
THE IDEALS OF
CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONDUCT
IN
HENRY JAMES'S
THE AMBASSADORS AND THE GOLDEN BOWL

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A thesis presented for the degree of Master of Arts
of Rhodes University

January 1969

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

The mature work of Henry James gives the fullest expression to certain ideals which I have called the ideals of consciousness and conduct. These ideals are the subject of this thesis. As they are best illustrated in the two novels, The Ambassadors (1903) and The Golden Bowl (1904), I have first analysed these books in detail. Though emphasising "theme" rather than "technique" (I make the usual working distinction while recognising its limitations), I have also attempted to show how intimately James's technique is related to his exploration of consciousness and conduct.

In Part Three I have tried to gather up ideas arising from the analyses of The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl; to compare them, expand on them and generalise from them. In this way I have arrived at conclusions that may help to interpret the mature vision of James.

I am grateful for the guidance given me during the past few years by Professor F.G. Butler and the staff of the Department of English at Rhodes. In particular I am indebted to Father Francis Cull, who undertook to supervise this study and who originally stimulated my interest in James.*

* All citation of works, prefaces or articles by Henry James is made in abbreviated form throughout (title, volume and/or page number). Full details of publication are given in a list immediately preceding the bibliography.

Quotations from The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl are followed by an indication of the volume and of the page on which they occur in the standard edition.

Certain idiosyncracies of spelling in the standard edition have been maintained, notably did n't, would n't, are n't, etc.

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PART ONE

THE AMBASSADORS

I. THE DRAMA OF DISCRIMINATION.

From the beginning of The Ambassadors, everything revolves round Strether, the character who is the Jamesian centre of consciousness in the novel. The first words are:

Strether's first question, when he reached the hotel, was about his friend; yet on his learning that Waymarsh was apparently not to arrive till evening he was not wholly disconcerted. (I, 3.)

The introduction to Strether is immediate in more ways than one. In our very first view of him he is presented as questioning - however elementary the questioning may be at this early stage, we at least see that Strether is a person who concerns himself with others before he considers himself. But a qualification follows: Strether is not put out when his conscientiousness is shown to be in vain. This qualification strikes the major alternative note of Strether's character, one which becomes clear some paragraphs later:

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. (I, 5.)

Even as Strether begins to materialise before us, we are aware that he is no ordinary case and that his consciousness is far from simple. While it is clear that he has arrived in Europe with some special purpose, it is already evident that there will be contradictions and ambiguities in his reactions.

The opening chapters of The Ambassadors are slow-moving, but their importance becomes plain in retrospect.

At first everything is in a minor key. Strether arrives in England rather than in France, which is to be the real scene of his drama. His first relationships are with minor characters in the novel. One is retrospectively aware that James has been preparing the reader carefully for acceptance and understanding of the drama that is to follow for Strether. James was always wary of a too sketchy or unreal establishment of major relationships in his novels, especially in those cases where one point of view is to dominate the structure. Roderick Hudson (1875) presents an example. The structural intention of the novel is much the same as that of The Ambassadors. In his preface to the New York edition of Roderick Hudson, James states :

The centre of interest throughout "Roderick" is in Rowland Mallet's consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness - which I had of course to make sufficiently acute in order to enable it, like a set and lighted scene, to hold the play. (1)

Rowland Mallet, like Strether, had to be portrayed with his "relation to everything involved a sufficiently limited . . . personal state to be thoroughly natural" (2), and yet his consciousness had to form a clear medium for the whole - which was to be:

the sum of what "happened" to him, . . . his total adventure; but as what happened to him was above all to feel certain things happening to others, to Roderick, to Christina, to Mary Garland, . . . so the beauty of the constructional game was to preserve in everything its especial value for him. (3)

But the earlier James ran into difficulty in this presentation, and in his later preface he admits them. He presented Rowland Mallet (the moderately young man who transplants a promising artist, Roderick, to Europe) as

1. The Art of the Novel, p.16.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

falling in love with the very New England girl to whom Roderick engages himself on the eve of departure. The girl, Mary Garland, was to form one of the major elements of Roderick's subsequent betrayal and was thus to become one of Rowland's responsibilities. The fault, which James admits, is that so important a relationship, for both Rowland and Roderick, is precipitated without sufficient preparation or motive, in the first chapters of the novel. "It is not really worked-in," James confesses, seeing how such a weakness, small as it is, yet affects the whole course of the novel:

The ground has not been laid for it [the impression made by Mary Garland], and when that is the case one builds all vainly in the air: one patches up one's superstructure, . . . one hangs fine old tapestry and rare brocade over its window-sills, one flies emblazoned banners from its roof - the building none the less totters and refuses to stand square. (1)

In The Ambassadors, James avoids precipitating Strether into his major relationships too soon. The "constructional game" is essentially the same as in Roderick Hudson:

The thing was to be so much this worthy's [Strether's] intimate adventure that even the projection of his consciousness upon it from beginning to end without . . . deviation would probably still leave a part of its value for him, and a fertiori for ourselves, unexpressed.

.

Other persons in no small number were to people the scene, and each with his or her axe to grind, . . . his or her relation to my leading motive . . . to establish and carry on. But Strether's sense of these things, and Strether's only, should avail me for showing them. . . . (2)

1. Ibid., p. 17.

2. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" Ibid., p. 317.

However, from the other people who are to "people the scene" in The Ambassadors, James chooses to introduce first two characters who are not of the greatest importance, Maria Costrey and Waymarsh, Strether's old friend. Both, like Strether, are Americans - but their differences are illuminating. Waymarsh is the epitome of the simple American no-nonsense mind (his fierce disapproval of European subtleties is later dubbed the "sacred rage" [I, 268] by Strether). Miss Costrey, who boldly strikes up an acquaintance with Strether in Chester, is very much the Europeanised American, a cosmopolitan playing the games of intrigue and wit. Her note is above all that of the modern. Waymarsh is a tangible reminder of Strether's past, and a kind of attendant conscience to him; Miss Costrey is Strether's introduction to his future in the new Old World.

James devotes a number of passages in his preface to a description of the worth and function of Miss Costrey. She is a ficelle, or, a confidante. Throughout the novel, Strether's interchanges with her are of importance to the reader, since they usually serve to sum up whatever encounter or development has preceded them, and to prepare us for the one that is to follow. The importance of their interchanges is so great that the novel even ends with one. Beyond this function of helping to tie up the threads, however, Maria Costrey plays as minor a part in the central drama as Waymarsh does. Though neither of their lives remains entirely untouched by the course of events which Strether's

visit to Europe sets in motion (1), they both essentially form relations that have, as James puts it, "nothing to do with the matter (the matter of my subject) but . . . everything to do with the manner (the manner of my presentation of the same). (2)

Miss Gostrey and Waymarsh are able to give us the most "outside" information on Strether, through their very non-central nature as characters. They both draw him out and are able to comment directly upon him. (A similar thing occurs with other minor characters who later appear in Paris, to form a kind of Greek chorus on Strether's problems. The most vocal and prominent of these are little Bilham and Miss Barrace.) This gives James greater latitude for variation, despite the single-point-of-view structure, than he would have if the novel were written in the first person. (3) In Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, the relation of Nick Carraway's past enables us to assess his character,

1. Waymarsh (whose name carries overtones of the character-naming in The Pilgrim's Progress) enters more into the "matter" of The Ambassadors when he later forms an unexpected relationship with a married woman, Sarah Pocock; while Miss Gostrey eventually reveals to Strether that she has fallen in love with him. Nevertheless, these are merely side issues of Strether's main drama.

2. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p.321.

3. James's own novel, The Sacred Fount (1901), offers a valuable contrast. In theme it is often similar to The Ambassadors, since in both novels the central character is engaged in the business of fathoming the depth and nature of relationships between other characters. However, in The Sacred Fount one is never sure of the true character of the narrator, as his story is told in the first person and one has no outside verification of what he sees and suspects, still less of what he knows. When James, in his preface to The Ambassadors, speaks of the "terrible fluidity of self-revelation" (The Art of the Novel, p.321) which the first-person form engenders, he probably had in mind his use of it in The Sacred Fount, as Leon Edel suggests in his introduction to that novel (p.vii).

and accept on trust his word as narrator of the tale. But in The Ambassadors, by avoiding the first person, James gives the reader even more to go by in understanding Strether than Strether himself would be able to tell us. He blends Strether's actions on arrival in Chester with his reactions to the sense of Europe, and affords glimpses into Strether's past (largely through Miss Gostrey and Waymarsh) which do not have to be strictly chronological. Moreover, while Strether's background is slowly filled in for us, James manages at the same time to convey that his hero's delay (so useful structurally) is no insignificant part of his character. One realises - and the realisation is confirmed by the rest of the novel - that Strether is unwilling, by his very nature, to approach matters directly or boldly. James establishes this important trait early, for it is what enables Strether's moral drama to be as lengthy and intense as it is. Strether's reluctance to act unless he is certain of his reasons both hinders and helps him. It hinders him in making decisions, but it helps him in its prevention of rash judgements of others.

The interrelation of form and theme in Strether's delay is a master-stroke which prevents clumsiness in the long preparatory chapters of The Ambassadors. They are largely used to fill in Strether's background and prepare the reader, but they also continually look forward to the body of the drama. Briefly, we learn in the opening chapters that Strether is engaged to a wealthy widow, Mrs. Newsome, of Woolllett, Massachusetts, after many years of editing a journal under her auspices; that she has sent him to Europe - and Paris in particular - to rescue her son, Chad, from the clutches of a woman and to bring him

back to the fold of the family (of the family business, to be precise). It seems, on the face of it, a simple enough mission; but from the outset James provides rich hints as to where and how the difficulties are likely to arise. Another fact which puts The Ambassadors far above Roderick Hudson, is that these difficulties are located chiefly in the character of the central consciousness himself. Rather than the sub- or secondary hero, Chad, it is Strether who is to find decision and action difficult; whereas, in Roderick Hudson, Roderick's struggles tend to outweigh Rowland Mallet's. This is not bad in itself, but it does detract from Rowland Mallet's stature. The advantage of Strether is his greater maturity and complexity. James says of him:

I rejoiced in the promise of a hero so mature, who would give me thereby the more to bite into - since it's only into thickened motive and accumulated character, I think, that the painter of life bites more than a little.

.....

It was immeasurable, the opportunity to "do" a man of imagination. . . . (1)

In addition, James welcomed the chance to couple that imagination with the discrimination of maturity (a valuable combination which Rowland Mallet lacks as a character):

The actual man's [Strether's] note, from the first of our seeing it struck, is the note of discrimination, just as his drama is to become, under stress, the drama of discrimination. It would have been his blest imagination, we have seen, that had already helped him to discriminate; the element that was for so much of the pleasure of my cutting thick . . . into his intellectual, into his moral substance. (2)

1. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 310.

2. Ibid., p. 316.

In Strether James had finally found the perfect vessel of consciousness for the single-point-of-view novel. Maisie, in What Maisie Knew (1897), is the perfect vessel for that kind of novel when it is about a child's awakening to the world of adults about her. Because we see everything through its effect on Maisie's consciousness, What Maisie Knew touches and convinces us more than the plight of Nanda Brookenham in The Awkward Age (1899), where the construction consists of a series of scenes dramatically presented. But James could go further than What Maisie Knew when he could place an adult among adults and demonstrate a different, a more advanced and intricate awakening, on the part of that adult. It seems a fairer pitting of forces, covering a wider range of experience. And, whereas Maisie still has her life before her, in middle-aged Strether James is able to show the quieter but deeper sadness of a wasted life.

Delaying in England, Strether begins to thicken for us at once. In the preface James states that Strether

had come to Paris in some state of mind which was literally undergoing, as a result of new and unexpected assaults and infusions, a change almost from hour to hour. He had come with a view that might have been figured by a clear green liquid, say, in a neat glass phial; and the liquid, once poured into the open cup of application, once exposed to the action of another air, had begun to turn from green to red, or whatever. . . .(1)

James perhaps underestimates his first four chapters, which are set in England. England is already, for Strether, "another air". And, to continue the chemical metaphor James uses, Miss Gostrey is also a catalyst in the process. She begins - by proxy as it were - the

1. Ibid., p.314.

great assault which Paris is to level at Strether: the assault on his Woollett preconceptions and theories, on his suppressed and dormant desires, and on his imagination and discrimination. When Strether goes sight-seeing with Miss Gostrey, he cannot help thinking:

It was with Waymarsh he should have shared it, and he was now accordingly taking from him something that was his due. 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 is n't sure it ought to enjoy. If it were it would." (I, 16.)

Miss Gostrey's sharpness fixes unerringly on Strether's basic dilemma. He feels strongly the attraction of the pleasant and the enjoyable - but he tends to refuse himself indulgence because pleasure seems "not right", perhaps even sinful. Owing to this New England aspect of his character, Strether always pauses before or during an experience, to reflect and to weigh the consequences; and while he does so the experience slips away from him. An even more interesting facet of the case is Strether's awareness of his own dichotomy. It is he who pinpoints his difficulty best: "'I'm always considering something else; something else, I mean, than the thing of the moment. The obsession of the other thing is the terror.'" (I, 19.)

Nevertheless, Strether is not so quick to accept Miss Gostrey's questioning of his mission. The woman

from whom he must rescue Chad is "'base, venal - out of the streets.'" (I, 55.) Discriminating as he is, he clings to such a preconception. It is written in black and white, in moral terms, and immensely simplifies his case. Good and bad are safely demarcated. The woman has no personal identity, not even a name, for Strether; she is merely Evil. He says of Chad: "'He wants, as I see him, to be protected. Protected I mean from life.'" (I, 71.) Ironically, "life" is the quantity which will continually surprise Strether and gradually alter his views. He will be unable to protect himself from it : it will surprise his preconceptions and every subsequent compromise that he makes. "Life" will force itself on Strether as something from which moral judgements cannot be insulated, if they are to be valid.

In his journey towards a revaluation of "life", Strether has another important travel companion besides Miss Gostrey and Waymarsh. This travel companion is never presented in the flesh. She is Mrs. Newsome, the chief agent in Strether's life (as we see it at the beginning) and the primary cause of his adventure into Europe. James gives an enlightening clue to the significance of her influence on Strether - both its weakness and its strength - in his original notes on The Ambassadors. He says of Mrs. Newsome: "She is of the strenuous pattern - she is the reflection of his old self." (1) Strether's reports to her from Paris progressively demonstrate his failure to communicate with her, as his ideas undergo their transformation. The gradual estrangement from Mrs. Newsome reflects Strether's estrangement from his old self. But for the first half, roughly, of the novel, she is never too far

1. The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 228.

from Strether's mind. In fact, she is often so forcibly present in this way that one scarcely realises she has not appeared in person. Later, when any meaningful contact with her breaks down as far as Strether is concerned, she is still represented by those other ambassadors (especially Sarah Pocock, her daughter and a less refined version of herself) whom she sends to replace the failed ambassador. Nor can Strether ever quite efface his original responsibility to Mrs. Newsome. She is no inconsiderable element in The Ambassadors. Strether remains to the end a victim of his past.

James has to provide, within the consciousness of Strether, the reasons why, despite the large moral pressure Mrs. Newsome exerts, he is yet able to go against her wishes. The answer lies in the fact that she is only a part of his immediate past. In Book Second of the novel, James leaps the gap between London and Paris, to show his hero alone. Although he has Mrs. Newsome's urgent letters with him, Strether is alarmed to find they strike him only as "the hum of vain things." (I, 82.)

In the Luxembourg Gardens he pulled up; here at last he found his nook, and here, on a penny chair . . . he passed an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow. (I, 80.)

Characteristically, he feels it "his duty to think out his state, to approve the process." (I, 81.) But this takes him further still from Mrs. Newsome. He sees his whole life pass before him as swiftly and clearly as a drowning man's life is said to do.

It had been a dreadful cheerful sociable solitude, a solitude of life or choice, of community; but though there had been people enough all round it there had been but three or four persons in it. Waymarsh was one of these. . . . Mrs. Newsome was another, and Miss Costrey had . . . shown signs of becoming a third. Beyond, behind them was the pale figure of his real youth, which held against its breast the two presences paler than

itself - the young wife he had early lost and
the young son he had stupidly sacrificed.
(I, 83-84.)

One of his most cherished hopes, after a brief honeymoon visit to Europe, had been to return and to extend his relation with "the higher culture". (I, 85.)
The hope had come to nothing, as indeed his whole life appears to have done. There is a dreadful sadness in a life that can be summed up in so few words. But Strether is not yet dying, as he will feel he is later when he decides to leave Paris. (1) The city has the power to stir old feelings long buried under the mediocrity of his life. He dares to think that he may after all have been kept for something.

Kept for something, in that event, that he did n't . . . dare as yet to divine; something that made him hover and wonder and laugh and sigh, made him advance and retreat, feeling half ashamed of his impulse to plunge and more than half afraid of his impulse to wait. (I, 86.)

This is the Strether we have already met, the Strether who wants to do, to enjoy, to live, but who is burdened by a long habit of holding back to consider. But it is also a richer, more rounded Strether, in whom we are seeing depths that are more potentially tragic than amusing. He is already more than a mere ambassador for Mrs. Newsome. And, in awakening to an older past than she represents, Strether is also imagining a future in which Mrs. Newsome has little part, a future which may recompense him for his wasted youth. In the Paris park, Strether is in a state of heightened awareness that is almost visionary: "he thought of things in a vast,

1. Cf. p.91 below : "He might for all the world have been going to die. . . ."

strange order, swinging at moments off into space, into past and future. . . ." (1)

Words like "strange" (and "mystic" - cf. p.18 below) are words which James reserves for effective use alone. He does not employ such words unless they are the only ones which will convey the extraordinariness of a situation or experience. (Compare, for example, D.H. Lawrence's excessive use of these and similar words, an excess which runs the risk of debasing their value.) The "strange, vast order" in which Strether sees things in the park is beyond the common order of experience, and it leaves its mark on him and on the reader. His lonely thoughts are comparable to a Shakespearian soliloquy in their effect. (2) They give us that insight into his consciousness, into his intellectual and moral make-up,

1. This was omitted from the text in the New York edition. I have taken it from the original 1903 Methuen edition as reproduced in The Ambassadors, ed. R.W. Stallman ("Signet Classics"; New York: The New American Library, 1960), p. 56.

2. Strether could be saying with Hamlet:

" . . . conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."

(Hamlet, III, 1, 11.83-85.)

However, as S. Gorley Putt points out, Strether is closer to T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, who says: "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be. . . ."

(S. Gorley Putt, A Reader's Guide to Henry James [London: Thames and Hudson, 1966], p.359.)

which we need if we are to believe that Strether's consciousness is the best medium for the ensuing drama. (1)

Strether cannot stay at this elevated level of vision. He drops back to the problem of his responsibility to Mrs. Newsome, but the clarity of his purpose "in the name of propriety" (I, 88) is already being threatened. He has not allowed sufficiently for the great visual and imaginative effect of Paris, "the vast bright Babylon, . . . in which parts were not to be discriminated nor differences comfortably marked." (I, 89.) The city assaults Strether's imagination with all the accumulated power of its years, all its vastness and variety of meaning. The simplicities of Woollett are overshadowed. Nevertheless, the more Strether finds himself responding to the call of Paris, the more the other half of his poor burdened "double consciousness" (I, 5) reacts, throwing up question after question.

1. I should add that we also need to believe the central consciousness is the only possible medium for the drama it reveals to us, if the work is to achieve the greatest degree of force, verisimilitude and density of which art is capable. Roderick Hudson fails of this in that Rowland Mallet does not seem indispensable as the central consciousness. Nor does The American (1877) quite succeed. Newman, the central consciousness and hero, is maturer than Rowland Mallet (of Roderick Hudson), but his personal texture is not as thick as Strether's is. Newman has Strether's earnestness without having his concomitant intensity of imagination and discrimination; so that his search to establish meaningful relationships takes place without, for us, sufficient light being thrown on those with whom he is involved. Newman is in the dark with so many things (above all, with his fiancée, Mme. de Cintré) that we too remain largely in the dark. Strether by no means provides all the answers for us, in The Ambassadors, but his remarkable mind lights up his struggles with far greater gleams than any of Newman's. We also understand, to a sufficiently significant extent, the persons whose lives Strether brushes so closely - in particular, Mme. de Vionnet. Compared with her, Newman's Mme. de Cintré is a mere shadow. The greater depth of The Ambassadors is due not only to Strether's maturity, but to James's own artistic maturity.

(Strether cannot think for long without a question mark.) In fact, the conflict within him provides the pressure Strether has needed to begin his campaign. He has "put himself in relation" (I, 93) - in relation, he feels, to every aspect of his personal problem. His mistake is to believe that he will be able to keep separate his judgement and his imagination.

Chad's apartment on the Boulevard Malesherbes presents Strether with his first concrete shock - not even in the person of the young man, but in the form of his house.

Poor Strether had at this very moment to recognise the truth that wherever one paused in Paris the imagination reacted before one could stop it. This perpetual reaction put a price, if one would, on pauses; but it piled up consequences till there was scarce room to pick one's steps among them. What call had he, at such a juncture, for example, to like Chad's very house?

.....
Of what service was it to find himself making out after a moment that the quality "sprung," the quality produced by measure and balance, the fine relation of part to part and space to space, was probably - aided by . . . the complexion of the stone, a cold fair grey, warmed and polished a little by life - neither more nor less than a case of distinction, such a case as he could only feel unexpectedly as a sort of delivered challenge?

(I, 96-97.)

The importance of Chad's house for Strether exemplifies James's insistence on attaching the highest relevance, for the reader and for his characters, to the places in which people choose to live. It is noticeable already in The Europeans (1878), in the quiet stress on the house of the Wentworths (chap. 2) and in the significance for Eugenia of Robert Acton's house (chaps. 6 & 11); and it continues to be of importance in most of James's works. In The Portrait of a Lady, (1881) for example, there is the hush of Gardencourt, the subtle attractions of Gilbert Osmond's Tuscan house (chap. 24), and finally the dark and massive structure of the Roman palace, the marital

home in which Isabel's spirit slowly suffocates. In The Spoils of Poynton (1897) the lovely house with all its contents is the whole basis of the story and reveals the characters of all who enter it, through their varied responses to it.

In his major phase James increases the metaphoric significance of houses. They are more to him than mere settings for his dramas, and he confers the awareness of this on his most sensitive characters as well. In The Wings of the Dove, the beautiful but shallow world of the fashionable English aristocracy is exemplified by Lord Mark's home, as seen by Milly Theale (Bk. 5, Chap. 1); while through Merton Densher we see in turn the massive, overbearing furnishings of Maud Lowder's home (Bk. 2, Chap. 2) and the dream-like unreality of the empty Venetian palace to which Milly retreats to die (Bk. 7, Chap. 3). In The Golden Bowl houses also signify much: the town houses of Eaton Square and Portland Place stand for the rigid, stuffy, respectable order of London society; Matcham, the country house of Lady Castledean, represents the playground of the fashionable world that recognises no laws but the social laws; and Fawns, the country home of the Ververs, with its overtones of the prelapsarian, even goes as far as symbolising Maggie's soul (cf. p.120 below).

In The Ambassadors it is of course Strether who feels the impact of houses most deeply. What he extracts from his awareness of others' surroundings plays a marked part in his moral and aesthetic drama. For instance, Chad's house is a factor which radically alters Strether's conception of the young man and his case:

The balcony, the distinguished front, testified suddenly, for Strether's fancy, to something that was up and up; they placed the whole case materially, and as by an admirable image, on a level that he found himself at the end of another moment rejoicing to think he might reach. (I, 98)

Similar effects will occur when Strether enters, later, the home of the artist, Gloriani, and when he visits Mme. de Vionnet in hers. A later, unfinished novel of James's contains two particular references to houses which illuminate his emphasis on them. The Sense of the Past (posthumously published) takes a London house as the setting for a strange drama - the hero's journey into the past. Ralph Pendrel finds the house "a museum of held reverberations." (1) More meaningful still is Mrs. Midmore's assertion that Ralph should visit their country home, Drydown, since "'that's where we're at home, where we're what we are, if you understand. . . .'" (2) James's houses hold the reverberations of all that has passed, and passes, through them; and they reveal the characters of those who live in them.

Chad's house spells above all difference. Strether comes to it with preconceptions of Chad and Chad's life, and it alters all these. Chad is not there, but one of his friends is. Little Bilham signifies for Strether Chad's unexpected "pronounced association with youth" (I, 98) and he draws Strether into Chad's house. On his last visit Strether remembers:

Present enough always was the small circumstance that had originally pressed for him the spring of so big a difference - the accident of little Bilham's appearance on the balcony of the mystic *troisième* at the moment of his first visit, and the effect of it on his sense of what was then before him. (II, 304-305.)

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1. The Sense of the Past, p. 67.
 2. Ibid., p. 164.

Chad's house is "mystic" because it holds so much "difference" for Strether. The word "difference" belongs with those which, in the Jamesian vocabulary, might almost be written with a capital letter. Difference is what inevitably confronts the Jamesian observer in Europe: the refusal of life and people to conform to one's expectations; their insistence on avoiding the names and labels one would like, for convenience, to fix on them. "The dramatic side of human situations subsists of course on contrast," James wrote in one of his prefaces. (1) But the contrast lies not only in the differing natures of James's characters, nor in the difference between the obviously American and the obviously European. It lies, most deeply, in the difference between appearances and reality.

For Strether, Chad's situation as it appeared from the safe distance of Woollett or even of London, is altered by the impact of his house. Yet, by the time of his last visit to that house, we are aware (and Strether is too) that the "reality" of Chad's house merely formed another appearance for Strether. Appearance and reality form a labyrinth through which he has to find his way before, at the last attempt on Chad's house, he finds the master alone there, at the centre of things, and comes as close as he can to the truth of Chad and his life. Strether's first visit unearths only little Bilham, Chad's friend; his second introduces him to more of Chad's friends, including Miss Barrace. Subsequent visits give him insights into Chad through Mme. de Vionnet, through Gloriani and Jeanne de Vionnet and even through Mamie

1. "Preface to 'Lady Barbarina,'" The Art of the Novel,
p. 199.

Pocock. But, from his first meeting with Chad in a Parisian theatre, Strether does not see him alone except in cafés, on streets, on outings. He does not see him alone - "'at home, where we're what we are'". (Cf. p.18 above) At the end, Strether does come successively closer to Chad: on that second last visit, when he has to wait for Chad; followed by the last visit, when he finds Chad there. This only happens when Strether has altogether ceased to compromise by accepting appearances.

However, Strether's mixture of imagination and discrimination prevents him from clinging for long to any one compromise. Though his inability to confront things directly holds him back, it also provides sufficient time for him to see more than others do, and consequently to judge with greater fairness. He is aided by the conventions which civilised society itself imposes. As with the elements of Strether's character, social convention is double-edged. It forms artificial barriers, but it also prevents vulgarity and rashness. Strether comes up against the double nature of a "high civilisation" when he has his first unexpected sight of Chad in a Parisian theatre.

The fact was that his perception of the young man's identity . . . had been quite one of the sensations that count in life; he certainly had never known one that had acted . . . with more of a crowded rush. And the rush, though both vague and multitudinous, had lasted a long time, protected, as it were, yet at the same time aggravated, by the circumstance of its coinciding with a stretch of decorous silence. They couldn't talk without disturbing the spectators . . . just below them; and it, for that matter, came to Strether - being a thing of the sort that did come to him - that these were the accidents of a high civilisation; the imposed tribute to propriety, the frequent exposure to conditions, normally brilliant, in which relief has to await its time. (I, 135-136.)

This is an important note in The Ambassadors (and in The

Golden Bowl). The rigid social order of Europe protects those who adhere to it, and its grace and propriety are attractive; but it can be stifling in its suppression of spontaneity. Nevertheless Strether, especially in the beginning, puts the demands of propriety to good use, employing the lapses of time they occasion for careful observation and consideration of his judgement. His first meetings with Chad and Mme. de Vionnet are both in surroundings that are strange to him, and both are governed by social laws. These laws give him time to exercise his imagination and his discrimination, both of which are stirred by the unexpectedly high respectability of Chad's - and Mme. de Vionnet's - social surroundings. Woollett had failed to take this into account in its view of the couple's lives.

The Woollett view had also disregarded the personal realities of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet. Strether is consequently thrown completely off course when Chad in person confronts him, not at all as Woollett had remembered him.

But oh it was too remarkable, the truth; for what could be more remarkable than this sharp rupture of an identity? You could deal with a man as himself - you could n't deal with him as somebody else. (I, 137.)

Chad is "a case of transformation unsurpassed" (I, 137) - he looks older, handsomer; he has the finest degree of confidence Strether has ever seen.

He had formerly, with a great deal of action, expressed very little; and he now expressed whatever was necessary with almost none at all. It was as if in short he had really, copious perhaps but shapeless, been put into a firm mould and turned successfully out. The phenomenon . . . was marked enough to be touched by the finger. (I, 152.)

Struck though he is by the tangibility of the fact of difference that Chad presents, Strether refuses to speak of it. Trying to keep the upper hand in the sit-

uation, he faces Chad in a café after the play and makes a declaration of his purpose. Chad's ease, that of a person "with manners formed" (I, 151), is disconcertingly attractive. In being true to Woollett's purpose, Strether has to make sacrifices.

"Do I strike you as improved?" Strether was to recall that Chad had . . . enquired.

He was likewise to recall - and it had to count for some time as his greatest comfort - that it had been "given" him, as they said at Woollett, to reply with some presence of mind: "I have n't the least idea."

.

Not only his moral, but also, as it were, his aesthetic sense had a little to pay for this, Chad being unmistakably . . . handsomer than he had ever promised. (I, 148-149.)

Whenever Strether is being loyal to Woollett (and therefore self-effacing), he seems to go against his "moral" and "also, as it were, his aesthetic sense." How much these two senses are really facets of the same thing, is what Strether's whole development illustrates. James, in his preface, stresses the interdependence of Strether's imagination and discrimination. Neither works alone. Imagination gives an insight that makes true discrimination possible; and discrimination, in its turn, tempers and controls imagination. Similarly, the moral sense, while consisting largely of discrimination between good and evil, starves without imagination (especially in the sense of perceiving and understanding another's point of view); and the aesthetic sense, demanding imagination, yet involves discriminating judgement as well. Strether's problem is to attain a synthesis of his moral and aesthetic senses. He must not sacrifice his perceptive and imaginative powers to moral considerations, yet he must avoid the vague stand of the a-moral, for the sake of his own integrity.

Strether's struggles are not lessened by Chad's "actual form giving him more to deal with than his imputed." (I, 164.) But beyond this there is also the impenetrability of another's existence, something which will most come home to Strether in his last meetings with Chad and M^{me}. de Vionnet. Chad's resistance to him is partly conscious, but his words hardly have the effect on Strether that his mere presence has. Chad succeeds in making an unconscious insistence on his own identity and on his right to be himself:

Chad raised his face to the lamp, and it was one of the moments at which he had, in his extraordinary way, most his air of designedly showing himself. It was as if at these instants he just presented himself, his identity so rounded off, his palpable presence and his massive young manhood, as such a link in the chain as might practically amount to a kind of demonstration.

.....
 What could there be in this for Strether but the hint of some self-respect, some sense of power, oddly perverted; something latent and beyond access, ominous and perhaps enviable? (I, 156.)

Strether spends several days trying to fathom the reason for Chad's transformation, in which he feels there is something abnormal, and in trying to reach that "something latent and beyond access" in the young man. His attempts are much the same as those of the narrator in The Sacred Fount (1901), who seeks to get to the bottom of the transformations of no less than four people: Mrs. Brissenden and her husband, and May Server and Gilbert Long. Mrs. Brissenden, though older than her husband, appears to have grown younger; while her husband seems to have aged with remarkable swiftness. May Server is losing her sparkling wit, while Gilbert Long is emerging from mediocrity. The narrator plays an intricate game of observation, investigation and comparison,

using the example of the married couple to deduce that May Server and Long have a secret liaison. His premise is that in an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, one party is always the "sacred fount" for the other party and runs the risk of being drained completely in the process. However, there is so much stress on the abnormal in The Sacred Fount that in the end one is only convinced of the abnormality of the narrator's mind. In addition, the first-person narrative cuts us off from any outside verification of the facts. In The Ambassadors the hints of some abnormal exchange between Chad and Mme. de Vionnet are far more subtle. The only elements of real strangeness are the "marked streaks of grey, extraordinary at his age, in Chad's thick black hair" (I, 140) - matched by Mme. de Vionnet's "air of youth" which "was at first almost disconcerting." (I, 210.) (1)

In The Ambassadors, the whole atmosphere of Paris is freer and brighter than the stuffy, constricted atmosphere of the country house, Newmarch, in The Sacred Fount.

