) Nevertheless, Strether is concerned about the veracity of his own imagination. He asks what doesn't occur to most inveterate dreamers to ask: is my imagination based on reality?

Strether's apprehension gets it due emphasis. After all, his defection can be justified solely on what he sees has happened to Chad. Knowing the limitations of vision characteristic of the Woollett "ambassadors," Strether examines what may be two extreme positions on the issue of Chad:

Yes, they would bridle and be bright; they would make the best of what was before them, but their observation would fail; it would be beyond them; they simply wouldn't understand. Of what use would it be then that they had come?--if they weren't to be intelligent up to that point: unless indeed he himself were utterly deluded and extravagant? Was he, on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation . . . but the alarm of the vain thing menaced by the touch of the real? . . . had they come to make the work of observation, as he had practised observation, crack and crumble, and to reduce Chad to the plain terms in which honest minds could deal with him? Had they come in short to be sane where Strether was destined to feel that he himself had only been silly? (223)

It has been noted that Strether is in and out of reality, and that in all important matters but one he is aware of the difference: he consciously plays a part whether on his own or in behalf of Chad. As the stark truth of Woollett forces itself on him, Strether sees he is actually doing nothing for himself--except feed his imagination. At moments he thinks it is for himself, but really it is only for Chad. He has been in conversation with Madame de Vionnet, who walks with him beyond the antechamber of her apartment. A visual image composes itself for him:

He stopped, he looked back; the whole thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet--full, once more, of dim historic shades, of the faint faraway cannon-roar of the great Empire. It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that, among old waxed parquets, pale shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra, he had always needfully to reckon with. They could easily make him irrelevant. The oddity, the originality, the poetry--he didn't know what to call it--of Chad's connexion reaffirmed for him its romantic side. "They ought to see this, you know. They must." (248-49)

Madame de Vionnet has told him a truth of which Strether can get only faint intimations: "No one feels so much as you. No--not anyone." (249)

As the tension between the Newsomes and Strether increases, the sense of drama becomes more prominent. At the party honoring the Newsomes Strether, as is his wont, composes the scenes for significant relationships. He watches Madame de Vionnet as she leaves the room: "That sense had already been so well fed by the situation about them that she

had quitted the other room, forsaken the music, dropped out of the play, abandoned, in a word, the stage itself, that she might stand a minute behind the scenes with Strether and so perhaps figure as one of the famous augurs replying, behind the oracle, to the wink of the other." (277)

But the wise dramatist knows that if he would save the comedy from the devastating intrusion of moral implications, he must lighten the situation with the comic spirit. In a conversation at the same party, Miss Barrace, a stock figure in these Parisian occasions, engages Strether in one of their light interchanges of current impressions. Only a small part of this virtuoso performance is contained in the following:

"It's as simple as twice two! From the moment he had to do something--"

"A crowd"--she took him straight up--"was the only thing? Rather, rather: a rumpus of sound," she laughed, "or nothing. Mrs. Pocock's built in, or built out--whichever you call it; she's packed so tight she can't move. She's in splendid isolation"--Miss Barrace embroidered the theme.

Strether followed, but scrupulous of justice. "Yet with every one in the place successively introduced to her."

"Wonderfully--but just so that it does build her out. She's bricked up, she's buried alive!"

Strether seemed for a moment to look at it; but it brought him to a sigh. "Oh but she's not dead! It will take more than this to kill her."

His companion had a pause that might have been for pity. "No, I can't pretend I think she's finished--or that it's for more than to-night." She remained pensive as if with the same compunction. "It's only up to her chin." Then again for the fun of it: "She

can breathe."

"She can breathe!"--he echoed it in the same spirit. "And do you know," he went on, "what's really all this time happening to me?--through the beauty of music, the gaiety of voices, the uproar in short of our revel and the felicity of your wit? The sound of Mrs. Pocock's respiration drowns for me, I assure you, every other. It's literally all I hear."

She focused him with her clink of chains. "Well--!" she breathed ever so kindly.

"Well, what?"

"She is free from her chin up," she mused; "and that will be enough for her."

"It will be enough for me!" Strether ruefully laughed. (278-79)

Miss Barrace offers a comment which carries unwittingly some intimation of the gloomy outcome of Strether's play:

"We know you as the hero of the drama, and we're gathered to see what you will do." (280)

Toward the end of Book Tenth it is apparent that the Newsomes, under the domination of Mrs. Newsome, who is "essentially all moral pressure," (292) intend to stand their ground: "Everything Mrs. Pocock had failed to give a sign of recognizing in Chad as a particular part of a transformation-- everything that had lent intention to this particular failure-- affected him as gathered into a large loose bundle and thrown, in her words, into his face. The missile made him to that extent catch his breath; which however he presently recovered." (293) This phase in the story ends on the serious note which brings the moral element up to the surface. The court outside

Strether's apartment had been the stage for scenes in his drama. The last use of this setting sees the protagonist watching Mrs. Newsome's daughter Sarah mount her carriage and drive away: "Sarah passed out of sight in the sunny street while, planted there in the center of the comparatively grey court, he continued merely to look before him. It probably was all at an end." (296)

Again at the balcony where the beginning of Strether's relationship with Chad had its setting, Strether returns, and fantasy and reality mingle again, as though Strether's imagination is unwilling to relinquish an indulgence he already is aware will be costly: "That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed--a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear." (298) Chad is generously willing to keep Strether in the center of the stage--in fact, to turn the burden of the whole performance over to him: "You've been 'wonderful, wonderful,' as we say--we poor people who watch the play from the pit; and that's what has, admirably, made her. Made her all the more effectually that she could see you didn't set about it on purpose--I mean set about affecting her as with fear." (300) Strether, in his determination not to take himself too seriously, sets himself in a perspective which reinforces the impression of actor, up to this point on the

level of comedy: "I'm true, but I'm incredible. I'm fantastic and ridiculous: I don't explain myself even to myself. How can they then . . . understand me? So I don't quarrel with them." (303) It is apparent even to Chad, now, that Strether loses regardless of Chad's future behavior. He exclaims: "And what I don't for the life of me make out . . . is what you gain by it." Strether sees that explanations, if there are any, are hopeless: "That's because you have, I verily believe, no imagination. You've other qualities. But no imagination, don't you see? at all." Chad is quick to agree: "I dare say. I do see. . . . But haven't you yourself rather too much?" Strether's facing up to this blunt statement of truth is followed with a hint of melancholy: "'Oh, rather--!" So that after an instant under this reproach and as if it were at last a fact really to escape from, Strether made his move for departure." (307)

The famous double excursion--the actual trip into the country, hitherto a "land of fancy," and the fanciful journey taking off from "a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before"--becomes the appropriate setting for Strether's imagination. One last exploitation of his power to draw assurance and refreshment from his fancy seems to be a necessary indulgence before renunciation. He knows the country into which he is journeying for a brief respite as "the background of fiction, the medium of art, the nursery of let-

ters; practically as distant as Greece, but practically also well-nigh as consecrated. Romance could weave itself, for Strether's sense, out of elements mild enough . . ." (318)

As he journeys the remembered Lambinet painting invites his imagination into the confines of its broad frame, then expands into an idyllic land where Strether luxuriates in the serenity drawn from rustic life. "Such were the liberties with which his fancy played . . ." (320) Yet with all its delicious solitude, it can still allow for the presence of Madame de Vionnet. He recalls that he had wished for a refreshingly intellectual association with her, but that he had "sacrificed an armful of high interests" (321) in deference to those of Chad.

As the actual journey on the train proceeds, the imaginary excursion induced by the Lambinet accompanies and continues to the end of the trip, where he is startled out of his day-dream by the presence of the hostess of the Cheval Blanc, "who met him, with a rough readiness that was like the clatter of sabots over stone." The effects of the dream remain with him, however: ". . . he still knew that he was amused, and even that, though he had been alone all day, he had never yet so struck himself as engaged with others and in midstream of his drama. It might have passed for finished, his drama, with its catastrophe all but reached . . ." (323) Strether insists upon casting his reverie here as always in the mode of drama:

For this had been all day at bottom the spell of the picture--that it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky. The play and the characters had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him, and it seemed somehow quite happy that they should offer themselves, in the conditions so supplied, with a kind of inevitability. (323)

This word inevitability picks up again ironic suggestions which have increased and intensified since the entrance of the Newsome family into the Paris act. It is the kind of irony that hints of tragedy. There had always been, of course, the wonderful equanimity with which Strether and Maria Gostrey and, on special occasions, Miss Barrace restored the tone of light comedy as though to fend off the inevitable denouement. In the very face of what is about to happen, Strether is still capable of the light tone: "That was part of the amusement--as if to show that the fun was harmless; just as it was, further, that the picture and the play seemed supremely to melt together . . ." (324) It had all been a play within a play, and Strether can afford to be amused at the facility with which he brings off all the dramatic devices to converge upon a total experience.

It is no wonder, then, that the stark and unmerciful interruption of his respite, forecast with subtle irony, should be viewed with the discerning eye of the true dramatist:

What he saw was exactly the right thing--a boat advancing round the bend and containing a man who held the paddles and a lady, at the stern, with a pink parasol. It was suddenly as if these figures, or something like

them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted more or less all day, and had now drifted into sight, with the slow current, on purpose to fill up the measure. They came slowly, floating down, evidently directed to the landing-place near their spectator and presenting themselves to him not less clearly as the two persons for whom his hostess was already preparing a meal. For two very happy persons he found himself straightway taking them--a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and fair, who had pulled pleasantly up from some other place and, being acquainted with the neighbourhood, had known what this particular retreat could offer them. The air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent--that this wouldn't at all events be the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt--and it made them but the more idyllic, though at the very moment of the impression, as happened, their boat seemed to have begun to drift wide, the oarsman letting it go. (325)

The shock comes in the recognition that these two new characters in the act are really none other than the leading characters of Strether's total drama--Chad and Madame de Vionnet. As the latter recognizes Strether, it appears that the boat for a moment veers away as though to avoid this unexpected encounter. Simultaneously, Strether calls and waves, leaving nothing for his friends to do but debark as they had previously intended and join him. This is a conspicuously disconcerting experience for the three of them: "It was a sharp fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream, and it had had only to last the few seconds to make him feel it as quite horrible. They were thus, on either side, trying the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness like some provoked harsh note." (326) The term violent, like the term "sacred rage," (287) has, as has been noted,

carried with it the suggestion of Strether's pleasant exaggeration. The use of the term now serves to darken the effects: "Chad dropped afresh to his paddles and the boat headed round, amazement and pleasantries filling the air meanwhile, and relief, as Strether continued to fancy, superseding mere violence. Our friend went down to the water under this odd impression as of violence averted--the violence of their having 'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he wouldn't know it." (326)

From this point to the end of Strether's "play," an ironic relationship exists between two kinds of drama--the drama for amusement, for a way of finding the richest possible relationships in the parts of a total experience, and the drama which is a lie. The brutal force of the difference could be so apparent only under the circumstances so artfully provided by the story up to this point. Strether has always known the operations of his imagination for what they really are. He sees them as a way of organizing experience for the maximum of meaning, the way of the true artist. It must be emphasized that Strether always understood the difference. His imaginative reconstructions of experience were never intentional misrepresentations of experience. They were even incapable of deceiving their creator. The one fatal flaw was in the eagerness with which Strether accepted the glib assurance of little Bilham that Chad's involvement was a "virtuous attach-

ment." This is all Strether needed to know in order to embark upon an imaginative excursion that would keep all the characters of his play in the happy relationship of light comedy. His belief in Chad's incredible change, attributed to Paris and its archetypal symbol, Madame de Vionnet, is an error only of degree: a transformation had been wrought but it is the flimsy, superficial device of which only the unimaginative are capable. Chad is a Newsome, a Newsome of "cold thought," of which his mother is the arch representative.

