IDEAS OF 'LIFE' AND THEIR MORAL FORCE IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the operation, in much of Henry James's fiction, of ideas about how people should live, and explores the manner in which these ideas operate to affect the meaning and moral structure of many of his novels.

It is proposed that James's fiction displays a form of limited moral pragmatism: it is argued that James is deeply and consistently preoccupied in his fiction with the notion of an attractive, purposeful, fulfilling life in relation to which the varied placing of his characters has strong effects upon the moral judgements invited by his novels, as well as upon their central meanings.

The introduction, having explained the principles on which texts have been selected for analysis, makes clear that the approach in the thesis will be to seek evidence, for its claims, chiefly in the texts of the novels, rather than in other written material by James, or in biographical information about him (though this is not ignored) on the grounds that approaches to his fiction which concentrate too little on the texts have often distorted their meanings. Through the approach here, it is sought to discover fresh implications in his work, and to reassess some existing views.

The first chapter, which discusses 'life' and 'morality' in relation to James's fiction, ends with a brief analysis of important passages in The Portrait of a Lady.

There follow four chapters, each providing extensive analysis of one of James's last four major novels, The Awkward Age, The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors, and The Golden Bowl.

The conclusion attempts to draw together what has been discovered about 'life' and its relation to morality in James.

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FOREWORD

All references to the novels are to Penguin editions.

INTRODUCTION: THE THEME AND THE APPROACH

I

Over the years, a number of critics including Edmund Wilson, J.A.Ward, Morton Dauwen Zabel, and Granville H.Jones[1] have seen as typical of James's characters a tendency which Wilson, referring here exclusively to James's male characters, refers to as 'a way of missing out on emotional experience, either through timidity or prudence or through heroic renunciation'.[2] Later, and rather disparagingly, he observes that 'the protagonists of the later James are always regretting having lived too meagrely' (p. 103). Granville H.Jones, who chooses to direct his study of James's work through analysis of the fate of innocence in his fiction (presumably Wilson had a fair influence on the book) remarks that:

> through experience, therefore - if experience registers, as it does on all but the fanatically single- or close-minded - innocence is either cultivated or corrupted, and it may well bring moral illumination, confusion, or harm to others. As J.A.Ward says of involvement in James's fiction 'To become involved is to become either sinned-against or sinner'.
> ... James's works are thus dramas of consciousness and conscience in which innocence is exposed to experience and involvement exacts responsible behavior. The implicit question is, how <u>does</u> one fulfill his sense of responsibility?
> The answer in James's moral universe is renunciation of further complications in order neither to corrupt or cause pain to others nor to be corrupted or suffer oneself.[3]

Morton Dauwen Zabel approaches the same tendency from a different angle. Discussing James's young telegraphist in 'In the Cage', 'the humblest heroine of all his tales', Zabel observes that:

> She joins the other heroes and heroines of the Jamesian drama - Christopher Newman, Catherine Sloper, Isabel Archer, Hyacinth Robinson, Maisie, Fleda Vetch, Strether, Milly Theale, Maggie Verver - who, caught, caged, or pinioned in situations that bring them to defeat, tragedy, or a liberating disillusionment, snatch from the baffling odds or denials of experience the only reward which the life condemned to limitation and reality

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1 Edmund Wilson, <u>The Triple Thinkers</u>: J.A. Ward, <u>The Imagination of Disaster</u>: Morton Dauwen Zabel, <u>Craft and Character</u>: Granville H. Jones, <u>Henry James's Psychology of Experience</u>

2 Wilson, p. 96

3 Jones, p.X, Ward, p.74

permits. [4]

Following L.C. Knights, he argues that this reward which comes from the 'sense of exclusion from experience' is - Zabel takes an optimistic view - 'a capture of the trophy of the spirit's "vitality" and self-knowledge, the "qualities making for life"'.

Clearly these approaches are opposed to, for example, Dorothea Krook's conception of the overloaded consciousness in James: where Wordsworth strips, James loads, ultimately creating characters 'on whom not a single implication of the meaning of their life's experience is lost' and who are 'keenly exposed to every fresh impact of experience'.[5] What seems doubtful about Ms Krook's view here is, first, that Jamesian characters frequently misinterpret themselves, often without enlightenment; second, that their psychological characteristics are such that they are <u>closed</u> to certain areas of experience and third that the 'self-consciousness' that Ms Krook herself emphasizes is frequently the very trait which cuts the characters off from experience.

Professor Zabel's equation of 'the baffling odds or denials of experience' with the 'qualities making for life' does make a certain kind of sense, but in the light shed by the novels and stories it seems irrationally positive. Professor Jones's interest in innocence produces interesting ideas, but his starting point, which is R.W.B. Lewis's conception of James's chief moral preoccupation as 'the dialectic of innocence and experience' [6] represents a questionable premiss, questionable chiefly because the very nature of concepts such as innocence and experience in James's work is itself problematic in a number of ways. For one thing, 'experience' is something which James represents many of his characters as never feeling themselves reassured about - reassured that they've had it, or know exactly what it is or what its possibilities are. For another, it is not all that easy to describe many of James's

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4 in his introduction to <u>In the Cage and Other Tales</u>, New York, 1958, p. 12 5 <u>The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James</u>, p. 22 6 R.W.B. Lewis, <u>The American Adam</u>, p. 153

characters satisfactorily as 'innocent'. For another, there is the problem of deceptive appearances: Nanda, for example, in The Awkward Age, is actually much less 'innocent' from the beginning than Vanderbank, which is one of the central ironies in the novel. But my main objection to concentrating on the innocence/experience dialectic is that it doesn't seem to me to describe with any centrality what most of James's fiction is about. It is possible to be or to feel yourself to be excluded from life and not be at all innocent. I am more interested in this thesis in the tension between involvement and exclusion. Furthermore, I believe that Lewis's dialectic represents something too close to an 'idea' in the sense that T.S. Eliot intended the word when he remarked rightly that James could elude ideas, a notion which will be examined further.

'Involvement' and 'exclusion', like 'experience' and 'innocence', imply some related questions. Experience of what? Innocence of what? Exclusion from what? Involvement in what?

Life.

The word 'life' occurs all over James's fiction, along with the sense that it is very desirable to 'live' and that most of his protagonists don't 'live' enough. It is never defined. But we can find it all the time. When Strether casts a wistful eye toward Gloriani and his attendant duchess, we know that they represent 'life'. Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant, splendidly described by Edmund Wilson as 'these healthily female women' (p. 107), are also described in relation to their sense for, mastery of, embodiment of, 'life' (though Wilson's observation that they take on a character 'frankly sinister' is highly debatable, as I shall try to demonstrate). Maud Lowther and Mrs Gereth are full of life. Lady Fanny, Petherton's sister, in her way, has the special quality. Miriam Rooth has it.

What these characters have is the capacity for 'involvement'. Frequently in James's fiction we are confronted with the metaphor of the river and the bank, the question of the plunge. Strether shocks himself at the extent of his plunge, and is justly delighted. A number of other protagonists are not able to immerse themselves at all. But the point is that the kind of 'life' missed is 'involvement' as distinct from 'obser-

vation' or 'impressions': the kind of involvement embodied by Kate Croy's aunt: 'Mrs Lowder _was_ London, _was_ life - the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray'.[7]

What I want to do is to try, over five chapters, to explore the operation of this complex and shifting idea in James's fiction in relation to the kind of moral judgements toward which James seems to direct his readers. It has long seemed to me that if the getting of 'life' is very important in James's fiction, then that fact is bound to affect the way in which we judge the characters' behaviour. What I will try to do is to show, principally in relation to four late novels, how the principle of involvement in life governs the whole nature of much of James's fiction. I believe it to be the most important theme in his work, although not all of his work. As Edmund Wilson points out, in the three long novels of the later eighties, _The Bostonians_, _The Princess Casamassima_, _The Tragic Muse_, there is 'a will to participate in life, to play a responsible role' (p. 105).

On its own, of course, this is not an entirely satisfactory statement: it would not be impossible to extend the theme of this thesis, at least a little, into all three. Olive and Basil in _The Bostonians_ are both strongly limited by _egotism_, which is undoubtedly, in the fiction examined in detail here - in relation to Isabel Archer or Vanderbank or Milly Theale - seen as a trait leading to forms of exclusion: furthermore, the novel's direction, toward what looks like widespread frustration at the ending, gives it another connection with those works which portray unfulfilment as a precondition of 'realism'. _The Princess_ is particularly explicit about involvement and exclusion. As John P. O'Neill points out: 'James used the design initially figured in Hyacinth's parents to structure his hero's relations with the other characters in the novel'.[8] Hyacinth is hereditarily doomed, in fact,

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7 _The Wings of the Dove_, p. 24

8 _Workable Design_, New York, 1973, pp. 50-51. He refers to the origins of Henry James's use of this theme as being in 'legend and fairy tale': O'Neill rightly implies the archaism of this approach compared to that of his other example, taken from Zola.

to experience a difficult relationship with the actual, no matter the broadening range of actuality he encounters: one thinks of how, at Medley, he finds that 'the repast was delicate - though his other senses were so awake that hunger dropped out and he ate, as it were, without eating - and the grave automatic servant filled his glass with a liquor that reminded him of some lines of Keats in the "Ode to a Nightingale"'. [9]Hyacinth is of course overwrought, but we observe the displacement of his response from the plane of the actual.

In The Tragic Muse, there might be a limited connection in a particular kind of perspective on Dormer's retreat from politics and in Miriam's retreat from Sherringham, but this novel is probably the most complete exception, and the artist's life for Dormer is the only fulfilment for him, and is not presented as renunciation.

There might be many such qualifications to Wilson's remark, but on the whole one agrees. Certainly these novels all make excursions into an external world of social breadth and detail.

From one sort of viewpoint they suffer from loose construction, and a relative lack of emotional or moral intensity when compared with what, from that viewpoint, seems to be the better work. In the case of The Tragic Muse, the looseness sometimes borders on aimlessness.

Opinion on the novels has varied widely. I do not regard them as representing James's better work: indeed The Tragic Muse is arguably one of James's least successful novels and to find its equal one has to go to the very beginning of his career.[10]

This bears on my choice of novels. These three I have excluded because I would not attempt to claim that 'life' is the major theme there that it is elsewhere. Also, with limited space, it is probably best to discuss novels which most seem to need discussion. Most of the work of James's early and middle periods is fairly accessible, and though it can be argued that The Awkward Age and The Ambassadors are neither of them particularly

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9 The Princess Casamassima, p. 261

10 This is not to deny the success of Miriam Rooth, or of the bleakly accurate and touching account of the artist's existence.

difficult novels, they are complex relative to earlier work, and seem to require more discussion than, say, anything from Roderick Hudson to The Spoils of Poynton.

The Wings of the Dove is James's most difficult novel. It is there, substantial, important, puzzling, in perhaps something of the relation, to the rest of James's work, which Measure for Measure has to Shakespeare's. The Golden Bowl is difficult in a different way - it is in a sense an exceedingly dense and concentrated novel which, particularly in the complexity of its moral developments, needs a great deal of attention.

It is important to emphasize that the thematic approach used here has bearings throughout James's work, on stories and on novels not analyzed here. Indeed, as early as 'The Story of a Year', Lizzie Crowe is described as being 'glad to step out of the current of life', and James remarks on the 'certain meditative rapture' even for the 'sensitive spirit' in standing on the 'quiet shore' and 'watching the hurrying, eddying flood'.[II]

There has been a certain amount of harmless critical speculation about a Rowland/Roderick division within James's personality: undoubtedly the passion which Roderick Hudson displays in James's early novel already seems strongly bound up with the sense - Rowland's - of danger. Already, too, in Rowland's speculations about the moral consequences of Roderick's development, there appears an interrrogative note where the nature of the balance between moral imperatives and the need for vital experience is scrutinized: furthermore, James's interest in egotism as a trait fatal to the possibility of certain kinds of personality development (here literally, in Roderick's last 'passionate walk' and hypothesized 'defiant entertainment' in the storm) is thoroughly established. And 'let a poor visionary devil live his life as he can' (p. 336), Roderick's ironical and catalytic plea to Rowland toward the end, is an early surfacing of moral difficulties which will be treated in terms

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II The Complete Tales of Henry James, Volume I, 1864-1868, pp. 76-77

highly problematic in James's later fiction.

The denial of fulfilment in The American caused particularly strong protest among James's readers.[12]

In The Europeans, the New Englanders inhabit a place seemingly more notable for its cleanliness and order rather than its liveliness or warmth. While the complexities of this excellent novel make facile any less than subtle approach to it, at the end we still survey a rather circumscribed field of possibility: Acton and Eugenia create in their cautious circling and parting a lasting sense of unease in the reader, the sense as so often elsewhere of a peculiar inevitability about frustrated chances. (Acton's fastidiousness is dramatized with great power in the later character of Vanderbank.)

Of Washington Square, Rebecca West aptly remarked:

> The book so beautifully expresses the woe of all those people to whom nothing ever happens, who are aware of the gay challenge of life but are prevented by something leaden in their substance from responding.[13]

Fleda Vetch, on the other hand, in The Spoils of Poynton, retreats from life because of an excess, in her substance, of a fatal over-refinement.[14]

The Sacred Fount, which belongs to the period on which this thesis chiefly focusses, has drawn varied comment over the years, some of it very exotic,[15] some sympathetic, some irritable. One of the defences of the novel (it seems, intrinsically, to need defending, and James's remarks to Howells and Pinker at the time suggest a consciousness of how his readers might respond) has been to see the narrator as an artist figure. Tony Tanner, characteristically,[16] has been a strong exponent of this view,[17] while others such as Oscar Cargill have expressed impatience at the idea. My own view on the protagonist-as-artist approach to James is contained within the discussion of The Portrait of a Lady below.

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12 see this thesis, p.31 13 Henry James, London, 1916, p. 56
14 see below, p.13 15 such as Jean Frantz Blackall's Wagnerian connection in chapter four of Jamesian Ambiguity and The Sacred Fount, New York, 1965 16 given, for example, his ideas on Isabel Archer (see this thesis, p.58) 17 in The Reign of Wonder, Cambridge, 1965

The difference between being an observer and a participant is clearly important in The Sacred Fount. But it is not, I would argue, important in its suggestion of the location of the artist. The observer/participant dialectic is as seductively misleading as that of innocence/experience:[18] the narrator is a participant (just as James the artist was). The Sacred Fount is much more interesting as a novel about the nature of social relations and, more importantly, about the value of different kinds of experience. The notion of different kinds of value being associated with different experiences is one to which this thesis returns frequently. Meanwhile it is necessary to insist that the novel is not, as some critics have felt, in some profound way expressive of despair: its very positiveness renders problematic the whole question of what 'involvement' with life is.

Even as late as The Ivory Tower,[19] it is Graham Fielder's Densher-like exclusion from the world of 'business' whose echoes and continuance he comes to survey - his 'being' rather than 'doing' of which Betterman so much approves - which is a central dynamic of the novel. Yet the question of the worth, in the Jamesian world, of 'being' without certain kinds of 'doing', is precisely one of the major questions this thesis will investigate.

I have ended the first chapter with an abbreviated discussion of The Portrait of a Lady, mainly in order to test some of the ideas raised in that chapter, but also partly to establish a substantial bridge between the four analytical chapters and my observations about other work of James.

I have also, naturally, chosen four novels in which I feel that 'ideas of life' are particularly active. And although two of them are flawed, I regard these four novels, along with The Portrait of a Lady, The Spoils of Poynton, and The Europeans as constituting James's best and most important long fiction.

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18 Walter Isle ('The Romantic and the Real: The Sacred Fount' in Henry James: Modern Judgements, London, 1968, p.260) talks of the divorce of 'art and life' and the narrator having the same 'innocence' as Fleda or Nanda. But none of them is innocent - nor is the narrator 'divorced from life'. Plainly.

19 'One pauses, horrified to find oneself ticking off these masterpieces on one's fingers, as though they were so many books by Mrs Humphrey Ward or buns by Lyons.' Rebecca West, p. 98

II

Having said something about the theme, it would be wise to give an indication of the approach. Jamesian criticism, to an extent which is probably unique, tends to focus a great deal on matters outside the fiction. This is for several reasons. Some of James's work, like The Wings of the Dove, often seems to require elucidation from outside the text. Again, James left a large body of work analyzing his professional concerns and techniques. In addition, he has provided autobiographical material, criticism and other writings to which it is possible to refer. Furthermore, Leon Edel has written an extraordinarily detailed and finely crafted biography, which stands as a monument around the foot of which there is a deal of personal recollection, and so on.

This business of approach, of course, raises questions which cannot be discussed here about the whole activity of criticism. Certainly one does not wish to insist upon the autonomy of the text: every context counts. But all too frequently Jamesian criticism is undermined rather than aided by the various kinds of contextualisation it invokes. To consider all questions of context from biographical matters to Marxist perspectives is legitimate when, and only when, proper respect is paid to the text. It has been my idea to concentrate almost exclusively on the texts of the novels, not as an ideological gesture, but in order to see what kind of analysis that produces. A refusal to consider that Milly Theale is Minny Temple will probably lead to conclusions different from those of most critics; but not incompatible with the idea that some aspects of James's distant recollections of Minny might well be incorporated in Milly. It might be argued that if what James says about something he wrote is in conflict with what one discovers in the text, one would be as well to 'trust the text'. Frequently conflicts do arise.

Of course one speculates about the origins in experience of the characters. One puzzles over some and seems to recognize others. It is hard not to see several possible eminent Ameri-

cans behind Waymarsh, not to speculate about some possible original of Fernanda Brookenham. It may be that there is no meaning to Densher's pain over his ignorance of Milly's last letter other than James's puzzlement and hurt over the suicide of Constance Fenimore Woolson.

More importantly, one is perfectly aware of James's personal concerns behind his fiction. That James was deeply and continuingly absorbed in the question of a 'life' from which he often felt himself to be separated is indisputable and many Freudian and other theories exist to try to explain why. Such explanations are required given, for example, James's hurt and resentment and near panic at the age of 56 when snubbed by William and Dr Baldwin over his delighted purchase of Lamb House. Though this cannot be the place for such a discussion, it is fascinating to speculate about his psychology and its development through a lifetime's experience.[20] But the failure to be properly cautious when examining texts in relation to the life of the author has lead to this kind of thing:

> A vivid, particularly realised Milly might for (James) stand in the midst of his indirections, but what for his reader these skirt round is too much like emptiness; she isn't there, and the fuss the other characters make about her as the 'Dove' has the effect of an irritating sentimentality.[21]

And in a footnote Leavis adds:

> She was associated for him with his beloved and idealised cousin, Minny Temple, who died young; but that doesn't give her any more substance for us.

Leavis is not a critic normally given to this kind of lapse. What has happened is that preconceptions formed by his identification of Milly with Minny have lead him into a negligent reading. It is particularly inappropriate given Leavis's own strictures upon the reading of the Prefaces:

> But the Prefaces in general belong essentially to that phase of the late James in which they were written. One must not expect to find out from James's discussion of it how one is to take an example of his more difficult and problematic works. Those who assume naively that they <u>are</u> getting light (and it seems

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20 A consideration of some aspects of James's life appears in chapter one, in an attempt to refine the meaning of the kinds of 'life' from which James felt himself excluded, and to establish those of which he was clearly a part.

21 'The Later James' in <u>The Great Tradition</u>. p. 183

> to be a not uncommon illusion) are likely to come away with some notable misconception...people don't expect to understand a late work of James unless they know beforehand on authority what they are to find.[22]

This is absolutely right, I feel, and one should be as cautious with the Prefaces (including those dealing with works which are not so 'difficult') as with any other non-textual information. I should prefer to regard the Prefaces as interesting criticism which may or may not have to do with James's novels.

I should like to finish this preliminary discussion by considering at length an example of the dangers I have been describing. One flaw in Leon Edel's otherwise splendid biography of James is his proclivity toward vulgar Freudianism. Wishing to establish an obvious pattern linking James's life, Prefaces and fiction, Edel often uses, as do so many others, procrustean methods toward the texts. This is an analysis concerning The Spoils of Poynton. Reference is made to James's experience with Guy Domville:

> Critics have been puzzled by the character of Fleda Vetch and her ill-motivated renunciation of Owen. Her reasons are noble; yet they have no relation to the realities James incorporated into his story. His scenario shows James at odds both with his characters and his plot. He seems to have fixed his mind on the ultimate destruction of Poynton; in the end no one is to have anything - as he had been left with nothing when his own artistic work went up in smoke at the St James's. The novelist begins, in effect, with the idea for one kind of novel, that of the dispossessed mother, and ends with another. He removes Mrs Gereth from the centre of the stage and puts Fleda in her place. To read James's late preface and his description of his heroine is to recognise that he'thought' one character but created another. The Fleda of his preface, the 'superior' girl with the 'demonic' mind and 'free spirit' is not in the book. In the book she is as confused and filled with tergiversation as as James had been in the theatre. His traditional ending would have been the triumph of the philistines and the defeat of the noble-minded. But he substituted melodrama instead; perhaps because he had himself been forced to abandon the stage, in a bit of melodrama not of his own making.[23]

The trouble is that this seems now to be a novel more of Professor Edel's making than of Henry James's. He adds more logs to the blaze by suggesting that unconsciously in having Poynton

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22 F.R. Leavis, 'James as Critic', published in Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism (edited by Morris Shapira), p. I4

23 The Life of Henry James (the Definitive Edition) vol.2, p.22I

burn down, James is recalling the fire in which his father lost his leg - the word 'amputation' occurs in the novel in connection with the loss of Mrs Gereth's antiques. It is interesting to note that this passage, which follows a narrative description of events in the novel, refers to critics, James's disaster in the theatre, and the late preface. The novel itself is pushed into the background. And while Edel is writing a biography, here he is with equal certainty supposed to be writing about the fiction. This is a good example of a conflict - among others - between preface and novel. The Fleda of the book isn't immensely 'superior', hasn't a 'free spirit' or a 'demonic' mind, but this is very much a matter of design and is wholly consistent with the apparent intentions of the novel, which is very much about Fleda, whether or not it ought to have had more to do with Mrs Gereth, who, incidentally, doesn't exactly disappear, and seems to manage to <u>share</u> the stage with Fleda in a relationship which contains all the central ironic meaning of the novel. The reasons for Fleda's renunciation, really the single reason, is far from 'ill-motivated', if that implies that insufficient reason is provided in the novel for the reader to imagine why she has done it. Her motive is probably rather pathetic and barely realised by Fleda herself, but it is strong enough. Her whole apparent compatibility with Mrs Gereth is based on their appreciation of the 'fine', as opposed to the philistinism of Owen and the Brigstocks. Mrs Gereth's weak point, however, is in the moral sensibility line, and Fleda is supposed to be wholly different; and indeed to an extent she is.

But what is undoubtedly the central irony in the novel is the fact that Fleda rejects Owen because it would be <u>vulgar</u>, in the Mrs Gereth sense, to usurp the ghastly Mona and appear to wish to steal somebody else's fiance. Fleda is in other words more the soulmate of Mrs Gereth than the reader wishes to believe. And indeed in this sense she is more 'fine' even than Mrs Gereth, who has lost sight of everything in the battle for the spoils (for no matter what admirable reasons); and since this is the pivot on which the novel turns, Edel's desire to equate James's life at this time with the fiction could be seen to have

lead to a very damaging distortion of the work. The 'confusion' and 'tergiversation' of which Edel writes is carefully, sometimes brilliantly handled by James in order to show how Fleda avoids facing her aesthetic decision when in fact a moral decision is called for. The fire is the only thing one can conceive of to destroy Fleda's protective web of intricacy: the whole ethos of the 'fine' as symbolized by Poynton perishes, and in a style which admits nothing of the melodramatic.

As for Edel's statement that 'in the end no one is to have anything', this is simply untrue. Fleda has, most importantly, regained the ability to think and to act; 'I'll go back', she says right at the end, the first direct, unclouded statement she makes in the book, and a dramatic and skilfully handled end to the novel it makes. As to the triumph of the philistines, they have, in a sense, triumphed: the spoils are destroyed.

Edel's theory about the recurrence of fire symbols hardly seems necessary to account for James's ending, as there aren't all that many ways of destroying a house. The mention of Guy Domville as having 'gone up in smoke' is a metaphor of Edel's and needn't be seen as having anything to do with the novel. The theatre was not burned down and nobody set fire to the stage or the author. It would have been metaphorically nearer the events at the St James's had Poynton fallen down around someone's ears. As for the 'melodrama' equation which Edel suggests: even were the novel in any way melodramatic, there is no reason to expect that James would have altered the ending to insert an autobiographical note of bitterness. Apart from the sheer absurdity of the idea, his reaction to the St James's business was not detached enough to impose a cerebral judgement, 'melodramatic', on the affair. It wasn't 'melodramatic', anyway. It was actual, frightening, hurtful, as Edel himself points out at great length.

CHAPTER ONE

'LIFE' AND MORALITY IN HENRY JAMES

I

There are suggestions of determinism in James's fiction, notably in The Ambassadors, but it is a half-baked notion, neither detailed nor systematic. There is no evidence that James was a determinist in any strong, thoughtful, serious way: the idea is there in the fiction as a kind of pleasantry. It does not explain, for example, in The Ambassadors, why Strether behaves as he behaves. It might be better to say, more accurately, that James in his life appears temperamentally to have been resigned to certain things.

It is important to raise the idea, to dispose of it, because of a number of things in his fiction such as renunciation and moral pragmatism, which will be among some major objects of this analysis.

And because of the frequent use of the expression, or of its variants, 'there we are!':[I] of the novels which are to be examined in detail, three of the four end this way. '"Then there we are!" said Strether' ends one. '"I see. There we are. Well," said Mr Longdon - "tomorrow."' ends another. The Wings of the Dove, however, is more sombre and here: 'we shall never be again as we were!' is Kate's last line. (Strether faces the present, Mr Longdon is prepared to face tomorrow, but Kate's declaration is an epitaph.) This (only relative) open-endedness is partly a result of the justice James does to moral complexities, but one is also conscious of the sense of his protagonists dealing with the inevitable, with a force which limits their possibilities. Of course, this force is Henry James, but why does he direct 'forces no whit less specifically powerful than the proverbial "doom of the house", - Destiny, Deus ex machina, - of great traditional art'[2] to the ends that he does?[3]

It is not that one would feel justified in calling James's work pessimistic, even after making some very obvious exceptions. It is too complex for that, and there are positive aspects nearly everywhere. For example, Dorothea Krook claims of The Awkward Age that 'it is essentially not a comedy at all, but a tragedy - the tragedy of Nanda Brookenham' (p. I38). But this isn't really true. Nanda is happy in everything but her wasted

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I What David Lodge in Language and Fiction (London, I966) calls 'the language of heightened cliche'. 2 Ezra Pound, 'A Brief Note; reprinted in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays (ed. Edel), p. 30. 3 Ruth Bernard Yeazell comments on two of these endings in Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James, Chicago, I976, pp. I00-I0I.

love for Van and we haven't enough sympathy with Van to elevate him to tragic proportions. Nanda will rather enjoy life at Beccles.

The trouble is that the positive aspects of the novel occur within a context where possibilities are already circumscribed. Whatever of the positive that we take from, for example, Mr Longdon's pleasing and flexible moral intelligence, is set against the sadness of a life shadowed by unrequited love, and death. The Ambassadors is in its way quite a cheerful novel, as a number of critics have remarked, but Lambert, James makes certain, will get so much and no more out of his experiences. Elsewhere the effect can be much more sombre, of course, as in The Wings of the Dove, but one still wouldn't be happy about defining that work as pessimistic. The air of the sombre is the result of something specific, notably that Merton and Milly are cut off from the life which they need. James is quite specific about it, that Kate is life for Merton. Milly, I shall argue, dies because nothing except death and illness can have any reality for her. But that isn't the whole novel, and much more importantly, James deals with Merton and Milly to a certain degree ironically which, as I shall try to show, complicates the matter considerably.

If there is no evidence in James's life or work to suggest that he was of a particularly gloomy nature, and really there is a huge amount of evidence - including the sheer amount of work he produced - to indicate the contrary, it is by now a commonplace that as a child he saw himself apart from other boys, that in his relations with William he was, to the end of his brother's life, insecure, that his relations with Edith Wharton and other richer and materially more successful people were tinged for him with self-doubt, and so on. It has not been difficult to characterize James, in spite of his occasionally huge social commitment, as an outsider, as one excluded. This is quite without moving into theories about his sexuality or into more exotic areas of psychoanalytical speculation.

And yet this requires some prolonged discussion.

II

In one respect they are particularly 'unrealistic' - the readiness shown by so many of them to surrender the tangible fruits of victory in favour of some almost quixotic ideal of personal honour. Notable examples of this are Christopher Newman... Isabel Archer...Fleda Vetch. For this strain of sacrificial idealism in James an origin may be sought in the realm of philosophy or in that of psychology according to one's temperamental bias. One may refer it back to the transcendental religious teachings of James's father, the friend of Emerson and disciple of Swedenborg. Or one may seek a psychological explanation in the whatever-it-was in James's personal experience that made him a lifelong celibate. James had many close friends; but when in his diaries he talks about 'living' it is always in connection with his lonely labours over his study table. And in his account of the passional relations of men and women there is always an air of platonic aloofness from the crudities of flesh and blood.[4]

As we shall see, that which Joseph Warren Beach feels is 'unrealistic' was seen in quite opposite terms by James. We shall further observe that 'living' - even in the notebooks - was for James much more than working. Nonetheless, the particular set of assumptions about fulfilment which mould the shape of James's work invites precisely Beach's kind of speculation. Philip Sicker, who, like Naomi Lebowitz, is interested in love and passion in James, discusses that collection of approaches to James which assume a passionless mind the creator of what is regarded as denatured fiction: Sicker cites the disapproval of Wells and what he rightly terms the 'virulence' of George Moore's personal attacks on James, whom he termed 'the eunuch'.[5] This group of approaches to James has had its adherents ever since, even although it is and has long been a commonplace that the view of James as a man of narrow outlook and experience isolated by devotion to his craft, and by disabling personality traits, is fallacious.

I do not intend to attempt to place specific works in relation to specific periods of James's life: Nicola Bradbury has speculated about the relationship between 'biography and genre' in relation to The Ivory Tower and The Sense of the Past,[6] and we

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4 from an introduction to The American, New York, I949
5 Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James, Princeton, New Jersey, I980, chapter one.
6 Henry James: The Later Novels, Oxford, I979, chapter six

may assume that such relationships become increasingly complex as a writer gets older. All I wish to do here is raise some questions, with no thought of historical specificity as to life/work interactions, about the ways in which James himself 'lived' and saw himself as living.

When one reads the chief source of information on James's life - Edel's epic biography - one can hardly fail to be struck by the quality of the texture of James's life through much of its near seventy four years, from an eventful childhood to a deathbed curiously rich in complex and fascinating utterances, themselves discerningly characterized by the fading Master:

> These final and faded remarks have some interest and some character - but this should be extracted by a highly competent person only - some such whom I don't presume to name, will furnish such last offices.[7]

One senses even behind the final incoherencies the liveliness of an extraordinary brain.

James's own experience was in fact exceptionally rich. His friends were numerous, at times in number apparently excessive: Edel quotes James complaining in a letter about 'the ravenous Moloch of one's endless personal social relations'.[8] He was able deeply to absorb many of the central characteristics of several cultures. His work and his life both testify to a willingness to probe many recesses of possible experience. If this was more true of his work than his life, his life is nonetheless in its way monumental. Edel's biography presents a quite remarkable portion of nineteenth and early twentieth century American and European high culture to be found in such close connection with one man's life and activities. From Thackeray's admiration of the boyhood jacket to Asquith's bearing witness to the Master's suitability for British citizenship, Henry James was closely familiar with the celebrated, rich and powerful of his time. The breadth of his interests, meanwhile, in painting, food, cycling, history, architecture, drama, conversation and literature was considerable.

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7 The Life of Henry James, Volume II, p. 8I0
8 The Life of Henry James, Volume II, p. 87

Nor was his a distant relation to the life about him. Examine his reaction to any hundred events in his life and one finds concern, connection, relationship, love, kindness, anxiety, hurt - the emotional repertoire of one who is very much within life. Furthermore, James was a sensuous man. Witness the famous description of the simpler aspects of Bressois cuisine:

> The table d'hote was going on, and a gracious, bustling, talkative landlady welcomed me. I had an excellent repast - the best repast possible - which consisted simply of boiled eggs and bread and butter. It was the quality of these simple ingredients that made the occasion memorable. The eggs were so good that I am ashamed to say how many of them I consumed. 'La plus belle fille du monde,' as the French proverb says, 'ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a'; and it might seem that an egg which has succeeded in being fresh has done all that can reasonably be expected of it. But there was a bloom of punctuality, so to speak, about these eggs of Bourg, as if it had been the intention of the very hens themselves that they should be promptly served. 'Nous sommes en Bresse, et le beurre n'est pas mauvais,' the landlady said with a sort of dry coquetry, as she placed this article before me. It was the poetry of butter, and I ate a pound or twp of it; after which I came away with a strange mixture of impressions of late gothic sculpture and thick tartines.[9]

James's profound satisfaction here is delightful. It is an awesome indication, however playful, of the potentialities of his appetite. Such commitment is the privilege only of the bon viveur. One thinks of how, in the same volume, he speaks of the experience of travelling south, wherever it should be:

> The full pleasure is to approach by stages and gradations; to observe the successive shades of difference by which it ceases to be the north. These shades are exceedingly fine, but your true south-lover has an eye for them all. (p. 104)

Setting the element of display aside, this is still the discrimination of a most inveterate enjoyer of life, no mere cool observer, however satisfied by observation: he speaks of the 'soft sensation' of descending the Alps into Italy. But at the same time the description reminds us to beware the assumption that observation is not a part of being vitally alive - here it is clearly

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9 A little Tour in France, pp. 235-236

an important aspect of just that.

The pleasure James took in more obvious encounters, with architecture or painting needs little illustration, so much was it a mode of existence. Again, one observes the gusto, the relish, here at Chartres:

> I spent a long time looking at Chartres Cathedral; I revolved around it, like a moth around a candle; I went away and I came back; I chose twenty different standpoints; I observed it during the different hours of the day, and saw it in the moonlight as well as the sunshine. I gained, in a word, a certain sense of familiarity with it; and yet I despair of giving any coherent account of it... The proper way to look at the towers would be to go up in a balloon and hang poised, face to face with them, in the blue air.[10]

W.H. Auden rightly found the European travel books, as personal impressions, 'timid':

> the reader is conscious that the traveller must have seen and felt a great deal more than he says, and refrained either from a fear of shocking or from a lack of confidence in his own judgement[11]

There is indeed too much of what Auden calls the 'conscientious father writing letters to an intelligent daughter of fourteen'. Would that there had been more of the Bressois eggs in James's European travel writing and less mechanical, dutiful classifications of the demerits of Bourges or Toulouse. There is nonetheless enough even there to enable a grasp of the outwardness of James's response to life. The whole of the much later American Scene, of course, no doubt partially for the reason, as Auden says, that James felt he had a right to say what he liked about his home country, is characterized, as Edel points out, by passion and zeal:

> He looks everywhere with scrupulous attention - and with passion. He touches the America of his own past with great personal tenderness and melancholy. The book is both elegy and oration.[12]

I shall be returning to the question of James's historical sense: his letters home during his first visit to Rome in October 1869 while being, as Edel remarks, consciously literary, are nonetheless clearly indicative of real exuberance:

> At last - for the time - I live! It beats everything: it leaves

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10 Parisian Sketches, London, 1958, pp. 117-118
11 introduction to The American Scene, New York, 1946, p. vi
12 The Life of Henry James, Volume II, p. 622

the Rome of your fancy - your education -nowhere. It makes Venice - Florence - Oxford - London - seem like little cities of pasteboard. I went reeling and moaning thro' the streets, in a fever of enjoyment. In the course of four or five hours I traversed almost the whole of Rome and got a glimpse of everything - the Forum, the Coliseum (stupendissimo!), the Pantheon, the Capitol, St Peter's, the Column of Trajan, the Castle of St Angelo - all the Piazzas and ruins and momuments. The effect is something indescribable.[13]

'Observation' is hardly a satisfactory description of this activity. Antique Rome, in its concentration of the reverberating historical past, moved James strongly, as Paris could be made to conjure the sense of the vanished First Empire, the pristine gloire.

In Rome the thirty year old Henry rode, variously, with Mrs Sumner, Mrs Boit, Mrs Wister, Miss Bartlett and Lizzie Boot, in the Campagna, and the enigma of the retreat from life in the fiction is perhaps intensified by the thought of James galloping with the beautiful Mrs Sumner among the aqueducts and wild flowers and ancient tombs. But arguably the enigma lessens when one considers the limits of all these relationships, the fact that all of them implied by their very nature finite limits to intimacy. As we shall see, the possibilities within relationship are crucially important to the idea of life within James's fiction, although 'life' is considerably more than that.

Yet if the relationships were limited, James was still on these outings very much alive - consider these moments from his Roman notebook, quoted by Edel:

> Middle of March. - A ride with Mrs W. out of the Porta Pia to the meadows beyond the Ponte Nomentana - close to the site of Phaon's villa where Nero, in hiding, had himself stabbed. It was deeply delightful - more so than one can really know or say. For these are predestined memories and the stuff that regrets are made of; the mild divine efflorescence of spring, the wonderful landscape, the talk suspended for another gallop.[14]

The romantic note is emphatic, and one may speculate about feelings on James's part involving a romantic view of the relationship as well as the landscape. Judging by Edel's account, both Mrs Wister and the mysterious Miss Lowe may have attracted James more than he cared to acknowledge to himself. The point is that

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I3 The Life of Henry James, Volume I, p. 257
I4 The Life of Henry James, Volume I, p. 363

no matter how 'safe' these relationships may or may not have been, anyone can see how abundant life must have seemed to James at such times, and anyone can see, in fact, how abundant it was. The passional mode is activated here, short though it may be of mutual love affairs or sexual relationship. The sense of proportion that such a recognition gives us will be of great value in assessing the fictional lives of Longdon or Nanda or Strether or of the narrator in The Sacred Fount.

The creative life, too, James's work as a writer, though its pleasures were (as I hope is now clearer) not his only pleasures, was a source of experience on which, by any standards, we have to place a very high value. The notebook entry for 26 December I88I, written while in America, at Cambridge, reviews some of the major events of his past year. Having speculated, beforehand, about his youthful years, 'those untried years', he then examines the kindling of enthusiasm over the theatre, and his excitement at a performance by Coquelin:

> It threw me into a great state of excitement; I thought seriously of writing to Coquelin, telling him I had been his school-mate, etc.[15]... I remember how, on leaving the theatre - it was a lovely evening - I walked about a long time under the influence not so much of the pièce as of Coquelin's acting of it, which had made the thing so human, so brilliant, so valuable. I was agitated with what it said to me that I might do - what I ought to attempt; I walked about the Place de la Concorde, along the Seine, up the Champs Elysees. That was nothing, however, to the state I was thown into by meeting Coquelin at breakfast at Andrew Lang's ... At that time, too, my hands were tied; I could do nothing and the feeling passed away in smoke. But it stirred me to the depths.[16]

If James was never in love with another human being - and he might, of course, have been in love with several, depending on our view of the concept - the language here, surely, generates much the same kind of a sense of emotional turmoil. Far from being a man too much in control of his feelings, this encounter was to lead to his emotions getting quite out of hand, as they had begun to be during the performance. Who can say that this is so poor a substitute for loving another person? In turn, perhaps,

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I5 this had, of course, a basis in fact
I6 The Notebooks of Henry James, New York, I947, pp. 38-39

too, we derive from this sort of entry a sense of how it was that James could write so well about passion in his novels, even if we believe he had little personal experience of such a mode in relation to his dealings with other human beings - this qualification understood, all the time, as problematic.

I want now to broaden this consideration: what of separation, loneliness, isolation, self-doubt, anxiety, confusion? These experiences are also indicators of a full emotional life. They may also tell us a lot about the meaning of the fiction.

If Joseph Conrad was right about the need for people to have emotional and intellectual protection from existential crisis, or even to have personal mythologies to fill an authentic nothingness - the 'butchers and policemen' so spectacularly missing in Heart of Darkness, but notable by their absence from much of Conrad - then James's 'case', in the sense that Conrad gives us 'cases', has its existential intricacies.

What, in the way of 'butchers and policemen', do people require in the way of existential support?

Families? No doubt it's as well James had one, for despite whatever difficulties he encountered over his mother's fears as he made his first sole journeys abroad, or over his brother's at times intemperate criticism, or over Alice's chronic illness, his family were clearly a major connection in his life, a continuing support. However, if one is to find a satisfactory part-answer to his later difficulties within human relationships, no doubt his early family experiences, well-documented by Edel and illuminated by James himself in A Small Boy and Others, supply it. A feeling of separation seems to have been familiar to him from his earliest years. Some approaches would characterize this chiefly in terms of an observer/participant dichotomy, as it is also possible to stress the 'femininity' of Henry as distinct from the masculinity of his brothers (emphasizing, alongside, the roots of the passivity of his male fictional characters), or to stress the self-doubt engendered in childhood, the curious mixture of self-confidence and self-deprecation which was seen in adulthood as a strange combination of affinities Aurelian or Napoleonic with

a propensity toward strong feelings of inadequacy. Furthermore, one senses strongly his doubts about the value of his father's life, 'spent in talk', open to potential criticism as a life somehow inadult in its lack of solid purpose and achievement, as James was to feel, spasmodically in later years, his own life to be. [17]

This is not the place for any detailed examination of the psychological pattern of James's childhood and youth; but when one views his curious behaviour over the Civil War[18] or his feelings of inferiority toward William, one sees major personality characteristics established early: a reluctance to commit the self beyond a certain point (how well he understood Isabel Archer!), a concomitant feeling of missing out on experience, with a resultant sense of what can crudely be called 'inferiority': and a dread of strong emotion. The dread of strong emotion, however that fear was engendered, seems to have surfaced in his life and his fiction with frequency. But - and this is important - we must not, like some commentators, take a recurring trait for a totality.

Friendship? It has been observed that James had innumerable friends. He also kept friends for a long time. How close he was to some will never be known. Nevertheless the retreat from very close emotional involvement which Edel stresses is observable with great frequency, taking the form, even at a certain point within relatively intimate friendships, of drawing back, or being ironical or consciously extravagant, of defusing emotional potential, of dispersing emotional energy. Less familiar acquaintances could be kept at bay by formality and stiffness. This can be observed, now, really only in the letters, although there is much personal testimony in this direction, too.

The strong feelings of love and affection which many had for him are not in doubt. Yet a relationship based on an overt sharing of mutual love or affection seems throughout to have been a matter of

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I7 the significance of not being adult is discussed, below, especially in connection with The Wings of the Dove: the distinction between 'talk' and 'passion' appears specifically in The Awkward Age, where it is very important - see this thesis, p.98

I8 Rebecca West saw his behaviour here as pivotal

profound difficulty for James. It is the shared, overt, emotionally creative possibilities of relationship which are not apparent in his life. (Even in saying that, of course, one is conscious of the doubt remaining about the nature of some of his [illegible] friendships: was the passionate note of the letters to the young men of his later years founded upon an assumption, a clear understanding, of ultimate propriety?)

But there is seldom any failure of feeling on James's part when it comes to friends and relatives; he was in fact a man frequently in the grip of strong emotion, whether he wished it or not. Certainly, his reactions to the deaths of friends and relatives sufficiently demonstrates that, as do his hundreds of generous and thoughtful actions, his anxieties and concerns over the troubles of others, his elation at their successes, his sense of loss in their absence. One thinks, quite apart from the most celebrated instance, of Minnie, of his grief at Stevenson's death, his reading of the line of Dante from his sister's urn, his long horror over Fenimore Woolson's grotesque demise, his piercing sense of loss at the passing of William, his feelings of desolation at the carnage of the world war.

Nonetheless - and no matter how frank and precise and uncamouflaged some of his correspondence and, apparently, his revelations in person to friends and relatives, of his emotional states - the guardedness, at a certain point on the scale of emotional contact, remains.

Though, as has been suggested, life must be read in different ways in James's fiction, it has been suggested above that <u>relationship</u> between men and women is a central location of 'life': and indeed several critics, most notably Naomi Lebowitz, and more recently Philip Sicker, have urged the centrality of human relationship in James's fiction, and Ms Lebowitz has been quite specific about the importance within the James canon of intimate human relationship as the guarantor of full engagement with life.[19]

Intimate human relationships imply a willingness to relax self-control, to become emotionally self-revelatory, to experience emotional turbulence. Often they are to a greater or lesser

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I9 Philip Sicker, <u>Love and the Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Henry James</u> : Naomi Lebowitz, <u>The Imagination of Loving</u>

extent sexually propelled. There is a sense in which James's characters are not likely to be able to do what their creator regards as unachievable: but that statement is acceptable only if qualified - qualified by noting that James's characters do, for example, in several instances, have sexual relationships, and indulge in other kinds of behaviour not open to James himself. And qualified further by observing that the reasons for a lack of engagement with life in the fiction are very varied: and qualified finally by acknowledging a shifting evaluation of the importance, in the fiction, of relationship as a mode of existence compared to other modes.

Let us beware, also, of taking renunciation of involvement as a comment, made by the fiction, on, say, the life of the artist; or of any other interpretation which localizes and perhaps trivializes the wider significance of the pattern.

Apart from considerations of family and friends, James's work, despite the delight we have seen it afford him, was of course isolating. All writing is: but in James's case his artistic integrity and his experimentation isolated him further, while the inevitable lack of public success at many periods in his life was nevertheless deeply felt. Though not explicit, his feelings about the Kiplings and Whartons of the world, the lesser artists with their assured success, their well-sited villas, their apparent freedom from financial anxieties and from self-doubts, are clear. No matter how irrational he knew his responses to be, he felt, again, excluded. Of course, the very warmth of Edith's affection for him, her intense fascination with him, and kindness (occasionally misplaced) toward him, must be adduced as qualification. But as an artist, as a worker, James was isolated nevertheless, even if it was as a writer of fiction that he doubted himself least of all.

Obviously, James lacked the 'butchers and policemen' of the mono-cultural experience which most people have. His departure, to the extent to which he departed, from American culture, has over the years been the subject of much debate, most celebratedly focussed by Van Wyck Brooks. Brooks's complaints are still, in one form or another, or in one or other of their ramifications, still

echoed. The fact is that to be assured of any certainties in life is harder if one's experience comprises the absorption of more than one culture. James assimilated at least two very successfully. Aside from the question of how this affected the fiction, it undoubtedly affected his sense of certainty in the purposes of his own life. I partially agree, as may well be obvious, with Edmund Wilson's judgement on Brooks's claims about the fiction:

> When all this has been said, however, there still confronts us, in connection with James, the question of a lack in his work of direct emotional experience - a lack which is naturally felt more disconcertingly in his later than in his earlier books, since it is less easily comprehensible in a mature than in a callow man. One can agree here with Mr Brooks that this insufficient experience of personal relations may be partly accounted for by James's isolation among the English. Yet to throw all the emphasis thus on James's social situation, as Mr Brooks seems to do, is surely to proceed from the wrong direction. James's solitude, his emotional starvation, his inhibitions against entering into life, were evidently the result of his fundamental moral character, not merely an accident of his social maladjustment; and with the problem of that fundamental character Mr Brooks never adequately deals.[20]

I agree, that is, that Brooks's emphasis on the cultural question is disproportionate to its importance: But, as should be obvious, I feel that Wilson goes much too far, for example, in talking about 'emotional starvation', which is glib and uncomprehending; and about the 'lack' of direct emotional experience in a fiction which is full of it. Wilson simply fails to ask himself what <u>sort</u> of emotional experience he's talking about, although one feels that if he'd found the answer he would still have exaggerated the lack.