(2) Paris has mystery but it has also a vast physical reality which James establishes throughout The Ambassadors in a series of acute descriptions. (See, for example, Book Second, chapter II, in which Strether wanders through the city and the park.) And Strether himself is a better aid to our lucidity than the narrator of The Sacred Fount.

1. Later, though almost unnoticeably, the position is reversed. Chad, contemplating the desertion of Mme. de Vionnet, appears to be renewing his youthfulness, "taking up his life afresh." (II, 306.) Meanwhile Mme. de Vionnet is, to Strether, older - "visibly less exempt from the touch of time." (II, 286.)

2. The atmosphere of Newmarch is the atmosphere of a strangely dislocated world, where the inhabitants wander like prisoners through passages and colonnades and formal gardens, meeting each other only intermittently. It is very similar to the atmosphere in the well-known French film, Last Year at Marienbad (directed by Alain Resnais).

He has a humility of which that narrator seems incapable. It comes out strongly when Strether speaks to the helpful Miss Gostrey about Chad's transformation:

"Well, the party responsible is, I suppose, the fate that waits for one, the dark doom that rides. What I mean is that with such elements one can't count. I've but my poor individual, my modest human means. It is n't playing the game to turn on the uncanny. All one's energy goes to facing it, to tracking it. One wants, confound it, don't you see?" he confessed with a queer face - "one wants to enjoy anything so rare. Call it then life" - he puzzled it out - "call it poor dear old life simply that springs the surprise. Nothing alters the fact that the surprise is paralysing, or at any rate engrossing - all, practically, hang it, that one sees, that one can see." (I, 167-168.)

Nor is Miss Gostrey modern and Europeanised for nothing: her sharp outlook clears the air, for Strether and for us. She comes straight to the point. Strether is only unable to see further than his surprise because he has been afraid to look beyond it. He took Chad's open denial of a woman's influence as an indication that the woman was too bad to be spoken of, a conclusion he had also drawn from the silence, on that point, of little Bilham and Miss Barrace. Miss Gostrey challenges his idea that some "mere wretch" may "really have counted" with Chad:

"I thought you thought - or that they think at Woollett - that that's what mere wretches necessarily do. Mere wretches necessarily don't!" she declared with spirit. "There must, behind every appearance to the contrary, still be somebody - somebody who's not a mere wretch, since we accept the miracle. What else but such a somebody can such a miracle be?"

He took it in. "Because the fact itself is the woman?"

"A woman. Some woman or other. It's one of the things that have to be."

"But you mean then at least a good one."

"A good woman?" She threw up her arms with a laugh. "I should call her excellent!" (I, 169-170.)

Nevertheless, Strether is slow to readjust to this new view of the matter. What keeps him back is the precise nature of his classifications. Good and "not nice"

are all he will at present allow. Miss Costrey reveals to him that Chad is not necessarily good.

"His disavowal of her is n't . . . pure consideration. There's a hitch." She made it out. "It's the effort to sink her."

Strether winced at the image. "To 'sink' - ?"

"Well, I mean there's a struggle, and a part of it is just what he hides. Take time - that's the only way not to make some mistake that you'll regret. Then you'll see. He does really want to shake her off."

Our friend had by this time so got into the vision that he almost gasped. "After all she's done for him?" (I, 171.)

Miss Costrey's trump card is: "'He's not so good as you think!'" (I, 171.) Hers is an early warning, like the narrator's in The Sacred Fount: "'One of the pair,' I said, 'has to pay for the other. . . . A miracle is expensive.'" (1)

At this stage, however, Strether has not seen Mme. de Vionnet (and she still is unnamed and, to him, unnameable), nor has he observed Chad in relation to her. Chad occupies all his imagination. And, if Chad is so much better than he had expected, how can he be bad - in any way? This is Strether's first major compromise with appearances. Chad's so convincing air of ease and freedom remains a barrier in Strether's development. Even Waymarsh (whom I have likened to Strether's attendant conscience) is submerged.

There were days when Strether seemed to bump against [Waymarsh] as a sinking swimmer might brush a submarine object. The fathomless medium held them - Chad's manner was the fathomless medium; and our friend felt as if they passed each other, in their deep immersion, with the round impersonal eye of silent fish. (I, 172.)

But, while Chad has assaulted, and (so far) won, Strether's

1. The Sacred Fount, p. 34.

imagination, little Bilham continues Miss Costrey's challenge to his discrimination - from another angle.

He informs Strether that Chad is not happy:

"He wants to be free. He is n't used, you see," the young man explained in his lucid way, "to being so good."

Strether hesitated. "Then I may take it from you that he is good?"

His companion matched his pause, but making it up with a quiet fulness. "Do take it from me."

"Well then why is n't he free?"

.....

"Why is n't he free if he's good?"

Little Bilham looked him full in the face.

"Because it's a virtuous attachment."

(I, 179-180.)

Bilham's view of a "virtuous attachment" is so different from Strether's that the latter cannot measure the distance between them. He accepts the statement as though it were made with all the simplicity, the lack of subtlety, of a Woollett judgement. Ironically, Strether's mistake enables him to meet Mme. de Vionnet with a far more open mind than he would formerly had done. The news that Mme. de Vionnet has a daughter reassures him further still.

Strether's pride in his delicacy prevents him from attacking Chad on the subject. Chad's continued silence about Mme. de Vionnet and her daughter, even when he is obviously preparing a meeting, constrains Strether to a matching reserve. Since Chad surrounds the ladies with "a consideration, a distinction" (I, 194), Strether reacts as he feels a gentleman should. At the same time he is vaguely alarmed by the sense that Chad is playing some deep game, in taking him to meet the ladies at a distinguished gathering, at the home of the sculptor, "the great Gloriani." (I, 193.) He feels that it is all a bribe and that, in offering the bribe, Chad is

"taking refuge from the realities of their intercourse."

(I, 193.) But, held back by his scruples, Strether fixes the blame firmly on himself:

Our friend continued to feel rather smothered in flowers [1], though he made in his other moments the almost angry inference that this was only because of his odious ascetic suspicion of any form of beauty. He periodically assured himself - for his reactions were sharp - that he should n't reach the truth of anything till he had at least got rid of that.
(I, 193-194.)

James effects a skilful blend of Strether's personal problems with the impositions of civilised society, making everything more difficult, and yet richer, for his hero.

1. In the original 1903 version, "smothered in sensations". (Italics mine.)

II. THE PROPORTIONS CHANGE.

Book Fifth of The Ambassadors lays bare the emotional centre of Strether with a directness unequalled anywhere else in James's work. Strether's monologue, in the form of an outburst directed at little Bilham, stands out from the pages of the novel like a manifesto. It is certainly Strether's manifesto, but one feels that it is also close to the heart of James's credo. Not only did he believe The Ambassadors to be "quite the best, 'all round,' of [his] productions" (1); but he also found the main beauty of the novel caught up and expressed by Strether's monologue in Gloriani's garden.

Nothing is more easy to state than the subject of "The Ambassadors". . . . The situation involved is gathered up betimes, that is in the second chapter of Book Fifth, for the reader's benefit, into as few words as possible - planted or "sunk", stiffly and saliently, in the centre of the current, almost perhaps to the obstruction of traffic. Never can a composition of this sort have sprung straighter from a dropped grain of suggestion [2], and never can that grain, developed, overgrown and smothered, have yet lurked more in the mass as an independent particle. The whole case, in fine, is in Lambert Strether's irrepressible outbreak to little Bilham on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden, the candour with which he yields, for his young friend's enlightenment, to the charming admonition of that crisis. The idea of the tale resides indeed in the very fact that an hour of such unprecedented ease should have been felt by him as a crisis, and he is at pains to express it for us as

1. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 309.

2. The grain of suggestion was an anecdote told to James; it is most fully described in James's notebooks, in the entry dated October 31st, 1895. (The Notebooks of Henry James, pp. 225 ff.)

neatly as we could desire. The remarks to which he thus gives utterance contain the essence of "The Ambassadors". . . . (1)

The first four books have been a preparation for this scene - a long and careful one, with Strether's thoughts in the Paris park the most immediate part of it. The other parts of the preparation have, however, been no less significant in their way: Strether's revealed sensitivity to his environment (as well as his fear of enjoyment that does not seem morally justifiable) and his awareness of social barriers in his dealings with Chad. In Book Fifth itself, these elements continue to lead up to Strether's self-revelation. In fact, they are more than ever apparent.

Gloriani's home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain is, as a setting and an impression on Strether, as important as Chad's house. For the sensitive observer, no scene is ever merely a backdrop. It is a "medium" (I, 195) - a medium for sensations and perception, a means of picking up unspoken facts about a milieu and the people inhabiting it. Gloriani's garden is yet another assault on Strether's senses - an "assault of images." (I, 196.)

Far back from streets and unsuspected by crowds, reached by a long passage and a quiet court, it was as striking to the unprepared mind, he immediately saw, as a treasure dug up; giving him too, more than anything yet, the note of the range of the immeasurable town and sweeping away, as by a last brave brush, his usual landmarks and terms. It was in the garden . . . that Chad's host presently met them; while the tall bird-haunted trees . . . and the high party-walls, on the other side of which grave hôtels stood off for privacy, spoke of survival, transmission, association, a strong indifferent persistent order. The day was so soft that the little party had practically adjourned to the

1. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 307.

open air, but the open air was in such conditions all a chamber of state. Strether . . . had the sense of names in the air, of ghosts at the windows, of signs and tokens, a whole range of expression, all about him, too thick for prompt discrimination. (I, 195-196.)

Not the least element in the assault is the figure of the great Gloriani himself. Gloriani remains a marginal character in The Ambassadors, a figure standing off but symbolising for Strether all that he has missed (though at times, he is rather grateful for missing such a life). Gloriani's eyes hold Strether as he has not yet been held:

He was n't soon to forget them, was to think of them, all unconscious, unintending, pre-occupied though they were, as the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed.

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Nothing on earth could have been stranger and no one doubtless more surprised than the artist himself, but it was for all the world to Strether just then as if in the matter of his accepted duty he had positively been on trial. 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. (I, 197.)

Gloriani, with all the rich and terrible experience he symbolises, questions Strether's fitness for interference in Chad's life. This is a far subtler touch than Roderick's questioning of Rowland Mallet's right to interfere, in Roderick Hudson. Roderick throws up his artistic career for a woman (Christina Light, by then married to the Prince Casamassima); he meets Rowland Mallet's remonstrations with the following outburst:

"What I resent is that the range of your vision should pretend to be the limit of my action. You can't feel for me nor judge for me, and there are certain things you know nothing about.

.

"There's something monstrous in a man's pretending to lay down the law to a state of sensibility with which he's unacquainted. . . ." (1)

1. Roderick Hudson, pp. 504-505.

Strether receives no such direct admonition, but, faced with Gloriani, he begins to feel similar implications.

However, Strether holds his own as an observer, if not as a "liver"; little Bilham's presence helps him to this. When Strether questions him again on the score of the "virtuous attachment," little Bilham's meaning at last emerges clearly:

"I can only tell you that it's what they pass for. But is n't that enough? What more than a vain appearance does the wisest of us know? I commend you," the young man declared with a pleasant emphasis, "the vain appearance."

(I, 202-203.)

Strether looks at the assembly of men and femmes du monde in the garden and sees little Bilham's point: society presents a surface that is brilliant and beautiful, whatever else it might not be. Miss Barrace, a lover of intrigue, positively feeds upon the excitement of appearances that represent a challenge to her wit. But she refuses to spoil her enjoyment by judgement. With her removeable lorgnette, she chooses only to see what is pleasant or intriguing.

He envied Miss Barrace at any rate her power of not being [serious about anything]. She seemed, with little cries and protests and quick recognitions, . . . to stand before life as before some full shop-window. You could fairly hear, as she selected and pointed, the tap of her tortoise-shell against the glass. "It's certain that we do need seeing about; only I'm glad it's not I who have to do it. One does, no doubt, begin that way; then suddenly one finds that one has given it up. It's too much, it's too difficult." (I, 204.)

Strether is able to place the Parisian difficulty:

"You've all of you here so much visual sense that you've somehow all 'run' to it. There are moments when it strikes one that you haven't any other."

"Any moral," little Bilham explained, watching serenely, across the garden, the several femmes du monde.

.....

"I dare say moreover," [Miss Barrace] pursued with an interested gravity, "that I do, that we all do here, run too much to mere eye. But how can it be helped? We're all looking at each other - and in the light of Paris one sees what things resemble. That's what the light of Paris seems always to show. It's the fault of the light of Paris - dear old light!"

"Dear old Paris!" little Bilham echoed.

"Everything, every one shows," Miss Barrace went on.

"But for what they really are?" Strether asked.

"Oh I like your Boston 'reallys'! But sometimes - yes."

"Dear old Paris then!" Strether resignedly sighed while for a moment they looked at each other. (I, 206-207.)

Like a chorus, but with much humour and a fine play of irony, Miss Barrace and little Bilham comment upon Strether's problem of appearance and reality. Their extreme of non-judgement throws into relief Strether's New England extreme, of wanting to place everything firmly in a moral light (his "Boston 'reallys'").

Strether's long-awaited meeting with Mme. de Vionnet is the final link in the chain leading to his self-realisation; all of it taking place in the wonderful setting of Gloriani's garden of life, which holds out to Strether everything that might have been for him.

She was dressed in black, but in black that struck him as light and transparent; she was exceedingly fair, and, though she was as markedly slim, her face had a roundness, with eyes far apart and a little strange. Her smile was natural and dim; her hat not extravagant; he had only perhaps a sense of the clink, beneath her fine black sleeves, of more gold bracelets and bangles than he had ever seen a lady wear. Chad was excellently free and light about their encounter; it was one of the occasions on which Strether most wished he himself might have arrived at such ease and such humour. . . . (I, 210.)

Despite the subtle hints of Mme. de Vionnet's strangeness - her eyes, and the golden bracelets beneath her black sleeves (this is reminiscent of the Prioress in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales who wears on her habit a golden brooch

with the ambiguous motto: Amor vincit omnia) - Strether is nevertheless struck most of all by the failure of another of his preconceptions:

There was somehow not quite a wealth in her; and a wealth was all that, in his simplicity, he had definitely prefigured. Still, it was too much to be sure already that there was but a poverty. (I, 211.)

And, although Mme. de Vionnet does later prove herself as various as Cleopatra, the original note she strikes for Strether in Gloriani's garden is the note he will eventually find the truest - the note of her "common humanity." (I, 213.)

For the meantime, Strether is not allowed much time to judge Mme. de Vionnet. Society intervenes in the same way as at Strether's first sight of Chad in the Paris theatre. A duchess and an ambassador (irony!) lead Mme. de Vionnet away with a "social art of which Strether . . . felt himself no master". (I, 215.)

The small incident brings home to him once again the impersonality of such a society, a "note . . . false to the Woollett scale and the Woollett humanity." (I, 214.) However, Mme. de Vionnet's odd social treatment of Strether falls into place "as but a minor incident of the procession" (I, 215) - a procession that is leading him to the heart of his own life. In little Bilham's interested presence, Strether overflows into "a quiet stream of demonstration that as soon as he had let go he felt as the real relief."

There were some things that had to come in time if they were to come at all. If they did n't come in time they were lost for ever. It was the general sense of them that had overwhelmed him with its long slow rush.

"It's not too late for you, on any side, and you don't strike me as in danger of missing the train; besides which people can be in general pretty well trusted, of course - with the clock

of their freedom ticking as loud as it seems to do here - to keep an eye on the fleeting hour. All the same don't forget that you're young - blessedly young; be glad of it on the contrary and live up to it. Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It does n't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you have n't had that what have you had? This place and these impressions - . . . well, have had their abundant message for me. . . . I see it now. I have n't done so enough before - and now I'm old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh I do see, at least. . . . It's too late. And it's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there. Now I hear its faint receding whistle miles and miles down the line. What one loses one loses; make no mistake about that. The affair - I mean the affair of life - could n't, no doubt, have been different for me; for it's at the best a tin mould, either fluted and embossed, . . . or else smooth and dreadfully plain, into which, a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured - so that one 'takes' the form, as the great cook says, and is more or less compactly held by it: one lives in fine as one can. Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore don't be, like me, without the memory of that illusion. I was either, at the right time, too stupid or too intelligent to have it; I don't quite know which.

.
 The right time is any time that one is still so lucky as to have.

.
 Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!"
 (I, 217-218.)

As James notes in his preface to The Ambassadors, Strether's words scarcely need any amplification. Their message could not be more straight-forward, and, although the words are directed at little Bilham, their message is above all for Strether himself. He is addressing his lost youth in the form of little Bilham. The words, "too late," have not for nothing been called the saddest in the English language; and Strether's whole monologue is a moving variation on that theme. When Bilham remonstrates that Strether is nevertheless "amusing" to him,

Strether replies: "'But what am I to myself?'" (I, 219.) This quiet question holds all the tragic implications of Strether's life. (1) But self-realisation has its rewards, and Strether finds his way out in Gloriani's garden of life. He watches the Duchess and the artist meet in an encounter, and he asks himself: "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?" (I, 219.) Strether realises that he does at least have this left to him - to be in relation to life through his reawakened awareness of it, even if it is too late for him to do the living. His perception of this possibility determines the whole course of the novel, from this point on. James says in the preface:

He has . . . missed too much, . . . and he wakes up to it in conditions that press the spring of a terrible question. Would there yet perhaps be time for reparation? - reparation, that is, for the injury done his character; for the affront, he is quite ready to say, so stupidly put upon it and in which he has even himself had so clumsy a hand? The answer to which is that he now at all events sees; so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this process of vision. (2)

Strether is too late for life, but he is not too late to do justice to the life of others. The process of his vision forms the whole remaining course of The Ambassadors. It is Strether's search for his lost dignity, for his lost life, which can only be found now in his understanding of the life of others. It may be only a vicarious life,

1. Similarly, unanswerable questions sum up the tragedy of Shakespeare's Othello and Lear; Othello's question being: "Where should Othello go?" (IV, ii, l. 274) and Lear's: "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I, iv, l. 223.)

2. The Art of the Novel, p. 308.

but it is nevertheless something happier to have been "kept for" than in the case of another of James's characters, in the short story entitled "The Beast in the Jungle." In this story the hero, John Marcher, feels he is being kept for something and spends his whole life waiting for it, only to realise that "he had been the man of his time, the man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened."

(1) Far from having nothing happen to him, Strether begins to live through "seeing" as much as he can and will eventually be as much - if not more - alive as the people about him.

The momentous experience in Gloriani's garden begins Strether's new life of "seeing." Nevertheless, as he reveals to Miss Costrey, he has made a second major compromise with appearances: he has chosen to accept that Chad is more interested in Jeanne de Vionnet than in her mother. He believes this even more when Miss Costrey informs him: "Ces gens-là don't divorce, you know, any more than they emigrate or abjure - they think it impious and vulgar." (I, 229.) Miss Costrey does not this time challenge Strether's compromise; she agrees: "'She has brought him up for her daughter.'" (I, 232.) But, speaking of women, she extends a warning. "'We're abysses'" (I, 234) she says, and the warning has implications that reach beyond women alone. Strether puts one more direct question to Chad himself before he sets out on his chosen path. He asks whether Mme. de Vionnet's life is "without reproach" and Chad's reply - "'Absolutely without reproach. A beautiful life.'" -

1. "The Beast in the Jungle," The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 17, p.125.

sets him at rest. (I, 239.) He does not sense yet how different a meaning Chad has attached to "beautiful" in his reply. (For Strether it means without sin; while for Chad it appears to mean undisgraced by public exposure or scandal.)

Books Six to Twelve of The Ambassadors trace in detail Strether's process of seeing, learning and understanding. He does not - and cannot, being the type of person he is - leave his conscience out of the process, but, as never before, he allows his perceptive faculty a full rein. He also allows himself freedoms beyond the call of Woollett's purpose. One of these freedoms is his acceptance of an invitation to visit Mme. de Vionnet - a move which Woollett could only see as collaboration with the enemy. And, once having allowed himself this, Strether does not restrain his imagination, nor oppose the impressions he receives. Mme. de Vionnet's house speaks to him with all the eloquence of Chad's home and Gloriani's garden, and Strether responds to its voice.

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 looking for . . . 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.

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They were among the matters that marked Madame de Vionnet's apartment as something quite different from Miss Costrey's little museum of bargains and from Chad's lovely home, he recognised 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.
(I, 243 - 245.)

Strether sees Mme. de Vionnet as the "beautifully passive" heiress of an old, old order of "transmission." (I, 245.) He recognises her place in that order while sensing at the same time her individuality: "He guessed at intense little preferences and sharp little exclusions, a deep suspicion of the vulgar and a personal view of the right." (I, 245.) Quite apart from Mme. de Vionnet's place in the glitter of social gatherings, is her place in this older order, as it is revealed to Strether by her home and her selected possessions. Here he is overwhelmed by "the air of supreme respectability, the consciousness, small, still, reserved, but none the less distinct and diffused, of private honour." (I, 245-246.)

This is the newest note yet for Strether in his adventure. He recognised Mme. de Vionnet's "common humanity" (I, 213) when he met her in Gloriani's garden, but now it is placed in a new light as the fruit of something immeasurably old - an aristocratic tradition in which a refined simplicity triumphs over the brighter gloss of the world of high society. (One has only to compare Mme. de Vionnet with Miss Barrace or even the Duchess, to see how; the difference will come out most, for Strether and for us, in the final chapters of The Ambassadors.) Refined simplicity is also the note that Mme. de Vionnet strikes personally, on Strether's first visit. She sits immobile during the visit (Chad has left them alone together), but merely by the "fine prompt play of her deep young face" (I, 247) she appeals to Strether with her unexpected humility. The sadness he senses underlying this

humility affects him deeply.

She was the poor lady for Strether now because clearly she had some trouble, and her appeal to him could only mean that her trouble was deep. He could n't help it; it was n't his fault; he had done nothing; but by a turn of the hand she had somehow made their encounter a relation. (I, 249.)

Strether's sensitivity to surroundings and to the unspoken things that lie beyond the spoken, lead him further than he had intended. His responsiveness leads him to feel sympathy for Mme. de Vionnet, and his sympathy implies, however unspoken as yet, a reciprocation. Strether still struggles to maintain the independence of his moral purpose; but, as with Chad, Mme. de Vionnet's mere presence - her personal reality which Woollett was so ready to overlook - alters everything.

At the back of his head, behind everything, was the sense that she was - there, before him, close to him, in vivid imperative form - one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met, whose very presence, look, voice, the mere contemporaneous fact of whom, from the very moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere recognition. (I, 252.)

James's exploration of the power of presence is a feature of his later work. He constantly insists on characters who have a personal aura that immediately alters everything within their reach. They are people who cannot be discounted. Their aura, their "presence", is so compelling that by itself it establishes them with intensity. Rose Armiger, the "Bad Heroine" (1) of The Other House (1896), and the hero, Tony Bream, are strong examples of the case. Tony's presence "was, anywhere and at any time, as much as ever the clock at the moment it strikes." (2) Rose Armiger possesses the same quality:

1. The Notebooks of Henry James, p.140.

2. The Other House, p. 103.

She had a presence that was, in its own way, like Tony Bream's: it made, simply and directly, a difference in any personal question exposed to it. (1)

Included in such presence are bearing and manner, even dress (2) - the attributes society cultivates; another part is, often, physical beauty - though not of the conventional kind usually, since it consists more of a radiance of strength of character. For James, much of the power of presence in a person stems from the fullness with which such a person lives. Ralph Pendrel, in The Sense of the Past (1917), says of the Midmores: "'You're all high-coloured and splendidly of this world.'" (3) Mrs. Beaver, in The Other House, says of Rose Armiger: "'Life is somehow becoming to her.'" (4) And another character, Dennis Vidal, is overwhelmed by Rose's "high insolence of life and strength." (5) The enviable nature of these forceful people emerges clearly in the short story entitled "In the Cage" (1898). The little Post Office girl who is the centre of the story is enthralled by her aristocratic customers, above all a certain lady who is conducting an affair by means of telegram and cable. This lady strikes the poor girl as

the high reality, the bristling truth, . . . one of the creatures, in fine, in whom all the conditions for happiness actually met, and who, in the air they made, bloomed with an unwitting insolence. (6)

1. Ibid., p. 97.

2. As, for instance, Ralph Pendrel perceives in the case of Mrs. Midmore: "She threw it off to a mere glance that she represented by the aid of dress the absolute value and use of presence as presence, apart from any other office. . . ." (The Sense of the Past, p. 145.)

3. Ibid., p. 192.

4. The Other House, p. 87.

5. Ibid., p. 143.

6. "In the Cage," The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 11, pp. 377 - 378.

James often characterises presence by the word "insolence" - the splendour such people as Chad, Kate Croy (in The Wings of The Dove) and Charlotte Stant (in The Golden Bowl) possess. This "insolence" is an ambiguous quality. It does not necessarily signify that the possessors are presences of good. But they are nevertheless powerful, enviable, remarkable; and no one can reckon lightly with them. (1)

In The Ambassadors, however, Mme. de Vionnet has all the power of presence without "insolence". She has struck Strether as humble through some deep sadness; her hard-won composure is far from insolence, though this does not detract from her personal force for Strether. The major reason is Strether's imaginativeness, which enables him to recognise her depths and her value. His mere recognition entails responsibility, which he tries to escape. Thinking he has found "the way . . . to get off," he promises what she asks, but with a reservation: "'I'll save you if I can.'" (I, 255.) Strether's attempt at escape proves futile several days later. He had promised Mme. de Vionnet that he would find out whether her daughter, Jeanne, is in love with Chad. But once again the perpetual reaction of Strether's imagination piles up its consequences.

She was fairly beautiful to him - a faint pastel in an oval frame; he thought of her already as of some lurking image in a long gallery, the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing was known but that she had died young. Little Jeanne was n't, doubtless, to die young, but one could n't, all the same, bear on her lightly enough.
(I, 259-260.)

1. It is Tony Bream's mistake (in The Other House) to reckon lightly with Rose Armiger; as it is also Maggie Verver's mistake (in The Golden Bowl) to underestimate the powers and the will of Charlotte Stant.

Instead of disturbing the girl's innocence, Strether asks Mme. de Vionnet a favour of his own: "'Don't touch her. Don't know - don't want to know.'"

"Anything, everything you ask," she smiled. "I shan't know then - never. Thank you," she added with peculiar gentleness as she turned away.

The sound of it lingered with him, making him fairly feel as if he had been tripped up and had a fall. In the very act of arranging with her for his independence he had, under pressure from a particular perception, inconsistently, quite stupidly, committed himself. . . . He had n't detached, he had more closely connected himself. . . . (I, 276.)

The realisation of his commitment brings relief to Strether. He enjoys the occasion (another glittering social gathering, at Chad's house) "as with dormant pulses at last awake." (I, 278.) And when little Bilham furnishes him with more new facts about Chad's feelings for Mme. de Vionnet, it is a relief for Strether to know he can support her. Chad, little Bilham says, cares less for Mme. de Vionnet than she cares for him. Strether is by now fully in accord with Miss Gostrey's earlier suggestion that for Chad to give Mme. de Vionnet up would be base and ungrateful after all she has done. Woollett wants Strether to force Chad to break with her, but Strether is no longer capable of divorcing Chad from his relationship with Mme. de Vionnet.

"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." (I, 283.)

Strether is therefore horrified to learn from little Bilham that Chad's return to America would sever the friendship altogether - and that Chad would be very likely to welcome the end of it. Book Sixth closes with Strether at last fairly certain where his sympathies lie.

Although he is, as far as he himself is concerned, now committed to sympathy with Mme. de Vionnet, his ever-present prior commitment to Mrs. Newsome prevents Strether from acting. For three weeks or more he avoids contact with Mme. de Vionnet, seeking to lessen his involvement. In Book Seventh, however, matters are brought to a head. The book opens with Strether alone in Notre Dame - one of those memorable scenes James achieves several times in his major works. I can only liken these scenes to epiphanies, in the sense James Joyce has given to the word. In Stephen Hero, Joyce says:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. (1)

Stephen goes on to explain that, at the moment of the epiphany, the "soul" or the "whatness" of an object "leaps to us from the vestment of appearance" and becomes radiant. (2) The wording of the youthful hero's concept is essentially vague and there have been many attempts to define what exactly Joyce meant by "epiphany." The general consensus (3) seems to be that an epiphany is a moment of

1. James Joyce, Stephen Hero (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), p. 188.

2. Ibid., p. 190.

3. Cf. for example the interpretations of "epiphany" by A. Walton Litz in The Art of James Joyce (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 23 ff., and by Theodore Spencer in his introduction to Stephen Hero (Jonathan Cape, 1946), pp. 13-14. Richard Ellman, though his study, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) is invaluable on most aspects of Joyce, only discusses the epiphany of objects - which was but a part of Joyce's theory. Joyce also applied his theory to characters and lives. As Theodore Spencer says: "Dubliners . . . is a series of epiphanies describing apparently trivial but actually crucial and revealing moments in the lives of different characters." (loc.cit., pp. 13-14.) This aspect of the epiphany is the one James reveals in his work.

revelation, a showing or a shining forth of meaning from some object, incident or scene. (Some of Joyce's earliest recorded epiphanies were merely fragments of conversation overheard.) However trivial the scene, object or incident may at first appear, at the moment of true perception it suddenly expands towards the infinite, radiating significance. An observer is of course implied, for the epiphany consists of an interaction between the watching consciousness and the thing or person observed (without the person needing to be aware of the watcher). The scene is epiphanised, or given potency and significance, by the insight of the perceiver.

Several critics have noticed how effectively James "frames" moments of heightened importance, especially in such outstanding scenes as Susan Stringham's view of Milly Theale in the Alps, in The Wings of the Dove (Bk. 3, chap. 1); or the card-game in The Golden Bowl (cf. p.155 below); and of course Strether's experience on the river, in The Ambassadors (cf. p. 74 below). F.O. Matthiessen draws attention to the framing of the latter scene and points out that it reveals James's "extraordinary awareness of how art frames experience." (1) In a study of James's "framing" techniques, Viola Hopkins gives a concise description of what I have called James's epiphanies when she calls them "moments of recognition in which sight and insight merge." (2)

1. F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 35.

2. Viola Hopkins, "Visual Art Devices and Parallels in the Fiction of Henry James," PMLA, vol. 76 (1961), p. 563.

In James's work, such moments are often the most outstanding in the novels. For the reader, as well as for the consciousness involved, these scenes are weighted with significance and revelations; yet they bear the weight by virtue of the accompanying evocation of surroundings highly poetic - either metaphoric or symbolic - in nature. One may usually recognise them by the comparisons that are drawn: to a picture, a stage setting or an old tale; that is, to some form of art. As F.O. Matthiessen puts it, art frames experience. While the experience remains immediate, it at the same time becomes immemorial - a timeless moment, framed and set apart from the formless flow of the casual impressions of life. Maggie Verver's major epiphany in The Golden Bowl occurs while she observes, through a window, the others playing a formal game of cards as though they were on a stage. In The Wings of the Dove, Milly Theale's painful insight into the limitations of her life occurs while she gazes at the Bronzino portrait in Lord Mark's home (Bk. 5, chap. 2). A picture emerges as the defining image of Strether's greatest revelation in The Ambassadors: his view of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet together on the river. Comparisons with literature arise in Strether's present epiphany in Notre Dame. The closest and most useful parallel in this case is in The Sacred Fount, where the narrator gains his deepest insight into May Server by coming across her alone in the grounds of

Newmarch. (1)

Strether goes to Notre Dame to escape from himself for a while, under the "impulse to let things be, to give them time to justify themselves or at least to pass." (II, 4.) The cathedral is to him a refuge from the "hard outer light" where justice - "and injustice too" - is so insistent. (II, 5.) Away from that light, in the dimness of the cathedral, Strether feels free to contemplate and to watch others (in their belief) with a "vague tenderness" (II, 6) that involves him in no responsibility. However, on this occasion of escape, Strether is "called upon to play his part in an encounter that deeply stirred his imagination." (II, 6.) This encounter is Strether's epiphany - in the wonderfully suggestive setting of the great cathedral that Strether goes to not as a believer but as a watcher and an admirer of others' faith. At first he is not aware that the figure which strikes him with its suggestive effect is Mme. de Vionnet's; nevertheless the lady's stillness arrests him.

1. There is the same magical sense of setting in The Sacred Fount encounter, which takes place at evening in the grey woods, a "castle of enchantment." (p. 98.) The scene as May Server approaches also recalls art: "We were in a beautiful old picture, we were in a beautiful old tale. . . ." "She came slowly and a little wearily down the vista, and her sad shy advance, with the massed wood on either side of her, was like the reminiscence of a picture or the refrain of a ballad." (p. 98.) For the narrator, the encounter is decisive: "All her story seemed at once to look at me out of the fact of her present lonely prowl." (p. 97.) What he realises is that May Server's trouble is very deep, since it has caused her to seek, for relief, the refuge of the woods (as Mme. de Vionnet seeks the refuge of the church in The Ambassadors); and what the narrator reaches through the epiphany is a sense of his responsibility, in consequence of his vision, to support her. "It was she herself, poor creature, who was [on my hands]; this was the thing that just now loomed large, and the secret [May Server's secret trouble] was a comparative detail." (p. 100.)