The accusing difference between the two kinds of drama is painfully apparent to this master artist:

It had been a performance, Madame de Vionnet's manner, and though it had to that degree faltered toward the end, as though her ceasing to believe in it, as if she had asked herself, or Chad had found a moment surreptitiously to ask her, what after all was the use, a performance it had none the less quite handsomely remained, with the final fact about it that it was on the whole easier to keep up than to abandon. (329)

With this withering disillusionment concerning the nature of the relationship and the shoddy effort now to conceal it, the whole truth lies open to Strether's view. Chad has left the burden of pretense to Madame de Vionnet--after all, it takes imagination to create and act a play: "Chad . . . could let her know he left it to her. He habitually left things to others, as Strether was so well aware, and it in fact came over our friend in these meditations that there had been as yet no such vivid illustration of his famous knowing how to live." (330)

Though Madame de Vionnet's play barely limps through to the end, she is yet to take a new hold and perform her final act for Strether. With his new sense of reality, he sees her pretense: "You are afraid for your life!" (341) This exposure brings an end to her act. She breaks down in sobs.

In the midst of this tumbling of Strether's house of cards, his resourceful imagination is capable of dealing with other possibilities and eventualities. What if the pair had been able to make their retreat, gracefully and free from outward signs of offense? His speculation comes round to his facing the cold hard truth of the deep deception:

He was rather glad, none the less, that they had in point of fact not parted at the Cheval Blanc, that he hadn't been reduced to giving them his blessing for an idyllic retreat down the river. He had had in the actual case to make-believe more than he liked, but this was nothing, it struck him, to what the other event would have required. Could he, literally, quite have faced the other event? Would he have been capable of making the best of it with them? This was what he was trying to do now; but with the advantage of his being able to give more time to it a good deal counteracted by his sense of what, over and above the central fact itself, he had to swallow. It was the quantity of make-believe involved and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach. He moved, however, from the consideration of that quantity--to say nothing of the consciousness of that organ--back to the other feature of the show, the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed. (331)

Persisting courageously in his role as playwright, Strether anticipates his next occasion with Chad and Madame de Vionnet. He anticipates seeing them separately, the time and condition determined by them. He explores the possibility of

ever seeing her again, and he realizes that his great vulnerability lies in the power which her "perfection of art" (336) has over his "fancy." He sees himself as having been made a joke of, the butt of a comedy. His embarrassment juxtaposed with his admiration of her propriety, her "appearances," yields this complex response:

. . . he could only ask himself how he should enjoy any attempt from her to take the comedy back. He shouldn't enjoy it at all; but, once more and yet once more, he could trust her. That is he could trust her to make deception right. As she presented things the ugliness--goodness knew why--went out of them; none the less too that she could present them, with an art of her own, by not so much as touching them. She let the matter, at all events, lie where it was--where the previous twenty-four hours had placed it; appearing merely to circle about it respectfully, tenderly, almost piously, while she took up another question. (337)

In this mood he casts himself in somewhat the role of the fool, the foolish pander, the fit object of gulling ribaldry: "He had absolutely become, himself, with his perceptions and his mistakes, his concessions and his reserves, the droll mixture, as it must seem to them, of his braveries and his fears, the general spectacle of his art and his innocence, almost an added link and certainly a common priceless ground for them to meet upon." (337) In view of the glowing expectations of a beautiful production now turned dubious play in which he performs an unworthy role, he sees the cancellation of all bright hopes: "The good of what he had done, if he had done so much, wasn't there to enliven him quite to the point

that would have been ideal for a grand gay finale." (340)

Strether foresees accurately the role in which she will appear when he receives her note asking that he come to her. She will be undemonstratively penitent, dressed in white, and extraordinarily mild in her manner. He proves to be right, and the effect disarms him, though his sense of reality sharpens his discernment: "She was older for him tonight, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maid-servant crying for her young man." (342) She confesses: ". . . we've thrust on you appearances that you've had to take in and that have therefore made your obligation. . . . you were getting on without them, and that's where we're detestable. We bore you--that's where we are. And we may well--for what we've cost you." He sees that her respect for him is genuine, that it lifts him out of the role of buffoon in spite of his failure and disillusionment: "And I who should have liked to seem to you--well, sublime!" (343) Yet whatever his assignment in the play of his own making, he knows the performance has come to an end.

In order to sever the connections the deception has violated, Strether must take the moral measurement in order to find a just attitude with which to regard what has happened

to him. This attitude would come into force in his necessary meeting with Chad:

It was a question about himself, but it could only be settled by seeing Chad again; it was indeed his principal reason for wanting to see Chad. After that it wouldn't signify--it was a ghost that certain words would easily lay to rest. Only the young man must be there to take the words. Once they were taken he wouldn't have a question left; none, that is, in connexion with this particular affair. It wouldn't then matter even to himself that he might now have been guilty of speaking because of what he had forfeited. That was the refinement of his supreme scruple--he wished so to leave what he had forfeited out of account. He wished not to do anything because he had missed something else, because he was sore or sorry or impoverished, because he was maltreated or desperate; he wished to do everything because he was lucid and quiet, just the same for himself on all essential points as he had ever been. Thus it was that while he virtually hung about for Chad he kept mutely putting it: "You've been chucked, old boy; but what has that to do with it?" It would have sickened him to feel vindictive. (346)

Prior to this meeting Strether and Maria Gostrey combine their insights in order to discover what had gone wrong. It had not been willful misrepresentation on the part of little Bilham: ". . . it was but a technical lie--he classed the attachment as virtuous. That was a view for which there was much to be said--and the virtue came out for me hugely. There was of course a great deal of it. I got it full in the face, and I haven't, you see, done with it yet." (349) Maria's reaction is so right, so accurate in its appraisal of the role of Strether's imagination in the total experience:

"What I see, what I saw," Maria returned, "is that you dressed up even the virtue. You were wonderful --you were beautiful, as I've had the honour of telling

you before; but, if you wish really to know," she sadly confessed, "I never quite knew where you were. There were moments," she explained, "when you struck me as grandly cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague." (349)

Strether admits that the whole combination of circumstances and events overwhelmed his too active imagination: "Of course I moved among miracles. It was all phantasmagoric. But the great fact was that so much of it was none of my business-- as I saw my business. It isn't even now." (350)

With all this courageous self-confrontation Strether nobly avoids remorse. He confesses to having been "ever so portentously solemn," (358) which we take to mean the attitude of taking himself too seriously. He reduces his role to the mere mechanical performance suggested by the beck-and-call of Chad and Madame de Vionnet: "He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. They came out, on one side, at their hour, jiggled along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jiggled his little course --him too a modest retreat awaited." (362)

Consistent with the pattern selected by Henry James for the presentation of central values in the human condition, Strether fulfills his wishes, wishes early formulated, buried under the pressures of practical necessity dominating his life to its middle years. By a phenomenal act of projection he revives submerged wishes and transfers them into the youth of Chad Newsome. But over and above Strether's imagined necessity

in behalf of Chad, there is room for a kind of fulfillment in his own behalf in an association with Madame de Vionnet. This lady seems the fulfillment, the objectification, of Strether's ideas of art. The ornate and tasteful background against which she moved, her own beautifully cultivated grace, her intelligence and sensitivity seemed to realize for Strether both his desires and their fulfillment. His long-submerged hunger for the feast that would satisfy his imagination was now being satisfied.

Strether's desires were not immoderate and his imagination was legitimate. What was lacking--and he knew it well--was the time of life in which these desires must be satisfied. His injunction to little Bilham to "live" and the intensity with which he urges it on the young man could only have been spoken from the ironic vantage of his own spent opportunity. Little Bilham is not sure he knows what Strether is talking about, part of his bewilderment arising from the urgency with which the elder man forces it. Unwittingly, Strether is recommending to little Bilham an attitude toward experience which is consumingly self-conscious. Such an attitude cancels out the very effect of the experience it seeks. Strether's own experience proves this truth. Throughout the course of his imaginative play-making and acting, he is conscious of its unreality. From time to time he is visited with a sense of futility and a loss of direction. Prior to his painful dis-

enchantment he had said: "Oh what I want is a thing I've ceased to measure or even to understand." (311)

Strether is brought to that impasse to which many other Jamesian protagonists arrive. It involves a renunciation. In Strether's case he has only to renounce that which he never in reality actually possessed. He must renounce the practice and dramatization of the dream. His very turning away from a world in which he had no part but that of an actor in a make-believe performance is his restoration to a reality commensurate with the conditions of his own life. He says to Maria Gostrey, when she seems to have found justification for his staying in Paris: "'I know. I know. But all the same I must go.' He had got it at last. 'To be right.'" She queries: "To be right?" Her question and her emphasis of it which follows is the question many readers want answered at the end of this experience: "But why should you be so dreadfully right?" (365) The exchange which follows speaks for a quality of integrity honoring the terms on which the personality lays claim to its unique self. Having been disenchanted from a world expressing only his imagination, and that almost exclusively through lives other than his own, he has no choice but to return to his self. The apparently unreasonable stringency of this choice is expressive of that self:

"That's the way that--if I must go--you yourself would be the first to want me. And I can't do anything else." So then she had to take it, though still with her defeated protest. "It isn't so much your being 'right'

--it's your horrible sharp eye for what makes you so."

"Oh but you're just as bad yourself. You can't resist me when I point that out." (365)

Maria's last speech brings the story round to its beginning and in the mode in which she and Strether had cast it on their first evening together: "She sighed it at last all comically, all tragically, away. 'I can't indeed resist you.'" (365)

Read as an extended metaphor of a staged drama with the successive set scenes as the dramatist's way of unfolding his idea, there are few spare words in The Ambassadors. This strategy for make-believe is governed by the desire to arrange the elements of a fresh and vital and evocative experience--an experience matching a long-buried dream--so that the sense of reality may temporarily stand for reality itself. Strether's excitement is merely touched off by the sights and sounds of Paris. It is release which his stay there celebrates, release of pent-up imagination, of latent and dormant wishes. Though their time, for Strether's life, is past, their momentary renewal and encouragement confirms their validity; their applicability--in their time--to a rich and varied life of the senses is established.

The Ambassadors may enjoy exceptionally wide appeal if, as James suggests, it can be viewed as the adventures of a man's mind in its effort to take up a past long since submerged

by the prosaic demands of practical life and restored to its youthful apprehensions and explorations of the poetry of experience. The poetry, springing directly from spontaneous response to the experience at hand, perceptively and imaginatively apprehended, is the province of every man gifted with an imagination founded in the world of empirical experience. The devastatingly qualifying term imagination points up the difference between a confined and cold sensibility represented by the Newsomes and the warm and eager and creative sensibilities of Lambert Strether.

## CHAPTER VII

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Two problems recur in critical readings of The Portrait of a Lady: Is Isabel Archer's choice of Gilbert Osmond consistent with her character as James portrays it? And what is the nature of her renunciation? These two questions are intimately related, the second answer depending on the answer to the first. The present study will find that Isabel's remove from reality, her habit of wish-projection, makes consistent her choice of Gilbert Osmond as her husband and explains and justifies the moral position which she acts upon in her renunciation. A discussion of these problems necessarily involves a close examination of a text which is tightly constructed and unusually sharply focused on the presentation of a complex character. James was proud of his achievement; it is inevitable he was aware that to the sensitive reader the last approximate fifteen chapters would fulfill the innumerable ironic forecasts which make of the first thirty-nine chapters an incredibly detailed projection of what follows. This study will first review what may be considered representative criticism of the characterization of Isabel; it will then answer this criticism in general terms; and finally it will work the text in order to relate the carefully delineated portrait of

Isabel in the first thirty-nine chapters with her decisions and their consequences in the last third of the novel. It will be seen that by a remarkable feat of the imagination she achieved what she wanted, only to discover that what she wanted was not really there. But the act of creation, however fanciful, morally involves the creator at the nexus of the dream and reality. Isabel faces this responsibility.