Finally, it is necessary to consider James's cast of intellect. Eliot's famous remark about James and the Idea is discussed later in this chapter, in relation to specifically moral issues in the fiction. Undoubtedly, James was of a fairly soeptical nature. He was also, - sometimes, it seems, involuntarily - intellectually <u>honest</u> in the extreme, like Strether, or Densher, or Nanda nearly always are. This showed in a number of ways. There is his splendid speech to Edith Wharton about one of her stories:[21]

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20 'The Pilgrimage', reprinted in <u>Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays</u>, ed. Edel, Englewood Cliffs, 1963, pp. 65-66

21 Edith Wharton may well have developed her own version of the Jamesian register and tone, but it is plausible nonetheless, and most entertaining into the bargain.

> Of course so accomplished a mistress of the art would not, without deliberate intention, have given the tale so curiously conventional a treatment. Though indeed, in the given case, no treatment <u>but</u> the conventional was possible; which might conceivably, my dear lady, on further consideration, have led you to reject your subject as - er - in itself a totally unsuitable one.[22]

We observe how, when the blow falls, James spares neither himself nor his victim the terrible adverb. Mrs Wharton referred to James's 'need to speak the truth', sometimes changing dramatically the whole direction of a judgement in mid-utterance. James's kind of honesty and type of scepticism were probably no easier on him than on some of his listeners. The comforting self-deceptions which all human beings need in order to survive were present in smaller quantities in James's consciousness than in most.

However: we should hardly wish to compare him with any actual or fictional beings confronted with existential despair. James did, in fact, take certain kinds of things for granted, certain moralities, articles of faith, proprieties, etiquettes. Indeed, over some aspects of social etiquette he may latterly have become too enthusiastic for a sceptic. He could take political events very seriously, too, and had strong views about a wide range of the events and behaviour of his day.

The British patriotism, for example, whose overt symbol came late in life was already suggested by the Anglo-American partisanship of his much earlier concern over British-American relations, just as patriotism was always an element in his relationship with his homeland. Two comparable extracts, one from the <u>Notebooks</u> and one from <u>The Tragic Muse</u>, give us a flavour of the importance for James, within his concept of what life was properly about, of a particular kind of historical connection, which here is at one with an explicit, romantic, conservative love of British history and tradition. The first is from the notebook entry of 20 December, 1881, written in New York, but recalling a week in Somerset with Lady Trevilian at Midelney Place:

> Somerset is not especially beautiful; I have seen much better English scenery. But I think I have never been more <u>penetrated</u> - I have never more loved the land. It was the old houses that fetched me - Montacute, the admirable; Barrington, that superb

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22 <u>The Life of Henry James</u>, Volume II, p. 568

> Ford Abbey, and several smaller ones... These delicious old houses, in the long August days, in the south of England air, on the soil over which so much has passed and out of which so much has come, rose before me like a series of visions. I thought of a thousand things; what becomes of the things one thinks of at these times?[23]

The elegiac note here is sounded not infrequently in the fiction, over ancient buildings and objects which are loved in themselves, and for their symbolizing cultural history, most notably, among the novels looked at in depth in this thesis, in The Ambassadors. But the specific echo of the extract above is in The Tragic Muse:

> there was another admonition that was almost equally sure to descend upon his spirit in a summer hour, in a stroll about the grand abbey; to sink into it as the light lingered on the rough red walls and the local accent of the children sounded soft in the churchyard. It was simply the sense of England - a sort of apprehended revelation of his country. The dim annals of the place appeared to be in the air (foundations bafflingly early, a great monastic life, wars of the Roses, with battles and blood in the streets, and then the long quietude of the respectable centuries, all cornfields and magistrates and vicars), and these things were connected with an emotion that arose from the green country, the rich land so infinitely lived in, and laid on him a hand that was too ghostly to press and yet somehow too urgent to be light. It produced a throb that he could not have spoken of, it was so deep, and that was half imagination and half responsibility.[24]

It is not only Marxist critics who could have a great deal to say about the view of history expressed here. It is undoubtedly naive. Rebecca West was to remark, speaking of James's 'odd lack of the historic sense':

> He had a tremendous sense of the thing that is and none at all of the thing that has been, and thus he was always being misled by such lovely shells of the past as Hampton Court into the belief that the past which inhabited them was as lovely.[25]

Or, one might add, that inhabited the nearby hovels. 'The long quietude of the respectable centuries' might have inspired derision in vanished upper class persons, but it would have rendered everyone else speechless at its inapplicability. I am not convinced that this, Nick Dormer's view of history, is greatly different from the authorial view, despite the conscious placing

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23 The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 34
24 The Tragic Muse, p. 197
25 Henry James, p. 27

of this very consciously patriotic passage. But for our purposes here it does not so greatly matter. What matters is a balanced recognition, on our part, of the breadth of a mind which on the one hand could be deeply negative and on the other, over an English landscape, so romantic and so fond.

For the James whose mind did, indeed, in a sense, triumph over ideas, nevertheless had strong and often hilariously incisive views on the upbringing of children; had strong and particular tastes in matters as trivial as waistcoats or walking sticks. He could be shocked by the behaviour of others, and not infrequently, embarrassed. He felt that certain things were right and other things wrong. Nowhere either in his life or in his fiction does one detect the bleakness of Conrad - only, perhaps, Merton Densher's stay in Venice, shut off from Milly, deprived of Kate, reaches the extremes of existential crisis characteristic of Conrad. James's doubts are more localized, his positive aspects more numerous.

III

Joseph Warren Beach used the term 'unrealistic' in the extract quoted above,[26] about behaviour which James felt 'corresponded to life', which is what James felt The American's ending did: 'I am a realist', he said. Edel observes that 'Bernard Shaw was to say to James years later that an author can give victory to one side as easily as another', and gives the opinion that James's '"determinism"' and 'fear of marriage' prevailed.[27] There is little doubt that the specific here characterizes a general tendency in James's fiction to reflect the experience, especially in relation to various kinds of involvement, of its author.

There are various ways of talking about this and the effects which it has: Sallie Sears explains the title of her book on James by saying 'I have called this vision "negative" rather than "tragic" in part because James could not assert positive values with any degree of success of conviction. He could not, though he spent his life trying, resolve the conflict of feeling that characterizes and dictates the ordering of his fictional worlds.'[28]

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26 p. I8 27 The Life of Henry James, Volume I, p. 475
28 The Negative Imagination, New York, I968, p. xii: this is of course too general - some positive values he cannot assert.

This quality of the 'negative', fairly widely recognised in James, takes one back to the notion of 'resignation' mentioned above; and the circumscription of the characters' world of possibility. 'Negative' seems the right kind of word, and the chances are that it is, as it were, finally an irrational sort of negativity rather than a reasoned one, making itself felt either in optional negative endings or in the way in which the reader is made to experience particular directional manifestations of the 'deus ex machina'. The things which are there to justify the negativity - such as spurious determinism - aren't necessarily convincing. The Golden Bowl, as I shall try to demonstrate, is badly flawed because of the way in which James's would-be negative treatment of Charlotte doesn't work. It is seldom, nevertheless, that one feels James's work suffers badly from the operation of the negative force. Negative works can - I mean this without ironical intent - be seen as worthy testimony to a particular kind of view. This is perfectly satisfactory. And where the negativity occurs, as has been implied, it is a part of a vision which takes in a lot more. The Portrait of a Lady, for example, does undoubtedly have negative features, but there is colossal vitality within it too. This is also true of The Wings of the Dove.

Terry Eagleton sees James's negativity in economic terms, taking, of course, a Marxist view. Eagleton refers to John Goode's discussion of Milly's wealth and the 'transcendent power of money',[29] and after pointing out that money doesn't need to be an object of concern to those who are immensely rich (an uncontentious statement) claims that:

> This, indeed, is the historical secret of the 'negativity' of the Jamesian spirit: negativity is the abyss which opens up between consciousness itself and the suppressed, supportive economic base of which it is finely oblivious - an abyss inscribed within consciousness itself as a blank freedom from financial constraint.[30]

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29 in The Air of Reality, p. 252

30 Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, p. 142

This statement requires more comment than it can be given here, as it appears to embody a certain self-contradictory quality. But it is necessary to mention the view represented here, given that money is stressed so heavily in, particularly, The Wings of the Dove and The Golden Bowl. Several answers are possible, but the primary fact is that negativity is not associated solely with rich characters in James's novels, quite apart from the fact that James himself was throughout his life keenly conscious of his own lack of financial security. Both of these facts are relevant to Dr Eagleton's point, although one cannot deny the link between money and negativity in, say, Milly and Adam Verver. But even there, other elements in the novels are dominant in directing the nature of the characters and the response of the readers. The fact is that James is good prey for Marxists and Freudians both, but more in appearance than substance. (Eagleton's prejudices become blatant when he allows himself one or two rather cheap sneers about James's response to Irish politics and to British unemployment.) In spite of this, Eagleton makes an important observation well worth considering:

> Yet the English social formation provided in the end no redemptive organic enclave for James. Professional house-party guest of the ruling class though he was for some twenty years, he found English life grossly materialistic and thought the condition of the upper class as rotten and collapsible as that of the French aristocracy before the revolution. Organic consciousness could find no locus but art itself, which alone could circumscribe the sprawling, tangled infinity of empirical relationships with its delicately delineating forms. James's later work represents the astonishing enterprise of rescuing and redeeming inorganic material existence by ceaselessly absorbing its raw contingencies into the transmutative structures of consciousness, deploying to this end the complex interlacings of a syntax constantly threatened with dissolution by the heterogeneous materials it just succeeds in subduing. 'All the value of (Strether's) total episode (in The Ambassadors)', he writes 'has precisely been that "knowing" was the effect of it.' 'Knowing' - consciousness itself - is the supreme non-commodity, and so for James the supreme value; yet in a society where the commodity reigns unchallenged it is also absence, failure, negation. In 'knowing', the world is appropriated and lost in the same act. This, finally, was the contradiction which even Henry James was unable to transcend. (p. I45)

James's attitude to the English upper classes is plain enough,

in The Wings of the Dove, and in The Golden Bowl,especially, where he becomes quite ferocious. The extent to which James 'rescues and redeems inorganic material existence' is probably not in dispute; though the value of the successful effort, no doubt, is. In stressing that for James the 'supreme value' is consciousness, Eagleton is concurring with Morton Dauwen Zabel and others. But although he is quite right to stress the importance, to James, of consciousness as a non-commodity - witness James's really embarrassing reticence about the source of the Newsome's fortune - Eagleton is wrong to regard consciousness as the supreme value, because consciousness is not life. It is quite true that the fact that society values only commodities is a real problem for James. It is in his fiction: Merton's lack of self-esteem is its result. And it was there in his life, in the self-doubts which plagued him when confronted with the success of a Kipling or a Wharton or even a Wilde.

But it isn't the main problem, for had it been, the novels would be less negative. We would, for example, experience Isabel Archer's recognition of Osmond's worthlessness as sufficiently positive for the novel's ending: usually, readers don't. 'Consciousness' is not the supreme value: it has great value, but in the fiction the great thing is 'life'. Merton is full of consciousness but Kate - and Aunt Maud - have 'life'. Isabel has increased consciousness but is denied life. Strether has an abundance of consciousness, but only begins to experience himself as a realised individual when exposed to the influences of Maria Gostrey and Marie de Vionnet, and when his consciousness becomes subsumed, though not diluted, by involvement.

Consciouness is the consolation. It is not the supreme value.

As I have implied, 'life' can only be plurally defined in the terms of its operation within James's fiction, for the reason that it has to do with complex and shifting preoccupations which are probably not rational. That is not to say that the thing which James felt that others had access to was something to which he, too, had access without knowing it: it is rather

to suggest that he elevated a group of personal anxieties into general principles about being alive and in society - a not uncommon procedure. But this, in turn, does not mean that we don't sense what it is that James means when he talks about life. It will be a concern of this thesis, as it moves toward a conclusion, to try to sift the various possible meanings of the term.

At this stage, all I wish to do is to raise some of the problems. For the fact is that 'life', in the fiction, is only in <u>one</u> sense one idea at all; only in the sense that it represents a valued mode or condition of existence, or attribute.

When we start to think about how it is represented we find it in a number of guises. Undoubtedly sexuality is one of them, as indicated by Edmund Wilson. Another is self-confidence, as represented by characters as diverse as Mrs Gereth and Chad Newsome (as well as by sexually significant characters such as Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant and Miriam Rooth). Power and authority - as represented by the Maud Manninghams and Sir Luke Stretts of the world - are also elements in the reckoning. People who are taken seriously by other people also have the quality of life: Strether feels this acutely when sensing Gloriani's mere politeness on their encounter. Unconcern as to the personal judgements of others about them is also a characteristic of those who have 'life'. Indeed, the less self-conscious people are, the more they seem to be associated with life. This is connected with the fact that we do not often share their point of view or, if we do, we are at some point cut off from it, as is the case with Kate and Charlotte. Sometimes these figures are glimpsed at a substantial distance, like Gloriani. It is as though James couldn't pursue very far the psychology of such people.

They have, therefore, an opaque quality, like Maud Lowder or, more impressively, Sir Luke Strett. They cannot be seen through. They are not, like Merton Densher, transparent. They cannot even be satisfactorily defined by those who may suspect that they invite censure. I shall examine this idea primarily in relation to <u>The Wings of the Dove</u>. It is important, when considering Maud Manningham, to bear in mind that Densher doesn't

even have the consolation of feeling morally superior to her. Menacingly, she is not afraid even of 'arduous thought'. It would be consoling to be able, with one's consciousness, to take account easily of people for whom the commodity is everything, but they are, in James's work, often too large. Such characters seem to have an adult, finished, polished, opaque quality quite different from the nature of a Hyacinth, or Fleda or Densher. The Ambassadors signals its largely positive quality considerably through the fact that Strether is allowed to develop at least some of the way across the range: so is Maggie Verver.

The power which such opaque characters possess is not infrequently portrayed through an onlooker's perception of them in metaphor which utilizes the larger members of the cat family. Gloriani is a 'striped tiger', Lady Fanny (in The Awkward Age) a 'tame tigress' and, as Sallie Sears points out, Aunt Maud is a 'lioness' and Kate a 'panther'. Cats are, of course, fairly inscrutable. James disliked cats, preferred small dogs, and once killed a cat at Lamb House, an episode Edel honourably mentions, but discreetly and with embarrassment.

These are all human qualities: there is also the rather difficult question of life and culture as a whole, the sense of how certain countries in certain historical periods provide the right kind of air in which to breathe 'life'. In The Ambassadors, Woollett is thin air, Paris much better: but the older Paris sensed in Marie's apartment is a thing finer still. James was always regretting changes for the worse in his favourite cities. And, to a certain extent, the American/European theme, if it is a theme, is about the fitness, for 'life', of different cultures.

IV

He is deeply interested in morality, and there are few tales which do not in some way turn on moral decisions by the main characters. But the moral quality of a work for him depends not on the validity of doctrines; the 'moral sense of a work of art' depends completely 'on the amount of felt life concerned in

producing it.' Though he qualifies this statement by including the 'kind' and the 'quality' of 'felt life', he is still unmistakably clear that the morality of the work - that which gives the 'enveloping air of the artist's humanity' - comes from the 'quality and capacity' of the artist's 'prime sensibility.'[31]

Wayne Booth, discussing the Prefaces, refers here to a way of talking about morality which James employs not, it should be stressed, in order to discuss morality as such, but to discuss the fictional presentation of moral behaviour, which is obviously not the same thing. Lawrence put a similar feeling in this way:

> If a novel reveals true and vivid relationships it is a moral work, no matter what the relationships may consist in. If the novelist honours the relationship in itself, it will be a great novel.[32]

Lawrence, characteristically, is less subtle, more sweeping, and probably saying on the whole rather less than James. But this is the tradition of thought which finds a powerful spokesman in Leavis. Lawrence, incidentally, coins a useful metaphor in this patchy essay: 'morality in the novel is the trembling instability of the balance. When the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection, that is immorality' (p. II0). One is not, of course, so sure about the last part of this: perhaps when the novelist puts his thumb in the scale, it is merely morality botched. This is what happens in The Golden Bowl.

Now it is obvious that one might try to float a claim about moral pragmatism on the basis of James's concentration on 'felt life' rather than, as Booth puts it, 'the validity of doctrines'. But the distinction above between morality and the fictional representation of morality has to be upheld. These statements by James and Lawrence are chiefly professional observations about the craft of writing. They may - they do - imply a certain pragmatic approach to moral questions, but since the observations do not concern human behaviour, but rather the presentation of human

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31 The Rhetoric of Fiction, p. 45
32 'Morality and the Novel' in Selected Literary Criticism, p. III

behaviour, one has to be very cautious in one's conclusions, and it is really to the fiction that one must turn in order to look for a moral view.

Lionel Trilling discusses the 'idea' in this way:

> Since the situations in which people or cultures find themselves are limited in number, and since the possible responses are also limited, ideas certainly do have a tendency to recur, and because people think habitually ideas also have a tendency to persist when the situation which called them forth is no longer present; so that ideas do have a certain limited autonomy, and sometimes the appearance of a complete autonomy. From this there has grown up the belief in the actual perfect autonomy of ideas. It is supposed that ideas think themselves, create themselves and their descendants, have a life independent of the thinker and the situation. And from this we are often led to conclude that ideas, systematic ideas, are directly responsible for events.[33]

Richard A. Hocks has traced 'the remarkable congruity between William's philosophical thought and the Jamesian idiom'[34] and he comments on Eliot's celebrated statement thus:

> It has become the habit, whether one is a Jamesian or not, to cite as point d'appui for one's argument the statement by T.S. Eliot that James 'had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it'. Whether one construes this as the supreme praise to be paid artistic detachment, or else the unwittingly uttered key to James's limitations, I know of no better brief description that could apply to pragmatistic thought: for the fundamental refusal to be violated by ideas undergirds and permeates all else. (p. 7I)

Trilling goes on to apply his remarks chiefly to politics, but we might well think of the significance of what he says for concepts such as good, or evil, or innocence, or determinism, which, though different from each other in their nature as 'ideas', are nonetheless the kinds of quantities in which people think. If one is prepared to allow that James may have eluded such concepts, 'eluded' in the sense that he does not allow abstractions to direct his intellectuality, then it may be possible to bring a useful flexibility to one's response to his novels, although, as Hocks says, that does not necessarily mean that one is going

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33 'The Sense of the Past' in The Liberal Imagination, pp.I96-I97

34 in Henry James and Pragmatistic Thought. As Dr Hocks points out, the book is not an attempt to place William in the relation to Henry Jr in which Quentin Anderson tries to place Henry Sr. Dr Hocks is concerned with 'congruity', not 'influence'.

to end up by estimating his novels more highly. 'Freedom' from abstraction may be a limitation. On the other hand, if James does structure his novels on the basis of such a (relative) freedom, then we must be prepared to approach the novels in a sympathetic frame of mind in order to find out.

Undoubtedly this means that we should refrain as much as possible from imposing patterns - such as the innocence/experience dialectic - on the work, and should instead judge what emerges from close analysis of the texts (I regard the examination of 'ideas of life' as a relatively open-minded pursuit). As Kenneth Graham puts it:

> Any suggested interpretation, like the meaning of the Jamesian word 'life', requires immediately to be, as it were, dropped back into the pot again - to 'prove' itself locally by its ability to be absorbed into the texture of the scene in question. [35]

There are one or two areas of possible moral concern in James's work which it is as well to distinguish, one from another, so that we may better understand the terms in which it is best to discuss morality in his fiction.

For example, there is one area of concern which we can dispense with immediately. I have commented on Terry Eagleton's disapproval of James, the disapproval one would expect from an orthodox Marxist. Dorothea Krook has defended James's relatively narrow field where the whole of humanity is concerned by drawing a parallel with Shakespeare's concentration on monarchy and aristocracy, but the defence is a bit feeble and really quite unnecessary. There is absolutely no point whatsoever in complaining about James's interest in the rich, any more than there is in complaining about Conrad's interest in the sea or Lawrence's interest in sex. By the same token, it is not worth pursuing very far the question of the extent to which James seriously pursues in his fiction the nature of social inequality. Money is, of course, very important in his work, and frequently - as in the lives of Densher and Kate and Lambert and Charlotte - not possessing money is the cause related to bigger or smaller eff-

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35 Henry James: The Drama of Fulfilment, p. 164

ects in the novels: in Densher's case, his lack of funds is investigated through considerable attention to its effects on his self-esteem, and at Lancaster Gate money is powerfully oppressive. At Marian's, Kate's sister in Chelsea, the lack of money is equated with a kind of personal repulsiveness. But one really cannot claim that, for example, the focus of The Wings of the Dove is on the social injustice which prevents Kate and Merton from marrying - it isn't presented as social injustice - or that there is something corrupt about Kate in her preference for a rich Densher: that there may be something corrupt about her preferring Merton rich through Milly's death is another matter.

The fact is that James's attitude to the distribution of wealth, in his fiction, with whatever exceptions are deemed appropriate, has a resigned quality, just as Merton is resigned to the knowledge that he will never earn significantly.

The next matter that must be investigated concerns the transcendent in James. There are parts of James's fiction, notably The Wings of the Dove, where one can hardly help but be tempted toward readings which incline in the direction of religion, the mystical and the occult. In fact (I shall try to demonstrate this) in, say, The Wings of the Dove, it is characters in the novel who mostly themselves introduce the imagery which leads to such readings, indicating merely a view of theirs (like Susan Stringham's of Milly) which we can accept or reject. Nevertheless, especially in The Wings of the Dove, one can understand what tempted Quentin Anderson.

It is a pity that such temptations have not been better controlled, however. This is Leon Edel:

> And beyond this suggestive title, James fills his novel with the beating of wings, the sense of the abyss, as if we were in the opening pages of Balzac's Seraphita, the novel of the androgynous nature of love (which would fascinate Yeats) with his Swedenborgianism and its use of the fjords of Norway and great Miltonic effects of sky and clouds and mist to suggest the empyrean. (volume II, p. 448)

There are one or two pages of The Wings of the Dove in which Susie sees Milly in terms like these. Other than that it is hard to know what, in the novel, Professor Edel is discussing. (He

ends this flight with a plunge into the bathetic: 'the bird imagery is sustained in the name Theale - the silver-and-gold dove is also thus a little duck'!)

It is in fact a realist novel, a novel which explores human psychology; as is The Golden Bowl beneath what is really a thin layer of symbolism. One can virtually disregard the symbolism in both novels (though not, of course, the characters' use of metaphor in The Wings of the Dove) without harming either of them much at all.

This leads me to the use of the terms 'good' and 'evil' which are employed nearly all the time in discussions of James's fiction. Where people use these as terms of degree - that is to say, where 'evil' means 'very, very bad' - it is remotely possible that they may be applied with propriety to James's work, though I don't know where: his view of human nature is too subtle and penetrating to enable him to distribute such judgements.

But evil is often used to mean something more than this, to imply a different kind of thing from mere wrong, or badness. As will by now be clear, it is not my view that James writes about good and evil in any transcendent sense, his father's concern with evil notwithstanding: after all there is really no evidence either from humanity generally or the James family in particular to suggest that the intellectual interests of men are usually exactly the same as those of their fathers.

Henry Jr, in his essay on Baudelaire, complains that the latter's 'Le Mal' is 'simply the nasty' and cites as a much better interpreter of the phenomenon Hawthorne, who 'felt the thing at its source, deep in the human consciousness'.[36] One of the problems in discussing evil is that people mean enormously different things by the term: presumably the transcendent usage refers to a kind of energy, a force: and I do not think this is often to be found in James outside certain tales: indeed I do not think it is to be found in the novels at all. But critics use the term so frequently that I should like to set out some ideas on the subject, bearing in mind what is at stake for the

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36 'Charles Baudelaire', in Selected Literary Criticism (edited by Morris Shapira), p. 56

evaluation of James's fiction in our choice of one or another of the various kinds of vocabulary available. I have selected as representative of those who look for the transcendent in a novel, Angus Wilson, who with great lucidity discussed the problem of evil in fiction in his radio talks on 'Evil in the English Novel' in I962/63.[37]

Mr Wilson finds a kind of thinness, as it were, in a good deal of English fiction because of the lack of transcendent perception in a large number of novelists, especially those later than Jane Austen from whose time, he argues, writers tend to take fright at the devil and tackle social concerns instead. Mr Wilson sees the absence of this transcendent quality as very much the absence of evil: were we able to achieve a sense of evil at work in or upon the characters then the novels would take on the extra dimension, the transcendental quality. In this connection he mentions, no doubt inevitably, Heart of Darkness:

> Yet in one of his stories, again through an ambiguous voice - the voice of Marlow - we see how evil can come in...when Kurtz cries out: 'The horror! The horror of it! ' Once again notice the rhetorical note, something we saw in James. It is evil, but it is not quite satisfactory because Conrad too is not absolutely able to explain this sense of evil in the concrete terms of his world. [38]

If it should appear that it is a mistake to seek evil in James, it is a less controversial pursuit in this one novel of Conrad's. There is little doubt that Conrad was trying to construct such a dimension in Heart of Darkness. The trouble is that the construction is so evident. When we read here that 'Conrad too is not absolutely able to explain this sense' perhaps we ought to pause. It is quite possible that Conrad was trying to write about evil without even the sense of it. That he lacked the sense is suggested, possibly, by the sheer scepticism and detachment of nearly all his work apart from this, but it is certainly indicated by the wealth, even compared to purplish Conrad elsewhere, of 'inscrutable mystery', things 'unspeak-

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37 based on the Northcliffe lectures in I96I, and broadcast on the BBC and printed in The Listener, Dec.27th-Jan.I7th, I962/63

38 I0th January

able' and other incoherencies which lead the reader to suspect that Conrad's heart just isn't in it. It is difficult enough, as Mr Wilson suggests, to express evil even if you feel it.

Mr Wilson goes on to criticize James for not having handled evil well enough in The Portrait of a Lady, and to praise him for his handling of evil in The Wings of the Dove. This seems unjust to the first, as I don't think James had any intention of incorporating evil in the novel anyway, and misrepresentative of the second, which doesn't seem to me to contain evil either.

Mr Wilson has this to say about The Portrait of a Lady:

> Madame Merle speaks of Osmond to Isabel Archer, before Isabel has met him: 'He is Mr Osmond who lives tout betement in Italy, no career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything'. It is all a little too easy, a little too novelettish; Osmond's ambition, we are told, was not to please the world but to please himself...then there is the rhetorical style. Madame Merle says to Osmond:'You are very bad, you have made me as bad as yourself.' And Osmond is spoken of - to Isabel - 'Your husband is the deadliest of fiends'. 39

The terms, he says, are unsatisfactory if the transcendental is sought, or 'desperately rhetorical if we are speaking in terms of right and wrong'. In this way he misses a great deal. Madame Merle speaks of Osmond in this way to interest Isabel, as it is precisely what Isabel wants to hear. If it is 'novelettish', that merely reflects upon Isabel (and Osmond in a different way) but not upon James. It has a plot function, and a thematic one. The so-called 'rhetoric' is, in fact, a way of explaining Osmond's vile treatment of individuals, and is couched in terms of some moral force. It could only be thought 'rhetorical' by someone not approaching seriously the idea that James is talking about right and wrong. Osmond may be vile in many ways, but not in the slightest satanic: he is in a sense ill, and in his condition - which is not without a tinge of pathos - behaves immorally toward other individuals. That is what Madame Merle means. 'Fiend' is a term used here to denote extreme personal tyranny. And even Madame Merle has the right to express herself strongly on the subject. When Mr Wilson says:

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39 3rd January

> There is something strange about his treatment of these two characters; there continues to be this emphasis on their being deracine, on their being foreigners...somehow as soon as we approach the idea of evil we are off on this other idea of danger to the English way of living from a particular sort of rootless person [40]

he verges upon a rather odd neglect of one of James's main themes, not to mention the eccentricity of his calm identification of James as a xenophobic Englishman. But what seems most telling is his 'the wicked - the evil shall we say - Madame Merle': clearly the whole point is whether we say she is evil or not, and to merely assume an intention on James's part won't do.

In praising James for his handling of evil in The Wings of the Dove, it may be felt that Mr Wilson is ignoring the whole tendency of the novel, while continuing to speak in terms of evil being a 'relative' thing:

> I think one may say that the characters of Kate Croy and of Densher and the way that they eventually destroy both Milly and themselves, show that one can develop the idea of characters who are doing wrong things until eventually they do something so wrong that it becomes what we would call evil, and gives the sense of an overpowering evil above themselves. [41]

> One sees exactly what he is getting at, but the language here suggests nothing which really transcends socially defined wrong. It is as though evil were merely the square or the cube of wrong. If evil lies along the scale from wrong, it is near to something which is simply exceptionally bad. Which is why, in common usage, we have 'evil smells' and so on. Mailer, in his American Dream, seems to have a similar conception of evil: Kelly, the father of Deborah, has evil associations piled all around him by the jungle psychologist Rojack, including, in the manner favoured by the author, goatlike and other smells. Yet he ends up little more than an evil-smelling industrialist, for all the sweaty fabrication.

Yet Mr Wilson may be right, and perhaps evil can develop in the way he suggests. There remains the problem that there is no evid-

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[40] January 3rd
[41] January 3rd

ence of activity 'above' Kate and Merton in the novel: as I hope to show, such a view may do the novel a fairly serious injury.

To discuss one critic's view of the novel's - novels' in general - 'extra dimension', and thus briefly, is not to dispose of the question, either of good or evil or of, more generally, the 'titanic' quality, as Mr Wilson puts it, which for him the sense of evil lends to a work. One wouldn't wish to dispose of the question.

But I think that one has to meet the implication that if the transcendent is absent from a novel it is thereby less admirable. Kenneth Graham discusses the problem in this way:

> As in The Spoils of Poynton, and as always when at his best, James is able to 'naturalize' the transcendental, and to make the world of the spirit a part, even if a tragic part, of our natural living. There is poetry in The Wings of the Dove, but it is not, as some readings of it come close to suggesting, a mystic meditation on the nature of the eternal. Milly is thoroughly endowed with flesh and blood and knowledge: there would be no tragedy if she were not. (p. I62)

'Naturalizing' the transcendental is one way of putting it. But perhaps one has to redefine the transcendental to discuss it in James. It could well be argued that James, in his infinite and delicate and compassionate penetration of the human personality provides in his fiction the only kind of imaginative transcendent experience readily available. In other words James, having perceived and written about certain areas of human experience, giving them a vivid existence in fiction, creates something as near to the transcendent as is actually possible. This means, of course, relativizing the concept of 'transcendence'. Should that be unacceptable, then it is surely possible to say that James does what he does and, if it lacks the 'transcendent', it is nevertheless possessed of the 'extra dimension' not available in most of the rest of English fiction: in other words, it is surely possible to claim that a novel can be 'titanic' without lifting its sights from human psychology, 'titanic' by virtue of its account of human nature. Indeed it is possible to go further and to say that to take a transcendent approach to

James which utilizes unwieldy ideas such as 'good' and 'evil' is actually to diminish the worth of his fiction: it is to think so much less of human beings and so much less acutely about them than James did.

V

This leaves another moral issue which will be analyzed in relation to areas of Isabel's behaviour in The Portrait of a Lady, a novel which I wish to examine briefly in order to exemplify some of the ideas which have been put forward, and in order to establish a link between the earlier work and the four late novels which are the main analytical focus of the thesis.

The element of personal tyranny suggested in Mr Wilson's talks is, of course, inseparable from any discussion of James. But to what extent is the characteristic central Jamesian character an unwilling victim of personal oppression? Is is possible that the characters are usually responsible for their own circumstances? Ezra Pound wrote:

> What I have not heard is any word of the major James, of the hater of tyranny; book after early book against oppression, against all the sordid petty personal crushing oppression, the domination of modern life, not worked out in the diagrams of Greek tragedy, not labeled 'epos' or 'Aeschylus'. The outbursts in The Tragic Muse, the whole of 'The Turn of the Screw', human liberty, personal liberty, the rights of the individual against all sorts of intangible bondage! [42]

And in a footnote he says:

> This holds, despite anything that may be said of his fuss about social order, social tone. I naturally do not drag in political connotations, from which H. J. was, we believe, wholly exempt. What he fights is 'influence', the impinging of family pressure, the impinging of one personality on another; all of them in highest degree damn'd, loathsome, and detestable.

Tony Tanner, in an essay on The Portrait of a Lady,[43] quotes the Kantian assertion that we must act 'as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means whereby'. And when Tanner says, of Isabel, that in some ways 'Osmond is as much a collaborator as a

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42 reprinted in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays (edited by Leon Edel), p.28

43 in Henry James: Modern Judgements (edited by Tony Tanner)

deceiver', he has clearly complicated the idea of personal oppression considerably.

Critics have varied considerably in their attitudes toward Isabel, and some have been rather hostile to her. Dr Tanner, in what is probably the most vigorous essay which has been written on the novel, is relatively sympathetic.

He sees Isabel's progress through the novel as 'the journey of an uncommitted, undefined self which sets out to find the right house to live in and the right partner to live with': and later as an 'analogue of the inquiring self, seeking realisation and identity' (pp. I43-I44). And yet this definition seems in conflict with a number of other points he makes, such as Isabel offering herself to Osmond 'as a fine finished object' or her rejecting the 'heavy actuality of Goodwood and Warburton'. An 'uncommitted, undefined' self which is 'seeking realisation' ought not to find its'right house' in the domain of Osmond, who in terms of actuality is so slight. The sort of self which could be expected to behave in this way is an already thoroughly committed, too-soon defined self which wishes to preserve its integrity. And the reason that this sort of self would find Osmond appealing, with his lack of 'career, name, position, fortune, past, future, everything' is all too apparent: he sounds as though he provides no challenge to the self. The supreme sacrifice which love calls for - sacrifice of self - is not necessary; not that the sacrifice is total, but then Isabel doesn't wish to risk anything. 'Giving' herself to Osmond is not to part with or to receive anything.

It could be argued in defence of Dr Tanner's observations that the self does indeed seek realisation but is merely chronically cautious about it: the 'heaviness' of Goodwood or Warburton transmits notions of rape to Isabel's emotional virginity. But the argument doesn't carry us very far. Warburton is not especially 'heavy' in his actuality; he is massive in his implications only for Isabel. And we simply cannot escape the fact that Isabel's fascination with Osmond, as soon as she hears of him, is at the very least based on her notion of his withdrawal from the world, as Dr Tanner in fact points out, which again suggests the idea

of a predefined self wishing to be up and out of the world on Osmond's hilltop. Her willingness to give herself at all on this occasion I regard as a consequence of her idea of Osmond's 'nothingness', rationalised into terms of a notion of his unconcern for the mere 'worldly': this is significant in itself. When Dr Tanner says:

> She seems unprepared for any harsh encounter with all that indifferent otherness which is not the self, which is not amenable to the self, and which may well prove cruel and hostile to the self (p. I46)

he seems to me to be saying, in fact, that Isabel has defined herself very well, and that it is committed to its own preservation in a state of stasis. And it is surely the central irony in the novel that Isabel gets <u>just what she wants</u>, this very opportunity for stasis, from Osmond. He is the last person in the world to have been able to give her what she eventually realises that she needed: namely, invasion of self, quite the opposite of her early half-conscious ideal. But what happens to Isabel at the end has to be seen in detail. I wish now to look at some of the opening pages.

Isabel's introduction to the novel is most skilfully handled, and provides intimations for the reader of the more explicit comments upon her character which are to follow. The opening pages of the second chapter portray Isabel, right at the start of her encounter with 'life', in a state of self-containment which seems immediately at odds with her ideals. Her introduction to Ralph is significantly at a remove, through the medium of Bunchie the terrier:

> His attention was called to her by the conduct of his dog, who had suddenly darted forward with a little volley of shrill barks, in which the note of welcome, however, was more sensible than that of defiance. The person in question was a young lady, who seemed immediately to interpret the greeting of the small beast. (p.I5)

'Without hesitation' she picks up the dog: there follows Warburton's interesting comment:

> Perhaps it's Mrs Touchett's niece - the independent young lady ... I think she must be, from the way she handles the dog. (p.I6)

Isabel has made herself felt on the scene without, we notice, any appeal to the human inhabitants of the garden. She is just suddenly <u>there</u>, and for the reader this has an implication very different from what might be expected regarding a young woman in such new surroundings, and in a sense merely on the threshold of living. Isabel seems already too 'finished'. Moreover, the very mention of the two notes in the terrier's bark, 'welcome' and 'defiance', introduce a sense of ambiguity to the proceedings very much in keeping with this unlikely independence. James has already, and very deftly, introduced the matter of Warburton's relationship with Isabel: handling a dog well is clearly just the sort of thing to appeal to a man of his pursuits, the next best thing to being a good horsewoman. If the reader finds himself somehow rather irritated by Isabel - and it seems that many readers have been - perhaps it is the word 'defiance' - her defiance of the reality of the others - which best sums up the source. But the defiance is unconscious; it appears as an annoying complacency. (Nervousness, since Isabel doesn't really seem nervous, is not a satisfactory explanation.) Isabel looks this way and that, breaks off frequently loudly to admire the dogs, asks their names, indulges in conversational nonsequiturs. It all points to a consistent self-absorption, rather than an interest in the others. '"I'm sorry you're out of health", she added, resting her eyes upon her venerable host.' She hasn't apparently been looking at him before; her interest lacks commitment. Old Touchett instructs her not to believe the aristocrat's claim as to the superiority of his own house. 'I don't know - I can't judge', says Isabel, 'smiling at Lord Warburton' (p. 19). This might be considered a little offensive - her host is old and infirm, but her interest is elsewhere. It is immediately after that Ralph, who takes 'no interest whatever' in this discussion, asks her 'Are you very fond of dogs?', though 'He seemed to recognise that it was a very awkward beginning for a clever man' (p. 20). And yet the attention that James forces us to give to this opening has been a matter of

design: Ralph, the most intelligent man in the novel, has wondered, like the reader, what this performance has been about. It is as a 'performance', partly, that it strikes us, if at the most an unconscious one. Her behaviour is very much like a defence against the actuality of the men. The dogs and the garden and the antiquity of the house pose no threat to her settled consciousness.[43]

The title of the novel has, of course, more than one comment to add to the text. In its relation to Isabel's self-conception, however, it probably has most force. She has, and early in life, painted her own portrait of what she feels she ought to be. More important, it suggests the preoccupation with 'appearances' which has been discussed by Tony Tanner, and that in itself has implications about her relationship with the current of life. The name 'Archer', apart from the implication about laying out a straight flight-path, suggests also a distance from the sought object. An archer's whole raison d'etre has to do with distance and separation. James, in the third chapter of the novel, becomes relatively explicit about some of these tendencies in his heroine.

As a child she has had the opportunity for schooling in a little primary school across the street:

> The little girl had been offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge in this establishment; but having spent a single day in it, she had protested against its laws and had been allowed to stay at home, where, in the September days, when the windows of the Dutch house were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table - an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled. (p. 24)

This 'elation of liberty' hand in hand with 'pain of exclusion' must be central to any discussion of the ambiguity in the final chapter of the novel. The pain is reminiscent of what has been said about James above - the recurring insecurity, the feeling of being out of the mainstream. And yet, as has been suggested, there

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43 James's grasp of the nuances of non-verbal behaviour, so crucial here, is often superb, as in the handling of Dolcino in 'The Author of Beltraffio', by his parents, or in Strether's first visit to Marie's apartment in The Ambassadors.

is a great attraction in detachment, a feeling of safety, a sense that to be immersed in what is going on is dangerous. This view of the matter is confirmed:

> She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the sidelights had not been filled with green paper she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement. But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side - a place which became to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror. (p. 25)

The metaphorical and explicit significance of all this, referring as it does to such early-established characteristics, is considerable. It is this room - later figured as a garden - in which she wants to come to terms with life, in so far as she is willing at all. We note that she thinks of it as 'the office'; that being traditionally a place where organisation and sytemising reign unopposed. I have said that the novel's most striking irony is that Osmond in fact gives Isabel exactly what she wants; and this fulfilment which goes wrong is hinted at in the preceding sentence, where we are told that the door is 'secured by bolts'. It is, however, somewhat later, in the novel's sixth chapter, that we find the images most memorable in our clues to Isabel's character:

> Her nature had, in her conceit, a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one's spirit was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses. (pp. 53-54)

Isabel recognises the existence of other gardens and the fact that 'there were moreover a great many places which were not gardens at all'. But the fact that she is assured, apparently, of her 'lapful of roses' suggests the inadequacy of her conception of what lies outside her garden; although the idea of introspection as 'an exercise in the open air' is what strikes us most here. It certainly goes some way to explaining her behaviour, for example, in those first moments at Gardencourt.

The paragraph also contains this startling sentence: 'what

should one do with the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for oneself?' (p. 54). It is startling because of its moral force. It introduces an element not yet fully brought out for consideration. The moral condemnation it implies is contained in its deviation from the question 'how can one possibly construct a scheme of the agreeable for oneself amidst the reality of widespread misery?'. We conclude, of course, that Isabel's mental habits are not such as to permit a genuine 'realisation' of misery at all. But this sentence also indicates something else - selfishness. So far it is the damage to the individual, and perhaps to others, resulting from self-absorption which has been discussed. But here our terms have to be stronger, our disapproval awakened.

Dr Tanner's identification of Osmond as a 'collaborator' has already been mentioned. We have been told that there is something 'cold and dry' in her which has prevented her from thinking about husbands. The possibility that whatever is wrong with Osmond is also, to a lesser degree, affecting Isabel, is suggested by two very significantly phrased sentences which end the paragraph presently being examined:

> She always returned to her theory 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.

'A general impression of life': almost everything is there in that phrase. First, it seems that the precondition is one of detachment. 'Life' is something outside. Second, one's 'impression' - only an impression - is to be 'general'; one finds out what people tend to do and one organizes them into specific categories compatible with certain theories. This is the 'office' metaphor again. The trouble is that this kind of preparation is insufficient for dealing with 'the unfortunate condition of others' and particularly for dealing with Osmond.

If the novel has an epiphany in the Joycean sense, this famous passage does surely contain the book's most striking revelation:

> Isabel...went straight to the door of her husband's study. Here she again paused an instant, after which she opened the door and went in. Osmond was seated at the table near the window with a folio volume before him, propped against a pile of books. This volume was open at a page of small coloured plates, and Isabel presently saw that he had been copying from it the drawing of an antique coin. A box of water-colours and fine brushes lay before him, and he had already transferred to a sheet of immaculate paper the delicate, finely-tinted disk. (p. 534)

This passage gives some idea of Osmond's enormous distance from the actual, the vital in life. There has been a mould for the coin, the coin itself, its image, then reproduced in a book, and finally Osmond's drawing: he is several removes from the original, making an impression of an impression, and so on. Quite apart from the significance of the object - a coin represents all that Osmond pretends to reject - it is the very pointlessness, the hopeless of this activity which strikes us. This is what his 'work' means: an utter waste of time, neither creative, nor scholarly nor lucrative, merely a way of using up hours, of getting rid of time. He looks at his drawing through a magnifying glass, a useful metaphor for his whole life, the raising of the minuscule to volumes of importance. How anyone can read this passage and continue to regard Osmond as 'evil', is difficult to understand. It is surely far from absurd to suggest that a reasonable response from the reader here might contain some distant pity, the kind of pity which is associated with the presence of illness. Osmond's very composure can only increase our sense of his hopelessness, so much might we expect him to be embarrassed by the disclosure of what he is doing.

The static, closed nature of Osmond's isolation is emphasized by his failure to perceive that Isabel must develop out of such a situation. He is left behind:

> He sat down before his table. 'I really can't argue with you on the hypothesis of your defying me,' he said. And he took up one of his little brushes again. (p. 538)

Without broaching the question of how far the essence of 'being' can legitimately exist in the adoption of appearances, we can say that there is a gulf between that which Osmond values and that which he thinks he values. There is no apparent connection between

his conception of self and the way he behaves. His behaviour in every way contradicts his conception of the end which it serves.

Isabel is part of Osmond's fantasy, not merely a 'portrait', another object to bolster this self-conception but actually, as we find out, indistinguishable from himself. He denies the existence of her separate personality. After this passage in the study Isabel now poses a threat to Osmond:

> You smile most expressively when I talk about <u>us</u>, but I assure you that <u>we</u>, <u>we</u>, Mrs Osmond, is all I know. I take our marriage seriously; you appear to have found a way of not doing so. I'm not aware that we're divorced or separated; for me we're indissolubly united...I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing! (p. 537)

Isabel realises that 'he spoke in the name of something sacred and precious - the observance of a magnificent form'. The passage has to be carefully examined. 'For me we're indissolubly united' means more than 'in my opinion of things'. It means that they are indistinguishable <u>for Osmond's ends</u>. He hesitates before that final explanation, and it is hardly surprising, for he is clearly incapable of understanding himself: then he says that what he values is 'the honour of a thing'. This can only be understood in the sense of an irrevocable commitment to a particular way of living, an acceptance of 'the consequences of our actions'. The consequences of Osmond's actions are that he has to keep living his fantasy; the 'honour' he talks about has to do merely with the structural integrity of his fantasy. It must be kept whole. Isabel is threatening to fracture the fantasy. When he says that Isabel has 'found a way' of not taking the marriage seriously, his real meaning is clear. She has found a way of not taking Osmond seriously, and all his actions are designed to ensure that he is taken very seriously. Finding a way of questioning the marriage is to threaten Osmond's ability to take himself seriously, and that is dangerous. We most probably conclude that Isabel, however, is not significant enough to him to cause him to collapse: he takes up his 'little' brushes again in a general sense. (James so often, and not merely in his novels, uses the word

'little' with a splendid acerbity.)

That is a way of talking about Osmond. I am not sure that it denies the novel anything. Were we to say merely that Osmond is deranged, that his portrayal is simply of a man mentally ill, perhaps schizophrenic, then no doubt we should do the novel an injury. But the point is that the novel describes highly complex and infinitely human situations. And 'transcending' human beings is, I believe, the last thing that James was concerned to do at any period of his writing, with whatever exception we make for ghostly tales. But the transcendence to the extraordinary and the feeling is achieved as a result of the complex, compassionate and morally sensitive mind expressing itself about human nature in the best possible way.