She was n't prostrate - not in any degree bowed, but she was strangely fixed, and her prolonged immobility showed her, while he passed and paused, as wholly given up to the need, whatever it was, that had brought her there. She only sat and gazed before her, as he himself often sat; but she had placed herself, as he never did, within the focus of the shrine, and she had lost herself, he could easily see, as he would only have liked to do. She was not a wandering alien, keeping back more than she gave, but one of the familiar, the intimate, the fortunate, for whom these dealings had a method and a meaning. She reminded our friend - since it was the way of nine tenths of his current impressions to act as recalls of things imagined - of some fine firm concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read, something that, had he had a hand for drama, he might himself have written, renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation. Her back, as she sat, was turned to him, but his impression absolutely required that she should be young and interesting, and she carried her head moreover, even in the sacred shade, with a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity. But what had such a woman come for if she had n't come to pray? Strether's reading of such matters was, it must be owned, confused; but he wondered if her attitude were some congruous fruit of absolution, of "indulgence." He knew but dimly what indulgence, in such a place, might mean; yet he had, as with a soft sweep, a vision of how it might indeed add to the zest of active rites. All this was a good deal to have been denoted by a mere lurking figure who was nothing to him; but, the last thing before leaving the church, he had the surprise of a still deeper quickening. (II, 6-7.)

Strether's experience in Notre Dame is given shape by that deeper quickening, which is his recognition of the figure as Mme. de Vionnet. Now, the imaginative insights he gained into an unknown figure's life show themselves to be insights into the life of someone he does know. Like the narrator in The Sacred Fount, Strether has to recognise his responsibility of sympathy towards the woman whom he has observed in her refuge. His response is to give Mme. de Vionnet an open assurance of

his support: he will tell Mrs. Newsome that she is "worth saving." (II, 17.) And Mme. de Vionnet again drives her advantage home immediately. Strether is prepared to support Mme. de Vionnet, but refuses to say whether he believes that Chad's going home will harm either Chad or Mme. de Vionnet. "'It's not my affair,'" Strether protests. She pulls him up sharply:

"I beg your pardon. It's just there that, since you've taken it up and are committed to it, it most intensely becomes yours. You're not saving me, I take it, for your interest in myself, but for your interest in our friend. The one's at any rate wholly dependent on the other." (II, 22.)

In recognising the truth of this, through his experience in Notre Dame and his resulting further commitment, Strether is at the greatest distance yet from Woollett and Mrs. Newsome. Even her attempt to reassert her fading influence cannot make him swerve from the path which has been made clear to him. Instead of complying with her demand to bring Chad home or else return himself, Strether does neither. In fact, he deliberately goes against her wishes by asking Chad not to go home yet, though the young man is quite ready to do so. It is Strether's last direct interference in the matter, at this stage; and it is more a retraction than an interference, since it is an attempt to wipe out his former pressures on the affair and allow things to take their natural course. Strether wants, as he felt in Notre Dame, to let things come naturally, to "give them time to justify themselves, or at least to pass." (II, 4.) And his refusal to leave, despite the fact that Mrs. Newsome is replacing him as ambassador (with the Pecoeks),

is a result of his wish to do justice to the affair. As he says to Miss Costrey, he must stay - "'Just to see that I do play fair - and a little also, no doubt, that they [the new ambassadors] do.'" (II, 43.)

Many things have been changed by Strether's realisation of his own perceptual and moral growth. Mrs. Newsome has never appeared so clearly to him as the sort of person she really is (1), and Mme. de Vionnet has grown immeasurably, in his eyes, in stature. Strether finds the cause when he becomes aware that Miss Costrey no longer has more to tell him than he has to give, and he reflects:

It was the proportions that were changed, and the proportions were at all times, he philosophised, the very conditions of perception, the terms of thought. (II, 49.)

Strether's own proportions, intellectually and imaginatively, are greater than when he began his mission; and they have allowed him to perceive the true proportions of Mrs. Newsome as well as of Mme. de Vionnet. For, while he recognises the personal worth of the Frenchwoman and her right to live according to her beliefs, he has at the same time to concede these points to Mrs. Newsome as well. Each woman has her own conception of her personal integrity and it is only fitting that each should be true to it. But, by the same justice, Strether too is entitled to be true to himself, even if it brings him into

1. "It struck him really that he had never so lived with her as during this period of her silence; the silence was a sacred hush, a finer clearer medium, in which her idiosyncracies showed.

.....
 And if he had never seen her so soundless he had never, on the other hand, felt her so highly, so almost austere, herself; pure and by the vulgar estimate 'cold,' but deep devoted delicate sensitive noble." (II, 47.)



Mrs. Newsome's disfavour. She is his benefactress and possibly his future wife, but she cannot replace his own conscience. By staying in Paris, Strether is living as closely as possible to the way he deeply feels he should always have been living; his own integrity is at stake. He is living, in his way, as fully as the main actors of the drama. His drama is a moral and aesthetic one: he is learning to appreciate the beauty of the moment without inordinate guilt; to reconcile his fear of pleasure and his longing for pleasure. Because he no longer has youth, the moment for him is not a moment of doing in the ordinary sense, but of perceiving and receiving to the utmost. Thought in such cases is another form of action; in fact, merely being, if it is with fullness, is action. In The Ivory Tower (James's second unfinished novel, posthumously published), the following interchange between Gray Fielder and Horton Vint illuminates the point:

"Do? The question is n't of your doing,
but simply of your being."
Gray cast about. "But don't they come
to the same thing?" (1)

Mentally, Strether is living the youth he never had. By being in Paris, on the outskirts (but nevertheless in relation to) a living drama, and by "seeing" as much as he can, he is "'making up late for what [he] did n't have early.'" (II, 51.)

"They may say what they like - it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth. One puts that in where one can - it has to come in somewhere, if only out of the lives, the conditions, the feelings of other persons."
(II, 51.)

Strether, with his curious mixture of detachment

1. The Ivory Tower, p. 115.

and involvement, and with his envious curiosity tempered by sympathy, is superior in his perceptions, now, to Miss Gostrey. She has only what he earlier characterised as her "science" (I, 137) of enquiry; she has curiosity without the far-reaching imagination of Strether. (1) Strether has begun to avoid her type of conjecturing; he waits for life to spring its surprises in its own time. He is thus in possession of far more than Miss Gostrey could ever be. Chad and Mme. de Vionnet are his now, in his own peculiar, vicarious sense.

"The point is that they're mine. Yes, they're my youth; since somehow at the right time nothing else ever was. . . . It would all go - go before doing its work - if they were to fail me."

On which, just here, Miss Gostrey inveterately questioned. "What do you, in particular, call its work?"

"Well, to see me through."

"But through what?" - she liked to get it all out of him.

"Why through this experience." That was all that would come. (II, 51.)

While Strether sees the couple through their experience, he is the closest to "living" he has ever been or, one feels, ever will be. He is so quietly exalted by it that even the imminent arrival of Sarah Pocock (who "increased in volume as she drew nearer" [II, 61]) cannot sully his enjoyment of his chosen course.

The early summer brushed the picture over and blurred everything but the near; it made a vast warm fragrant medium in which the elements floated together on the best of terms, in which rewards were immediate and reckonings postponed. (II, 59.)

1. Waymarsh failed far earlier of having anything to offer Strether in his search; Miss Gostrey has lasted longer because at least she did not have Waymarsh's complete "social sightlessness." (I, 137.)

Nevertheless, there is a hint of the pathetic in Strether's new freedom. His triumphs are those of the little man still - he takes "days off" in Paris as though he were a timid little clerk in Mrs. Newsome's family business.

He . . . did what he had n't done before; he took two or three times whole days off - irrespective of others, of two or three taken with Miss Costrey, two or three taken with little Bilham: he went to Chartres and cultivated, before the front of the cathedral, a general easy beatitude; he went to Fontainebleu and imagined himself on the way to Italy; he went to Rouen with a little handbag and inordinately spent the night.
(II, 59-60.)

Poor Strether! Vignettes such as the above keep before us constantly the limited nature of his late awakening to life and freedom, and remind us that externally his life will remain a bare one. It is only his inner life that will benefit.

The arrival of the new ambassadors in Paris dampens Strether's hard-won assurance. Sarah Pocock is Woollett at its narrowest and blindest; she is unswerving in her moral views and lacking in imagination. Mamie Pocock, though she later appears as Woollett at its best, is at first unforthcoming, over-shadowed as she is by her forceful sister-in-law; while Jim Pocock, Sarah's husband, is the businessman who represents Woollett at its worst level of vulgarity. Strether had hoped that the Pockocks might approve of the change in Chad, validating his own reactions. But he is soon aware that Sarah's "bridling brightness . . . was merely general and noticed nothing." (II, 80.) Jim, on the other hand, reveals his perceptions as limited to the crudely and luridly speculative. The failure of Strether's last chance to explain his

conduct to Woollett sets him questioning the whole basis of his consciousness:

Was he, on this question of Chad's improvement, fantastic and away from the truth? Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation . . . but the alarm of the vain thing menaced by the touch of the real? Was this contribution of the real possibly the mission of the Pecoeks? - had they some to make the work of observation, as he had practised observation, crack and crumble, and to reduce Chad to the plain terms in which honest minds could deal with him? (II, 80-81.)

Fortunately, though Sarah is very real to him, Strether is unable to discount the equally compelling reality of the people he has met in Paris. His doubts fade once he recalls those people and the strength of their impressions on him - Maria Costrey, little Bilham, Mme. de Vionnet, Jeanne de Vionnet, and Chad himself. He reassures himself as to the validity of his method of observation. It does not reduce people to "plain terms," but then he is learning that one cannot reduce people to plain terms without doing serious injustice to some aspect of them. People cannot be "dealt with" as though they were inanimate merchandise or mere figures upon a balance sheet.

So the arrival of the Pecoeks, by bringing matters to a head, serves to clarify for Strether where his sympathies lie. They lie with the misjudged - with Mme. de Vionnet. "With Sarah's brilliant eyes on him," he steps into Mme. de Vionnet's boat. "It rocked beneath him, but he settled himself in his place." (II, 94.) With his double consciousness (the "detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference" (I, 67), Strether is in fact elated at the "quite excitingly, altogether richly, inevitable" nature of his position. (II, 112.) He is

relieved to have had the decision to join Mme. de Vionnet forced upon him by others; and he puts the resulting freedom he gains to immediate use. Now that he is committed not only in his own eyes but in those of Sarah Pocock, he feels free to show his commitment by going to visit Mme. de Vionnet. With her, instead of with Miss Gostrey, he discusses the new ambassadors. His choice of supporting Mme. de Vionnet in place of Sarah Pocock is validated anew by the differences he perceives between the rival women. He has already met with Sarah's "calculated omissions of reference," the fruit of a "hopeless limited propriety." (II, 113-114.) When he converses with Mme. de Vionnet he is conscious of a different kind of omission, which does not stem from narrow prejudice and is instead the fruit of a high civilisation:

It ended . . . by being quite beautiful between them, the number of things they had a manifest consciousness of not saying. He would have liked to turn her, critically, to the subject of Mrs. Pocock, but he so stuck to the line he felt to be the point of honour and of delicacy that he scarce even asked her what her personal impression had been. He knew it, for that matter, without putting her to trouble. . . . (II, 114.)

Their omissions lack the hypocrisy of Sarah's, since they are prompted by discretion and delicacy, a sense of "high decencies" (II, 114) that is positive, rather than negative (as in the case of Sarah, whose omissions are a refusal to speak her real feelings). Hypocrisy falls away from Strether and Mme. de Vionnet's omissions because they understand one another. Reciprocity is the key to

their height of communication. (1)

It is a strange twist of irony that the New World, in the person of Sarah Pocock, should raise higher barriers to communication than the Old World with all its subtleties. However, the Old World is not without its darker side, nor the New World without its virtues. Mamie Pocock will later exemplify for Strether the advantage of Woollett manners when they are at their simplest and least hypocritical. Meanwhile Mme. de Vionnet reveals how treacherously deep the Old World can be. Strether has been reflecting anew on the "romantic side" of Chad's connection with Mme. de Vionnet and all that her house signifies for him:

Her noble old apartment offered a succession of three [rooms], the first two of which indeed, on entering, smaller than the last, but each with its faded and formal air, enlarged the office of the ante-chamber and enriched the sense of approach. Strether fancied them, liked them, and, passing through them with her more slowly now, met a sharp renewal of his original impression. He stopped, he looked back; the whole thing made a vista, which he found high melancholy and sweet - full, once more, of dim historic shades, of the faint far-away cannon roar of the great Empire. It was doubtless half the projection of his mind, but his mind was a thing that, among old waxed parquets, pale shades of pink and green, pseudo-classic candelabra, he had always needfully to reckon with. The oddity, the originality, the poetry - he did n't know what to call it - of Chad's connexion reaffirmed for him its romantic side. (II, 125.)

1. Earlier in The Ambassadors, faced with the difficulty of explaining the change in Chad to Mrs. Newsome, Strether reflected that

"nothing ever was in fact - for anyone else - explained. One went through the vain notions, but it was mostly a waste of life. A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, did n't care if they did n't." (I, 141.)

In The Ivory Tower, Gray Fielder states that "a relation is exactly a fact of reciprocity." Prejudice is a barrier to communication because it is not reciprocal but "single-handed." (p. 233.)

But, in the ante-chamber - "a little slippery and cold even in summer" (II, 126) - Mme. de Vionnet turns to Strether with the announcement: "'We're marrying Jeanne.'" (II, 126.) It strikes him immediately as a move in a game and a tacit assumption of his complicity. Mme. de Vionnet's super-subtle manoeuvrings of him seem to Strether to be as "exquisitely remorseless" (II, 128) as the disposal of her daughter for her own ends.

"Ah well," said Strether decorously, "I heartily hope you may [bring it off]." There seemed little else for him to say, though her communication had the oddest effect on him. Vaguely and confusedly he was troubled by it; feeling as if he had even himself been concerned in something deep and dim. He had allowed for depths, but these were greater: and it was as if, oppressively - indeed absurdly - he was responsible for what they had now thrown up to the surface. It was - through something ancient and cold in it - what he would have called the real thing. In short his hostess's news . . . was a sensible shock, and his oppression a weight he felt he must somehow or other immediately get rid of. There were too many connexions missing to make it tolerable he should do anything else. He was prepared to suffer - before his own inner tribunal - for Chad; he was prepared to suffer even for Madame de Vionnet. But he was n't prepared to suffer for the little girl. So now having said the proper thing, he wanted to get away. She held him an instant, however, with another appeal.

"Do I seem to you very awful?"

"Awful? Why so?" But he called it to himself, even as he spoke, his biggest insincerity yet. (II, 129-130.)

Strether's "insincerity" reveals that, even in the discreet interchanges that are governed by the sense of approach, by high decencies and delicacies, there are certain flaws. Strether's insincere reply to Mme. de Vionnet is a tribute to decorum, concealing his shock at her actions but also stifling his spontaneity. He finds his reactions checked as they were checked by propriety at his first meeting with Chad. There is the

same ambiguity - for, if a high civilisation has depths of beauty, it also conceals shallows of insincerity. But, as before, Strether perceives that the only way out is to use the time gained by the demands of propriety, to consider the facts quietly, "before his own inner tribunal." (II, 129.) His "insincerity" is in fact tactfulness, a white lie which does not reject Mme. de Vionnet outright. As if she is aware of this, she rewards Strether with further confidences through which he begins to see what lies behind her cold treatment of Jeanne. Her disclosure that Chad has had the initiative in the affair is for Strether "a light, a lead." (II, 131.) He sees for the first time the "refined disguised suppressed passion of her face" (II, 131) - and his sudden intimacy with "her innermost life" (II, 130) begins for him the discovery of the power of human passions that lurk even in the "cold chambers of the past" (II, 127) of Mme. de Vionnet's house.

Strether explains to Miss Costrey what the incident has shown him: "It means, this disposition of the daughter, that there's now nothing else: nothing else but him and the mother." (II, 138.) But he is wrong when he sees it as a final triumph for Mme. de Vionnet, as a sign from Chad of "the measure of his attachment." (II, 139.) Strether is still convinced that Chad's loyalty to Mme. de Vionnet is unshakeable and that he cannot be swayed by the Pecoeks. How mistaken Strether is emerges when he announces that Jim Pecoek above all acts as a deterrent to Chad leaving Mme. de Vionnet:

"The difficulty's Jim. Jim's the note of home.

.....

"The note of the home for which Mrs. Newsome wants

him - the home of the business. Jim stands, with his little legs apart, at the door of that tent; and Jim is, frankly speaking, extremely awful." (II, 140-141.)

Strether does not foresee that this note, the vulgar note of big business, will in fact appeal to Chad.

The strongest note of home comes to Strether himself from Mamie Pocock. He finds her alone on Chad's balcony and "rather shabbily" (II, 146) deserted by the others. (1) What strikes him most in his silent view of Mamie - for the experience gives him insights into her character in the same way that he gained insight into Mme. de Vionnet in Notre Dame - is her "quiet dignity that pulled things bravely together." (II, 150.) He is suddenly aware of how much she has gone through and how much she has grown in stature since arriving in Paris, where "deep still things had come to pass within her." (II, 151.) Mamie, Strether realises, has seen - seen the change in Chad, and her consequent inadequacy as an object of attraction to him; and she has quietly kept her distance, with her secret. Even in conversation with Strether, "friendly, familiar, light of touch and happy of tact, she exquisitely stayed out. . . ." (II, 151.)

The hour took on for Strether, little by little, a queer sad sweetness of quality; he had such a revulsion in Mamie's favour and on behalf of her social value as might have come from remorse at some early injustice. She made him, as under the breath of some vague western whiff, homesick and freshly restless. (II, 152.)

Mamie's natural and open manner of reference to Mme. de Vionnet and her daughter makes Strether somehow ashamed at his own reticence. Mamie makes their names sound "easy as he could n't have begun to do, and yet it could

1. Sarah Pocock has formed a strange alliance with Waymarsh; Chad is out with Jim - though Strether does not suspect him of liking it.

only have cost her more than he should ever have had to spend." (II, 153.) (1)

She abounded in praise of them, and after the manner of Woollett - which made the manner of Woollett a loveable thing again to Strether. He had never so felt the true inwardness of it as when his blooming companion pronounced the elder of the ladies of the Rue de Bellechasse too fascinating for words and declared of the younger that she was perfectly ideal. . . . "Nothing," she said of Jeanne, "ought ever to happen to her - she's so awfully right as she is." (II, 153.)

Mamie's understanding is so close to Strether's own that he feels a rush of gratefulness towards her, and at the same time has to rethink his judgement of Woollett. "Mamie would be fat, too fat, at thirty; but she would always be the person who, at the present sharp hour, had been disinterestedly tender." (II, 155.)

Strether expresses his renewed respect by urging little Bilham to marry Mamie.

"I want . . . to have been at least to that extent constructive - even expiatory. I've been sacrificing so to strange gods that I feel I want to put on record, somehow, my fidelity - fundamentally unchanged after all - to our own. I feel as if my hands were imbrued with the blood of monstrous alien altars - of another faith altogether." (II, 167-168.)

It is in fact the only constructive thing Strether can do now. For the rest, the situation is out of his hands. He has been relegated to the sidelines of action by the new ambassadors - and they make their moves with a swift-

1. Mamie is more directly involved in the affair than Strether is. She has obviously been in love with Chad, quite apart from Woollett's plan for him to marry her. But, on seeing Chad's new form, she withdraws out of respect for him and out of self-respect too. As Strether notes to little Bilham, she "does n't want to profit by another woman's work. . . ." (II, 172.) Mamie is, I think, an example by which Strether profits when he has to choose to stay or withdraw, at the end.

ness he cannot match. Nor can he communicate with them to any meaningful extent. Waymarsh's strange alliance with Sarah Pocock deprives him of any remaining influence over Strether's conscience. He announces that he is going to the Alps with the Pockocks, and adds: "'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! Strether suddenly felt quite ashamed for him; he breathed a greater boldness. (II, 194.)

After this, Waymarsh's old warning ("'Quit this!'") has no power over Strether. "It lacked its old intensity; nothing of it remained; it went out of the room with him." (II, 194.) It is Strether's parting with his old conscience and the New England mistrust of pleasure and beauty.

After the break with his old friend, Strether finds that Sarah Pocock also has little power over him. She alienates him merely by her manner as, grandly officious, she bears down on him "to receive his submission." (II, 196.) Sarah is Mrs. Newsome's representative, yet she fails to move Strether.

As Mrs. Newsome was essentially all moral pressure, the presence of this element was almost identical with her own presence. It was n't perhaps that he felt he was dealing with her straight, but it was certainly as if she had been dealing straight with him. She was reaching him somehow by the lengthened arm of the spirit, and he was having to that extent to take her into account; but he was n't reaching her in turn, not making her take him; he was only reaching Sarah, who appeared to take so little of him. (II, 198.)

Sarah and Strether have little common ground on which to meet. Sarah's idea of Chad's duty is a narrow one, while Strether has perceived "'totally different kinds of duty'" (II, 200) for Chad. It all comes back to how little

Sarah Pocock sees - how little, compared with Strether's, her imagination has responded to Mme. de Vionnet.

"Do you consider her even an apology for a decent woman?"

Ah there it was at last! She put the matter more crudely than, for his own mixed purposes, he had yet had to do; but essentially it was all one matter. It was so much - so much; and she treated it, poor lady, as so little. (II, 202.)

The confrontation between Sarah and Strether, the new ambassador and the old, reveals again the importance of perspective and proportions. "Essentially it was all one matter" - yet these two people have totally different views of it. Sarah sees the affair in the harsh light of Woollett morality, which is so uncompromising that it oversimplifies dangerously. She reduces everything to "plain terms" (II, 8) - as Strether originally had done. He in his turn has long since come to see such terms as inadequate. Sarah's definition of "good" is rigid and absolute; while for Strether "good" is relative. When Miss Costrey later says of Sarah: "'If it does n't do . . . to deny that Marie's charming, it will do at least to deny that she's good.'" (II, 242), Strether replies: "'What I claim is that she's good for Chad.'" (Italics mine.) Strether's moral categories are no longer compartmentalised, no longer insulated from what he perceives. For all that he might feel he has been sacrificing before "alien altars" (II, 168), Strether's allowances for a different kind of morality show greater imagination and discrimination than Sarah's blind attempts to constrict a complicated affair to the rigid, sparse pattern of Woollett morality.

The difference of perspective between Sarah and Strether has its roots in the differing nature of their

characters. Strether has his "poor old trick of quiet inwardness" (II, 201); while Sarah is all outward "dry glitter" (II, 96), "all cold thought." (II, 239.)

Strether is capable of the same disinterested tenderness Mamie had shown; while Sarah is firm and purposeful, requiring "no patronage and no support, which were but other names for a false position." (II, 96.) Sarah and Strether are far apart at the beginning of the interview; but after her refusal to meet him half-way, or even a quarter of the way, agreement is an impossibility. The finality of the rupture is expressed by Sarah's abrupt departure in her carriage - a scene which is a masterful blending of action and the symbolic. Sarah labels the whole affair "'hideous'" and Strether quails: "'Oh if you think that - !'"

"Then all's at an end? So much the better. I do think that!" She passed out as she spoke and took her way straight across the court, beyond which, separated from them by the deep arch of the porte-cochère, the low victoria that had conveyed her from her own hotel was drawn up. She made for it with decision, and the manner of her break, the sharp shaft of her rejoinder, had an intensity by which Strether was at first kept in arrest. She had let fly at him as from a stretched cord, and it took him a moment to recover from the sense of being pierced. It was not the penetration of surprise; it was that, much more, of certainty; his case being put for him as he had as yet only put it to himself. She was away at any rate; she had distanced him - with rather a grand spring, an effect of pride and ease, after all; she had got into her carriage before he could overtake her, and the vehicle was already in motion. He stopped halfway; he stood there in the court only seeing her go and noting that she gave him no other look. The way he had put it to himself was that all quite might be at an end. Each of her movements, in this resolute rupture, reaffirmed, re-enforced that idea. Sarah passed out of sight in the sunny street while, planted there in the centre of the comparatively grey court, he continued merely to look before him. It probably was all at an end. (II, 205-206.)

Sarah's departure leaves Strether behind both literally and figuratively. The carriage of action has gone off without him. He is out of everything as far as Woollett is concerned, but he has nevertheless felt this as inevitable. Woollett demands decisiveness; it demands dramatic exits and denouements. Sarah's exit has left Strether free to pursue the course of his own inner drama of observation and judgement, and free as never before to receive the import of that drama to himself, and himself alone. Strether all receptively awaits the revelations that are still to befall him and which will in their own time decide for him his withdrawal.

III. THE FINAL REVELATIONS.

Stripped of his part in the active drama that Woollett demands, and alienated by his own choice from Mrs. Newsome and all that she stands for in the way of material gain and security, Strether is in his most exposed - and consequently most receptive - state yet. Still engaged in penetrating the labyrinth of appearance and reality that Chad's house represents for him, he pays another visit to the house. The hints of a deep ambiguity in Chad have been gathering slowly throughout The Ambassador, but Strether has ignored the import of most of them, remaining firm in his belief in Chad's essential goodness. When Strether first saw Chad's lovely home, and then met the transformed and polished Chad himself, everything was so much better than Strether had expected that he could not see any further. Yet the ambiguities are there.

At their first meeting Chad affects Strether as having "some self-respect, some sense of power, oddly perverted; something latent and beyond access, ominous and perhaps enviable." (I, 150.) (Italics mine.) Strether's envy of Chad - of his attractiveness to women and his man-of-the-world qualities - leads him to disregard the question of what lies beneath the smooth, polished surface of Chad's manner. How deep does the transformation go?

[Strether] had been wondering a moment ago if the boy were n't a Pagan, and he found himself wondering now if he were n't by chance a gentleman. It did n't in the least, on the spot, spring up helpfully for him that a person could n't at the same time be both. There was nothing at this moment in the air to challenge the combination; there was everything to give it on the contrary something of a flourish. (I, 160.)

The air of Paris and the social beauty of its high civilisation so impress Strether that he cannot at first distinguish between art and the artificial. Later Strether will perceive that the value of Mme. de Viomet's social grace lies in her ability to be "natural and simple" (II, 276) - and even if it is "the perfection of an art" (II, 276) it is an art which comes naturally to her as a woman of breeding and an heiress of an old order of transmission. Chad's transformation is, one suspects, artificial. Miss Gostrey and little Bilham have taken their turns to intimate as much to Strether: "'He's not so good as you think!'" (I, 171) and "'He is n't used . . . to being so good.'" (I, 179.) But Chad's manner, the "fathomless medium" (I, 172) in which Strether felt submerged, holds him at bay even when, before the arrival of the Pococks, Strether senses in Chad a "slight increase . . . of the hardness originally involved in his acquired high polish." (II, 65.) Chad is then so accomodating to Strether that he can only conclude Chad is "too nice" to harm anyone. Chad not only agrees to stay in Paris at Strether's request, but he also wants the Pococks to have a good time. "'Can I help it?'" he asks ingenuously. "'I'm too decent.'" (1)

1. In the original 1903 edition, "'too nice.'" (Italics mine.)

"Yes, you're too decent!" Strether heavily sighed. And he felt for the moment as if it were the preposterous end of his mission.

It ministered furthermore to that temporary effect that Chad made no rejoinder. (II, 70.)

The reader of James can sense here a warning note. "Too decent" or "too nice" is an echo of the words of Tony Bream, in The Other House (1896). Like Chad, Tony Bream is a person whose presence affects the people about him without conscious effort on his part. Yet, James seems to say, such people are no less responsible for their effect on others than they would be if they exerted it consciously. Tony Bream's presence causes so much havoc in the lives of those about him that he comes to see his being "too nice" as a curse rather than a blessing. Because of her passion for Tony, Rose Armiger murders the child who stands in her way. (Tony's wife, dying young, asked him not to remarry during the life time of their child.) Although Tony attempts to take the blame for the murder, Rose knows he has nothing to fear; no one will even suspect him. "'That's his advantage,' said Rose. 'People like him too much.'" (1) But when this is repeated to Tony himself by Paul Beever

it embittered again the taste of his tragedy. He remembered with all his vividness to what tune he had been "liked," and he wearily bowed his head. "Oh, too much, Paul!" he sighed as he went out. (2)

Unlike Tony Bream, Chad never has to realise that people like him too much for their own good. He is no less responsible than Tony for what his existence and his actions (however unthinking) have done to others, but he never

1. The Other House, p. 227.

2. Ibid., p. 228.

arrives at the degree of self-realisation that Tony Bream reaches. Chad's polished manner conceals an inner lack of human tenderness and a deficiency of conscience. He is able to shrug off his guilt as Tony Bream, who has seen his guilt too clearly, cannot do. (1)

The basic deficiency in Chad's character which enables him to remain blind to his responsibility begins to emerge in Strether's present visit to his house. However, it is not Strether's final turn in the labyrinth. Chad is not there when Strether goes in and his absence (as at Strether's first visit) only brings out the enviability of the young man's life.

Strether spent an hour in waiting for him - an hour full of strange suggestions, persuasions, recognitions; one of those that he was to recall, at the end of his adventure, as the particular handful that most had counted. 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 the dagger in a contadina's hair, had been pushed within the soft circle. . . . 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 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. (II, 209-210.)

This is the romantic Strether, projecting into Chad's life all his old longings, all the losses and failures of his missed youth. James makes it clear:

1. Certainly, Tony Bream's circumstances are more horrifying than Chad's desertion of Mme. de Viennet would be; but to James any betrayal of moral responsibility is wrong.

The main truth of the actual appeal of everything was . . . that everything represented the substance of his loss, put it within reach, within touch, made it, to a degree it had never been, an affair of the senses. That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed - a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear.
(II, 211.)

When Chad does appear in person, Strether feels he "had been pursuing Chad from an early hour and had overtaken him only now." (II, 212.) Most of all, he is struck by Chad's "knowing how to live." (II, 212.) However, it is not Chad Strether has overtaken, but his own lost youth, shown to him, by Chad's house, as it might have been. Strether is so intoxicated by the experience that he cannot suspect Chad's appetite for life of being anything but tasteful and discriminating. He chooses to ignore the signs of Chad's restlessness, assuming that the young man's ideals of conduct are the same as his.

"They demand you on the basis, as it were, of repudiation and ingratitude; and what has been the matter with me," Strether went on, "is that I have n't seen my way to working with you for repudiation." (II, 224.)

Though he speaks with lightness, Strether comes closer to the truth when Chad professes not to see what Strether gains by his position. Strether replies: "That's because you have, I verily believe, no imagination. You've other qualities. But no imagination . . . at all." (II, 225.) In James's work, this is a reproach often voiced by the imaginative character to the unimaginative one. The reproach in fact bears strong overtones of envy, since the person who makes it invariably feels also the double-edged nature of imagination. In Roderick Hudson (1875), Christina Light pinpoints the

ambiguous character of imagination when she says to

Rowland Mallet:

"The only nice thing . . . is to be as ignorant as a fish. We can't be though, you and I, unfortunately, can we? we're so awfully intelligent. We're born to know and to suffer, are n't we?" (1)

Intelligence and imagination are practically synonymous in the Jamesian vocabulary, and when Christina Light speaks of the painful rewards of intelligence, she means the same as when she later says: "'Imagination's not a virtue - it's a vice.'" (2) Fleda Vetch, heroine of The Spoils of Poynton (1897), finds imagination lacking in the hero, Owen Gereth, while her own imagination, over-active and over-romantic, in the end brings her more discomfort than help. (3) In The Other House (1896), it is the passionate Rose Armiger who reproaches Tony Dream with a lack of imagination, while at the same time her imagination, over-vivid, leads her to horrible deeds. (4)

Strether, while he might reproach Chad with having no imagination, cannot deny Chad's counter-reproach:

1. Roderick Hudson, p. 167.

2. Ibid., p. 381.

3. Fleda's romanticism leads her to believe she can win Owen Gereth away from his hard, unimaginative fiancée, Mona Brigstock, and thus save the "spoils" of Poynton for those who appreciate them (herself and Mrs. Gereth.) In the end her imagination only helps her to perceive the supremacy of Mona's immovable will, and she wonders "if it did n't work more for happiness not to have tasted, as she herself had done, of knowledge." (The Spoils of Poynton, p. 199.)