In an essay concerned with relating The Portrait of a Lady to the romantic element in the traditional American novel, Richard Chase finds the reconciliation of Isabel Archer's intelligence and high moral sense to the enormity of her miscalculation in marrying Gilbert Osmond in James's conscious creation of a protagonist who has "the advantage of verisimilitude since that is how an ambitious young woman in the latter part of the nineteenth century--spiritual puritan though she might be--would conceive of her quest, knowing it to be no longer inevitably the part of woman to isolate herself from the world either because of religious convictions or in acquiescence to the conventions about woman's place."<sup>1</sup>

Somehow, this fusion of Isabel into a topical conceptual scheme does violence to the individualization which James so carefully and consummately achieved for his heroine. Isabel's individuality, her charming and perplexing uniqueness, does much more than typify something. Mr. Chase makes a better point when he attributes her imagination to the same sort of romanticism which characterizes the traditional American novel,

and he is effective in his conclusion: "Isabel tends to see things as a romancer does, whereas the author sees things with a firmer, more comprehensive, and more disillusioned vision of the novelist."<sup>2</sup> Key words in his essay are "romantic" and "fantasy," and these come closer both to Isabel's view of herself throughout her story, even from the outset, and to the reader's view provided by the sympathetic narrator. But Mr. Chase is too concerned with relating Isabel and her story to the romantic strain in American fiction to note the particulars of her illusory pursuit of experience, particulars which accumulate into a syndrome for which the term romantic seems almost anomalous. Isabel can muse over her tendencies toward the romantic and can even discuss them disarmingly, yet remain woefully ignorant of some debility of personality or impairing deficiency of experience or both which eventually undermines her high purposes and shows them to be folly. In an earlier chapter Mr. Chase mentions the "psychological possibilities of romance."<sup>3</sup> He seems later to assume that James's fiction holds out these possibilities, and he probes them suggestively in his brief discussion of The Turn of the Screw, but disregards their almost blatant hints in The Portrait of a Lady. His treatment of Isabel as a romanticist appears to be at the sacrifice of Isabel as a character.

Isabel's treatment at the hands of literary criticism has, indeed, covered the character-typing experience, from the topical "American Girl" to the typical "passionate pilgrim."

D. W. Jefferson finds these categories ample to contain Isabel and liberal enough to accommodate her story, as far as it goes. James has slighted his obligation to the reader by referring to background knowledge of Isabel which he chooses to withhold but which, says Mr. Jefferson, the reader needs in order to make the reconciliation between Isabel's intelligence and morality and her tragically faulty judgment:

James's method in portraying Isabel raises questions which bear upon his later technique. Some tell-tale passages from the early descriptive paragraphs point to the nature of the method and its disadvantages. In one place he says that 'her errors and delusions were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his subject must shrink from specifying'; and elsewhere, that his heroine '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 more purely expectant.' Here James reveals something of the embarrassment inherent in the position of the novelist who has committed himself to a role akin to that of an omniscient biographer, in an age of dawning psychology and sociology. It is ultimately a heavier commitment than is good for a novelist to accept. . . . There is no limit to the questions a reader may ask of a novelist who, by explaining so much, places himself in the vulnerable position of being accountable for all. The Portrait of a Lady, great work of art though it is, is faulty in this respect: the mode of presentation is such as to awaken in the reader a curiosity which is not fully satisfied. It is about Isabel's relations with Madame Merle and Osmond that questions are liable to arise. Is James's portrayal of these characters such as to explain Isabel's attachment? As soon as we begin to examine details, we realize that we are up against complex matters of social and cultural history which it ought not to be necessary for the reader of a novel to be concerned with. Ralph describes Osmond as a 'sterile dilettante,' and the words go straight to the mark, yet Isabel is unshaken. How can we appreciate fully his power to interest her without more knowledge than James gives us of his actual tastes, the quality of his comments on specific

works of art, and so forth? But if we had more detail of this kind, we should also need the corresponding detail about her: how much did she know, and where was she liable to be impressed and therefore misled? In the interests of a completely realistic understanding of the situation, we should need to know more of the background of social and moral attitudes against which such a life as Osmond's would seem 'fine.' These questions only occur to us because in the early part of the book our sympathetic interest has been aroused to an unusual degree and then frustrated. In some passages, before the Osmond situation begins, we are very near to Isabel. When the most crucial choice of her life is about to be made, we feel that we know her less well. We are not permitted to live through these experiences with her. James places a serious strain upon us by sharing with us his 'omniscient novelist's knowledge of Osmond and Madame Merle as conspirators, so that we know the kind of trap she is falling into without being near enough to feel intimately what the situation means to her; and from the early part of her married life we are excluded entirely. Later, we again see things from Isabel's standpoint, and in the marvellous forty-second chapter (the 'backward glance') where we are indeed near to her, much--though not all--is done to make her initial error imaginatively convincing.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Jefferson's question "Is James's portrayal of these characters [Madame Merle and Osmond] such as to explain Isabel's attachment?" indicates a failure to allow for the foundation of latent character so carefully laid in the opening scenes of the novel. When James states that "her errors and delusions were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his subjects must shrink from specifying," does he not mean to suggest that Isabel is out of this world, that she is a dreamer not yet initiated into the world in which her ability to grasp and discriminate reality will be tested and found wanting? To suggest any more than this would be, surely,

to hint of matters having to do with some other story, and Isabel's story is only about to begin with the entrance of Mrs. Touchett into her life. Her life prior to this has been largely one of the imagination. Her aunt's sudden appropriation of her life--it amounts to that in spite of Isabel's frequent declarations of independence--actualizes her dreams and bitterly realizes her fantasies. To "shrink from specifying" is to forecast what will be specified dramatically in the end. We need only to know that the fantasies of her girlhood in the big house in Albany are of a kind which makes her amenable to the world of appearances perfectly represented by Madame Merle. The often-quoted exchange between these two gains in irony when the gaping disparity of Isabel's words and her later attachments becomes evident:

"What has he? An ugly brick house in Fortieth Street? Don't tell me that; I refuse to recognize that as an ideal."

"I don't care anything about his house," said Isabel.

"That's very crude of you. When you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us--and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things. One's self--for other people--is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps--these things are all expressive."

This was very metaphysical; not more so, however, than

several observations Madame Merle had already made. Isabel was fond of metaphysics, but was unable to accompany her friend into this bold analysis of the human personality. "I don't agree with you. I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should."

"You dress very well," Madame Merle lightly interposed.

"Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society."<sup>5</sup>

But Gilbert Osmond is the expression of Isabel's delusion. She mistakes her attraction to him for the expression of her real self. Henrietta Stackpole, long before the debacle, sees this. Isabel's dignity, her right to the sympathy of the reader, would have suffered had the narrator begun by exercising his authority in these explicit terms:

The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams. You're not enough in contact with reality--with the toiling, striving, suffering, I ma, even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You're too fastidious; you've too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people who will be interested in keeping them up. (185)

Mr. Jefferson joins Arnold Kettle in regretting that we do not see or hear of Isabel during the year prior to her marriage to Osmond. Mr. Kettle asks: "Is it not a little strange that of all the essential parts of Isabel's story which are revealed to us the section of her life most pointedly avoided

is that immediately before her decision to marry Osmond? . . . This is, from the novelist's point of view, the most difficult moment in the book. How to convince us that a young woman like Isabel would in fact marry a man like Osmond?"<sup>6</sup> Isabel herself answers this question in painful detail in the remarkable scene, chapter forty-two, in which she searches herself to find the extent of her own responsibility in what now appears, in its real light, a terrifying blunder. But this painstakingly honest probing of herself, as necessary and wonderful as it is, tells us nothing that we didn't already know through a tightly woven fabric of ironic forecast by herself and her relatives, suitors, and friends. Even the narrator, who suggestively pretends to be withholding vital information, discloses more, apparently, than meets the eye of many readers. The difficulty on the part of Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Kettle (a difficulty circumvented by Mr. Chase in classifying Isabel as a romantic) is their failure to accept the terms on which Isabel's career begins and on which it proceeds to the point of meeting Gilbert Osmond. They seem to insist that her choice should have been reasonable. But the point is that Isabel herself--not Henry James--was unable to explain her attraction to Osmond, unable until circumstance forced the confrontation in chapter forty-two to gain self-knowledge.

Mr. Kettle allows for Isabel's kind of sensibility in real life, and he implicates James for providing a "powerful

element of self-indulgence" toward readers who would be attracted to Isabel's "martyrdom":

The popularity of James's novels among our intelligentsia today is significant too. It includes, I feel certain, not merely a genuine admiration for his extraordinary qualities, but also a powerful element of self-indulgence. It is not only pleasanter but easier to involve oneself in an idealized sensibility, a conscience removed into realms outside the common and often crude basis of actual living. Many besides Isabel Archer imagine that they can buy themselves out of the crudities through the means of a high-grade consciousness and a few thousand pounds. And Henry James, albeit unconsciously, offers a subtle encouragement. He expresses the fate of Isabel Archer but expresses it in a way that suggests that it has, if not inevitability, at least a kind of glory to it. So that when Isabel takes her decision to return to Rome the dominant sense is not of the waste and degradation of a splendid spirit, but of a kind of inverted triumph. Better death than a surrender of the illusion which the novel has so richly and magnificently and tragically illuminated.<sup>7</sup>

To readers for whom the questions of Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Kettle are not answered in the novel, James's preface to the New York edition of The Portrait of a Lady is commended. The author's comments about his story are not, of course, the novel; they are not its equivalent. But they do serve to remind us all over again that the conditions of Isabel's being, her sensibilities, her total self as known to herself, were such as to make her decisions not only consistent but also vested with a kind of inevitability which it is the peculiar satisfaction of the reader to pursue. These conditions are laid down abundantly and unmistakably, and though they are dominated by utter impracticality they also suggest strongly the intelligence and, at last, the closeness to experience

which James terms morality. To bring herself around to an intelligent closeness, to some sincere experience, is to evolve a knowledge of herself which can come only through a moral crisis.

The objections raised by Mr. Kettle are voiced by many readers who become attracted to Isabel and protest the mistreatment they feel she does not deserve. Like Mr. Touchett, they are "amused by her distinctness of preferences,"<sup>8</sup> without also being alarmed. But what is to be done with all that James has told us about her? It may be supposed that these readers would agree with Stephen Spender that "A third of this book is taken up with brush work which has nothing to do with the story but much to do with James's determination that he would really present Isabel Archer to us."<sup>9</sup> Unless this effort of James can be seen as a skillfully, subtly presented portrayal of a personality and character to whom some cataclysmic experience was inevitable, the complaint of offended readers is justified.