Finally, I want to look at the last pages of The Portrait of a Lady. Above, I looked at a scene taking place in Osmond's study. As Isabel leaves at its termination, James tells us that she 'felt as if a cold, dark mist had suddenly encompassed her' (p. 538). We return to a rather bewildering pattern of 'light' and 'dark' imagery in the final pages as Isabel is with Goodwood in the garden. Now we may readily appreciate that the appropriate imagery to use at a time of disillusionment with Osmond is that of darkness and not of light, as there has all along been too much light in Isabel's view of things. Darkness is the recognition, the realisation of failure and misery, which is all-important if Isabel is to achieve a moral victory, if she is to undergo a moral development in terms, at least, of consciousness: a development from the days when misery had to be fitted in with a scheme of the agreeable for Isabel. There is, however, the other sort of development which we may feel that Isabel ought to undergo. And that concerns the issue of whether or not she will become capable of 'immersion' in the sense in which it has been understood.

In Conrad's The Secret Agent, there is a character, the Assistant Commissioner, whose very title suggests the ambiguity which surrounds him. He is not one, certainly, with the encapsulated men who surround him. Sometimes he displays signs of the unexpected,

sitting up when he seems as though about to slump on the desk, slapping the table with his hand when seeming to fall asleep: simultaneously it appears that he is as fond of the formulated and predictable as the other characters. Conrad is unwilling to allow him to become too positive in the economy of the novel, yet also seems to wish a suggestion of some kind of optimism to remain in an undoubtedly dark piece of writing.

No doubt we will allow Isabel her moral development in the first sense suggested above; it is there for us to see. But it might be argued that the ending of the novel leaves us without a real idea as to whether Isabel will succeed in breaking out of her isolation or not. Of course there is no doubt as to whether or not she will return to Osmond - she will. This is one novel where such questions seem to be demanded. She will 'accept the consequences of her actions'. But in what way will she accept them?

Ambiguity reigns throughout the final stages. There has been a kind of 'breaking out', certainly:

> The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out, all round her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. (p. 590)

This is 'our' world, the reader's world, the world which we have watched Isabel ignoring. She is now out of the office and out of her complacency. Our first difficulty with the text, however, is considerable: what happens between Isabel and Goodwood?

> His kiss was like white lightning, a flash that spread, and spread again and stayed; and it was extraordinarily as if, while she took it, she felt each thing in his hard manhood that had least pleased her, each aggressive fact of his face, his figure, his presence, justified of its intense identity and made one with this act of possession. So she had heard of those wrecked and under water following a train of images before they sink. But when darkness returned she was free. She never looked about her; she only darted from the spot. (p. 591)

The imagery though ambiguous is primarily sexual in these first few lines. What kind of sexual encounter has Isabel had with Goodwood? After all, where is he when she comes to herself? 'When darkness returned' - we are deliberately kept in ignorance of how much time has elapsed. But if this is merely the aftermath of this kiss of Goodwood's, where has Goodwood gone? How

do we interpret 'this act of possession'? It is not at all in Goodwood's character either to leave Isabel in a state of near-hysteria or to leave before trying urgently to settle what is between them. We have to assume that something has been settled. He is no longer there and they are no longer arguing about her future. The confusion, the fact that James has left this final encounter 'private' seems to point to an emphatically sexual interpretation of this paragraph. And yet we are unable to be certain. James doesn't even say that these 'things in his hard manhood' now in fact do justify themselves and now do temporarily please her; he says 'it was extraordinarily as if' they justified themselves. But if they did in fact please her, for a moment, could we make sense of it in the scheme, in terms of the directions, of the novel? What Isabel has previously disliked about Goodwood is primarily his emphasis, his strong actuality. In a moment of genuine freedom this is surely what she might be expected to embrace. Tony Tanner says:

> Now for the first time she is subjected to the full force of his sexual claims. It is a shattering experience, but it is also a release. She was not made to go that way. (p. 158)

This may be a little evasive. A sexual release, Isabel giving herself, and receiving Goodwood, would be the strongest possible symbol of her new freedom from self, in the context of this novel. Tanner talks about her 'being subjected to the full force' of Goodwood's claims, but then that is merely what James tells us; the question is whether or not a full sexual encounter occurs, because if it does, it has considerable significance for Isabel's development. But she is not meant to go the way of Goodwood, as Dr Tanner says. She is now unable, as he says, to go back to the simple level of life which Goodwood represents. However, one has to be distinct: while we can understand a developed Isabel rejecting Goodwood as belonging to a past where everything was simple, that is quite a different thing from rejecting the sexuality which he represents. That would be to say that Isabel had developed much less than we might hope, for this sexuality is symbolic of Isabel abruptly - if momentarily - being fully alive.This in turn has a

great deal of bearing on what she does next.

For she goes back, we assume, to Osmond. That is not to reject the actuality which Goodwood has intruded upon her; or not necessarily, for her return must be seen as a consequence of the moral development which has been discussed. Dr Tanner has this interesting comment to make upon Isabel's likely future:

> Now I think one might fairly suggest that James, in fact, could not see exactly what sort of future such a person might have, how she might take up her place again in the social scene. We can admire Isabel's fine stoicism and admit at the same time that it is hard to visualise the details of her future. And this, I think, is because James is already feeling the necessary connection between the artistic observation of life and the renunciation of active participation in it. As Isabel becomes more the artist, in her mind, so she will withdraw from social involvement, if not physically then at least psychologically. If she never returns to sit in the garden of Gardencourt, then we may be sure she will spend many later years reposing in the garden of her mind. With James's later artist figures or observers, the attempt at any active participation is all but abandoned from the start. (p. 159)

Well, perhaps the whole point is that James could not see what sort of future Isabel might have because he has come to the point where the issues involved are so close to himself and so troubling to himself that he is unable to pursue them. I do not see Isabel as an 'artist'. And this business of 'abandoning participation' we are analyzing as possibly the most important and striking feature of James's work, and certainly the crux of The Portrait of a Lady. If Isabel will, as Dr Tanner suggests, 'spend many years reposing in the garden of her mind', then what has been accomplished? This is exactly what she always did. This is precisely the image of the novel's opening chapters. James is certainly not feeling the necessary 'connection between the artistic observation of life and the renunciation of active participation in it'. The novel isn't about an artist and it isn't therefore specifically about lack of participation in life on the part of any one type of person. Hyacinth, Isabel, Rowland, Fleda, all fail to participate, as does Merton, and all are different from each other and none of them artists. If James had felt it necessary to be detached and had he recognized the need, then he would have prod-

uced fiction wholly different in nature from the fiction we are examining. The issue would have been settled, the novels wouldn't be full of characters whose very source of frustration and unhappiness is their inability to participate, to immerse themselves.

To suggest that James's novels can be seen as discussions of the so-called 'artistic dilemma' is, wretchedly, to delimit them enormously. It is a mere critical convenience.[44]

At the end of The Portrait of a Lady nothing is solved. The imagery of darkness and light, which has been fairly consistent, abruptly leaves us confused. Isabel rejects the white lightning of Goodwood as representing the old and simple. Darkness returns. But then she darts toward the lights of the house. James qualifies it further, 'she had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door'. 'For she saw nothing' may indicate that the lights of the house play no part in this imagery; yet 'they shone far across the lawn'. This is highly reminiscent of the Assistant Commissioner, who Conrad has weave a path between symbolic large windows and obscuring blinds. Isabel has won a moral victory of sorts, her selfishness has gone: she may have had a sustaining blast of life from Goodwood. But if in fact her fate is to return to the garden of her mind (however, so to speak, briefly fertilised) does the development not seem sadly insufficient?

James does not answer the question. I shall go on to suggest that he is unable to solve the problems set by the question of participation, and, as will be seen from the analysis of his late work, that this has consequences varied both in importance and in kind.

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44 Tony Tanner says, of the narrator in The Sacred Fount: 'there is little doubt that the narrator epitomizes the artistic instinct ... his initial line of inquiry ... extends to the whole question of discerning or imposing a principle of order in or on the world' (The Reign of Wonder, p. 325). Apart from any other objection one might raise to this, it is a most restricted (and particularly bourgeois) view of the nature of art. And it selects, arbitrarily, an artistic connection from quite other possibilities.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AWKWARD AGE

I

The Awkward Age is probably one of James's most perfect novels in spite of its being unobtrusively so ambitious. It presents a wide range of strongly differentiated characters within a book diverse in its themes and yet strongly unified throughout. It is a novel of remarkable intelligence even by James's standards, especially in its portrayal of the fine and not so fine moral discriminations which can be advanced regarding the Buckingham 'set' at its heart. That intelligence is further demonstrated in the way that Longdon and to an extent Nanda are placed in such dynamic juxtaposition to the inner group.

One could begin by talking about Fernanda whose centripetal force is so strongly at work in the novel, or about Van who, if anyone, the novel most obviously belongs to. But perhaps one should identify the nature of the Buckingham set first. It is Mitchy, essentially much more at ease (usually) with Buckingham Crescent life than Van, who provides us with the best definition of the Buckingham approach:

> 'Aren't we very much the same - simple lovers of life? That is, of that finer essence of it which appeals to the consciousness - well, enlarged and improved. (p.270)

Even the hesitation is typical of an approach to nature essentially loxodromic, an approach in which obliquity is a form of sensuous pleasure. Simple lovers of life are what they're not, of course. Petherton, Lady Fanny, Cashmore, perhaps Harold, are relatively simple and love 'life' in some fairly simple sense. The 'finer essence' to which Mitchy refers is something else, something refined, partly abstracted, a question of 'tone', 'effect' and 'attitude'. What Fernanda, Mitchy and Van take their self-conscious pleasure in is a form of voyeurism, a special kind of vicariousness. They watch other people and they talk about them. Fernanda, a formidable operator whose armoury includes charm, intelligence, cunning, and ruthlessness, has assembled a kind of menagerie for their pleasure: the presence

of others not introduced further in the novel is hinted at. Lady Fanny is the prime exhibit. Mitchy and Van are also part of the entertainment for each other and for Fernanda. But there are those with perspectives on Fernanda too, notably the Duchess.

There is no sense of tragedy, as such, in the novel, and there is considerable comedy. Yet all in all the novel is a sad one in which words displace, but never more than temporarily, the sense of emptiness which haunts the protagonists. As much as anything else the novel is about 'talk'. The characters are for the most part either talkers or not so in an exaggerated sense, and this becomes an important source of the novel's interpersonal tensions.[I] Edward Brookenham, Lady Fanny, Nanda and Mr Longdon in their various ways act as foils to the talkers, while frequently the latter are incriminated by the silence of the others. Mr Longdon sits wincing beneath the verbal blows of the Duchess. A near-hysterical Van chatters round and about the silent, grave Nanda. Episodes of exhausting dialogue are momentarily hushed, with a glimpse of peace at Mertle and Beccles. Behind it all is the silence of the grave and the ghost of Lady Julia. Here and there, amidst what often strikes the reader as a wanton neglect of mortality, is fear in its presence: its wanton neglect lies in the attitude toward life of the main characters.

The complexities of relationship among Longdon, Nanda, Mitchy and Van provide the novel with its primary source of propulsion and its chief sources of tension. What develops is a predicament in which Nanda loves Van, who is too fastidious to receive her although he would appreciate the fortune which would accompany her; in which Mitchy loves Nanda, who cannot accept him; and in which Longdon's interest is to see Van marry Nanda in order to compensate for his own lack of fulfilment with Lady Julia.

If the novel's ironies are sufficiently persuasive to prevent us from having an unqualified sympathy with anyone in it, they are at the same time rounded enough to enable the reader to view all the characters, with perhaps the exception of Mr Cashmore and the unlovely Harold, in the light of a more or less

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I Nicola Bradbury discusses silence in The Awkward Age in chapter two of Henry James: The Later Novels

benign interest. Edmund Wilson's reference to 'this disembowelled gibbering crew who hover around Nanda Brookenham with their shadowy sordid designs' [2] seems unnecessarily dyspeptic. There are no easy moral judgements to be made in the novel.

Almost everyone in the novel is at a more or less awkward age. As we shall see, that reference is only ostensibly to Nanda and Aggie, and the myth of Nanda's 'plight' is relentlessly exposed as a myth. Mr Longdon, Fernanda, the Duchess, Van, Harold, Cashmore - all of them are at an awkward age in one relation or another. The age - the time in which they live - is generally awkward, and not just in its effects on Mr Longdon.

A sense of <u>value</u> seems to be missing from the lives of most of the characters and sometimes the word is forced home upon us. The view from Mrs Brook's window is expensive, but the imagery used to describe it has a markedly relevant specificity in its detail and a universality of application throughout the novel, like the contents of the shop window belonging to Conrad's Verloc. And the view is gloomy. Harold watches Fernanda:

> then slightly pause at the wide window that, in Buckingham Crescent, commanded the prospect they had ramified rearward to enjoy; a medley of smoky brick and spotty stucco, of other undressed backs, of glass invidiously opaque, of roofs and chimney-pots and stables unnaturally near - one of the private pictures that in London, in select situations, run up, as the phrase is, the rent. There was no indication of value now, however, in the character conferred on the scene by a cold spring rain. (p.5I)

We may pass over the irony of this being an expensive view, as sufficiently obvious. Perhaps the main clue is the mention of 'undressed backs', and its reference to Tishy's emphatic style in dress (and Nanda's ideas on her behalf). The phrase's metaphorical bearing is equally clear: it is the undressed backs to which eyes are always turned in the Crescent - it is notoriously difficult to look Fernanda in the eye - and into which the knives are occasionally plunged. From there, we notice 'glass invidiously opaque', and what could be more symbolic of Buckingham ideals of

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2 <u>The Triple Thinkers</u>, p. I09

communication? The stables, roofs, chimney pots, are 'unnaturally near'; as are those at the centre of the set to each other. 'A medley of smoky brick and spotty stucco', while it might be specious to see anything particularly Italianate (or Neapolitan) in the 'spotty stucco', does nevertheless sufficiently suggest the notion of usage and taint which affect those too long exposed to the Crescent's atmosphere. 'Private pictures' and 'select situations' of the kind limited to the perceptions of the improved consciousness are Buckingham hallmarks. And : 'there was no indication of value now' might be taken in a general sense. The point is that glass at its most 'natural' is for looking through, and there are certain elements in all structures which should function without being seen; this includes social structures.

Our attention is being drawn to the prevalence of obfuscation over communication, asphyxiating proximity over balanced intimacy, unfeeling curiosity over benign interest: this is the view from Mrs Brook's room. And just as the Duchess arrives, Fernanda raises the blind a little.

There is even more to it than that, however. The place has 'a confessed out-of-season vacancy': there is the sense fully for us, and presumably also at least partly for Fernanda, that other people are off doing something better elsewhere. This makes the whole scene even less attractive.

To what extent, then, is life missed by the characters here, and what - since the problem's of Nanda's age are by their own confession manufactured by her mother and her mother's close friends - are the real moral concerns of the novel? I propose to look at the major characters, and examine themes, structure and moral implications in so doing.

It is tempting to read for Longdon 'long-done', though it is as well to resist the temptation. In fact he is almost an ambiguous character, in that his general air of being a ghost is complicated by his actual force within the novel, and his ability to adjust to his new surroundings, and the sense we have of his representing something - a kind of dignity or propriety or nobility - which there doesn't seem to be much of elsewhere. He is not

in a very full sense, we feel, morally positive within the novel's structure. As we shall see, there is too much about him which is dismal, stiff, withdrawn, defeated - there is undoubtedly quite a lot of that, even if not so much as we may at first suppose. 'There was nothing after Lady Julia': the starkness of this statement about his past doesn't detract from its truth. Life has been spent with his sister 'feeling sorry for each other'. In this vacuum it is understandable that his nature has become so susceptible to 'fright', and, moreover, that the noise and glare of Buckingham Crescent should pass for 'life'. Mr Longdon has been conditioned to think of life as taking place far outside his parish:

> At the period at Malvern - the particular time I just mentioned to you - Lady Julia was already married, and during those first years she was whirled out of my ken. Then her own life took a quieter turn. (p. 47)

Here is the sense, emphatic in so many other Jamesian contexts, in 'whirled out of my ken', of life taking place elsewhere, beyond the reach and proper comprehension of the protagonist who feels his own life to be so little like it, so dissatisfyingly a mere surrogate.

Yet Longdon is not complaining about ersatz life; has he not after all come to London with fairly positive intentions? And he is, undoubtedly, both more broad-minded and charitable than Van, and much less vulgar than the Duchess. One doesn't want to make too much of Mr Longdon, but his positive aspects are certainly there.

It will be useful to examine Longdon together with Van. The two of them have certain things in common, but in a sense it is the unexpected differences between them which determine the path of the novel: they will be the main object of this analysis.

It is apt that Longdon should be described on the first page of the novel as 'apparently unassertive'; it strikes the right note of doubt. He becomes, in some ways, very assertive later in relation to his plans for Nanda and Van. Furthermore, there is a concealed explosiveness in his initial approach to Van (it is Longdon who makes the approach): 'Mr Longdon wondered, to

Vanderbank, if their course might by any chance be the same'. It is, as we discover, remarkably 'the same' from now on, in many respects. In relation to Longdon's eventual view of Van as protean, as being capable of providing Longdon with vicarious fulfilment by finding happiness with Nanda where Longdon couldn't with Lady Julia, the one similarity - that both men are fastidious about the innocence of women - will be enough to make Longdon's ambition impossible. The irony will be that Longdon will have made more or less successful efforts to overcome his misgivings while the 'modern' Vanderbank cannot.

There is a lot of evidence in the novel to suggest that Van is a not entirely pleasant character. It is likely that he is one of James's most authentically distasteful creations, though that is so importantly a relative matter. His room is 'all convenience and character' and like its owner 'pleasant and ruddy'. But convenience and character must cause us to ask - which? If it is all 'convenience' then the 'character' must be assumed. Van has 'too many photographs' and they serve to comment on both men. We may wonder whether 'too many' photographs doesn't need explanation. A clue may be provided by Vanderbank's comments on the one of Aggie:

> She <u>is</u> extremely pretty - with extraordinarily red hair and a complexion to match; great rarities, I believe, in that race and latitude. She gave me the portrait - frame and all. The frame is Neapolitan enough and little Aggie is charming. (p. 36)

The comments are couched in what comes quickly to be recognised as Buckingham-language; a racy inconsequence (of course she gave him the frame!), an inconsequent aestheticism, a tone which hints at the nutritive powers of the superficial, a concentration on 'charm' and 'beauty'. It is particularly interesting that Van's attention and description veer outward to the frame. First, this becomes conversation merely for its own sake, and though that is typical of several characters in the novel, it is especially so of Van. He is like a man with a bad conscience and we keep wondering what causes it. Furthermore, we note the equal attention to the person and to the frame. Either will do. People do not get their full value from the Buckingham set, and Van will quickly show

signs of a rather gross insensitivity toward the feelings of Longdon and others. Finally, the indirectness, the shift from the obvious, is worth noting in itself. This is another group characteristic. But the explanation of the 'too many' photographs is almost certainly that first, Van is chiefly concerned with surface rather than substance, convenience rather than character, and that he finds, furthermore, and this is more important, people easier to handle in photographs than he does in life. He tells Longdon that Nanda's photograph is a 'present from the original'. It is the 'original' that presents severe problems when it comes to emotional involvement, but the photograph is charmingly innocuous.

We may say that Longdon's relationship to the memory of Lady Julia has something in common with Van's relationship to the photograph: for different reasons, direct experience is difficult for them. Longdon's response to Nanda's photograph is actually somewhat chilling. After remarking on the degree to which Nanda has 'Lady Julia's expression', he says, rather alarmingly (not that Van responds in that way) that 'she's much more like the dead than like the living'. It is the attitude here toward Nanda which disturbs us most. It seems that this cannot augur well for her. There is a grim humour in the description of the frame: 'little Nanda was in glazed white wood'. Lady Julia, presumably, is in oak. We are also concerned about Longdon for his own sake. His response to the living Nanda's photograph must strike us as unhealthy, where Van's response to Aggie's was only morally furtive.[3]

Longdon is of course a potential 'find'. He has lots of good ingredients such as quaintness and wistfulness. He is bewildered and old-fashioned. Van's amusement extends to laughing at Longdon's bewilderment. Van, of course, 'laughs' or 'smiles' most of his statements here as in other parts of the book. Once or twice, as in the library at Beccles, he is all the more significantly serious for the pervasiveness of his mirth elsewhere. But mostly Van mists up the windows with his good humour. Van 'laughed'. Van 'smiled'. Van 'broke down in mirth', his amusement 'overflowed', he 'broke into laughter at his dismay', he was 'so

3 Philip Sicker discusses morbidity in James's fiction of the late nineties in chapter four of Love and the Quest for Identity in the Novels of Henry James.

amused that it might have passed for excited'. This last points to a clue James occasionally drops, to the effect that the mirth is at times a disguise for a specific emotion, as well as being an important part of a generally assumed surface.

Apart from the tensions which this mirth points to in his character, the insensitivity of much of his laughter is blatant. Longdon admits to finding current events bewildering and frightening. Van finds some of his bewilderment very funny and actually makes sure to bewilder Longdon more than is necessary. Mixed as it is with a certain apparent deference which is also we feel in part genuine, the insensitivity is all the more unpleasant. At times it is gross. Puzzled at a reference of Longdon's and thinking him to be referring to Fernanda's mother, Van asks crudely 'the old lady?'(p.38). He fails to respond to Longdon's change of expression.

In this initial encounter is established, too, the Buckingham set's curious delight at its own behaviour. Van is eager to acknowledge to Longdon how daring they are - he seems really to want to put it beyond doubt, and his insistence - 'we do talk, I think' - has a strange, rather unsophisticated smugness. Longdon seems such an easy person (quite apart from any other consideration) to impress. And there is something adolescent in the wish to try. Nanda, and it is one of the novel's major ironies, is much more adult than this.

But two other important matters are established in the opening scenes. One is that Longdon is not without backbone. His look now and then hardens critically and there are signs here, so far for Longdon unconscious, of the condemnation he will finally and accurately apply to Van at the end of the novel. Longdon, in response to Van's remark that London life is 'tit for tat', 'earnestly and pleadingly' asks 'what becomes of friendship?':

> The young man met his eyes only the more sociably. 'Friendship?'
> 'Friendship.' Mr Longdon maintained the full value of the word. (p. 39)

The point here is that Van's sociable look is a most inadequate response. One might be forgiven for thinking that he hasn't considered the word 'friendship' before. A 'sociable look' is perhaps

all too appropriate to what Van's notion of friendship is. The full difference is brought out here between 'friendship' and mere 'sociability'. Longdon maintains 'the full value of the word'. Here, then, Longdon is positively functioning as a bulwark against the Buckingham group's assault on certain human values. Other similar contrasts - for example the difference between Longdon's 'frightened' and Van's 'shocked' - demonstrates the way in which Longdon talks about actual emotional responses while Van tends to concentrate on 'effect'.

But Van's genuine deference has been mentioned and no sketch of the complexities of this relationship would be complete without a brief consideration of the reasons for Van's constant laughter. We notice at one point that Van feels 'positively more guilty than he would have expected' when Longdon asks him if he calls Mrs Brook 'Fernanda'. In fact Van even goes to the extent of explicitly denying it. On the next page he is rather charmingly guilty about Fernanda's own practice with regard to naming him. This suggests more common ground with Longdon than we might have expected.

In fact Van wholly fails to understand himself:

> 'If I tell you,' Vanderbank went on, 'that I've that sort of fulcrum for salvation which consists at least in a deep consciousness and the absence of a rag of illusion, I shall appear to say that I'm different from the world I live in and to that extent present myself as superior and fatuous. Try me, at any rate. (p.48)

However self-deprecating he is in order suitably to temper the claim, this is how he sees himself. We may pass over without comment the illusion about his deep consciousness, which in itself sufficiently invalidates the rest. The second thought is more interesting. We might be listening to Conrad's Decoud: indeed here James touches a vein extraordinarily characteristic of Conrad. It is the sort of misleading, false yet seductive jingle which kills Decoud and, in Victory, Heyst. That the 'absence of a rag of illusion' should constitute a component of a 'fulcrum of salvation' has perhaps little general truth. For Vanderbank this is appallingly inappropriate. Nanda will be striving at the end of the novel to enable him to keep intact his illusions about himself.

He will be exhorting her to make things right for him with Longdon, in order to maintain the illusion of his good name. The absence of any illusions on his part about Nanda will make her, for him, quite impossible, when Longdon does indeed 'try' him.

In fact his agitation, in the form of his artificial mirth, his levity, his concern with surface, is the result of his discomfort in his circumstances, for the Buckingham set - for which he and Fernanda have laid the groundrules - makes him pay a heavy emotional price.

And 'deep consciousness' is something the complications of which Van is constantly avoiding. He has spent his initial encounter with Longdon being 'charmed' by the 'effect' of someone who has been 'frightened' by the 'talk' at Buckingham Crescent. (This is not to deprecate Longdon, who has still to adjust.) The similarity with Osmond and his 'little brushes' here is quite clear.

It is given to Van, as the novel develops, to demonstrate better than anyone the vicarious quality of the set's enjoyment. Nanda, wishing at her first meeting with Longdon to understand Van's description of Longdon's emotional state as 'beautiful, beautiful, beautiful', asks 'beautiful? Why beautiful?', and Van responds: 'I won't spoil it. Have it from <u>him</u>!' (p. II7). Like Wensleydale or claret, such an effect must be absorbed at the right moment of maturity, and never rushed. Challenged by Longdon with not having prepared him for Nanda, Van gives himself away:

> 'I see - I should have liked to make more of it; though,' he added smiling, 'I might so, by putting you on your guard, have caused myself to lose what, if you'll allow me to say so, strikes me as one of the most touching tributes I've ever seen rendered to a woman.' (p. I20)

It is an odd thing, to have a collection of memories of tributes paid to women by other men. Even compared to Longdon's joy at a resemblance to a dead woman, the air Van breathes seems low in oxygen. There is something bordering on the grotesque about his relish. Given the circumstances it is very nearly ghoulish and perhaps here the strength of Edmund Wilson's comment, quoted above, is not entirely inappropriate.

Time and time again, however, there is evidence of the part of

Van's character closer to Longdon: we discover from Mrs Brook and Mitchy that he gives 'tremendous warnings' about books which, says Fernanda, 'after all haven't killed one'. We see him declare to Nanda that she cannot know of the objections to Tishy - and this couldn't be further from the mark. He will even be concerned, at Mertle, about her smoking.

Yet as has been suggested, Van isn't simply a compound of sophistication and unexpected primness: he can also be rather unpleasant, and this is seen at its most extreme in the encounter Longdon has at Mrs Brook's with his hostess at her most formidable. Longdon has made it evident enough that he doesn't like her, and she gets her revenge. As Longdon leaves, she asks him, in response to the dreadful Cashmore's background comment about Longdon getting Nanda because of knowing her grandmother, 'and won't you have to say it's all you were to get?' (p. I56). This is vicious, and Longdon turns 'with a strange gasp' to Van. Van says 'come!'. And we are not quite sure whether to see him as Longdon's or Fernanda's ally - we may have an uneasy sense of the tall Vanderbank looking down on the considerably smaller Longdon (James makes one remark on each man's height during the novel) with detached interest, as cat with mouse. Because earlier in this scene, Longdon, while listening to some general banter about Nanda, of which he altogether disapproves, has signalled to Van silently to intervene. But:

> Vanderbank's silence might, without his mere kind, amused look, have seemed almost inhuman. (p. I5I)

'Mere' speaks volumes: how much else, after all, have we seen of Van other than his kind, amused look? Perhaps there isn't anything else. Longdon has to do his 'own simple best'.

The smoking-room scene at Mertle, followed later by its sequel in the library at Beccles, is very important, but so are Nanda's preceding encounters with Van and Longdon in the grounds. The surroundings of the house are rich in silence, tranquillity, repose and dignity. The noxious fumes of the preceding episode at the Crescent, the charged air, give way to the wholesome breath of the garden at Mertle. The landscape is one which Longdon might have

occupied with Lady Julia:

> It was a point (Nanda) had had to take another rise to reach, a place marked by an old green bench for a larger sweep of the view, which, in the distance, where the woods stopped, showed, in the most English way in the world, the colour-spot of an old red village and the tower of an old grey church. (p.I58)

Nanda is not only set apart from the others here, she is specifically to become seen as part of a unit with Mr Longdon from now on - she will shortly say to Van 'my set's Mr Longdon'.

As though to emphasize his difference from the simple world of the English countryside in which Longdon and Nanda so clearly belong, his distance from the landscape in which appearance and substance are not at odds, Van arrives agitated, hot, in frenzied good-humour, having taken a route in itself very significant:

> The great thing was that he had walked from the station to stretch his legs, coming far round, for the lovely hour and the pleasure of it, by a way he had learnt on some previous occasion of being at Mertle. (p. I58)

The tangential in Van always wins; he has even had to take a circuitous path to the house. That this should be 'the great thing' of course refers to his awkwardness, though Longdon will make him yet more awkward. We also notice that characteristic separation of 'the lovely hour' and 'the pleasure of it'. This distinction is wholly typical. He is, as it were, detached from 'the lovely hour', self-conscious about the 'pleasure' - which by so much diminishes the pleasure. Furthermore, we notice the inevitable sophistication; Van has learned the route on a previous occasion.

We are about to be able to make a direct comparison between Van and Nanda, and Longdon and Nanda. These initial encounters at Mertle establish several things. The slowing of pace achieved by the description of the landscape - short though it is it has to be seen as relative to the rest - makes more credible Nanda's now established relationship with Longdon.

The episode between Nanda and Van establishes clearly Nanda's love for Van and Van's discomfort in its presence. His range of non-verbal behaviour during the episode is remarkably eloquent, as is his verbal evasiveness. We also notice how Longdon and Van's

roles are slightly readjusted. Longdon allows Nanda to smoke 'immensely', and Van slightly disapproves. Longdon is already showing signs of being able to cope with the new age better than Van. Van, not for the first time and certainly not for the last, can sound oddly like the Duchess in his concern for propriety in Nanda's behaviour.

It is also significant that Longdon replaces Van as Nanda's companion; this is an enactment of what will happen at the end of the novel, when Longdon, because of Vanderbank's by then clearly total rejection of Nanda, virtually adopts her. The Mertle episode is also a more precise foreshadowing of the scene at the end of the novel where Van becomes almost hysterical in Nanda's room.

Longdon's ability to adjust to the world he now faces is suggested by his determination here to involve himself: there is a healthy spiritedness in his interrogation of the couple as he meets them:

> Mr Longdon looked from one of them to the other. 'Where have you been together?'
> Nanda was the first to respond. 'Only talking - on a bench.'
> 'Well, I want to talk on a bench!' (p. I66)

He is still described, just after this, as 'the old man', but this spirit in him is about to emerge with emphatic consequences for Vanderbank's equilibrium. Meanwhile Longdon's liveliness is evident in his conversation with Nanda, in which we see him coming to terms with the differences between Nanda and Lady Julia. The ambivalence in his response to the climate in which Nanda is so much at ease, of which she is so much a product and even a producer, is nicely controlled. On the one hand, there is his resigned 'the end of everything? One might easily receive that impression'. On the other hand, when Nanda tells him that Mitchy must marry Aggie:

> Mr Longdon stared, but even in his surprise seemed to take from the swiftness with which she made him move over the ground a certain agreeable glow. 'Does "Aggie" like him?' (p. I74)

Longdon is flexible enough to be interested, often in spite of himself.

The extent to which he - rather than Van - is prepared to try to

do without illusion is emphasized by his inarticulate appeal to Nanda not to pretend to be anything she isn't: 'I hope you don't think I want you to be with me as you wouldn't be - as it were - with yourself'. Longdon is willing to accept Nanda as the young woman she is, which, given his point of comparison in Lady Julia, says much for his ability to adjust to new circumstances. As Nanda says, 'Granny wasn't the kind of girl she couldn't be - and so neither am I'. This is a delightful way on Nanda's part of constructing a similarity between her and her grandmother. In both cases, we observe the concern, on Nanda's part and on Longdon's, to express meaning: this compares interestingly with Van's empty articulacy. Really only Longdon and Mitchy are able to respond to Nanda as she deserves. Both of them are able to do her justice.

Longdon then has to try to do justice to the Duchess:

> Mr Longdon's impenetrability crashed like glass at the elbow-touch of this large, handsome, practised woman who walked, for him, like some brazen pagan goddess, in a cloud of queer legend. (p. 179)

Thus are Beccles and Naples in collision. A great deal of humour is derived from this delightful conjunction. The Duchess says it herself: 'there it is - I make you wince'. It has been an object of interest to the set to observe when at last the Duchess will address the elderly visitor - whose position, in a novel in which naming is important, is indicated by his lack of forename - as 'Longdon'. She does, of course.

But the novel's complex ironies are much developed by this interlude between the two at Mertle. Aggie and Petherton, beauty and the beast, make an unlikely couple. Petherton is an aristocrat in the medieval mould. He is characterized by large teeth and physical power, and is an upper-class carnivore. He will yet leave marks on Aggie's flesh, and we can prophesy the outcome from the relationship here.

Aggie is a product of the Duchess's concentrated attention, deliberately prepared for consumption. We have seen early in the novel how the Duchess has challenged Fernanda over Nanda's unsuitability as a companion for Aggie.

Aggie's role in the novel is chiefly as a suggestion of what, in terms of the ideals of some of the characters, a young girl ought to be - as quite distinct from what Nanda is. And in this role Aggie is one of the reasons for our more or less discounting the importance of any kind of anxiety over Nanda. For Aggie is really rather a flop, in the wider and longer-term view. It is not just that she starts, immediately on becoming married, to make up for lost time with Petherton. It is also that she is such a nonentity. Longdon tries with all his patience to talk to her, and we observe that he is good at this kind of thing. But 'she understood too little - he gave it up' (p. I82). Nanda beside her may be 'a northern savage' but even Longdon, with his special qualities of anxiety, is much more at ease with her. Aggie would be no kind of companion at all. Aggie therefore acts within the novel's structure to validate Nanda's worldliness.

That Nanda's worldliness, however, will prove to undermine her marriageability, is rightly predicted by the Duchess. Of course Mitchy greatly desires to marry Nanda, and in that sense the Duchess might be thought to be wide of the mark. But she is specific:

'If Nanda doesn't get a husband early in the business - '
'Well?' said Mr Longdon, as she appeared to pause with the weight of her idea.
'Why, she won't get one late - she won't get one at all. One, I mean, of the kind she'll take. She'll have been in it too long for <u>their</u> taste.'
...'Been in what?'
...'Why, in the <u>mal'</u> <u>aria</u> they themselves have made for her.'
(p. I94)

This is perceptive and prophetic. Mitchy isn't 'the kind she'll take', but Van is. Of course, we are likely to reflect that under the circumstances the loss has its positive side.

This encounter of Longdon's with Aggie and the Duchess is notable also for an odd sentence:

Both the girls struck him as lambs with the great shambles of life in their future; but while one, with its neck in a pink ribbon, had no consciousness but that of being fed from the hand with the small sweet biscuit of unobjectionable knowledge, the other struggled with instincts and forebodings, with the suspicion of its doom and the far-borne scent, in the flowery fields, of blood.
(p. I8I)

This may strike us as a sort of self-indulgent whimsical morbidity on James's part, a momentary self-conscious grim humorousness. For it certainly doesn't seem to belong to Longdon's personality, and it is rather disconnected from everything else. It seems a plausible part of someone's reverie, but not Longdon's - perhaps Mitchy's. It is really rather puzzling.

It is with these pressures and influences on Longdon in the immediate past that the celebrated smoking-room episode occurs. This scene represents Longdon's attempt to settle the question of Nanda's position by letting Vanderbank know that his relative impecuniosity need prove no objection to a marriage with Nanda. The point at which Longdon announces his idea is reached only after a certain testing period during which both men, each described in language which emphasizes his concern to deceive the other as to his true thoughts, move round the room in a carefully choreographed pattern, with Van who has the look of a 'prepossessing criminal' finally yielding the high lounge to Longdon, the 'judge', whose authority is tempered by the initial quaver of eagerness in his voice when he starts to divulge his proposition. We are bound to reflect, of course, that this 'apparently unassertive' old man is now trying to make a fairly substantial intervention into Van's life and that how Van responds is his own business. Nevertheless we are likely to feel less than sympathetic to the form of Van's response to Longdon's proposal, and to be critical of its import. Even Longdon fairly quickly responds with a 'dryness'. Van's early reaction is irritatingly inconsequent, egocentric, and incipiently greedy. His 'instant admiration' flushes across the room and his first praise is for 'effect' - 'how awfully jolly of you - how beautiful!' (p. 201). He scarcely 'for enthusiasm' hears what Longdon says. James's irony is good here: 'shining and sincere, he had held for a minute Longdon's eyes'.

We notice that Van then goes on to enthuse about the proposal as though Nanda's role were hardly in it:

> Vanderbank, clearly, was touched by it. 'How extraordinarily kind you are to me!' Mr Longdon's silence appeared to reply that he was willing to let it go for that, and the young man next went on: 'What it comes to then - as you put it - is that it's a way for me to add something handsome to my income.' (p. 202)

'Willing to let it go for that' is partly a reference to the fact that the person Longdon is chiefly concerned to be kind to is Nanda, though of course his proposal does represent a high estimation of Van. But Van's concluding summary of the matter is rather gross and we have the sense, as the chapter progresses, as Van's detachment becomes apparent, that Longdon is disturbed by the younger man's lack of immediate commitment, though at the close of the interview still hopeful of his eventual acceptance. Van is left alone in the 'great empty, lighted billiard-room'. This solitude is - and Nanda's ultimate verdict will state it devastatingly - Van's lot for life, probably; an emptiness on a large scale.

His discomfort at what with Fernanda and Mitchy are close quarters - that is to say, very close - has been remarked upon already. In the tense scene which follows Mertle, Fernanda tells Mitchy about the offer and Van: 'was not angry - none of the inner circle at Buckingham Crescent was ever angry - but he looked grave and rather troubled' (p. 219). Van is very much the victim in the little drama which develops, or which (primarily), Fernanda develops. The menacing, what we might now call rather Pinteresque quality of the encounter is more suited to the personalities of Mitchy and Fernanda than to that of Van.

At Beccles, the positive side of Longdon's character and contribution to the novel emerges strongly: we are now on Longdon's territory:

> Mr Longdon's garden took in three acres and, full of charming features, had for its greatest wonder the extent and colour of its old brick wall, of which the pink and purple surface was the fruit of the mild ages, and the protective function, for a visitor strolling, sitting, talking, reading, that of a sort of nurse of reverie. The air of the place, in the August time, thrilled all the while with the bliss of birds, the hum of little lives unseen and the flicker of white butterflies. It was on the large, flat enclosed lawn that Nanda spoke to Vanderbank of the three weeks that she would have completed there on the morrow and that had been - she made no secret of it - the happiest she had yet spent anywhere. (p. 243)

That this should have been Nanda's happiest three weeks ever is, of course decidedly significant, especially in the way that it forces us to modify some of our previous judgements about the

implications, for the girl, of a life spent with Longdon. The brick wall exercises a 'protective' function, which makes its comment on the 'mal' aria' of which the Duchess has complained at Buckingham Crescent. Its extent may be the result chiefly of Longdon's considerable wealth, but its colour is a positive result of the tempering effects of age. Here are advantages which age has over youth. And where Buckingham Crescent is all unnatural views and close intrusions, this wall is the 'nurse of reverie'. (And there is unbounded personal space here, in comparison with the Crescent.) There are 'little lives' here which manage to be 'unseen' - unlike those in London - and the location is simple and private. Just as Mertle followed one overcharged episode at Buckingham Crescent, now Beccles makes its comment on another.

The house, like the garden, speaks of a tradition and continuity which, while lacking (for example) the echoed grandeur of Marie de Vionnet's apartment in The Ambassadors, nevertheless speaks of its own kind of historical experience:

> the look of possession had everywhere mixed with it, in the form of old windows and doors, the tone of old red surfaces, the style of old white facings, the age of old high creepers, the long confirmation of time. Suggestive of panelled rooms, of precious mahogany, of portraits of women dead, of coloured china glimmering through glass doors, and delicate silver reflected on bared tables, the thing was one of those impressions of a particular period that it takes two centuries to produce. (p. 245)

The description is carefully balanced - the house takes up a considerable space 'in the little world, at least, of Beccles' - but there is nevertheless considerable substance here by which to be impressed. Even Mitchy (with his forty thousand a year) is very impressed.

The note, however, of attenuation is still very much present, though it is an attenuation which has (if we can use the word unselfconsciously of anything in this novel) 'charm'. 'Portraits of women dead' is a sufficiently obvious allusion. But the next two items, 'coloured china' and 'delicate silver' are seen at one remove from their actual presence, the first 'glimmering through glass doors', the second 'reflected on bared tables'. Life, here, is a delicate, quiet business - neither robust nor loud. Longdon is scarcely at all present throughout the entire scene, except as

he is represented by the garden, the house, its decoration and furnishings, and by some indirect reporting of his background presence.

Here, Van's (by now) real distance from Mitchy and Fernanda, his unwillingness to play games with matters which are now preying on him - he is thinking about rather a lot of money - leads to a very telling exchange. Under discussion are Longdon's feelings about two other persons being in on what was to be a secret between him and Van. Mitchy's content and tone here are classic Buckingham:

'Oh, but you <u>have</u> - didn't he at least feel? - or perhaps even have (kept your own counsel) better, when you've two such excellent persons to keep it <u>for</u> you? Can't he easily believe how we feel with you?'

Vanderbank appeared for a minute to leave this appeal unheeded; he continued to stare into the garden while he smoked and swung the long leg he had thrown over the arm of the chair. When he at last spoke, however, it was with some emphasis - perhaps even with some vulgarity. 'Oh rot!' (p. 266)

'Rot' of course it is. Van's 'vulgarity' is merely in stating, in a rare way, directly, an opinion. The spell is not, of course, for Mitchy, broken as easily as that. But Mitchy's adherence to Buckingham conventions - down here in Suffolk - is to be tested to its limits. Van, discussing their fine speculations, commits an even greater vulgarity. '(Longdon) doesn't want a lot of gossip and chatter.' Not even Cashman would say a thing like this. Van's companion is clearly taken aback: '"Oh!" said Mitchy with meekness'.

Van's self-centredness - which has sufficiently filled the scene until now - emerges in one of its grosser forms at the end of this episode. Mitchy (they are briefly referring to Aggie) says:

'The young lady I named isn't my <u>choice</u>.'
'Well then, that's only a sign the more that you do these things more easily.'
'Oh, "easily"!' Mitchy murmured. (p. 274)

The reader knows just how little ease is involved. Mitchy's self-effacement here, his civilised decision not to protest, emphasizes Van's insensitivity.

At Tishy Grendon's, the likelihood of Nanda's unsuitability for marriage to Van is finally turned into certainty. Significantly, as Nanda enters she finds Van looking at himself in a mirror.

The book off which Petherton pulls Aggie is Van's, and Nanda has been its judge - Van's disapproval of that fact leads him for the first time with her away from mere politeness: 'you're too particular', he says of her judgement.

All during the low comedy performed by Aggie and Petherton and compered by Mrs Brook, the point of view is most notably Van's: 'when Vanderbank's attention was free again', 'Vanderbank, for a minute, took in the circle' - this is conveyed unobtrusively. It has the effect for us of heightening his involvement in the incident, and our sense of the implications, for him, of Nanda's involvement.

Longdon, in the meantime, has been loosening yet a little more in his attitudes toward the circle. He is, and consciously and deliberately, the source of two bursts of hilarity from the assembled company, as when, in agreement with the Duchess's injunction that it would be better not to speculate on Mr Grendon's whereabouts, Longdon adds 'there it is - exactly' (p. 296). He is possibly even playing to the gallery. But his appeal to Vanderbank to protect him goes unheeded - it is Edward Brookenham who lets him off Fernanda's hook. The eighth book ends with Longdon clearly, though not explicitly, finding the evening's adolescent romps not at all to his taste.

Van's good-humour, still to flare into hysterical proportions at his final interview with Nanda, is not so evident on his next meeting with Fernanda. Mrs Brook is complaining that her circle is finished (there is evidence to the contrary) and Van is pointing out that 'the smash' is her doing. There is certainly an air in the room of loss, of abandonment. Circumstances also engender a directness between Van and Fernanda which portrays Vanderbank in an unusual light: 'Vanderbank, on this, lighted for the first time with a laugh' (p. 314). These two know each other well, and Van is seen here behaving more naturally than we have seen him do before.

Prior to Van's final scene with Nanda in the novel, Mitchy provides us with another fairly positive slant on Longdon's life. Talking at Mrs Brook's, Longdon has been demonstrating further his flexibility in the London environment, speaking with a 'gaiety

slightly strained', smiling 'somewhat extravagantly'. But he relapses 'into an anxiety more natural than his expression of a moment before' (p. 34I) as they discuss Nanda, and as they speculate on Nanda's unhappy love for Vanderbank, Mitchy says:

> 'Any passion so great, so complete,' Mitchy went on, 'is - satisfied or unsatisfied - a life.' Mr Longdon looked so interested that his fellow-visitor, evidently touched by what was now an appeal and a dependence, grew still more bland, or at least more assured, for affirmation. (p. 34I)

Longdon's interest is stimulated presumably by the perceived parallel with his passion for Lady Julia. This assertion, that such experience nevertheless constitutes a 'life' - it, as it were, qualifies for the judgement - is tolerably cogent coming from Mitchy who is so open to life, so interested in everything. Mitchy's perception of worth in such a passion is, naturally enough, heightened by his own experience with Nanda: that is not to say that we must class him, as a victim of unrequited love, with Nanda and Longdon, but to note that he has an entry into such matters through his feelings for Nanda which after all are - for Mitchy - strong. (Of course, there is some doubt in his assurance to Longdon about Nanda's passion, which in James's fiction we would expect: it is our assumption that the worth of such experience is problematic.) Longdon gives Mitchy his unqualified moral approval: '<u>you're</u> all right!' (p. 345).

It might legitimately be objected that James's handling of Van's hysteria in the tenth book gets a little out of control: I think it does, really. The trouble is that it seems we are to assume, literally, no break in the monologue until Nanda's intervention about Mr Longdon's flowers. Furthermore, James's subtlety surely deserts him with this authorial intrusion:

> Had he an inward terror that explained his superficial nervousness, the incoherence of a loquacity designed, it would seem, to check, in each direction, her advance? (p. 352)

Of course he had, is the answer, but the fact is sufficiently shown in his behaviour, and we don't need told. This is Nanda's speculation, but we have surely assumed this insight on her part rather earlier than this. There follows the possibly unnecessary, because so emphatic, observation of Vanderbank's 'refined satisfaction with

himself': although perhaps the need for the phrase is that it will make quite explicit the extent of Nanda's maturity and real moral strength when, in spite of her perception of Van's abjectness, or because of it, she will help him to be 'let down easily'. Meanwhile we note the irony in Van's 'super-abundance, almost, of interest, inattention and movement'. Like the tension between convenience and character earlier, this plainly demonstrates the superficiality of Van's interest. The final verdict on Van - 'he's so right - for himself' - brings out fully the irony that even the apparently empty passions of Nanda and Longdon are a form of 'life' more vital than Van's self-regard and consequent isolation.