4. However, when Rose reproaches him with the lack of observation and fears and doubts, Tony reacts with indignation at the implication of stupidity. "'Not to have the things you mention, and above all not to have imagination, is simply not to have tact, than which nothing is more unforgiveable. . . .'" (The Other House, p. 54.) Tony has greater insight and humility than Chad.

"But have n't you yourself rather too much?"
 "Oh rather - I!" So that after an instant,
 under this reproach and as if it were at last
 a fact really to escape from, Strether made
 his move for departure. (II, 225.)

There is in fact little common ground between Strether and Chad, however much Strether may delude himself into believing Chad is living his youth as he would live it. People like Chad are the kind with the most irreducible "presence," the most impenetrable and unshakeable personality. They are the "livers," the ones the imaginative watchers envy for their power to live boldly and simply; they are also the ones on whom the watchers can have the least effect. (1) As Miss Costrey comments: "There's nothing so magnificent - for making others feel you - as to have no imagination." (II, 240.) Strether is unable to sway Chad by imposing his own values upon the young man. Chad has no imagination, and Strether has too much.

However, there are other characters in James's works who are not totally unimaginative, in the sense of being imperceptive, as Chad is in The Ambassadors (and as Charlotte Stant is in The Golden Bowl). Yet these others - Mme. de Vionnet in The Ambassadors and the Prince in The Golden Bowl - do not have less personal force for having more sensitivity. They possess, in fact, a deeper beauty than the superficially brilliant "livers." And the imaginative watchers choose these deeper "presences"

1. The gulf between those who live and those who merely watch is a recurrent theme of another great writer, Thomas Mann (1875-1955). The outstanding example is Tonio Kröger, in which the watcher-hero, an outsider, "suffers" hopeless love for "the blond, fair-haired breed of the steel-blue eyes, which stood to him for the pure, the blithe, the untroubled in life. . . ." (Thomas Mann, Stories of A Lifetime [London: Secker & Warburg, 1961], I, 20+.)

for the basis of their struggles for beauty. In The Ambassadors, Strether's appreciation finally comes to rest upon Mme. de Viennet's beauty, and it is important that he should recognise it fully. He cannot do this, however, until he has penetrated to the heart of the labyrinth he is in, and ceased altogether to compromise with appearances. The last stages of The Ambassadors trace the collapse of Strether's compromises with an artistry which renders all the foregoing, elaborate bewilderingments intensely worthwhile. (1) The truths Strether comes to face go deeper than those for which a moral system like Woollett's allows. Life itself springs its surprises on him, and the revelations occur in a heightened manner similar to the revelations of Strether's experience in Notre Dame.

Once again, Strether goes off on his own to escape his problems; but this time he goes into the French countryside, to recapture the sense of a painting, "a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years

1. Here I must disagree with Mr. Leavis, who claims that The Ambassadors 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." (F.R. Leavis, "The Later James," The Great Tradition [Perseus Books, 1962], p. 178.) In Mr. Leavis's opinion, what Strether has missed is not adequately realised by James, so that the elaborate preparation in The Ambassadors leads nowhere and is "disproportionate to the issues - to any issues that are concretely held and presented." (Ibid., p. 178-179.) The issues of The Ambassadors cannot be concrete - James presents them as fully as he can, but they are issues which remain essentially impenetrable to the watcher-figure like Strether, or to any of us for that matter. Strether learns - and the process is necessarily a slow one - that he has missed the deepest experience of human life: intimate relationships with others. While coming to this realisation, Strether also discovers the beauty of life and human nature - an abysmal beauty that retains to the end elements of a terrible mystery. This beauty and terror cannot be a "concrete issue" in any narrow sense.

before, at a Boston dealer's and that he had quite absurdly never forgotten." (II, 245.) He had dreamed of owning the painting, but had turned away from the possibility because he felt his means were inadequate. The situation echoes Strether's whole life, all the "ifs" and "might-have-beens" of his wasted years. His dreams always remained dreams because he had never dared to take the plunge of commitment to his own desires. In the French countryside, he gives himself up to the enjoyment of the moment. To his imagination, he is in the picture, the Lambinet he has coveted all his life. By the end of the day he has "not once overstepped the oblong gilt frame." (II, p. 252.) At the same time, he feels himself also in the picture, in the scene, of the drama between Woollett and Paris.

Though he had been alone all day, he had never yet so struck himself as engaged with others and in midstream of his drama. It might have passed for finished, his drama, with its catastrophe all but reached: it had, however, none the less been vivid again for him as he thus gave it its fuller chance. He had only had to be at last well out of it to feel it, oddly enough, still going on.

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

.....

The conditions had nowhere so asserted their difference from those of Woollett as they appeared to him to assert it in the little court of the Cheval Blanc. . . . They were few and simple, scant and humble, but they were the thing, as he would have called it, even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old high salon where the ghost of the Empire walked. "The" thing was the thing that implied the greatest number of other things of the sort he had had to tackle; and it was queer of course, but so it was - the implica-

tion here was complete. Not a single one of his observations but somehow fell into a place in it; not a breath of the cooler evening that was n't somehow a syllable of the text. The text was simply, when condensed, that in these places such things were, and that if it was in them one elected to move about one had to make one's account with what one lighted on.

(II, 253-254.)

With these reflections, Strether has reached a state of acceptance which renders him the perfect recipient of the revelation that is to follow at the riverside. Waiting for his meal in a riverside pavilion, Strether contemplates the wide, empty stretches of water.

Such a river set one afloat almost before one could take up the oars - the idle play of which would be moreover the aid to the full impression. This perception went so far as to bring him to his feet; but that movement, in turn, made him feel afresh that he was tired. . . .

(II, 255.)

The scene recalls the traditional symbolism of the river of life as exemplified, for example, in George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss. The climax of experience for Maggie Tulliver is brought about by the river, and is played out on the river itself. The river besides which Strether stands in The Ambassadors symbolises all the possibilities and limitations of his life. He only leans beside the river, too "tired" to venture out on its waters. He is content to watch. The possibility of his setting out on the river of life has disappeared with his youth; what remains for him is to observe others upon the river and enjoy their enjoyment. And that is what happens.

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. (II, 256.)

As with his silent view of the woman in Notre Dame, Strether needs no knowledge of the couple's identity to find his imagination captured:

For two very happy persons he found himself straightway taking them - a young man in shirt-sleeves, a young woman easy and fair, who had pulled pleasantly up from some other place and, being acquainted with the neighbourhood, had known what this particular retreat could offer them. The air quite thickened, at their approach, with further intimations; the intimation that they were expert, familiar, frequent - that this would n't at all events be the first time. They knew how to do it, he vaguely felt - and it made them but the more idyllic. . . . (II, 256.)

This time, the recognition occurs more quickly, and it is mutual. The whole picture wavers under the impact of it. The couple, recognising Strether, lose the steadiness of their course; and he, recognising Mme. de Vionnet and Chad, has "a sharp start of his own." (II, 257.) Perceiving that the couple are debating "the risk of betrayal" (II, 257), Strether finds the onus of the accident falling upon himself. Once again, it is for him to make the advance, to give a sign of his continued support of Mme. de Vionnet and Chad, despite his growing shock at the revelation of their deep intimacy. Oddly enough, though it is a silent one, the crisis affects Strether as violent beyond bearing. His simple, exaggerated gestures of surprise and joy are a feint, and the response of the couple is also a covering-up of their embarrassment, but the outcome is a distinct reward.

The boat, in mid-stream, still went a little wild - which seemed natural, however, while Chad turned round, half springing up; and his good friend, after blankness and wonder,

began gaily to wave her parasol. Chad dropped afresh to his paddles and the boat headed round, amazement and pleasantry filling the air meanwhile, and relief, as Strether continued to fancy, superseding mere violence. Our friend went down to the water under this odd impression as of violence averted - the violence of their having "cut" him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he would n't know it. (II, 258.)

Strether, aware of the need for keeping up the decent, sociable pleasantry, avoids making excuses for his awkward presence there - excuses which would reveal his knowledge of having interrupted something very personal and intimate between Mme. de Vionnet and Chad.

"Nothing of the sort, so far as surface and sound were involved, was even in question; surface and sound all made for their common ridiculous good fortune. . . ."

(II, 259.) The value of small social pretences is evident. Though merely "surface and sound," they prevent the dangers of a deeper betrayal. Paradoxically, it is "out there in the eye of nature" that Strether perceives the relief that good manners and small, social white lies afford. Minor falsehoods are right when they prevent major ones, and the sins of omission are less than the sins of commission, since they can guard people from wounding each other's feelings irreparably.

Characteristically, it is Mme. de Vionnet who most carries off the "performance." (II, 263.) Though he is aware they must each know it is only a performance, Strether is greatly relieved - the performance "was on the whole easier to keep up than to abandon." (II, 263.) But, after the whole thing is over, after they have all returned to Paris as though Chad and Mme. de Vionnet had had no intention of staying in the country, Strether is

left with a feeling of distaste in his "spiritual stomach" at "the quantity of make-believe involved." (II, 265.) And he is left with the knowledge that, for his own sake, he will have to clarify what the experience has meant for him - since what has happened at the riverside has merely been a summing up, a gathering into one gilt frame, of everything that his relationship with Chad and Mme. de Vionnet means. He had needed living, human figures to fill the frame of his observation, his conception of what life might be and mean. Chad and Mme. de Vionnet had sailed into his sight, together, admirably filling the measure of his desires. But he is not, and cannot be, an invisible watcher beyond the frame. Though he watches from the side of the river, the people on the river are aware of his presence and he cannot escape the responsibility of his existence. He has to give a sign - reciprocate and commit himself. Nor can he escape the responsibility of seeing the reality of the picture. He had wanted it to be idyllic: a silent picture of a man and a woman, beautifully together in a boat unrocked by repercussions and complications. Instead, he has to face that the appearances of the picture, which up to then were all that he had accepted, are not the reality; the man and the woman are not merely painted figures, but alive and very human and consequently complex, struggling, imperfect. Beyond his revulsion at the amount of make-believe involved in what happened at the river, lies the major revelation it has afforded Strether: "the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed." He realises

intimacy, at such a point, was like that - and what in the world else would one have wished it to be like? It was all very well

for him to feel the pity of its being so much like lying; he almost blushed . . . for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll. He had made them - and through no fault of their own - momentarily pull it for him, the possibility, out of this vagueness; and must he not therefore take it now as they had had simply . . . to give it to him? (II, 266.)

The rest of The Ambassadors is an extension of what Strether's new insight means to and for him. One feels, after the mastery of the river scene, that nothing could follow such a climax without being a severe let-down; but Book Twelfth displays James's talent for sustaining the relevance of the high points in his novels. Everything in Book Twelfth stems from the tensions and reliefs of the meeting on the river (which, as I said, expresses the whole of Strether's problem metaphorically); and everything slips quietly into its place in Strether's total experience, in his last meetings with Mme. de Vionnet and Chad, and his last discussions with Maria Costrey. It is Mme. de Vionnet who requests the meeting with Strether. He feels tempted to refuse and would, were it not that the atmosphere of the Postes et Télégraphes acts on him in the way that the features of the countryside and the little French inn acted on him (making him realize, then, that "in these places such things were, and that if it was in them one elected to move about one had to make one's account with what one lighted upon" [II, 254]). In the Postes et Télégraphes, replying to Mme. de Vionnet's message, Strether senses in the air "the vibration of the vast strange life of the town" (II, 270) and "something more acute in manners, more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life."

After he had put in his paper he had ranged himself, he was really amused to think, on the side of the fierce, the sinister, the acute. He was carrying on a correspondence, across the great city, quite in the key of the Postes et Télégraphes in general; and it was fairly as if the acceptance of that fact had come from something in his state that sorted with the occupation of his neighbours. He was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris, and so were they, poor things - how could they all together help being? They were no worse than he, in short, and he no worse than they - if, queerly enough, no better. . . . (II, 271.)

But already, counter to the move towards taking things as they come, Strether feels the need for the shaping of his experience (the need which will decide his departure). He wishes there were less ease in wrongdoing and longs for

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. (II, 272.)

James uses the river image still: Strether cannot float on the river of life without his conscience aching for some direction, or even some obstruction of a "penal" nature. (1) He is as much worried by a lack of moral grip on things as he was worried by a moral grip so strong that it strangles (Sarah Pocock's, for example). But, used as he is to others taking the initiative out of his hands, he is at present at a loss with regards to opposing the "silver stream of impunity." He floats on in his "irresponsibility, his impunity, his luxury" to yet another canvas - the "high clear picture" of Mme. de Vionnet's house. (II, 273.)

1. In the original 1903 version, "disciplinary" is used instead of "penal."

More than ever her house insists, for him, upon the old, old past which makes it, like the house in The Sense of the Past, a "museum of held reverberations." (1) And here, in the midst of the reverberations, dressed with ageless simplicity, Mme. de Viomet is what she is.

The windows were all open, their redundant hangings swaying a little, and he heard once more, from the empty court, the small plash of the fountain. From beyond this, and as from a great distance . . . came, as if excited and exciting, the vague voice of Paris.

.....

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

It was at present queer beyond words . . . that such suggestions should keep crossing the scene; but it was doubtless the effect of the thunder in the air, which had hung about all day without release. His hostess was dressed as for thunderous times, . . . in simplest coolest white, of a character so old-fashioned, if he were not mistaken, that Madame Roland must on the scaffold have worn something like it.

.....

The associations of the place, all felt again; the gleam, here and there, in the subdued light, of glass and gilt and parquet, with the quietness of her own note as the centre - these things were at first as delicate as if they had been ghostly. . . .

.....

He knew in advance he should look back on the perception actually sharpest with him as on the view of something old, old, old, the oldest thing he had ever personally touched; and he also knew, even while he took his companion in as the feature among features, that memory and fancy could n't help being enlisted for her. She might intend what she would, but this was beyond anything she could intend, with things from far back - tyrannies of history, facts of type, values, as the painters said, of expression - all working for her and giving her the supreme chance, the chance of the happy, the really luxurious few, the chance, on a great occasion, to be natural and simple. She had never, with him, been more so; or if it was the

1. The Sense of the Past, p. 67.

perfection of art it would never - and that came to the same thing - be proved against her. (II, 275-276.)

Mme. de Vionnet's house, on this last visit, had brought out even further all that Strether vaguely felt about her when he saw her as the "lurking figure of the dim chapel" (II, 8) in Notre Dame: the romance that she represents for him, as well as the underlying hints of passion and tragedy that he sensed. The note of her simplicity which at first so disappointed him in Gloriani's garden, and the variety she subsequently showed herself capable of, are resolved for Strether now. Her combination of simplicity and art is such that she transcends the artificial into a higher region of the natural than, say, the rather crude naturalness of Woollett. Like Christina Light in Roderick Hudson (1), Mme. de Vionnet is not false, however many roles she might play, because she lives each facet of herself fully and sincerely.

What was truly wonderful was her way of differing so from time to time without detriment to her simplicity. Caprices, he was sure she felt, were before anything else bad manners,

1. Christina Light is a younger and bolder character than Mme. de Vionnet; both however face the charges of falseness, owing to their variety. Mme. de Vionnet is dismissed by Sarah Pocock as a devious woman, in much the same way as Christina Light is dismissed by Mary Garland: "'I think she's false.'" (Roderick Hudson, p. 384.) Rowland Mallet, however, sees more in Christina - "energy was there, audacity, the restless questioning soul." "Even if she tells untruths at times, they are still 'sincerities of spirit.'" (p. 279.) And Madame Grandoni sums Christina up for Rowland: "'I think she's an actress, but she believes in her part while she's playing it.'" (p. 196.)

and that judgement in her was by itself a thing making more for safety of intercourse than anything that in his various own past intercourses he had had to reckon on. If therefore her presence was now quite other than the one she had shown him the night before, there was nothing of violence in the change - it was all harmony and reason. (II, 276.)

Combined with her basic sincerity, Mme. de Vionnet's social art enables her to handle any awkwardness as only a highly civilised being can.

He could trust her to make deception right. As she presented things the ugliness - goodness knew why - went out of them; none the less too that she could present them, with an art of her own, by not so much as touching them. (II, 277.)

Mme. de Vionnet's power to make the ugliness go out of things, and her avoidance of the violent and the unreasonable, are the beauties of a high civilisation at its best. The word violence recurs often in the latter part of The Ambassadors, each time in the sense of its being averted or kept in abeyance, to the advantage of beauty and harmony.

To appreciate fully the transmutation of the ugly to the beautiful, Strether must first recognise, and face, the human truths and passions that lie beneath the surface of a high civilisation and of the woman belonging to it. The chill of knowledge begins when he perceives the terrible human vulnerability beneath Mme. de Vionnet's poise, art and beauty. He had wanted not to find wrongdoing so easy, had wanted to feel "that somebody was paying something somewhere and somehow." (II, 272.) His wish is granted from the very quarter in which he least desires to see harsh payment. Mme. de Vionnet exclaims:

"I've made a change in your life, I know I have;

I've upset everything in your mind as well; in your sense of - what shall I call it? - all the decencies and possibilities. It gives me a kind of detestation - " She pulled up short.

Oh but he wanted to hear. "Detestation of what?"

"Of everything - of life."

"Ah that's too much," he laughed - "or too little!"

"Too little, precisely" - she was eager.

"What I hate is myself - when I think that one has to take so much, to be happy, out of the lives of others, and that one is n't happy even then." (II, 282.)

What chills Strether is his perception of depths beyond what Mme. de Vionnet is saying to him.

It was of Chad she was after all renewedly afraid; the strange strength of her passion was the very strength of her fear; she clung to him, Lambert Strether, as to a source of safety she had tested, and, generous graceful truthful as she might try to be, exquisite as she was, she dreaded the term of his being within reach. With this sharpest perception yet, it was like a chill in the air to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited. For at the end of all things they were mysterious: she had but made Chad what he was - so why could she think she had made him infinite? (II, 284.)

Mme. de Vionnet, beautiful and accomplished as she is, is yet as much subject to human inadequacies as anyone else. The miracle she wrought on Chad is also not proof against failure, since it is based on another human being; and human beings, Strether realises, are in the last instance both unfathomable and irreducible.

She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme queerness that he was none the less only Chad. Strether had the sense that he, a little, had made him too; his high appreciation had, as it were, consecrated her work. The work, however admirable, was nevertheless of the strict human order, and in short it was marvellous that the companion of mere earthly joys, of comforts, aberrations (however one classed them) within the common experience, should be so transcendently prized. It might have made Strether hot or shy, as such secrets of others brought home sometimes do make

us; but he was held there by something so hard that it was fairly grim.

.....
 He presently found himself taking a long look from her, and the next thing he knew he had uttered all his thought. "You're afraid for your life!" (II, 284-285.)

Faced with the revelation of the terrible, consuming passion of Mme. de Vionnet for Chad, Strether experiences the same half-comprehending wonder one experiences in the face of Anna Karenina's passion for Vronsky. Like Anna, Mme. de Vionnet is a woman inextricably committed to her earthly passion; like Vronsky, Chad is a man "ineffably adored." (II, 285.) Like Anna Karenina (though with more tragic results in Anna's case), Mme. de Vionnet holds all of life as nothing besides her passion for the younger, simpler man who is her lover. There is something "grim" and "cold" in it for Strether - an echo of how he felt when Mme. de Vionnet disposed of her daughter.

It was actually . . . as if he did n't think of her at all, as if he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed. She was older for him to-night, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet; and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man. The only thing was that she judged herself as the maidservant would n't; the weakness of which wisdom too, the dishonour of which judgement, seemed but to sink her lower. (II, 286.)

Mme. de Vionnet is less sublime, more mortal, for Strether now; the note of her common humanity has never been stronger. But she is at the same time exalted by her passion in his eyes, for it is the fullest expression of

herself and of her womanhood that he has seen. (1) However, Strether's vision of her beauty is inexpressible; Mme. de Vionnet cannot comprehend it. She sees herself as "bld and abject and hideous" (II, 288) in her collapse. In the bitterness of her self-condemnation, her only refuge is in a stark fatalism: "'Things have to happen as they will.'" (II, 288.) "'There's not a grain of certainty in my future - for the only certainty is that I shall be the loser in the end.'" (II, 288.)

Her last words to Strether are as moving as Anna Karenina's cry for life. "'I want everything. I've wanted you too,'" Mme. de Vionnet says. (II, 289.) She has wanted his appreciation to sustain her and to keep her at a high pitch of confidence in her passion. The saddest thing is that despite Strether's "'Ah but you've had me!'" she cannot believe in his respect; she has condemned herself too harshly for anything but despair to survive. He goes away from this last so naked encounter with Mme. de Vionnet with the desperate hope of influencing Chad to prevent the doom his mistress foresees. How desperate the hope is becomes clear even before he has found Chad. He imagines, on learning that Chad is away, that he is away with Mme. de Vionnet as before. Only when she seeks out Maria Costrey to find Chad does Strether

1. In his introduction to The Other House, Leon Edel quotes from James's account of Hedda Gabler in 1891. The description might well be applied to Mme. de Vionnet:

"Her motives are just her passions. . . . One isn't so sure she is wicked and by no means sure . . . that she is disagreeable. She is . . . complicated and natural; she suffers, she struggles, she is human, and by that fact exposed to a dozen interpretations." (The Other House, p. xv.)

realise that not all things between Mme. de Vionnet and Chad are depths of complicity. There are also shallows in such an affair - shallows of deception and disregard. Strether is coming closer, in his labyrinth of appearance and reality, to the truth of Chad.

Strether has already placed his feelings with regard to the "virtuous attachment," as little Bilham designated it. Miss Costrey draws him out to a statement of these feelings, at the same time telling him of Mme. de Vionnet's search for Chad. Strether realises that this knowledge might cause "a change in his attitude - in other words a revulsion in favour of the principles of Woollett." (II, 296.) Strether has had too much, by this point, of sacrificing at alien altars, too much of relations that "bristled with fine points, points all unimaginable beforehand, points that pricked and drew blood." (II, 293.) (1) His worry over Chad's disappearance is however a matter between himself and Chad; for the time being, with Miss Costrey, he returns to what the whole affair has meant for him. "'Little Bilham had shown me what's expected of a gentleman. Little Bilham had lied like one.'" (II, 299.)

"It was but a technical lie - he classed the attachment as virtuous. That was a view for which there was much to be said - and the virtue came out for me hugely. There was of

1. There are many references to "blood" in The Ambassadors - all in connection with Mme. de Vionnet and her life, echoing the jungle-metaphor: the high civilisation of the great world conceals the deepest of human passions and treacheries. In urging little Bilham to marry Mamie Focock, Strether admits: "'I feel as if my hands were imbrued with the blood of monstrous alien altars. . . .'" (II, 168.) And, at the start of that final interview with Mme. de Vionnet which reveals to him the strength of hidden human passions, Strether senses in the "vague voice of Paris" the "smell of blood." (II, 274.)

course a great deal of it. I got it full in the face, and I have n't, you see, done with it yet."

"What I see, what I saw," Maria returned, "is that you dressed up even the virtue. You were wonderful - you were beautiful, as I've had the honour of telling you before; but, if you wish really to know," she sadly confessed, "I never quite knew where you were. There were moments," she explained, "when you struck me as grandly cynical; there were others when you struck me as grandly vague."

Her friend considered. "I had phases. I had flights."

"Yes, but things must have a basis."

"A basis seemed to me just what her beauty supplied."

"Her beauty of person?"

"Well, her beauty of everything. The impression she makes. She has such variety and yet such harmony." (II, 299-300.)

Mme. de Vionnet's beauty has been the "basis" of Strether's ethical exploration. Most of all, the value of that foundation has resided in the fact that "it was all not a fixed quantity." (II, 300.) Her beauty is the beauty of a high civilisation and of a character inwardly sincere and harmonious, however much its outward form might be subject to change. Yet even that inward being has been shown to be intensely subject to life; Strether has seen an abysmal beauty in Mme. de Vionnet's passion. There is no question of a "fixed quantity" in her beauty; much of it must remain forever impenetrable to Strether, and consequently his judgement of her can never be a final one. Strether's refusal to see Mme. de Vionnet again is part of this. She wants to know what he thinks of her - to press him into saying, in plain words, what he feels. But he wants to leave his impression and his judgement of her fluid, by refusing to say the unsayable. Strether said to Miss Gostrey: "Well, it [Mme. de Vionnet's beauty] was all not a fixed quantity.

And it had for me - it has still - such elements of strangeness." (II, 300.) To remove that last element of strangeness, the last trace of mystery in her otherness, would be to destroy her beauty for him - destroy it by "fixing" it. (In a similar way, in The Golden Bowl, Maggie chooses that Charlotte and the Prince should keep the secrets of their personality, rather than expose themselves and lose their beauty for her.)

But, before he can go, Strether feels the responsibility of seeing Chad for the last time. His final visit to the "mystic troisième" (II, 305) is the one in which, at last, he finds Chad there, at home and at the centre of things. The appearance of Chad on the balcony reminds Strether of his first view of the house, when little Bilham's appearance on the balcony testified suddenly to so much that was "up and up" (I, 98) in the whole case. The coincidence between the first and last visits shows how much Strether has come full circle. Certainly, with regard to Chad, he has: at first he thought Chad merely bad; then, faced with the remarkable appearances of his house and friends, and the appearance of the young man himself, Strether made a compromise. Consequently, he did not heed the repeated warnings of Miss Gostrey and little Bilham, and of his own imagination, that, although Chad was so much better than he had expected, he was still not perfectly "good." Now, at this last confrontation, Strether has to face the true Chad. The revelations Strether undergoes are still not without their excitement. Perceiving that Chad had been away - "intensely away, away

to a distance and alone" (II, 305) - and is now on his balcony "occupied . . . in what might have been called taking up his life afresh" (II, 306), Strether is overcome by his vision of this young man's life:

His life, his life! - Strether paused anew, on the last flight, at this final rather breathless sense of what Chad's life was doing with Chad's mother's emissary. It was dragging him, at strange hours, up the staircases of the rich; it was keeping him out of bed at the end of long hot days; it was transforming beyond recognition the simple, subtle, conveniently uniform thing that had anciently passed with him for a life of his own. Why should it concern him that Chad was to be fortified in the pleasant practice of smoking on balconies, of supping on salads, of feeling his special conditions agreeably reaffirm themselves, of finding reassurance in comparisons and contrasts? There was no answer to such a question but that he was still practically committed - he had perhaps never yet so much known it. It made him feel old, and he would buy his railway ticket - feeling, no doubt, older - the next day; but he had meanwhile come up four flights, . . . at midnight and without a lift, for Chad's life. The young man . . . was already at the door; so that Strether had before him in full [1] visibility the cause in which he was labouring. . . . (II, 306-307.)

Nevertheless despite Chad's cordial formality (as ever), Strether already knows there is something deeply wrong with the situation. Although Chad would "with the minimum of encouragement . . . propose to keep him indefinitely" (II, 307), Strether yet knows he has to go and that his business lies elsewhere.

"You'll be a brute, you know - you'll be guilty of the last infamy - if you ever forsake her."

That, uttered there at the solemn hour, uttered in the place that was full of her influence, was the rest of his business; and when once he had heard himself say it he felt that his message had never before been spoken. (II, 308.)

1. In the original 1903 version, "in renewed visibility." (italics mine.)

And, as Strether presses his message home to Chad again and again, there is once more a chill in the air, "a slight breath of the ominous." (II, 312.) Chad insists upon his continued loyalty to Mme. de Vionnet and on her worth - but he protests too much. His "nevers" are too strong, too thickly strewn, for Strether to be reassured by them. There are suggestions of a callousness in Chad that Strether had not imagined before:

He meant no harm, though he might after all be capable of much; yet he spoke of being "tired" of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner. "She has never for a moment yet bored me. . . .

.
She has never been anything I could call a burden." (II, 313.)

Chad's very denials reveal possibilities of Mme. de Vionnet being boring or a burden - things Strether had never imagined such a woman could be. The comparison of Mme. de Vionnet with "roast mutton" (implicit, for Strether, in the way Chad speaks of her) implies subtly that Chad has appetite rather than taste - that his transformation does not, after all, go as deep as Strether had believed. A gentleman on the surface, Chad is yet underneath it all a "pagan," as Strether had felt on first meeting him. The two elements have not merged at all. The transformation had been too swift, too miraculous, for its human material. Chad has not the imagination of Strether, painful though it is (in that the possessor is liable to feel others so strongly); he has only the facile imagination of the advertising and business world. This is the final shock for Strether.

There was just one thing for which, before they broke off, Chad seemed disposed slightly to bargain. . . . He might himself mention that he had been getting some news of the art of advertisement. (II, 315.)

Chad insists that his interest is "'purely platonic.'" "There at any rate the fact is - the fact of the possible. I mean the money in it." (II, 317.) Strether is again unconvinced by Chad's protestations. Chad's restlessness unnerves him, showing him how little he is really able to influence Chad and the course of his life with Mme. de Vionnet. Chad, charming as he is, has not confided fully in him; as casual and elusive as ever, he has slipped away from Strether.

With the final, ominous light his last meeting with Chad has given him on the affair, Strether is at the end of his stay in Paris. He has had the choice of remaining there. The pull has been strong: "The sign that the inward forces he had obeyed really hung together would be that . . . he should promote the good cause by mounting guard on it." (II, 307-308.) But to stay would be to risk the beauty of his experience. He cannot, he is aware, alter Chad and halt his restless longings any more than Mme. de Vionnet can; indeed, if she cannot do so, what hope has he? The natural course of life, with its wayward passions, its hidden deceits and downfalls, cannot be altered by the interference of one New Englander. Strether's continued interference would merely falsify things and sully the beauty of what he has gained from his experience. Already that beauty has shown itself to be abysmal.

His last interview with Maria Gostrey maintains the atmosphere he has felt encroaching on him during his last days in Paris.

He might for all the world have been going to die - die resignedly; the scene was filled for him with so deep a death-bed hush, so melancholy a charm. That meant the postponement of every-

thing else - which made so for the quiet lapse of life; and the postponement in especial of the reckoning to come - unless indeed the reckoning to come were to be one and the same thing with extinction. It faced him, the reckoning, over the shoulder of much interposing experience - which also faced him; and one would float to it doubtless duly through these caverns of Kubla Khan. It was really behind everything; it had n't merged in what he had done; his final appreciation of what he had done - his appreciation on the spot - would provide it with its main sharpness. The spot so focussed was of course Woollett, and he was to see, at the best, what Woollett would be with everything there changed for him. Would n't that revelation practically amount to the wind-up of his career? (II, 293-294.)

More than ever, now that Strether has seen signs that everything might yet fall apart between Chad and Mme. de Viennet, he must go back to Woollett with the memory of his experience - to round it off, to consolidate it and give it form and shape. He and Miss Costrey had from the beginning constantly wondered "where he would 'come out.'" (II, 321.)

They had so assumed it was to be in some wonderful place - they had thought of it as so very much out. Well, that was doubtless what it had been - since he had come out just there. He was out, in truth, as far as it was possible to be, and must now rather bethink himself of getting in again. He found on the spot the image of his recent history; he was like one of the figures of the old clock at Berne. They came out, on one side, at their hour, jiggled along their little course in the public eye, and went in on the other side. He too had jiggled his little course - him too a modest retreat awaited. (II, 321-322.)

Woollett is his free choice - even in the face of all that Miss Costrey seems to offer him, of "exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days." (II, 325-326.)

It built him softly round, it roofed him warmly over, it rested, all so firm, on selection. And what ruled selection was beauty

and knowledge. It was awkward, it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things; yet, none the less, so far as they made his opportunity they made it only for a moment. (II, 326.) (Italics mine.)

Strether's choice, his "selection," is to return to his old responsibilities, not only to do justice to them and to himself ("I must go. To be right." [II, 326]), but to do justice to his experience of life. Since he has not "lived" himself, his experience has been of the life of others; but, since he is not one of the players himself and remains essentially a spectator, he can select for himself the ending. Though he has had the thing he has been "kept for" (I, 86) - an imaginative and ethical drama of the highest intensity - it can be no more than that, and his self-fulfilment, through the superb "living" of others, is over now. However, the denouement is one of his own choice, based on the standards of beauty and knowledge. He has faced as much beauty and as much knowledge as he can; now he himself draws the line, writing "Finis" at the end of the drama, or, like an artist, positions the frame of the picture.