At the same time James is tender and sympathetic toward Isabel, he lays her open to grave misfortune which is the result of her own doing. His ambivalent attitude toward her matches what we like to think is the best judgment that human beings can pass upon human beings. We do not need to know any more than the author shows us of Madame Merle and of Osmond to know that Isabel would make up for her--and our--deficiencies of knowledge by an extraordinary act of the imagination. The

sensitive reader should know enough about Isabel by the time she meets Madame Merle to know how and why she would respond to this creature who epitomizes a kind of sophisticated society but who represents no solid system of values. It is, actually, what James strategically withholds about these two personages that makes Isabel's reaction to them consistent. With the meeting of each, Isabel's own personality seems at once to take on proportions and suggest idiosyncrasies James does not need to labor. To repeat, the aura of mystery surrounding Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond is what commends them most to Isabel's tastes. It is not Osmond's quality of judgment on specific works of art, but simply Osmond as a devotee of art, Osmond as a communicant in some esoteric order that encompasses all the glowing generalities which Isabel mistakes for experience, for life. James leaves no word unturned to impress us with this telling implication. Of Madame Merle, about whom much has already been observed by Isabel and recounted by Madame Merle herself, there is a great deal that remains vague:

She was in short the most comfortable, profitable, amenable person to live with. If for Isabel she had a fault it was that she was not natural; by which the girl meant, not that she was either affected or pretentious, since from these vulgar vices no woman could have been more exempt, but that her nature had been too much overlaid by custom and her angles too much rubbed away. She had become too flexible, too useful, was too ripe and too final. She was in a word too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be; and she had rid herself of every remnant of that tonic wildness which we may assume to have belonged even to the most amiable persons in the ages before countryhouse life was the

fashion. Isabel found it difficult to think of her in any detachment or privacy, she existed only in her relations, direct or indirect, with her fellow mortals. One might wonder what commerce she could possibly hold with her own spirit. One always ended, however, by feeling that a charming surface doesn't necessarily prove one superficial; this was an illusion in which, in one's youth, one had but just escaped being nourished. Madame Merle was not superficial--not she. She was deep, and her nature spoke none the less in her behaviour because it spoke a conventional tongue.<sup>10</sup>

It would be difficult to imagine a single opportunity James overlooked to lay down carefully and precisely the personality of his charming heroine. To summarize or review her attributes is to seem to disturb the perfect picture which the story presents to the moment of her meeting Gilbert Osmond. Yet in view of the frequent misunderstanding of Isabel, it may serve to note the manner in which we learn of her attraction, even infatuation, to generalities, her idealistic pursuit of "experience," and her fine and admirable and untested sense of morality. The moral choice she makes at the end can better be appreciated when we see the real nature of her commitment.

Isabel talks a great deal about herself. Though she is an egoist and knows it and confesses it, she draws conversation with her relatives and friends to the subject of herself without attempting to do so. She is the subject for interesting and informative conversation. The innocent and open manner with which she expresses her ideas, ideals, and feelings creates an illusion of freedom which, though unreal, is enviable. Perhaps this explains in part the reader's attraction

to her.

Isabel is seen to possess "a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks." It is not difficult to regard her "life" as absorbed in thought: "She spent half her time in thinking of beauty and bravery and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action: she held it must be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong." (53)

Isabel is infatuated by abstractions. The surpassing irony of her self-confidence in her ability to discern and avoid evil exists in the enormity of this concept as she sees it and the relatively small-scaled examples in her limited experience: "On the whole, reflectively, she was in no uncertainty about the things that were wrong. She had no love of their look, but when she fixed them hard she recognized them. It was wrong to be mean, to be jealous, to be false, to be cruel; she had seen very little of the evil of the world, but she had seen women who lied and who tried to hurt each other." (53) It is not, of course, by "fixing them hard" that the wrongs she details can be known in their darkest manifestations. To know these evils in their intensity is to see them as the consequences of personal decision, as the aftermath of an unqualified commitment. Isabel is to experience all these. Meanwhile she can only deal with their abstracts.

She imagines herself in some future relation to such experience, and she imagines herself as the victor: "Her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she should be what she appears, and she would appear what she was. Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she might find herself someday in a difficult position, so that she should have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded." (54)

It is significant, though seldom noted in critical readings of this novel, that Isabel intuitively associates the ominous with courtship and marriage. Her susceptibility toward being captivated by ideas would make any appeal in that direction irresistible: she has a weakness for ideas. Consumed in notions of self-perfection she would succumb to any enticement which held out the promise of furthering her "progress."

The generalities and abstractions over which Isabel's active mind plays usually have to do with the dark side of experience from which she is, naturally, determined to keep herself free. The generalities always have to do with difficulties of others, these others being as general and abstract as the concepts to which they relate. Somehow she is able always to bypass herself when it comes to specific experience: "She always returned to her theory that a young woman whom after all every one thought clever should begin by getting a general impression of life. This impression was necessary to

prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others a subject of special attention." (56) She seems always to be getting ready for life instead of realizing that she is already in it.

To the point in the novel where Madame Merle enters her life, virtually the whole concern is to portray Isabel as an intelligent, naive, inexperienced idealist, smitten by ideas about "the free exploration of life" (101) and taken by notions of altruism in the vaguest sense of the term. She is a young lady waiting for "development," for "perfection." Isabel is charming but this is not necessarily a saving grace. She tells her uncle, "I don't like to have anything settled beforehand. I like more unexpectedness." (59) It turns out that the unexpected does happen to Isabel--unexpected to her, but within the careful reader's power to anticipate.

Most revealing is the confirmation of the author's observations in Isabel's reaction to Lord Warburton, Madame Merle, and Gilbert Osmond. In a particularly crucial conversation with Lord Warburton, Isabel may seem to be saying that she cannot be happy without being miserable. This interpretation is, in fact, a common one:

"I can't escape unhappiness," said Isabel. "In marrying you I shall be trying to."

"I don't know whether you'd try to, but you certainly would: that I must in candour admit!" he exclaimed with an anxious laugh.

"I mustn't--I can't!" cried the girl.

"Well, if you're bent on being miserable I don't see why you should make me so. Whatever charms a life of misery may have for you, it has none for me."

"I'm not bent on a life of misery," said Isabel. "I've always been intensely determined to be happy, and I've often believed I should be. I've told people that; you can ask them. But it comes over me every now and then that I can never be happy in any extraordinary way; not by turning away, by separating myself."

"By separating yourself from what?"

"From life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer."

Lord Warburton broke into a smile that almost denoted hope. "Why, my dear Miss Archer," he began to explain with the most considerate eagerness, "I don't offer you any exoneration from life or from any chances or dangers whatever. I wish I could; depend upon it I would! For what do you take me, pray? Heaven help me, I'm not the Emperor of China! All I offer you is the chance of taking the common lot in a comfortable sort of way. The common lot? Why, I'm devoted to the common lot! Strike an alliance with me, and I promise you that you shall have plenty of it. You shall separate from nothing whatever--not even from your friend Miss Stackpole." (118)

The usual reading sees Warburton's final statement as a suggestion that Isabel takes his offer to include more than it can possibly contain: "I don't offer you any exoneration from life or from any chances or dangers whatever." Isabel's fear --there are grounds for believing it substantially justified --is that to marry Warburton would be to be poured into the mould of a tradition:

He appeared to demand of her something that no one else, as it were, had presumed to do. What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he rather invidiously lived and moved. A

certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist--murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. (94)

Indeed, Warburton cannot exonerate her from life but neither can he exonerate her from the bonds of tradition his kind of life signifies. Isabel regards such a choice, perhaps justly, as a final gesture of freedom. Warburton makes well-meaning pretenses to a liberalism which is anomalous with his background and with the tradition it is his province to sustain. The reader no more believes in this assumed liberalism than does Isabel. There is, of course, more to the foregoing conversation than this suggests: it is revelatory of Isabel's unrealistic notion of how experience is gained. She makes the pursuit of experience an altogether self-conscious venture and seems to be paying mere lip service to the inadvertency of pain. To read into Warburton's proposal and Isabel's rejection broad political implications is to divert the focus from her idiosyncratic impulses having no relevant connections with "Americanism" or "democracy." Plainly, she does take the dreamer's view of her relationship to vicissitude. Isabel could never have attained self-knowledge in the way of life here offered to her. Her vision of life is not shareable, least of all with Lord Warburton. Though Isabel's moral sensibility has not yet been tested by strenuous experience, her sympathetic reaction to his offer and her considerate refusal reflect favorably on her serious-minded regard for his feelings.

Her refusal of Warburton on the grounds that she has an "orbit of her own" is all the more ironic in view of the orbit into which her fatal decision concerning Osmond forces her.

In the chapter (21) prior to her meeting Gilbert Osmond, Isabel's egocentricity is almost labored. Though half of the material in the book from the beginning to her dawning self-knowledge in chapter forty is spent preparing us for the mistake Isabel is about to make, it seems that emphasis needs to be given to a blindness which can come only from an absorption with the self. The impression is conveyed that Isabel feels her life so important and her advent into the "world" so consequential that the slightest error would end all her chances for happiness. We admire Isabel's high moral sense, and we feel it will secure her against any very serious infraction of the moral law, but we fear that her very concern may make her commit a gross error of judgment through over-cautiousness.

Ralph advises her:

Take things more easily. Don't ask yourself so much whether this or that is good for you. Don't question your conscience so much--it will get out of tune like a strummed piano. Keep it for great occasions. Don't try so much to form your character--it's like trying to pull open a tight, tender young rose. Live as you like best, and your character will take care of itself. Most things are good for you; the exceptions are very rare, and a comfortable income's not one of them.  
\* \* \* You've too much power of thought--above all too much conscience. . . . It's out of all reason, the number of things you think wrong. Put back your watch. Diet your fever. Spread your wings; rise above the ground. It's never wrong to do that. (189)

She acknowledges this: "You could say nothing more

true. I'm absorbed in myself--I look at life too much as a doctor's prescription. Why indeed should we perpetually be thinking whether things are good for us, as if we were patients lying in a hospital? Why should I be so afraid of not doing right? As if it mattered to the world whether I do right or wrong!" She expresses her self-consciousness about the great issue she makes over trivial choices: "I try to care more about the world than about myself--but I always come back to myself." (189) Because she is so intensely aware of her "sublime soul," (94) she fears the exercise of the freedom of which she makes so much. Her large inheritance from Mr. Touchett, though it frees her to act with the independence she has always guarded, opens the way for greater mistakes, for more serious miscalculations: "Yes, I'm afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom and I'm afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't one would be ashamed. And one must keep thinking; it's a constant effort. I'm not sure it's not a greater happiness to be powerless." (190)

In spite of her confession of self-centeredness and her agreement with Ralph concerning it, Isabel finds no difficulty in habituating herself to her riches and even, as might be expected, identifying herself with them. It was noted in the preceding chapter of this study that Fleda Vetch readily identified herself with the treasures at Poynton. James invariably

strengthens his characterization of a dreamer in this manner. Neither Isabel nor Fleda is a type; they are not case histories. But James is never more perceptive of the total syndrome described as wish-projection than when he allows his character to become attached to material things. Before turning Isabel over to the machinations of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, he makes two devastating observations about her. The first concerns her confused sense of identity:

His advice had perhaps helped the matter; she had at any rate before leaving San Remo grown used to feeling rich. The consciousness in question found a proper place in rather a dense little group of ideas that she had about herself, and often it was by no means the least agreeable. It took perpetually for granted a thousand good intentions. She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things to be done by a rich, independent, generous girl who took a large human view of occasions and obligations were sublime in the mass. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. (190)

An ominous forecast follows immediately: "What it did for her in the imagination of others is another affair; and on this point we must also touch in time." (190)

The second charge against Isabel--in the last paragraph prior to her meeting Gilbert Osmond--he observes:

It was in her disposition at all times to lose faith in the reality of absent things; she could summon back her faith, in case of need, with an effort, but the effort was often painful even when the reality had been pleasant. The past was apt to look dead and its revival rather to show the livid light of a judgment-day. The girl moreover was not prone to take for granted that she herself lived in the mind of others--she had not the fatuity to believe she

left indelible traces. She was capable of being wounded by the discovery that she had been forgotten; but of all liberties the one she herself found sweetest was the liberty to forget. (191)

It has been noted that a factor in Isabel's attraction to Osmond is the "mystery" about him. She finds him impossible to classify, and this commends him to her all the more:

He resembled no one she had ever seen; most of the people she knew might be divided into groups of half a dozen specimens. . . . Her mind contained no class offering a natural place to Mr. Osmond--he was a specimen apart. . . . Madame Merle had had that note of rarity, but what quite other power it immediately gained when sounded by a man! It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld, that marked him for her as by one of those signs of the highly curious that he was showing her on the underside of old plates and in the corner of sixteenth-century drawings. . . ." (220)

What would appear as faults in others seemed to Isabel virtues in Osmond: "He was certainly fastidious and critical; he was probably irritable. His sensibility had governed him--possibly governed him too much; it had made him impatient of vulgar troubles and had led him to live by himself, in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about art and beauty and history." (220) This is all immensely fascinating to Isabel. For the first time in her limited experience she is looking at a man whose physical appearance and poise and whose brilliant talk can match all the lovely generalities which she has heretofore imagined. The very language of her thoughts connotes the pejorative, yet Isabel transmutes by the power of her active imagination everything into virtue: "He had consulted his tastes in everything--his tastes alone perhaps,

as a sick man consciously incurable consults at last only his lawyer: that was what made him so different from every-one else." Isabel is almost stupidly unaware of the significance of the distinction she makes when she compares Osmond to Ralph in one very important regard: "Ralph had something of this same quality, this appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship; but in Ralph it was an anomaly, a kind of humorous excrescence, whereas in Mr. Osmond it was the keynote, and everything was in harmony with it."