II

There are in the novel at least three identifiable clowns, namely Mitchy, Fernanda and Carrie; Longdon himself, as we have seen, enters, at times, quite consciously the ring. Clowns perform through a form of self-abasement. In <u>The Awkward Age</u> there is a considerable weight of implication behind this self-sacrificial display, implication concerning the strain of existence in the protagonists' chosen milieu. What we observe is the payment of a heavy premium on acceptability, in terms of the adoption of the submissive posture. It is relevant to Van's discomfort that his self-conception doesn't permit of such flexibility. Mitchy is all sackcloth and ashes in redemption of what he sees as his essentially unforgivable self, but Van is in need of his 'sacred terror'. The sacred terror renders any sort of self-sacrifice apparently unnecessary, but in fact it is his inability to compromise with life which places such strains on him. Fernanda has, however, come to terms with self-abasement early on in life. Phoenix-like she has risen replete with artifice:

> Mrs Brookenham had passed half round the room with the glide that looked languid but that was really a remarkable form of activity, and had given a transforming touch, on sofa and chairs, to three or four crushed cushions. It was all with the sad, inclined head of a broken lily. (p. 55)

Her predominant sign is an utter dislocation, from meaning, of tone and appearance. This gives to most of her utterance an iron-

ical or even dialectical quality. There is no doubt whatsoever that Fernanda is one of James's most splendid creations.

It is worth commenting on the collision between Fernanda, and the dreadful Harold, 'deep in a large brocaded chair, with his little legs stuck out to the fire', with which we are introduced to her. The oddity of the Brookenhams is indicated immediately in the 'sharp surprise' and 'disappointment' (itself ironically qualified) with which she views her son. Harold has no artifice at all. Directness is Harold's speciality, and though occasionally it is also Fernanda's, as it is Nanda's, and Edward's, so that we must regard it as a Brookenham possibility, Harold's directness is of a frequency and type which in itself would be enough to condemn him in his mother's eyes; were it not for the fund of possibilities Harold offers in that line. Harold is also uncomfortably perceptive. The introduction to Fernanda also establishes her embattled financial state, her practical domestic worries, which we have to keep in mind as providing comment on a minor theme. Edward is no more understanding of Fernanda's flights than Bob Assingham is of his wife's; and there is less obvious affection between the couple in The Awkward Age. We are forced to remember that Harold is Fernanda's product, too, as well as her torment, which may lead us to see him as an embodiment of his mother's moral flaws.

Flawed Fernanda may be, but she is also morally perceptive. It is Fernanda who explodes completely the myth that Nanda is unworldly, referring (to Van) to 'the preposterous fiction, as it after all is, of Nanda's blankness of mind' (p. 2II). Even more striking is her observation about Tishy as the Duchess calls, on Harold's departure.

The Duchess and Fernanda have a relationship of such mutual familiarity that they read each other almost perfectly. It is at Fernanda's rearranged cushions that the Duchess looks, the moment she enters the room. The continuing significance of the conversation about Nanda and Aggie which follows has been remarked on already. It is in this connection that the Duchess refers to Tishy as 'initiated' and Fernanda replies with quite superior perception:

'Well, my dear, if Tishy strikes you as "initiated", all one can ask is "Initiated into what?" I should as soon think of applying

such a term to a little shivering shorn lamb.' (p. 62)

These accurate moral judgements by Fernanda give the reader a validation of his sense of the extended moral parameters within which and against which most of the characters utter their more limited perceptions.

It is given to Fernanda to see into Mitchy's depths accurately too. Mitchy as has been observed has had to make sacrifices on the road to social acceptance and James is very explicit about this:

> in the desperation of humility, he wished to make it public that he had thrown to the winds the effort to please. It was written all over him that he had judged, once for all, his personal case, and that as his character, superficially disposed to gaiety, deprived him of the resource of shyness and shade, the effect of comedy might not escape him if secured by a real plunge. (p. 77)

Mitchy is at once the most wordly of all the characters in the novel and at the same time - this is very significant for the novel's overall moral balance - one of the two or three most attractive. He is perceptive, relatively selfless, charitable and undemandingly in love with Nanda. Throughout the novel we see him behaving mainly with sensitivity toward others.

When Fernanda tells him of the Duchess's allegation that, as Mrs Brook puts it, Nanda is 'damaged and depraved', we notice Mitchy's very real emotion: 'he was clearly conscious of his nerves; he fidgeted away a few steps, then, with his hands in his pockets, fixed on his hostess a countenance more controlled' (p. 86). And when he challenges the Duchess 'he laughed, though not with the clearest ring'. Mitchy is upset: his strength of feeling for Nanda is undeniable and his first enquiries have been for the 'child', as he calls her. It is in fact only in relation to Mitchy's depths of worldiness that Nanda can appear at all child-like. Where Van, for instance, is concerned, Nanda in her relations with him is increasingly the more adult.

Mitchy's worldliness is demonstrated very early, in his reaction to Fernanda's rather self-congratulatory confession of shock at the two French books he has lent her, self-congratulatory in the sense that she is self-conscious about their 'daring'. Mitchy is'honestly surprised':

> I rather liked the one in the pink cover - what's the confounded thing called? - I thought it had a sort of something-or-other. (p.78)

Mitchy is unimpressed by what he considers to be beside the book's point and he is not concerned to project any impression of 'sophistication'. His own conscious assumption of a surface has more to do with the Buckingham 'refinement', as when, quizzed about the relationship between the Duchess and Petherton he says:

> 'Ah, it's just my knowing that constitutes the beauty of my loyalty - of my delicacy. (p. 82)

It is in relation to this that his vagueness about the books should be understood, his forgetting the author, his remembering the books by the cover rather as Van discussed the frame instead of the portrait.

Fernanda's ability to cut through the foliage which they both cultivate is seen, in relation to her perception of Mitchy, most clearly in this statement which also exemplifies Fernanda's role as an instrument of authorial authentication:

> Yet there's in the midst of all this ('depravity'), and in the depths of you, a little deep-down delicious niceness, a sweet sensibility, that one has actually, one's self, shocked as one perpetually is at you, quite to hold one's breath and stay one's hand for fear of ruffling or bruising. (p. 82)

We shall detect the truth of this frequently enough, especially in Mitchy's relations with Longdon, Nanda, and Van. It is the character who, all the others agree, is the most worldy, who is beyond the pale of respectability (aided by his lineage), who is also one of the two most positive, along with Nanda, in the novel. Real moral sensitivity and the capacity for life are most of all Mitchy's qualities, (except for the way the latter is qualified by his adoption of the attenuated Buckingham mode). We have already looked at his sensitive handling of Van in the library at Beccles.

It is with the entry of Lady Fanny that we receive an explicit statement of Mrs Brook's locally understood function:

> 'one can't know Fernanda, of course, without knowing that she has set up, for the convenience of her friends, a little office for consultations. She listens to the case, she strokes her chin and

prescribes -'

The Duchess is enthusiastically supported by Petherton:

> 'And the beauty of it is,' cried Lord Petherton, 'that she makes no charge whatever!'
> 'She doesn't take a guinea at the time, but you may still get your account,' the Duchess returned. 'Of course we know that the great business she does is in husbands and wives.' (p. 95)

Something of what Lady Fanny represents has been suggested previously, but it is necessary to examine the following passage in some detail:

> Nothing, in general, could have been less poorly conventional than the kind of reception given in Mrs Brookenham's drawing-room to the particular element - the element of physical splendour void of those disparities that make the questions of others tiresome - comprised in Lady Fanny's presence. It was a place in which at all times, before interesting objects, the unanimous occupants, almost more concerned for each other's vibrations than for anything else, were apt rather more to exchange sharp and silent searchings than to fix their eyes on the object itself. In the case of Lady Fanny, however, the object itself - and quite by the same law that had worked, though less profoundly, on the entrance of little Aggie - superseded the usual rapt communion very much in the manner of some beautiful tame tigress who might really coerce attention. There was in Mrs Brookenham's way of looking up at her a dim, despairing abandonment of the idea of any common personal ground. Lady Fanny, magnificent, simple, stupid, had almost the stature of her brother, a forehead unsurpassably low and an air of sombre concentration just sufficiently corrected by something in her movements that failed to give it a point. Her blue eyes were heavy in spite of being a couple of shades too clear, and the wealth of her black hair, the disposition of the massive coils of which was all her own, had possibly a satin sheen depreciated by the current fashion. But the great thing in her was that she was, with unconscious heroism, thoroughly herself; and what were Mrs Brook and Mrs Brook's intimates, after all, in their free surrender to the play of perception, but a happy association for keeping her so? (pp. 96-97)

This is one of the most important passages in the novel. It begins and ends with all that is unhealthily characteristic of Mrs Brook's set and in extreme contrast in the middle is all that is so differently characteristic of Lady Fanny. We notice the irony in the phrase 'less poorly conventional' which belongs with 'improved consciousness' and 'the play of perception' as characterisations of the set by the set. Next we notice what is 'received' - an 'element'; the response is to a feature of the person which can be

abstracted from the person to suit the refined sensibilities of the observers. Yet there is more to it than that. 'Poorly conventional' is what in fact their response is not; they are genuinely impressed, and impressed by the 'element' rather than by the person just because the 'element' is so foreign to them. James is doing a great deal in this description. Simultaneously he characterizes their usual response and their reaction here, thus drawing our attention to the former in itself and also to its relation with what seems here rather to hold them in awe.

Of their usual reaction, we might say a great deal. The reaction is to 'interesting objects'. Carrie Donner might be one such, were there not so many 'tiresome' disparities in her, blurring the element. Their identification of people as 'objects', in the light of what has been said, rather begins to speak for itself. Again, we are conscious of the curious tangentiality: they do not focus on the 'object' as much as on each other. Their approach to actuality has similarities with the presentation of those objects in Longdon's house mentioned earlier. The 'set' look at 'reflections', they approach actuality at a remove. Given the presence of another individual, their mere concern for each other's 'vibrations' demonstrates a curious, incestuous, almost masturbatory quality.

There is therefore a double rejection, of the object's humanity and then of the consequent object even as an object. The resultant atrophy in their involvement in anything vital reminds us of Osmond's 'work' in his library. It is a rejection of life.

What brings them out now is Lady Fanny. In this sense she is a minor positive feature in the novel. She may be a 'tame' tigress - she is after all kept as an exhibit by Mrs Brook - yet she 'coerces attention'. In other words, Lady Fanny drags them out of their habitual hypnotised self-attention. With an irony reminiscent of Conrad there is the suggestion that her stupidity and lack of complexity and imagination are her salvation. Nevertheless we are confronted with what, at the Crescent, is done with imagination and intelligence. Why, with these qualities in some abundance, are the characters held so in sway by someone who so evidently lacks them? After all, James creates some humour at Lady Fanny's expense,

whose 'air of sombre concentration' is just 'corrected' by the fact that nothing exists to give it a point. Why should Mrs Brook's recognition of the absence of common ground express itself in a look (self-deprecatory) 'dim and despairing'? We cannot know for sure whether or not this is just one of Fernanda's misleading gestures.

Yet there may well be a sense in which she is well aware of something enviable in Lady Fanny. What has arrested the group is Lady Fanny's undeniable, irrefutable individuality. Magnificent as a tigress, she has a self-contained actuality which stands in massive contrast to her observers' lack of substance, in utter contrast to the attenuated, nebulous mode. In this setting she has considerable animal reality. There is weight in her eyes, her hair. Around her the spectators seems ethereal. The disposition of the coils is 'all her own', her hair has a sheen 'depreciated by the current fashion'. This is very far from the trivial and self-belittling concerns, as they actually are, of Mrs Brook's intimates, to whom such reliance on their own individuality would be abnormal. Even Mitchy's bizarre attire is an attempt to be, above all, acceptable by refusing, as it were, to compete at all.

Particularly we notice the simplicity of the language at the end of the description: 'but the great thing in her was that she was, with unconscious heroism, thoroughly herself'; her unconsciousness is of course everything. It stands in persuasive criticism of the sickly self-observation of the others. The contrasting parenthesis in the statement belongs to the observers and emphatically points up the essential Lady Fanny: 'but the great thing in her was that she was thoroughly herself'. It is this air of readiness to meet life head-on which so arrests the watchers. It is indeed as voyeurs that we irresistibly identify them. Voyeurism typifies so much of their activity.

The set's 'free surrender to the play of perception' seems all the more insipid a commitment after this description, a sort of missing of Lady Fanny's point. Their characterisation as a 'happy association' for the preservation of Lady Fanny's quintessential excellence is of course an authorial irony. What they exist to preserve is the lady's presence (for which Harold suffices eventually), in order that they may enjoy their speculations on her behaviour.

Shortly after this we receive an interesting light on Mitchy, as the Duchess refers to Carrie as 'that preposterous little person' and Mitchy replies that:

> the little person was perhaps not more preposterous than anyone else, that there was something in her he rather liked, and that there were many different ways in which a woman could be interesting (p.97)

As well as perhaps including the Duchess among those equally preposterous persons, Mitchy obviously feels a certain kinship with Carrie, who is another of the novel's clowns; a woman who, though 'painfully shy', has 'committed herself to a "scheme of colour" that was practically an advertisement of courage'. Mitchy's defence of her underlines the lack of anything vicious or, in relation to his sense of other people's integrity, insensitive, in his character.

On the day at the Crescent when Fernanda tells Mitchy about Longdon's offer to Van, so much happens that one would have to take a chapter to follow all the threads. Van's discomfort has already been explored. He cultivates detachment, moves about a great deal, and his laugh, when it comes, 'showed some inattention'. Yet the encounter, like some rather vicious parlour game, sees each at any moment - Mitchy, most of all Van, but even Fernanda - a potential victim.

Fernanda feels that the other two 'could, at bottom, and as things commonly turned out, only be united against her' (p. 229). Van is isolated by the speculation of the other two about his predicament with Nanda. Mitchy, with his love for Nanda is also, less obviously, seen to be making an effort to stay afloat. Fernanda may be 'wonderful', but 'she was perhaps not even now so much so as Mitchy found himself able to be'.

It is as Vanderbank (like Waymarsh in another awkward scene in a different novel - Waymarsh whose 'sacred rage' corresponds to Van's 'sacred terror') looks out the window, not for the first time, that the three give us at once a definition and a condemnation of the activities typical of the set. Mrs Brook says:

> 'And yet to think after all it has been mere <u>talk</u>!'
> Something in her tone again made her hearers laugh out; so it was still with the air of good-humour that Vanderbank rejoined: 'Mere, mere, mere. But perhaps it's exactly the "mere" that has made us range so wide.'
> Mrs Brook's intelligence abounded. 'You mean that we haven't had the excuse of passion?' (p. 230)

The extent to which Mrs Brook intends this as serious self-criticism is a little doubtful. But (as Van says) 'there you are!': what they have is 'mere talk without the excuse of passion'. It is Mrs Brook's intelligence again which provides the definitive statement.

Fernanda's viciousness toward Longdon on one occasion has been remarked and her behaviour is frequently devious, ruthless, rather cruel and also - in spite of her assertion that the set is never 'vulgar' - sometimes rather tasteless. Yet some of the pressures on her have been mentioned and there are certainly times that she is an object of sympathy (as well as - as in the passages instanced - of admiration): one of the novel's lasting images is of what the Duchess and Longdon observe at Tishy's:

> Separated from them by the width of the room, Mrs Brook was, though placed in profile, fully presented; the satisfaction with which she had lately sunk upon a light gilt chair marked itself as superficial and was moreover visibly not confirmed by the fact that Vanderbank's high-perched head, arrested before her in a general survey of opportunity, gave her eyes, in conversation, too prayerful a flight.
> (pp. 289-290)

The evidence is that Fernanda doesn't love Van, but she certainly has a certain kind of dependence on him: she is not above mocking him for an unwitting suggestion that she may want him for herself, but she clearly misses his company when it is absent.

But there is another aspect of Fernanda's behaviour which intrigues one beyond the novel's end, and that is her close questioning of Mitchy about the fate of the five pound note she fined him for what Van called his 'cheap paradox'. Harold, naturally, stole it: Fernanda has been 'trying for months and months to remember to find out' if Harold gave it back. Mitchy has forgotten the affair. Fernanda's 'rigour' as he now calls it, will no doubt put us in mind of the Duchess's earlier quoted assertion that 'you may get your account' from Mrs Brook. But that hardly explains her anxiety over the stolen money. Partly, we can explain it in terms of an actual (if only eventual and not consistent) scrupulousness, for that might be in accord with many of her persuasively lucid and honest moral utterances.

But there is a disturbing quality about her anxiety here which suggests greater depths, the guilty obsession of a Lady Macbeth. It is as though Fernanda is making a kind of moral compensation through her treatment of this incident in order to balance her failure over - perhaps - the interference she has just been responsible for in at least three other lives. For she has just caused Mitchy to shed tears in response to what is a kind of interpersonal construction of her own invention. Mitchy's face, in fact, has glared so strikingly that it has needed all of Fernanda's composure to achieve her spoken confirmation of the realisation which she has fed to him - that Van is jealous of him. Coming after this, her anxiety about the five pound note strikes us, on top of her various other incongruities, as the one which signals that Fernanda's mind has paid a high price for its mainly unrestricted lunges into the lives of other people.

III

Nanda is direct, lucid, uncomplicated, rather humourless, mature and kind; her judgement is fairly good but not perfect, as proved by her advice to Mitchy about Aggie, advice particularly ill-judged given her actual lack of surprise at the way Aggie develops after her marriage.

When she adopts the Buckingham tone and register as she does once or twice it is merely with the effect of stressing not so much its incongruity on her lips as the fact that she doesn't get it right:

'into what mysteries you plunge', says Longdon:

> 'Oh, we do; that's what everyone says of us. We discuss everything and every one - we're always discussing each other. I think we must be rather celebrated for it, and it's a kind of trick - isn't it? - that's catching. But don't you think it's the most interesting kind of talk? Mother says we haven't any prejudices.' (p. I25)

The sheer artlessness of the account sounds wrong for Buckingham sophistication, and there is no warmth of self-appreciation, no confidence in the assertion of corporate identity. It is delivered from her sense of the need to put Longdon in the picture. Nanda's 'kind of talk' is really very different.

It may be objected that if this is true, then there is something odd about Nanda's ending the third book with 'you were right, Mr Van. It's beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!' (p. I27). But quite apart from our sense that this, like her 'command of the situation more desired perhaps than achieved' (p. II2), is simply an attempt to be accepted into the 'adult' world, there is also our feeling that any similarity to Van's earlier utterance is qualified by the preceding paragraph. As Nanda tells Longdon that he is 'good', there are tears in her eyes. Our attention is being drawn to the difference between what Nanda means and what Van meant: his was his conventional response to 'effect'; while Nanda is, to use the phrase occuring earlier, maintaining 'the full value of the word'. Van has used it with his customary good-humoured appreciation. Nanda is emotionally moved, and can hardly trust herself to speak. The words are emphasized in this way precisely so that we will be conscious of the change in meaning. It is rather the way in which 'Mr Van' has been wrong which is important; wrong for Nanda, for Longdon, for Van himself.

In fact Nanda does not again return to this style. As we read a little earlier: 'she was to a certainty not self-conscious - she was extraordinarily simple'. It is not just that she is therefore placed as being different from the set. What is so absurd about the assumption of concern for her innocence is that, even as we see her appear in the novel for the first time, we perceive that she is above and beyond the set. While Van is fascinated by the set's gossip about Carrie, Nanda, who knows more than they do anyway about the facts (thus as has been observed making nonsense of Van's concern for her 'innocence'), springs quickly and naturally to Carrie's defence:

> there was clearly something in the girl that would always make for lucidity. 'Do you mean about Carrie Donner? I don't believe it, and at any rate I don't think it's anyone's business. I shouldn't have a very high opinion of a person who would give up a friend.' (p. II5)

Her constant lucidity is in itself in opposition to the tendencies of her mother's set. Here, while the group's concern is with the amusement Carrie offers, Nanda's is with Carrie's wellbeing. It has been pointed out already that Mitchy elsewhere springs rapidly to

Carrie's defence, and as Nanda goes on to add that Tishy 'says that to be with some nice girl is really the best thing' for Carrie, 'poor Mitchy's face, hereupon, would have been interesting, would have been distinctly touching, to other eyes; but Nanda's were not heedful of it' (p. II8). So while Nanda's directness, simplicity and gravity place her with Longdon, her worldliness places her with Mitchy.

Nanda is also in an important way similar to the positive elements in Lady Fanny. She takes, that is to say, a stand on her individuality. She is unlike Lady Julia and unlike her mother (though we see her mother's influence in some of her actions). As we have seen, she even goes out of her way to stress to Longdon the differences between her and her grandmother, in the full knowledge of how he may respond. That he responds positively is of course to his credit with the reader, in that he is seen to be prepared to meet changed circumstances.

Nanda is equally direct with Van although there, too, the consequences are clear to her. That she is in love with him, there is no doubt. Quite apart from the Duchess's authoritative suggestion that 'Nanda's fairly sick - as sick as a little cat - with her passion' ('the oddity of the image could draw from Longdon no natural sound'!), Nanda's 'oh Mr Van, I'm "true"!' (p. I63) on the bench at Mertle, along with Van's reaction, adequately establishes the point. But it doesn't prevent her from participating in this rather extraordinary exchange, in the garden at Beccles, with the object of her affection:

> 'Well, you really haven't any natural "cheek" - not like <u>some</u> of them. You're in yourself, as uneasy, if anything's said and everyone giggles or makes some face, as Mr Longdon, and if Lord Petherton hadn't once told me that a man hates almost as much to be called modest as a woman does, I would say that, very often, in London now, you must pass some bad moments.'
>
> The present might precisely have been one of them, we should doubtless have gathered, had we seen fully recorded in Vanderbank's face the degree to which this prompt response embarrassed, or at least stupefied him. But he could always laugh. 'I like your "in London now"!' (p. 250)

The extent to which Nanda is beyond Van is scarcely to be expressed - she goes on to point out how, even by the effect she sees she is producing in him, she can tell the extent to which he is vulnerable.

And:

'There it is - it's all out before one knows it, isn't it, and I can't help it any more than you, can I?' So she appeared to put it to him, with something in her lucidity that would have been infinitely touching; a strange, grave, calm consciousness of their common doom and of what in especial in it would be worst for herself.
(pp. 250 - 251)

That Nanda does not give Vanderbank up entirely at this moment for his failure to react at all to this - he almost does, and James merely poses us a question as to Nanda's response - is signalled by her shortly subsequent remark about how Harold is a 'born consumer' while she does 'with awfully little' and 'could easily do with still less' (p. 252).

The most finely drawn contrast of all between the Buckingham set's 'refinement' and Nanda's more prosaic style comes just after this exchange with Van: she and Mitchy have already recognised the irony that he wouldn't be shocked in 'a single hereditary prejudice' by Nanda's 'awfulness'. Her state is the result of her 'exposure':

'Doesn't one become a sort of little drainpipe with everything flowing through?'
'Why don't you call it more gracefully,' Mitchy asked, 'a little aeolian-harp set in the drawing-room window and vibrating in the breeze of conversation?' (p. 260)

We can share, a little, Mitchy's hidden amusement at her unflattering image. But the juxtaposition of the images poses the question as to which element of the former image - drainpipe or contents - is most unflattering to whom. It is perhaps the question which has struck Mitchy most. (This is one of Nanda's several heartwarming naiveties, so different from Van's cold pleasantries: the other most salient being her response to Mitchy's characterisation of himself and Petherton as 'the Gnome and the Giant': 'do you find Lord Petherton a Gnome?' - though here, perhaps, the naivety is, thoughtfully, assumed.)

It is toward the end of the novel that Nanda's moral sophistication reaches its peak. Her behaviour is of a fineness similar to Strether's in The Ambassadors. Not only does she let Van off gently,

she even pleads for him with Longdon, displaying a charity which Longdon can scarcely permit her. Her last long speech of the novel serves to universalize the problems of her upbringing - she acts here as a sort of spokeswoman for her generation: the reference, in fact, goes even further and touches the epoch itself:

> 'We're many of us, we're most of us - as you long ago saw and showed you felt - extraordinary now. We can't help it. It isn't really our fault. There's so much else that's extraordinary that if we're in it all so much we must naturally be.' It was all obviously clearer to her than it had ever been, and her sense of it found renewed expression; so that she might have been, as she wound up, a very much older person than her friend. (p. 382)

The age is itself awkward:

> 'Everything's different from what it used to be.'
> 'Yes, everything,' he returned with an air of final indoctrination. 'That's what he ought to have recognised.'
> 'As you have?' Nanda was once more - and completely now - enthroned in high justice. 'Oh, he's more old-fashioned than you.'
> 'Much more,' said Mr Longdon with a queer face. (p. 382)

Longdon's response is a clear note of optimism here at the end.

The book has a kind of anti-ending, rather like The Ambassadors. Though a direction is strongly enough indicated, in both novels, the 'there we are' contained in the last line of both books is present in place of any neat resolution. The narrative is not, in other words, closed to the same extent as in, for example, The Portrait of a Lady, or The Golden Bowl. This is perfectly in keeping with the moral problems raised in the former pair of novels (though I shall later suggest reasons for dissatisfaction with the ending of The Ambassadors). The unfulfilment which is basic to Longdon and Nanda's departure together, which is not compensated by their being together, is the source of the novel's lingering sadness. Yet the positive attitude to their future which both exhibit, along with the memory the reader has of the attractive nature of Beccles, and the sterility of the social life which Nanda is leaving, offset to a fair extent - as does the continuing problem of Mitchy - the sense the reader might otherwise have of Nanda setting out on a life starved as much as Longdon's has been of vital experience. Indeed given her life to date, that is not really possible. And this is most important - for what has been most valued authorially throughout the

novel is openness to life, openness of the kind Nanda and Mitchy have, and which even Longdon in his way develops. We can say that the ending is more positive than that of The Portrait of a Lady, of The Golden Bowl, of The Wings of the Dove; but that its positive qualities are limited.

It is to be hoped that this analysis undermines the sort of view of the novel expressed here:

> It is a comedy of manners, its range deliberately limited...taste and tact are the touchstones of this world; morals have become manners...(James) accepts the world of manners as his novelistic donnée and works almost wholly within its limits.[4]

and that it adequately comments upon the disabling idea that the novel is about the menaced innocence of a young girl, a misconception which has lead to very much the wrong sort of focus on the novel, as when Dorothea Krook talks about the 'diabolical badness'[5] of Buckingham Crescent.

Many critics' understanding of this underrated novel has been undermined by their failure to perceive that the idea of Nanda's 'innocence' is ironical, that she is in fact the most adult character in the novel. At no point is she threatened by her mother's circle at all.[6]

Her correlative in the world of innocence is Aggie, the miserable failure of whose upbringing is additional testimony in the novel to the high value of Nanda's very real worldliness.

The other most worldly character receives equally sympathetic authorial treatment. Mitchy, who, unlike Van, is difficult to shock and authentically sophisticated, is also kind and sensitive, as we have seen.

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4 Margaret Walters, 'The Awkward Age', in The Air of Reality, p. 190
5 The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James, p. 161
6 John P. O'Neill (in Workable Design, p. 90), following the preface instead of the novel, sees Nanda among the 'innocent and the helpless' in James's fiction. Rather extraordinarily, he seems to regard marriage to Longdon as one of the possible dangers facing Nanda at the end of the novel.

The Duchess's moral concerns are exposed as mere cant, while the blatantly tainted Fernanda is the source of some of the novel's most morally percipient comment.

As we shall see, this undermining of moral appearances, this complicating of moral realities, is an increasingly difficult question in the fiction under examination, most of all in the Wings of the Dove and in The Golden Bowl. At the least, we can say that James is prepared to distinguish in his novels between etiquette and actually significant moral behaviour. In the preface, James may have discussed a novel about the difficulties of the 'hovering female young', [7] and referred to the threat of Nanda's exposure, but that is patently in the actual novel an irrelevance. It is her very exposure which earns her authorial sympathy. Naomi Lebowitz remarks, of Jamesian morality generally, that 'his morality is formed out of the constant exposure of a sensitive character to the possibilities of engagement'.[8] As we have seen, Nanda is, as she puts it, 'a little drainpipe'. In fact, she has coped with exposure, in her solemn way, excellently well. Her moral sensitivity is beyond doubt and her behaviour by and large (some advice to Mitchy notwithstanding) kind, sensible and honourable.

Nanda and Mitchy have both had much exposure, both have responded with moral intelligence to their lives. This, within the Jamesian view, invalidates other criticisms which may be made of them.

Longdon, who is part-open to exposure, but predominantly closed, is, therefore, ambivalently disfavoured by the author. Openness to experience, followed by a response expressing moral intelligence, has high value. Fernanda, who herself seems to perceive, at one or two moments, the sterility of her pursuits, is handled with similar ambivalence.[9]

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7 The Art of the Novel, p. 103
8 The Imagination of Loving, p. 13
9 Fernanda has a repressed predatory sexuality about her which in other forms within James's fiction would tend to represent a positive value, as though she were a sort of deviant cousin of Charlotte Stant and Kate Croy.

Van belongs with Fleda, Isabel, Milly; the characters cut off from engagement by self-absorption. He has considerably more surface decency than Mitchy, but within the novel's moral terms is corrupt, like the Duchess, who is a more vulgar form of Maud Lowder, and less sinister. The Duchess, nonetheless, has the virtue of a Maud Lowder, the connection with the vital, the forcefulness of personality, the confidence. (That she is transparent - the opacity of Strett and Aunt Maud is discussed below - is a sign of her relative tameness, however.)

We have seen how Lady Fanny represents life, embodies it, as do Kate Croy and Miriam Rooth and Charlotte Stant, in their different ways, as a possibility of connection: connect yourself with such a person and you share the energy.

Life, in the novel, is represented in a variety of other ways, some of which exploit limited types of contrast. Contrasts, for example, between self-centredness and unselfconsciousness, between conversational discourse and discourses of serious meaning, between self-conscious enjoyment and natural enjoyment, between talk and passion, between sociability and friendship, between the city and the country, between London and Beccles.[10] These contrasts have been examined above: in each instance, the latter term within the contrast is approved as against the sterility or timidity or effeteness of the first. Given Van's connections with that list, his position is hopeless. No-one's, in this novel, is ideal.

But here we may allow ourselves the biographical note, and remember James's rides in the Campagna, his friendships, his deeply felt experiences of all kinds: Mitchy says to Longdon, as we have seen, of Nanda's futile love for Vanderbank, 'any passion so great, so complete, is - satisfied or unsatisfied - a life'.[11] In other words, let us not be mechanistic about such matters: there are innumerable modes of living, in a relatively full sense of the term. (Who can say that James didn't live?) We should not feel any sense of anything stronger than a kind of sadness at Nanda's

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10 Beccles and Mertle belong within the complex of feeling discussed above, pp. 29-31

11 see this thesis, p. 81

future, or Longdon's. The negative capability which James had quantities of is theirs in some measure too (Mitchy has nearly as much as a guarantee of survival requires). And that will not be, by any means, their predominant mode. Nanda had, after all, never been happier than at Beccles.

It is in the next three novels under analysis that unfulfilled relationships start to weigh most heavily, and, albeit that relationship is a more occupying presence in The Golden Bowl than in The Wings of the Dove, it is in the latter that its frustrated possibilities echo most gloomily in the Jamesian canon.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

Of all of James's novels, The Wings of the Dove is surely that which most inspires doubt in the reader as to his ability ever fully, satisfactorily, to comprehend it. It is open to us - I shall avail myself of the chance - to explain some of its difficulty by way of certain imperfections. But even when these have been alleged, and not, on the whole, to the novel's so very great disadvantage, one is left with a work which, with full authorial intention, seems always to reverberate within one's recollections with a changing note. Successive readings always seem to undermine recent certainties. This is no doubt a mark of excellence in the novel, and one might fairly become as obsessive about the book's mysteries as it is possible to be about those in 'The Turn of the Screw'.

That comparison has in it a suggestion that there might be a rather sinister quality in The Wings of the Dove. I should say now that I do not propose to find that quality where it is often found, in the behaviour of Kate and Merton, but in Milly's illness.

Presumably it is the very difficulty of the novel which has lead commentators to forget the text and write instead about Minny Temple or James's feelings of confusion in relation to his brother William, as here:

> It is important for an understanding of both Henry James and his heroine Milly Theale, to note that he remarks that his acceptance of people entirely on William's terms 'was the truth at that season, if it wasn't always to remain the truth'.[1]

One barely begins to understand what such formulations - especially when based on mere autobiography - are designed to show. Yet, as we have seen, even Leavis, not much given to lapses of that specific sort, prefers to give Minny precedence over Milly in The Great Tradition. This is not to say that one fails to acknowledge certain connections, and indeed there are perhaps some moments in the novel where Milly does come to be sentimentalized a little by James, but all the rest of the sentimentalizing is done by the other characters (though importantly not all of them) and it is an elementary kind of critical lapse which confuses that with authorial sentimentality.

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1 Jean Kimball, 'The Abyss and The Wings of the Dove', in Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 276

The trouble is that Milly <u>is</u> an imperfectly drawn character, though not in the sense, or to the drastic degree, that Leavis suggests. She is flawed as a creation in two main ways. First, the ambiguity carefully established in her appeal rather wears off as the novel moves toward a conclusion. Second, James fails to control her intelligence, as he familiarly does in his late fiction, in the sense that she starts to think and speak a little as he might when in fact she is supposed to have distinct limitations. An illustration from Mrs Lowder's dinner party may suffice to substantiate the point. On the one hand, there is an Austenesque barb as counterpoint to some of Milly's more swollen reflections:'these were immense excursions for the spirit of a young person at Mrs Lowder's mere dinner-party' (p. I06). Yet almost in the same breath there is Milly's high-level repartee, her hit at Lord Mark: 'you're blasé, but you're not enlightened. You're familiar with everything, but conscious, really of nothing. What I mean is that you've no imagination'. James does us the honour of observing that her wit has been sharpened, but that hardly suffices. It is not so much the intelligence as the experience and maturity to which the sally testifies which is at odds with - say - Milly's uncritical attitude to Susie (to the extent that the attitude is static) or her attitude to Merton or to anyone. This is just not the response of a culturally untutored person, particularly a young one.

The barb about the 'mere' dinner party suggests another aspect of Milly which might be thought unsatisfactory, and that is the apparent discrepancy between Milly the dove/princess and Milly the mere young American girl, the 'cheap exotic', of whom Lord Mark (and Merton) have seen droves. But of course this, far from being a flaw, is one of the novel's major strengths. It is not James, who, in this matter, is confused. It is rather that the characters do indeed see Milly in different ways and that those critics whose reading of Milly leads to her exaltation, or leads to the judgement that she is sentimentalized, are simply choosing some parts of the novel and ignoring other large and important parts. What is most desirable is

that our response to Milly should incorporate a tension which does justice to her various (intended) shades.

Why, then, is Milly's illness the chief source of the 'sinister' in the novel? F. O. Matthiessen remarks that in the final stages of the novel James succeeds in making us feel that 'Milly has been wrapped around and isolated by sinister forces',[2] though he sees this as the result of her having been 'literally smothered off stage by Kate's terrifying will', a view which will not be supported here. Certainly, there are obvious ways in which her illness is sinister; the sensibility belonging to the later stages of the twentieth century winces considerably at the description of Sir Luke as 'the master of the knife', and any veiled account of terminal illness may well take on a sinister nature.

But the argument we have become used to is that concerning the wrongdoing of Merton and Kate. Their behaviour is indeed subjected to the reader's moral sense in such a way that revulsion occasionally surfaces, particularly toward Kate. But that there should be something decidedly unpleasant for the reader in Milly's illness beyond its obvious facts is so plainly signalled that it is odd how often it is ignored.

Is Milly physically ill? She presumably is, though it is not as easy to prove it as some would suggest:

> The fact is that Milly Theale is dying, not from unrequited love, not from a lack of will, but from an incurable physical disease.[3]

Ms Kimball cites as evidence the fact that Densher 'suddenly sees this' as a consequence of Sir Luke's appearance in Venice after Lord Mark's visit. But looking at the novel, we observe that Densher sees no such thing: he sees the pain, the horror, the mortality in the picture: but there is no disputing that anyway: he does not recognise an 'incurable physical disease' in these facts.

But this doesn't really matter all that much. The fact is established with immense repetition that Milly can live or not, according to what she decides, physical illness or no. And this is perfectly compatible with her feelings, for example, on Mark's first

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2 Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 57
3 Jean Kimball, Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 280

descent, when she finds it 'woeful to have to rank him among those minor charms of existence that she gasped, at moments, to remember she must give up' (p. 298). For all the suggestion here of a force acting on Milly against her will, it is nonetheless her will which is weak in permitting her judgement here. We may think of her as having a physical disease if we wish, but we will also wish to pay attention to its metaphorical meaning with particular reference to its suggestion of spiritual malaise.

I shall suggest here what I think is the nature of Milly's real illness and then go on to explain how the judgement seems to me very satisfactorily to explain much of what is in the novel.

Essentially, what is wrong with Milly is that she perceives reality only through, or even in, illness and death. Illness and death are the only realities which she can properly recognise. The following is a fairly explicit passage in which James explores the idea. I quote it at some length because it really does tell us a great deal about his conception. It concerns her second interview with Strett:

> She struck herself as aware, aware as she had never been, of really not having had from the beginning anything firm. It would be strange for the firmness to come, after all, from her learning in these agreeable conditions that she was in some way doomed; but above all it would prove how little she had hitherto had to hold her up. If she was now to be held up by the mere process - since that was perhaps on the cards - of being let down, this would only testify in turn to her queer little history. <u>That</u> sense of loosely rattling had been no process at all; and it was ridiculously true that her thus sitting there to see her life put into the scales represented her first approach to the taste of orderly living. Such was Milly's romantic version - that her life, especially by the fact of this second interview, <u>was</u> put into the scales; and just the best part of the relation established might have been, for that matter, that the great grave charming man knew, had known at once, that it was romantic, and in that measure allowed for it. Her only doubt, her only fear, was whether he perhaps wouldn't even take advantage of her being a little romantic to treat her as romantic altogether. This doubtless was her danger with him; but she should see, and dangers in general meanwhile dropped and dropped. (p. I54)

She has never had 'anything firm':the growing crystallization of the idea of illness is therefore horribly attractive and even 'romantic'. She is 'held up', if she is held up at all, by the growing plausibility of the idea that she is ill and that she is going to die. The paradox is brought out fully at the end of the passage:

'dangers in general meanwhile dropped and dropped' - this really is the last thing, after all, that one would wish to say about her predicament. The danger to which she refers is, rather appallingly, the danger that she won't be believed.

That she should thus be pleased by the increasingly plausible appearance of her doom is something we should by this stage in the novel be expecting, for the signals have been there from the beginning. Her very eagerness over the first interview with the great doctor has been enormously telling. She has been worried about 'failing of justice to her errand' (which is not compatible, entirely, with a sense of imminent apotheosis) and her eagerness over the experience is strangely marked. She wants the great man for a friend, a friend who would:

> moreover be, wonderfully, the most appointed, the most thoroughly adjusted of the whole collection, inasmuch as he would somehow wear the character scientifically, ponderably, proveably - not just loosely and sociably. (p. 150)

We can overlook the oddity of talking about one's doctor with such relish as sufficiently obvious. This is an exceptionally interesting insight we are being offered. To what will Strett be 'appointed' and 'adjusted'? Presumably he will be adjusted to Milly's needs and appointed to fit them: the notion of his wearing his character as friend 'scientifically, ponderably, proveably' is doubly significant. Most obvious is the sense that she doubts friendship in others (though what does this make of Susie?). But more interesting is the sense that she wants to have her condition scientifically validated. Indeed Milly becomes frightened of the scientific intervention, frightened 'that she might find she had interested him even beyond her intention, find she was in fact launched in some current that would lose itself in the sea of science' (p. 150). This makes her 'stammer' and 'pant'. Now there is a sense in which anyone who has ever consulted a doctor understands this fear of being lost, of having the matter taken away beyond personal control. But there is a special sense in this in relation to Milly. First, the 'romance' is threatened by science. Second, this current threatens her idea of Strett as 'adjusted' and 'appointed'. But finally and most importantly, the occult in Milly's personality, the secret fascination

with illness and death is faced by a scientific intervention which might threaten its reality. This is what makes her most of all stammer and pant. This causes her to struggle within the relationship. But she surrenders and the consultation ends on the strangest note:

> the relation was the special trophy that, for the hour, she bore off. It was like an absolute possession, a new resource altogether, something done up in the softest silk and tucked away under the arm of memory. (p. I5I)

This leaves us with a disturbing sense of her relish for the occasion, her apparent morbidity. Kate is onto it at once: 'I believe you like it'.

One does not really have to <u>deduce</u> the secret fascination in Milly. James tells us that it is there. Susan, a romantic (in the vulgar sense), if ever there was one, sees Milly, shortly after the first appearance in the novel of the two ladies, sitting above an abyss. Susie holds her breath:

> What had first been offered her was the possibility of a latent intention - however wild the idea - in such a posture: of some betrayed accordance of Milly's caprice with a horrible hidden obsession. (p. 84)

What 'horrible hidden obsession'?

We have been simultaneously introduced to several things. To the two characters, to - most of all - Susie's particular kind of perception and to Milly's plasticity.

It has been Susie's wish to be 'literary', and she has been a writer of 'romantic' tales. But in Milly's character 'she found herself in presence of the real thing, the romantic life itself'. There is of course a certain obvious tension in that statement, consequent upon our perception that the 'romantic life' can only be 'the real thing' in a limited sense. But we must see Susie not just as a romantic interpreter of Milly, but as one of her several <u>creators</u>. As an interpreter, her freedom is clear enough - of one observation we read:

> That was the great thing with Milly - it was her characteristic poetry: or at least it was Susan Shepherd's. (p. I28)

So we must remember that 'the potential heiress of all the ages' (p. 74), is <u>Susie</u>'s phrase, and correspondingly swollen. The

sentence which contains the phrase does after all point to the significant fact - for us - that Susie impresses Milly. Susie too is conscious of the irony of this fact, while the reader is bound to use it to qualify the sense of Susie's epithet. When Susie speculates as to whether Milly is choosing among the kingdoms of the earth or wants them all, the reader winces. The speculation belongs in one of Mrs Stringham's literary works. The reader will throughout balance this view of Milly with Densher's, Kate's, Mark's, and with some more direct authorial counterpoint.

So Susie interprets Milly in a particular way, a manner which lacks a proper discrimination: but the thing about Milly is that she is heavily - very heavily - influenced by how people see her.

We've already seen how much Strett's attention has meant to Milly. In a sense it has seemed that her sense of identity is dependent on it. Early, in the third book, we have heard of her 'vagueness, the openness, the eagerness without point and the interest without pause', Milly's 'really larger vagueness' (p. 78).

Someone who has very little in the way of a strong sense of self-identity is, presumably, open to suggestions about her own nature, impressionable where the reactions of others are concerned. What we observe throughout the novel is people assigning roles to Milly, and Milly - sometimes with emphatic gratitude - accepting them, defining herself in terms created by other people. Her plasticity is along with her other qualities virtually an invitation to them to invent roles for her.

But there is one area of nature, one area of experience, within which she is certain to be able to locate her own personality. In short, all her relatives are dead. Milly is the 'final flower' of an:

> immense, extravagant, unregulated cluster, with free-living ancestors, handsome dead cousins, lurid uncles, beautiful vanished aunts, persons all busts and curls, preserved, though so exposed, in the marble of famous French chisels. (p. 75)

So the predominant reality in experience for Milly is death. Other than that - and the note is sounded from the beginning - she has nothing in the way of <u>positive</u> faiths and certainties about nature. This very fact is illustrated again and again by the way in which

she accepts other people's versions of herself: all she has to feel her individuality with is her sense of the inevitability of death. That is what her personal knowledge amounts to. We must not forget the stress which is placed on her relative ignorance of ideas, her relative isolation from the more complex manifestations of culture.

And not only that: surrounded as she has been by the busts of vanished relatives, powerful reinforcers of her sense of death, her very role as sole survivor has encumbered her with a weight which prevents a personal, combatant identity from emerging: 'she couldn't have lost it if she had tried - that was what it was to be really rich. It had to be the thing you were'.

Quentin Anderson, from whose directions those here could scarcely diverge more, has nevertheless made a point about Milly with which one has to agree: 'with every naturalistic and emblematic resource at James's command, he has presented Milly Theale as a person incapable of assuming an identity, of being a "somebody"'.[4] We would have to add here, unless someone else offers an identity to her.

The trouble is that people keep responding to her in quite the wrong way. It has begun, we are informed, even before the European trip, when Milly has been to Boston, which helps 'as nothing else could' to emphasize 'the constant fact that what you had most to do, under the discipline of life, or of death, was really to feel your situation as grave'. James of course pokes fun at Boston, especially through Susie, not infrequently in the novel. But this comment has its serious side. For Milly, who is very much 'under the discipline' of death, to feel her situation as 'grave' is most unsuitable.

Therefore to return to 'the hidden obsession': Susie has already divined in Milly something - more than mere 'American intensity' - which remains a 'muffled and intangible form' but which were it known (the figure in the carpet!) would become 'instantly the light in which Milly was to be read'. What this is, we learn as the novel progresses, is the hold which death has on Milly's imagination: it is precisely this which Merton's love - if Milly could have returned it long enough and happily enough - might have shaken off: this has been the direction, not so specifically applied, of Sir Luke's early reasoning, and more specifically of his later.

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4 The American Henry James, p. 263

But there is another aspect of Milly's character with which we are acquainted early and which must also be considered before we proceed further:

> She had arts and idiosyncrasies of which no great account could have been given...such as the art of being almost tragically impatient and yet making it as light as air; of being inexplicably sad and yet making it as clear as noon; of being unmistakably gay, and yet making it as soft as dusk. (p. 78)

And:

> She worked - and seemingly quite without design - upon[5] the sympathy, the curiosity, the fancy of her associates (p. 79)

Both these extracts indicate that Milly is perfectly capable of consciously working upon people's conception of her. In other words, she collaborates with them in their taking advantage of her plasticity. And indeed her lack of a sense of identity, far from its meaning that she is without active self-concern, seems to mean rather the opposite. Dorothea Krook remarks that 'her self-consciousness is her glory (James wishes us to understand)' and points out how conscious Milly is of 'acting out the character of the American Girl'.[6] Well, one might easily feel that Milly's self-consciousness is not necessarily something to celebrate; certainly her consciousness of herself as an American is only one of a number of visions of herself which she partly acts out.