Strether has travelled from ignorance, through knowledge averted, to a full-face confrontation with reality. But even reality has shown itself abysmal and unending; for the reality of human nature is, in the final instance, impenetrable, and human relationships neither stay the same nor do they ever really end. Strether cannot convince Mme. de Vionnet of his regard, or comfort her; he cannot make Chad a better or more predictable person. He cannot force their relationship to keep its high pitch of beauty, but neither will it end with decisive shape:

it will merely decline, slowly and painfully. Strether can only select for himself the best way to satisfy his own nature, his own imagination and conscience. So he chooses a termination in which, though he loses, he at the same time earns the right to keep the memory of a beautiful experience and the knowledge he has gained. With that strange "detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference" (I, 6), Strether is able to contemplate loss and gain, weigh them and reach an equilibrium. He is at least in command of his own life, if he cannot be in command of the lives of others. "The power to choose is destiny," says Roderick Hudson (1) - and Strether has at last chosen for himself and become master of his own identity. That is why, despite the vicarious nature of his experience and the hints of the pathetic, of the Prufrock in Strether, at the end of The Ambassadors he nevertheless commands the reader's respect and atones for his former want of "positive dignity." (I, 87.) He has given shape and form to his experience, and thus to his identity - he has become the artist of his own life.

1. Roderick Hudson, p. 141.

PART TWO

THE GOLDEN BOWL

I. "THE PRINCE."

In The Golden Bowl, James moves away from the single centre of consciousness used in The Ambassadors. The Golden Bowl is divided into two parts, "The Prince" and "The Princess." However, each of the parts is intended to reveal a single consciousness. In his preface to the novel, James writes:

I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, . . . my preference for dealing with my subject-matter, for "seeing my story," through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. (1)

This was certainly the case in The Ambassadors, where Strether was not "strictly involved" in the events he witnessed. He increased the significance of those events tremendously by his appreciation of them, but essentially he remained an outsider who was "more or less detached." In The Golden Bowl the two registering consciousnesses are at the same time two of "the deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding participants" of "the great game." (2)

Both the Prince and the Princess hold up the glass to the events about them, yet in each case it is "never a whit to the prejudice of [their each] being just as consistently a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general

1. "Preface to 'The Golden Bowl'", The Art of the Novel, p. 327.

2. Ibid., p. 328.

imbroglio, actor in the offered play." (1) The value of each consciousness is doubled, each being "a compositional resource . . . of the finest order, as well as a value intrinsic." (2)

I do not want to give the impression that Strether, in The Ambassadors, is not also a "value intrinsic" as well as a compositional resource. However, it will later become clear that the Princess's struggle in The Golden Bowl is greater than Strether's because she is not able to be quite as detached a witness as he is. James confesses that, in choosing as registering consciousnesses for The Golden Bowl such deeply involved characters (and in choosing two instead of one), he was in search of "the point of view" that would give him "most instead of least to answer for." (3) The form of The Golden Bowl promised a greater complexity and variety than the form of a novel in which there is only one registering consciousness. In his notes on The Ivory Tower, James says of the "'psychological picture'" he was presenting: "The beauty is in the complexity of the question. . . ." (4) His belief in the beauty of complexity is frequently expressed throughout his prefaces and critical writings. Complexity gave the novel the most "felt life" and interest, increasing the verisimilitude and also the moral intensity of the novel:

1. Ibid., p. 329.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 328.
4. The Ivory Tower, p. 341.

There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth . . . than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. (1)

Lucidity was not to be ruled out by complexity and variety, "the prize being, naturally, to achieve the lucidity with the complexity." (2) However, complexity was invaluable for increasing the intensity of life in the novel, and, once the life was intense, the "morality" of the novel would be insured. Though the novelist must select what he needs from the wide range of complexities of life, he must in no way limit that range.

D.H. Lawrence says much the same thing:

The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place and circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.

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. (3)

I shall deal with this question in more detail in Part Three. In the meantime, I wish to concentrate on The Golden Bowl, which, with The Ambassadors, best answers James's high ideals of achieving beauty of form and complexity of issue. The Golden Bowl has a planned and well executed economy of form, but it is at the same time a highly complex novel that deserves careful analysis.

1. "Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 45.
2. The Ivory Tower, p. 348.
3. "Morality and the Novel," Phoenix, The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: William Heinemann, 1961), p. 528.

The first section of The Golden Bowl, "The Prince," opens with that personage engaged in a restless stroll about the streets of London. He is restless when he should not be: he had set out to conquer Maggie Verver and has already achieved success. Yet he is "rather serious than gay." (I, 4.)

What had happened was that shortly before, at three o'clock, his fate had been practically sealed, and that even when one pretended to no quarrel with it the moment had something of the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made. (I, 4-5.)

Like The Ambassadors, the novel begins on a note of arrival. Strether arrived in England with the mission before him straightforwardly defined. The Prince has reached a state of finality in his marriage arrangements. But, as with Strether, complications multiply round a situation that is, on the surface, an ordinary and simple one. Indeed, in The Golden Bowl complications arise from the Prince's decision to an extent which may even make them seem unlikely. After his marriage to Maggie, Adam Verver (her father) marries Charlotte Stant in order to please Maggie and cement the foursome beyond which she seems to desire nothing in life. The Ververs do not know that the Prince and Charlotte have been in love before. They proceed to have an affair, while Maggie remains singularly attached to her father, especially after the birth of her child. The situation of a man having an affair with his wife's step-mother seems a lurid one, and lurid it would merely be if James were not from the start so careful to establish more than the obvious, more than simply story or plot. Like his artist-narrator in "The Beldonald Holbein," he finds "more life in situations

obscure and subject to interpretation than in the gross rattle of the foreground." (1)

In The Golden Bowl there are many obscurities and invitations to interpretation. In fact, James suggests so many possibilities that it is easy to fix on only a few and so seriously distort his intention. A common distortion is the insistence on the corruption of the Ververs, a wealthy, art-collecting father-and-daughter team who appear to have purchased the Prince as they might a valuable object. (2) This aspect of the Ververs does emerge in the novel; no one escapes their share of responsibility for what happens. But to insist upon it more than James does is an injustice to him. Not only should one take into account the end of the novel (and it could not be more important than it is in The Golden Bowl), but one should not overlook the equally crucial opening passages. The Prince has met the Ververs half-way. "He had been pursuing for six months as never in his life before. . . ." (I, 4.) His reasons begin to show through as we see him alone with his thoughts. He is looking for

1. "The Beldonald Holbein," The New York Edition of Henry James, Vol. 24, p. 392.

2. F.R. Leavis for example, in The Great Tradition, claims that James is explicit about the spirit in which the Ververs marry their respective spouses, but in his claim Leavis isolates two passages from The Golden Bowl which, with James, is a dangerous practice. I think it has been largely overlooked that the emphasis on material values occurs only in the first half of The Golden Bowl - the part entitled "The Prince." The Prince, in fact, begins the novel on a note of materialism. But in "The Princess," Maggie's half of The Golden Bowl, the emphasis is on moral rather than material values. The Prince's half is largely aesthetic-material; the Princess's aesthetic-moral. By the end of "The Princess" the Verver "power of purchase" (II, 366) is revealed as something quite other than the Prince's earlier mistaken view of it.

an empire - for wealth to replace the long-faded glories of the Roman Empire, or even, more simply and closer to home, the diminished prospects of the Italian aristocracy.

If it was a question of an Imperium, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. (I, 3.)

The lure of an empire does not consist merely in the material glory it offers. The Prince's stroll on the eve of his marriage is also enlivened by the "possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols. . . ." (I, 4.) The excitements, for a man like the Prince, of a great social world are also in the range of his appetite for life.

Yet the desire for wealth and a full social life are not the Prince's only motivations, nor does he see these facets of an empire as ends in themselves. They represent for him the field in which he seeks his identity. The Prince's identity, or "place," is constantly referred to as a matter of deep concern to him. To Maggie he has said:

"There are two parts of me. . . . One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless bêtises of other people - especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written - literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've . . . wonderfully looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant - unimportant save to you - personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing." (I, 9.)

Innocently candid, Maggie replied that it is precisely the Prince's history that has won her, not his "unknown quantity, [his] particular self." (I, 9.) The Prince has rightly taken Maggie's declaration as simply an example of "the extraordinary American good faith" (I, 10), and of innocent romanticism. At the same time, he sees dangers in the Ververs' approach to life and to himself. Though the romance of the matter, to him, lies in allying himself with "money, . . . power, the power of the rich peoples" (I, 17-18), he does not abandon his self-awareness.

He was intelligent enough to feel quite humble, to wish not to be in the least hard or voracious, not to insist on his own side of the bargain, to warn himself in short against arrogance and greed. Odd enough, of a truth, was his sense of this last danger - which may illustrate moreover his general attitude toward dangers from within. (I, 16.)

To the Prince, the greatest danger is that he might not discover what it is the Ververs expect of him, since they refuse to talk of his personal character. The Prince even wonders whether the Ververs would mind if he brought them nothing but his family history; "he found himself believing that, really, futility would have been forgiven him." "Such was the laxity, in the Ververs, of the romantic spirit." (I, 17.) Attempts to broach the subject of his personal worth have been met with embarrassment and avoidance by the Ververs. "He had noticed it before: it was the English, the American sign that duplicity, like 'love,' had to be joked about. It could n't be 'gone into.'" (I, 15.) These breaches of communication worry the Prince, not only because they make it impossible to discover what the Ververs really think of him, but also

because (unlike Gilbert Osmond in The Portrait of a Lady) he wants his wife to have ideas of her own and to reveal them to him.

He expected her, desired her, to have character; his wife should have it, and he was n't afraid of her having too much. He had had in his earlier time to deal with plenty of people who had had it. . . . He was thus fairly on the look-out for the characteristic in this most intimate, as she was to become, of his associates. He encouraged it when it appeared. (I, 19.)

Everything comes back to the Prince's need to know where he is, and to understand the bafflingly vague "general expectation . . . of which he was the subject." (I, 23.) It is this which causes the Prince's restlessness despite his successful "capture" of Maggie Verver.

What was singular was that it seemed not so much an expectation of anything in particular as a large bland blank assumption of merits almost beyond notation, of essential quality and value. It was as if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, mediaeval, wonderful, of which the "worth" in mere modern change . . . would be great enough, but as to which, since there were finer ways of using it, such taking to pieces was superfluous. That was the image for the security in which it was open to him to rest; he was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts. What would this mean but that practically he was never to be tried or tested? What would it mean but that if they did n't "change" him they really would n't know - he would n't know himself - how many pounds, shillings and pence he had to give? (I, 23.)

The Prince wants to be tested, so that he may know where he stands. He does not want to remain a "morceau de musée" (I, 12) - an ancient golden coin lying unvalued and unused in the others' possession. He wants to expand, to live up to his vision of a modern life (for he has "absolute acceptance of the developments of the coming age" [I, 17]).

Since Maggie is at this stage no help to him, he turns to Mrs. Assingham, his matchmaker, for guidance "across the unknown sea." (I, 26.) This reminds one of D.H. Lawrence's extended metaphor of the sea of marriage, in Kangaroo (chapter IX). The Prince's sea of marriage is more complicated than most since his wife is accompanied by her father, who is their common benefactor, and both carry a cargo of vague "general expectation." (I, 23.) The Prince realises it will be left to him to steer his own course and to ensure his own self-discovery, but he confesses to Mrs. Assingham that he is too "stupid" to do this by himself. He is afraid he has not the same sense of rightness and direction as the Ververs seem to have.

"I should be interested," she presently remarked, "to see some sense you don't possess."

Well, he produced one on the spot. "The moral, dear Mrs. Assingham. I mean always as you others consider it." (I, 31.)

But Mrs. Assingham is of little help to the Prince. She too prefers to admire him as

some very noble personage who, expected, acclaimed by the crowd in the street . . . , had gallily and gallantly come to show himself: always more-over less in his own interest than in that of spectators and subjects. . . . (I, 42.)

And, besides being too in awe of the Prince's social standing to be honest with him, Fanny Assingham is enough of a lover of intrigue not to want things to go smoothly. She admits: "I don't fear [complications] - I really like them. They're quite my element." (I, 43.)

Fittingly, it is Fanny Assingham who announces that Charlotte Stant has come to England for Maggie's wedding. Fanny knows the secret of the Prince's past love for Charlotte; although it remains unspoken, it is there between

them.

It fairly befell at last for a climax that they almost ceased to pretend - to pretend, that is, to cheat each other with forms. The unspoken had come up, and there was a crisis . . . during which they were reduced, for all interchange, to looking at each other on quite an inordinate scale. (I, 33.)

The tension is heightened when Charlotte herself enters the room. She has the immediate impact of all James's characters who possess "presence." Moreover, Charlotte is all that the humbler Maggie is not; she is

a tall strong charming girl who wore for him at first exactly the air of her adventurous situation, a reference in all her person . . . to winds and waves and custom-houses, to far countries and long journeys, the knowledge of how and where and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid. (I, 45.)

Charlotte's unafraid, adventurous spirit, which the Prince does not yet see as excessive strong-mindedness, is something to which one already feels he would be attracted. His appreciation extends also to Charlotte's highly European taste, which gratifies his own. Her taste

was the thing in her - for she threw it out positively on the spot like a light - that she might have reappeared . . . just to cool his worried eyes with. He saw her in her light. . . . It showed him everything - above all her presence in the world, so closely, so irretrievably contemporaneous with his own: a sharp, sharp fact, sharper during these instants than any other at all, even than that of his marriage. . . . (I, 45.)

Charlotte's presence effaces all other considerations, chiefly because there is a powerful physical attraction between her and the Prince. He appreciates her beauty "in the sense of the already known." (I, 46.) Nothing could be more sensual than his mental reassessment of Charlotte:

He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded,

the polished slinness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved. . . . He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers and the shape and colour of her fingernails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back, and the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for exhibition, for a prize. He knew above all the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces. . . . It was as if, before she turned to him, he had weighed the whole thing in his open palm and even heard a little the chink of the metal. When she did turn to him it was to recognise with her eyes what he might have been doing. (I, 46-47.)

Charlotte does not shrink from her recognition of the Prince's thoughts; something which establishes immediately the mutuality of their attraction.

It is not made clear, however, exactly how great their former intimacy had been. Though there are many sexual undertones in The Golden Bowl, James's accent is on passions, rather than on sexual passion in its purely physical manifestations. (1) His approach is even perhaps not so different from D.H. Lawrence's in its insistence on the dark and mysterious side of love's power. Reduced to simple terms, The Golden Bowl is about marriage and adultery (just as, in equally simple terms, The Ambassadors is about an illicit and also adulterous affair.) But James prefers to penetrate to a deeper level of human love than the physical level, and not, I strongly feel, through any Victorian type of prejudice in the matter of sex. The Prince's encounter with Charlotte is unmistake-

1. Stephen Spender writes well on James's treatment of sex, in his article, "The Contemporary Subject," which is reproduced in Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Leon Edel ("Spectrum Books"; Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.)

bly sensual, but the quality which finally emerges from it is a different one. When the Prince and Charlotte are left alone, the real emphasis is plain. James is not so much interested in sexuality as in the relationship it must always involve between a man and a woman. As with his treatment of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet in The Ambassadors, the accent here is on the power that an intimate relationship gives to one of the parties while at the same time it weakens the other.

Once more, as a man conscious of having known many women, he could assist . . . at the recurrent, the predestined phenomena, . . . the doing by the woman of the thing that gave her away. She did it, ever, inevitably, infallibly - she could n't possibly not do it. It was her nature, it was her life, and the man could always expect it without lifting a finger. This was his, the man's, any man's, position and strength - that he had necessarily the advantage, that he had only to wait with a decent patience to be placed, in spite of himself, . . . in the right. Just so the punctuality of performance on the part of the other creature was her weakness and her deep misfortune. . . . (I, 49-50.)

The Prince leaves it to Charlotte - as he will later leave it to his wife - "to arrange appearances." (I, 50.) But he has perhaps not allowed for Charlotte's boldness: she handles the awkward moment with decisiveness and takes things further than he had expected. She demands, as within her rights, an hour alone with the Prince - ostensibly to choose a wedding gift for Maggie. He bends to Charlotte's will once he perceives that safety rests in "the note of publicity." (I, 61.) Fanny Assingham's approval of Charlotte's plan (given grudgingly but with a sense of excitement at the possible complications) establishes the propriety of the rendezvous, in the Prince's eyes. He takes the "licence from her, as representing

friendly judgement, public opinion, the moral law, . . . or whatever." (I, 61.) One feels immediately the fatal flaw in the Prince's moral code: he believes that the safety of an act makes it right.

These first three chapters of The Golden Bowl have been, as James intended, from the Prince's point of view. However, Fanny Assingham usurps his place in Chapter Four. She is called in as an aid to lucidity far more than Maria Costrey in The Ambassadors, and she comes into her own to an extent that Miss Costrey never does. Fanny is useful for both her public and her secret connections with the central foursome. She is interested in all four players of the game, and her particular kind of interest is to see them as just that: players of a game. She is a watcher and schemer all in one: "her vision of human nature was not supine, not passive." (I, 34.) Fanny cannot resist interfering in the lives of others for her own amusement. Her husband, Colonel Assingham, is an important adjunct to her, even though she accuses him "of a want alike of moral and of intellectual reaction." (I, 67.) His sanity balances Fanny's hyperactive fancy and acts as a foil to it. His "'I don't quite see, my dear'" is ever the signal for her machinery of enquiry to be set loudly in motion. Fanny "sees" - all too much. The friendly, albeit one-sided, verbal battles between the Assinghams form a significant part of James's technique in the first half of The Golden Bowl. They supplement the Prince's point of view, and if one looks for the cause of such a need, one reaches the assumption that James felt the Prince's sense of things to

be after all inadequate - at least compared with the Princess's. The Prince has himself claimed stupidity in the moral field. Fanny Assingham talks of little else beside morality and thus supplements his lack of ideas. This is, however, not to say that Fanny Assingham speaks directly for James. Her constant theorising does not always clear the air; it often complicates it. Fanny is not always truthful, and she can be flippant; she also digs for complications where there would not appear to be any, and thus seems quite to invite them.

In Chapter Four, Fanny takes great intellectual delight in examining the possible complications of Charlotte's presence. She knows the Prince and Charlotte only gave up each other because they could not see their way to marrying without money, and she suspects that there is more to Charlotte's return than affection for Maggie. But Fanny insists that Charlotte does not intend "the least complication" (I, 70), even while she recognises this is not enough to avert them. Her only solution is to keep any hint of danger from Maggie. "She was n't born to know evil. She must never know it." (I, 78.) Fanny's attitude to Maggie matches the general attitude of all the other characters in The Golden Bowl: Maggie must at all costs be protected from knowledge. Of course, no one can be so protected, nor, James implies, should they be. Maggie will awaken to selfhood only when she does "know evil." As long as she is ignorant, Charlotte will be able to lure and hold the Prince on the grounds that they are "safe" and consequently right. The misguided "kindness" of the people round Maggie is one of the major

means of enlisting our sympathy for her, even before we have seen her by the light of her own consciousness.

Meanwhile, Fanny's sympathies lie with Charlotte, whom she is to see "'through her noble, lonely life.'" (I, 85.) Her whole attitude speaks of a vicarious living, like Strether's in The Ambassadors. The people she watches are claimed by her as "'my own'" (I, 86), as Mme. de Vionnet and Chad were claimed by Strether. (1) But, unlike Strether, Fanny Assingham does not know when to stop. It is her self-appointed "duty" to arrange the lives of the Ververs and Charlotte and the Prince. She has arranged the match between the Prince and Maggie, and now, to cover her nervousness at what she may have done - "One can never be ideally sure of anything. There are always possibilities." - she plans to see that Charlotte "'gets a good husband as soon as possible.'" (I, 86.) Strether, in The Ambassadors, learned the hopelessness of trying to change the lives of others. In The Golden Bowl, Fanny Assingham's interference only brings eventual good, instead of harm, because Maggie finds the strength to face the complications. She is awakened by them to self-awareness and knowledge of evil, but it rests upon her alone to transform the ugliness into beauty. Mrs. Assingham does not escape implied censure. She emerges from The Golden Bowl as one of the Jamesian "fools" (2), while

1. Strether says: "'The point is that they're mine. Yes, they're my youth. . . .'" (The Ambassadors, II, 51.)

2. In James's prefaces one may trace many references to "fools" and their usefulness for throwing into relief the greater perception and imagination of the "free spirit" on whose life they encroach. ("Preface to 'The Spoils of Poynton,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 129.)

her husband oddly engages one's respect despite all Fanny's claims to superiority. On this occasion her machinations cause him to say: "'And you call me immoral?'"

It made her hesitate a moment. "I'll call you stupid if you prefer. But stupidity pushed to a certain point is, you know, immorality. Just so what is morality but high intelligence?" This he was unable to tell her; which left her more definitely to conclude. "Besides, it's all, at the worst, great fun." (I, 88.)

Fanny's theory of morality would be all very well if it were not for that latter qualification. One may see in this how little Fanny speaks for James. Though intelligence does, in his works, lead a person to possess a fine moral sense, it is not simply intelligence as meaning cleverness or wit. Mrs. Assingham has these. The intelligence James shows to be most valuable is of another kind; Fanny expresses only half-truths. In The Golden Bowl it is Maggie who will best exemplify a high intelligence and a fine moral sense - and not merely verbally, but in action.

The complications Fanny so carelessly invites for "fun" begin almost at once. Chapter Five reveals Charlotte alone with the Prince, with the pretext for the rendezvous all but forgotten. "'I came back for this. Not really for anything else,'" Charlotte says. "'To have one hour alone with you.'" (I, 89.) To give credit to the Prince, this is not what he has expected; but his good nature prevents him from raising ugly questions wherever they can be avoided. Ease and simplicity appeal more to his taste than what he terms "fuss." "Apparent scruples were obviously fuss" (I, 95) - and so the Prince

leaves everything to Charlotte. His good nature is in fact his weakness, Charlotte's superior will her strength - for the time being. Even though Charlotte claims to be absolutely honest, and, in giving herself away, "perfectly willing to do it for nothing" (I, 98), she is in fact pressing home her advantage. Playing on the Prince's susceptibility, she reveals that her action is not after all free of ulterior motives:

"I wanted you to understand. I wanted you, that is, to hear. I don't care, I think, whether you understand or not.

.....
 What I want is that it shall always be with you - so that you'll never be able quite to get rid of it. . . . (I, 97.)

When the talk at last turns to Maggie and the wedding gift, James gives it many layers of meaning and suggestion:

"Anything of course, dear as she is, will do for her. I mean if I were to give her a pin-cushion from the Baker-Street Bazaar."

.....
 [Charlotte] went on in her own way. "But it is n't a reason. In that case one would never do anything for her. I mean . . . if one took advantage of her character."

"Of her character?"

"We must n't take advantage of her character," the girl . . . pursued. "One must n't, if not for her, at least for one's self. She saves one such trouble."

.....
 "She certainly gives one no trouble," said the Prince. And then as if this were perhaps ambiguous or inadequate: "She's not selfish - God forgive her! - enough."

"That's what I mean," Charlotte instantly said. "She's not selfish enough. There's nothing, absolutely, that one need do for her. She's so modest," she developed - "she does n't miss things. I mean if you love her - or rather, I should say, if she loves you. She lets it go."

.....
 "She does everything herself. And that's terrible."

The Prince had listened; but, always, with propriety, did n't commit himself.

"Terrible?"

"Well, unless one's almost as good as she. It makes too easy terms for one. It takes stuff within one, so far as one's decency is concerned, to stand it. And nobody," Charlotte continued in the same manner, "is decent enough, good enough, to stand it. . . . Not without prayer and fasting - that is without taking great care. Certainly," she said, "such people as you and I are not."

The Prince, obligingly, thought an instant. "Not good enough to stand it?"

"Well, not good enough not rather to feel the strain. We happen each, I think, to be of the kind that are easily spoiled."

Her friend again, for propriety, followed the argument. "Oh I don't know. May not one's affection for her do something more for one's decency, as you call it, than her own generosity . . . has the unfortunate virtue to undo?"

"Ah of course it must be all in that."

(I, 101-103.)

Here in a nutshell lie all the difficulties of the case. They spring from the characters of the persons involved; Maggie being so trusting and easy to take advantage of, and the Prince and Charlotte being of the "kind that are easily spoiled." It is important, however, to note the subtle differentiation James sustains between the characters of Charlotte and the Prince. It is all too easy to bracket them together as Charlotte herself has done. But the Prince reveals a truer understanding of decency and a deeper affection for Maggie than Charlotte does. He has hesitations and qualifications which Charlotte overlooks in her view of Maggie; there is even a veiled suggestion of contempt in her attitude to her friend. Somehow, Charlotte is lacking in tenderness. The Prince has a warmth to his character which tends to soften one's judgment of him in a way it is not softened for Charlotte; he has also a humility which she is not large enough to possess.

Chapter Six moves on to the little shop in Bloomsbury and the central symbol of the book - the golden bowl itself. Both the shop and the bowl are major elements of the plot. By a series of coincidences they later reveal to Maggie the long duration of the Prince's secret intimacy with Charlotte. These coincidences would be unpardonably clumsy if the bowl were not invested with so much symbolic meaning that it seems indispensable to the novel, and Maggie's eventual discovery of it less accidental than inevitable. From the moment one hears of the bowl (one is helped, moreover, by the title of the novel), one is aware that it is more than a dramatic device. However, it is unwise to extract the bowl from its differing contexts for the purpose of a convenient analysis. Meanings gather round the bowl through the reactions it produces in the characters who see it: in Maggie, in the Prince, in Charlotte, and even in Fanny Assingham. Without the full range of these facets, the bowl appears a flat symbol. In the novel, it continues to radiate significance, making any simple formula inadequate. The dimensions of the bowl as a symbol depend upon the characters who are related to it at any specific time.

The discovery of the bowl by Charlotte and the Prince is accidental, yet it would be impossible without their actions. Abandoning the hope of finding a gift for Maggie in the little shop, they fall to discussing - in Italian - an exchange of gifts between themselves. They presume that they are safe to speak freely, but the shopman intervenes and proves them wrong; he understands their language despite his appearance of being perfectly

English. He brings out the golden bowl, which immediately produces different reactions in Charlotte and the Prince. She eagerly takes it up in her hands, while he regards it "from a distance." (I, 112.) The shopman admits that the bowl, contrary to its appearance, is not of solid gold; it is gilded crystal. The Prince moves away in impatience, but Charlotte is determined to find the weak spot she suspects in the bowl. She fails to discover it and finds herself at odds with the Prince, who knew the minute he saw the bowl: "'Why, it has a crack.'"

"But it's exquisite," Charlotte, as if with an interest in it now made even tenderer and stranger, found herself moved to insist.

"Of course it's exquisite. That's the danger." (I, 119.)

One scarcely need enlarge upon the differences the incident has brought out between Charlotte and the Prince, nor the way in which it prefigures their future relationship. The Prince has an instinct for (and fear of) danger, especially the dangers "from within." (I, 16.) Although he might find appearances "exquisite," he is intent upon establishing the true worth of the things he perceives and will be likely to perceive true beauty when he sees it. Charlotte, for all her cleverness, lacks penetrating insight, whether it be into matters of taste, like the golden bowl, or into her relationships and the consequences of her actions. Her parting words on the day of the fateful rendezvous are: "'Well, I would marry, I think, to have something from you in all freedom.'" (I, 121.)

A year at least has passed by the opening of Book Second of "The Prince." He is married to Maggie, and

they have a son. The Book, however, opens with a closer view of the Prince's father-in-law, Adam Verver. This is another deviation from James's professed intention of keeping the Prince's point of view in the first half of The Golden Bowl. (Fanny Assingham's colloquies with her husband have already taken us a little apart from him.) However, what is really important in the first half is the impression of Maggie's absence. It is not a physical absence, but rather an absence of influence or force. She is "absent" as the negative opposite of those who are "present." The Golden Bowl brings James's exploration of presence to its height. Maggie begins in absence, a good person but innocuous. Against her stands the marvellous presence of Charlotte. Compare the descriptions of Charlotte as a Florentine figurine (I, 46), as a "huntress" (I, 46) and as the Prince's "notion . . . of a muse" (I, 47), with the image Maggie evokes in her father's mind. She has for him

the appearance of some slight slim draped "antique" of Vatican or Capitoline halls . . . set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet . . . 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. . . . (I, 187.)

Maggie is as absent and as nameless as a statue; and as modest and retiring as "a nun." (I, 188.) Set against the powerful presences of Charlotte and of the Prince, it is no wonder that she is overshadowed. (Nevertheless, when Maggie does awaken - in "The Princess," the second half of the novel, she emerges with the greatest force of all the characters.)

In the first half of The Golden Bowl, even Adam

Verver only serves to bring out Maggie's deficiencies. He is an enigmatic character, always "at the back of the stage" (I, 169) in the novel, and when we do get a closer view of him, as in Book Second, it is mainly a view of Maggie's life through his eyes. He is a considerable influence on his daughter, whose marriage has not altered their relationship. He has decided that "'for living with'" his son-in-law is "'a pure and perfect crystal.'" (I, 138.) (1) Adam's attitude of vague trust is the same as Maggie's; his "passion for perfection at any price" (I, 146) causes him to overlook the fact that human relationships are seldom, if ever, perfect. He sees nothing missing in Maggie's marriage: she shows "the maximum immersion in the fact of being married." (I, 148.) But, for the reader, there are signs that the birth of her son and her resulting domesticity have altered things.

It was of course an old story and a familiar idea that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and a husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mamma and a grandpapa. (I, 156.)

The setting for this stage of the marriage is, aptly, Fawns, the Verver's country house, the very name of which suggests an idyllic, prelapsarian world. The vast spaces of Fawns, its lake and park, wide windows and halls, all give the inhabitant "the sense . . . of one's having the world to one's self." (I, 125.) The atmosphere suits

1. The images of the Prince as a crystal and, alternatively, a golden coin, echo the symbolism of the golden bowl. The bowl is of crystal under its gilt, and the crystal is not flawless as the gilt makes it appear. Similarly: the golden coin must be "changed" to assess its real worth, just as the bowl must be broken before Maggie realises the true worth of the Prince.

Maggie and her father, but one wonders how happy the Prince can be. Fanny Assingham is there to keep him "quiet" - but "you did n't need a jailer, she contended, for a domesticated lamb tied up with pink ribbon." (I, 161.)

Maggie and Adam Verver are both blind to the potential serpents of evil in their paradise. The scene in which they withdraw to the small walled garden to be together stresses the falsity of an ease too easily achieved.

Their rightness, the justification of everything - something they so felt the pulse of - sat there with them; but they might have been asking themselves a little blankly to what further use they could put anything so perfect. They had created and nursed and established it; they had housed it here in dignity and crowned it with comfort; but might n't the moment possibly count for them - or count at least for us while we watch them with their fate all before them - as the dawn of the discovery that it does n't always meet all contingencies to be right?
(I, 167.)

Maggie's sense of what is wrong is vague as yet, but, behind her concern that her father should remarry, there does seem to be concern for her husband as well. It emerges indirectly:

"I don't think we lead, as regards other people, any life at all. We don't at any rate . . . lead half the life we might. And so it seems, I think, to Amerigo."
(I, 175.)

Maggie proposes Charlotte Stant as a means of revitalizing their lives. Charlotte, she says, is "'great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life.'" (I, 180.) Her view is essentially a romantic one: "'She has loved - and she has lost.'" (I, 185.) Little does Maggie know what she is inviting when she suggests that they should take care of Charlotte. Clearly, in the

garden at Fawns, she and Adam are sitting "with their fate all before them." (I, 167.)

To all appearances Fawns remains idyllic after the arrival of Charlotte Stant. Her social value as "the real thing" (I, 195) establishes itself for them all, and especially for Adam Verver in whom the aesthetic principle is a flame fed by "the idea (followed by appropriation) of plastic beauty, of the thing visibly perfect in its kind." (I, 197.) Charlotte is a perfect asset to the "general golden peace" of Fawns. (I, 192.) No one notices the effect of Charlotte's presence on the Prince, however. Finally he requests that he and Maggie should go abroad. His explanatory description of the call of Italy could well be applied to the call of Charlotte. "He called it a 'serenade', a low music that . . . disturbed his rest at night." (I, 198.) The departure of the Prince and Maggie leaves the field open for Charlotte, who remains at Fawns with Adam Verver. On the eve of going with her to purchase oriental tiles at Brighton, Adam wanders alone upon the terrace at Fawns and suddenly perceives what Maggie wants for him: "a marriage as good . . . as hers had been." (I, 208.) The moment turns into an epiphany for him. His realisation of Maggie's generosity and love is a light breaking upon the "luxuriance of her spiritual garden."

As at a turn of his labyrinth he saw his issue, which opened out so wide . . . that he held his breath with wonder. He was afterwards to recall how just then the autumn night seemed to clear to a view in which the whole place, everything round him, the wide terrace where he stood, the others, with their steps, below, the gardens, the park, the lake, the circling woods, lay there as under some strange midnight sun. It all met him during these instants as a vast expanse of discovery, a

world that looked . . . extraordinarily new, and in which familiar objects had taken on a distinctness that . . . gave them an inordinate quantity of character and verily an inordinate size. The hallucination, or whatever he might have called it, was brief, but it lasted long enough to leave him gasping.
(I, 207.)