(220) Ralph as connoisseur of experience! Poor Isabel does not see that that kind of connoisseurship is only admirable --only tenable--as a "humorous excrescence." Osmond is, indeed, a connoisseur of experience--in the worst possible meaning of the term: he takes it seriously; he looks on experience as something to be collected, as objects of art are collected, that is, with the same critical disinterestedness. Osmond is not exonerated from life but has made himself and Isabel believe he is exempt.

The suspicious mixture of self-deprecation and self-praise by which Osmond acquaints Isabel with himself would have served as a warning to one less a dreamer and more experienced: "This would have been a dry account of Mr. Osmond's career if Isabel had fully believed it; but her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting." (223)

Osmond has presented himself as a man free to pursue

whatever expresses himself. This has great appeal for Isabel who has a passion for freedom. She restrains, in part, her expression of admiration. It would be vulgar to express her unbounded enthusiasm: "It was her present inclination, however, to express a measure of sympathy for the success with which he had preserved his independence. 'That's a very pleasant life . . . to renounce everything but Correggio!'" (223) But Osmond shrewdly modifies this ideal picture by adding a somber tone of self-sacrifice. This will ravish Isabel, whose imagination mingles freedom with self-sacrifice in a general, ideal combination of beauty and nobility:

"Oh, I've made in my way a good thing of it. Don't imagine I'm whining about it. It's one's own fault if one isn't happy."

This was large; she kept down to something smaller.  
"Have you lived here always?"

"No, not always. I lived a long time at Naples, and many years in Rome. But I've been here a good while. Perhaps I shall have to change, however; to do something else. I've no longer myself to think of. My daughter's growing up and may very possibly not care so much for the Correggios and crucifixes as I. I shall have to do what's best for Pansy."

"Yes, do that," said Isabel. "She's such a dear little girl."

"Ah," cried Gilbert Osmond beautifully, "she's a little saint of heaven! She is my great happiness!" (223)

We have noted that Isabel's illusion expressed itself in attraction to generalities, in a sense of being the potential agent of mercy to the troubled, and in an extraordinarily acute moral sense. Osmond keys in every element of Isabel's

illusions, and when she finally sees the light she realizes that the blindness which darkened half of Osmond had been illuminated by nothing substantial, but by her imagination:

He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now--she saw the whole man. She had kept still, as it were, so that he should have a free field, and yet in spite of this she had mistaken a part for the whole. (350)

She had been charmed by the combination of the visible aspects of Osmond and what else her imagination had made of him. Besides being a man of physical attractiveness and beautiful ideas, he was the most fit possible object of pity, of charity, she could imagine. Isabel had not changed in order to give herself to Osmond; she had changed Osmond--in her mind. His appeal to her moral sense works because she is both moral and responsible:

He spoke gravely and almost gently; the accent of sarcasm had dropped out of his tone. It had a gravity which checked his wife's quick emotion; the resolution with which she had entered the room found itself caught in a mesh of fine threads. His last words were not a command, they constituted a kind of appeal; and, though she felt that any expression of respect on his part could only be a refinement of egotism, they represented something transcendent and absolute, like the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country. He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious--the observance of a magnificent form. (438-39)

Mrs. Touchett is right; her judgment, if not her compassion, is sometimes an improvement on Ralph's: "But she takes

her pleasure in such odd things; she's capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for the beauty of his opinions or for his autograph of Michael Angelo." (230) It has been noted that Isabel has difficulty believing in the reality of the past. But Lord Warburton and Caspar Goodwood bring the past into the present by coming to Rome before it is too late. Their appeals to Isabel are useless, however. Apparently, it was not within the scope of their personalities to say what Osmond was able to say to Isabel: "'For me you will always be the most important woman in the world.' Isabel looked at herself in this character--looked intently, thinking she filled it with a certain grace." (258)

Osmond has had the advantage of speaking almost always the truth about himself: he has had the advantage of Isabel's imagination working in his behalf. His cohort, Madame Merle, has instructed him in the ways of Isabel's imagination. He knows that with all he might say this young idealist will protect his precious mysteriousness. She seems almost afraid of a disenchantment, not from learning that Osmond is not the complete embodiment of the ideal, but that the mystery might be dispelled. Even when Osmond indicates a willingness to say more about himself on matters central to personality, Isabel discourages further conversation. She will, indeed, learn the whole truth, as Osmond ironically suggests, and then the mystery will have become Isabel's:

"I'm not too troubled to think. And I think that I'm

glad we're separating--that I leave Rome to-morrow."

"Of course I don't agree with you there."

"I don't at all know you," she added abruptly; and then she coloured as she heard herself saying what she had said almost a year before to Lord Warburton.

"If you were not going away you'd know me better."

"I shall do that some other time."

"I hope so. I'm very easy to know."

"No, no," she emphatically answered--"there you're not sincere. You're not easy to know; no one could be less so."

"Well," he laughed, "I said that because I know myself. It may be a boast, but I do."

"Very likely; but you're very wise."

"So are you, Miss Archer!" Osmond exclaimed.

"I don't feel so just now. Still, I'm wise enough to think you had better go. Good-night."

"God bless you!" said Gilbert Osmond, taking the hand which she failed to surrender. After which he added: "If we meet again you'll find me as you leave me. If we don't I shall be so all the same." (259)

Osmond boasts--under the pretense of humble confession --that "propriety" and "convention" and appearance govern his life: "'You say you don't know me, but when you do you'll discover what a worship I have for propriety.' 'You're not conventional?' Isabel gravely asked. 'I like the way you utter that word! No, I'm not conventional: I'm convention itself. You don't understand that?'" (259) Isabel should draw back from such a warning; her notions of freedom are antithetical to convention, at least in the degree and kind Osmond maintains.

But for these words Isabel's fantasy supplies its own meanings: we are reminded of a conversation with Ralph, early in Isabel's association with Osmond:

"I ask you because-I want your opinion . . . ," said Isabel.

"A fig for my opinion! If you fall in love with Mr. Osmond what will you care for that?"

"Not much, probably. But meanwhile it has a certain importance. The more information one has about one's dangers the better." (210)

Isabel was yet to hear from Ralph the unadorned truth about the man she would marry, but by then she would not have the courage to receive it: ". . . you were meant for something better than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante." (286) On the occasion of these words Ralph knew it was too late. He saw what her imagination had been pleased to create: "She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was dismally consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours." She has created a validity beyond the power of his strong words. He knows nothing he can say can help. His own responsibility in her delusion strikes him with force: "Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into her power to meet the requirements of her imagination. He had done so, and the girl had taken full advantage of the luxury. Poor Ralph felt sick; he felt ashamed. Isabel had uttered her last

words with a low solemnity of conviction which virtually terminated the discussion." (288)

Having made her choice and having lived happily in her illusion a little more than a year, Isabel gradually becomes aware of the price she has paid. The "beauty and nobility and magnanimity" which were the abstractions in which her dreams were cast have been smothered by the silent strictures imposed by Osmond:

He said to her one day that she had too many ideas and that she must get rid of them. He had told her that already, before their marriage; but then she had not noticed it: it had come back to her only afterwards. This time she might well have noticed it, because he had really meant it. The words had been nothing superficially; but when in the light of deepening experience she had looked into them they had then appeared portentous. He had really meant it--he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance. (352)

Her deeply-cherished freedom is blighted. The free play of ideas, so entrancing at the beginning of her strange quest for "life," is stifled by her husband's self-centeredness: "The real offense, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his--attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching." (335)

The stricture in itself could have been endured. There would have even been the possibility of "nobility" in giving up her ideas to a greater, a finer, source, but Osmond's ideas, to

which hers were to be subservient, were unworthy: "To begin with, they were hideously unclean. She was not a daughter of the Puritans, but for all that she believed in such a thing as chastity and even decency. It would appear that Osmond was far from doing anything of the sort: some of his traditions made her push back her skirts." (355)

Isabel's memorable discussion with Madame Merle in the first days of their acquaintance had put Isabel on record as having distinguished sharply between the self and the accoutrements and accessories of "appearance." Now Isabel finds herself caught in a world of stale and meaningless forms:

There were certain things they must do, a certain posture they must take, certain people they must know and not know. When she saw this rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her; she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay. She had resisted of course; at first very humorously, ironically, tenderly; then, as the situation grew more serious, eagerly, passionately, pleadingly. She had pleaded the cause of freedom, of doing as they chose, of not caring for the aspect and denomination of their life--the cause of other instincts and longings, of quite another ideal. (354-55)

Isabel sees now that Osmond's life of appearances, his insistence on a settled decorum, is nothing more than "a refinement of egotism," expressed in "the observance of a magnificent form." Ralph is yet to tell her: "You wanted to look at life for yourself--but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional!" (470)

The conclusions which reality finally forces upon her are those which her intimates had urged her to see: ". . . Isabel had flattered herself at this time that she had a much richer view of things, especially of the spontaneity of her own career and the nobleness of her own interpretations, than poor stiffly-reasoning Mrs. Touchett." (424) Now in the night-long reflection on circumstances which had brought her to this strange involvement, she comes to realize that "the man in the world whom she had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer, for her money." (425) She recalls Ralph's last warning, in the garden in Florence: "She had only to close her eyes to see the place, to hear his voice, to feel the warm, sweet air. How could he have known? What a mystery, what a wonder of wisdom!" (357)

To the question, How could Isabel not have known? the answer, as has been indicated, is in the peculiar nature of her imagination. The word romantic, which Isabel applies to herself and by which Mr. Chase characterizes her imagination, covers the general type of sensibility of which Isabel is an example. Mr. Chase finds in this novel points of contact with the romantic tradition, and even verbal echoes of Hawthorne's romances. Wisely, he avoids pressing the thesis too far: "In James's books one catches hold of the romance only just as it is disappearing into the thicket of the novel. Thus it is a thankless task to pursue too long and arduously something that is always being assimilated into something else. James is not

a romancer like Hawthorne or Melville; he is a novelist to the finger tips."<sup>11</sup>

Isabel's personality receives the novelist's treatment. Her individuality is close to the facts of human experience. But the individuation achieved by her imagination sets her dangerously apart from the human connections readily recognizable in ordinary life. This accounts for the strong temptation to treat her as a case history and to let her identity get lost in a bevy of heroines with certain obvious traits in common. When Mr. Chase mentions the "psychological possibilities of romance" the reader may be grateful that the possibilities do not get explored. James's concern with art is responsible for keeping values and responsibilities in close league.