She is very concerned with herself. She wants to find out about herself. Whenever we see things through Milly's eyes in the novel, we see them through a kind of mist. Her impressions are always filtered through her primary consciousness of herself, her doubts about herself. This is very clear indeed from the early stages of her appearance in the novel:

> But I sometimes wonder...well, if I shall have much of it...of everything I have...I only mean, shall I have it for long? That is if I have got it...I don't think I've really <u>everything</u>...that's the matter - that I can scarcely bear it...the power to resist the bliss of what I have! (pp. 88-89)

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5 James goes on to justify his (since much-criticized) indirectness in treating Milly: 'we shall really ourselves scarce otherwise come closer to her than by feeling their impression and sharing, if need be, their confusion' (p. 79). This might to some sound more like an excuse than a policy, but it suggests a plausible line of defence.

6 <u>The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James</u>, p. 210

In the last words quoted there is in fact a show of irony, but the rather embarrassing amount of self-interest is unavoidable.

Therefore in talking about Milly's personality we can say that she is very interested in herself because she has no firm basis on which to construct a sense of her own identity, other than her sense of death; that her lack of certainty about her identity causes her to be exceptionally plastic and that her interest in herself leads her to manipulate other people, or collaborate with them, in constructing versions of her personality.

II

What we are to be informed that it is in Milly's power to do is to 'live'. Certainly as we see Milly at Mrs Lowder's dinner party it appears that she is going to attempt to do so, and the characteristic sense of involvement as difficult emerges as soon as James touches on the subject:

> It wasn't then, as the prospect seemed to show, so difficult to get into the current, or to stand, at any rate, on the bank...she thrilled, she consciously flushed, and turned pale with the certitude - it had never been so present - that she should find herself completely involved. (pp. 97-98)

We are also conscious of Milly's potential to direct her attention outward: 'her sensibility was almost too sharp for her comfort'. But as the occasion progresses, the strength of Milly's self-concern makes itself felt. She says to Mark that Kate 'can care for me - she must feel that - only by being sorry for me'. And again that 'she pities me. She understands'. We learn a little after this that 'she was still conscious of the failure even of curiosity he had just shown in respect to herself'. She is angling for a particular kind of sympathy. Sympathy, pity, are responses which she seems to find natural. (There is evidence in the novel of a discrepancy between the sympathy Milly assumes and the sympathy actually given.) Her appeal for Mark's sympathy here has 'quavered out in spite of her'. But really, as in her relations with, say, Kate, or Sir Luke, this kind of collapse is inevitable. One of the changes which takes place in the portrayal of Milly's character in the novel is the way in which we lose our active sense of this tension. But then this has much to

do with the way in which toward the end of the novel we are, for other purposes, cut off from her point of view much as we are cut off from Charlotte's in The Golden Bowl.

Lord Mark has bestowed his sense of Milly's identity upon her, so different from Susie's. He has categorized her, she has been 'popped into the compartment in which she was to travel for him' (p. 104). She recognizes 'his certainties about a mere little American, a cheap exotic, imported almost wholesale'. This is the sort of material to which reference has been made as to its comment on Susie's flights. And James makes an intriguing remark about Milly's capacity to accept it:

> It was a use of her that many a girl would have been doubtless quick to resent; and the kind of mind that thus, in our young lady, made all for mere seeing and taking is precisely one of the charms of our subject. (p. 104)

This is surely, ironically phrased as it is, very much the sort of trait which has been identified above: this refers explicitly to Milly's plasticity.

This process continues: 'it was a fact - it became one at the end of three days - that Milly began to borrow from the handsome girl a sort of view of her state'. Now Milly is accepting the role of princess, albeit only 'the nearest approach to a practical princess Bayswater could hope ever to know' (p. 115). At Matcham, her plasticity is the cause of her tears at the Bronzino. We have noticed the foggy quality of her perception of externals in her approach to the house with Mark. Their advance is 'without haste, through innumerable natural pauses and soft concussions' and 'everything now again melted together; and kind eyes were always kind eyes - if it were never to be worse than that!' Are they really kind? we may wonder, or is Milly simply determined to see kindness everywhere as a substantiation of her condition? She hasn't, at Matcham, even visited Sir Luke yet: we can only assume that her apparent certainty about her doom comes from her irrational conviction.

She then responds in an extraordinary way to the Bronzino, shedding tears and telling Mark 'I shall never be better than this'. Mark takes this to be some sort of moral judgement but

'he hadn't understood'. Why should this be such a fulfilling moment? Critics have answered the question in various ways. Keeping in mind what has been suggested about Milly above, it seems possible that the portrait represents for Milly a possible or perhaps a perfect self-conception, precisely what she lacks. The portrait might be an external verification, an external embodiment - she decides - of a possible personality. This is in spite of her lack of recognition of any physical resemblance, though three characters other than Mark see the similarity. What is most attractive about the woman is that 'she was dead, dead, dead'. But she is young, richly dressed, has hair which must have been like Milly's: 'it was perhaps as good a moment as she should have with anyone, or have in any connexion whatever'. This is a very strong statement. [7] Her 'I shall never be better than this' might mean a number of things.[8] Obviously it can refer in the most general way to her health: all the afternoon she has been soaking up her impression of kindness, and now Lord Mark has 'recognized' her in a very special way. She may also mean that as, so to speak, a version of herself, it is as good as it is possible to be. But she is perhaps not referring really to either the painting or her health. There may be a sense in which she is expressing the sheer <u>appropriateness</u> of the kind of interest which is being taken in her. (But there is a less positive sense in which she may partly be expressing an unhealthy feeling of justification in having interpreted herself in the correct terms.)

It is so that we can keep our balance that James undermines almost immediately our growing sense of certainty that there must indeed be something wrong with Milly. Enlisting Kate's aid, she has to meet Kate's characteristic briskness: 'what in the world is the matter with you?' (p. I48):

> Milly felt her for the moment only as a much older person, standing above her a little, doubting the imagined ailments, suspecting the easy complaints, of ignorant youth. It somewhat checked

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7 James's interest in the quality of experience leads him to portray characters (Milly, Strether, Nanda) not infrequently so as to include what they feel to be the best moments of their lives.

8 For example, Quentin Anderson sees her 'increasing spiritual ascendancy' as 'inversely proportional to her growing illness' (<u>The American Henry James</u>, p. 264).

her, further, that the matter with her was what exactly as yet she wanted knowledge about.

This isn't of course the same as saying that Milly's ailments are imagined - far from it. But on the other hand, her ailments are clearly a long way from substantiation, and as we have seen, she isn't really sure, when she visits Strett, if he will take her seriously. Yet by the end of the second interview with Strett it appears that she is fairly certain, for herself, of her doom. He seems to be trying 'to warm the air for her'. But Milly is quite certain that 'the air, for Milly Theale, was, from the very nature of the case, destined never to rid itself of a considerable chill'. She refers, with a specific kind of intention, to the death of her family: '"but they died," she went on, to be fair all round, "of different things. Still, there it is."' And as she sits in the park, in the passage that S. Gorley Putt feels is an example of those in The Wings of the Dove 'which combine verbal beauty and psychological penetration to a degree not surpassed by this novelist - or...by any other', [9] Milly reinterprets the encounter, works on it, shapes it, to suit her purpose: 'she had been treated - hadn't she? - as if it were in her power to live; and yet one wasn't treated so - was one? - unless it came up, quite as much, that one might die' (p. I62). She 'put together the proofs that it was as one of the weak he was treating her': and then - perhaps the most important single sentence in the whole novel:

> It was perhaps superficially more striking that one could live if one would; but it was more appealing, insinuating, irresistible, in short, that one would live if one could. (p. I66)

This is a splendid sentence. Milly's response to the alternatives is almost an aesthetic one. This is hardly in any sense concerned with the facts of the interview. It is more like an artistically pleasing formulation, the thing which is 'romantically' right. What pleases Milly is not the artistry, which is the means to an end: what pleases is how the idea of 'living if one could' suits

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9 The Fiction of Henry James: A Reader's Guide, p. 270

Milly's occult preoccupations. It is in this sense that the important word 'insinuating' is meant. Here again is the collapse of the will, of volition, in the face of Milly's basic obsession.

III

It is to 'live' that Milly will be advised: Kate Croy is 'charged with life to the brim', and the novel's first two words, 'she waited' do more than make a reference to Kate's rather longer (and fruitless) wait later in the novel: they stress the <u>verb</u> in the sentence, they stress the action: she isn't waiting passively, but waiting 'pale with irritation'.[10]

She will later have to wait longer for Densher and his appearance in the novel is marked by an absence of salient verbs and a sentence of the kind to which those who dislike James most object:

> Merton Densher, who passed the best hours of each night at the office of his newspaper, had at times, during the day, to make up for it, a sense, or at least an appearance, of leisure, in accordance with which he was infrequently to be met, in different parts of the town, at moments when men of business are hidden from the public eye. (p. 34)

The abundance of commas is only one part, however, of the carefully crafted nature of the description. We learn - more from its shape than its content - an enormous amount; that Densher is not a man of business (this has a metaphorical import too), that his nature is complex, that his levels of volition are low. The sentence's indecisive, wandering, hesitating, imprecise progress is all to the point. The description continues:

> More than once, during the present winter's end, he had deviated, towards three o'clock, or towards four, into Kensington Gardens, where he might for a while, on each occasion, have been observed to demean himself as a person with nothing to do. He made his way indeed, for the most part, with a certain directness, over to the north side; but once that ground was reached his behaviour was noticeably wanting in point. He moved seemingly at random from alley to alley; he stopped for no reason and remained idly agaze; he sat down in a chair and then changed to a bench; after which he walked about again, only again to repeat both the vagueness and the vivacity.

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10 Laurence Bedwell Holland, in <u>The Expense of Vision</u>, points out that three 'crucial motives in the novel', 'paleness', 'waiting' and the 'decision to stay' are thus rapidly introduced (p. 288).

'He had deviated' - we reflect that he often will. He learns a kind of determination only through his experience in Venice. 'Towards three o'clock or towards four' is also telling: not to know what the time is, precisely, when you are dealing with someone like Maud Lowder, is poor testimony indeed. We later learn that he has to shake his 'poor, dear, shabby, old watch, to start it up again'. Aunt Maud's clocks need no such encouragement. He is observed to 'demean himself as a person with nothing to do': specifically this looks forward to his stay in Venice, though it has a much larger general implication.

That implication is also there in his only 'certain' directness which is even then only temporary, his apparently pointless behaviour. The point of contrast is there in the 'men of business' who are 'hidden from the public eye'. This latter state is an area of mystique to Densher. Later, Maud Lowder will look at him with a particular appearance of slight disgust which causes him to reflect that 'he had been looked at so, in blighted moments of presumptuous youth, by big cold public men' (p. 58).

These 'cold public men' are representative of that area of 'life' in James's novels from which protagonists are so frequently separated. Densher is experiencing feelings shared elsewhere by Hyacinth Robinson, to a lesser degree even by Strether, as when the latter, for example, looks at Gloriani and his attendant duchess. Aunt Maud '<u>was</u> London, <u>was</u> life - the roar of the siege and the thick of the fray'. She is 'afraid of nothing'.

Densher's self-estimation is low enough to make him rather more diffident. His opposite in the novel in this respect is probably Sir Luke, who plays the adult to Densher's role as child when they are together. Densher's behaviour in the park is, indeed, rather childlike in form. While Sir Luke is 'hidden from the public eye' by his inscrutability even when he is physically present, thus giving him a kind of opacity, Densher's very transparence is mercilessly exploited in the opening scenes. His motives, desires, weaknesses, are as evident to Aunt Maud as his purposelessness is to the reader in the descriptions above. It takes some time, in the novel, for us to see through Aunt Maud - not until she attempts, in Milly's hotel, to gain her for an ally, do we begin.

One of the most impressively, rigorously explored moral dilemmas in the novel is therefore represented by Densher's response to Aunt Maud as he has his early interview with her at Lancaster Gate, where 'he had no retort but that he loved the girl - which in such a house as that was painfully cheap'(p. 54). He is oppressed by the vulgarly expensive furniture, rather than managing to feel superior to it. Like Lambert Strether, he has a pitilessly accurate view of his own character. His moral doubts are splendidly conveyed in his sense, at Lancaster Gate, of 'the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance'. Densher is of course intelligent enough to perceive the irony with which some would treat such a claim on behalf of the house's ambience, treat such a combination of material and spiritual virtues. He is in fact, precisely, intelligent enough to be beyond refuge in irony. He recognizes the real force in the air: 'these things finally represented for him a portentous negation of his own world of thought'. And it is not that this comment thereby places Densher as all the weaker for the thought. This particular kind of moral realism is authorially approved. It is a realistic observation because in fact Mrs Lowder does have a good conscience - a better one than Densher - because of her big balance: and she actually has more 'morality' than her niece Mrs Condrip manages to portray in her poverty.

For it is poverty which is the stark antithesis of Lancaster Gate. Chelsea will, in the novel, twice be relentlessly contrasted with richer locations, Lancaster Gate and the Palazzo Leporelli. If Densher is threatened within his own private morality by Lancaster Gate, he is vulnerable also through his realisation of its bearings on his relationship with Kate.

James displays in The Wings of the Dove a particular kind of detestation of poverty - I think it is that. That is to say, he is not merely weighting the novel's moral balance by making wealth seem the only possible medium in which to float: there is evidence of a rather uncontrolled revulsion, not really approached elsewhere in his fiction, in his treatment of poverty here. Lionel Croy's Chirk Street is a 'vulgar little street' and Kate is waiting in

'a vulgar little room'. The sofa is 'shabby' and the upholstery of the armchair gives 'the sense of the slippery and sticky'. In Marian's house, matters worsen: 'the two young women were still in the presence of the crumpled table-cloth, the dispersed pinafores, the scraped dishes, the lingering odour of boiled food. Kate had asked, with ceremony, if she might put up a window a little'. Marian has 'grown red and almost fat'.

This is a different universe from that occupied by Aunt Maud and now also by Kate. (None of this is, in truth, obvious material for nausea, but one can hardly doubt the imaginative distaste on James's part.) The spectre of this sort of life, and that represented by the Miss Condrips, far from keeping Kate wholly absent from Chirk Street and Chelsea, in fact stimulates her to show willing to share it and perhaps improve it. James goes out of his way to establish moral credentials for Kate in a situation in which perhaps we might condone moral retreat. She offers to stay with her father. She tolerates the dim and embarrassing Marian. She is appalled by behaviour on their part which disgraces the family name in which she is shown to have so much pride.

Kate's chief characteristic apart from her vitality is her lucidity (later to warp under pressure from Densher's newly-forged moral authority toward the end). We have already remarked James's ability to explore with relentlessness the ramifications of moral problems: it is these ramifications which are after all the true source of the problematic (it is something seen to equal advantage in The Ambassadors). These first pages represent, through Kate's consciousness, a view of the possibilities of moral evasiveness in human thought, here the thoughts of Lionel and Marian, which has a particularly searing truth - we wince at Marian's 'poor old papa!', her 'dear old Aunt Maud!' (p. 3I), for all the mass of half-conscious self-deception, greed, sentimentality and moral cowardice which produces it. These family relations abound in embarrassment to make the reader squirm. Marian 'threatens' Kate that the younger sister will have to stop visiting Chelsea: 'such were the threats she could complacently make, could think herself masterful for making' (p. 3I).

The point is that Kate winces with us, or rather we wince through Kate. Her own honesty, straightness, charity, decency, are being emphasized all the time, particularly in her treatment of her father. Not at one time does she think about herself.

This world of poverty is not, at the time we first see her, Kate's. But it could be. She is lodged not perilously but not permanently in the splendour of Lancaster Gate. There is therefore a huge contrast, between Kate and Milly, mainly between the potential states (financial, social, developmental, and so on) of the former and the actual states of the latter. Densher as an alternative to Kate represents something of a return to Chirk Street in at least some important areas of experience; indeed he will later reflect, on the stark Christmas Day after Venice, that such a place as Marian's may well be his final home.

But other important suggested contrasts between Kate and Milly must be borne in mind. Kate, as has been observed, is never seen to think about herself (the stare into the mirror at Chirk Street is not one of vanity). That she won't take Merton 'as he is' doesn't prove this selflessness to be a mere appearance. There is a sense, surely, in which, having pointed to Chirk Street and Chelsea as he does, James is eliminating, as a potential real theme, the question of whether or not Kate and Merton should go ahead and marry. The fact is that it is not presented as a possibility. Densher will in fact, later in the novel, reflect on Kate's 'genius for the so-called great life', her 'presence for the so-called great house', her 'grace for the so-called great positions' (p. 449). His would-be ironical 'so-called' (or James's?) lacks conviction. If one were to argue that Kate's rejection of his proposal, so to speak, of marriage with relative poverty, is a real moral question in the novel, one would presumably have to find evidence of it. Without question, of course, is the growing moral importance of Kate's scheme to ensure a different outcome - but that is a different matter altogether. The fact is that the reader experiences Kate's desire that Merton should get Milly's money as an action on Densher's behalf: although it is not <u>quite</u> so simple as that, as we discover. Two things complicate the matter. One is the structure of the novel in relation to Kate's point of view. The other is the change in our

reception of Kate's note of 'lucidity' as the novel starts to draw toward a close.

Another main difference between Milly and Kate is the fogginess of one and the lucidity of the other. This is related to the previous difference: Milly sees other people only through the mist of self-consciousness. Kate has piercing vision.

A further important difference to notice is the positive approach of Kate to life - she is willing to try to improve Chirk Street and Chelsea - compared to the negative tendency of Milly.

I make these points to do justice to the depth and scale of the major moral problem, to the extent that it can be considered a single problem, involved in Kate's scheme to make Merton rich. Just as Charlotte Stant, with whom she has much in common, is made attractive to us from the outset, Kate, with one qualifying detail, is portrayed as personally and morally attractive, and portrayed with considerable depth and breadth as such from the beginning. The detail I refer to is her outburst to Marian: '"And where do you pick up such vulgar twaddle?" Kate demanded with her clear face. "How does such stuff, in this hole, get to you?"' (p. 32). The 'clear face' is in keeping with the portrayal of Kate just discussed. But this is a ferocious statement. Is it intended to reveal Kate's capacity for unambiguously distasteful behaviour? We must remember that her lucidity is several times in the novel coupled with a 'hard' quality. It might be that her response here is felt by James to be appropriate to the provocation offered her and felt to be only slightly too strong, as is subsequently acknowledged. It might be that the statement's excessive force belongs with James's excessively disapproving treatment of the characteristics of poverty outlined above. But perhaps it is an early warning of a less acceptable side of Kate to be revealed later.

Two interesting parallels have yet to be mentioned. We note that Kate is attracted to Merton for the same reason that Milly is attracted to Susie. Merton and Susie represent culture. They have had similar educations, too, in foreign schools. This perhaps explains their ease with each other later.

And what is the significance of Lionel Croy? Why does he have his

breakdown, which occurs at the end of the novel? Kate's 'he cries' is shocking: it opens an abyss. At the beginning of the novel, Lionel has a fake illness. By the end of it, he has an illness which is deadly serious. (Kate has heard of the 'wicked' thing her father has done when unable to go to church because of 'an extraordinary fog'). I don't want to insist absolutely that any of this is significant, but merely to suggest that it is, after all, unlikely not to be. Some kind of parallel with Milly (with, at least, the Milly I have been sketching) is obvious. Lionel Croy's tears at the end have several possible references, including some parallel with Merton's obsession with the 'something sentient and throbbing' which has been sacrificed with Milly's letter.

IV

Our first sight of the Palazzo Leporelli immediately succeeds the consultation between Strett and Milly in which Strett is all optimism and Milly all doomed certainty. When she refers to 'the end', 'he had a cheerful blankness' (p. 279). In other words he doesn't actually know what she means. Yet Milly's last statement, uttered with specific reference to Densher, but with considerable general meaning, 'I'm afraid there's really nothing one can do', is one of the continuing string of declarations of faith from Milly which we have already examined. The subsequent description of Milly's 'apartment of state' emphasizes another role for Milly, as a less 'practical' princess than before, now with a palace and a court. The description also emphasizes her passivity and spiritual insubstantiality: 'the hard, cool pavements took reflections in their lifelong polish', 'the sun on the stirred sea-water, flickering up through open windows, played over the painted "subjects" in the splendid ceiling' (p. 282). These are processes which take place independently of Milly. She doesn't 'see' the reflections. The ancient pavements 'take' them. Even the sunlight as an active agency takes precedence. It is like the description of a scene devoid of human presence. All this has happened before Milly and will happen after her. Meanwhile the words in the description have

a weight and a precision which rather effaces her - 'embossed', 'beribboned', 'flourished', 'scolloped', 'gilded', 'moulded', 'figured' - this suggests something of the mausoleum.

We have by this point in the novel observed new roles for Milly. Her awkward encounter in the National Gallery with Merton and Kate in front of the lady copyists leads her to play the American girl: 'she became as spontaneous as possible and as American as it might conveniently appeal to Mr Densher, after his travels, to find her' (p. I92). This role has been suggested by the American party who have accidentally drawn her attention to Densher.

The lady-copyists are interesting. This has been Densher's mother's employment and Milly envies those here. In some ways this seems a typical direction for her thoughts - away from life, at a remove from the scene, like Osmond, copying a copy. Yet 'the case was the case of escape, of living under water, of being at once impersonal and firm' (p. I87) - the 'impersonality' might be a more positive route. 'If I could lose myself <u>here</u>!' - in spite of her thought, she is assuming a guise for Merton and Kate the very next moment.

Just before, the dove image has been suggested to Milly by Kate:

> (Milly) had risen as she spoke, and Kate had stopped before her, shining at her instantly with a softer brightness. Poor Milly hereby enjoyed one of her views of how people, wincing oddly, were often touched by her. 'Because you're a dove.' With which she felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an <u>accolade</u>; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. (p. I84)

And:

> It was moreover, for the girl, like an inspiration: she found herself accepting as the right one, while she caught her breath with relief, the name so given to her. She met it on the instant as she would have met the revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. <u>That</u> was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. Oh, <u>wasn't</u> she? - it echoed within her as she became aware of the sound, outside, of the return of their friends.

Just as the lady in the Bronzino answered a need, so does this

image of Kate's. Milly's response to it leads one to observe that either, first, here is one of the places in the novel that James <u>does</u> sentimentalize Milly - for her reaction is a little nauseating - or second, James intends us to be a little nauseated, albeit sympathetically. That the latter is likely is indicated by what happens next. With Aunt Maud: 'she had felt in a rush all the reasons that would make it the most dovelike; and she gave it, while she was about it, as earnest, as candid' (p. I85), which of course it isn't, since she's telling a lie about Merton. And as she plans for Sir Luke's visit: 'she should have to be clear as to how a dove <u>would</u> act'. It is only two pages later, then, that we read: 'she should have been a lady-copyist - it met so the case'. Milly, in her eagerness for an identity, will jump at anything. And as they all fail, her one certainty increasingly consumes her.

Furthermore, given her careful seduction of Sir Luke, her carefully crafted and assumed dovelikeness, her (really quite extraordinary) decision to leave Susie to face him (in order to increase his interest) , aren't we really forced to regard the psychological implications of her illness as paramount? Particularly when - as we later learn - Sir Luke hasn't in fact said anything alarming to Susie at all.

Our judgement of Kate and Merton's actions will of necessity have to be eclectic in its operation. Both Maud Lowder and Susan Stringham are more or less aware of some of what is happening. Merton, as he is aware, is being influenced by four women, not one. It is this which causes him to find a kind of quiet relief in Strett's company. As Merton goes through the prolonged - one might say indefinite - stage of deciding, or not deciding, what to do about Milly, almost every influence, including Milly's own, pushes him in the direction Kate wishes him to go. Maud, of course, openly wishes him to 'work' Milly. By the time Densher is in Venice, there really seems to be no doubt as to the influences:

> Of two circumstances connected with this disposition of his person he was even now not unmindful; the first being that the lady of Lancaster Gate had addressed him with high publicity and as if

> expressing equally the sense of her companions, who had not spoken, but who might have been taken - yes, Susan Shepherd quite equally with Kate - for inscrutable parties to her plan. (p. 308)

That we can add Sir Luke to this group means that to see the action as Kate's and Merton's is inadequate.

Another aspect of this is the actual nature of the relationship which Merton and Milly have developed. Offsetting the sense of conspiracy is the manner in which the two take up their American friendship:

> it was in fact wonderful that their excellent, their pleasant, their permitted and proper and harmless American relation - the legitimacy of which he could thus scarce express in names enough - should seem so unperturbed by other matters. (p. 24I)

Naturally, to ease his conscience, Densher consciously plays the American card. But in fact there is a legitimate dimension in the relationship:

> She had been interesting enough without them - that appeared today to come back to him; and, admirable and beautiful as was the charitable zeal of (Kate and Mrs Lowder), it might easily have nipped in the bud the germs of a friendship inevitably limited but still perfectly workable. (p. 24I)

So in fact the fifth advocate of the relationship is Milly herself. It is rapidly evident to Densher that her fondness for his company raises the question of 'the peculiar brutality of shaking her off' (p. 248). The ultimate proof of that effect is of course Milly's 'turning her face to the wall' after Mark's 'second descent'.

Densher's view of himself in Venice is a development of this line of thinking, which is either an acceptable, properly complex view of the situation, or else an evasion on Densher's part. At the outset of his Venetian misadventure he frequently 'paused in disgust at his want of ease' (p. 3I5), during his strolls. But:

> He had, however, only to cross again the threshold of Palazzo Leporelli to see all the elements of the business compose, as painters called it, differently. It began to strike him then that departure wouldn't curtail, but would signally coarsen his folly, and that, above all, as he hadn't really "begun" anything, had

> only submitted, consented, but too generously indulged and condoned the beginnings of others, he had no call to treat himself with superstitious rigour. (p. 315)

This is of course partly the kind of evasion that we would expect of the wandering, passive, rather purposeless character who has been portrayed. On the other hand - isn't there quite a lot of truth, if not in the excuse that he has been manipulated in such a way as to remove personal responsibility, at least in the thought that to leave will merely harm Milly? If there is, then that makes the background to his initial involvement signally less important than the way in which he handles his involvement.

It has already been suggested that we have some difficulties when it comes to assessing Kate's moral responsibilities in relation to the novel's developments. The point is neatly made by J. A. Ward:

> ...Kate's mind is closed to us throughout all the final nine books. Since we see Kate only through the thoughts of Densher and Milly, the process of her transformation from a woman governed by ideas of loyalty to one who sends her fiance to make love to another woman remains something of a mystery.[11]

As suggested above, this is an account of Kate's actions which is oversimplified, but the process does remain inscrutable, though her motives and justifications have been made clear enough at the outset. Rather than this being a weakness, what it does is to confront the reader with Kate's constant 'lucidity' - of which Densher develops a 'horror, almost' (p. 421), which also 'affected him of a sudden as almost glib' (p. 403), and which becomes wholly glib - in the way that Densher has to confront it.

Kate is in a sense denied the opportunity to explain herself to the reader - for reasons suggested above[12] - and this can have several possible results. The likeliest is that we shall feel that she is simply out of touch, morally, with the whole situation into which she, primarily, has precipitated Densher. We may also sympathize with Densher's feeling that Kate has got herself well out of

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11 The Search for Form, pp. 173-74

12 this thesis, p. 19

suffering's way. There is one point particularly at which Kate is likely to shock the moral sensibility of most readers. It is where Densher, returned from Venice, makes his appeal to Kate simply to marry him. She doesn't 'see what has changed' (p. 419). And Densher suddenly realizes that she is saying that if he knows Milly has left him money, then, of course, Kate will marry him: 'the point she made was clear, as clear, as that the blood, while he recognized it, mantled in his face' (p. 420). We have, before this, observed stages in his gradual estrangement from Kate. But here his response turns 'quickly to mere cold thought, thought which led to something else and was like a new dim dawn'. And yet what is Kate's probing here but the logical conclusion of what they both set out to do?

So perhaps we may reach this point. It is not that Kate's behaviour toward Milly shocks us. If that were so we should have to be shocked at Aunt Maud, Susie, Strett, as well as Densher and Kate. And we are not. At the end we are a little appalled at Kate's insensitivity chiefly to the change in Densher. Densher has changed, has, like Strether, been put through the mill. There are hypocrisies and evasions of which he is still to be capable. But he is altered beyond Kate's ability to communicate with him. Kate herself perceives that he has suffered intensely, but her realisation is late and the expression of it ironic, as from one who feels the distance now in their relationship: Densher tells her that his offer of the unopened letter which has arrived on Christmas Eve is 'a symbol of my attitude', to which Kate replies, 'your attitude, my dear, is that you're afraid of yourself. You've had to take yourself in hand. You've had to do yourself violence' (p. 444). Her judgement applies to the whole of his experience with Milly.

V

Densher's characteristic passivity never leaves him. He belongs with the many other passive males in James's world, like Chad and Amerigo, a world where women exert the moral force. Densher's stand against Kate takes the form of letting her decide what to

do.

But in fact there is no choice to make: 'we shall never be again as we were!' is precisely the point - as we already know, the relationship between Kate and Merton is in reality permanently damaged. In getting the thing their relationship needed - money - the relationship has been destroyed. Merton's question to Kate at the end, his invitation to choose between him and the money is superseded by her challenge to him to deny that he is in love with Milly's memory. This is no mere evasion on her part.

Earlier, in Venice, in the one instance in Kate and Merton's relationship in which he has exerted authority clearly, although only to chain himself even more closely to Kate's influence, Merton has persuaded her to come to his rooms. The terms in which his response to her reaction are phrased tell us a lot about the interplay here between involvement in life and 'moral' appearances:

> she hadn't thrown over his lucidity the horrid shadow of cheap reprobation. Of this he had had so sore a fear that its being dispelled was in itself of the nature of bliss. The danger had dropped - it was behind him there in the great sunny space. So far she was good. (p. 327)

'Good' here means more than 'straight', 'honest'. It means in the direction of their joint plans for fulfilment. This is how morality is defined here. (We notice, also, that Densher's brief exercise of authority is characterised by lucidity, for once, on <u>his</u> part.)

After the two English women return to London, the momentousness of the sexual and spiritual experience with Kate fills Densher's rooms: 'what had come to pass within his walls lingered there as an obsession importunate to all his senses' (p. 347). Yet his objection to the proposed intrusion on his shrine of the visit by Susie and Milly drops away when Milly insists on how much good the visit would do her: he experiences 'something inordinately strange, something of a nature clear to him only when he had left her' (p. 355). He has started to experience Milly's dependence upon him: 'it was on the cards for him that he might kill her' (p. 358). It has been made perfectly clear to us before this - and his realisation that 'he might kill her' if he doesn't act carefully doesn't alter the judgement - that Densher's love is

all for Kate: when he is with Milly 'it was as simple as sitting with his own sister might have been, and not, if the point were urged, very much more thrilling' (p. 308). The three ladies may see Milly 'as a princess, as an angel, as a star' but Densher is aware primarily of 'the little American girl who had been kind to him in New York'. Nothing in respect to his feelings toward her, other than concerns his sympathy, changes up to the moment when Pasquale and Eugenio virtually turn him away from the Palazzo. It is after he glimpses Mark, during which his behaviour, as he walks round and round to confirm Mark's identity and probe the meaning of his presence, becomes incipiently irrational to an extent that it has not yet approached, that he goes on to become, to his own perception, 'abject': 'what was it but abject for a man of his parts to be reduced to such pastimes?' (p. 368).

It is with Susie's visit to his rooms that he has really to face what he has been condoning: 'the hound!' he says of Mark, but he moves off 'with a hot face' as he becomes conscious 'of an intention in his visitor's reserve' (p. 383). If Mark is a hound because of his plans to acquire Milly's money, what, thinks Densher, am I?

Those who have deplored the fact that James cuts our view of Milly where he does, never to let us see her in her dying weeks, have ignored the many advantages of the decision, not least its consequence for our view of the implications for Densher of the fact that <u>he</u> has to content himself with the sight of the Leporelli gondola bearing Sir Luke away to the Palazzo:

> Densher watched the gondola out of sight - he heard Pasquale's cry, borne to him across the water, for the sharp, firm swerve into a side-canal, a short cut to the palace. He had no gondola of his own; it was his habit never to take one; and he humbly - as in Venice it <u>is</u> humble - walked away, though not without having, for some time longer, stood, as if fixed, where the guest of the palace had left him. (p. 388)

This is one of the bleakest moments in fiction, as Densher's whole stay in Venice after being turned away by Eugenio is one of the bleakest passages. Small wonder that the relationship with Kate should suffer from his ordeal - Densher is experiencing the

collapse of any kind of sense of context, and with it, meaning, in a way which reminds us of the existential wastes to be encountered in Conrad's fiction. Sir Luke's visit comes in about the middle of Densher's trial: 'his main support really was his original idea, which didn't leave him, of waiting for the deepest depth his predicament could sink him to' (p. 390). In fact, he is soon borne up by Strett. His final passage with Milly is merely to be reported. What this does is stress the extent to which the experience belongs to Merton and not to Merton and Kate.

Sir Luke's visit to Venice raises the other obvious question: should Merton have lied to Milly to save her? We must accept his judgement that 'it wouldn't have done any good' (p. 403). But he and Kate have a debate about the morality of his decision, and Merton claims that had he denied Kate to Milly, he would subsequently have behaved according to his denial. No precise meaning is suggested for his declaration to Kate that 'to convince you, I would have insisted or somehow proved - !' (p. 404), but it is probably a reference to her ignorance of what for him was involved in his choice of directions when last facing Milly.

When Kate jerks the letter from Milly into the fire, Merton half-starts as though to prevent her. It is only after this that the reader recognizes fully the extent to which Merton, to use Kate's phrase, has 'done himself violence'. Kate's spirit has pervaded his rooms in Venice. His rooms in London are now filled with another spirit.[I3] Merton is carrying round with him a secret thought which cannot be shared with Kate, a thought which slips away as the days melt:

> He kept it back like a favourite pang; left it behind him, so to say, when he went out, but came home again the sooner for the certainty of finding it there. Then he took it out of its sacred corner and its soft wrappings; he undid them one by one, handling them, handling it, as a father, baffled and tender, might handle a maimed child. But so it was before him - in his dread of who else might see it. Then he took to himself at such hours, in other words, that he should never, never know what had been in Milly's letter. (p. 450)

I3 Kenneth Graham discusses this contrast, in Henry James: the Drama of Fulfilment, p. 229

The loss of what was in the letter, the possibilities which he imagines, become 'a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes - his pledge given not to save it - into the fathomless sea' (p. 450):

> or rather even it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that, for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint, far wail. This was the sound that he cherished, when alone, in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it - doubtless by the same process with which they would officiously heal the ache, in his soul, that was somehow one with it. (p. 451)

This 'something' is the product, the fruit, the child, of all that has gone before. There is a hint, in the language, of some serious temporary damage to Merton's mind: the images, the 'maimed child' in its soft wrappings, the 'sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing', are very disturbing, the latter particularly in its suggestion of abortion. 'The turn she would have given her act': it has become vitally important to Merton to know what Milly would have said: moreover, the phrase is in its relative coarseness indicative of the strength of his curiosity. The 'inevitable sounds of life' have become temporarily alien to Merton.

'She died', Kate will remark right at the end, 'for you in order that you might understand her'. John Goode remarks that 'nothing seems clearer than the parabolic direction of The Wings of the Dove', [I4] and indeed in statements such as this of Kate's, as well as in many other respects, one is conscious of Christian images, though it is unlikely that they are more than a relatively slight enrichment of the text: John Goode goes on to say that 'we are not shown that Densher becomes a morally better person - only that his wasted passion divides him inexorably from Kate' (p. 245). [I5] However we are shown - at the very least - that Densher has been shaken morally, to the marrow. And it may be argued in his favour that he now cherishes a memory of Milly

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I4 The Air of Reality, p. 244

I5 L.B. Holland remarks that 'the novel's action spends itself, as the form completes itself, in the consuming passion with all its waste which James found life and art to be'. (The Expense of Vision, p. 327)

which in two aspects is fairly positive: first, he has, in recollection, liberated Milly from her wealth: second, he himself is influenced by his experience and apparently changed scale of values to renounce the wealth which in a different form once made him tremble in Lancaster Gate. But the real answer to the question of how his experience has affected Densher is to point out that, like Fleda, he has regained some individuality: in Densher's case, Kate - in a sense - no longer runs his life. Only 'in a sense', for even his bid to stand against her will is passive.

Presumably - the suggestion is tentative - Densher's 'cherishing' of the 'faint, far wail', his handling of the 'maimed child', is not simply a question of his baffled curiosity about the letter, but the manifestation, like Lionel Croy's breakdown, of the guilt which in Densher's case he feels about not having <u>tried</u> to save Milly: his certainty - if it was that - as to the futility of such a course has evaporated. That is one explanation. It seems, furthermore, that his desire to 'cherish' the sensations he receives, his sadness at their loss, indicates that they are the most important things in his life, his main evidence of being human. In that case, one might say that not only is he in love with Milly's memory, but that he is holding on to feelings which, in their bitterness, are drink to the parched soul, an essence of the human qualities which have somehow been displaced by circumstances surrounding his relationship with Milly.

The idea that in some way Milly has died for the two lovers is strongly undermined by her previous obsession with death: Milly has died because she was going to die - but perhaps also because Merton couldn't do anything to prevent her. There isn't really anything truly positive to emerge from the end of the novel. Death has won Milly, Kate's great force for life has been warped, and Densher stands in isolation from any obvious source of comfort.

Life and death, matter and anti-matter: it is tempting to see

Kate and Milly that way. Not that it makes much difference to Densher, who isn't going to get either.

Densher is, in a sense, excluded from life in advance - as we have seen, we derive a sense of hopelessness even from the structure and rhythm of the paragraphs in which he is introduced. The side of James which was self-doubting has its most obvious embodiment in Densher. Strett plays William to Densher's Henry. Densher is childish and transparent and unimportant. One of the great triumphs of the novel lies in James's making the relationship with Kate credible while sustaining precisely that estimate of Densher by the reader. Densher does have all these qualities.[I6]

There is an interesting hierarchy of adulthood involving Densher, Kate, Milly, Maud and Susie. Milly thinks of Kate as 'a much older person', just as Maud and Strett seem to Densher adults to his role as child. Maud looks at Densher the way Kate looks at Milly. Susie, the one genuinely infantile member of the group, comes at Densher in Venice with all the more force because of the unexpectedness of stark moral truth coming from such a source.

Quite apart from the complementarity which some critics have pointed out in Kate and Merton (as in Charlotte and Amerigo),[I7] Kate therefore has another role to play in relation to Densher which specifically involves taking care of him, as Charlotte arranges things, for a time, for Amerigo, or as Marie de Vionnet directs Chad.[I8] That role provides, in its cessation, about as much positive meaning as we get from the end of the novel: Densher, like Fleda, gains some individuality, as Strether, in a different context, learns to 'toddle' (or as Hyacinth shoots himself).

But the other significances of the adult/child dichotomy are that, first, 'life' is something James felt to be enjoyed by and characteristic of highly developed adults: Milly and Densher are both, therefore, placed, and there is an irony, probably, in Milly's apparent hopes of him. More than that, the assumption of

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I6 the moral thoroughness of the novel has much to do with the relentless moral honesty of Densher's self-perception, the hot flush as he realizes how like Lord Mark he behaves - in this he is very close to Strether, and distant from Isabel Archer or Fleda Vetch

I7 sometimes involving some rabidly sexist speculation about androgynes

I8 as so many ladies, the Lucy Cliffords of the world, looked after James

authority by Maud, Strett and Kate, contrasted with the vacillations of Milly and Densher, mean that we shall almost certainly see Kate as carrying the moral responsibility for the scheme - though I have pointed out the extent of the collaboration of other characters, above. Densher and Milly are too plastic - Milly, literally, fatally so - to be praised or blamed for anything. As Amerigo's amorality lets him off the hook or, to some extent, Chad's attractiveness, or Osmond's derangement, or, in The Spoils of Poynton, Owen's stupidity, so Densher's lack of adult form releases him. Kate, like Charlotte or Marie or Isabel or Fleda, will be where the reader seeks responsibility, moral explanation.

How does Kate fare? It has to be said that while we can choose to convict Charlotte Stant, or not, we finally have to condemn Kate, even if we have to think hard about it first. In various ways, as has been demonstrated, she is admirable. But where the change in Charlotte's personality is complicatedly and contentiously filtered through Maggie's developing consciousness, Kate, whose own point of view is, as we have seèn, also shut off, is nevertheless focussed upon with what we feel to be some reliability by Merton. If (as I shall argue) the central difficulty with Charlotte is that of accepting the alteration in her character, Kate's transformation, her move from determination to hardness, from lucidity to glibness, is expertly achieved.

Never, of course, have circumstances been so exonerating: Kate, like Charlotte in The Golden Bowl, is the novel's chief embodiment of strength of personality, of (up to a point) perceptual force, of human attractiveness, of sexuality. Not only that, but, like Charlotte, she is shown to be capable of high moral discrimination in judgement and conduct. What she wishes to achieve is the object of other people's desires, too - including Milly's.

The novel's outcome is classifiable among those in James's fiction which have the quality of inevitability long ago discerned by Ezra Pound. Densher's character alone is guarantee enough of the outcome - yet, as differently in The Golden Bowl, the reader feels the pull of another possibility, the realization of the so centrally important relationship between Kate and Densher. And the lack of fulfilment there, made so much worse by the clear view at the end

of how little is left for them to share, is further complicated by the alternative loss - of the potential which Densher might have realized with Milly.

But exclusion from life, for Densher, is not all about exclusion from close relationship, any more than exclusion from life in the novel exclusively concerns Densher. As we have seen, the world, elsewhere inhabited by Gloriani, or Miriam Rooth, or Chad Newsome, of full engagement with life, is here closed to Densher in a manner, in this novel, especially forceful. Strett comes into Densher's world as from another planet altogether, where people move swiftly about with important work to do, with a sense of purpose, who enjoy social recognition and respect; people without doubts and without weaknesses.

Exclusion from a life of material <u>security</u> - for it is security rather than ease or comfort or luxury whose lack propels Kate and Merton - is keenly felt by both. Kate's family difficulties and Merton's queasiness at Aunt Maud's are powerful testimony. The equation Merton recognizes, ironical or not, between morality and money, is felt deeply. It is hard, again, not to strike the biographical note. Money, to James, was most importantly to do with security.

Milly has been discussed at great length. In all of James's fiction she takes us as far as possible from life, further than 'The Altar of the Dead' or anything comparable. Milly is the true source of the novel's sinister note: she embraces, with a justification and consistency and logic and passion which represent one of James's most remarkable feats, a mode of illness and incipient death as a means of experiencing reality. The distance that she must represent, from Minny Temple, is enormous.[I9] If one were to explain her biographically, then she would be the repository of all of James's own experience of illness and death among friends and relatives, the embodiment of terminal illness as a way of life, the representation of an important mode of human existence throughout James's time.

I9 she is closer to Alice James than to Minny .

CHAPTER FOUR

THE AMBASSADORS

I

F.R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition, regards The Ambassadors as a bad book, feels that it exhibits senility and criticises it briefly but specifically thus:

> The Ambassadors...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 realised? 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? [1] (p. 186)

Leavis's remarks take us straight to the heart of the novel's business, although I disagree with almost everything he says here. The initial point about 'life' it is odd to find Leavis of all people making: it is doubly odd in that in this novel it is not difficult to find - 'realised' and 'concretely held and presented' - the elements Leavis misses. Neither does The Ambassadors seem particularly elaborate, nor does reading it require much effort: these observations of Leavis about the 'effort' might, minus their implications of fruitlessness, be better applied to other novels by James, such as The Golden Bowl. The Ambassadors is a highly accessible novel. Reading it is certainly not as intense an experience as reading The Wings of the Dove, but its lighter quality is matched by a lightness and ease in its texture and construction. The point of view, for example, is famously well done. The perfection of the novel's shape has been an object of critical attention throughout the century.

Indeed The Ambassadors is a relatively light-hearted novel, the flavour of the humorous being frequently predominant.[2] Yet, as will be demonstrated, it is a novel rich in its perception of

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1 David Lodge's response to this, in Language and Fiction, is discussed in the concluding pages of this chapter.

2 Ian Watt in his explication 'The First Paragraph of The Ambassadors' has drawn the distinction between humour and irony, pointing out rightly that James's treatment of Strether does not create the distance characteristic of the latter. (Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 298)

human nature, and - in spite of what Leavis says - in its evocation of life. Certainly, if one did not believe that, one would believe the novel to be a failure, so explicit is its concern with life: as F.O. Matthiessen puts it: 'as Strether delivers (the challenge to live) in Gloriani's garden, it becomes in fact the quintessential expression of a dominant theme that runs throughout James's work'.[3] It is probably not, in fact, 'quintessential', but it is, as it were, the manifesto, the declaration of faith. And in no other novel is 'life' so much the wholly predominant theme.[4]

The novel is explicitly about how people live, and it opposes Paris, France on the one hand to Woollett, Massachusetts (with a heavy touch of Milrose, Connecticut) on the other in a contrast between different ways of living, different moral styles, and more profoundly different moral realities. There is no easy American/European opposition: the sophisticated Maria Gostrey is American,[5] Chad is American, and there is even from the novel's first page a kind of moral pluralism on Strether's part. Again, Waymarsh and the Pococks respond in a fashion more mixed, to Europe, than is immediately apparent.

However, the extremes of the moral spectrum within the novel are represented by Woollett and by Paris in a clearly understood manner. These extremes have to be seen as a mixture of judgement and conduct, or, to put it another way, moral conduct has to be seen to subsume the important activity of moral judgement. It has to be said that America, where it is in undilute form, as it were, doesn't come off all that well: if one subtracts the two Euro-Americans, only Strether himself upholds the honour of his country. Woollett, as in Sarah and Jim, is handled roughly. Jim

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3 Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 25

4 What, incidentally, Leavis means by 'taking the elaboration of the theme in the spirit in which we are meant to take it', is difficult to say.

5 Many critics have followed Matthiessen's assertion that 'another aspect of the structure - and its most artificial - is the role of ficelle conceived for Maria Gostrey. She exists only as a confidante for Strether, only as a means of letting him comment on his experience' (p. 38). But this is following James rather than the novel, and James was exaggerating the difficulty.

is a negligible person (admittedly a fairly negligible character) and James without unnecessary unpleasantness writes him off. He is 'small and fat and constantly facetious' and if not for his style in clothes, hats, cigars and 'very little stories' would be 'practically indistinguishable'. He is described as 'gurgling' with joy, and has 'little legs', usually a bad sign in James. He is significant to Strether and the reader chiefly in the sobering sign he presents of what Woollett would like to make of Chad, or have Chad make of himself. Marie de Vionnet has made Chad, and Woollett has made Jim. The reader chooses without anguish, In this sense Jim is important in making certain kinds of judgements.