Adam's vision illuminates the significance of Fawns - a significance that goes one step further, even, than that of Chad's house in The Ambassadors. To Strether Chad's house was a labyrinth of appearance and reality. For Adam Verver, Fawns is momentarily Maggie's "spiritual garden": her soul, wide and innocent and beautiful as Eden, lies before him, lit only by the strange light of his discovery.

Significantly, Fawns is left behind the next day, when Adam proposes to Charlotte. He does so in the more worldly surroundings of Brighton, with its "high pitch and high colour of the public sphere," compared with which Fawns "was out of the world." (II, 211.) Adam's proposal is a strange one. He is quietly decided, and quietly honest about his reasons: he is marrying to put his daughter "'at peace.'" (I, 223.) Charlotte is shown in the best light she ever receives. She is careful to question whether Adam thinks he really knows her. "'I mean when it's a question of learning one learns sometimes too late.'" (I, 221.) Yet Charlotte is not as honest as Adam is to her. She keeps from him the secret reason for her hesitation, asking him to wait for approval from Maggie; but one suspects she is thinking of the Prince. They move on to the even worldlier atmosphere of Paris, since the Prince and Princess are abroad. Paris is Brighton "at a hundred-

fold higher pitch," filled with "strange appearances in the air." (I, 228.) Adam is not at home in this world of "bristling traps . . . all smothered in flowers" (I, 228), but Charlotte is; it is she who has the advantage here. Maggie's word of joyful approval is rejected by her as insufficient. Only a telegram from the Prince finally decides her. As we learn later, his message is this:

"A la guerre comme à la guerre then" - it had been couched in the French tongue. "We must lead our lives as we see them; but I am charmed with your courage and almost surprised at my own." (I, 290.)

Charlotte immediately tells Adam: "'I'll give you . . . what you want.'" (I, 239.) Though, "as for her conscience" (I, 240), she offers him the chance of reading the message, Adam refuses. On the surface, there is nothing to discredit their marrying. So the stage is set for "The Marriages" (the title James originally planned for the novel) - and for their strange results.

Books First and Second have been a long preparation; in comparison, Book Third is a swift-moving one. It plunges at once into the communal life of the two married couples. Two years have passed in which Charlotte has found herself able to face society "with a consciousness materially, with a confidence quite splendidly, enriched." (I, 245.) She is even bolder now and, on the night of a glittering reception, she reaches a climax of daring. Adam Verver is ill and Maggie has gone home to be with him; Charlotte openly takes her place beside the Prince. Fanny Assingham's watchfulness only increases Charlotte's impatience "to be suspected, sounded, veritably arraigned,

if only that she might have the bad moment over." (I, 249.) The moment comes when Fanny questions Maggie's absence. Secure in her advantage - for she knows Fanny must fear "that she might have 'gone too far' in her irrepressible interest in other lives" (I, 253-254) - Charlotte makes her point:

"I've simply to see the truth of the matter - see that Maggie thinks more on the whole of fathers than of husbands. And my situation is such," she went on, "that this becomes immediately . . . a thing I have to count with."
(I, 257.)

(She forgets that she herself is thinking first not of her husband but of another woman's husband.) Charlotte's justification is that, since she and the Prince are being unjustly neglected, they must fill the gap in each other's social lives. She presents a convincing image of "high pale lighted disappointment, . . . as of a creature patient and lonely in her splendour." (I, 263.)

Unable to shake Charlotte's high confidence, Fanny turns hopefully to the Prince for reassurance that all is well. At last, after so long a break, the Prince is directly before us again. (1) Good natured as ever, he presents a firm front to Mrs. Assingham's doubts. Yet she senses depths beneath the flow of his eloquence: an appeal to her complicity which is "fairly like a quintessential wink." (I, 271.) Fanny is overcome by the bitterness of what she has brought about. "She suddenly wanted to go home. . . . She wanted to leave well behind

1. However, although Charlotte has dominated the preceding chapters, she is after all an extension of the Prince's view, or, as Fanny says, she is his "appendage." (I, 266.)

her both her question and the couple in whom it had abruptly taken such vivid form. . . ." (I, 273.) The complications Fanny had half-expected, even half-wanted for "fun," have suddenly taken shape - human shape, very very different from the shape of mental games. Despite the Prince's renewed appeal to her to be his guide, Fanny flees from her responsibility.

She but brooded at first in her corner of the carriage: it was like burying her exposed face, a face too helplessly exposed, in the cool lap of the common indifference, of the dispeopled streets, of the closed shops and darkened houses seen through the window of the brougham, a world mercifully unconscious and unreproachful. It would n't, like the world she had just left, know sooner or later what she had done, or would know it only if the final consequence should be some quite overwhelming publicity. (I, 276.)

Mrs. Assingham's discussion with her husband that night furnishes information on what is happening in the Verver circle, and affords an insight into the intricacies of human intercourse. When Fanny insists she would not have allowed the second marriage if Charlotte had not had so much confidence, Bob Assingham growls: "'Did you ask her how much?'" Fanny replies: "'Never, never - it was n't a time to "ask." Asking is suggesting - and it was n't a time to suggest.'" (I, 279.) (Italics mine.) Fanny's difficulties are the difficulties of the others as well. Everyone involved has been treading on ground either known or suspected by them to be dangerous, yet no one has ever spoken aloud, for fear of precipitating the possible. Fanny is aware it is too late now to do anything. Her only hope lies, surprisingly enough to her, in Maggie. Fanny has come to see that Maggie is not quite as simple or as timid as she had supposed, and she puts in a prophecy:

"In fact - I do begin to feel it - Maggie's the great comfort. I'm getting hold of it. It will be she who'll see us through. In fact she'll have to. And she'll be able."
(I, 280.)

Meanwhile the undaunted Charlotte is pursuing her advantage and putting the case before the Prince in such a way as to absolve them, in her eyes, of any guilt. Their position is beautiful because they have done nothing at all: "'There has been plenty of "doing" . . .; but it's all theirs, every inch of it; it's all a matter of what they've done to us.'" (I, 289.) Charlotte holds that, because she offered to show the Prince's telegram to Adam Verver in Paris, "her position in the matter of responsibility was therefore inattackably straight." (I, 291.) On the Prince's side, there is gratefulness to Mr. Verver for his financial backing, and a consequent sense of obligation to him; but this obligation is a weight the Prince does not know how to remove. It makes him uneasy that he has still not worked out what is expected of him, nor found his place.

The crisis comes for him "one dark day" (I, 293) in Portland Place, when Maggie is as absent as ever. It is tea-time, but "though the fireside service of the repast was shiningly present the mistress of the table was not." (I, 294.) The Prince quickens with an unnameable tension that is neither "the impatience of desire" nor "sharp disappointment." (I, 294.) It is enough however that Charlotte should at this moment arrive, making no secret of her intention to see the Prince alone and strong in the power of her presence.

Charlotte Stant, at such an hour, in a shabby four-wheeler and a waterproof, Charlotte Stant turning up for him at the very climax of his special inner vision, was an apparition charged

with a congruity at which he stared almost as if it had been a violence. (I, 295.)

Charlotte, standing before the fireplace in renewed visibility, with her "so handsome rain-freshened face" (I, 297), revives for the Prince their common past and negates the present. (He even thinks of her as Charlotte Stant.)

It made that other time somehow meet the future close, interlocking with it, . . . as in a long embrace of arms and lips, and so handling and hustling the present that this poor quantity scarce retained substance enough, scarce remained sufficiently there, to be wounded or shocked. (I, 298.)

The meeting in fact ends in an embrace between the Prince and Charlotte, for she succeeds in convincing him of their freedom, "a freedom that extraordinarily partook of ideal perfection, since the magic web had spun itself without their toil, almost without their touch." (I, 298.)

In fact, it is really Charlotte who has adroitly spun the web, and with a very firm touch indeed. Guilty as Maggie and her father might be in their neglect of their marriage partners, Charlotte is no less guilty in disregarding her marriage so knowingly. It does not matter, she seems to be saying, because she has no children and never will:

"'It's not . . . my fault,'" she claims. (I, 307.) All that matters is that she and the Prince should take their freedom; they will, of course, "protect" the others still.

A plan in which so much hidden ugliness resides becomes, in her expression of it, "'too beautiful.'" (I, 312.)

And, because of the aesthetic appeal of the plan, the Prince feels "rather righted than wronged." (I, 310.)

Charlotte casts a veil of beauty over her intentions, making them appear even sacred. "'It's sacred,' he said at

last." (I, 312.) At this, "they passionately sealed their pledge." (I, 312.)

Charlotte's "intenser presence" (I, 322-323) continues to overshadow Maggie for the Prince. At Adam Verver's Easter dinner he has an opportunity to observe the two women together in the same company. Charlotte alone stands out, "where so much else was mature and sedate," as holding high "the torch of responsive youth and the standard of passive grace." (I, 321.) Maggie awakens in him only the "images of rather neutral and negative propriety that made up, in his long line, the average of wifehood and motherhood." (I, 322.) He is conscious of the silent complicity that links him with Charlotte even in company.

It put them, it kept them together, through the vain show of their separation; made the two other faces, made the whole lapse of the evening, the people, the lights, the flowers, the pretended talk, the exquisite music, a mystic golden bridge between them, strongly swaying and sometimes almost vertiginous, for that intimacy of which the sovereign law would be the vigilance of "care," would be never rashly to forget and never consciously to wound.
(I, 325.)

This is the complicity which takes the Prince and Charlotte to the weekend house-party at Matcham despite the decision of Maggie and Mr. Verver not to go. Apparently free again without their doing, the pair are exhilarated. Matcham is a perfect setting for the inevitable result of their exciting freedom. "The great house was full of people, of possible new combinations, of the quickened play of possible propinquity. . . ." (I, 330.) Everything at Matcham rests upon appearances, which constitute the safety of Charlotte and the Prince.

Both our friends felt afresh, as they had felt

before, the convenience of a society so placed that it had only its own sensibility to consider - looking as it did well over the heads of all lower growths. . . . What any one "thought" of any one else - above all of any one else with any one else - was a matter incurring in these halls so little awkward formulation that hovering Judgement, the spirit with the scales, might perfectly have been imaged there as some rather snubbed and subdued but quite trained and tactful poor relation. . . . (I, 330-331.) (1)

The Prince's situation strikes him as "grotesque in its flagrancy," like "some elaborate practical joke carried out at his expense." (I, 332.) Matcham and his situation are both so lacking in subtlety that the only way for the Prince to maintain a sense of dignity is to accept everything about him and respond to the spirit of the place, to its "glowing plea for the immediate." (I, 332.) He feels this all the more because there is in him the "strange final irritation" of his wife's "so contented . . . view of his conduct and course - a state of mind that was positively like a vicarious good conscience cul-

1. The protective and self-protecting atmosphere of Matcham echoes the atmosphere of that other country house of James's - Newmarch, in The Sacred Fount. The narrator says:

"I think the imagination, in those halls of art and fortune, was almost inevitably accounted a poor matter; the whole place and its participants abounded so in pleasantness and picture, in all the felicities, for every sense, taken for granted there by the very basis of life, that even the sense most finely poetic, aspiring to extract the moral, could scarce have helped feeling itself treated to something of the snub that affects . . . the uninvited reporter in whose face a door is closed.

.
 We existed, all of us together, to be handsome and happy, to be really what we looked - since we looked tremendously well; to be that and neither more nor less, so not discrediting by musty secrets and aggressive doubts our high privilege of harmony and taste. We were concerned only with what was bright and open. . . ."

(The Sacred Fount, p. 114.)

tivated ingeniously on his behalf, a perversity of pressure innocently persisted in. . . ." (I, 333.) Maggie's attitude of blind trust awakens in the Prince his great need for personal dignity, his "inextinguishable sense of a higher and braver propriety." (I, 334.)

Being thrust, systematically, with another woman, and a woman one happened, by the same token, exceedingly to like, and being so thrust that the theory of it seemed to publish one as idiotic or incapable - this was a predicament of which the dignity depended all on one's own handling. What was supremely grotesque in fact was the essential opposition of theories - as if a galantuomo . . . could do anything but blush to "go about" at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verber in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall. (I, 335.)

The only way, in the Prince's eyes, for he and Charlotte not to be "ungracious," is for them to comment upon their situation together.

In this way the Prince and Charlotte come to share "an exquisite sense of complicity" (I, 335) at Matcham. Once again James writes with a deep and controlled sense of the power of sensuality - a power which need not rest upon physical contact alone. Charlotte's proximity to the Prince is balanced by her necessary distance from him in company, merely increasing the pressures on the Prince. In their few snatched minutes alone they communicate a sensual excitement to each other without touching: "the intensity both of the union and the caution become a workable substitute for contact."

They had prolongations of instants that counted as visions of bliss; they had slow approximations that counted as long caresses. The quality of these passages in truth made the spoken word, and especially the spoken word about other people, fall below them. . . . (I, 339.)

Nevertheless, Charlotte cannot refrain from her insistent

verbal manoeuvrings of the situation. She constantly holds before the Prince their freedom from responsibility and the consequent "beauty" of their justification. She has the air of managing everything with the utmost competence, and it is she who arranges for them to stay over at Matcham after the departure of the Assinghams (Fanny having wormed her way into the house-party at all costs to watch Charlotte and the Prince). The Prince is more than willing; he even had the same idea himself. Adding another touch of the grotesque, the hostess, Lady Castledean, has made the lengthened stay possible in order to disguise the fact that she "had kept over a man of her own." (I, 352.) But the Prince is by this time in no way to be put off. Under the influence of Matcham's atmosphere everything, even the touches of the grotesque, "melted together, almost indistinguishably, to feed his sense of beauty." (I, 351.) He is no longer worried "as to the element of staleness in all the freshness and of freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and guilt in the innocence." (I, 354.)

If however there is guilt in Maggie's innocence, there is certainly little freshness in the guilt of Charlotte and the Prince. Their meeting on the terrace takes a form so exaggerated that it strikes one as operatic and over-played, rather than as the note of true drama. Charlotte appears at her window, dressed unexpectedly for travel, and smiles down at the Prince. Their eyes meet on the knowledge that "their cup was full; which cup their very eyes, holding it fast, carried and steadied and began, as they tasted it, to praise." (I, 356.) "It only wants a moon, a mandolin and a little

danger to be a serenade," the Prince calls out, and Charlotte responds by throwing him a flower from her breast.

"Come down quickly!" he said in an Italian not loud but deep.

"Vengo, vengo!" she said as clearly, but more lightly, tossed out; and she had left him the next minute to wait for her. (I, 357.)

Even their language is the language of the opera. Charlotte gives the lie to the "freshness," the spontaneity of their act, when she reveals that she has planned every minute of their time together, to the extent of practically knowing the railway timetable by heart. But the Prince is too taken with the apparent beauty of what has happened to be irritated at all by Charlotte's managerial air. For him, the day is like "'a great gold cup'" for them to drain together. (I, 359.)

The Prince's image, which Charlotte takes up and places, brings the symbol of the golden bowl to the fore again. To Charlotte, the bowl is something "'beautiful'" and "'real'" (I, 359) that she has offered him before. The Prince recalls the bowl at Charlotte's insistence, but remembers it as "'the treacherous cracked thing you wanted to palm off on me.'" (I, 359.) Charlotte is undaunted: "'I risk the cracks.'" (I, 359.) But the Prince maintains his independence: "'Risk them as much as you like for yourself, but don't risk them for me.'" (I, 360.) However, the veiled warning in his words fails to penetrate the surface of Charlotte's audacity. Having detailed the practicalities of the planned adultery and urged that they "employ" their time, she says: "'These days, yesterday, last night, this morning, I've wanted everything.'" (I, 363.)

Charlotte gets her "everything" - and ensures that their return from Gloucester to London is in time for dinner with the others. It is "safe" enough - but less and less beautiful or "sacred." James calls again upon the Assinghams to provide the outside view of the Prince and Charlotte's complicity and to close the section of The Golden Bowl entitled "The Prince." Fanny reviews what has been done; she also prepares the way for Maggie's emergence as the new centre of things in the second half of the novel. Fanny's distressed attempts to justify the conduct of the guilty lovers are somewhat hollow. She maintains the lovers are "wonderful" and "beautiful" - but the basis of her evaluation is that things could have been worse. Charlotte "'observes the forms,'" says Fanny. "'And the forms . . . are two thirds of conduct.'" (I, 390.) In the light of Fanny's ambiguous position, her character and the essentially frivolous nature of her morality, it is too much to take this pronouncement as a direct indication of James's own belief. Moreover, Fanny leaves unspecified that last "third" of conduct. James does not. Indirectly but undeniably, he gives it to us in the last half of The Golden Bowl, through the sufferings and discoveries of Maggie. Maggie has to supply that other third of conduct which will give the "forms" validity without destroying their beauty. She has to fill out the hollowness left in their common conduct by ignorance and lack of true communication.

Fanny Assingham prepares us for Maggie's role. Maggie, she says, "has done the most."

"Well, she did it originally - she began the vicious circle. For that . . . is simply what it has been. It's their mutual conside-

ration, all round, that has made it the bottomless gulf; and they're really so embroiled but because, in their way, they've been so improbably good."

"In their way - yes!" the Colonel grinned. "Which was above all Maggie's way." No flicker of his ribaldry was anything to her now. (I, 394.)

Fanny has little concern now for the mere facts of physical infidelity on the part of Charlotte and the Prince; nor has James. The issues at stake are wider and deeper, and will be so for Maggie too. The Prince and Charlotte are guilty but not alone in guilt, for guilt may reside in ignorance. Maggie has been only half-alive. From the beginning she has been "the creature in the world to whom a wrong thing could least be communicated. It was as if her imagination had been closed to it, her sense altogether sealed." (I, 384.) Fanny Assingham puts the case into plain terms: what Maggie must awaken to is "Evil - with a very big E: for the first time in her life. To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it." (I, 385.) This alone will "make her decide to live." (I, 385.)

Maggie's need to "live" is an expression of the Jamesian theme that came up so strongly in The Ambassadors. But Strether's was the viewpoint of a person who had failed throughout his life to "do," and to be, with fullness. He could only make up for his loss by "seeing" the life of others. In The Golden Bowl, Maggie has not "lived," but she is young and intimately involved in the lives about her, despite her "absence." She has been in a prelapsarian sleep, blinkered by her ignorance of evil and her refusal to acknowledge its possible existence even in those dearest to her. But it is open to her to atone

for her absence by awakening to the possibilities for good and evil in herself. The Ambassadors turns mainly on Strether's ability to "see". The Golden Bowl turns on Maggie's ability both to see and to do, to act upon her discovery of evil for the good of everyone about her. Her struggle is a greater one: she must face awareness, and assert her presence in the circle about her without destroying it. She must make - and preserve - a new equilibrium, in their lives.

This has to be done, as Fanny points out, without disturbing Adam Verver, the general benefactor of Maggie, the Prince and Charlotte. "'She'll have to save him,'" Fanny declares. "'To keep her father from her own knowledge.'" (I, 386.) The truth is that, by saving her father, Maggie will save them all; James has brought out already the obligation and respect Maggie and the Prince and even Charlotte have to and for Adam Verver - it is in fact the one thing they really have in common. But Fanny expresses the case only in terms of Maggie's love for her father, from whom she must keep her knowledge. "'She'll die first.'" (I, 402.) These are Fanny's last words and the close of "The Prince." The focus is now on Maggie alone, and for her it is a case of life and death - of the life or death, morally, of herself and those about her. Beauty and life - or ugliness and death: these are Maggie's alternatives.

II. "THE PRINCESS."

Up till now one has scarcely thought of Maggie as "The Princess." She has been, even in marriage "still always . . . irremediably Maggie Verver." (I, 323.) It is as though she has been a Sleeping Beauty, yet one whom even the kiss of her Prince Charming did not awaken to be a princess. The kiss that awakens Maggie is bestowed upon another woman. The second half of The Golden Bowl opens with the Princess in the process of awakening: she is listening to an "inward voice that spoke in a new tone." (II, 3.) Her "garden of life" long had planted in its centre

some strange tall tower of ivory, or perhaps rather some wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned at the overhanging eaves with silver bells that tinkled ever so charmingly when stirred by chance airs. She had walked round and round it - that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left her for circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow: looking up all the while at the fair structure that spread itself so amply and rose so high, but never quite making out as yet where she might have entered had she wished. She had n't wished till now - such was the odd case; and what was doubtless equally odd besides was that though her raised eyes seemed to distinguish places that must serve from within, and especially far aloft, as apertures and outlooks, no door appeared to give access from her convenient garden level. The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. At present however . . . it was as if she had ceased merely to circle and to scan the elevation, ceased so vaguely, so quite helplessly to stare and wonder: she had caught herself distinctly in the act of pausing, then in that of lingering, and finally in that of stepping unprecedentedly near. (II, 3-4.)

Maggie's image of the tower is a striking one, especially as it occupies so prominent a position at the opening of "The Princess." At first sight it appears unwise of James to introduce this symbol when the novel has already at its centre the symbol of the golden bowl. But obviously James has recourse to the tower because Maggie at this stage cannot be aware of the aptness of the golden bowl as an expression of her circle's situation. The tower succeeds as an alternative symbol to the golden bowl because on close examination of it one finds it has the same significance in Maggie's mind as the golden bowl has for the reader in the total context of the novel. James makes this clear, too:

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

Like the golden bowl, the tower symbolises their beautiful "life in common." (I, 396.) The tower has the same ambiguities as the golden bowl. It has an outward appearance of beauty that deceives Maggie (as the golden bowl will do when she finds it); it is "impenetrable and inscrutable" from Maggie's level of passive, wondering acceptance of its exterior surface. Maggie suspects that for those truly within the tower there must be "apertures and outlooks" she cannot reach. In the same way, the golden bowl has a different significance for Charlotte and the Prince, who have seen it. For them, the situation of their lives is a gift, a golden cup for them to drain together: like Maggie, they have been able to marry without breaking with their past. They are in the secret, in the tower with their own "apertures and outlooks."

They know of the hidden flaw in the golden bowl and can guard against its exposure.

The tower amplifies the meaning of the golden bowl through its dual naming as a tower of ivory and as "some wonderful beautiful but outlandish pagoda," enamelled and highly decorated. The tower of ivory suggests the conventional symbol of unwise isolation or of delusion and illusion. (1) The alternative description of the tower strikes the note of the strange and the exotic. One remembers that, when Adam Verver proposed to Charlotte, he was also engaged in purchasing oriental tiles; and the note of the beautiful but bizarre East will recur when Maggie finally resists the temptation of selfish passions, which figure as "a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air. . . ." (II, 237.) Through suggestions like these, the symbol of the tower is subtly woven into connection with the dominant pattern of imagery in The Golden Bowl, however much of an imbalance it appears to cause when one first meets it in Maggie's thoughts. (2)

1. As such it is the central symbol of James's unfinished novel, The Ivory Tower. The heroine, Rosanna Gav, is isolated by her wealth, "perched aloft in an ivory tower." (p. 215.) The same isolation falls on Gray Fielder, whom Rosanna causes to inherit great wealth. She also promises him more money, concealed in a little ivory tower, which is a valuable work of art - yet "the whole, its infinite neatness exhibited, proved a wonder of wasted ingenuity. . . ." (pp. 148-149.)

2. One can blame on this apparent imbalance interpretations of the tower such as S. Gorley Putt's: "One stirs uneasily at the suggestion that father-fixation and convenient princely substitutes are being equipped with an outside phallic symbol." (A Reader's Guide to Henry James [London: Thames and Hudson, 1966], p. 372.) A closer examination of the symbol than Mr. Putt's makes a Freudian interpretation appear hopelessly inadequate.

She faces her new vision of the tower in her garden of life with the recognition that she can no longer accept it at its face-value (as she has the Prince, the golden coin she has never tried to "change" into its real value). At last she has ceased to take comfort in the impressive appearance the tower - their common situation - presents in the social field. But Maggie hesitates to penetrate to the heart of the tower. Under these conflicting pressures, she experiences a restlessness similar to the Prince's at our first sight of him. Like him, she is disturbed by suppressed passions and bewildered values.

She had never doubted of the force of the feeling that bound her to her husband; but to become aware almost suddenly that it had begun to vibrate with a violence that had some of the effect of a strain would, rightly looked at, after all but show that she was, like thousands of women, every day, acting up to the full privilege of passion. Why in the world should n't she, with every right - if on consideration she saw no good reason against it? The best reason against it would have been the possibility of some consequence disagreeable or inconvenient to others - especially to such others as had never incommoded her by the egotism of their passions; but if once that danger were duly guarded against the fulness of one's measure amounted to no more than the equal use of one's faculties or the proper playing of one's part. (II, 7-8.) (1)

At present Maggie believes that she has merely to assert herself and her rights to correct everything. She is about to learn, by a painful process, that a passionate insistence on her rights will not be enough, and that the proper playing of her part, as she sees it now, will only

1. Ironically, Maggie's care recalls words the Prince spoke to Charlotte at their first meeting in The Golden Bowl: "'It's always a question of doing the best for one's self one can - without injury to others.'" (I, 58.) He failed to avoid injury to others, but, on the other hand, Maggie has done injury to others (and to herself) by thinking too little of her own right to happiness.

worsen matters. Only when she herself is convinced of her own value will she properly play her part as a Princess, full partner to the Prince in his dignity.

Maggie makes her first move on the evening of the Prince's return from Matcham with Charlotte, but as yet she is still playing in the dark. She breaks the established pattern of their lives: it had been assumed they would all dine together, and instead Maggie waits for the Prince at her own fireside, the very fireside which earlier testified to her absence. And, waiting, she is aware that she is beginning a deep and dangerous game.

She was no longer playing with blunt and idle tools, with weapons that did n't cut. There passed across her vision ten times a day the gleam of a bare blade, and at this it was that she most shut her eyes, most knew the impulse to cheat herself with motion and sound.

(II, 9-10.)

Fortunately she is forced by the Prince's lateness to wait and wait, and to face the unavoidable examination of her "accumulations of the unanswered."

They were there, these accumulations; they were like a roomful of confused objects, never as yet "sorted," which for some time now she had been passing and re-passing, along the corridor of her life. She passed it when she could without opening the door; then, on occasion, she turned the key to throw in a fresh contribution. So it was that she had been getting things out of the way. They re-joined the rest of the confusion; it was as if they found their place, by some instinct of affinity, in the heap.

(II, 14.)

When the Prince does arrive, Maggie finds she has been unprepared for the effect of her act of assertion upon him. His visible uncertainty and embarrassment makes her "significant," and "this had a kind of violence beyond what she had intended." (II, 15-16.) The Prince recovers his poise and reacts worldlessly: "he had ad-

vanced upon her smiling and smiling, and thus, without hesitation at the last, had taken her into his arms." (II, 17.) Unspoken between them is their mutual recognition of fear - fear that "the precious equilibrium" (II, 17) of their common life might waver. For a time Maggie finds relief in their silent embraces, feeling as if she were "floated and carried on some warm high tide beneath which stumbling-blocks had sunk out of sight." (II, 25.) She is deceived by his nearness and warmth into thinking she has only to share his weekend at Mat-cham (she makes him tell her about it) to make it hers as well.

She wanted him to understand from that very moment that she was going to be with him again, quite with them, together, as she doubtless had n't been since the "funny" changes . . . into which they had each, as for the sake of the others, too easily and obligingly slipped. They had taken too much for granted that their life together required, as people in London said, a special "form" - which was very well so long as the form was kept only for the outside world and was made no more of among themselves than the pretty mould of an iced pudding . . . into which, to help yourself, you did n't hesitate to break with the spoon. (II, 27-28.)

This is something Maggie finds it hard to achieve, however. Charlotte is the most formidable obstacle, as she discovers the next day, when she goes to confront her stepmother on her own ground. Maggie's insight into the complexity of the situation is quickened by her newly-awakened powers of perception. Charlotte and Adam are at Eaton Square together, yet they seem very much separated from each other. Maggie sees the situation as though it were "a painted picture" illuminated by "a light, strange and coloured" in which "objects took on values not hitherto so fully shown." (II, 31.) She is

aware of the excessive number of art catalogues and papers surrounding her father; she is aware that Charlotte is standing at the window as though only waiting for Maggie's arrival before flying to her freedom. Charlotte is alert and watchful, and Maggie's sense of danger, which she had allowed the Prince's embraces to dispel, stirs again. She sees "realities looming through the golden mist that had already begun to be scattered." (II, 31.)

Though she again breaks the established pattern of their lives, refusing the usual "change of guard" (II, 32) over her father, Maggie exercises care. Her actions strike her more than ever as involving her in a game, or in a play. "She reminded herself of an actress who had been studying a part and rehearsing it, but who suddenly, on the stage, . . . had begun to improvise. . . ." (II, 33.) Maggie is exhilarated by the sense of action "action quite positively for the first time in her life, or, counting in the previous afternoon, for the second." (II, 33.) Yet she realizes that she must not play the card of jealousy, since "to play it would be to end the game."

She felt herself - as at the small square green table between the tall old silver candlesticks and the neatly arranged counters - her father's playmate and partner; and what it constantly came back to in her mind was that for her to ask a question, to raise a doubt, to reflect in any degree on the play of the others, would be to break the charm. (II, 34.)

This dual chain of imagery is one that leads up to Maggie's most terrible hour - the hour of her vision at Fawns during the card game, when she will feel herself the author of the play. The imagery expresses perfectly what Maggie is faced with as she sets out. She must take an

active part in the drama of their lives and at the same time contrive to direct that drama, without the others knowing she is controlling their action. Unseen by them, she must alter the rules of the game, in such a way that the game is not disrupted nor "the play of the others" openly challenged. Who is cheating at the game, who playing secret scenes off-stage? No one must know that Maggie even suspects that wrong is being done, yet she must prevent the wrongs from continuing.

Maggie thinks she has found a way of changing the situation, but she has underestimated Charlotte. Though she arranges to accompany her on her social rounds, in an attempt to re-establish her own importance, Charlotte keeps up her guards. Quite equal to the situation, she throws "over their intercourse a kind of silver tissue of decorum." (II, 38.)

It hung there above them like a canopy of state, a reminder that though the lady-in-waiting was an established favourite, safe in her position, a little queen, however good-natured, was always a little queen and might with small warning remember it. (II, 38.)

As when, in The Ambassadors, Strether practises his idea of freedom, in Maggie's social ascendancy there is a hint of the pathetic. If Strether seems to typify the "little man" of the twentieth century, Maggie is his female counterpart. Her heroics are so domestic - yet one should not forget that even a tragedy like Othello is largely domestic, and that Maggie gains ground later on. Like Strether in The Ambassadors, she wins true personal dignity eventually. But the struggle to become more than a social "Princess" is a long one for Maggie and its early stages are necessarily pathetic in contrast to the

final ones. If Maggie's emergence were too quick or easy it would destroy the verisimilitude James held to be so profoundly important in the novel. Thus, in the early stages of her ascendancy, Maggie meets with a reversal. Charlotte may in a sense be trapped by her care for observing the "forms," but Maggie is no less free from a trap of her own making. When she pairs off with Charlotte, the Prince takes her place in keeping Adam Verver company, and the foursome continues. It is as if there is a conspiracy against Maggie's every attempt to "challenge the perfection of their common state." (II, 39.)

Partly this reversal is Maggie's own fault (she has so long praised their common life as perfect that she cannot suddenly complain of it), and partly it is due to the complicity between the Prince and Charlotte, an accord Maggie has not succeeded in breaking.

They had built her in with their purpose - which was why, above her, a vault seemed more heavily to arch; so that she sat there in the solid chamber of her helplessness as in a bath of benevolence artfully prepared for her, over the brim of which she could but just manage to see by stretching her neck. Baths of benevolence were very well, but at least, unless one were a patient of some sort, a nervous eccentric or a lost child, one usually was n't so immersed save by one's request. It was n't in the least what she had requested. She had flapped her little wings as a symbol of desired flight, not merely as a plea for a more gilded cage and an extra allowance of lumps of sugar. (II, 43-44.)

Maggie does not need to know the "purpose" of Charlotte and Amerigo to perceive her isolation. She "was arranged apart." (II, 45.) And without her father to turn to, "during the first shock of complete perception . . . she felt very much alone." (II, 45.) Maggie has at last

awoken to the possibility that the Prince and Charlotte might be "sustained by an ideal distinguishably different from her own." (II, 45.) The recognition of their totally separate existence isolates her.