Our leading character is saved from a case-history fate by the charm of her enthusiasm for "experience" and her delight in discussing it, by the charm with which she deals irresponsibly in high-sounding generalities, by her "noble" aspirations, however tenuous. She is saved by the daring moral demands she makes on herself, and by the strong will with which she forces the satisfaction of those demands. It is this last trait which implicates Isabel and her creator in the charge of "self-indulgence" brought forth by Mr. Kettle, and it is in the examination of Isabel in terms of her morality which should bring us closest to her real self.

Her egocentricity reconciles her exaggerated fear and her over-weening self-confidence. The possibilities of attain-

ment are, to her imagination, so illustrious they frighten her with the enormity of their possible failure. Being who she is--who she thinks she is--a failure would be unbearable. The only attachment of which she is capable is one of her own imagining. Her attraction to Osmond is an expression of self-love. Osmond's "beautiful mind" (353) does not exist, except in her imagination. She falls in love with her own creation. As she gradually discovers the immorality behind appearances, she comes to terms with the real world, with communicable experience, with actuality. Her wish-projection had denied her time and experience with which to make real attachments to the variegated world issuing from Gardencourt. She entered too abruptly the world of Gardencourt from the world of the big, silent house in Albany. The life supplied by the Touchetts and Lord Warburton suggested too much beyond its own confines.

We have stated that Isabel resembles the image her deluded imagination sees in Osmond. In her more down-to-earth moments she identifies herself easily with Ralph. In fact, Ralph serves as a gauge by which we may measure Isabel's distance from reality at any given moment in the novel. Isabel and Ralph share common traits of temperament.

Ralph induces his father to increase the legacy stipulated for Isabel in Mr. Touchett's will. The careful persistence--his father is on his deathbed--provokes an inquiry: "But I don't see what good you're to get out of it." Ralph's reply is revealing: "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." (161) What he had said a few minutes before carried, unwittingly, sinister overtones: "I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants--to see the world for instance. I should like to put money in her purse." (158) Ralph's interest in Isabel, knowing as he does it can never be more than friendship, has the effect of living out through her the satisfactions denied himself, partly because of his infirmity. His father reflects: "You speak as if it were for your mere amusement." The reply is candid: "So it is, a good deal." (159)

Ralph's meddling and his reasons for it indicate his limitations in understanding Isabel. He expresses confidence in her good judgment long after his mother has sensed the danger.

As Isabel begins to see her error she discovers the real qualities in Ralph, qualities needing no boost from her imagination. Formerly, the comparisons between Ralph and Osmond were always in favor of the latter, though Isabel felt warm ties with her cousin. Now it is turned about: "But Ralph's little visit was a lamp in the darkness; for the hour that she sat with him her ache for herself became somehow her ache for him. She felt today as if he had been her brother." (356) Her concluding observation during her night vigil marks the beginning of her restoration to a sense of reality: "It was simply that Ralph was generous and that her husband was not.

There was something in Ralph's talk, in his smile, in the mere fact of his being in Rome, that made the blasted circle round which she walked more spacious. He made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been. He was after all as intelligent as Osmond--quite apart from his being better." (357)

With the death of Ralph, Isabel is alone--except for Pansy. On the occasion of her leave-taking, she had gone to say goodbye to Pansy at the convent. The young lady had been sent back to "think a little" after glimmerings of an independence she showed in her expressed attraction to Mr. Rosier. Isabel finds her subdued: "She didn't presume to judge others, but she had judged herself; she had seen the reality. She had no vocation for struggling with combinations; in the solemnity of sequestration there was something that overwhelmed her. She bowed her pretty head to authority and only asked authority to be merciful." (454) Before Isabel leaves, Pansy exacts a promise from her that she will return: "'Oh, I'll do everything they want. Only if you're here I shall do it more easily.'" Isabel considered. 'I won't desert you,' she said at last. 'Goodbye, my child.'" With Pansy's abrupt "I don't like Madame Merle," Isabel is further disarmed. "'You'll come back?' she called out in a voice that Isabel remembered afterwards. 'Yes--I'll come back.'" (455)

Before her marriage Isabel had said to Pansy, "'I shall

be so kind to you.' A vague, inconsequent vision of her coming in some odd way to need it had intervened with the effect of a chill." (293) Later, when Pansy is receiving the attention of Lord Warburton and the urgent and highly acceptable remonstrances of Mr. Rosier, Isabel is affectionately solicitous of her young stepdaughter's happiness. She is "struck with her shy sincerity," with "Pansy's supreme simplicity, an innocence even more complete than Isabel had yet judged it." (303) Pansy is bewildered by the anxious attention, however covert, her father and Madame Merle are paying to her interest in both Lord Warburton and Mr. Rosier. She is obedient and dutiful, but not passive: "Isabel was touched with wonder at the depths of perception of which this submissive little person was capable; she felt afraid of Pansy's wisdom--began almost to retract before it." (307)

However tenuous the characterization of Pansy may seem to critical readers, or however she may serve as a vehicle for some of James's own attitudes,<sup>12</sup> she is, as an element of the "felt life" of the story, a perfect instrument for the containment of Isabel's sentimental altruism. We have already seen how Osmond uses Pansy to key in Isabel's sentiments on his own behalf. She exists in her own right. In the course of the novel she gains connections with Isabel as a charming young girl; as the daughter of Isabel's lover; as Isabel's stepdaughter; as the object of a kind of attention from Isabel's former courtier, Lord Warburton; as the daughter of Isabel's

erstwhile friend, Madame Merle; and finally, as the only love connection left to Isabel at the close of the novel, excepting--and only in a highly qualified sense--her aunt.

We recall Isabel's experiencing the conviction--very early in her career--that a "young woman whom after all everyone thought clever should begin by getting a general impression of life. This impression was necessary to prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others a subject of special attention." This is amusing in one so young and inexperienced. The "distinctness of preferences" is not a prerogative of real life, only of the dream. Now Isabel has gained her "general impression," and in so doing has made an unimaginably grave mistake. Her turning now to the unfortunate condition of others--to Pansy--is not in the role of heroine, as she had imagined, not in the capacity of a "clever young woman" grown wise by observing life while keeping it all safely at a distance. She will find the fulfillment of her dream in ministering to the emotional needs of Pansy, and we believe it will be at the cost of extraordinary self-sacrifice. It will be quite unlike Isabel had imagined. It will be inside real life.

James brings Isabel to that "closeness to experience" which is "morality" in her alternating stupor and meditation as she makes her way to Ralph in London. Her thoughts brighten and darken as she tries to imagine what lies ahead, beyond Gardencourt. We do not expect clear vision to characterize her

contemplations: the displacement brought about by discovery is too radical. The vision begins to take shape as she mingles with the presences which seem to inhabit that first scene of her career. Then her last visit with her dying cousin and the deep feelings of love forming the almost wordless communication between them begin to give substance to the long-sought vision of life. But mediating these impressions, setting them against some contiguous experience dependable in its constancy, is the image of Mrs. Touchett. Isabel's aunt had seemed from the beginning to have astutely, even austerely, avoided a very deep involvement in life. The two are now seated in the long dining hall across from each other at "an abbreviated table" at lunch:

Here, after a little, Isabel saw her aunt not to be so dry as she appeared, and her old pity for the poor woman's inexpressiveness, her want of regret, of disappointment, came back to her. Unmistakably she would have found it a blessing to-day to be able to feel a defeat, a mistake, even a shame or two. She wondered if she were not even missing those enrichments of consciousness and privately trying--reaching out for some aftertaste of life, dregs of the banquet; the testimony of pain or the cold recreation of remorse. On the other hand perhaps she was afraid; if she should begin to know remorse at all it might take her too far. Isabel could perceive, however, how it had come over her dimly that she had failed of something, that she saw herself in the future as an old woman without memories. Her little sharp face looked tragical. (465-66)

The words which form these profound impressions in Isabel's mind evoke in the mind of the reader impressions of her impossible quest and its inevitable conclusion. Through the intimations impressed on our heroine's mind we come to see the

nature of her vision. Isabel had had nameless forebodings as she youthfully contemplated her destiny. These we may term--appropriating it from a description of Fleda's dark premonitions prior to her last visit to Poynton--the "imagination of disaster." But what Isabel now discerns in the countenance of her aunt she sees through the light of her presently-shaping vision of evil. Mrs. Touchett had made what seemed on the surface a fairly successful attempt at exonerating herself from life. Like Isabel, she had been "used" by Madame Merle, but the effect had touched her only indirectly. The death of her son brought this response: "Go and thank God you've no child," she had said to Isabel, "disengaging herself" from Isabel's attempt to console her. We do not know that her impulse to remain apart from the vicissitudes incident to love involvements had anything to do with the illusory pursuit of "experience" which was the essence of Isabel's folly. We cannot imagine her as ever having possessed the charm which had been a factor in Isabel's egoism. But Isabel sees in her aunt's face that she had "failed of something," (472) and she discerningly associates it with that safe remove from life which Isabel had herself, ironically, sought. Had Pansy not come into her life, she may very well have succeeded.

It is interesting that in Isabel's desperate plight, the responsive reader turns as a possible way out to the person of Caspar Goodwood. James seems to be dangling this not-

altogether-appealing prospect before us. F. R. Leavis catches one critic reading a happy ending into the novel: Isabel lives happily ever after with Caspar Goodwood.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Kettle sees in her refusal of Goodwood and Warburton support for his thesis that Isabel fits a death-wish pattern. Having quoted from James's notation concerning the ending of the novel,<sup>14</sup> he argues:

James's own evidence is of course conclusive as to his intention, but it is not necessarily relevant as to what is in fact achieved; and it seems to me that, although the ending of The Portrait of a Lady does not completely and irrevocably round off the story--the possibility of Isabel's later reconsidering her decision is not excluded--yet the dominant impression is undoubtedly that of the deliberate rejection of life (as offered by Caspar Goodwood) in favour of death, as represented by the situation in Rome. The scene with Goodwood is indeed very remarkable with its candid, if tortured, facing of a sexual implication which James is apt to sheer off. On the whole the effect of this scene, though one understands completely the quality of Isabel's reaction, is further to weight the scales against a return to Rome. Even if Goodwood himself is impossible, the vitality that he conveys is a force to be reckoned with and Isabel's rejection of this vitality involves more clearly than ever the sense that she is turning her face to the wall.<sup>15</sup>

If "Goodwood himself is impossible" Isabel's rejection of him can hardly be regarded as a decision against "life."<sup>16</sup>

Mr. Kettle seems to assume that Isabel is actually still free to choose: "It seems to me inescapable that what Isabel finally chooses is something represented by a high cold word like duty or resignation, the duty of an empty vow, the resignation of the defeated, and that in making her choice she is paying a final sacrificial tribute to her own ruined conception of

freedom."<sup>17</sup> It would seem rather that Isabel is forced to the only realistic conclusion possible: through the abuse of freedom the right to choose is lost. It is not so much that Isabel has learned stern lessons about duty and resignation; it is rather that she takes what is left after her exploitations have run their course. Whatever remains for Isabel now must arise from circumstances which the future will have to produce. Her connections with the past hold no promise, not because of any debilitating habit of rejection but by their very incompatibility with Isabel's corrected self. Lord Warburton is no more acceptable to Isabel the disillusioned than he was to Isabel the dreamer and, as Mr. Kettle acknowledges, Goodwood is impossible. The personality is no less inviolate in the light of common day than it is in the dream.