Where Sarah is concerned, however, James is really quite unusually, one might argue, almost uniquely, albeit good-humouredly, savage; indeed the following passage is almost heavy-handed:

> (Strether) had always seen Sarah gracious - had in fact rarely seen her shy or dry; her marked thin-lipped smile, intense without brightness and as prompt to act as the scrape of a safety-match; the protrusion of her rather remarkably long chin, which in her case represented invitation and urbanity, and not, as in most others, pugnacity and defiance; the penetration of her voice to a distance, the general encouragement and approval of her manner, were all elements with which intercourse had made him familiar, but which he noted today almost as if she had been a new acquaintance. This first glimpse of her had given a brief but vivid accent to her resemblance to her mother; he could have taken her for Mrs Newsome while she met his eyes as the train rolled into the station. It was an impression that quickly dropped; Mrs Newsome was much handsomer, and while Sarah inclined to the massive her mother had, at an age, still the girdle of a maid; also the latter's chin was rather short, than long, and her smile, by good fortune, much more, oh, ever so much more, mercifully vague. (p. 230)

This is saved from sheer inappropriateness by the cunning combinations of sentiment and observation: her chin is remarkably long, but represents invitation and urbanity - to whom? we may ask. 'The penetration of her voice to a distance' is coupled with the 'general encouragement and approval of her manner' and again we are invited to question the reassurance, a subtlety of process sufficient to save the description getting quite out of control. That Sarah is a massive, dull, aggressive woman with a huge chin, a loud voice, and an insincere smile like the scrape of a safety-match is nevertheless established. And although the distinction

between Sarah and Mrs Newsome is sufficiently made, what the reader is certain to be struck with most of all is Strether's perception of the similarity.

Some of James's freedom of expression is maintained in his description of Woollett's other ambassadress, Mamie, who although handsome and easy, soft and sweet, is also 'portly' and has a touch of the matron about her at her young age, the influence of Woollett, as well as 'such a hint of the polysyllabic as might make her something of a bore towards middle age' and a 'rather flat little voice, the voice, naturally, unaffectedly yet, of a girl of fifteen' (p. 280). That 'yet' has odd implications, and one can also deduce in Marie de Vionnet's desire to introduce Jeanne and Mamie her sense of Jeanne's superiority; for where Jeanne and Marie represent, as it were, the best of youth and maturity, Mamie's youthful and mature aspects are respectively those of rawness and matronliness.

It is significant also that the first quite explicit statement of Strether's relationship with Sarah's mother follows the unpleasant description of Sarah as she arrives at the station, when there is a reference to 'the woman at home, the woman to whom he was attached' (p. 230). The description surfaces just as Strether is seen momentarily 'gasping' at what is at stake in any 'split' between himself and Mrs Newsome: and in fact we are told that he has undergone 'an instant renewal of his loyalty'. It is a measure of the extent to which James has established Strether's development by this stage of the book, that this reversion strikes us as self-delusion. There has been too much discrimination in the preceding description in which the point of view is at least very heavily shared by Strether, in which many of Mrs Pocock's elements have been noted by Strether 'almost as if she had been a new acquaintance'. His 'instant renewal of loyalty' is just another stage in his steady development: one doesn't, anyway, renew loyalty 'instantly' and this scene serves mainly to emphasize the fact that the loyalty has gone.

The nature of Sarah's embassy is explored and defined very thoroughly particularly in two scenes where the moral unattractiveness of Woollett becomes very overt. The scene in Sarah's salon in the

eighth book of the novel creates tensions and embarrassments unsurpassed anywhere in James's fiction. The encounter, intermittently behind Waymarsh's turned back and sometimes in his awkward view, among Strether and Sarah and Marie is one of a number of severe tests of Strether's mettle.

Marie discusses him in a way which, he is fully conscious, exacerbates Sarah's annoyance at the gap between the Lambert of now and the Lambert of Woollett. He even blushes at the mention of Maria Gostrey. Yet playing the part he does here is no more than one of a number of logical concomitants of his development. Sarah's part in what occurs makes a forceful moral comment on the gap between Woollett and Paris. In what is possibly the most embarrassing sequence of all, Strether makes an overture to Sarah, with an urbanity resultant upon Parisian influences:

> 'I feel, when I hear you say that, that you don't quite do justice to the important truth of the extent to which - as you're also mine - I'm <u>your</u> natural due. I should like much better,' he laughed, 'to see you fight for me.'

The reader is almost certain to deprecate the constipated quality of Sarah's response:

> She met him, Mrs Pocock, on this, with an arrest of speech - with a certain breathlessness, as he immediately fancied, on the score of a freedom for which she wasn't quite prepared... 'Well, Mr Strether - !' she murmured with vagueness, yet with sharpness, while her crimson spots burned a trifle brighter and he was aware that this must be for the present the limit of her response. (p.248)

Sarah is not capable of any significant flexibility: she can no more rise to meet this than fly. It is a wonderful collision which, for Sarah, places Lambert very firmly with Marie and all else unacceptable.

What Strether has been hoping is that the new embassy will, collectively or individually, show signs of discrimination over Chad's development: Mamie, it turns out, responds in the way he has hoped. But the full sense of Strether's and the reader's disappointment at Sarah's hopelessness isn't felt until Strether's penultimate interview with her at his hotel (the last brief encounter is merely reported). Sarah, we discover, thinks nothing she

wouldn't have thought months earlier in Woollett: of Marie, she inquires of Strether as to whether or not he considers her 'even an apology for a decent woman' and, perhaps worst of all, when asked to evaluate what Strether calls Chad's 'fortunate development', Sarah says 'I call it hideous' (p. 315). This is a kind of definitive declaration. 'It rang out so loud as to produce for the time the hush of everything else.' Its force, as we shall see, derives particularly from the crystalline quality of Lambert's opposed perceptions of the moral realities of the situation, from his now stronger-than-ever sense of what is right.

I don't think there is any real ambiguity intended in James's presentation of Sarah (unusually, as has been implied), nor in Sarah's judgements. That is not the same as saying that we may not have our reservations about Chad and Marie - it is to say that there can be no disputing the manner in which James intends us to respond to Sarah's judgement: it is a vindication of Lambert's behaviour. That we may ourselves perceive difficulties in our response to Chad and to Lambert's sacrifices generally is a result of James's determination to make moral problems properly problematic. It becomes increasingly clear, increasingly explicit toward the end of the novel, that Lambert is to be put severely to the test of his moral resilience; and that there should be shades, for him and for us, in Chad and Marie's attractiveness, is all to the point: Lambert's ultimate consistency is part of the same pattern although, as will be argued, this last determination 'to be right' needs a good deal of scrutiny, for his refusal of Maria is not inevitable.

Waymarsh, a truly splendid creation, is Milrose acting as a kind of moral bridge across the chasm between Woollett and Paris: Ian Watt has spoken aptly of Waymarsh's 'role of being the sourly acid test of the siren songs of Europe'[6] and it is the gap between Waymarsh's outward gloom and his actually increasingly embroiled position which provides much of our entertainment. But not, of course, just entertainment: Waymarsh is, unlike Sarah and more like Strether, flexible. Admittedly he preserves, just and no more, his air of disapproval to the end, but the substance of his objec-

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6 Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 297

tion is visibly gone, and his note of warning merely the persistence of a habit, and the necessary preservation of an appearance of consistency. And Waymarsh's transformation acts as a kind of validation of Strether's altered state (which in turn validates Chad's).

Waymarsh is initially characterized for us by Strether's sense of dread, as it can probably be called, at the thought of renewing acquaintance with him. Even as Strether re-encounters him on his arrival, it is brought home to him that Waymarsh is 'for his part joyless' (p. I6). That 'joyless' has a specific reference to a comment of Maria's two pages previously about 'the failure to enjoy', a quality connected with Woollett generally: allied to Strether's sense that Waymarsh would be unable to profit by Maria, this introduction seems to mark Waymarsh as hopeless. After all, 'his most frequent form of words was that he knew himself' and this, and his impressive appearance as of a Lincoln-like statesman, seem to suggest a 'finished' personality insusceptible to transforming influence. Two things however, complicate the portrait. First, he is initially too lugubrious not to be suspected of contriving some part of his distress. Furthermore, James describes his head and eyes as being superfluously impressive, at the same time informing us of a rumour that the beard has been grown to conceal flaws in his otherwise distinguished physiognomy (p. I9). In other words Waymarsh is self-conscious, and his appearance is not fully to be taken as indicative of his true chracter.

But near the beginning of Strether's stay in Paris what we are chiefly aware of is the effect of Waymarsh in making Strether self-conscious: Strether's developing sophistication has to perform a little uncomfortably in the spotlight of Waymarsh's glare, as here, when Strether is speaking of Little Bilham:

> 'He's very pleasant and curious too,' Strether added - 'though he's not from Boston.'
>
> Waymarsh looked already rather sick of him. 'Where is he from?'
>
> Strether thought. 'I don't know that, either. But he's "notoriously", as he put it himself, not from Boston.'
>
> 'Well,' Waymarsh moralized from dry depths, 'everyone can't notoriously be from Boston.' (p. 70)

There is a stiff, unyielding, debunking, Presbyterian quality in

Waymarsh's comments, as though Strether is indulging in behaviour which is unseemly, either because it is insincere, pretentious, or effeminate - certainly because it is not 'of Woollett' (or Milrose), and rather as though William Dean Howells had appeared in Flaubert's dressing-gown. What, presumably, is specifically wrong is that Waymarsh finds Little Bilham's use of the word 'notoriously' pretentious and regards it as one of Bilham's standard gambits: so we might deduce. Whatever, Waymarsh has advice:

> 'Look here, Strether. Quit this.'
>
> Our friend smiled with a doubt of his own. 'Do you mean my tone?'
>
> 'No - damn your tone. I mean your nosing round. Quit the whole job. Let them stew in their juice. You're being used for a thing you ain't fit for. People don't take a fine-tooth comb to groom a horse.' (p. 7I)

But Waymarsh finds the Parisian atmosphere increasingly breathable, and finds companions first in Miss Barrace, who refers to him as Sitting Bull, a fine touch to convey Waymarsh's self-conscious and statuesque non-participation in the enveloping culture; and then in Sarah. We are indeed delighted to find that he has been buying Miss Barrace flowers, in vast quantities, and Strether reflects that Waymarsh has in this respect entered into the spirit of things Parisian much more than he.

That Waymarsh preserves his scrupulousness in the midst of his transformation of character is indicated in a performance of splendid unconscious comedy on his part during the awkward scene at Sarah's salon. Waymarsh is keeping out of a collision which in theory at least, is the kind of thing he doesn't approve of: only it is he who has in a sense brought it about. It is not that really he feels guilty about having contacted Mrs Newsome: but his consciousness of the fact is upon him, his consciousness that what may be good for Lambert isn't perhaps what Lambert wants. Given this, Waymarsh's judicious - in a sense, for it isn't tactful - discrimination as to the quality of Jeanne, has the dual effect of making this relatively minor character satisfyingly more complex, and of placing Sarah's judgement further beyond our approval. Lambert is using superlatives:

> 'Mademoiselle de Vionnet,' he explained, in considerable form, to

Mrs Pocock, 'is pure perfection. Mademoiselle de Vionnet is exquisite.'

It had been perhaps a little portentous, but 'Ah?' Sarah simply glittered.

Waymarsh himself, for that matter, apparently recognized, in respect to the facts, the need of a larger justice, and he had with it an inclination to Sarah. 'Miss Jane's strikingly handsome - in the regular French style.'

It somehow made both Strether and Madame de Vionnet laugh out, though at the very moment, he caught in Sarah's eyes, as glancing at the speaker, a vague but unmistakable 'You too?' It made Waymarsh in fact look consciously over her head. (p. 252)

Waymarsh's qualification, his concession 'in the regular French style', is not it appears regarded by Sarah as sufficient homage to Mamie.

Waymarsh's transformation, relatively less marked in nearly all respects than Lambert's, has the effect, as has been indicated, of justifying Lambert's behaviour. If Sitting Bull can be induced to send nosegays, how can Lambert Strether be condemned? This helps to place Sarah in the wrong. But the relationship between Strether and Waymarsh undergoes an even stronger alteration: for in the end Strether is giving Waymarsh advice, and Waymarsh looks by far the less authoritative of the two characters.

Waymarsh has come to announce Sarah's arrival in Lambert's hotel; and Lambert has been remembering his friend's earlier 'quit this' and is now almost moved to utter it himself. For Waymarsh has changed under Sarah's influence, the 'sacred rage' has gone and Waymarsh's simplicity has been invaded. It is in fact he who utters the warning:

'See here, Strether.'
'I know what you're going to say. Quit this!'
'Quit this!' But it lacked its old intensity; nothing of it remained; it went out of the room with him. (p. 308)

The authority, the authoritativeness, which was the product of the sacred rage, no longer exists. Waymarsh is going to the Alps with the Pococks and to Waymarsh himself this seems to represent morally a partial collapse. It is interesting here how the old, spare, dry scepticism, earlier in its dignity almost a positive sign of Milrose, now disappears to be replaced by an unambiguously pathetic aspect of the Connecticut conscience. Strether wishes

him a good time in the Alps:

> Waymarsh fairly looked up at him as from the foot of them. 'I don't know as I ought really to go.'
> It was the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose, but, oh it was feeble and flat!

By this stage in the novel, given the reader's acceptance and assimilation of Lambert's now flexible outlook , this will strike him as feeble. It gives Lambert's next utterance great authority. It turns the tables on Milrose. And it carries quite a lot of the novel's moral significance.

Earlier, Maria's comment about Woollett's 'failure to enjoy' was mentioned. The remark is uttered at Chester, and there Strether, like Waymarsh before his expedition, is feeling guilty, feeling guilty in fact that he is enjoying himself with Maria while not sharing the enjoyment with Waymarsh:

> He looked repeatedly at his watch, and when he had done so for the fifth time Miss Gostrey took him up.
> 'You're doing something that you think not right.'
> It so touched the place that he quite changed colour and his laugh grew almost awkward. 'Am I enjoying it as much as that?'
> 'You're not enjoying it, I think, so much as you ought.'
> 'I see' - he appeared thoughtfully to agree. 'Great is my privilege.'
> 'Oh it's not your privilege! It has nothing to do with me. It has to do with yourself. Your failure's general.'
> 'Ah there you are!' he laughed. 'It's the failure of Woollett. That's general.'
> 'The failure to enjoy,' Miss Gostrey explained, 'is what I mean.'
> 'Precisely. Woollett isn't sure it ought to enjoy. If it were it would. But it hasn't, poor thing,' Strether continued, 'anyone to show it how. It's not like me. I have somebody.' (p. I4)

This is one of a number of similar statements about Woollett in the novel, statements that imply that the Woollett consciousness in its untempered form - the main one - is not capable of living fully. Strether's sense of even the crowded existence which has brought Waymarsh to the brink of nervous collapse is cautious - 'this very proof of the full life as the full life was understood at Milrose' (p. I9). Chad declares later as he and Lambert discuss the oncoming Pocock embassy, that 'they're children; they play at life' (p. 225): it is the discrimination of someone who has been trained by Marie to live with a full adult gusto. And the comment's strength tends to be all for its objects and its recep-

tion by the reader unproblematic - there is no sense of its reflecting ironically on Chad or on Lambert's agreement with him, any more than there is anything other than simple approval in Lambert's later observation to Maria, in reference to Sarah, Waymarsh, Mamie, Chad and Jim, as they explore the delights of Paris, that 'they're living. They're rushing about' (p. 270). Lambert's greatly increased ability to revel in such a fact makes a marked contrast with, for example, his much earlier statement to Maria about Chad, in relation to Lambert's purpose in trying to take Chad back to Woollett. Maria has suggested that the main reason for Chad's return would probably be financial. And Lambert replies:

> 'Well, not only. I'm acting with a sense for him of other things too. Consideration and comfort and security - the general safety of being anchored by a strong chain. He wants, as I see him, to be protected. Protected I mean from life.' (p. 48)

Now, by the time Lambert has his conversation with Waymarsh before the latter's Alpine adventure, we are well aware of how important 'life' is to him, of the extent to which he sees the need to be immersed, not to hang back. And confronted by Waymarsh's feeble hesitation, Lambert continues:

> Strether suddenly felt quite ashamed for him; he breathed a greater boldness. '<u>Let</u> yourself, on the contrary, go - in all agreeable directions. These are precious hours - at our age they mayn't recur. Don't have it to say to yourself at Milrose, next winter, that you hadn't courage for them.' (p. 308)

Strether's feeling is, that if he somewhat regrets the disappearance of the Sitting Bull persona ('he really for the time regretted it - poor dear old sombre glow! Something straight and simple, something heavy and empty, had been eclipsed in its company'), Waymarsh should now pursue his new experiences properly, follow through logically the consequences of his altered perceptions - 'live up to Mrs Pocock'. This is why, when Waymarsh utters his final 'quit this' his authority is a mere appearance.

II

The novel is of course chiefly Lambert's, and Lambert's the intelligence through which its events are filtered. It is essential to try to understand what happens to Lambert and what sort of moral significance his transformation has, as well as to try to discover what there is in the novel which is 'life' in the sense that Lambert has previously missed.

The first paragraph of the novel establishes the essential pluralism of Lambert's outlook, when compared with other members of the Woollett fraternity, in its first sentence. His first question is about Waymarsh, as is proper given Strether's sense of duty. But that is immediately qualified by the following 'yet'. And of course his hesitations over Waymarsh are particularly significant given that the latter in his unreclaimed state is so typical of the Woollett/Milrose characteristics which Lambert is to reject.

James is very explicit, in the first two pages, about Lambert's latent susceptibility to the attractions of a European sojourn. Not only are we told that 'he was burdened, poor Strether - it had better be confessed at the outset - with the oddity of a double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference'(p. 6): but he have learned in the novel's second paragraph that the European 'note' has been for Strether 'such a consciousness of personal freedom as he hadn't known for years'. That is a very strong statement. Given what this tells us about what he already realizes, as to Europe's potential for him, it is not surprising that his transformation proceeds at the gallop it does. Plainly the time is ripe. And perhaps - if we permit ourselves an improper speculation - imminent marriage to Mrs Newsome is a plausible cause of Lambert's bolt from the stable. The search for Chad, after all, is to be his test.

Strether 'had believed he had a limit; but the limit had been transcended within thirty six hours': Maria Gostrey leads him into a world in which 'small things' are 'yet large for him' and Chester is 'charming to his long-sealed eyes' (p. I4). Significantly perhaps we have learned that 'his eyes were so quiet behind his eternal nippers that they might almost have been absent without changing his face'. It seems that one of the things Europe does for

Strether is to cause him to observe: Chester, for example, contains a beauty which Strether previously hasn't been conscious of seeing. That he should see it <u>now</u> also owes something to the nature of his companion, more congenial to an open attitude to life than any Newsome or Pocock other than Chad.

And Strether's development also involves a wider sensuous awareness: dining with Maria before the theatre, the lighted candles have rose-coloured shades: 'and the rose-coloured shades and the small table and the soft fragrance of the lady - had anything to his mere sense ever been so soft?' (p. 33). Strether is becoming immersed (Maria is 'floating him into society' while Waymarsh 'on the brink' has been 'watching the force of the current') and he finds that he 'wants more wants'. This development is at times expressed as being very fast indeed: on speculating with Maria on Chad's milieu 'Strether really felt that he could imagine it better now than three hours before' (p. 46). As Strether settles into the European atmosphere, however, we continue sufficiently aware of the traits in his character conditioned by Woollett: as when, for example, Maria asks if he is certain that Marie is bad for Chad (this before he has met either) and he replies 'of course we are': what, apart from the obvious, is important here is the plural, the notion of a corporate Woollett view in which at this early stage Lambert still includes his own. Elsewhere, there is his gauche would-be compliment to Maria, 'haven't I sufficiently showed you how I admire <u>any</u> pretty girl?' (p. 49), which can be taken more than one way.

There is also a suggestion of a more permanent trait, one which may remain slightly problematic beyond the end of the novel. It concerns the penetration of Lambert's perception, perhaps, or the strength of his concentration, or both. In shop windows he notices 'lemon-coloured volumes', 'fresh as fruit on the tree' (p. 57) and reflects on how his acquisition of a dozen of these on a previous trip proved a false start on a journey toward cultural education. He contrasts them with the green covers at home, the works on economics, politics, ethics, which reflect Mrs Newsome's taste. And then, a few pages on, we find Strether under

the arches of the Odeon, lingering 'before the charming open-air array of literature classic and casual':

> He found the effect of tone and tint, in the long charged tables and shelves, delicate and appetizing; the impression - substituting one kind of low-priced consommation for another - might have been that of one of the pleasant cafes that overlapped, under an awning, to the pavement (p. 62)

This is neither a major nor an unambiguous piece of characterisation, and indeed elsewhere Strether is portrayed as having a kind of ruthless accuracy of judgement which is much more striking. But there is a suggestion, over these pages, of the dilettante in Lambert, a hint as to why he has not, by his own standards or by most other standards, in the novel been materially successful. He is - one doesn't wish to push the idea too far - perhaps rather oddly taken here with matters of surface, particularly at the Odeon: 'the effect of tone and tint' is an odd approach, in a way, to an array of books, although indeed we are well aware of the positive side here in terms of Lambert's aesthetic reawakening. But what sticks in the mind is the lingering doubt over his judgement, a doubt whose main bearing will be upon his response to Chad and Marie later.

E.M. Forster in his at times wretched but occasionally perceptive remarks on The Ambassadors refers to the 'hourglass' shape of the novel and speaks of the book's 'symmetry', though never explaining the terms except through inadmissible claims such as that 'Strether and Chad change places'.[7] But certainly the novel is constructed in such a way that Strether changes course almost exactly in the middle: toward the middle, we realize just how strong a transformation Lambert has undergone: and just beyond the middle, he advises Chad to stay in Paris.

The initial stages of the transformation have been examined, and there are too many relevant details to make it possible to look at them all, but the main ones will be selected.

Even Chad's 'high broad clear' and 'admirably built' house

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7 'Pattern and Rhythm', Aspects of the Novel, p. I42

impresses Lambert favourably, he likes on first sight its 'measure and balance' and its 'fine relation of part to part and space to space', its nature a fair omen for his response to its owner. Strether meets Little Bilham, a charming rather than corrupt example of Chad's acquaintanceship, though Lambert, amusingly for the reader, makes the conscientious decision as he enters Chad's house to tell Waymarsh 'all about it'. Strether, anxious for his imperilled objective, resolves, for all that the 'irregular life' sits upon Bilham and Miss Barrace like 'a delicate marvel', to be morally on his guard: 'he must at any rate be clearer as to what... he was still condoning' (p.77). Thus, some pages before Chad's first appearance, Strether has already occupied ground from which Sarah would steer clear. Chad appears first in the borrowed box at the Theatre Francais, a splendid location for his entrance in several ways. The play itself is a manifestation of the high civilisation which Chad now represents. Chad's very familiarity with everything there, even with the act of coming late into a box, impresses Lambert strongly. Even the fact that the box can be borrowed is a sign of high amenity. And since both Lambert and Chad are thinking of each other, their position, for they must of course remain silent spectators, is therefore one of immediate communion, and 'the imposed tribute to propriety' puts Lambert in mind of the high life, makes him feel that he is leading truly 'the life of high pressure' (p. 89). Furthermore there is also the sense of the polish of Chad's performance being for Lambert, the spectator, one more item to applaud at the play.

In contrast to this scene, Strether's confrontation after the play with Chad is marked by directness and close observation. Chad's character is not strongly developed by James. He is a little like Amerigo, smooth, rounded, 'pagan', possibly amoral. Chad has the passivity of so many males in James, as is clear in a number of places as when, for example, after the traumatic scene at the Cheval Blanc, where Strether realises that 'Chad in particular could let (Marie) know he left it to her. He habitually left things to others, as Strether was so well aware'(p.354). Chad fills a most important role even just by being credibly an object of admiration to Lambert, Bilham, Marie and all the others.

This is not the whole of his role in the novel, of course, and, equally, it does not involve an uncritical imaginative admiration of Chad by the reader: we may, for example, have reservations over the way Lambert is used. But there is no case for arguing that there is really anything seriously objectionable in Chad's character: there may be in him a quantity of self-centredness, a willingness simply, like Amerigo, to be pleased. What Chad's mistress has given him, certainly, is form: sometimes we receive a sense of an inner, feline, comfortable Chad rather detached from human intercourse, who has the finest of concerned surfaces, as when, late in the novel, he will ask Lambert: 'don't you count it as anything that you're dished - if you <u>are</u> dished? Are you, my dear man, dished?': and James adds 'it sounded as if he were asking if he had caught cold or hurt his foot' (p. 322). But this is probably within the bounds of acceptability: he needn't, after all, be perfect. Lambert, Bilham, Marie, Jeanne, Mamie, Gloriani, Miss Barrace - these seem sufficient character witness, even if Lambert's view ultimately shifts. It may be that the attractiveness of Chad seems that of social grace rather than that truly of personality. But then there need be no intention to portray him as profound: and his behaviour is generally exemplary, and there are answers which may be given about his treatment of Lambert, or about his possible future treatment of Marie.

So, Chad may, as indicated by teeth which present 'the main ornament of his face' be a consumer, but at the same time, as Strether puts it:

> 'The fact remains nevertheless that she has saved him.'
> Little Bilham just waited. 'I thought that was what <u>you</u> were to do.'
> But Strether had his answer ready. 'I'm speaking - in connection with her - of his manners and morals, his character and life. I'm speaking of him as a person to deal with and talk with and live with - speaking of him as a social animal.' (p. 182)

As approbation, one has to acknowledge that this is comprehensive, even if it might not be Strether's so strongly held view later.

It is significant to note that during the first encounter between the two men we may ourselves have been influenced by our observation of Lambert's new impressions to feel that his strong

line to Chad about Woollett is a little dishonest, duty rather than conviction. Particularly, as their conversation comes after a very important episode for Strether, namely his passage with Maria at the Quartier Marboeuf amidst her collection of pieces:

> In the brownness were glints of gold; patches of purple were in the gloom; objects all that caught, through the muslin, with their high rarity, the light of the low windows. Nothing was clear about them but that they were precious, and they brushed his ignorance with their contempt as a flower, in a liberty taken with him, might have been whisked under his nose. But after a full look at his hostess he knew none the less what most concerned him. The circle in which they stood together was warm with life, and every question between them would live there as nowhere else. (p. 78)

'Warm with life' - this is a strong statement, an indication of strong feelings on Lambert's part. Such a congenial room, such a congenial companion, these things are new in his life and 'he was extraordinarily glad to see her'. What we must bear in mind is how Lambert will then, in what can be seen as a sequel, re-evaluate his surroundings here in comparison to Marie de Vionnet's apartment.

But he has seen enough even before he goes there, to realise fairly fully the contrast between the life he might have lived and the one he has lived, and we see this most clearly at Gloriani's in his sermon to Little Bilham. Strether has a ruthless way with his self-analysis. Bilham, trying to console him with a 'better late than never', in relation to Strether's self-professed unworthiness to talk to distinguished people, is met with a relentless 'better early than late', a sobering judgement which is followed by the celebrated exhortation to the younger man to 'live'. It is very important to note how at the beginning of the lengthy address Strether is, quite explicitly, indulging in the same kind of moral pragmatism which characterized his earlier 'let yourself go - in all agreeable directions' to Waymarsh: 'live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life' (p. I40). He is 'deterministic' (not seriously) but advises Bilham to have at least 'the illusion of freedom'.

Yet at the same time Strether is still speculating as to where

life is to be found in its intense form: watching Gloriani and the duchess he wonders 'were they, this pair, of the "great world"? - and was he himself, for the moment and thus related to them by his observation, in it?' (p. I4I). Gloriani is 'the glossy male tiger, magnificently marked'. Still, not unexpectedly, Lambert remains prepared to live through observation, but that equation has become for him problematic. Nevertheless, we later find that Bilham has taken his advice rather in that light: 'didn't you adjure me... to see... for it must have been that only you meant' (p. I78).

We should probably link Lambert's sense of what has been missed, which he expresses at Gloriani's, to the expanded sense of the past which fills him at Marie de Vionnet's. Here, yet again, we see Lambert drinking in impressions which reverberate deeply within his personality and this is one of his most important experiences in the novel.

Marie herself makes her impression on Lambert by stages. It is important, in our judgement of Lambert's moral discrimination, to note that he isn't swept off his feet by Marie, or otherwise deprived of his self-control. His first meeting with her at Gloriani's is, in terms of his response, muted: she is fair, slim, her smile is natural and dim - there is nothing approaching a superlative. Indeed this first meeting contains a note almost of the disparaging: 'her speech, charming correct and odd, was like a precaution against her passing for a Pole' (p. I35) and 'wherein was her talk during their moments on the bench together not the same as would have been found adequate for a Woollett garden-party - unless perhaps truly in not being quite so bright' (p.I37). It is later that Lambert comes more and more to admire her (though generally with some detachment) and the gradual nature of the acceptance speaks of genuine discrimination. It is later, at Chad's, that a sense of her attractiveness begins fully to emerge in Lambert.

But her apartment in the rue de Bellechasse makes an immediate impact:

She occupied, his hostess, in the rue de Bellechasse, the first

floor of an old house to which our visitors had had access from an old clean court. The court was large and open, full of revelations, for our friend, of the habit of privacy, the peace of intervals, the dignity of distances and approaches; the house, to his restless sense, was in the high homely style of an elder day, and the ancient Paris that he was always acutely looking for - sometimes intensely felt, sometimes more acutely missed - was in the immemorial polish of the wide waxed staircase and in the fine boiseries, the medallions, mouldings, mirrors, great clear spaces, of the greyish-white salon into which he had been shown. He seemed at the very outset to see her, in the midst of possessions not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary cherished charming. While his eyes turned after a little from those of his hostess and Chad freely talked - not in the least about him, but about other people, people he didn't know, and quite as if he did know them - he found himself making out, as a background of the occupant, some glory, some prosperity of the First Empire, some Napoleonic glamour, some dim lustre of the great legend; elements clinging still to all the consular chairs and mythological brassed and sphinxes' heads and faded surfaces of satin striped with alternate silk.

The place itself went further back - that he guessed, and how old Paris continued in a manner to echo there; but the post-revolutionary period, the world he vaguely thought of as the world of Chateaubriand, of Madame de Staël, even of the young Lamartine, had left its stamp of harps and urns and torches, a stamp impressed on sundry small objects, ornaments and relics. He had never before, to his knowledge, had present to him relics, of any special dignity, of a private order - little old miniatures, medallions, pictures, books; books in leather bindings, pinkish and greenish, with gilt garlands on the back, ranged, together with other promiscuous properties, under the glass of brass-mounted cabinets. His attention took them all tenderly into account. They were among the matters that marked Madame de Vionnet's apartment as something quite different from Miss Gostrey's little museum of bargains and from Chad's lovely home; he recognized it as founded much more on old accumulations that had possibly from time to time shrunken than on any contemporary method of acquisition or form of curiosity. (pp. 155-156) 8

There is nothing idle about the layering of detail here: the description is closely bound to Lambert's strong response. The court is 'full of revelations', for it is the product, like everything else here, of a 'culture' in a sense of the word which simply doesn't apply to Woollett. We are - and this is a place in James's work where it can't be ignored - very close to autobiography here, and the passage with its nostalgia for the days of the Empire, its presentation of an environment essential to a certain developed kind of human character is deeply felt. Lambert senses here the 'ancient Paris that he was always looking

8 David Lodge's view of this scene is discussed below

for - sometimes intensely felt, sometimes more acutely missed'. This is one of the experiences Strether can hardly blame himself for being too late for, but the wistfulness is there nonetheless. And the sense that the culture produces the person is explicitly formed in the observation that Lambert 'seemed at the very outset to see her, in the midst of possessions not vulgarly numerous, but hereditary cherished charming'. It is this kind of influence which Chad has absorbed, Chad who now has his own 'lovely home'. This is the air besides which that of Woollett is merely functional. We notice here the as yet unconscious comparison with Maria's horde of possessions, to become in a moment explicit. The 'glory' and 'prosperity' of the First Empire, the 'Napoleonic glamour': here we are getting close to what James may well have considered 'life' at its fullest. The unspecific in this sentence - 'some dim lustre of the great legend' - is focussed by the detailed and concrete, the 'faded surfaces of satin draped with alternate silk', in such a way as to embody the past in the present. Vague nostalgia is sharpened by precise observation. This is furniture which was used by people of the Napoleonic period, still in its proper setting - and it is interesting to see how for James the excitement is self-explanatory. Even pre-revolutionary Paris echoes in the apartment, but Strether's taste in Paris is James's own. Everything on display here is formed by a kind of natural order of cultural accretion. Lambert takes all the objects 'tenderly into account': this experience in itself is plainly an important aspect of 'life'.

Finally, we observe how Lambert's discrimination continues to advance: Maria's collection is now a 'little museum of bargains', although, at the same time, Lambert can still do justice to Chad's 'lovely home'.

Continuity, tradition, substance, weight, significance, all combine in the description of the apartment to suggest with increasing cogency that Woollett's disapproval is impertinent. Paris has its own order: '(Lambert) guessed at intense little preferences and sharp little exclusions, a deep suspicion of the vulgar and a personal view of the right'. And Lambert finds that

his mission has unexpected difficulties in its way even beyond those already encountered: 'the air of supreme respectability - that was a strange blank wall for his adventure to have brought him to break his nose against...it formed in short the clearest medium of its particular kind that he had ever breathed' (p.I57). How 'its particular kind' differs from Woollett's 'particular kind' we ourselves must decide: but, tracing as we are the process of Lambert's development, we must conclude that the importance of this episode is probably unrivalled. It is also, obviously, important in the sense that it explains the kinds of influences which have been working upon Chad.

In fact, Marie's role in Chad's altered state comes under discussion: Lambert says 'oh, if it's all <u>you</u> - !' and Marie replies 'well, it may not be "all"...but it's to a great extent. Really and truly' (p. I63). And before Lambert has gone, he has made an important promise: 'I'll save you if I can'. This is an important bridge toward his really relatively extravagant declaration to Bilham at the end of the sixth book, but before looking at that we should consider an interesting passage which represents a piece of characterisation very striking in its effect on our opinion of Lambert's reliability over judgements about human character and behaviour. When he meets Gloriani at Chad's, the sculptor, as has been mentioned, is portrayed as effectively validating what Chad represents. But there is more importance, as has also been suggested in another context, in his presence, than that. We have remembered Gloriani from <u>Roderick Hudson</u> as a positive character of sorts. In <u>The Ambassadors</u> he represents, as has been suggested, an embodiment of life of a sort both fascinating and mysterious to James. Strether and Gloriani have met at the latter's house, when 'the deep human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile - oh the terrible life behind it! - was flashed upon him as a test of his stuff' (p. I27). Notable at Chad's is Strether's conclusion that he is simply not up to Gloriani, not in his class, in some hierarchy which though but hinted at is felt as inexpressibly actual:

> it was as if even the momentary link supplied by the doubt

between them had snapped. He was conscious now of the final reality, which was that there wasn't so much a doubt as a difference altogether; all the more that over the difference the famous sculptor seemed to signal almost condolingly, yet oh how vacantly! as across some great flat sheet of water. He threw out the bridge of a charming hollow civility on which Strether wouldn't have trusted his own full weight a moment. (p. 168)

There is no reason for us to challenge Strether's self-deprecation; on the contrary, we accept it as a sign of his intellectual honesty and his perceptual accuracy. It is precisely this sort of recognition in Lambert which makes it necessary to take him seriously.

It is at the end of the sixth book and throughout the seventh that we measure the distance Lambert has come. At the end of the scene at Chad's party, Lambert is talking to Bilham: already, Marie has appeared in her full glory: 'he could have compared her to a goddess still partly engaged in a morning cloud, or to a sea-nymph waist-high in the summer surge' (p. 173). It is just after, that Lambert takes, in relation to the operative realities of his mission, his longest step:

'And what torment - to call a torment - can there ever possibly be with a woman like that?' As if from the interest of his own question Strether had gone on without hearing. 'Is it for her to have turned a man out so wonderfully, too, only for somebody else?' He appeared to make a point of this, and little Bilham looked at him now. 'When it's for each other that people give things up they don't miss them.' Then he threw off as with an extravagance of which he was conscious: 'Let them face the future together!'

Little Bilham looked at him indeed. 'You mean that after all he shouldn't go back?'

'I mean that if he gives her up - !'

'Yes?'

'Well, he ought to be ashamed of himself.' But Strether spoke with a sound that might have passed for a laugh. (p. 184)

It might have passed for a laugh but its compensatory effect is nonetheless negligible. This, even for the new Lambert, is a declaration as daring as any that he has made, particularly, indeed specifically, because Lambert says nothing lightly: we know that he will now act on the dynamic of this statement. He is now wholly at odds with Woollett, now their enemy.

The decision, which in a sense it is, for he doesn't know what he thinks until the utterance has been made, is then as it were sanctified by the encounter in Notre Dame, during which Lambert's transformation accelerates: 'he felt even as he spoke how at that instant he was plunging' (p. 190). The encounter leads to the meal with Marie which intensifies the sense for Lambert of sensuous and spiritual exploration which has begun with the walk in Chester and the early moments with Maria:

> the mere way Madame de Vionnet, opposite him over their intensely white table-linen, their omelette aux tomates, their bottle of straw-coloured Chablis, thanked him for everything almost with the smile of a child, while her grey eyes moved in and out of their talk, back to the quarter of the warm spring air, in which early summer had already begun to throb, and then back again to his face and their human questions. (p. 192)

Lambert has 'touched bottom', this is the 'smash in which a regular runaway probably ends'. Not that he is anguished - he is in fact sanguine: 'one might as well perish by the sword as by famine'. And there is an invidious comparison between Marie and the now very distant Mrs Newsome: Marie was 'a woman who, between courses, could be graceful with her elbows on the table. It was a posture unknown to Mrs Newsome, but it was easy for a 'femme du monde' (p. 194).

If the comment has moral undertones, they are indulgent. And there is a further-reaching comparison:

> The thing that most moved him was really that she was so deeply serious. She had none of the portentous forms of it, but he had never come in contact, it struck him, with a force brought to so fine a head. Mrs Newsome, goodness knew, was serious; but it was nothing to this. (p. 198)

His conversion then, rests on a very substantial base. It is the fruit of prolonged consideration. Of that we are sure.

Three days after comes 'the scrap of blue paper' from Woollett, and now, in the middle of the novel, Lambert starts to work quite against the Woollett policy.

III

Chad responds with justifiable surprise when, in conversation, Lambert reveals his change of heart: 'you want me now to "stay"?' (p. 204). But he quickly recovers with a charming joke when told of Mamie's enlistment to the cause: 'Mamie - to corrupt me?' This is splendidly ironical and has as we come to realise a certain serious bearing. Woollett, after all would make of Chad, if it could, a Jim Pocock. And so, finally, the operative irony: Lambert persuades Chad to stay.

It is noticeable, during the period of Lambert's 'plunge',how Waymarsh has been missing from the scene and how appropriate it is. When Chad departs the hotel Strether looks about for Waymarsh but only 'superficially'. The bad conscience is increasingly a thing of the past, although we now find him perhaps deluding himself a little as to his own desire to remain in Paris. Speaking of Chad to Maria, he explains 'I want to see him a little further. He's not in the least the case I supposed; he's quite another case. And it's as such that he interests me' (pp. 212-213): and James adds 'it was almost as if for his own intelligence that, deliberate and lucid, our friend thus expressed the matter'. That 'almost as if' is probably significant: there is a sense in which Lambert could hardly, and this simply for his own reasons, be expected to wish to leave.

Nevertheless, this conversation with Maria establishes a more important fact, namely that Lambert is now a self-supporting individual capable of operating in a complex moral environment: as Maria says, 'you've got your momentum and can toddle alone' (p. 209). And Lambert agrees, 'yes - I suppose I can toddle'. Shortly after, he is able to give a balanced account of his feelings about his stay in Paris, again to Maria:

> It's a benefit that would make a poor show for many people; and I don't know who else but you and I, frankly, could begin to see in it what I feel. 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.
> (p. 217)

Lambert is quite clear that he feels he is having his youth now, or having an experience as near as he could ever reach it. And he even goes to Chartres, to Fontainebleau where he 'imagined himself on the way to Italy', and to Rouen 'with a little handbag' where he 'inordinately' spends the night. This is kindly humour here, humour rather than irony. Small things will always to some extent be large for Strether, and this is one of the earliest clear signs in the novel of the possibility of pathos in Lambert's situation, a pathos which will be emphatic once or twice later, if finally subordinate to our sense of his resilience.

Resilience is required, as we have seen, in great measure when Sarah visits the hotel. Lambert's personal responsibility in the matter is made terrible by Chad's undertaking to Sarah: 'he'll go in a moment if you give him the word - he assures me on his honour he'll do that' (p. 310). This is Sarah's dreadful message. Lambert is wearily resigned to the weight of responsibility that Chad in this way lays on him: Chad is 'all right in having said to you - well anything he may have said. I'll take it all - what he does put on me'. The putting on I shall shortly return to. Lambert now makes another kind of difficult choice, between Marie and Mrs Newsome, though the difficulty lies no longer in discriminating the superiority of one over the other:

'I've given sufficient proof, one would have thought,' he added, 'of my deep admiration for Mrs Newsome.'

'And pray what proof would one have thought you'd call sufficient? That of thinking this person here so far superior to her?'

He wondered again; he waited. 'Ah dear Sarah, you must leave me this person here!'

In his desire to avoid all vulgar retorts, to show how, even perversely, he clung to his rag of reason, he had softly almost wailed this plea. Yet he knew it to be perhaps the most positive declaration he had ever made in his life, and his visitor's reception of it virtually gave it that importance. 'That's exactly what I'm delighted to do. God knows we don't want her!' (p.314)

'Perhaps the most positive declaration he had ever made in his life' is, given Lambert's by now well-established accuracy of judgement, an indication of the moral weight he attaches to the stand he is making on Marie's behalf. The things which Marie

represents, a particular kind of cultivation, of civilization; a comprehensiveness of spiritual and sensuous awareness and experience, a social grace, and more - Strether cannot agree, at any cost, to deprecate, nor pretend to deprecate. There is also to consider now the strength of a personal loyalty to Marie. And this in spite of the fact that Sarah really, for all her crudeness here, gets through to Strether, hits her mark at least a glancing blow. He winces, he doesn't like the sound of disapprobation of Chad and Marie's relationship 'on other lips'. He can 'toddle' but he can't morally saunter - he is still vulnerable, which makes his determination here all the more fascinating. This is where, as elsewhere, we are being reminded that a problem is a problem - neither Lambert's rejection of Chad and Marie nor his acceptance of them could ever be easy on him.

And this is followed by a truly brilliant touch: Strether, having defended a kind of life lived by other people, now quite logically, but with a real sadness, measures the distance between their capacity for it and his, even in material terms, for he goes to Chad's house, convinced that his Woollett connection is at an end; only to experience uncomfortably the felicity of Chad's position. Though this is not a life which Strether could enjoy at Woollett with Mrs Newsome (though explicitly he feels the excitement here as a freedom he missed with his youth), the stress on the material is sufficient to set up the sense of what is <u>also</u> not now Lambert's:

> The mellowest lamplight and the easiest chair had been placed at his disposal by Baptiste, subtlest of servants; the novel half uncut, the novel lemon-coloured and tender, with the ivory knife athwart it like a dagger in a contadina's hair, had been pushed within the soft circle - a circle which, for some reason, affected Strether as softer still after the same Baptiste had remarked that in the absence of a further need of anything by monsieur he would betake himself to bed. The night was hot and heavy and the single lamp sufficient; the great flare of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar, played up from the boulevard and, through the vague vista of the successive rooms, brought objects into view and added to their dignity. Strether found himself in possession as he never yet had been; he had been there alone, had turned over books and prints, had invoked, in Chad's absence, the spirit of the place, but never at the witching hour and never with a relish quite so like a pang. (p.317)

These observations are to be followed, in a passage to which we shall return, by Chad's stark, though polite, account to Lambert of what the latter is losing. Here, as Lambert briefly and for the only time in his life has a full and stinging sense of all that his lack of wealth deprives him of, his sacrifice of the Woollett connection, in material terms, surfaces as considerable. The light seems softer as Baptiste retires because Strether feels momentarily really like the owner left in possession, his own servant gone to bed. A lemon-coloured novel appears again - we recall Strether's earlier taste - and is described, oddly, as 'tender'; such is the strength of Strether's feeling for the place. His 'relish' like a 'pang' suggests ironically that, as his capacity for enjoyment increases, he can only be made more aware of his material incapacity.

But Strether hasn't of course actually lost anything yet, as we discover, since he sees Sarah again, and pleads for a stay of execution. As he discusses this with Maria a number of matters arise. Why <u>is</u> he staying on? What will he do for a month in Paris? If Chad and Marie go off together, what sort of attitude to Lambert will that demonstrate? Might it not be that in a sense they <u>have</u> to get away from him? - because of what he has done for them.

For the reader this raises other questions. Has Lambert been used badly, or has he achieved what he wanted? Why is it that we are now, one way or another, beginning to feel in spite of all evidence of his resilience, a little sorry for him? - as though he were letting himself in for experiences for which we suspect he is too vulnerable. His vulnerability will surface at the Cheval Blanc. But before we examine these closing scenes, it is necessary to pursue a little further the notion of Lambert as victim. A number of critics have agreed that it is appropriate that Lambert should be severely tested. William Troy, comparing James himself to Strether, comments that 'he wins through, by a long and difficult "process of vision", to an acceptance of human life as it is lived - qualified, of course, by a revalidation of the

naively grasped moral certitudes of his youth'. [9] William M. Gibson remarks that:

James is unable to praise 'a fugitive and cloister'd vertue', innocence which is untried. Strether is thus like James's post-Civil War American - the good American in his essay on Hawthorne: he 'has eaten of the tree of knowledge' and he attains stature only as he acquires, however painfully, knowledge of the world and of good and evil. [10]

'Good and evil' we can, of course, forget about, as they are irrelevant to the novel. But both these remarks are in accord with suggestions made earlier that James makes moral problems properly problematic, although both oversimplify the case. How much knowledge of human life Lambert ultimately acquires, and how much he accepts 'human life as it is lived', aren't easy quantities. Furthermore, Lambert's 'innocence' (he isn't actually ever innocent) isn't 'tried' so that we can admire him. It is tried because of James's properly complex approach to moral problems.

And one of the problems we are faced with in relation to Lambert's difficult progress is his apparently self-sacrificial nature. At his farewell visit to Marie, she at least seems clear about Lambert's position:

...'I don't really pretend I believe you couldn't, for yourself, not have done what you have. I don't pretend you feel yourself victimized, for this evidently is the way you live, and it's what - we're agreed - is the best way.' (p. 366)

The 'best way' has just been defined:

'What it comes to is that it's not, that it's never, a happiness, any happiness at all, to take. The only safe thing is to give. It's what plays you least false.' (p. 365)

The meaning of Marie's utterance here is directed by the adjective 'safe', which seems to give it a private meaning for Marie simply not applicable to Lambert. Certainly it wouldn't be 'safe' for her to take too much from Chad, since she suspects or knows that he will eventually leave her. But Lambert, who in the end will

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9 'The Altar of Henry James' in Henry James: Modern Judgements, p.48
10 'Metaphor in the Plot of The Ambassadors' in the same volume, p. 314

give rather a lot (although he has no doubt 'taken', too, in another sense) will be left in a position neither emotionally nor financially any safer than the one he was in when he arrived: financially it will really be much worse.