Desperately, Maggie continues her attack in the social field. She enters the London world of dinner-giving by inviting the Matcham party to dine with her; the Castledeans had before been accepted as Charlotte's terrain. Luckily Adam Verver takes the hint and regretfully cancels his plan to go abroad alone with Maggie, now that she is apparently enjoying her life in London. Mistakenly, she tries to suggest to the Prince that he should go abroad with Adam and leave her with Charlotte. He stalls for time, but on this occasion Maggie refuses to surrender to his physical power over her and insists upon discussion. The Prince, of course, has the last word, by asking that the matter be referred to Charlotte. They have reached their house in Portland Place by this stage in the conversation and, waiting all politely before their door, flanked by stiff servants in livery, the Prince seems once more in command. "The sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed rose before her, and there was something in Amerigo's very face . . . that was like a conscious reminder of it." (II, 66-67.) Maggie submits to the ordered and the fixed. Their common life continues.

Though she does not give up, Maggie's struggle is a submerged one now. James stresses the unuttered once more. She might have said to her rather dazzled father:

"Yes, this is by every appearance the best time we've had yet; but don't you see all the same how they must be working together for it and how my very success, my success in shifting our

beautiful harmony to a new basis, comes round to being their success, above all; their cleverness, their amiability, their power to hold out, their complete possession in short of our life?" (II, 73-74.)

But of course Maggie avoids speaking the unspoken words and decides instead that she must "simply sacrifice" (II, 82) her father, without his knowledge. Facing him alone in the Park, "as at some hard game over a table for money" (II, 84-85), Maggie keeps up her pretence of happiness. Their talk is a labyrinth; a winding path narrowly cut from the surrounding menace of the felt but unspoken. Adam Verver describes the "happy spell" of their common life as possibly immoral, or at least "uncanny." (I, 92.) Though she wonders how much he may suspect, Maggie keeps smiling and has to agree to their summer migration to Fawns despite her vision "of what a summer at Fawns, with Amerigo and Charlotte still more eminently in presence against that higher sky, would bring forth." (II, 86.) Maggie's only condition is that Fanny Assingham should be invited to Fawns. As she puts it to herself, Fanny might "mitigate the intensity of her consciousness of Charlotte." (II, 97.)

When Maggie returns from the Park with her father and child, it is again brought home to her how separate the Prince and Charlotte are - apart and together. They are "perched together in the balcony, he bareheaded, she divested of her jacket . . . ; all evidently to watch for the return of the absent, to be there to take them over again as punctually as possible." (II, 98-99.) Gay and in tune with the pleasant morning, they light up "the front of the great black house with an expression that quite broke the monotony, that might almost have shocked

the decency, of Portland Place." (II, 99.) The group below find themselves staring up at the couple "as towards truly superior beings." (II, 99.) The hardest thing for Maggie is that the Prince and Charlotte possess to a remarkable degree what James has elsewhere characterised as the "high insolence of life and strength." (1) Their complicity is strangely enviable. Maggie is in the same position as the poor little Post Office girl, in "In the Cage," who sees the Captain and his Lady Bradeen as "shoulder to shoulder in their high encounter with life, their large and complicated game." (2) For Maggie it is a climax of insight into her helplessness before the accord of Charlotte and the Prince.

Their general interested brightness and beauty, attuned to the outbreak of summer, had seemed to shed down warmth and welcome and the promise of protection. They were conjoined not to do anything to startle her - and now at last so completely that, with experience and practice, they had almost ceased to fear their liability.
(II, 104.)

Both with her father and with the brilliant couple, Maggie is "imprisoned in the circle of reasons it was impossible she should give." (II, 106.) Fanny is the only source of aid, having "less assurance through having less control" than Amerigo and Charlotte. (II, 104.) So, while allowing the couple to pay another weekend visit together, Maggie keeps her friend back for questioning. Fanny puts into words what Maggie has been afraid to think: "'You believe your husband and your father's wife to be in act and in fact lovers of each other?'" (II, 116.) However, Maggie is not simply trying to catch out the guilty

1. The Other House, p. 143.

2. "In the Cage," The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 11, p. 149.

pair; she begs Fanny: "'Denounce me, denounce me . . . if you can see your way.'" (II, 117.) She is willing, even eager, to transfer any guilt to herself, but Fanny, for fear of betraying the others (and herself), refuses to admit guilt on any side. Together they swear that it is impossible the Prince and Charlotte should be carrying on "a criminal intrigue . . . amid perfect trust and sympathy" (II, 119) - yet "the next minute [Maggie] had burst into tears over the impossibility, and . . . even caused them to flow, . . . sympathetically and perversely, from her friend." (II, 120.)

Fanny is thus all "sympathetically and perversely" on Maggie's side, despite her allegiance to the Prince and Charlotte. Her resulting dilemma runs as a kind of subplot to Maggie's dilemma, much as comedy may form the subplot of a serious drama. Maggie's dilemma has tragic potentiality: it is her task, in The Golden Bowl, to avert the violence of the tragic, to convert unstable passions into knowledge and equilibrium. Fanny, on the other hand, has the relief of being able to stand by and watch another do the struggling. She and the Colonel "could still talk of marvellous little Maggie, and of the charm, the sinister charm, of their having to hold their breath to watch her. . . ." (II, 121-122.) The topic "grew, from day to day, in a manner to make their sense of responsibility almost yield to their sense of fascination." (II, 122.) Maggie has no such relief, so that it is on an altogether lower level that the Assinghams echo her drama. Fanny says to her husband:

"We shall have . . . to lie for her - to lie till we're black in the face."

"To lie 'for' her?" The Colonel often, at these hours, as from a vague vision of old chivalry in a new form, wandered into apparent lapses

from lucidity.

"To lie to her, up and down, and in and out - it comes to the same thing. It will consist just as much of lying to the others too: to the Prince about one's belief in him; to Charlotte about one's belief in her; to Mr. Verver, dear sweet man, about one's belief in everyone." (II, 122-123.)

Maggie too has to resort to lying, giving chivalry a new form, to protect the very people to whom she lies. As Fanny says, ninety-nine women out of a hundred would in Maggie's place act with blind resentment, a "natural passion." (II, 125.) Maggie has to be the hundredth woman; she has to be unnatural to prevent the violence of open accusation and the chain of recriminations that would follow. "Knowledge, knowledge, was a fascination as well as a fear. . . ." (II, 140.) But she must avoid asking for it, above all from her husband.

She was keeping her head for a reason, for a cause; and the labour of this detachment, with the labour of her forcing the pitch of it down, held them together in the steel hoop of an intimacy compared with which artless passion would have been but a beating of the air. (II, 141.)

Maggie perceives that art has its rewards, and its advantage over "artless" passion. Control is the note of her fiercely quiet struggle to preserve order from chaos.

As Maggie's art increases, her value and importance increase, though at first only for herself, for "she must conceal from [the Prince] the validity that, like a microscopic insect pushing a grain of sand, she was taking on even for herself." (II, 142.) Maggie needs to discover some pride in herself before she can command the respect of others. But, "mistress of shades" though she is becoming, she must guard against appearing too artful to the Prince, "who was a master of shades too." (II, 142.)

Ironically, Charlotte strikes Maggie as her protectress in

this difficulty. Her "too perfect competence" will offset Maggie's humbler art and perhaps tire the Prince's "finer irritability." (II, 143.) Nevertheless, Maggie would be at a dead end were it not for her timely discovery of the fateful golden bowl while she and the Prince are alone in London before joining the Ververs at Fawns. Immediately, the bowl reasserts itself as the central symbol of the novel, ousting the tower of Maggie's earlier insight.

Fanny is called in to witness the effect of the golden bowl upon Maggie and one can scarcely read too much into the passages between the two women. Maggie relates how, acting upon "an allusion of Charlotte's, of some months before," she had wandered "a little wild" of the respectable antique shops - they had become "a hollow parade which had long since ceased to beguile." (II, 155.) She had been in search of a birthday present for her father which would be personal rather than "dedicated to the grimacing . . . gods" of art. (II, 156.) "The infirmity of art was the candour of affection, the grossness of pedigree the refinement of sympathy. . . ." (II, 156.) Yet Maggie had still succumbed to a seeming rarity - the golden bowl; only later when the flaw was pointed out to her by the contrite dealer did she perceive its unsuitability. However, it is not the material flaw in the bowl that counts. It has a deeper flaw: it has "'turned witness'" (II, 163), testifying to the depth and long duration of the Prince's intimacy with Charlotte. (The dealer, delivering the bowl, had caught sight of the photographs of the couple and recalled their intimate visit to his shop years before.) Maggie has placed the bowl on the mantelshelf in

her room to confront her husband, but he has kept away as if sensing danger. Fanny's eyes keep returning to the bowl, "inscrutable in its rather stupid elegance, and yet, from the moment one had thus appraised it, vivid and definite in its domination of the scene." (II, 165.) Fanny sees that "as a 'document'" the bowl is in fact ugly. (II, 165.) She also sees that it is standing between Maggie and the Prince, of whose return Maggie now despairs. Taking up the dreadful, beautiful bowl, Fanny speaks and acts for her friend.

"I don't believe in this, you know."

It brought Maggie round to her. "Don't believe in it? You will when I tell you."

"Ah tell me nothing! I won't have it," said Mrs. Assingham. She kept the cup in her hand, held it there in a manner that gave Maggie's attention to her . . . a quality of excited suspense. (II, 177.)

Refusing to "know," Fanny raises the bowl above her head and "dashed it boldly to the ground, where she had the thrill of seeing it lie shattered with the violence of the crash." (II, 179.)

Acting for Maggie, she has broken the golden bowl with violence. As if to fulfil the implications, the Prince immediately appears in Maggie's room, his query "a sharpness almost equal to the smash of the crystal." (II, 179.) Fanny leaves the couple to their first open confrontation, over the broken pieces of the golden bowl. At first nothing is said, nor need be said, between them. Maggie sees how the bowl unmistakably reminds her husband "of something known, some other unforbidden image." (II, 181-182.) She turns away in order not to see his disillusionment as that image is destroyed. (1)

1. Naturally the Prince is reminded of his image of "a great gold cup" (I, 359) which he and Charlotte were to drain together at Matcham.

That was a mere shock, that was a pain - as if Fanny's violence had been a violence redoubled and acting beyond its intention, a violence calling up the hot blood as a blow across the mouth might have called it. Maggie knew as she turned away from him that she did n't want his pain; what she wanted was her own simple certainty - not the red mark of conviction flaming there in his beauty. If she could have gone on with bandaged eyes she would have liked that best. . . . (II, 182.)

Though the violence of the exposure horrifies Maggie, she no longer can pretend to blindness for the Prince's sake. She tries to restore order on her own, but fails:

She went in silence to where her friend . . . had braced herself to so amazing an energy, and there under Amerigo's eyes she picked up the shining pieces. Bedizened and jewelled, in her rustling finery, she paid, with humility of attitude, this prompt tribute to order - only to find however that she could carry but two of the fragments at once. (II, 182.)

She also fails to hold the broken pieces together, but her vain attempts are primarily to give her husband time:

"time for Amerigo's use, not for hers, since she for ever so long now . . . had been living with eternity. . . ."

(II, 184.) The Prince's beauty is Maggie's chief concern. "She wanted to say to him ' . . . Arrange yourself so as to suffer least, or to be at any rate least distorted and disfigured. Only see, see that I see, and make up your mind on this new basis at your convenience.'" (II, 184.)

A beautiful wordless tension is sustained by James for several pages; a tension during which Maggie grows in stature and realises the responsibility of freedom. She is free to act on her certainty of the Prince's wrongdoing, free to extract from him the "truth" of his deception. But what condemns action "to the responsibility of freedom" is the different truth of the Prince's "new need of her, a need which was in fact being born between them in

these very seconds." (II, 186.) Maggie rises to this new conception of her duty and breaks the painful silence to speak matter-of-factly about the bowl, leaving the interpretation of her words to the Prince. Maggie becomes at this moment a Beatrice-figure.

Had n't she fairly got into his labyrinth with him? - was n't she indeed in the very act of placing herself there for him at its centre and core, whence . . . she might securely guide him out of it? (II, 187.)

Behind Maggie's spoken words about the bowl lies everything she is urging the Prince to take from her:

"Its having come apart makes an unfortunate difference for its beauty, its artistic value, but none for anything else. Its other value is just the same - I mean that of its having given me so much of the truth about you. I don't therefore so much care what becomes of it now - unless perhaps you may yourself, when you come to think, have some good use for it. In that case," Maggie wound up, "we can easily take the pieces with us to Fawns." (II, 188-189.)

She gives the Prince his freedom (intimating that he may see Charlotte before deciding anything), and weighs against it, in the scales, her certainty and her new dignity. The whole affair of the unspoken, as their eyes meet, becomes "between them a kind of unprecedented moral exchange over which her superior lucidity presided." (II, 189.)

Finally Maggie names Charlotte and her relationship with the Prince. He cannot afford to admit everything is as serious as Maggie implies, but his admission of respectful love for Maggie is honest in its own way: "'You've never been more sacred to me than you were at that hour - unless perhaps you've become so at this one.'" (II, 199.) The Prince makes no attempt to bridge the gap between "that hour" - the hour of his first rendezvous with Charlotte - and the present hour. The chasm implied leaves Maggie cold, but "she kept her direction still." (II, 199.)

All she will give the Prince is the fact that she has ceased "Not to know!" (II, 202.) For the rest, he must find out for himself. This time it is Maggie who has the last word. But her struggle is far from over and the summer at Fawns has still to be faced.

Book Fifth is more than ever Maggie's book and Fawns, where the group's "life in common" is resumed, is the setting of her fiercest drama. From the beginning of the stay at Fawns, Maggie vibrates with her hidden knowledge, from which she cannot hide yet which "was almost too violent . . . to recognise. . . ."

It was as if she had come out - that was her most general consciousness; out of a dark tunnel, a dense wood, or even simply a smoky room, and had thereby at least for going on the advantage of air in her lungs. It was as if she were somehow at last gathering in the fruits of patience. . . .

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It was her telescope in fact that had gained in range - just as her danger lay in her exposing herself to the observation by the more charmed and therefore the more reckless use of this optical resource. Not under any provocation to produce it in public was her unremitting rule; but the difficulties of duplicity had not shrunk. . . . (II, 207.)

Maggie has emerged from the underground world of her ignorance (one might call it the ignorance of innocence) but she must keep the luminosity of her knowledge from the others, in order to achieve something greater and gentler than the violence of truth revealed. She has to bear alone the responsibility of "knowing" - even Fanny Assingham helps less at Fawns than Maggie had hoped. She can only be "their general sign of unimpaired beatitude." (II, 208.)

Fanny Assingham once again echoes Maggie's drama in a minor key, diffusing "restlessly nothing but peace - an

extravagant expressive aggressive peace." (II, 209.)
 The idea that peace may be "aggressive" rather than merely passive is akin to the idea that Maggie must use patience as a force - a force far from submissive though it might be mistaken for that. Christ, in Milton's Paradise Regained, demonstrates the beauty and power of patience and self-restraint, as against the distorting fury of Satan's impatience. In The Golden Bowl, Maggie employs the same humble force against Charlotte's impatience and will succeed in the end through "the firmest abstention from pressure." (II, 361.) (Cf. p.171 below.)

The cover for Maggie's silent struggle is society itself (even as society was the cover for the Prince and Charlotte at Matcham). Fawns is "animated and peopled - thanks to the fact of the presence of 'company' in which Maggie's ability to preserve an appearance had learned from so far back to find its best resource." (II, 209.) Fawns is filled with "number, . . . movement, . . . sound"; her spiritual garden flowers with "every form of the unruffled and the undoubting." (II, 211.) Her patience, thus sheltered, soon begins to bear its fruits. After a short while she is able to say to Fanny with certainty that the Prince has not told Charlotte of his wife's knowledge. "Nothing has passed between them - that's what has happened." (II, 213.) He understands, Maggie says, that she wants "'a happiness without a hole in it.'" (II, 216.) Fanny extends the image.

"A brilliant perfect surface - to begin with at least. I see."

"The golden bowl - as it was to have been." And Maggie dwelt musingly on this obscured figure. "The bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack."

For Mrs. Assingham too the image had its

force, and the precious object shone before her again, reconstituted plausible presentable.
(II, 216-217.)

"A brilliant perfect surface - to begin with at least." This much Maggie gains for the meantime. Her cover is patience and society at Fawns; the Prince's cover is his reserve, a "negative diplomacy" (II, 228) in which he leaves to Maggie everything beyond his deception of Charlotte.

But, though the Prince has undertaken to deal with Charlotte, he has done so by keeping her in the dark and she "could only all the while be struggling with secrets beyond any guessing." (II, 229.) There is no defence for Maggie against the possibility that Charlotte will choose to deal with her, to test "her trouble upon her lover's wife." (II, 229.) Maggie's defences are threatened by her sympathy for Charlotte, a sympathy only enlarged by her own experience of suffering. It leaves her sense

open as to the sight of gilt wires and bruised wings, the spacious but suspended cage, the home of eternal unrest, of pacings, beatings, shakings all so vain, into which the baffled consciousness helplessly resolved itself. The cage was the deluded condition, and Maggie, as having known delusion . . . understood the nature of cages. She walked round Charlotte's - cautiously and in a very wide circle; and when inevitably they had to communicate she felt herself comparatively outside and on the breast of nature: she saw her companion's face as that of a prisoner looking through bars.
(II, 229-230.)

The awareness of Charlotte's consciousness is the first step in Maggie's most painful round of recognitions since the golden bowl brought home to her the difference between her husband's ideals and her own.

By recognising Charlotte's separate condition, by

imagining her "baffled consciousness" for herself, Maggie steps into the strange atmosphere of another world. One can only describe this world as comparable to the nightmarish world of a Kafka novel (The Trial in particular), or a novel by Sartre, or Simone de Beauvoir. (In her novel, She Came to Stay, the heroine's most terrifying experience is the perception of her own rival's consciousness.) It is a world entered by suffering people, a strange dark world in which they encounter both their own isolation and the frightening "otherness" of another's consciousness. It is also the world of the tragic hero, both Greek and Shakespearian; the modern existentialism of Kafka and Sartre and de Beauvoir is merely a re-recognition of the deepest truth of tragedy: the inescapable isolation of the individual man. In The Golden Bowl, James shows Maggie's awakening to Charlotte's consciousness as leading to her nightmarish and extended epiphany at Fawns.

So it was that through bars, bars richly gilt but firmly though discreetly planted, Charlotte finally struck her as making a grim attempt; from which at first the Princess drew back as instinctively as if the door of the cage had suddenly been opened from within. (II, 230.)

Charlotte's attempt to break free from her cage occurs on the night of the card-game, which fills Chapter II of Book Fifth - James's finest and deepest piece of writing in all his work.

Four of the party are playing bridge: Mr. Verver and Mrs. Assingham, the Prince and Charlotte. Mrs. Assingham is Maggie's stand-in. Maggie welcomes "the comparatively hushed hour - for the bridge-players were serious and silent - much in the mood of a tired actress who has

the good fortune to be 'off'" (II, 231.) It is as if Maggie's alter ego has been freed to roam about and watch the others, almost without being seen. But the hour is not really one of rest. Her eyes "strayed back to life, in the stillness." (II, 232.) She watches the bridge-players, set apart from her and suddenly made, "in their personal intensity and their rare complexity of relation, freshly importunate to her." (II, 232.) Maggie realises that the fact of her existence is not ruled out by her absence from the card table.

Direct above all for her was the sharp-edged fact of the relation of the whole group, individually and collectively, to herself - herself so speciously eliminated for the hour, but presumably more present to the attention of each than the next card to be played.

Yes, under that imputation, to her sense, they sat - the imputation of wondering, beneath and behind all their apparently straight play, if she were n't really watching them from her corner and consciously, as might be said, holding them in her hand. She was asking herself at last how they could bear it - for, though cards were as nought to her and she could follow no move, so that she was always on such occasions out of the party, they struck her as conforming alike, in the matter of gravity and propriety, to the stiff standard of the house. (II, 232-233.)

The card-game becomes a metaphor for their whole situation - a metaphor prepared for by the frequent references to the "game" in The Golden Bowl, and more striking in its fitness and immediacy than the symbol of the bowl itself. The four players Maggie watches from a distance conform "to the stiff standard of the house," but suddenly, provoked by "so complete a conquest of appearances" (II, 233), Maggie experiences the desire to use the power she has felt. It is as though, sitting there at ease, the other players have accepted only half of Maggie, in the form of Fanny: her mere physical replacement, without her inner spirit.

And she holds the unexpected energy which could shatter "all this high decorum"; she thrills momentarily to "that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horribly possible." (II, 233.)

But here, as in the total context of the novel (which the card-game metaphorically implies), Maggie recovers her balance and resists the temptation of the violent and the emotional. She chooses not to "sound out their doom." (II, 233.) Instead, she passes behind the players at the card table, pausing behind each chair.

Silent and discreet she bent a vague mild face upon them as if to signify that little as she followed their doings she wished them well; and she took from each, across the table, in the common solemnity, an upward recognition which she was to carry away with her on her moving out to the terrace a few minutes later. Her father and her husband, Mrs. Assingham and Charlotte, had done nothing but meet her eyes; yet . . . with the secret behind every face, they had alike tried to look at her through it and in denial of it.

It all left her, as she wandered off, with the strangest of impressions - the sense, forced upon her as never yet, of an appeal, a positive confidence, from the four pairs of eyes, that was deeper than any negation and that seemed to speak on the part of each for some relation to be contrived by her, a relation with herself, which would spare the individual the danger, the actual present strain, of the relation with the others. (II, 234.)

Maggie faces the knowledge that it is she who is to pay for "the whole complexity of their peril," she who is to be the chosen "scapegoat of old, . . . charged with the sins of the people." (II, 234.) Her burden is greater than that of the scapegoat of old, however, for she may not sink under it and die.

It would n't be their feeling that she should do anything but live, live on somehow for their benefit . . . to keep proving to them that they had truly escaped and that she was still there to simplify. (II, 235.)

Out on the dark terrace of Fawns (where Adam Verver earlier had his secret vision of her soul), Maggie faces her martyrdom away from the provocation of the others' ease - "that provocation of opportunity which had assaulted her, within, . . . as a beast might have leaped at her throat." (II, 235.) She looks in at the card-players through one of the windows. Distanced now, they "might have been figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author." (II, 235.) At this point, Maggie's isolation is terrifying, reinforced as it is by her separation from the others, who continue their soundless game at the other side of the glass, in the brightly lit room. It is above all her power that isolates her. She alone has "the key to the mystery" (II, 236), and the responsibility is almost too great to bear. She peers into the empty, lighted drawing-room:

Spacious and splendid, like a stage again awaiting a drama, it was a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up. (II, 236.)

The temptation is still with Maggie to give in to "natural" reactions, to demand "the rights of resentment" and utter "the protests of passion." (II, 236.) But Maggie knows that, in her position, and as the Prince's wife, that "range of feelings . . . figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky. . . ." (II, 236-237.) The "natural" passions are exciting and enticing but they are denied to Maggie if she would preserve "serenities and dignities and decencies" - in short, the order and beauty

of civilisation at its best.

Evil itself, though unexpected, has not been violent.

Maggie's horror has been

the horror of finding evil seated all at its ease where she had only dreamed of good; the horror of the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. (II, 237.)

An evil so insidious can only be overcome by a matching subtlety. Maggie turns from the crude natural passions of "terror and disgust," from the "bitter-sweet of their freshness." (II, 237.) Much as they might assuage her outraged innocence, to give in to them would be to commit a different evil: a denial of her own responsibility, and a desertion of the others. Rather than shatter their peace and self-control as Fanny shattered the golden bowl - with violence, she must shift the peace on to a firmer basis. She must somehow replace the evil behind appearances with good, and so reinforce these appearances, in their beauty, with reality instead of falsity.

It is now that Charlotte breaks free from the cage in which Maggie has imagined her. She leaves the card table to come in search of her step-daughter, and her act, "though superficially commonplace," strikes Maggie as "a breaking of bars."

The splendid shining supple creature was out of the cage, was at large; and the question now almost grotesquely rose of whether she might n't by some art, just where she was and before she could go further, be hemmed in and secured. (II, 239.)

But Maggie cannot alter Charlotte's intention or crush the will of another. She flees along the terrace until a new vision opens before her. Charlotte must believe deeply in her hold over Adam Verver, if she is prepared to risk

precipitating a public exposure of the affair. She would then be weighing her word against the word of his own daughter. If Charlotte sees no danger in a confrontation, Maggie realises, "it was only the golden bowl as Maggie herself knew it that had been broken." (II, 240.) It is only her attitude that threatens the golden bowl of their common illusion of safety and peace and dignity.

When Maggie perceives this, she knows she must not risk leaving "the unuttered and unutterable" (II, 240) hanging in the air between herself and Charlotte. It is time to clear the air of implications. She turns to await Charlotte's slow, insistent and menacing approach; she even goes forward to meet her, her head bowed before Charlotte's undeniable dignity. Maggie's path is clear to her now. She is to bow before Charlotte's "inveterate completeness and noble erectness." (II, 243.) She is to allow her to have the outward victory of the battle.

They presently went back the way she had come, but she stopped Maggie again within range of the smoking-room window and made her stand where the party at cards would be before her. Side by side for three minutes they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the positive charm of it and . . . the full significance - which, as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more after all than a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter. (II, 243-244.)

Charlotte's interpretation of the scene is, Maggie realises, that its harmony should be preserved for her sake, "her security at any price." (II, 244.) Maggie's interpretation embraces the good of them all, but Charlotte's pride almost makes her wish her father would look up from his game and have to choose between them - choose the woman who is "to pay." (II, 245.) It is Maggie's last moment of weakness, however, for Charlotte draws her on to the state-

ly, formal drawing-room, as though that alone, not "the terrace and the sullen night," were a worthy setting for "the completion of her idea." (II, 246.) Charlotte's overpowering will helps Maggie to fit her subservient role, facing her defeat, and even her imminent loss of dignity, from beneath a shawl that is worn "for humility." (II, 247.)

Charlotte's proud, self-righteous words express her advantage to the full: "Have you any ground of complaint of me? Is there any wrong you consider I've done you? I feel at last that I've a right to ask you." (II, 247.) Maggie's duty consists in lying. She gives Charlotte the denial she demands: "'I accuse you - I accuse you of nothing.'" (II, 250.) Her pause makes the statement beautifully ambiguous, but it succeeds as a lie. Maggie receives strength from the example of the Prince, who has lied to Charlotte on her behalf.

They were together thus, he and she, close, close together - whereas Charlotte, though rising there radiantly before her, was really off in some darkness of space that would steep her in solitude and harass her with care. The heart of the Princess swelled accordingly even in her abasement; she had kept in tune with the right. . . . The right, the right - yes, it took this extraordinary form of humbugging . . . to the end. It was only a question of not by a hair's breadth deflecting into the truth. (II, 250-251.)

Maggie is able to avert the harmful violence of truth, even to swear upon her honour that she has thought no ill of Charlotte. As she does so her shawl (worn for humility) slips from her. Paradoxically, at the consummation of their "conscious perjury" (II, 251), Maggie stands unveiled at last, like a figure of truth finally emergent from her underground imprisonment, finally upright in the

full light of justice. (1) The consummation of the perjury is a kiss of Charlotte's own asking, to which Maggie passively submits. To complete the significance of this embrace, it is witnessed from the door by the other players of the game and takes on "a high publicity." (II, 252.) In the glare of this publicity, Maggie has renounced an exposure of the truth by submitting to the embrace of falsehood. Her submission is "passivity" (II, 251) - the abstention from insistence upon harsh truth in the interests of a new, a higher moral truth. It is Maggie's greatest moment, for all its appearance as her worst, and the climax of her part in The Golden Bowl.

Once again, as after Strether's epiphany at the river in The Ambassadors, one can scarcely believe James will be able to sustain tension and interest after so great a climax. And once again, James proves his mastery of his art. Maggie has completed the public side of her task, giving the group as a whole the safety of their "serenities and dignities and decencies" (II, 236.) But she has still to establish her relation to each of the other three members

1. For this enlightening interpretation I am indebted to Alexander Welsh's article, "The Allegory of Truth in English Fiction," Victorian Studies, vol. IX. Mr. Welsh traces the conventions of the representation of truth and falsehood in 19th century novelists, from Scott and Thackeray to Conrad and James. The Golden Bowl, he maintains, cannot be fully appreciated apart from this tradition, in which truth and falsehood are personified as female rivals. "By implication, falsehood is outwardly more attractive than the 'not very handsome' truth. The choice of truth is associated with restraint . . . and falsehood . . . with merely sexual attraction." (p. 8.) James in fact transforms the tradition, Mr. Welsh says, when he makes Maggie, his figure of truth, learn to lie. Maggie unveiled is like the conventional figure of truth, yet she is transcending that role. "She abridges the rule about truth-telling in order to exult in the rule of loyalty," becoming "a newer and freer ideal of truth." (pp. 26 and 28 resp.)

of the group, individually. Three encounters therefore await her yet: one with her father, one with Charlotte (of Maggie's own choice), and, if she is successful, an encounter with the Prince that will be her greatest reward.

Maggie's encounter with her father takes place upon the secluded bench at Fawns, repeating their hour of togetherness there, years before. Now, however, Maggie has to keep up a smiling deception. She insists upon her selfishness, saying to Adam: "I sacrifice you."

"But to what in the world?"

At this it hung before her that she should have had as never yet her opportunity to say, and it held her for a minute as in a vise. . . . This was the moment in the whole process of their mutual vigilance in which it decidedly most hung by a hair that their thin wall might be pierced by the lightest wrong touch. (II, 267.)

Maggie maintains her equilibrium. She refuses to "break down and name Amerigo" (II, 268) and instead accepts her father's unspoken offer to be her sacrifice. She only names American City, the place of Adam Verver's intended museum and temple to art. Her father takes it up; he and Charlotte will go back. The idea "was a blur of light in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked by contrast in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed." (II, 271.) As never before, Maggie realises her father's moral integrity and strength, and the realisation is an immense relief.

He was strong - that was the great thing. He was sure - sure for himself always, whatever his idea: the expression of that in him had somehow never appeared more identical with his proved taste for the rare and true. (II, 274.)

With her father's worth reaffirmed for her, Maggie feels herself strong as well: "his strength was her strength, her pride was his, and they were decent and competent together." (II, 274-275.) To conclude their unspoken bond

they meet in an embrace very different from its counterparts between Maggie and Charlotte, and between Maggie and Fanny: "it was an embrace that, august and almost stern, produced for all its intimacy no revulsion and broke into no inconsequence of tears." (II, 275.)

Though her bond with her father has been cemented forever, Maggie is still isolated from her husband because of their "forfeiture . . . of any reality of frankness." (II, 281.) Yet she has room for trust in the Prince, submitting to her "abysmal and unutterable love" (II, 262) for him. And she has room for pity for Charlotte, a pity that raises Maggie's stature immensely. She imagines Charlotte's bewilderment in the face of the Prince's coldness and knows that the "beatitude of triumph" (II, 283) has turned hollow for Charlotte. Her escape from the cage had only had "for the short interval its impressive beauty." (II, 283.) In reality Charlotte is not free, but tied - tied ever so gently but ever so firmly to the will of her husband, Adam Verver: "the likeness of their connexion would n't have been wrongly figured if he had been thought of as holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck." (II, 287.) Maggie watches Charlotte take comfort in the renewed presence of society, "the outer world" streaming into Fawns like "bedizened performers of the circus," and tempering Charlotte's "aspect of isolation." (II, 289.) In desperation Charlotte attempts to establish her freedom, and hide her fear, by taking parties of guests and visitors about the art treasures of Fawns. It is on one of these occasions that Maggie has her most terrifying insight into Charlotte's consciousness.

There was a morning when . . . Maggie paused on the threshold of the gallery through which she had been about to pass, faltering there for the very impression of [her father's] face as it met her from an opposite door. Charlotte, halfway down the vista, held together, as if by something austere in the grace of her authority, the semi-scared (now that they were there!) knot of her visitors. . . . Her voice, high and clear and a little hard, reached her husband and her stepdaughter while she thus placed beyond any doubt her cheerful submission to duty.

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 "The largest of the three pieces has the rare peculiarity that the garlands looped round it, which as you see are of the finest possible vieux Saxe, are n't of the same origin or period, or even, wonderful as they are, of a taste quite so perfect. They've been put on at a later time by a process known through very few examples, and through none so important as this, which is really quite unique - so that though the whole thing is a little baroque its value as a specimen is I believe almost inestimable."

So the high voice quavered, aiming truly at effects far over the heads of gaping neighbours. . . . (II, 290-291.)

Maggie meanwhile at the window knew the strangest thing to be happening: she had turned suddenly to crying, or was at least on the point of it - the lighted square before her all blurred and dim. The high voice went on; its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain. (II, 292.)

Turning from the horror of the vision, Maggie surprises the same tears in her father's eyes. Mutely, they communicate their compassion for Charlotte, and Maggie can only conclude: "There was honestly an awful mixture in things. . . ." (II, 292.) She realises that the Prince has gone to London to escape from the sound of "Charlotte's high coerced quaver before the cabinets in the hushed gallery." (II, 294.) He too is in pain, but he has her support, while Charlotte has none.