Perhaps the problem Mr. Kettle experiences with The Portrait of a Lady lies in the social and psychological burden he heaps upon the novel. Like other readers who incline to soften James's "solidity of specification"<sup>18</sup> into broad, generally useful concepts, Mr. Kettle insists on conceptualizing Isabel, her story, and James himself: "For Henry James, though he sees the tragedy implicit in the Victorian ruling-class view of freedom, is himself so deeply involved in that illusion that he cannot escape from it. His books are tragedies precisely because their subject is the smashing of the bourgeois illusion of freedom in the consciousness of characters who are unable to conceive of freedom any other way."<sup>19</sup> The

examples he offers, besides Isabel, have already been treated in the present study. If Isabel's story is the great one Mr. Kettle acknowledges it to be, it deserves to be separated from conceptual schemes and seen as experience possessing valid connections with real and recognizable life. It needs to be emphasized that the appeal of Isabel's story to readers of the present day is based on values more constant and more universally applicable than a "Victorian ruling-class view of freedom."

This is not to say that James was not interested in exploring and defining, illustrating and evaluating important elements of the complex milieu into which he places Isabel. Her conversations, particularly with Mr. Touchett and Henrietta Stackpole, suggest ideological tensions which, though always lightly, satirically treated, reveal a sense on James's part of the significance of major thought currents. Isabel's wishful approach to life magnetically holds the world in which she moves. The conditions of her being are contingent upon a world of multiple and various views and systems of values. James's phenomenal awareness of that world and his lively and authentic presentation of it are partly responsible for the greatness of his achievement. Even more important than these factors, however, is his attraction to the charm of individuality, his interest in the manifestation of personality in its unique expression, its very defiance, we may say, of stereotypes contrived to represent or illustrate. Whatever integrity

the novel may claim--the only claim James would insist upon-- is its closeness to life, by which he did not mean his own life.

It may be that Mr. Kettle, like many sensitive readers of Henry James, resists facing the stringent rightness of the real morality, the sociologically and historically unclassifiable morality. It is assuring to assume, as Isabel did, that mankind generally aspires to be right, to do good. The comfortable attitude is that rightness and goodness are better left indefinite and, if need be, equivocal. Could it be that James leads the reader by some deft manipulation into siding with Isabel in the pursuit of safely ideal experience? Might part of the impact of the novel come from the reader's inability to face reality as insistently and uncompromisingly as Isabel does? Isabel's moral sense is sound; her view of it suffers from the same inflated notions as do her views of her personal freedom, of her cleverness, of her altruistic inclinations. Her intuition tells her that there is something fundamentally wrong with Madame Merle. Though she detects it before it is too late, she refuses to act upon her feelings; she makes her usual allowance for Madame Merle's weakness and eventually becomes its victim:

She believed then that at bottom she had a different morality. Of course the morality of civilized persons has always much in common; but our young woman had a sense in her of values gone wrong or, as they said at the shops, marked down. She considered, with the presumption of youth, that a morality differing from

her own must be inferior to it; and this conviction was an aid to detecting an occasional flash of cruelty, an occasional lapse from candour, in the conversation of a person who had raised delicate kindness to an art and whose pride was too high for the narrow ways of deception. Her conception of human motives might, in certain lights, have been acquired at the court of some kingdom in decadence, and there were several in her list of which our heroine had not even heard. She had not heard of everything, that was very plain; and there were evidently things in the world of which it was not advantageous to hear. (269)

Yet when Isabel finally learns all, when she sees the travesty worked of every ideal and every value sustaining the right to take life seriously, she has only pity for Madame Merle who, she learns, is Pansy's real mother: "Poor woman-- and Pansy doesn't like her!" She reflects: "How the poor woman must have suffered seeing me--." (477)

The wages of presumption is humiliation. Her fear of shame has hovered over Isabel's contemplation of marriage, the breach of a vow "made before all the world." "She seemed to see, none the less, the rapid approach of the day when she should have to take back something she had solemnly bestowed. Such a ceremony would be odious and monstrous; she tried to shut her eyes to it meanwhile." (376) Her sense of right does, then, make allowance for the possibility of severing the marriage vow, at the cost of unutterable shame. When we see her last there is no indication of the course she will take regarding marriage. Of the ending James writes: "The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished--that it has not seen the heroine to the end of her situation--that I have

left her en l'air. This is both true and false. The whole of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. It is complete in itself--and the rest may be taken up or not, later." (379)

By a "geometry" of his own James came upon "the related state, to each other, of certain figures and things" in the wish-fulfillment configuration. The fulfillment of the dream and the shock of its realization--its harsh, sometimes brutal reduction to reality--is not the whole of any experience. But the sequel is quite another story, arising as it does from a new premise and with a measure of self-knowledge commensurate with both the actualities and the possibilities of life. The world out of which Isabel emerges was in a great measure darkened by her willful ignorance: "With all her love of knowledge she had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge co-existed in her mind with the finest capacity for ignorance."<sup>20</sup> Knowledge has a way of making the difference between what appears and what is. Henrietta tried to force a sense of the difference on to her friend's attention: "'Do you know where you're drifting?' Henrietta pursued, holding out her bonnet delicately. 'No, I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see--that's my idea of happiness.'" (171)

Isabel's imagination was too elusive even to be fastened

to images. Her reply to Henrietta is the only metaphor she creates in all her conversation about ideals and feelings. She makes only negligible use of figures of speech provided by others. Ralph conjectures: "'You want to drain the cup of experience.' 'No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I want to see for myself.'" (144)

If Isabel's imagination does not express itself in the modes usually thought of as romantic, neither does it body forth specific aims and ideas. It is the general expectancy, the anticipation, of "greatness" which seeks a form in real life for its containment. When it cannot find this form in actuality it proceeds to create one. The only legitimate imagination is that which arises out of real life, an imagination to which real life gives the form. The wish-projection mechanism reverses the process. This is illusion.

## CHAPTER VIII

## CONCLUSION

The novels and short stories which claim the attention of the present study dramatize one question: What is real? Perhaps it is the nature of the implied question and James's answer, by means of a wide-ranging canon of high literary achievement, which induces criticism to treat his fiction as though it were either philosophy or psychology or, more recently--in the case of Quentin Anderson--metaphysics. But James's fiction is certainly neither philosophy nor psychology, nor can it be said to reflect a preoccupation with the question in terms of either of these disciplines, let alone a given system within them. It may, however, be said, as it has been through the years, that James is a moralist. This observation has become a commonplace. Yet the moral awareness and behavior of his leading characters do not exemplify, nor could they be codified. The only abstraction which could be drawn from the moral experience of the protagonist in a James story is the annoyingly amorphous: To thine own self be true.

James kept his eye on experience. The experience itself, not the "system of observation" in which it was discovered and in which it was allowed to work its own way, became all-important. In his preface to the New York edition of Roderick

Hudson, he recalls the "ache of fear" with which, as a virtual novice, he approached the problem of entering and leaving the "related state, to each other, of certain figures and things" in the process of marking off the bounds of his story. The "principle of continuity," the relatedness of "figures and things," made any paring away seem arbitrary, willful, and merciless. It was not merely a problem of disturbing the continuity but of deciding among an apparent infinitesimal number of possibilities, a great many of which could, and perhaps should, develop and coexist in the fullness of experience.

If "the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting," the problem of bounds arises also in determining what to pursue once inside the experience and what to forego among the manifold suggestions the donnée offers. This is, of course, the problem every story-teller must solve with each undertaking, but to James, whose super-sensitive attraction was to fine distinctions, subtle nuances, and almost imperceptible variations of tone, the problem was formidable. To him the fine perceptions were the experience. The surcharged implications presented by the "related state . . . of certain figures and things" have an almost irresistible power to fascinate: "Relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."

The area of experience James almost invariably exploits in his major fiction is circumscribed by a personality given over to extremely simplified view of its own relation to the world of experience into which it seems to be entering as the story begins. Prospects ahead entice the imagination into the formulation of wishes which should be easily realized, fantasies time alone will actualize. The illusory nature of these wishes bespeaks lack of self-knowledge. Juxtaposed with this naivete regarding the self is a quality of high moral earnestness, expressed in behavior open, the motives apparent and willing to be known for what they are, the whole exhibiting the quality of disarming innocence. Exacting moral standards take the measure of character in periodic and final judgments.

The "self in relation to the self" is a phrase suggesting both the range and sharp focus on direct and at once completely spontaneous and reflective and utterly unself-conscious experience of a protagonist who--in independent and uninfluenced action--comes round to see and feel his own integrity in a sound moral position. The range of selfhood extends between the world of fantasy--or at least of contemplated but untried aspiration--and the tested and proven world of the apprehended self, the corrected self, the wish renounced or brought in line with unalterable, inimitable morality, with the self standing alone. The real, reality, is that action and expression which identifies the self, the morally discovered or corrected individuality. The expanse between the wish and

its correction or renunciation is occupied by ready-made modes of experience served up either as art, by connoisseurs, or as social status served up by meddlers, usually, in any case, economic parasites.

The immense resources of a James fiction almost invariably order themselves in the interest of one or more characters --in some cases all the major characters in a single work-- who are isolated from the world of action, the world of affairs engaging and absorbing the apparently less self-conscious attention of those who appear to be at home in it. The mode of participation at the beginning is that of the wish. Through it limiting and frustrating obstacles become the raw materials out of which dynamic processes of the unconscious gradually give substance to an illusion. The transformation of elements of reality into wish-fulfillment is the almost invariable beginning of a causal sequence making a story bearing certain superficial resemblances to the quest configuration. Indeed, the resemblance is close enough to provoke reader expectation not fully satisfied in the end. Many of James's stories leave the protagonist at a strange impasse, as though he is unaware of what has happened to him. The reader is not certain the experience can be understood. Some novels, the more richly complex, bring self-knowledge through the process of moral crisis. Desire to enter the actual world and accomplish self-realization on its terms, but without relinquishing the wish, is the thread on which James's strategies and his "systems of observation"

are strung. Variations on this pattern of behavior, recognizable in the human condition and by no means contingent upon a special moral frame, evolve intricately within a single work and become the one great truth on which the whole canon rests.

The attainment of self-knowledge is, of course, a moral triumph. The crisis making it possible occurs only after the "self in relation to the self" has passed through strenuous rigors of change, has traversed the long distance from self-consciousness which presumes self-knowledge and its concomitant sense of self-respect and poise, to the revelation that the wished-for is illusory, that experience cannot be known through an overt but impersonal representation, that suffering cannot be experienced at a safe distance from the center of its action. The gradually changing relationship of the self to the self begins with the immorality of self-delusion and ends with the morality of self-knowledge. The protagonist learns at last that ultimate values are invariably and intimately moral; that morality is a private, personal, inimitable response; that its expression is incompatible with either self-pity or recrimination; that it is neither demonstrative nor dramatic; and, most significant, that it is responsible.

The familiar observation that a James protagonist operates in a blessed economic vacuum, ill-founded though it is in the canon, could have originated and persisted only through the success with which the protagonist removes by a formidable act

of the will the economic consideration so often the very crux of the story. One of the more recent and in itself impressive statements of this notion of economic freedom argues in favor of artistic "simplification":

Even Henry James, on the surface one of the most complex and hair-splitting and qualifying and entangled of fictionists, begins with absolutely sweeping simplifications. To clear the way for the unimpeded moral choices which form the crucial moments of all his stories, he first eliminates most of what some other novelists might build their whole books from. No James character ever has to worry about making a living; James endows them all with handy inheritances. No James character is fettered by family responsibilities or any of the complex nets that fasten about the feet of people in life. All of James's people are free to move at will through the world he has made for them, absolutely and deliberately set free from all mundane entanglements so that their moral choices can be "pure" and uninfluenced. And though the complexities of the actual choice, the backing and filling, the delicate hesitations and withholdings, the partial renunciations and the hair-fine scruples, may be almost maddeningly complex, the act of simplification which has made this complexity possible is just as impressive.