But when she says that Lambert has not been victimized, we are more likely to agree with her, though there is a difference between being 'victimized' and being 'used', and he has certainly been used, been manipulated. Maria's plausible idea, for example, has been that Chad delayed his initial appearance to let Lambert become seduced by the Parisian atmosphere. Marie has been presented in the best possible way. Bilham misleads Strether as to the lovers' relationship. Strether's sense of being used is very plain indeed: when Chad wishes him to meet, at his home, Jeanne de Vionnet, Strether knows the quantity which he is to appreciate, and:

> Strether knew well enough with what Chad wished him to compare (his impression of the <u>jeune fille</u>), and though he entirely assented he hadn't yet somehow been so deeply reminded that he was being, as he constantly though mutely expressed it, used. He was as far as ever from making out exactly to what end; but he was none the less constantly accompanied by a sense of the service he rendered. He conceived only that this service was highly agreeable to those who profited by it; and he was indeed still waiting for the moment at which he should catch it in the act of proving disagreeable, proving in some degree intolerable, to himself. (p. I64)

But the fact is that as he increasingly gets to like Europe, motives become, as we have seen, very mingled. Increasingly, we feel that Strether may be there for his own sake, though right to the end of the novel there is reason for him to stay disinterestedly - namely so that he can warn Chad, as he does, never to abandon Marie: and this is plainly a strong motive. A mixture of personal and altruistic motives is likely, and morally in some ways the most satisfying. The fact is, however, that at least one major question remains problematic, and that is the <u>extent</u> to which Chad has used Lambert. Has he, for example, agreed to go back with Lambert because he knows Lambert won't acquiesce? There is a strong argument against that, and some evidence for, but the fact probably is that Chad, feeling the

beginnings of restlessness, is toying with the idea of going back and to an appreciable extent simply giving Lambert the decision. We often feel, as has been remarked, where Chad is concerned, his essential self-sufficiency, his capacity to adapt the world to his own ends. But while we have our difficulties as to Chad's real feelings for Lambert, it is nevertheless true that not only does he, after Sarah's departure from Paris, wish to (although tactfully refrain from trying to) offer Lambert some financial provision, but that he reacts thus after having tested Lambert's capacity for self-sacrifice to the hilt by asking him some very pointed questions about money, albeit that his solicitousness, as was previously remarked, seems not, with Chad, to imply that he is desperately anxious on his older friend's behalf. His questions and comments are certainly relentlessly relevant. When Lambert points out to him that Chad too stands to lose money, Chad points out that he can afford to. We wince a bit at all this, and it is part of Lambert's self-imposed ordeal that all of this awkwardness has to come out and has to be, in detail, considered. Our discomfort is on Lambert's behalf - he is conscious, as we know, that financially he has been no success; and this is a fact which will surface again with some poignancy over the business of the Lambinet. It is another aspect, like his response to Gloriani (and his reaction to Gloriani's response to him) which goes to establish Lambert's underlying vulnerability, this important feature of his personality which gives his moral dilemmas their full human significance.

It is not appropriate to decide to classify Lambert as a victim or a manipulee, though it is of course intended that we should be aware of the question. It is the very ambiguity of his position which is intended: Lambert is at the least a collaborator in his fate.

IV

Leon Edel sees Lambert's excursion into the scenery remembered from the Lambinet desired long ago as a cultivation of what

Lambert has spoken of to Bilham as 'the illusion of freedom'.[11] Lambert's ability to enjoy this day in the country is undoubtedly a victory. It is indeed significant that he can enjoy himself in this way without guilt, and with a sense of timelessness. The self-consciousness, the rather surprised glances at himself experiencing the phenomenon of pleasure, which have typified many of his previous Paris excursions, have gone. And so there is an aspect of this adventure which is certainly positive and which represents the fullest exercise we have seen of Lambert's acquired freedoms. And although he couldn't when younger afford the Lambinet, he now, it might be argued, has the real thing, the landscape itself: art has, as James held, made life.

But the episode isn't written in such a way as to suggest that meaning. On the contrary, Strether's intellectual subordination here of nature, to art and to memory, is fairly consistent.

There has of course been poignancy for the reader in the description of Lambert's early flirtation with the idea of buying the Lambinet. It has been, in connection with the purchase of a work of art 'the only adventure of his life', and though the price, for a Lambinet, has been low, it has been too high for Lambert, occasioning an early incidence of his by now very familiar deflating self-assessments. The reader is reminded, too, of the earlier passages in the novel, the trips to Chartres and Fontainebleau, and the explicit statement of how small things usually take on for Strether a large significance: there is something very moving in Lambert's cherishing the idea, even now, that this was the picture he would have bought, though James naturally avoids any excess of sentiment.

We keep noticing how the scene resolves itself into the picture: 'the oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines' (p. 342) and the scenery 'fell into a composition' within them. There is a clear sense in which the here and now is not the most actual element in the composition: 'it was what he wanted: it

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11 The Life of Henry James, Volume 2, p. 416

was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet'. In other words it is only France of a sort, and very much the sort connected with memory. It is not a bad thing, of course, this manipulation of the actual, but it marks Lambert's distance from the landscape he is actually in, and it is about to impose itself on him dramatically.

It may, furthermore, be possible to say that Lambert's manipulation of the landscape is a sign of the inevitably limited extent of his transformation, his adaptation, to his new environment. That in the midst of this countryside his thoughts go back to his earlier years is not necessarily a reassuring sign, as this of all times requires his most recently acquired powers of assimilation. What is also less than reassuring is his increasing sense of how 'right' everything in the landscape is - the Cheval Blanc, the village, the projected meal. He has had his little adventures 'and had meanwhile not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame. The frame had drawn itself out for him, as much as you please; but that was just his luck' (p. 346). Lambert is still, as it were, in an organized, selective, designed world, which in the Lambinet was the product of artistic control, and which in his own perception is the product of a certain form of idealization. That he should have thought that there was so little difference between the Lambinet and the actual landscape is a measure of what he still has to learn.

This gives a truly ironic dimension to the words with which the third part of the eleventh book begins:

> 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. (p. 349)

It is indeed the 'right thing' in a landscape painting, perhaps; an added element of visual interest or charm. But the other, harsh sense in which this is the 'right thing' is that it is the corrective about to be administered to Lambert's incomplete sense of the actual - this will 'fill up the measure', indubitably,

introduce the element of realism which 'had been wanted more or less all day'. It is a pity, of course, that Lambert couldn't have had his day in the country without this happening, but Lambert's course is a hard one.

The difference between the controlled world of the Lambinet and the actual one Lambert is in is made fairly explicit in James's phrase 'the eye of nature' - 'the violence of their having "cut" him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he wouldn't know it' (p. 350). Nature contains 'harsh notes' and 'violence'[12] and Lambert feels the crisis as 'quite horrible'. He knows he shouldn't feel the way he does, though he can't deny the upset:

> Yet his theory, as we know, had bountifully been that the facts were specifically none of his business, and were, over and above, so far as one had to do with them, intrinsically beautiful; and this might have prepared him for anything, as well as rendered him proof against mystification. (p. 352)

This is our previous fear over Lambert's vulnerability being confirmed.

His habitual honesty with himself makes the experience even more horrible: what is he to make of the fact that they would, could they have got away with it, have pretended not to see him? Their reasons are obvious, yet so hard to accommodate. Furthermore, he realises, in spite of his perception that Chad and Marie have lied about their intentions, that he possibly could not have lived with the knowledge that they were staying at the inn. So far he can get from Woollett, but not as far, perhaps, as Chad and Marie could take him. That there might just be the very slightest element of emotional involvement with Marie contributing a small share of his response here is not impossible.

Forster's version of what is happening here is interesting, if acceptable only in bits:

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[12] Naomi Lebowitz remarks that 'James became more and more luxuriantly profuse in his water imagery that equated engagement in life with the proper launching to sea' and she cites the river encounter here as the bringing together of 'the literal and figurative strands'. (The Imagination of Loving, p. 67)

Paris is winning - and then (Strether) catches sight of something new. Is not Chad, as regards any fineness in him, played out? Is not Chad's Paris after all just a place for a spree? This fear is confirmed. He goes for a solitary country walk, and at the end of the day he comes across Chad and Mme de Vionnet. They are in a boat, they pretend not to see him, because their relation is at bottom an ordinary liason, and they are ashamed. They were hoping for a secret week-end at an inn while their passion survived; for it will not survive, Chad will tire of the exquisite Frenchwoman, she is part of his fling; he will go back to his mother and make the little domestic article and marry Mamie. They know all this, and it is revealed to Strether though they try to hide it; they lie, they are vulgar - even Mme de Vionnet, even her pathos, is stained with commonness... So Strether loses them too. As he says: 'That, you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.' It is not that they have gone back. It is that he has gone on. The Paris they revealed to him - he could reveal it to them now, if they had eyes to see, for it is something finer than they could ever notice for themselves, and his imagination has more spiritual value than their youth.[13]

Forster's assured predictions are not particularly persuasive, least of all his prophesy that Chad will marry Mamie: he may well go home, but that is not the same thing. There is never even remotely any suggestion that Paris is 'just the place for a spree' - that is the Jim Pocock view. The 'while their passion survived' is also Forster's invention - there is no evidence that they feel their relationship to be at that stage just yet. But he is right about the effect that the incident has on Strether's view of Marie, although he puts it badly. What has happened is that Strether has now a view which circumscribes Marie and Chad. He can see all round them - and he can see moral responsibilities in Chad's position which Chad apparently can't. It is not at all, as Forster claims, that Strether sees a finer Paris, whatever that means, metaphorical or otherwise, than they do. What Lambert sees is that with the pleasures, and with the fulfilment of the potential of the human personality, which are the benefits of a wide experience, must also come certain kinds of sensitivity toward other people, in order that one's experience is not gained at their expense. This realisation enables him to do several things. One is to revisit Marie and see her, still benignly and even with admiration, as merely

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I3 Aspects of the Novel, pp. I40-I42

human, fairly ordinary; and to leave her decisively in a way which suggests that his 'toddling' has become something relatively adult. It also causes him to decide to plead for her, and this is partly in turn because he has had a realisation about Chad, not as crude or extreme as Forster suggests but nevertheless significant. He realises that although Marie had made Chad into 'anything one would', he is nevertheless 'only Chad', 'the companion of mere earthly joys' (p. 367). Strether has come a long way: from being the figure in the street who gazed up admiringly at Chad's house, he is now able to look at Chad and try to forgive his easily-glimpsed deficiencies. He tells Chad that he must never leave Marie, and in doing so finds out that Chad may yet become an American businessman and that he is also lacking in the kind of charity, sensitivity, which Strether values so highly: 'the way youth could express itself was again and again a wonder. (Chad) meant no harm, though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being 'tired' of (Marie) almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner' (pp. 384-385). Strether, speaking to Chad with increasing dryness, has now acquired all the moral authority. His stature, for all his self-doubt, is quite considerable.

That does not, however, bring us to a conclusion, for the novel leaves us with a problem. It is the problem of Strether's deciding to go back to Woollett. The decision is linked with his moral authority, and we seem to be invited to believe that it is an essential part of it; yet plainly it doesn't seem to have much compatibility with, say, Strether's advice to Bilham.

The key seems to lie in what I have called in reference to Waymarsh a kind of Presbyterianism, specifically a particular kind of attitude toward pleasure and the implications of pleasure for moral duty.

After the return from the countryside, Lambert receives a petit bleu from Marie and when considering where they might meet, reflects in this way:

he might have suggested a stone bench in the dusty Tuileries or a penny chair at the back part of the Champs Elysees. These things would have been a trifle stern, and sternness alone now wouldn't be sinister. An instinct in him cast about for some form of discipline in which they might meet - some awkwardness they would suffer from, some danger, or at least some grave inconvenience they would incur. This would give a sense - which the spirit required, rather ached and sighed in the absence of - that somebody was paying something somewhere and somehow, that they were at least not all floating together on the silver stream of impunity. Just instead of that to go and see her late in the evening, as if, for all the world - well, as if he were as much in the swim as anybody else: this had as little possible in common with the penal form. (p. 359)

We have some information about the source of this response:

He reverted in thoughts to his old tradition, the one he had been brought up on and which even so many years of life had but little worn away; the notion that the state of the wrongdoer, or at least this person's happiniess, presented some special difficulty. (p. 359)

This speaks of a particular kind of moral and religious background at work, and is evidently also the tradition in which Mrs Newsome and Sarah and Waymarsh have been formed. Strether is actually made very uncomfortable by the absence of any application of his notion of duty. We should pay attention to the swerve which his thinking takes: 'they' are all afloat on a river of impunity, first of all: but then Strether takes the guilt chiefly to himself, or feels it emphatically on his own part - 'as if he were as much in the swim as anybody else'. He isn't going to speak for them, but for himself; here is, in terms of James's recurring metaphor, something of a reversion, an attempt to crawl onto the bank. He must pay - not necessarily for them, but for his own pleasures. This is a return of his self-consciousness, a surprise at his immersion, a guilt at his enjoyment, a bout of moral panic. Here is certainly, within Lambert's personality - as distinct, so to speak, from James's - a plausible reason for his determination to return. Because we do have to seek reasons for Lambert's renunciation, as has been suggested: according to Lambert's advice to Bilham, his decision to go back is irrational. Furthermore, it is necessary to try to determine whether or not this ending has any of the quality

of 'inevitability' which characterises, say, The Portrait of a Lady.

It is not that Lambert doesn't know what he is going to miss. When he makes his final visit to Marie, her apartment seems as attractive as ever. There are of course modifications in the mood of the description which suggest an unpleasant future for Marie: Strether speculates about 'the smell of blood' in the Paris streets and wonders if Madame Roland wore on the scaffold an attire like Marie's. The present order is likely to be usurped. But the spell of the place is still on Lambert, 'the associations of the place, all felt again' (p. 361). Yet he knows that he will never come back, and will retain the memory of the place as the 'old, old, old, the oldest thing' he has ever known. He is already thinking of this experience as a 'loaf' of memory for the 'stress' of Woollett.

This is not all that he will leave. Maria Gostrey is very fond of Lambert, and is several times quite explicit, as much as she can be, about her feelings. As Lambert makes his final visit:

> the place had never before struck him as so sacred to pleasant knowledge, to intimate charm, to antique order, to a neatness that was almost august. To sit there was, as he had told his hostess before, to see life reflected for the time in ideally kept pewter; which was somehow becoming, improving to life, so that one's eyes were held and comforted. (p. 388)

All the things are here - pleasant knowledge and antique order - which we have seen him valuing. Even the 'vivid delf' has the 'dignity of family portraits'. The place even has an 'august' neatness, which may well be as much and more, we might imagine, as is on offer at Mrs Newsome's. Maria's house has therefore a lot to commend it, its own virtues as well as those of Woollett and Marie de Vionnet's. [14]

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14 Matthiessen comments that this final complication 'serves rather to exaggerate the negative content of Strether's renunciation' (p. 38). As has been noted, Matthiessen regards Maria as an artificiality, however. Presumably the more one allows Maria some substance, the more negative Strether's renunciation feels. Matthiessen seems to be able to reconcile his view of James 'holding to his structure' with his perception of the difference between 'imputed and actual values'.

Strether turns down what is virtually a proposal: why? 'To be right' (p. 393). Maria points out that he has already gained much from his adventure: 'it's you who would make me wrong', he replies.

Approaches to the ending of the novel vary. One cannot normally argue with Jamesian endings, for the sense long ago remarked by Ezra Pound is generally emphatic. It is certainly possible to argue that Strether is simply being himself, behaving in a way which proves his earlier point that he is 'too late' to live, and in fact this is the line taken as part of F.O. Matthiessen's ambivalent approach. But I suspect it is unjustifiable.

The whole central dynamic of the novel has been to do with Lambert's ability to change, to develop, and he has done so considerably. This raises the question of which 'self' he is being true to in deciding to return. There is certainly none of the inevitability, about the decision, of Isabel's return to Osmond or Kate and Merton's parting of the ways. A reasonable view might be that Lambert might just as well have remained with Maria, that is, if James had put a bit more work into her character (although one would like to repeat that there is more work there already than sometimes recognised). It could certainly be claimed that Lambert's decision shows only that he hasn't learned enough in Europe.[I5]

Undoubtedly we are face to face again with James's view of what is 'like life', James's view of what it is to be a 'realist'. To push critical impropriety to its limits: perhaps the proper ending would have been genuinely ambiguous: ideally the reader should have been able to decide what Lambert would do.

I5 Any extended discussion of the significance of the ending would also have to take into account these two problems: first, isn't the ending really at odds with the mood and tone of the novel, and only compatible with other, more characteristic Jamesian works? And isn't that disparity perhaps disguised by the really rather strange equanimity with which Lambert and Maria discuss these matters, James's evasive 'all comically, all tragically' which certainly can't be the latter?

David Lodge remarks, of Leavis's objections to The Ambassadors, quoted at the beginning of this chapter:

> In some respects, this argument can never be rebutted. Whether James displays a sense of what is valuable and significant in living, and whether he demands a disproportionate effort from the reader, are questions that can only be answered in a spirit of religious witness.[16]

But, referring to the 'vagueness' of the description of Marie de Vionnet's house, through the prevalence of abstraction over concreteness in that scene, and plurals over singulars, he raises the question of the degree to which the style - certainly up until the scene on the river - may be considered the appropriate one for Strether's generalized approbation of what Lodge calls the 'Paris "symbol"'.[17] This has the effect of conceding something to Leavis, but then making the substance of Leavis's objection a virtue instead. However, that response seems excessive. One can readily agree with Lodge's remarks about the de Vionnet house without, at all, concluding that 'life' isn't concretely realized in the novel, as something experienced by Strether. I differ from Lodge for two reasons. First, the attenuation of focus which is the result of James's style in the extract Lodge quotes is only relative.[18] The description is still highly detailed. It is still the result of close attention by Strether. Furthermore, as it continues, not only does it become slightly more closely-observed than the extract Lodge examines, but it is made evident to the reader that Strether has quite clearly discriminated between what is here and what is at Miss Gostrey's, or Chad's, which, the judgement coming after what, after all, is merely this preliminary view, implies closer assimilation and processing of Parisian novelties than Lodge concedes, and closer understanding on Strether's part of what he himself values. In other words, Lodge's qualifications do not, on this ground, validate Leavis's contention.

Secondly, there are other passages in the novel where the observation is even more precise and concentrated, passages coming well

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I6 Language and Fiction, p. I9I. Lodge also adopts Christof Wegelin's idea of 'social beauty' as being what Strether previously missed.
I7 pp. I92-I94 I8 there is a similar passage in The Awkward Age (see above, p. 78) which presumably has no such purpose as Lodge suggests for the other one - there may well be more

before the river scene, such as, for example, the celebrated straw-coloured Chablis episode, where not only the fare, but Marie's postural connotations are so carefully detailed. There is the later episode in Chad's deserted house, where Strether observes the novel with 'the ivory knife athwart it like a dagger in a contadina's hair'.[I9]

This is not to contend the assertion that Strether's focus is in a sense untried, and perhaps unreliable,[20] as indeed the 'nippers' early on emphasize. But it should be insisted that there is quite ample suggestion in the novel of the kinds of things Strether has missed and now begins to establish some connections with: as well as of things he has missed and knows he has no chance of experiencing.

Again, we find the concept of 'life' expressed in a variety of forms. Human relationships are again seen as central:[2I] whatever Woollett finds 'immoral' in Chad's relationship with Marie, Strether sees as justifiable in terms of the enjoyment which both participants receive from it. We are talking about a kind of love,[22] and presumably about sexual enjoyment. Strether's moral disapproval is finally reserved for Chad's apparent readiness to abandon his mistress. A fulfilling relationship is therefore given a high value in the novel, a relationship which makes moral reservations about its existence take a subordinate place, which indeed largely negates them, or even turns them round and asks them to enlist.

As we have seen, even Waymarsh's behaviour validates this relationship. Woollett's objections are ruled out of court. At least, apparently they are.

But the felicities of the relationship like the relationship itself are inscrutable: they are asserted and believed, but not available for detailed understanding. The success of the relationship belongs to the opaque world of Strett and Gloriani. The

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I9 see this thesis, p. I60

20 see this thesis, pp. I48, I6I

2I Naomi Lebowitz feels that it is 'the possibility of relationship' which Strether 'finally discerns as the centre of life' (p. 67)

22 more dubious on Chad's part

relationship which we do observe, between Strether and Maria Gostrey, which is visible, is therefore also doomed.[23]

What Chad and Marie possess is indeed positive enough, but can only be understood, as it were, by James, in a relation to it which echoes Strether's own at the river scene, that of an outsider, someone who is excluded. When he constructs the initial stages of a detailed, closely observed relationship, then it must go the way of Merton's with Kate or Amerigo's with Charlotte. 'Realism' asserts itself. Strether 'must' go back.

Therefore, whatever there is in the novel of a view of the enriching possibilities of life, for the development of the personality and the enjoyment of the individual, within intimate human relationships, is again circumscribed. Strether's decision to return is part of the circumscription.

James's decision to have Chad contemplate leaving is even more interesting: it is in fact almost a final reassertion of the apparently outmoded Woollett view. For although the view of Marie propounded by Woollett is refuted, the disapproving judgement on the relationship is to some degree revitalized by Chad's finally revealed attitude to Marie, that which consequently displays Strether in such morally mature terms. If Chad is thus prepared to leave Marie, doesn't that call into question what it is she has made of him? If he can speak of being tired of Marie, as of being 'tired of roast mutton for dinner', this does tend to re-present the relationship with an emphasis on Chad's sexual appetite (we remember the salient teeth).

This, in turn, may not detract from a particular kind of sensuous value in the relationship, but it does detract from its more subtle moral achievements. It brings Mrs Pocock back, as it were, into the picture.

There is, then, because of Lambert's 'renunciation' and Chad's relative detachment, a qualification of the apparent view that fulfilment and satisfaction within intimate human relationships is possible.

It should be stressed that the return to America has nothing to

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23 as we have seen, this would not be an issue for those critics who can't see any substance in Maria Gostrey anyway

do with the completion of an intended moral structure. On the contrary, Woollett has seemed, within the pragmatic moral view the novel throughout most of its length supports, immoral, because unsympathetic to the development of the human personality, which, again, lies at the heart of what is seen to be important. The return is, rather, based on James's sense of what is 'real': it is, like similar outcomes elsewhere, reflexively negative.

But - like The Awkward Age - The Ambassadors has much else in it which is positive. Other aspects of 'life' - high cultural experience, sensuous experience, social amenity, interaction with highly developed personalities - are present in abundance. Strether's enjoyment of human company, of the company especially of attractive women, of Paris's culture and cultural history, of Chablis - these things are heartwarmingly present in the novel, felt clearly by the reader as a transfusion of vital experience for Strether which his decision to return to Woollett does nothing to alter.

As in other works, the existence of the highly developed, inscrutable personality - here, Gloriani - presents the suggestion of forms of human development beyond the level of the central protagonists. As in Densher's response to Maud Lowder, Strether has no protection from Gloriani in irony. Gloriani's power is freely acknowledged, like Strett's.

So we can say that if 'life', again, has much to do with the potentialities of intimate human relationship, it nevertheless means other quite different experiences and attributes. If we are, despite the qualifications above, inclined to see The Ambassadors as a relatively positive Jamesian novel, it is because, among other factors, of the increasing evidence of emotions as strong as delight on the part of its developing central protagonist,[24] as well as the presence of a relationship which, in spite of the threats made to it toward the end, has clearly been, for a time at least, deeply satisfying.

Finally we observe again the absence of any rigid moral system: Strether's own instincts with respect to Chad and Marie amount, in the end, to the hope that Chad will behave well to Marie. There

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24 the development, like that of Maggie Verver, is in itself positive

may be a hope in it for him that the relationship he could never achieve can be sustained by them.[25] But the essential fact is that he adjusts his moral outlook to the circumstances, that what is good in 'life' is morally right, provided that people can treat each other with respect and kindness.[26] The extent to which Chad's threatened defection makes a comment upon the proviso is a real question.

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25 as with Longdon's view of Nanda and Van

26 Strether's plea to Sarah about Marie - 'you must leave me this person here' is (see this thesis, p. I59) 'perhaps the most positive declaration he had ever made in his life' - essentially a plea for compassion in judgement, as in conduct. Naomi Lebowitz remarks that 'the great sin for James was the sin against relationship, a natural extension of Hawthorne's old unpardonable sin' (Lebowitz, p. I08)

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GOLDEN BOWL

I

The Golden Bowl is as morally complex as it is possible for a novel to be. What are the moral complications?

The book's structure is such that the point of view switches in a deeply decisive manner a little more than half-way through, at which point - at the beginning of the novel's second book - the reader's by now really keenly active curiosity about Maggie starts to be satisfied. We have acquired some familiarity with Charlotte, Amerigo, Adam, Fanny and the Colonel, but really none with Maggie. Given the sudden mist which descends upon the outlook once matters start to be filtered through Maggie's (initially) very laborious consciousness, progress is slow: but we are now at least able to put her weight into the scales. The switch is 'decisive' because we are henceforth invited, in the main, to view events in a manner different from that which we have become accustomed to during the first book. To put it at its simplest, which where this novel is concerned is to stretch a point, there seems, in the first book, to be a 'case' made out for Amerigo and Charlotte, and against, certainly Adam and perhaps also Maggie. There is no doubt that until one starts to become familiar with Maggie's machinations in the second part of the novel, one may well have felt inclined to be sympathetic toward Amerigo and Charlotte and to feel, again inevitably to oversimplify, that Adam and Maggie get roughly what they deserve. There is, on the other hand, a distinct effort by James to swing the reader's sympathies the other way in a number of places in the second book. This does two things. It makes the novel more satisfying, in that its moral structure becomes increasingly complicated and its moral discriminations authentically finer. But it also, in places which will be indicated, gives evidence of James, to recall Lawrence's phrase about authorial 'interference' in general, 'putting his thumb in the pan' - in other words there is some evidence that James is in parts of the second book trying to push us in directions that we feel are, in relation to the previously established tendencies of The Golden Bowl, unnatural.

This is a flaw, which is part of a wider flaw: the smaller

flaw lies in the way in which the moral Charlotte, the little we see of her in the second book, is not the moral Charlotte of the first. Another part of the wider deficiency is the way in which the treatment of the Assinghams , so - and sometimes tediously - intrusive elsewhere in the novel is simply abandoned. The wider deficiency is, in fact, the way in which Maggie's point of view in the second book cuts off our view of the other characters at a time when the development of the novel really requires that we discover more about them.

Arguments might be made out to justify these things, or to justify them up to a point: and indeed it is impossible not to admire just precisely the way in which James's control of point of view is so powerfully wielded, how the shut-down is accomplished in the second book. It is just that perhaps we are likely to feel that Charlotte - mainly Charlotte - has been withdrawn from our view far too soon, and that the glimpses of her we then receive, the caged beast, the soul in torment, to use Maggie's metaphors, take considerable liberties with the shape of Charlotte's character as it was previously formed.[I]

Where weaknesses are under discussion, two others should be mentioned now so that they may be in view from the outset. One concerns the character of Adam Verver, about whom critics have traditionally had much to say. F.O. Matthiessen's view is (perhaps rather characteristically) ambivalent, in the sense that while famously objecting to Verver's 'benevolent Swedenborgian' moral tone[2] he also refers to the cruelty of the 'silken cord' exercise as 'obscene',[3] and this is one of a number of Verver's qualities which Matthiessen points out which are not at all morally benevolent. Sallie Sears comments that it was not James's purpose to give us 'a realistic picture of a John D. Rockefeller, the conditions that he created, or the conditions that created

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I Sallie Sears argues of the novel's two halves that 'in each case the focus of pity is upon the person or persons in the gravest plight, the ones who are helpless in the face of manipulations' but this assumes (I feel wrongly) that the second half is entirely credible. (The Negative Imagination, p. I74)

2 Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 90 3 p. I00

him' and goes on to see horror and nightmare in the Ververs', particularly Maggie's, exercise of power in the second half of the novel, [4] but while there seems little doubt that the weight of moral condemnation was at some point in the novel intended to fall upon the Ververs , the idea is not sustained in that way and I find it difficult to see 'horror', or anything as strong, in the book.

My objection to Adam is not that he is benevolent, for he is not, but that he is portrayed, sometimes simultaneously, as invalid and geriatric but also forceful in a way which puts a heavy strain on the novel which is scarcely borne. It seems that our only choice is to regard him as unsuitably lightweight or else to regard the images of meekness as Maggie's uncomprehending approaches to her father, as of a Christian who overstresses the lamb in Christ: we could then make of that image which offended Matthiessen so much, the silken noose, the gathered lassoo, an authorial reassertion of the millionaire's forceful character. However: what it feels more like than that is an attempt by James to repair damage done to Verver's characterisation earlier on. After all, it is not really enough to say that the picture of Adam as a kind of helpless invalid derives mainly from Maggie. It is the only picture we really get from the novel, except for one passage, from the beginning of the seventh chapter, in which last it is possible to argue that a more decisive kind of Adam is depicted - I would argue, really a quite different character from the later one. After all, if the noose was always there and only unperceived by the loving daughter, how did Charlotte manage to misbehave with Amerigo? - we find Bob Assingham speculating on Charlotte's freedom later on.

The second difficulty is the objection F.R. Leavis makes about the weakening effect of the novel's indirectness, the lack of metaphorical punch: in fact, I do not propose to treat that as if there were grounds for serious objection.

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4 pp. I6I-I62

These flaws seem real enough, yet the novel remains an extraordinary achievement. The direction to pursue in attempting to clarify its difficulties has already been suggested: to what extent does James intend, and in what parts of the novel, that Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship should be capable of moral justification? Does the novel's overall moral ambiguity - and I intend to show that it is extremely ambiguous - strike one as an achieved design of the author? Or might the ambiguity which the novel possesses be a different kind from that which James intended? Could it be that the novel is pulling, quite inadvertently, in different directions?

Leavis, while feeling that we would be justified in sympathy with Charlotte and to some extent Amerigo, nevertheless is sure that there is no ironical intent toward the Ververs:

> our attitude towards the Ververs isn't meant to be ironical. We are to feel for and with them. We are to watch with intense sympathy Maggie's victorious struggle to break the clandestine relation between her husband and Charlotte, establish the pretence that nothing has occurred, and get Charlotte safely packed off under a life-sentence to America, the penal settlement.[5]

Any number of critics could now be found to oppose this view, but the main objection to make is that Leavis treats one part of the novel as if it were the whole: it may be possible to demonstrate that there are parts of the second book where our sympathies are - successfully or otherwise - invited on Maggie's behalf, but there are many places in the novel where they are enlisted on Charlotte's behalf and where our feelings about the Ververs are manipulated in such a way that we feel for them distaste and suspicion and disapproval. There are, and Leavis is aware of it, many places in the novel where James is extensively ironical about the Ververs. And we read the second book, after all, only after the first, in which James is <u>mainly</u> ironical about the Ververs.[6]

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5 <u>The Great Tradition</u>, p. I85

6 Sallie Sears disagrees with Leavis's judgement for quite different reasons: citing the preface, which may be unfortunate, she talks about the 'perfect balance and formal opposition between the two books of the novel' (p. I84). Essentially she accounts for the novel's complexities by claiming that they are a matter of design, seeing 'Charlotte's grief and terror' as 'very real', where I see them as unsubstantiated.

II

It is part of the novel's considerable ironic strength that the 'case', such as it is, for Amerigo and Charlotte, or at least an important part of the case, is explicitly stated not only near the end of the novel, when they have no longer any remote possibility of a relationship, but by, of all people, Maggie. Maggie is imagining what Charlotte's justification of her relationship might be. It is, no doubt, a good bit of imaginative transference on her part:

'You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in <u>your</u> relation what can there have been, worth speaking of, to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? Why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame - oh, the golden flame! - a mere handful of black ashes?' (p. 521)

This has the advantage of being an argument which strikes a chord in us, based on our stored responses to the first book, in which, indeed, our sense of the relationship between Amerigo and Charlotte has sufficiently borne out that this kind of claim might plausibly be made. And the centre of the argument is 'the wine of consciousness': which is an appeal according not only with the characterisation of Charlotte in the first book, but which has a structural significance too, in the sense that as soon as the point of view passes to Maggie, 'consciousness' is a quality of which we are, in general, less pleasingly aware. We are frequently in the novel reminded that Maggie's consciousness has restrictions. We have been made aware during the relatively early passage at Fawns in chapter nine, as father and daughter sit apart from the company in their secluded garden retreat, that Verver recognizes how his daughter has been described as 'prim' and that on one occasion Maggie has been glad to be compared to a nun: this some four or five pages after the pair, speaking of Charlotte, have agreed that - in Maggie's words - Charlotte is 'great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life' (p. 149), albeit that initially Verver has wanted

to know 'what has she done - in life?'.

Bearing in mind that it is a considerable part of the novel's concern to demonstrate that Maggie's character develops during her crisis, there is certainly, initially, a narrowness, or thinness evident in her consciousness, which James seems to stress even as we share her point of view: or indeed, perhaps especially here:

> There were plenty of singular things they were not enamoured of - flights of brilliancy, of audacity, of originality, that, speaking at least for the dear man and herself, were not at all in their line; but they liked to think they had given their life this unusual extension and this liberal form, which many families, many couples, and still more many pairs of couples, would not have found workable. (p. 303)

There is something spiritually parochial in that 'dear man and herself' and a complacency both in the line of argument and in her reflecting that 'they liked to think' - a satisfaction in a habitual mode of thought which seems to preclude, among a number of other things, change.

What I want to do now is explore the case which Maggie imagines Charlotte making out for herself, and the wider case, for it is wide. For example, as Leavis has pointed out, there is a considerable extent to which the Prince and Charlotte are portrayed as objects to the vision of Adam and sometimes Maggie much as the furniture and the rest are objects to them. This attitude of the Ververs persists, as Leavis says, right to the last farewell. When Leavis points out that James is quite explicit about this, he might well have gone further and said that it is so explicit and frequent that it even begins to lose, quite soon in the novel, its ironic force. After a while one has to accept it as part of (particularly) Verver's character. Nevertheless one doesn't because of that cease to weigh the fact in the balance - quite the contrary.

We must then consider the fact that explicitly, Verver marries Charlotte for Maggie and not primarily for Charlotte herself. Further, we have to consider the way in which father and daughter pursue their rather exclusive relationship beyond their marriages. These things are plain enough in the novel, they are not

matters over which there can be any contention, and they present something of a justification for Charlotte and Amerigo. In fact they could even be seen as presenting a considerable justification. But if one is making out a case for that sort of intended, if not fully executed, ambiguity in the novel, then one must do so not so much on the plane of the balance of abstract causes, justifications and effects, as in the field of our responses throughout our reading of the novel. And while it is true that these considerations are not perceived, not at all, as merely abstract, I doubt if it is on this ground absolutely that one should properly contend, in that it is not for these reasons that primarily we might feel sympathy with Amerigo and Charlotte. There is a more deeply involving source of our imaginative feelings in the matter, than their treatment at the hands of the Ververs, and that is the comparison between the natures, and the relationship, of Charlotte and Amerigo on the one hand, with the natures of the Ververs and their two marriages on the other. There are quantities here which James appears to be placing in deliberate ways for inspection by our moral sense, though, as I have suggested, not with a consistency which extends throughout the whole of the second part of the novel.

III

Charlotte's note is struck, initially, quite apart from the emphasis of her surname,[7] during Amerigo's brief encounter with her at Fanny's before his marriage, where her directness, openness, her lack of any unnecessary formality, her admirability, her incomparability, are established.

She is a considerable physical presence in the first part of the novel compared to Maggie at any stage of the novel. Amerigo with some pleasure inspects her: she is firm and flexible, her

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7 Maggie: 'I've been asking myself if it were quite the right moment, or in any way fair, to ask you if you could stand just now another woman.'
Adam: '..."Stand" one - ?' (The Golden Bowl, p. 147)

appearance a mixture of muse and huntress, and, as Edmund Wilson puts it, 'healthily female'. Gabriel Pearson, discussing the commercial imagery toward the end of the description, comments that 'the fact that James has the Prince immediately seeing her as a filled and clinking, but also empty, silk purse establishes a complicated series of connexions between sex and money'[8], but although one takes the point, Amerigo doesn't see her as 'empty' but as 'well filled with gold pieces' (the 'emptiness' is actually a subordinate part of the metaphor's mechanics), which emphasizes Charlotte's substance and actuality.

It is worth comparing the urgent vitality of the description with the later account of Maggie:

> she stood there before (Adam) with that particular suggestion in her aspect to which even the long habit of their life together had not closed his sense, kept sharp, year after year, by the collation of types and signs, the comparison of fine object with fine object, of one degree of finish, of one form of the exquisite with another - the appearance of some slight, slim draped 'antique' of Vatican or Capitoline halls, late and refined, rare as a note and immortal as a link, set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet, for all the sudden freedom of folds and footsteps forsaken after centuries by their pedestal, keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred, absent eyes, the smoothed, elegant, nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. (pp. I53-I54)

Making whatever allowance we make for the role of the father, the function the description has in its comment on <u>him</u>, the really rather insipid, lifeless quality hinted at could hardly be more different - even from Charlotte's own sculptural qualities, 'the free arms...completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors, in the great time, had loved, and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze'. It is very important to keep the comparison in mind when faced with the difficulty of believing in Charlotte the 'haunted creature' much later on.

In speech, the authorial interpolations, 'Charlotte was easily clear', are themselves significant. She is lucid and self-possessed. As early as this we inevitably draw the comparisons with

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8 '<u>The Golden Bowl</u>', in <u>The Air of Reality</u>, p. 3I6

Kate Croy (though we should beware thinking that because one becomes glib and hard, so does the other).

In the novel's fifth chapter James describes the encounter in the park between Charlotte and Amerigo: the episode occurs after our first exposure to the extended convolute interpretative sessions of the Assinghams, and provides what is very much a breath of fresh air. If one compares the opening statement of the fourth chapter with that of the fifth, the difference is seen to be significantly immense. Colonel Assingham - he who, James delightfully informs us, has eyes like 'little blue flowers plucked that morning', one among many examples of the energy there is to spare in a novel which has its share of longueurs - utters at the opening of the fourth chapter a sentence which stands for much of the Assingham's very existence: 'I don't quite see, my dear, I don't quite see, I'm bound to say, why you take it even at the worst, so ferociously hard. It isn't your fault, after all, is it? I'll be hanged, at any rate, if it's mine.' (p. 69). He implies that it might, for all that the matter has any logic, be anyone's: and there follows what we will soon recognize as a chapter of characteristically tortuous discussion (during which Fanny decides to marry off Charlotte). The next chapter begins with Charlotte's 'well, now I must tell you, for I want to be absolutely honest' (p. 88). This, to the Prince's sensibility is even 'ominous'. James then refers to a 'cleansing breeze', 'freshened' air and a 'wholesome smell of irrigation'. This second view of Charlotte for the reader is worth careful consideration. How 'honest' is she? Hasn't she brought the Prince out on false pretences? Won't she then attempt to persuade him to take a present, in contradiction of her stated intention? There are obvious rejoinders to these objections. What strikes the note of authentic honesty is that she knows Amerigo well enough to know that he needs the Verver millions, and her confession is potentially enough to frighten him off instantly - it is not likely to gain her anything. It is difficult to suspect her moral integrity.

This clear-eyed, honest quality is echoed by her behaviour at Brighton in relation to the whole matter of the marriage to

Verver in general and to the telegram from Amerigo in particular. It might be argued that she ought to have insisted that Verver read: yet she asks him to do so twice, which is not necessarily a debt which she owes to a suitor whose proposal has such a mixture of motives behind it. There is no doubt in her mind as to what would have been lost:

> She had thereby forborne to call his attention to her consciousness that such an exposure would, in all probability, straightway have dished her marriage; that all her future had in fact, for the moment, hung by the single hair of Mr Verver's delicacy (as she supposed they must call it) (p. 222)

The parenthesis is a necessary irony in reference to an episode in which Verver effectively 'collects' Charlotte much as he does the Damascene tiles from Mr Gutermann-Seuss.

Charlotte's individuality and the force of vitality within her are perhaps most splendidly revealed in the passage which occurs on the March afternoon in Portland Place as the Prince wanders about for boredom in the saloon: it follows the scene in which, from the start of the fourteenth chapter, James has established the startling public success of Charlotte as Mrs Verver, and established the renewed relationship between her and Amerigo, most particularly through the anxious deliberations of Mrs Assingham. The great stride in the narrative from the thirteenth to the fourteenth chapter, as from sixth to seventh, is characteristic of the authority with which James moulds his material over large areas of the novel. It is in the coda, as it were, for us, to the public event, that Amerigo sees Charlotte roll up in the 'rickety "growler"'. That Charlotte is still in love with Amerigo has been established with considerable economy during the public passage: 'this was doubtless a large consequence of a fairly familiar cause, a considerable inward stir to spring from the mere vision, striking as that might be, of Amerigo in a crowd' (p. I93). In a chapter which ends with Charlotte and Amerigo 'passionately sealing their pledge' (James's handling of the final paragraph on p.237 has altogether too awkward an experimental quality), we are made to feel some of what Charlotte and her force represents to Amerigo in his lifeless condition. Charlotte, as soon as the butler has disappeared,

gets to the point of the visit with 'the whizz and the red light of a rocket', an unaccustomed reverberation in Portland Place. And her dress itself, and mode of arrival, have an eccentric quaintness in which the Prince finds significance:

> she was yet invested with the odd eloquence - the positive picturesqueness, yes, given all the rest of the matter - of a dull dress and a black Bowdlerised hat that seemed to make a point of insisting on their time of life and their moral intention, the hat's and the frock's own, as well as on the irony of indifference to them practically playing in her so handsome rain-freshened face. (p. 227)

Asking her why she has arrived in this way, she says: 'it's just because of the weather... it's my little idea. It makes me feel as I used to - when I could do as I liked' (p. 228). The truth of this, interestingly, puzzles him only because he can't understand why she tolerates the discomfort of the growler. Her lack of freedom seems to him obvious. And we are invited to compare Charlotte's day with Maggie's. Maggie has taken the Principino to Eaton Square. Charlotte meanwhile has done many things. Amerigo asks where she has been:

> 'Everywhere I could think of - except to see people. I didn't want people - I wanted too much to think. But I've been back at intervals - three times; and then come away again. My cabman must think me crazy - it's very amusing; I shall owe him, when we come to settle, more money than he has ever seen. I've been, my dear.' she went on, 'to the British Museum - which, you know, I always adore. And I've been to the National Gallery, and to a dozen old booksellers, coming across treasures, and I've lunched, on some strange nastiness, at a cookshop in Holborn. I wanted to go to the Tower, but it was too far - my old man urged that; and I would have gone to the Zoo if it hadn't been too wet - which he also begged me to observe. But you wouldn't believe - I did put in St Paul's. (p. 231)

This liveliness is vitalizing and warming amidst the inactivity of the other three: and her account is even broadened so that a sidelight can be turned on Maggie's absorption with her father to the exclusion of other demands - it transpires that Maggie has offered to do something for her father, and taken the carriage, at which Amerigo, interested, asks '<u>your</u> carriage?' (p. 231). Charlotte brushes the matter aside, but it is an important insight into the way in which the father and daughter

behave toward their spouses.

This episode has also made clear a further fact: namely the way in which the position they have reached has developed as a result of the activities, wishes, acts, of others:

> What had happened, in short, was that Charlotte and he had, by a single turn of the wrist of fate - 'led up' to indeed, no doubt, by steps and stages that conscious computation had missed- been placed face to face in a freedom that partook, extraordinarily, of ideal perfection, since the magic web had spun itself without their toil, almost without their touch. (p. 227)

Our comprehension of Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship at, as it were, its peak, is most detailed and complete during the episode at Matcham, and particularly during the morning of the carefully arranged trip to Gloucester. James's treatment of England here has a substantial satirical force: he manages indeed to render rather comical Lady Castledean's passion for the musical Mr Blint and yet simultaneously deal with Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship in a way which, perhaps because of the comparison, separates it and enhances it. The two are felt to have virtually complete possession of the place before their departure, and the Prince's speculations on the English and English life serve further to detach the couple.

The felicity of the relationship is self-evident at Matcham, and needs no further examination at this stage. Should any doubts exist, they lie in our feelings of uncertainty about Amerigo's capacity for anything really as energetic as love, but that is a doubt which applies to all of Amerigo's behaviour - we can say, here, that his feelings are at least relatively strong: a hint (from Fanny) that his feelings for Charlotte are weaker than they appear is followed up, in the novel, only in the sense that it may explain the Prince's reconciliation with Maggie. Whatever we shall take that to be.

After Matcham, the first book concludes with further Assingham deliberations, and when we move to the second part of the novel we see Charlotte again only through Maggie's rather unreliable perception.

Maggie's view of Charlotte, to which we are then exposed, can be approached in two ways, at least. We might argue that James, having given us a charming, vital, honest Charlotte in the first book, now intends us to keep that picture with us right to the end of the novel as part of a sophisticated process of juxtaposition: a juxtaposition of a view of Charlotte which is Amerigo's, authorial and more generally validated in the first part of the novel with a view of Charlotte in the second which is Maggie's. Or we can argue that James actually attempts to alter our sense of Charlotte's good qualities in order to make our view of the Ververs increasingly less ironic. This latter design would of course imply a swerve in the novel's course, and it is toward the latter view, as has been indicated, that I incline.

It is not that the novel cannot accommodate a developed, adverse view of Charlotte: it is that the view of her in the second half just isn't compatible with the presentation in the first, and that is a serious flaw. One or two general points might be made, before considering the specific: for example, how are we to accommodate the notion of the comparatively lifeless Verver - the almost wholly lifeless Verver - weaving his 'magic' as Maggie thinks of it, leading Charlotte round, in the recurrent image, by the neck? Have we not, at Matcham, toward the close of the first half of the novel, had such an impressive demonstration of Charlotte as a planner, a 'fixer', that we find it difficult to believe that Adam's rope is more than she can manage to slip? James seems to arrange for a passivity to afflict Charlotte with much of the same thoroughness with which geriatry has, up until the departure for America, descended on Adam. Again, Charlotte's apparent despair, caused by her ignorance of who knows what about her relationship with Amerigo, is difficult to accept in the form that it is offered:

> It was odd how that certainty again and again determined and coloured her wonderments of detail; the question, for instance, of <u>how</u> Amerigo, in snatched opportunities of conference, put the haunted creature off with false explanations, met her particular challenges and evaded - if that was what he did do! - her particular demands. (p. 454)

Charlotte as a 'haunted creature' 'put off' by Amerigo is a change that, to put it at its simplest, the novel simply hasn't provided any plausible explanation for, particularly if we are to assume that Maggie's view is in fact more or less accurate.