James does, indeed, achieve notable artistic simplification, which is to say that his leading characters simplify a hitherto hopelessly entangled situation by dealing with the mundane at last with a high and beautiful personal morality. Wallace Stegner's incidental tribute to James's art<sup>1</sup> carries ironic implications, unwitting tribute to the skill with which James makes so immanent the stark economic realities of life, the debilitating effects of fortunes already earned, inheritances given or taken away by surprise, fortunes sought and fortunes failed. Morgan Moreen and his tutor, Nanda, Fleda

Vetch, Tina, Eugenia, Catherine Sloper, Morton Densher--all these and many others are caught in a tangle of provocations among which the economic is the most unyielding. Most of the meddling and interference, so prominent in the situations of so many of his heroes and heroines, is economically motivated. In fact, the plot usually turns on an encounter with the world of monetary affairs which exposes the wish element in the pursuit. Where the leading character has the notion of economic freedom, this freedom is seen at last as illusory. Money is at the center of almost every syndrome shaping into crisis. The late realization that money has perverse and vicious power is part of the total disenchantment. James sees his characters through to an unraveling, the protagonist truly freed at last from the undeniably mundane, though often left in economic straits. It may be safe to say that "livelihood" figures both in the illusion with which a story begins and in its denouement. The familiar "system of observation" commonly referred to as the "international contrast" provides extraordinarily realistic situations in which money is the crux.

Another aspect of the material world in which the leading character becomes involved, sometimes inextricably, is the world of material art. On the conceptual level art is at once the organization of life and the assertion of its ideals. This seems to be the essence of James's statements in his exchange with H. G. Wells. James would not look upon real art as static, but would see in it the latent, the potential, expression of

something to which the significant moment leads. This seems to be the sense of his bold statement: "It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance . . . and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process."<sup>2</sup>

To see the non-artist manifest what appears to be a genuinely moving, rapt response to a masterpiece of visual art, to be aware that he carries away from it reflections which preoccupy him even in his mundane absorptions, is for the less sensitive sometimes a cause of anguish. What is there in the art experience which has the power so to attract and apparently even to control? Allowing for a large measure of cultural and intellectual affectation, surely there remains something genuine in the power of art to work its spell. This is where the pursuer of illusory experience is so easily caught. That art is a mystery in its power to attract--an experience strange and apparently intimate--is reason enough for the seeker of abstract experience to seek identification. The connoisseur is always there as a link between the self-conscious adventurer and the mystery of art.

Then there is the aesthetic dimension of the art experience: the structure of principles and ideas about art. The mysterious power of art objects encourages speculation and conceptualization. When art becomes conceptualized--when it loses its concretion in principle and doctrine, in aesthetics --it loses also its connection with vital experience. It tends to retreat from reality. Ready and waiting to be overwhelmed

by the "art" experience, the pursuer of illusion is ripe for the machinations of the pseudo-artist, the hyper-aesthetic connoisseur. This conniving parasite holds out the prospects of participation in esoteria of an order set apart by its unerring discriminations and its condescending attitudes toward what it terms the crudities and vulgarities of everyday life. While professing to see subtle, incommunicable meanings in the object and in the "art" experience, he suggests by his very response to "culture" that the naive adventurer may become initiated and share the highly specialized experience.

Art is, then, a ready-made mode of experience into which the individuated personality of the protagonist may find accommodation. This is possible only to a temperament capable of wishing its existence out into a sphere beyond its own living. To identify the self with the variety of forms and expressions embraced by the word art is to experience at least a counterfeit of the varieties of experience within reality. The apparent value to the self of such a substitution for experience is that it seems to insure against the kind of direct and painful involvement which the self fears.

The unrealistic view of experience--the world of wishes, fantasies, and daydreams--is the product of what might be called a sense of inadequacy or insecurity in the real world. The leading character is not, of course, seeking identification with the forms of art. But one way or another the enticement to do so is present, either as the devices of meddlers or

as a mode of rationalization engaged in independently.

At the hands of criticism during his day and since, James has fallen victim of a fate quite different from, but with ironic connections with, the real and the counterfeit in the world of art. Those who judge him without reading his works are merely echoing the kind of judgment explicit in H. G. Wells's publications and in the careless identification of James with his first-person narrator. Recent critics of major stature, among whom are F. R. Leavis, F. W. Dupee, Leon Edel, R. P. Blackmur, and the late F. O. Matthiessen, are gradually breaking down these unfounded prejudices. Obstacles still remaining are those for which Van Wyck Brooks and Vernon L. Parrington are heavily responsible. They have to do with implications in James's expatriation. His long residence in England and eventual renunciation of American citizenship are exploited in the interest of interpretive biography, and inferences spill over into his writings. Against the charge of rootlessness, Mr. Quentin Anderson seeks to establish James as an "American among Americans."<sup>3</sup> But in order to do so, Mr. Anderson uses much the same methods as do the critics whom he seeks to correct. He further complicates the relationship between James's life and his writings by involving the metaphysics of Henry James, Sr. James as an exponent of his father's metaphysics becomes the author of a string of allegories supporting a fantastically modified transcendentalism.

If Anderson's The American Henry James meddles in the

life of his subject in order to repatriate him and thus make him belong to somebody or something, it is for the purpose of forcing James to yield his secret--his figure in the carpet. Mr. Anderson is honest in declaring his purpose, though not always faithful to it. His last chapter begins with a statement important for a necessary but often neglected discrimination: "This is not a chapter of conclusions about Henry James, the novelist, because this book has not dealt directly with James as an artist, but with his convictions about human beings and the universe they inhabit . . ." <sup>4</sup> Since there is no appreciable body of writings on this essentially philosophical and metaphysical subject from the pen of Henry James, the study must, as it does, draw largely from James's fiction. It is possible to deal with a writer's art without dealing with him as an artist. Though the distinction appears to be strained and carping, in the instance of James it is not only useful but necessary. To treat James as an artist is to discuss the principles and techniques with which he operates and to illustrate from his works. To deal with James's fiction as such is to free it from its author at least long enough to observe its independent entity in the center of its own referential world.

## FOOTNOTES

The writer of the present study is responsible for italics exceeding a single word.

Chapter I

- 1 Leon Edel, "An Introductory Essay" (New York, 1953), p. vi. Mr. Edel refers to an essay by Wilson Follett, "Henry James's Portrait of Henry James" (New York Times book review, August 23, 1936), p. 2.
- 2 Preface to Roderick Hudson, in The Art of the Novel, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 3. Because the New York Edition of James's fiction is not easily available outside the larger university libraries, the convenient collection introduced by Mr. Blackmur is cited throughout.
- 3 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in The Art of Literary Criticism, ed. Paul R. Lieder and Robert Withington (New York, 1943), p. 659.

Chapter II

- 1 Quentin Anderson, The American Henry James (New Brunswick, 1957), p. 149.
- 2 The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1955), p. 102.
- 3 Henry James, Selected Short Stories, ed. Quentin Anderson (New York, 1957), p. 142.
- 4 F. O. Matthiessen, Stories of Artists and Writers (New York, 1956), p. 14.
- 5 Sean O'Faolain, The Short Story (New York, 1951), p. 76.
- 6 Quentin Anderson, "The Two Jameses," Scrutiny, XIV (September, 1947), p. 8.
- 7 Anderson, Selected Short Stories, p. 144.
- 8 Henry James, Stories of Artists and Writers, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, 1957), p. 287.
- 9 The Art of the Novel, p. 49.
- 10 Selected Short Stories, p. 279.
- 11 Henry James, The Aspern Papers (New York, 1956), pp. 162-3.

Chapter III

- 1 F. W. Dupee, Henry James: His Life and Writings (New York, 1956), pp. 162-3.
- 2 Ibid., p. 135.
- 3 The Art of the Novel, p. 62.
- 4 Henry James, The Bostonians, ed. Irving Howe (New York, 1956), p. 464.
- 5 Henry James, Washington Square, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1959), p. 10.
- 6 Henry James, Washington Square, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York, 1959), p. 63.
- 7 Op. cit., p. 356.

Chapter IV

- 1 Henry James, The Aspern Papers, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1959), p. 12.
- 2 Ibid., p. 13.
- 3 Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), p. 72.
- 4 Op. cit., p. 202.

Chapter V

- 1 Washington Square, ed. Mark Van Doren, p. 119.
- 2 Ibid., p. ix.
- 3 Washington Square, ed. R. P. Blackmur, p. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 11.

Chapter VI

- 1 Preface to The Ambassadors, p. 307.
- 2 Ibid., p. 307.

- 3 F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Garden City, 1954), p. 196. "The Ambassadors too, which he seems to have thought his greatest success, produces an effect of disproportionate 'doing'--of a technique the subtleties and elaborations of which are not sufficiently controlled by a feeling for value and significance in living. What, we ask, is this, symbolized by Paris, that Strether feels himself to have missed in his own life? Has James himself sufficiently inquired? Is it anything adequately realized? If we are to take the elaboration of the theme in the spirit in which we are meant to take it, haven't we to take the symbol too much at the glamorous face-value it has for Strether? Isn't, that is, the energy of the 'doing' (and the energy demanded for the reading) disproportionate to the issues--to any issues that are concretely held and presented?"
- 4 Leon Edel, "Introduction to The Ambassadors" (Cambridge, 1960).
- 5 Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York, 1957).
- 6 Henry James, The Ambassadors (Cambridge, 1960).
- 7 Notebooks, p. 228.

#### Chapter VII

- 1 Richard Chase, The American Novel and its Tradition (Garden City, 1957), p. 134.
- 2 Ibid., p. 119.
- 3 Ibid., Chapter I, "The Broken Circuit," pp. 1-28.
- 4 D. W. Jefferson, Henry James (London, 1960), pp. 39-41.
- 5 Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (Cambridge, 1956), p. 172.
- 6 Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. II (New York, 1960), p. 29.
- 7 Ibid., p. 34.
- 8 Op. cit., p. 59.
- 9 F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Garden City, 1954), p. 190.

- 10 Portrait, p. 165. This passage and one already quoted on page 72 underscore Isabel's awareness of the problem of appearance versus reality in real life. Perhaps her too easy resolution of the problem may be laid to her generous trust in appearances where they confirm her own tastes.
- 11 Chase, p. 135.
- 12 Leavis, p. 186. "Though Pansy serves obvious functions as machinery in the relations between Isabel and Osmond, her presence in the book has, in addition, some point. As a representative figure, 'the white flower of cultivated sweetness,' she pairs in contrast with Henrietta Stackpole, the embodiment of a quite different innocence --a robust American innocence that thrives on free exposure to the world. She brings us, in fact, to the general observation that almost all the characters can be seen to have, in the same way, their values and significances in a total scheme."
- 13 Ibid., p. 190. "But then it is difficult to believe that anyone capable of making anything at all of Henry James could pronounce as another contributor, Mr. Stephen Spender, does: 'A third of this book is taken up with brush work which has nothing to do with the story, but much to do with James's determination that he would really present Isabel Archer to us.' After that we are hardly surprised when Mr. Spender tells us that 'there is something particularly obscene about What Maisie Knew, in which a small girl is, in a rather admiring way, exhibited as prying into the sexual lives of her very promiscuous elders'--hardly surprised, though the consummately 'done' theme of What Maisie Knew is the incorruptible innocence of Maisie; innocence that not merely preserves itself in what might have seemed to be irresistibly corrupting circumstances, but can even generate decency out of the egotistic squalors of adult personal relations."
- 14 Ibid., p. 189.
- 15 Kettle, pp. 30-31.
- 16 Op. cit., pp. 189-90.
- 17 Kettle, p. 31.
- 18 "The Art of Fiction," p. 659.
- 19 Op. cit., pp. 31-32.

20 Notebooks.Chapter VIII

- 1 Essay published separately by Viking Press, April, 1962, p. 3.
- 2 Henry James and H. G. Wells, ed. Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray (Urbana, 1958), p. 34.
- 3 The American Henry James, p. 7.
- 4 Ibid., p. 347.

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## VITAE

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