That James's thumb is in the pan is actually all too evident from now on: the 'haunted creature' being 'put off' is weight enough, but now begins a thread of imagery representing Charlotte as a beast springing on Maggie from its cage, a thread which leads to the celebrated pounce on the terrace at Fawns. That Charlotte pounces is at least partly back in character - the pounce in itself is therefore something of an inconsistency within the second half. But that her energy should be represented as affecting Maggie in this relation is a distinct manipulation, too forcibly so, of our responses. The passage has been rightly admired, for there is much in it which is very fine, but the manipulation is at times irritatingly evident amidst the narration. Maggie's vulnerability is over-emphasized: she is too much, and insufficiently rationally the lamb to Charlotte's lion:

> Maggie came on with her heart in her hands; she came on with the definite prevision, throbbing like the tick of a watch, of a doom impossibly sharp and hard, but to which, after looking at it with her eyes open, she had none the less bowed her head. (p. 463)

And:

> Maggie had kept the shawl she had taken out with her, and, clutching it tight in her nervouness, drew it round her as if huddling in it for shelter, covering herself with it for humility. (p. 466)

The whole episode of confrontation and denial is an aesthetic and moral vulgarity for which Charlotte is held to be responsible, portrayed as making inevitable. But this is a too-abrupt re-characterization to be anything other than damaging to the novel, particularly its climax:

> With which she saw soon enough what more was to come. She saw it in Charlotte's face, and felt it make between them, in the air, a chill that completed the coldness of their conscious perjury. 'Will you kiss me on it then?' (p. 469)

The sequel to this scene, where Charlotte is more gently pursued by Maggie, raises the same objections even more emphatically. Not only is Charlotte made to accuse Maggie of trying to ruin her marriage, but she is even made to flounce off with a gloating 'you recognize then that you've failed?', and we can't after all lay <u>this</u> at Maggie's door: this is an authorially validated event, not an interpretation. Certainly it all gives Maggie a splendid moral elevation - 'yes, she had done all' - but it is very expensively purchased. This manipulation is at times really almost crude, as though James, determined to swing the novel in the way he has decided to take it, is going to spare no effort. Charlotte is referred to as Amerigo's 'accomplice' (p. 489) in a context which has again robbed her of independence and dignity, and several pages later we are told, in relation to Charlotte's perception that she and Adam share a taste for beautiful objects, that Maggie 'had in due course seen her begin to "work" this unfortunately natural source of sympathy for all it was worth' (p. 493): this is surely astonishing. Were, as has been suggested, this intended to be Maggie's patently warped view of things which we are examining, then we might be able to accommodate it; but as we have seen, this kind of perception appears to be authorially supported. And this is not the Charlotte who asked Adam to read Amerigo's telegram. And if it is a different Charlotte, the novelist ought to have told us. She ought to have been altered.

A little further on Maggie muses at 'the mystery by which a creature who could be in some connexions so earnestly right could be in others so perversely wrong' (p. 495): by which time, we gather, Charlotte's voice has become 'high and clear and a little hard'.

And then, in order to consolidate the sense we are now supposed to have - and which many critics apparently do have - of Maggie's moral worth, we are presented with the image of Charlotte as a soul in torment, giving visitors a guide to the treasures in a high voice which quavers in its aim for effects and sounds to Maggie 'like the shriek of a soul in pain' which

of course brings the tears to Maggie's eyes. Maggie's sympathy - 'can't she be stopped? Hasn't she done it enough?' - is simply an irritation, so little does James establish that the object of sympathy could have got into the position of needing it. It is very surprising that this scene is so frequently accepted at face value.

Charlotte's return to self-possession at the end of the novel is of merely formal interest.

IV

Amerigo's special quality is passivity, which he has, even by the standards of the Jamesian male, to a very large degree. Indeed it is Charlotte's capacity as an organiser of life which is such an important feature of her attractiveness to him, as is made explicit in the passage at Matcham:

> They had these identities of impulse - they had had them repeatedly before; and if such unarranged but unerring encounters gave the measure of the degree in which people were, in the common phrase, meant for each other, no union in the world had ever been more sweetened with rightness. What in fact most often happened was that her rightness went, as who should say, even further than his own; they were conscious of the same necessity at the same moment, only it was she, as a general thing, who most clearly saw her way to it. Something in her long look at him now out of the old grey window, something in the very poise of her hat, the colour of her necktie, the prolonged stillness of her smile, touched into sudden light for him all the wealth of the fact that he could count on her. He had his hand there, to pluck it, on the open bloom of the day; but what did the bright minute mean but that her answering hand was already intelligently out? So, therefore, while the minute lasted, it passed between them that their cup was full; which cup their very eyes, holding it fast, carried and steadied and began, as they tasted it, to praise. (p. 267)

No other relationship in the novel is seen to offer anything even approaching the happiness and vitality of this one, just as no other character is given Charlotte's quality of life. It is, of course, Charlotte who has organized matters toward a visit to Gloucester, while Amerigo has only thought of it. This passive quality is identical with Adam Verver's notion that the Prince has no unpleasant 'angles' - he makes no difficulties.

The problem is that Amerigo makes none with either Maggie or Charlotte. That he characteristically wouldn't is predictable from the first page of the novel:

> The young man's movements, however, betrayed no consistency of attention - not even, for that matter, when one of his arrests had proceeded from possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him on the pavement, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols held at perverse angles in waiting victorias. (p.29)

The Prince may be passive, but he is also restless, even as near his wedding-day as this (or because of it). His interest in and powers over women are well-established - Maggie has seen him reduce other women to a 'passive pulp', and there is an oblique reference to 'the very pretty, the typically Irish Miss Maddocks' and to the effect that 'the Miss Maddocks of life (had) been assured of their importance for him'.

The lack of 'consistency of attention' is also characteristic: Amerigo's attention kindles only occasionally, and then often at odd, whimsical moments of perception. He is typified by a strange, restless inactivity, a sort of pacing, heavily smoking resignation. He is resigned because of his need to ally himself with the Verver millions, yet we feel that his relationship to those he is with - except, for a time, Charlotte - is one characterized by an inevitable detachment. It is not just that the Prince is Italian; there is also a sense that he is an anachronism, that there is no obvious relationship that he can have with the contemporary, and certainly the contemporary English, world.

At Matcham he is the victim of a kind of alienation.He feels that he is variously defined only as an 'outsider, a foreigner, and even as a mere representative husband and son-in-law' and that he is 'irrelevant to the working of affairs' (pp. 264-265). He feels that his fellow guests are 'inferior people' yet is resigned to being 'made light of'. However, as his view of the English is largely that they are 'droll', this scarcely worries him. James's satirical force in this episode, directed at certain elements within upper-class English society, works partly

by juxtaposing the music hall comicality of Lady Castledean's affair with Mr Blint with the Prince's rather bored reflections on English imperfections:

> But it was at the same time precisely why even much initiation left one, at given moments, so puzzled as to the element of staleness, of innocence in the guilt and of guilt in the innocence. There were other marble terraces, sweeping more purple prospects, on which he would have known what to think, and would have enjoyed thereby at least the small intellectual fillip of a discerned relation between a given appearance and a taken meaning. The inquiring mind, in these present conditions, might, it was true, be more sharply challenged; but the result of its attention and its ingenuity, it had unluckily learned to know, was too often to be confronted with a mere dead wall, a lapse of logic, a confirmed bewilderment. (p. 266)

This is, for all that the Prince has his simplicities to the point of childishness, the reflection of a highly bred Roman with a useful perspective on his present country: Dorothea Krook talks about 'catching one's breath a little at the sheer quantity of illumination contained in the simple phrases' and points out the relation of Amerigo's thoughts here to thematic concerns elsewhere in James's work.[9]

Just as Amerigo's character has its odd mixture of brooding anxiety and passivity, the contrast between the adult and the child in his nature is marked; and elsewhere we are struck by his naivety, his self-indulgence and even his vulnerability. The self-indulgence is largely by way of an apparent amorality; which is self-confessed, albeit that the confession has been apparently ironical. Fanny has asked him what sense he may not possess. And he answers 'the moral, dear Mrs Assingham' (p.48), going on draw an elaborate metaphorical comparison between 'old Roman' and modern Anglo-American morality.

In fact, Amerigo does not have a great deal of active moral significance in the novel. He is, as it were, there very much as a cause and less as an effect, and as a cause generally understood rather than exemplified, although his sexuality is clearly emphasized (if not as much as some critics would appear to suggest). He is, however, there as an effect, in a sense, of the Ververs. And for all his passivity and amorality, we are

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9 The Ordeal of Consciousness, pp. 234 - 235

inclined to feel sympathetic toward him: he is exempt from condemnation, if we accept the basis of his character, and it is as 'finished', quite extraordinarily 'produced' (in the celebrated metaphors) that he is presented. More to the point, he is on occasion portrayed as rather unhappy, and with cause. Just as Charlotte has brightened up his day at Portland Place when she arrives in the 'growler', his estrangement from her causes him considerable anxiety, and the quality of his life seems unnecessarily thin. The scene in which Maggie goes to tell him that her father and stepmother are arriving for tea, presents him living in a way which gives us cause to think back to that terrible scene in the library in The Portrait of a Lady. The echo here is only that, but it is substantially affecting:

> The Prince was in his 'own' room, where he often sat now alone; half a dozen open newspapers, the 'Figaro' notably, as well as the 'Times', were scattered about him; but, with a cigar in his teeth and a visible cloud on his brow, he appeared actually to be engaged in walking to and fro... She knew herself suddenly, almost strangely, glad to be coming to him, at this hour, with nothing more abstract than a telegram; but even after she had steeped into his prison under her pretext, while her eyes took in his face and then embraced the four walls that enclosed his restlessness, she recognized the virtual identity of his condition with that aspect of Charlotte's situation for which, early in the summer and in all the amplitude of a great residence, she had found, with so little seeking, the similitude of the locked cage. He struck her as caged, the man who couldn't now without an instant effect on her sensibility give an instinctive push to the door she had not completely closed behind her. He had been turning twenty ways, for impatiences all his own, and when she was once in with him it was yet again as if she had come to him in his more than monastic cell to offer him light or food. (p. 526)

It is hard indeed not to think of the Prince as an exotic animal bagged for a zoo in which he can only pace and pine. It is difficult not to feel too that James's so overt references to the Prince as a 'find', a 'piece', a collector's item, is meant, with ironical implications for our view of the Ververs, to make such a view of the Prince the inevitable one. He is dependent and dispossessed - his 'own'

room it is not, for he is mortgaged to the Ververs. The room is at once prison, monastery, and zoo to its inhabitant deprived of freedom, feminine contact and his natural habitat. Maggie embraces not Amerigo, but the four walls, and the pacing is like a beast's in the pathological stage of boredom.

The relationship between daughter and father has to a great extent excluded Amerigo, which of course has implications for our view of him, of them, of his relationship with Charlotte. His sense of exclusion is conscious and strong: during the scene at Portland Place with Charlotte, his resentment is revealed as substantial: 'very vehemently, he brought out: "How can I not feel more than anything else how they adore together my boy?"'(p. 233). And indeed the Principino, it is evident, has been hijacked by Adam long before as another item in the collection.

The Prince's final apparent reconciliation with Maggie is undermined by the apparent incompatibility of the different directions in which James has been taking us, and which are both evident in the novel's last few pages. There is nothing ambiguous or apparently ironical in the final few sentences:

> He tried, too clearly, to please her - to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: '"See"? I see nothing but <u>you</u>.' And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast. (p. 547)

Yet, as Leavis points out, the scene preceding this has shown Verver and his daughter viewing Charlotte and Amerigo in a very specific way: the father and daughter see 'the two noble persons' in the 'general harmony' of all the other 'pieces' and their presence constitutes proof of 'a rare power of purchase': 'you've got some good things', says Adam, and 'who shall say where his thought stopped?' (p.541). This might be thought to give Maggie's 'pity and dread' a new twist, a grim ironical force, though one can scarcely feel that James intended it.

V

That Adam is not presented favourably in moral or in any other terms is indisputable, but it seems likely that Adam is James's least successful character in the novel, at every stage of his portrayal, and that we have to concede that he represents a weakness. The trouble is that although James's intention toward Adam from the outset has seemed ironical, he reduces Verver, as the novel proceeds, to implausible ineffectuality. At the beginning of the seventh chapter, however, where Verver makes his first appearance in the novel, there may be the suggestion of a Verver who never really develops beyond the suggestion, but quickly becomes something else. Certainly, there is a tendency in the physical description of Fawns, to imply a certain kind of characterization:

> Adam Verver at Fawns, that autumn Sunday, might have been observed to open the door of the billiard-room with a certain freedom - might have been observed, that is, had there been a spectator in the field. The justification of the push he had applied, however, and of the push, equally sharp, that, to shut himself in, he again applied - the ground of this energy was precisely that he might here, however briefly, find himself alone, alone with the handful of letter, newspapers and other unopened missives, to which, during and since breakfast, he had lacked opportunity to give an eye. The vast, square, clean apartment was empty, and its large clear windows looked out into spaces of terrace and garden, of park and woodland and shining artificial lake, of richly condensed horizon, all dark blue upland and church-towered village and strong cloud-shadow, which were, together, a thing to create the sense, with everyone else at church, of one's having the world to one's self. (p. III)

Sharpness, precision, energy and strength are what it might have taken such a man to get to his position in life and 'vast, square, clean' and 'shining' and 'artificial' may suggest something of the nature of his enterprises and his project at American City. The 'large clear' windows say something about his perception, and just as his life appears to have been 'richly condensed' (as are the results of his collector's skill), he has a considerable part of the world 'to himself'. Yet the apartment is 'empty' and the windows look out to 'spaces', just as Maggie is now married and Verver left

to the prowling Mrs Rance. His having emerged 'through tortuous corridors' very much in 'quiet flight' suggests a literal twist in the imagery. All this might suggest a kind of vast serenity temporarily a little blighted, yet very quickly James starts to treat Verver with an irony which is less ambiguous than anything else in the novel. This has its effect on two rather different levels, one of brief physical and spiritual description, and another of subtler approach in which Verver's character is treated to more extended analysis. In this initial scene at Fawns, for example, we learn that he is a 'musing, reconsidering little man'. James's fondness for the disparaging possibilities of the adjective 'little' has been noted previously. He applies it to Adam, and to various aspects of Adam, with some frequency from now on. Indeed he even, late in the novel, seems to make an attempt, as we shall see, to render compatible the two apparently quite incongruous tendencies in his characterization here, by using the adjective again in a manner designed to rob it of any actual diminishing effect. But the inconsistency isn't in the irony - that is fairly constant. It is rather in the notion, on the one hand, of the world-conquering Adam, and on the other, of the helpless aged parent, a view which, as I have stressed, is not only Maggie's.

But to that inconsistency we may return. Meanwhile it is worth noting that the direction James's approach takes is unmistakable when it comes to placing Adam beyond our sympathy. He is a 'small, spare, slightly stale person', balding and with a 'neat, colourless face' provided with the 'merely indispensable features'. He has a 'concave little stomach' and wears the same costume every day (though his staleness owes nothing to this: we are clear that he has an identical new outfit every day). Even his coat is 'little' (pp. I23, I4I, I42).[IO]

To balance this description, fortunately, there is a

IO There is perhaps in James's derision here a pride, ironical or not, in his own vastness, and in his own fondness for sartorial inventiveness.

reference to Verver's eyes as 'youthfully, almost strangely beautiful', the physical feature which, presumably, corresponds to his collector's taste: as was suggested in connection with the opening description of Fawns, his features are clear and his appearance likened to an empty room with 'ample and uncurtained windows' (here the room, actually, is 'small').

The physical descriptions of Verver are chiefly disparaging. But the key to his moral character is found in the relatively lengthy description in the seventh chapter of Verver's psychological basis.

There are too many passages in the novel, from beginning to end, in which Verver's confusion of physical objects and people is made explicit for it to be necessary to discuss this aspect of his character. It is perfectly clear that it is on this basis that he has accepted Amerigo and Charlotte, and as was demonstrated earlier, even his vision of Maggie has been in terms of sculptural, rather than human, detail. He even would like to take the little old church on his Fawns property back to America and exhibit it in a glass case. It is an apt metaphor for the terrible fate that awaits Charlotte.

But there are other aspects of Verver's moral character which have to be clarified. If 'to rifle the Golden Isles' has been 'the business of his future', he has carried it on with success. His view of himself as a result implies a towering estimation: 'he was equal, somehow, with the great seers, the invokers and encouragers of beauty - and he didn't after all perhaps dangle so far below the great producers and creators' (p. 122). In his self-estimation as art patron he places himself well above Julius II and Leo X: it is a kind of maniacal variation on the theme of Mr Wentworth's 'we are all princes here' in The Europeans.[II] But James goes quite far along with this view, for he does justice to the true power of American money: yet he never after this in the novel really does anything with the early characterization - to the tiny extent that Verver's character unfolds any further, it does so along quite other lines.

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Nevertheless, the attribution of such traits contains minor implications for our view - for example - of Charlotte's behaviour later.

There is, however, also in this early account a matter with profound relevance for our judgement of Charlotte's behaviour, as well as for other judgements we may make. It concerns Verver's recollections of the character of his first wife and of her 'suitability' for his development since her death. This really is an extraordinary passage and it is the one really reverberating moral comment on Adam Verver which the novel contains:

> he even sometimes wondered what would have become of his intelligence, in the sphere in which it was to learn more and more exclusively to play, if his wife's influence upon it had not been, in the strange scheme of things, so promptly removed. Would she have led him altogether, attached as he was to her, into the wilderness of mere mistakes? Would she have prevented him from ever scaling his vertiginous Peak? - or would she, otherwise, have been able to accompany him to that eminence, where he might have pointed out to her, as Cortez to <u>his</u> companions, the revelation vouchsafed? No companion of Cortez had presumably been a real lady: Mr Verver allowed that historic fact to determine his inference. (p. I23)

We notice how that 'presumably' is merely a momentary qualification. Nine words later it is a 'historic fact'. Verver's experience suggests a strong likelihood that indeed no lady <u>could</u> have accompanied Cortez on his scaling of the Peak. There has indeed been a sense earlier in the same paragraph that there are ways in which the first Mrs Verver wasn't a real lady, depending on what that quantity is. Verver appears to know what a 'real lady' is, as befits a connoisseur. He certainly thinks that Charlotte is one, which may be a little ironical if we can agree that there may be a sense in which she isn't. It would not be inappropriate if a man who insisted on finding much the same perfection and identifiability in human beings as he gets in Damascene tiles were to find his assumptions wholly undermined. However that may be, our assumption here will probably be that the first Mrs Verver probably was a lady.

But if she was not, therefore, an ideal companion for the ascent - which says something important about Adam's scruples

while ascending - is a real lady an ideal companion for the summit? Where does that leave Charlotte? We may say that if Charlotte does not behave like Adam's conception of a 'real lady', then he can hardly complain. And if she is a 'real lady', perhaps that is more than he deserves: this is the background to our later judgement of Charlotte.

The other matter important to deal with in relation to Adam is the disparity of the two characterizations which occur in the novel. One might choose one or two apparently incompatible examples, and I shall allow two to suffice. We have already seen Adam compare himself to Cortez, and a pair of popes. His relationship to the world in general is described by yet another mighty claim:

> (His eyes) showed him where he had come out; quite at the top of his hill of difficulty, the tall sharp spiral round which he had begun to wind his ascent at the age of twenty, and the apex of which was a platform looking down, if one would, on the kingdoms of the earth and with standing-room but for half a dozen others. (p. II5)

It is very difficult indeed to regard this Verver, Cortez ascended, and the one in the next example, as the same person:

> (Maggie) didn't go into the detail of what sacrificing him would mean - she didn't need to; so distinct was it, in one of her restless lights, that there he was awaiting her, that she should find him walking up and down the drawing-room in the warm, fragrant air to which the open windows and the abundant flowers contributed; slowly and vaguely moving there and looking very slight and young and, superficially, manageable, almost as much like her child, putting it a little freely, as like her parent; with the appearance about him, above all, of having perhaps arrived just on purpose to <u>say</u> it to her, himself, in so many words: 'Sacrifice me, my own love; do sacrifice me, do sacrifice me!' Should she want to, should she insist on it, she might verily hear him bleating it at her, all conscious and all accommodating, like some precious, spotless, exceptionally intelligent lamb. (pp. 355-356)

That this is entirely Maggie's distorted view of her father is an explanation which has already been rejected. (Whether it is or it isn't, it is hard to know what such slack writing could possibly do other than harm the novel.) It is more that James manipulates Adam's character in order to serve whichever of two different purposes is to hand, with inevitable results. When

he wishes to portray Adam as enormously vulnerable in order virtually to sanctify Maggie's behaviour, that is how he appears. When he wants us to realise how Charlotte is doomed at the end of the novel, fated to be shipped back with the other exhibits to American City, then Adam's Cortez-like qualities suddenly and oddly reassert themselves:

> It had the effect, for (Maggie), of a reminder - a reminder of all he was, of all he had done, of all, above and beyond his being her perfect little father, she might take him as representing, taking him as having, quite eminently, in the eyes of two hemispheres, been capable of, and as therefore wishing, not - was it? - illegitimately, to call her attention to... He positively, under the impression, seemed to loom larger than life for her (p. 484)

Perhaps it is chiefly the reader who is being given the reminder. Here, Adam is 'little' and 'larger than life' simultaneously, as though to deny that the word 'little' has ever been used disparagingly. Virtually none of the qualities ascribed to him here have ever at any point in the novel been evident to the reader and if James wishes to convince us that Adam would be able to lead Charlotte round with a rope (and had James wished to justify such an act!) then he should prove it is conceivable. He doesn't, and lay it on though he does in the description, the detail cannot negate the impressions we have received until now, not even Maggie's 'great and deep and high little man'.

VI

Maggie has already been discussed quite considerably: we shall concentrate now on the idea of her moral development, because this is an important aspect of the novel. Charlotte and Amerigo's relationship acts as a catalyst to cause Maggie to change.

This adds another moral dimension to the book. Not only is it that a case can be made out for Amerigo and Charlotte on the grounds already outlined: we may also reflect that Maggie's character develops as a result of Charlotte's reappearance in her life, something which may complicate our view of the relationships which the novel portrays.

The notion that Maggie will develop under the crisis is first essayed by Fanny Assingham in the last chapter of the novel's first half. It emerges from the strange form of dialectics which the Assinghams practise, and is the product of their observation (really Fanny's, of course) that Maggie is beginning to miss the Prince's full presence. Fanny has begun by observing that Maggie is beginning to doubt, for the first time, 'of her wonderful little judgement of her wonderful little world'. The tone is in accord with the ironical effect of what we have seen of some of Maggie's judgement elsewhere. Fanny continues:

> 'Now, however, she has begun to live. And the way it comes to me, the way it comes to me - ' But again she projected her vision.
>
> 'The way it comes to you can scarcely be that she'll like it!'
>
> 'The way it comes to me is that she <u>will</u> live. The way it comes to me is that she'll triumph.' (p. 285)

This is substantially what happens, in fact. Fanny's idea is that Maggie's consciousness has been unsealed, particularly to what Fanny calls 'wrong things'. In this case 'Evil - with a very big E: for the first time in her life'. (There is presumably no suggestion in the novel of evil in the strong sense discussed above in the first chapter: the use of the term here is a result of Fanny's perception of the seriousness of the matter.) That Fanny, however, is not all that worried about its final effects is clear from her next statement: it will be enough to 'give (Maggie) a shaking' (p. 286). The idea is in effect that Maggie will be shocked out of complacency and absorption in her narrower concerns. Matters will have to be disagreeable 'to make her decide to live'.

To 'live', with whatever increase may be implied in that as to the multiplication of complexities and ambiguities and as to the manipulation of her habitat to enable her fuller participation, is what we see Maggie fairly quickly beginning to do. Nothing could emphasize it more than the Matcham party's dinner at Portland Place. There is a metaphorical precision about the event which is splendid: the whole key to Charlotte and Amerigo's pleasure at Matcham had been Maggie's absence and now

Maggie is in a most emphatic way seizing a whole area of new experience with an eagerness which wants to go back to an occasion she has missed and recreate it, do it over again so she can be a part of it. It is an awesome demonstration of the power of her money. She does something that all human beings would like to do at various times in their lives, and re-enacts events in order to give them an ideal shape. The improvement is there for Maggie everywhere in this party. Importantly, of course, she is present this time. But much more than that, her immersion in the affair, her centrality, is immense. She reduces even Lady Castledean to 'an unprecedented state of passivity'. She is very much the daughter of the father James never got round to portraying, a true Verver of a sort which Adam doesn't manage to be: she contemplates 'the cornered six, whom it glimmered before her that she might still live to drive about like a flock of sheep' (p.334).

Specifically, Maggie is now usurping Charlotte as the glittering social focus: she is becoming increasingly <u>like</u> Charlotte in her effect. We perceive this as a positive development.

Even Fanny has redesigned herself for the occasion: dowdy and peripheral in the hot-house air of Matcham, she is redefined by her position of importance at Portland Place, and now confidently makes her presence count, resplendent in 'new orange-coloured velvet with multiplied turquoises'. Maggie's re-enactment of the first occasion includes the design of redefining Fanny: 'Maggie was not indifferent to her own opportunity to redress the balance - which seemed, for the hour, part of a general rectification' (p. 347).

None of this is the mere assumption of a persona: James handles her development splendidly, the development of her capacity to live; her moral development in the specific arena of her attitude to Amerigo is, as has been established, ambiguous.

That she continues to change, that she is also fully conscious of it, is clear:

'I put (Amerigo) in possession of the difference; the difference

made, about me, by the fact that I hadn't been, after all - though with a wonderful chance, I admitted, helping me - too stupid to have arrived at knowledge. He had to see that I'm changed for him - quite changed from the idea of me that he had so long been going on with. (p. 445)

And the development is rapid, such as that her 'extensions of view' might well, she reflects, have 'stupefied' her.

The extension of Maggie's negative capability is also demonstrated by the sudden wrench, from the welter of introspective musings, of a clear, stark, recognition: 'meanwhile the facts of the situation were upright for her round the green cloth and the silver flambeaux; the fact of her father's wife's lover facing his mistress' (pp. 455-456). This is like the shock of Fleda's 'I'll go back' in The Spoils of Poynton. The winning of a clear view of circumstances, a facing up to moral fact - this is the gain. The crux, if there is one, of her journey into new experiences, comes in the late passage at Fawns: here she sees 'evil seated, all at its ease, where she had only dreamed of good', yet, having looked at 'terror and disgust', knows that she must 'put away the bitter-sweet of their freshness'. To feel outraged would be to give the others up and 'that...was not to be thought of' (p. 459). The outcome of her argument is morally very mature, though we may speculate as to the extent to which she manages not to give them up. The moral courage which Maggie exemplifies in her confrontation, a little later, with Charlotte, her sense that she is 'in tune with the right', nevertheless can hardly serve the ends of all four of them. If the 'right' is to indulge in 'this extraordinary form of her humbugging', then it is 'right' mainly because it conforms to the pattern, the pattern of Amerigo's humbugging and Adam's ignorance. It rather isolates Charlotte.

That whatever development that Maggie undergoes is not only because of, but also at the expense of Charlotte, is made quite explicit in Maggie's comment to Amerigo near the end: 'how can we not always think of her? It's as if her unhappiness had been necessary to us' (p. 532).

VII

The Assinghams produce a quantity of moral comment; such as: Fanny's 'what is morality but high intelligence?' - apparently a consistent view with her as Maggie observes later in the novel that Fanny 'only thinks people are sometimes fools; she doesn't seem to think so much about them being wrong'. Yet for all that one can identify ideas belonging to Fanny, the Assingham's presence in the novel is really out of proportion to their structural importance, and it is difficult to concede them much thematic importance. The reader may often share the Colonel's scepticism about Fanny's bouts of analysis, acute as her observations sometimes are. The Assinghams don't emerge to the extent they ought as important in themselves in a novel in which they are so prominent. There are several signs of James's difficulty with them. For example, Fanny's idea above isn't really used anywhere in the novel - it might be applied to the complex relationships of the central four, but only laboriously and unconvincingly. In the context it has the ring merely of a pseudo-epigram.

There are times when Fanny Assingham is wheeled on by James rather dutifully: and if she should behave rather eccentrically under the circumstances, should she for example pick up people's ornaments and smash them to pieces on their floors, who can blame her. One feels that James should either have used her less, restricting her to the important narrative and interpretative functions which she executes, or have developed her with some consistency as a fifth major character. As it is, the Assinghams are responsible for some taxing <u>longueurs</u>, and for the occasional absurdity:

> (Adam) became aware himself, for that matter, during the minute Maggie stood there before speaking; and with the sense, moreover, of what he saw her see, he had the sense of what she saw <u>him</u>. This last, it may be added, would have been his intensest perception had there not, the next instant, been more for him in Fanny Assingham. Her face couldn't keep it from him; she had seen, on top of everything, in her quick way, what they both were seeing. (p. I3I)

This is much too near hilarious self-parody for comfort, and

since many of Fanny's speculations are misguided, even her acuteness here seems rather pointless. Well may James qualify this as he can: 'so much mute communication was doubtless... marvellous'.

Where the Assinghams are useful is chiefly in the way that they further the narrative and enrich the mix of moral speculation upon the behaviour of the other four. Their deliberations result, through shadings and accretions and steps and discoveries in the establishing of some fairly complex character development, as in, for example, the sketching out of the beginnings of change in Maggie's personality, which enables us the more rapidly to assimilate the alterations. Not only of course do they introduce thematic and structural developments: they also help to consolidate our response to what have been, in the main thread of the narrative, some rapid movements.

It seems unlikely that James could have handled such complex moral developments in any other way: remove from the novel the Assinghams' extended moral seminars, and much else would become incomprehensible. But extend the seminars less and the novel might have been even more enjoyable. The trouble with them is, precisely, that they are detachable: they are insufficiently integrated.

At times one has a glimpse of how the Assinghams might have represented a really much more substantial contribution to the novel's structure, as when, after the revelation of the public Charlotte, they return to Cadogan Place in their brougham and Fanny sits on thoughtfully as the Colonel opens up the house:

> It made her so helpless that, as the time passed without her alighting, the Colonel came back and fairly drew her forth; after which, on the pavement, under the street-lamp, their very silence might have been the mark of something grave - their silence eked out for her by his giving her his arm and their then crawling up their steps quite mildly and unitedly together, like some old Darby and Joan who have had a disappointment. (p. 220)

Of course there is a rather spurious quality about Fanny's

responsibility for the relationships over which she worries, a sense for the reader that her life lies entirely in nurturing her anxieties and cultivating the gardens of others - a sad life. But there is a positive quality in the marriage, a sense of the mutual dependence (one observes all the personal and possessive pronouns in the extract above) of Fanny and the Colonel which has at least a peripheral significance in our consideration of the other relationships. Their marriage has flaws, but it has a battered dignity and human warmth, particularly evident on the return from Matcham when, though there is no reference to it, we know that she is recovering from an unpleasant experience, and wonder how much it has to do with her tears in the drawing-room:

> Yet the effect of this small crisis, oddly enough, was not to close their colloquy, with the natural result of sending them to bed: what was between them had opened out further, had somehow, through the sharp show of her feeling, taken a positive stride, had entered, as it were, without more words, the region of the understood, shutting the door after it and bringing them so still more nearly face to face. They remained for some minutes looking at it through the dim window which opened upon the world of human trouble in general and which let the vague light play here and there upon gilt and crystal and colour, the florid features, looming dimly, of Fanny's drawing-room. (p. 282)

What unsatisfactoriness one may feel here is a result of the way that the whole episode is then relentlessly related straight to the affairs of Charlotte and Amerigo, when in fact the emotion seems to spring from aspects of the Assingham's own situation, and when genuine integration would be better furthered by using that fact.

It should be said, however, that the Assinghams nevertheless even in these scenes extend the novel's boundaries very usefully, not least in the sense that they represent a contrast against which the extreme privilege of the other more central characters may be understood - what would, of course, have to be regarded as a Jamesian 'contrast'.

As to the image of the golden bowl itself, on which there has been so much comment, it is as well to allow it as full a range

of suggestibility as possible. In a general way, acceptance of flaws may be equated with a desirable sort of negative capability. One may apply the notion in a number of different ways to the novel: to two flawed marriages, or even three, or at one stage to the relationship between Charlotte and Amerigo. In the same way, the refusal to accept, or the inability to detect, flaws, is significant at a number of stages, just as one can also apply the symbolism to individual characters, such as the Prince, who (of course) Verver addresses as 'a pure and perfect crystal'. Perhaps the main import of the symbolism for our view of the Ververs must be ironical, in the sense that those who collect people as they do objects (and Adam's passion is for 'perfection at any price') will have to be prepared to face up to the differences between the two commodities, or the fact that one isn't. Fanny, after all, is described as 'crystalline' (p.29I) at a point where her plausibility is straining itself to the full.

There are probably two aspects of the bowl's symbolic value which need consideration here. The finding of the bowl by Maggie takes place in very significant circumstances, coming as it does after her inquiry into, or rather her consolidation of her respect for, her husband's ancestry, an analysis of the quality of the pedigree. Her reaction to the discovery she subsequently makes about Amerigo and Charlotte is interesting, in that her manner of dress as she summons Fanny over has the effect that she looks, 'for the first time in her life, rather "bedizened"' (p. 403). She is overdressed, which Fanny sees as a sign of her wanting to cling to 'order and symmetry'. And as the Prince's ancestry was examined on these two previous occasions, with Mr Crichton, now the presence of Maggie's 'New England grandmothers' in her blood seems aptly mentioned. They have been 'dusting and polishing' ancestors, just as now Maggie tries to assert a failing sense of order in a situation whose implications she wishes to reject. As an embodiment of a crucial stage in Maggie's moral development, the scene is excellent.

But the bowl is first examined by Charlotte and Amerigo. What is most interesting is the way in which the discussion develops as to whether or not there is a crack. Nobody in the novel, it is worth remembering, ever sees the crack: they guess there is one, or not, as the case may be, and with whatever significance for the reader's view.

Charlotte can admire the bowl while accepting that it is flawed, Amerigo assumes that it must be flawed (which makes it exquisite but dangerous) and Maggie doesn't see the flaw at all. In this relation, we can see it as a symbol of the relationship between Charlotte and Amerigo - the shopkeeper warns that should anyone wish to smash it, it will smash. Charlotte doesn't have the price of the bowl - but she marries Verver. Such are the moral realities of the illicit relationship, and Amerigo's response absolutely in line with his amorality.

One can no more take sides in the novel than in most Jamesian works. It is not ultimately a question of 'preferring' Charlotte to Maggie, any more than of 'preferring' Kate to Milly. It is necessary, though, to stress that the novel is sufficiently ambiguous for us to take from it the sense that there are ways in which the relationship between Charlotte and Amerigo is presented as just as morally justifiable as, or more so than, their marriages, and that ideas of 'life' are again central to the judgement: Charlotte is 'great in life', while Adam puts 'into his one little glass everything he raised to his lips'. If the apparent harmony in the other relationship strikes us as implausible, we shall be left with an ending similar to many others. Charlotte and Amerigo, in whose relationship lay the greatest possibilities for happiness, are permanently apart.

Naomi Lebowitz remarks that the book is 'essentially the purest novel of relationship in the James canon' (p. I3I) and justly observes that 'the means of living, the furniture of existence,

are more than ever simplified'.[12] She goes too far in claiming that it is freed from 'fixed social and historical attachments and concerns', however: 'the serious moral substance of human relationship' in the novel, for example, is inseparable from considerations of material wealth, whose meaning in the novel has precise social modulations. Culturally, the Prince's 'Italianicity' is in the novel important, as we have seen.

But there is little doubt that she is right in her implication that 'felt life' in the novel to a great extent proceeds from the experience of relationship.[13] Other forms of life, human, sensuous, cultural, can be found in the other three late novels I am discussing. It can be found in The Golden Bowl, too, but the emphasis, unquestionably, is on human relationship.

Critics have remarked, over the years, the similarity of Kate Croy and Charlotte. In keeping with my remarks above on the novel I should wish to refine that notion to one of similarity between Kate and what might be called the first Charlotte, of the two present in the novel. Both these characters, 'healthily female', embody, with relative emphasis on their sexuality, a source of life available - if not for long - to a male character of considerable passivity. What will happen to Kate we don't know - we hope the Condrips aren't in wait. No doubt she is too lively for that. Charlotte, with the greatest (half-intended?) irony in the world gets Adam. We have seen how in The Wings of the Dove the ache of unfulfilment is largely, from the reader's position, Merton's. In The Golden Bowl it is, arguably, also chiefly Amerigo's - Charlotte's feelings being reported more or less unreliably by Maggie. Neither man, each the victim of his passivity, gets the woman who radiates so much of each novel's energy, behaves, like Charlotte, with 'the whizz and the red light of a rocket'. To the Prince - caged, in the novel, more than once - Charlotte seems a natural source of denied freedom, a channel to a life of greater possibility. She brings a vital presence to the occasionally Osmond-like emptiness of his life. She embodies, but in an only briefly attainable form for the man in

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I2 the powerful effect of the reporting of Charlotte's socially-detailed trip in the growler results from this: it has the effect of being a window onto life

I3 Ms Lebowitz has a rewarding chapter on the subject of 'felt life', p. 21

the novel who can release the effect of these things in her, force of personality - important to the passive male - creativity of mind, a suggestion of how to live freely, sexuality quite distinct from Maggie's initially vapid spirituality. As in The Wings of the Dove, moral arguments seem to work against the establishment and consolidation of a permanent relationship. What we feel about the validity of the moral arguments in The Golden Bowl will depend on our reading of the novel's development: I have been arguing, essentially, that we are at liberty to see the 'right' match as Charlotte's and Amerigo's, and the impossibility of that as a negative feature, the main cause of the novel's varied effects on us.

Fascinatingly, as Maggie becomes more Charlotte-like, she becomes apparently more worthy of our approbation. Being Charlotte-like is what Fanny Assingham has meant when she predicts that Maggie will 'live'. Maggie (one thinks of The Sacred Fount) rises in vitality as Charlotte sinks; indeed she points this out in so many words herself. James, having had to kill off the Charlotte-like qualities of Charlotte, resurrects them in Maggie: Maggie, as we have seen, even replays history in order to perform it in a Charlotte-like way, with Charlotte-like experiences. Therefore, in one reading of the novel - though my objections to it would be obvious - the Prince eventually gets Charlotte, as Maggie. My objection is, of course, that while such a development would have made The Golden Bowl a work of astonishing merit, it doesn't in fact read like that at all.

Elsewhere we have other visions of life: Verver's rather coarse power-speculations toward the beginning of the novel (Strett, as we have seen, is much more Verver-like); the warmth of shared, positive compromise in the Assingham's marriage.

But Charlotte's extraordinarily emphatic presence in her parts of The Golden Bowl has much to do with the singularity, within the economy of the novel, of her vitality: Maggie, as we have seen, is too complex to be spoken of as a mere character - but the other two main characters, and the earlier Maggie, are characterized by languour or boredom or vapidity or geriatry, while the Assinghams are both too sad and too (intrusively) peripheral to count.

As in The Wings of the Dove, then, where our sadness may be as

much for the warped Kate as for the self-doomed Milly, in The Golden Bowl, our lingering wistfulness may be for the lost potential of Charlotte, our final consolation nothing adequate in the flowering of Maggie.

Two forms of 'rightness' pull against each other, as in The Wings of the Dove: the (at times only would-be) deus ex machina toward separation of Charlotte and Amerigo and against an instinct we have about the distastefulness of the Ververs and the mutual appropriateness of Charlotte and Amerigo, the moral propriety of a fulfilled relationship between them. It is, as in another context in The Ambassadors, James's old sense of 'realism' at work rather than any completion of an intended moral structure. In terms of the view of the novel I have put forward, its ending is of mainly formal interest.

CONCLUSION

The upshot of all such reflections is that I have only to let myself go! So I have said to myself all my life - so I said to myself in the far-off days of my fermenting and passionate youth. Yet I have never fully done it. The sense of it - of the need of it - rolls over me at times with commanding force: it seems the formula of my salvation, of what remains to me of a future ... All life is - at my age, with all one's artistic soul the record of it - in one's pocket as it were. Go on, my boy, and strike hard; have a rich and long St Martin's summer.[1]

Rigidity, inflexibility, intransigence - these are bad characteristics in the Jamesian world. The rigorous imposition of moral preconceptions and social prejudices on the organic stuff of life is usually shown to be either ill-advised or cruel, and always impoverishing.[2]

This thesis has been about life and morality in James's fiction.

'Life', as we have seen, is a complex of ideas in the fiction, ideas which can generally be related to the following experiences and attributes.

First, there are experiences which James, as a man who lived an emotionally and sensuously much fuller life than is often recognized, was well-equipped to bring to realization in his fiction. A man who had a full openness to the vitality of the Minny Temples, Sarah Wisters, Lucy Cliffords, Fanny Kembles and Edith Whartons of his world was in an excellent position to create characters with the force of Kate Croy or Miriam Rooth. The prevalence of women in such roles in the fiction has been recognized.

That openness to life of James himself enabled him, equally, to translate his own passions into a form which concretizes so splendidly in the novels loves like those between Charlotte and Amerigo, or like that Fleda has for Owen, or Densher for Kate.

That fine and vital receptivity also made it possible for him to create a world, to which readers respond with such imaginative force, in which a range of sensuous and cultural experiences are enjoyed and absorbed and intelligently analysed by his characters, the analysis frequently, as in the case of Strether, only

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1 The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 106
2 Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder, p. 271

adding to the enjoyment, although sometimes, as in the cases of Vanderbank and his friends, excluding it.

That is the life which there is. Then there is the life which is missed.

So that a second strand in the complex is comprised of experiences which James, perhaps quite often vaguely and irrationally, felt himself denied. He may not have known what they were: in the fiction they tend to be inscrutable: they are the things, whatever they are, that Lady Fanny and Gloriani and Strett do. Or, more closely in focus and more easily the subject of speculation, the things that Miriam Rooth does when Sherringham isn't with her, the intimacies, including sexual intimacies, of Chad and Marie, the more or less hidden life which certain protagonists don't have access to: characters like Isabel Archer, Merton Densher, Maggie Verver or Lambert Strether; or Hyacinth Robinson, Rowland Mallett, the narrator in The Sacred Fount, or Longdon. A strong sign of the positive in James is where a character like Maggie or Strether develops within the novel so as to achieve a closer connection with what has been denied. Negative values predominate where a character like Isabel Archer or Vanderbank, through, for example, egocentricity, continues within a self-imposed exclusion. And, as we have seen, the positive weight of the alteration of Maggie and Strether is balanced respectively by the disintegration of Charlotte, and the threatened disintegration of the Paris symbol.

Thirdly, and still in the category of the life that is missed, are the people who embody life, who are never the centres of consciousness, but always the focus of consciousness, who, although positively created, tend negatively to be beyond reach, or beyond, in their vitality and attractiveness, maintenance in that form.

To 'live', then, is to increase the range of one's intellectual, cultural, sensuous or sexual activity and contact and receptivity: or, to put oneself in connection with those who embody life, whose presence is its guarantor. Where Kate is not, Densher is in suspended animation. When Charlotte descends on Amerigo with the 'whizz and the red light of a rocket', the novel lights up and echoes to the sound.

In the fiction examined above we have seen that the negativity applied to the intimate relationships based on love and sexual attraction is fairly constant, though not entirely, since Chad and Marie, or Amerigo and Maggie can, complicatedly and with qualifications, nonetheless be seen as positive, depending on one's approach (particularly to the latter). On the other hand we have seen that there is hope even within a circumscribed personality like Longdon's, that there are fine moments in the life of a Lambert Strether, great and memorable experiences even for Merton Densher, sympathetic qualities in Fernanda Brookenham, radical personality developments in Maggie Verver.

Furthermore: one might well argue that there is an invaluable creative tension in the novels between the rendering of life - as in Charlotte - and the criticism to which this quality is subjected, both by the points of view of Maggie and Amerigo, and by the surrounding structures of authorial feeling in which she emerges.

The achievement of a sense of life in the novels, in other words, may be dependent on the perilousness of its achieved and rendered form, just as there is an important interaction between negative tendencies subverted by strong vital elements.

Meaning, therefore, as we might expect, is produced by difference: Lowder/Densher, Gloriani/Strether, Isabel/Osmond, interact to produce a sense of rendered life: the same process produces subtler meanings in pairs like Mitchy/Van, or in whole groups like the Buckingham set.

This is not to deny the negative strain. It is to try to place it within a properly complex set of interacting elements.

In chapter one, I surveyed some alternative approaches to morality in James and have tried, in my analyses of the novels, to give some sense of the way in which it is produced by how people live rather than being inscribed within authorial assumptions about how they should behave. The observations, say, that Ezra Pound made about

personal tyranny, hold good as parallel truths alongside the argument I have been trying to illustrate. Of course there is moral condemnation in James's fiction: but it is reserved for egocentricity, for meanness of personality, for thinness of spirit, for ungenerosity of judgement and cruelty of conduct; for a lack of respect for life.

When Kate Croy's determination becomes hardness, her lucidity, glibness, then she is condemned. The intelligence of her recognition of the nature and rights of others has been clouded. Her discernment has been coarsened. It is that transition from the fine to the coarse which James doesn't sustain (or, really, begin) in his treatment of Charlotte.

But when Lambert Strether or Maggie Verver start, as it were, to feel the light and warmth of the sun on them, and begin to blossom, then that is a moral victory - they are being seen to do justice to life.

Some moral assumptions within the society of his time are treated by James, as we have seen, as negligible forms of etiquette (and James, increasingly, was not a man to spurn etiquette easily). He is not remotely concerned about the propriety of Nanda's 'exposure' to her mother's circle - indeed such a theme would have made the work the novel of 'manners' that hardly any of James's fiction ever stooped to be. The conventional disapproval of the liaison between Chad and Marie is located in the character of the - in Jamesian fiction - quite especially dreadful Sarah Pocock, whose introductory description one might recall, in an unfocussed moment, as being almost Dickensian.

If full moral approbation is in a sense withheld from all of James's characters then it is because life is also to some extent also withheld. In <u>The Ambassadors</u>, our moral irritation with Strether is that he doesn't plunge further.

So that if we can only approve morally of Kate Croy up to a point in her behaviour, that is because her force for life begins to warp: she becomes unattractive to us and morally unacceptable to us through a process of interaction between these two complexes of response.

Isabel Archer's self-absorption and immorality are from the same source: by being in the garden of your own mind you are at once out of life, and simultaneously unmindful of other people and of the rest of nature. That, like Vanderbank's conduct, is gross.

In this way morality emerges from life.

Given James's need for self-adequacy, his lifetime's performance is astounding, his will as close to Edel's and others' Napoleonic analogies as one likes to come. By the same token, that he should have continually doubted in his life and in his fiction whether he 'knew' life, whether he was, and, ultimately, had been in it, is unremarkable given his childhood and cultural, social and professional circumstances. That this doubt might be of a determinant nature in his fiction seems exceptionally plausible.

That realization in turn heightens one's sense of James's life and fiction as an extraordinary achievement of instinct, will, and negative capability.

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