So Maggie is moved one hot afternoon to follow the restless Charlotte into the garden at Fawns, for an encounter of her own choice. Her intention is very different from Charlotte's menacing intention towards Maggie on

the night of the card-game; even the time of day is different. In place of the "starless dark" of the night at Fawns (II, 296), there is an "immensity of light," a "brilliant void." (II, 306.) Maggie goes after Charlotte not to test her but to "make somehow, for her support, the last demonstration." (II, 307.) She finds Charlotte taking refuge in

an ancient rotunda . . . with its uncorrected antiquity, like that of everything else at Fawns, conscious hitherto of no violence from the present and no menace from the future.
(II, 309.)

Charlotte, standing there "at bay" (II, 303), affects the Princess as tragic, an effect only increased as Charlotte stiffens her pride: "she flung it round her as a denial of any loss of her freedom." (II, 312.) Charlotte virtually soars in her pretended freedom. It is her idea that she and her husband should return to America; Adam Verver is hers more than he is Maggie's. "'What I ask for,' Charlotte declared, 'is the definite break. And I wish it now.'" (II, 315.) Maggie takes the cue for her final falsehood and her final abasement before Charlotte. She must pretend that she is the only obstacle to Charlotte's departure with her father, and she does. Charlotte "flamed aloft" - she "might truly have been believing in her passionate parade." (II, 316-317.)

"How I see," she broke out, "that you've worked against me!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" the Princess exclaimed.

Her companion . . . on this turned round with a flare. "You have n't worked against me?"

Maggie took it and for a moment kept it; held it, with closed eyes, as if it had been some captured fluttering bird pressed by both hands to her breast. Then she opened her eyes to speak. "What does it matter - if I've failed?"

"You recognise then that you've failed?" asked Charlotte from the threshold.

Maggie waited; . . . then she made up her

mind. "I've failed!" she sounded out before Charlotte, having given her time, walked away. She watched her, splendid and erect, float down the long vista; then she sank upon a seat. Yes, she had done all. (II, 317-318.)

Book Sixth, the final book of The Golden Bowl, ushers in a new trial for Maggie. Her active struggle is over, and her object of altering the basis of their common life has almost been achieved. She and the Prince are already alone together in London, awaiting the departure of the other couple for America. But Maggie, conscious of the Prince at her side, needs patience more than ever. She has no wish to force him to any demonstration before he is ready for it; she refuses in any way to violate his personal dignity. Her respect for him gives him at last the "place" that has been the object of his search from the beginning. Now, "he stood as fixed in his place as some statue of one of his forefathers" (II, 323), while it is Maggie who must move, circling about him. She does it willingly, respecting the place made for her husband "beforehand by innumerable facts, . . . made by ancestors, examples, traditions, habits." (II, 323.) The greatest token of her respect is her refusal to know any details of the relationship between the Prince and Charlotte. By her own choice, the whole affair is a closed book that will never be opened again at her instance.

The quiet, ultimate climax of The Golden Bowl is heralded in Chapter Two of Book Sixth. Charlotte invites herself and her husband to a formal farewell tea in Portland Place. Facing the Prince with the telegram in her hand, Maggie is struck by the degree of possession she has reached.

Of a sudden somehow, and quite as by the action of their merely having between them these few

written words, an extraordinary fact came up. He was with her as if he were hers, hers in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a new and a strange quantity. . . . (II, 339.)

She offers him the chance of being alone with Charlotte once more. It is a "common offer" from both Maggie and her father, "so [shuffling] away every link between consequence and cause that the intention remained . . . subject to varieties of interpretation." (II, 345.) Maggie is aware that this makes the Prince's usual "touchstone" - taste - "now all at sea." (II, 345.) She steps in to guide him, by speaking of her affection for Charlotte. "'She's wonderful and beautiful, and I feel somehow as if she were dying.'" (II, 346.) But the Prince will not share in compassion for Charlotte. "'She's stupid,' he abruptly opined." (II, 348.) At his harsh judgement, Maggie lifts the problem far above both herself and Charlotte. "'I see it's always terrible for women,'" she says. (II, 349.) And James puts the deepest words of The Golden Bowl into the Prince's mouth.

The Prince looked down in his gravity.
"Everything's terrible, cara - in the heart of man. She's making her life," he said.
 "She'll make it." (II, 349.) (Italics mine.)

Everything is terrible "in the heart of man." While Charlotte, alone and desperate and wounded, "makes" her life, she is, as Maggie points out, making Maggie's and the Prince's too. Once again there is the sense of "an awful mixture in things" (II, 292) - in all things comprising the human condition. So much in human relationships consists of "the unuttered and the unutterable" (II, 240), of the unspoken and "the unspeakable." (II, 350.) With such depths of unspoken knowledge between herself and

the Prince, Maggie needs no embrace to consummate their bond. She is prepared to wait until they are really alone together, for she knows at last that she has "saved herself" (II, 353) - with her father, with Charlotte, and now with the Prince. All dangers have dissolved and the way is open for James's profound resolution of The Golden Bowl.

The final chapter, despite the quietness of its effect, matches in mastery the more terrible climax of the card-game chapter in Book Fifth. There is a marked drop in tension, but no drop in tone; James sustains his control to the end. The high, cool drawing-room of the house awaits the farewell visit.

The time was stale, it was to be admitted, for incidents of magnitude; the September hush was in full possession at the end of the dull day, and a couple of the long windows stood open to the balcony that overhung the desolation - the balcony from which Maggie, in the springtime, had seen Amerigo and Charlotte look down together at the hour of her return from the Regent's Park, near by, with her father. . . .
(II, 354-355.)

This time it is the Prince and Maggie who are above, at the elevated level of the balcony, awaiting Adam Verver and Charlotte. It is at last the right division into pairs, albeit a less exciting one at first sight. However, Maggie demonstrates the quiet dignity of her hard-won superiority when the Prince announces his wish to tell Charlotte that he lied to her - and that his wife did so too. Maggie responds with "the very first clear majesty he had known her to use." "'Are n't you rather forgetting who she is?'" (II, 356.) It is less a question than an admonition. Like Royalty receiving Royalty, they proceed downstairs to meet the carriage of the Ververs.

The Verver couple, "conjoined for a present effect" (II, 357) as never before, add weight to Maggie's forbiddance of "correction." Charlotte appears secure in her role as wife and representative of the arts, resplendent in the "show of serenity she succeeded in making." (II, 357.) Maggie can only admire the "taste and discretion" with which Charlotte "carried it off" (II, 357), and the quiet, dignified lucidity of her father. On the surface, the scene is all harmony, and "the harmony was n't less sustained for being superficial." (II, 358.) Maggie and her father move apart to communicate their realisation of the value of that harmony. They appear to be discussing a painting which was his wedding gift to her, but their words penetrate several levels of meaning.

"It's all right, eh?"

"Oh my dear - rather!"

He had applied the question to the great fact of the picture, as she had spoken for the picture in reply, but it was as if their words for an instant afterwards symbolised another truth, so that they looked about at everything else to give them this extension. She had passed her arm into his, and the other objects in the room . . . stood out, round them, consciously, for recognition and applause. Their eyes moved together from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness - quite as if for him to measure the wisdom of old ideas. The two noble persons seated in conversation and at tea fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony: Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly "placed" themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. [1] There was much in-

1. By this stage I feel one can no longer interpret the Ververs' "rare power of purchase" (italics mine) as a merely material strength. It is clearly a greater strength, the power of the aesthetic and the moral combined in the taste of Maggie and Adam Verver.

deed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? "Le compte y est. You've got some good things."

Maggie met it afresh - "Ah don't they look well?" Their companions, at the sound of this, gave them . . . an attention, all of gravity, that was like an ampler submission to the general duty of magnificence. . . . "I'm so glad - for your last look."

With which, after Maggie - quite in the air - had said it, the note was struck indeed; the note of that strange accepted finality of relation, as from couple to couple, which almost escaped an awkwardness only by not attempting a gloss. Yes, this was the wonder, that the occasion defied insistence precisely because of the vast quantities with which it dealt - so that separation was on a scale beyond any compass of parting. To do such an hour justice would have been in some degree to question its grounds - which was why they remained in fine, the four of them, in the upper air, united through the firmest abstention from pressure.

(II, 359-361.)

This, one feels, is the summation of The Golden Bowl, and the coda of James's greatest theme: the beauty of order and harmony in a high civilisation, as against the chaos, violent and ugly and wounding, of the primary emotions set free from control. The averting of violence in the interest of this refinement of beauty, is a far from negative action. In fact, it calls for great moral strength to uphold that "firmest abstention from pressure" (italics mine) and to resist the temptation to a selfish destruction of harmony. Granted, the harmony is not strictly pure or deep. Maggie knows it is superficial. But its surface is beautiful with the beauty of art, against which the natural (the unartificial) must inevitably appear crude. (1) What it comes to is that the harmony is a

1. For example, the refinement and beauty of harmony has already been set against the "wild eastern caravan" of primary emotions, with its "crude colours in the sun."

human artefact and anything human, by the Jamesian definition, is ever "an awful mixture." But one may fight to gain the ascendancy for beauty.

And this is what Maggie's deeply human struggle, against odds as deeply human, has achieved. She has purchased, by the toil of her own patience, the continuing nobility of the Prince and Charlotte - and thereby of herself and her father. In short, she has purchased the lasting beauty of their interlocking relationships together. The price is high for something that is perhaps after all only an illusion. Perhaps the golden bowl can never be anything but cracked, or liable to be cracked, beneath its surface. Yet that illusion, James seems to say, is the highest achievement of which man is capable. (1)

Passing at length on to the balcony with her father, Maggie wonders "whether reality . . . would overtake or meet her there." (II, 362.) But her fear is no longer deep; she feels "once more how impossible such a passage would have been to them, how it would have torn them to pieces." (II, 362.) She maintains the golden lie. With "a felt sincerity in her words" (II, 363), she cries not "Father, forgive them . . ." but: "'Father, father - Charlotte's great!'"

1. In this respect, James is very close to Conrad, from whose novels one gets a similar impression: man's ideals and victories may be only illusions, but these are the sustaining illusions which make man more than a mere animal. "In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part." (Joseph Conrad, *Nostrano* [Penguin Books, 1963], p. 409.) Life is only significant because man believes he is capable of directing his actions to a worthy end.

They could close upon it - such a basis as they might immediately feel it make; and so they stood together over it quite gratefully, each recording to the other's eyes that it was firm under their feet. (II, 364.)

They were parting . . . absolutely on Charlotte's value - the value that was filling the room out of which they had stepped as if to give it play, and with which the Prince on his side was perhaps making larger acquaintance. (II, 365.)

After this communion with his daughter, there is nothing for Adam Verver to do but to leave Maggie to her life. Stillness reigns in the house after his departure with Charlotte, stillness "not so much restored as created." (II, 366.) In this stillness tinged with sadness by the encroaching dusk and the Ververs' so final departure, Maggie finds the fruits of her struggle swelling into ripeness. Tasting her new, vast freedom with the Prince, "their freedom to be together there always," she knows "her reason for what she had done."

She knew at last really why - and how she had been inspired and guided, how she had been persistently able, how to her soul all the while it had been for the sake of this end. Here it was then, the moment, the golden fruit that had shone from afar. . . . (II, 367.)

Here at last is the "certification of the amount" (II, 367) (1) - and it rests in her husband's hands, in fact in his very person:

With her sight of him renewed to intensity she seemed to have a view of the number. His presence alone, as he paused to look at her, somehow made it the highest, and even before he had spoken she had begun to be paid in full. (II, 368.)

1. This picks up once again the Prince's image of himself as a golden coin: "If they did n't 'change' him they really would n't know - he would n't know himself - how many pounds, shillings and pence he had to give." (I, 23.)

To the end, Maggie refuses to accept a confession from the Prince, a confession that could only be "monstrously" destructive to himself and to Charlotte, "before whose mastery of the greater style she had just been standing dazzled." (II, 368.) Consistently, Maggie refuses "to listen to the uttered word" and disposes of it "for ever." (II, 368.)

One can only quote the final words of The Golden Bowl to convey the full effect of Maggie's - and James's - ending.

"Is n't [Charlotte] too splendid?" she simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

"Oh splendid!" With which he came over to her.

"That's our help, you see," she added - to point further her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in - or trying to - what she so wonderfully gave. 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 you." 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.

(II, 368-369.)

One could not ask for a more exquisite rendering of "passion, mature, abysmal" (1) between a man and a woman; nor for a more concrete attestation to James's own great words: "'Everything's terrible, cara - in the heart of man.'"

1. The Ambassadors, II, 286.

PART THREE

CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONDUCT

Henry James's own judgement, when he came to write the prefaces to his collected works, was that The Ambassadors was "quite the best, 'all round'" (1) of his productions. However, after studying James's works as a consistent development of certain themes, I believe that The Golden Bowl is in fact the fullest and greatest expression of James's vision of life. The Ambassadors, though a masterpiece in its own right, falls below The Golden Bowl on the scale of excellence; nevertheless I have found a close analysis of The Ambassadors to be invaluable in my approach to an assessment of The Golden Bowl.

Between The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl in James's production lies The Wings of the Dove. (Though it was published before The Ambassadors, in 1902, it was in fact written after it. The publication of The Ambassadors was delayed until 1903.) The Wings of the Dove is also a great novel, but in many ways it is of a different order from The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl. The themes that I wished to consider - the themes of "living" and "seeing," to put them in Jamesian terms - I found largely transcended in The Wings of the Dove. Milly Theale, the heroine, wills to "live" but she is physically foredoomed, by her incurable illness, to die. Dying, Milly

1. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 309.

transcends the world and its problems in her spiritual life-in-death. (1)

I have concentrated on the two works of James's maturity which are most concerned with the here and now, with living, struggling characters for whom there is no escape from their destiny - which is to live out their lives as best they can. I have mentioned the themes of "living" and "seeing," but the terms require some expansion. Essentially, "living" expresses an aesthetic ideal: the ideal of living a full and vital life, missing none of its opportunities for experience. "Seeing" expresses, basically, a moral ideal: the ideal of comprehending fully the responsibilities and significance of "living." The two - "living" and "seeing" - merge together when they are at their best, for both are ideals of responsiveness to life: a responsiveness which in fact gives life its significance.

At first sight, the two ideals may seem diverse. The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl, in their differing emphases, appear to reinforce this impression. The theme of "living" is the one that stands out most memorably from The Ambassadors. Strether's outburst in Gloriani's garden tends to dominate the novel:

1. Of course, this is not so in the case of Merton Den-
sher, who cannot escape the life before him. His case
would be interesting to analyse, but I have not done so
because I feel that the central focus of The Wings of the
Dove is on Milly Theale, as the central focus of The
Ambassadors is on Strether, and of The Golden Bowl, on
Maggie.

"Live all you can; it's a mistake not to.
It does n't so much matter what you do in
particular, so long as you have your life.

.....
Do what you like so long as you don't make
my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!"

(The Ambassadors, I, 217-218.) (1)

On the other hand, the outstanding facet of The Golden Bowl is Maggie's need to "see" both her own life and the lives of those about her, so that she may re-establish the moral goodness of these lives. Moral issues seem to be uppermost in The Golden Bowl: in particular the moral beauty of living within a code of decency and dignity - of order and harmony. But this is not the whole of the picture, just as, in The Ambassadors, there is more than the credo: "Live all you can."

The Ambassadors centres round Strether's desire to "live" - but the outcome of the novel is in a different key from: "It does n't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life." Strether's outburst is occasioned by his original view of Chad Newsome's life - but Chad emerges as an inadequate person, despite his appearance of being ideally suited to living a beautiful life in a high civilisation. Chad, despite his polished exterior of "manners formed" (Amb., I, 151), is a hollow man - and Strether finally resigns his opportunity for living through the life of Chad, in favour of a higher ideal. "Seeing" in the end outweighs "living" for Strether, for reasons which I shall explore later.

In The Golden Bowl, to see her way to the salvation of herself and of the others, Maggie needs more than an

1. Hereafter I shall cite The Ambassadors as Amb., and The Golden Bowl as GB.

awakened perceptiveness alone. She must, as Fanny Assingham says, "decide to live." (GB, I, 385.) The chaos that threatens the foursome is precipitated by the difference in ideals of the characters. The Prince and Charlotte respond to the urge to "live all [they] can," while Maggie and her father passively leave the living to the vital pair. The Prince and Charlotte are attracted by the notion of an aesthetic vitality, a "higher and braver propriety" (GB, I, 334) than the humble moral decency by which the Ververs, father and daughter, are governed. To achieve a unity in all their lives, Maggie must cease to be "absent" as she so markedly is throughout the first half of The Golden Bowl. That she "sees" is not enough: she must also "live" if she is to match up to the Prince's aesthetic ideal.

Maggie's case is much the same as Strether's case. Like him, she sets out being "unaware of life" - an apt description by James of such characters in his works (1) - and like him she needs to "live." But Maggie is "morally earnest" (2) and discovers - as Strether too discovers - that for her high ideals living as much as one can, and however one can, is not sufficient. The Golden Bowl brings this out more clearly than The Ambassadors, since for Maggie it is not too late to live her life fully. Once she finds that disharmony and ugliness have crept into the relationships that form the basis of her life, she does decide to live. But she learns by painful experience that, by living out her emotional reactions to

1. "Preface to 'The Reverberator,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 187.

2. Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 17.

the situation, she will only increase the disorder and threaten even the illusion of peace.

At first Maggie attempts to follow only her awakened will to live. She asserts her place in the home by waiting at her own fireside for the Prince's return from Matcham and Charlotte. To her mind, she is merely "like thousands of women, . . . acting up to the full privilege of passion." (GE, II, 8.) However, her action sets the Prince on his guard: all Maggie gains is a superficial recognition of her rights of passion. The very next day this is not enough for her and she attempts to assert her place in the wider field of their social world, by accompanying Charlotte on her round of social visits and by entertaining as a Princess should. Again Maggie only gains a superficial deference. Despite everything, she is still arranged apart by the Prince and Charlotte. In a final desperate attempt to live with their forcefulness, Maggie tries to impose her will on the Prince by suggesting firmly that he should go away with Adam Verver and leave her with Charlotte. The Prince's refusal is reinforced by the rigid formality of their lives. "The sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed rose before her, and there was something in Amerigo's very face . . . that was like a conscious reminder of it." (GE, II, 66-67.)

By the time Maggie discovers the golden bowl that bears witness to her husband's long intimacy with Charlotte, she is aware that her past attempts are useless for correcting the deception in their lives. Her final choice between acting up to the privilege of passion and finding another means of salvation is made on the night of the card-game at Pawns. If she "lives," responding to the provoca-

tion of all her emotions, she will people their world with "terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up." (GB, II, 236.) On the other hand, she may control her passions and redirect the wasted beauty of their lives to a worthier end, peopling their world instead with "serenities and decencies and dignities." (GB, II, 236.) Maggie's choice is between ugliness and beauty: between the formless and the ordered.

If living as one instinctively feels the need to is not enough, how does James reconcile his ideal of "living" with his ideal of "seeing" the moral consequences of one's actions? Obviously to live all one can is not sufficient without some basis of form and order in which the morally good will blend with the aesthetically appealing. "Living" requires the concomitant of certain ideals of conduct to give one's life direction. For James, these ideals of conduct issue from the individual consciousness - a consciousness of a rare kind. In James's gallery of characters, there are always those who "live" (like Charlotte Stant and Chad Newsome) and those who are his real heroes and heroines (like Strether and Maggie Verver). (1) It is through the latter that James presents his ideals of consciousness and of conduct. They, the real heroes and heroines, are what Conrad termed James's "choice souls" -

1. To exemplify the "livers" in The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl, I have chosen Chad Newsome and Charlotte Stant rather than Mme. de Vionnet and the Prince. The latter are not in quite the same category, since the heroes and heroines do achieve moral contact with them, and in fact come to base their struggles far more on their beauty than on the attractiveness of the pure "livers."

the "fine consciences" of which James is the historian. (1)

In the Jamesian ideal, conscience and consciousness are interchangeable. To all his chosen vessels of consciousness may be applied the description of Hyacinth Robinson in the preface to The Princess Casamassima: he has "the power to be finely aware and richly responsible."

James continues:

It is those moved in this . . . fashion who "get most" out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable us, as readers of their record . . . also to get most. Their being finely aware - as Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware - makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them. (2)

The intense and finely aware person draws from life the greatest degree of significance because he is also richly responsible, having a highly developed conscience, or sense of moral good. Describing James's characters, Conrad said:

A fine conscience is naturally a virtuous one. What is natural about it is just its fineness, an abiding sense of the intangible, ever-present, right. (3)

If one accepts this premise - that a fine conscience or consciousness is also a virtuous one - it follows that a person in possession of such a conscience will always attempt to match his conduct to the ideal of the "right." And, having a finer sense of the right than a person with a coarse or stupid consciousness, his conduct will be nobler, even though he too only lives as he feels best.

A fine conscience is an intelligent one. When Fanny Assingham asks: "'What is morality but high intelligence?'" (GE, I, 88) she is, partially, speaking for James

1. Joseph Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1921), pp. 18 and 21 resp.

2. The Art of the Novel, p. 62.

3. Joseph Conrad, op. cit., p. 22.

himself. But Fanny does not define the type of intelligence that results in moral fineness; the type of intelligence exemplified by Strether in The Ambassadors and by Maggie in The Golden Bowl. Their intelligence is compounded of sensitivity, delicacy, imagination and discrimination. The interaction of these qualities produces what F.R. Leavis calls "spiritual and intellectual fineness."

(1) And this fineness issues in ideal conduct, at the same time giving the maximum of sense to such life and action. Spiritual fineness is both good and beautiful - which is James's ideal blending of the moral and the aesthetic.

It might appear, however, as if this ideal is something that is separable from James's art, in the form of a propounded thesis or a proffered message. This is never the case, precisely because he chooses such "fine consciences" as the centres of consciousness in his works. His moral ideal is inseparably fused with his artistic ideal of intensity. As a representation of life, art, to James, is most beautiful and most moral when it is most intense: when it has the greatest "amount of felt life concerned in producing it." (2) A distinguishable moral purpose on the part of the artist limits the work of art, for "the essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field [of life]." (3) The artist's only plan should be

1. F.R. Leavis, "The later James," The Great Tradition (Peregrine Books, 1962), p. 180.

2. "Preface to 'The Portrait of a Lady,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 45.

3. "The Art of Fiction," The House of Fiction (London: Mercury Books, 1962), p. 43.

to handle, primarily, not a world of ideas, animated by figures representing these ideas; but the packed and constituted, the palpable, provable world before him, by the study of which ideas [will] inevitably find themselves thrown up. If the happy fate is accordingly to partake of life, actively, assertively, not passively, narrowly, in mere sensibility and sufferance, the happiness has been greatest when the faculty employed has been largest. (1)

What applies to the artist also applies to his characters - in James's scheme of art. By employing as the centres of consciousness in his works those characters who see and feel the most, James gives to their experience the maximum significance - in fine, the shape and significance of art itself. Conrad said of the art of the novelist:

It is rescue work, [the] snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values - the permanence of memory. (2)

Art, to Conrad, takes us "out of [our] perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness." (3)

What is important is that James not only shapes the lives of his chosen characters into art - that is after all the artist's task - but he also confers the power of art upon them in their lives. Their self-awareness (which leads to an awareness of others; of their responsibility to others and to the higher, less tangible ideal of the "right") renders their lives and conduct more meaningful than the lives of those with lesser qualities, dimmer consciousnesses. It makes them the artists, or masters, of their own lives. But equally important is the fact that

1. "The Lesson of Balzac," ibid., pp. 72-73.

2. Joseph Conrad, op. cit., p. 16.

3. Ibid.

the heroes and heroines of James, being human and not gods, have to earn that power. James recognised "the danger of filling too full any supposed and above all any obviously limited vessel of consciousness" (1) and thus making the central consciousness impossibly all-seeing, all-knowing. James's heroes and heroines, to reach the ideal state of beauty and knowledge, have to pass through stages of bewilderment and suffering. Inevitably they set out unaware of life, but life, entangling them in the "ordeal of consciousness" (2), brings out their potential.

The Ambassadors, as I have attempted to show in my analysis of the novel, traces in detail Lambert Strether's growth of awareness of life and his search for an ideal of conscience (or consciousness) and conduct. The obstructions he meets in what appears to be a straightforwardly moral mission are obstructions of his own creation. Strether is a man of imagination and discrimination and - one need hardly say - intelligence. It is his "blest imagination" that helps him "to discriminate." (3) He fails of his "moral" purpose (in the narrow New England sense) because he cannot - and will not - prevent his imagination from responding, at every turn, to the life and people about him. Though he sets out to protect Chad, in his own words, "from life," Strether discovers that he cannot protect himself from it, or, more pertinently, from his own imaginative responses to life. His long-dormant

1. "Preface to 'The Princess Casamassima,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 63.

2. This is the phrase Dorothea Krook singles out, for the title of her study of James, from the preface to The Wings of the Dove. (Cf. The Art of the Novel, p. 289.)

3. "Preface to 'The Ambassadors,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 316.

will to live is stirred by Paris and its people. His youth has passed without his having lived "in the sense of sensations, passions, impulses, pleasures." (1) But he is aware of having a second chance: he may expand his consciousness to encompass the "living" of others - in particular, of Mme. de Vionnet and Chad. Perceptiveness plays a large part in Strether's expansion. Even before the realisations that occur for him in Gloriani's garden, he reacts to perceptions that carry him beyond "his usual landmarks and terms." (*Amb.*, I, 195.) The loveliness of Chad's house is one, the transformation of the young man himself another. There is a whole chain of such perceptions which assault Strether's imagination and his moral sense. Mme. de Vionnet shatters his preconceptions, and her house and possessions all reinforce his growing awareness of her private honour. And, the more finely aware he becomes, the more richly responsible he is. He becomes committed to the woman whose beauty has captured his imagination (just as his envious admiration of Chad commits him to the young man). Strether's experience in Notre Dame clarifies for him the extent of his responsibility for his own perceptiveness.

It is at this stage that Strether's consciousness really becomes an ordeal. He cannot divorce his conduct from it, since that would be to deny the validity of his consciousness. But the moral pressure of the new ambassadors challenges the validity of Strether's perceptions. Sarah Focock allows nothing to remain vague and undefined. She sees so little, in comparison with Strether, that he is

1. The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 226.

forced to question the truth of his observations. "Did he live in a false world, a world that had grown simply to suit him . . . ?" (Amb., II, 81.) Weighing every perception, however small, Strether has reached such an intensity of consciousness that everything is in danger of seeming illusory. Has he, while seeking to draw the utmost out of life and do it full justice, merely succeeded in losing touch with reality altogether? Though Strether rejects the challenge of Sarah Pocock, it is only to find his assessment challenged again - and by the very people on whose apparent worth it is based. He is chilled when, for her own ends, Mme. de Vionnet disposes of her daughter in an arranged marriage. Strether's second last visit to Chad's house begins to reveal that his projection of himself into Chad's youth is playing him false. Chad is not prepared to be and to act as Strether would if he were in his place. The rush of insight quickens in the final chapters of The Ambassadors. Strether's view of the lovers on the river gives him the knowledge of their intimacy which he has avoided facing before. And his last visits to Mme. de Vionnet and Chad reveal that

A pity beyond all telling
Is hid in the heart of love (1)

and in the heart of man.

Where is Strether to find the basis for his appreciation of life, when life itself is so treacherously changeable and its beauties so destructible? Are its beauties, which he thought he had perceived, in fact unreal? This is the stage Maggie reaches in The Golden Bowl, in her even more terrifying ordeal of consciousness. Like Strether, she passes through successive stages of bewilder-

1. From Yeats's poem, "The Heart of Love."

ment, but they involve for her intenser suffering because she is so much more involved in the relationships that form the basis of her consciousness of life. For Maggie everything comes to a head on the night of the card-game at Fawns. Before this, she has been made to be aware of evil - but she has not had to face so intense a perception of its existence as she faces in her epiphany at Fawns. Isolated more than ever before, and with the scene of the card-game so acutely framed by her vision that it becomes a palpable expression of everything at stake, Maggie experiences "the horror of finding evil seated all at ease where she had only dreamed of good. . . ." (GE, II, 237.) She had trusted in appearances, hoping that her belief in them would render them true. She wanted "'a brilliant perfect surface - to begin with at least.'" (GE, II, 216.) But now, at the height of her ordeal of consciousness, Maggie doubts the very basis of her struggle for beauty and harmony. Is there any beauty to save in her circle of relationships? Would it not be more honest to shatter a decorum that is such a false "conquest of appearances"? (GE, II, 233.)

Both Maggie and Strether reach this intensity of consciousness in which their faith in life is undermined and the very existence of truth and beauty is seriously questioned. Their consciousness becomes a torment because, as Conrad said,

the range of a fine conscience covers more good and evil than the range of conscience which may be called, roughly, not fine; a conscience less troubled by the nice discrimination of shades of conduct. A fine conscience is more concerned with essentials. . . . It is a thing of infinite complication and suggestion. (1)

1. Joseph Conrad, op. cit., p. 21.

The fine conscience is concerned with essentials, with a choice between good and evil, beauty and ugliness - but it is also so sensitive to minute shades of differentiation that the choice is extremely difficult. Both Maggie and Strether falter when they comprehend the fallibility of human beings and the potentialities for evil in everyone, including themselves. Both long for some basis on which to rebuild their shattered faith in life and beauty and truth. Though chaos threatens, like an abyss suddenly opened at their feet, they refuse the temptation to give in and instead seek to recreate an order.

In their struggles to recreate the order and harmony which give life its shape and significance, James's tormented "choice souls" find themselves set against the very things it is their wish to save. Their opponents are the "livers" - the people they most envy for their completeness - and the forms of civilised society - the very forms which should, ideally, be society's greatest good, and theirs as well. The livers are the "not fine" consciences whose actions threaten the happiness and integrity of the fine consciences. In The Ambassadors, Strether's happiness depends upon his appreciation of Mme. de Vionnet's beauty. Her life is threatened by Chad's blindness and Strether appeals to the young man not to desert Mme. de Vionnet and destroy her. But Chad is a liver who has only manners, not morals. Like Gloriani, he extends to Strether "the bridge of a charming" but "hollow civility." (Amb., I, 262.) Chad is irreducible and Strether's fine ideals can have no effect upon his conscience. In The Golden Bowl it is Charlotte who is the brightest and most beautiful

presence - and the chief element of destruction. (1)
 She is praised by Fanny Assingham for her unfailing observance of the forms. "The forms are two thirds of conduct," Fanny claims. (GE, I, 390.) But the unspecified other third of conduct is important - and Charlotte, like Chad Newsome, does not possess it. That other third is a combination of the qualities which the coarse consciences, as against the fine consciences, lack. Charlotte and Chad have intelligence but none of the attendant imagination and discrimination, the moral delicacy, of the fine consciences' intelligence. Like Mona Brigstock and Mrs. Gereth (in The Spoils of Poynton) they are "all will" (2) and have "no fundamental tenderness."

(3) Entirely lacking in the fine perceptiveness of James's struggling heroes and heroines, the livers are consequently selfish. Impatient of the needs of others, they are capable of wounding others morally and even killing them morally. (4)

F.O. Matthiessen defines the difference between the fine consciences and the imperceptive livers in the following way:

1. The Prince is not as much a "liver" as Charlotte, and consequently less dangerous to Maggie. He is established from the beginning as aware of "dangers from within." (GE, I, 16.)

2. "The awful Mona Brigstock, who is all will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision, into sense of shades or relations or proportions." ("Preface to 'The Spoils of Poynton,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 131.) Charlotte and Chad are all the more dangerous than Mona Brigstock in that they do present a surface of taste.

3. The Spoils of Poynton, p. 44.

4. This is the phraseology James himself uses in The Ambassadors. Strether, before meeting either Chad or the woman he believes to be but the last of a long line of women, muses on the Latin motto: "Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat - they had all morally wounded, the last had morally killed." (Am., I, 93.) Of course, Strether is mistaken. It is Chad who will be capable of morally killing Mme. de Vionnet.

They [James's characters] always fall into their positions on his scale according to their degree of awareness; the good character was the one who was most sensitive, who saw the greatest variety of moral possibilities, and who wanted to give them free play in others. The bad character was obtuse or wilfully blind to such possibilities; he was dead in himself, and at his self-centred worst, tries to cause the spiritual death of others. (1)

I cannot, however, agree with Mr. Matthiessen entirely. The so-called "bad character" in James does not try to cause the spiritual death of others. Rather, he or she is capable of causing that spiritual death through being quite incapable of comprehending another person's spiritual life. In The Ambassadors, for example, Strether agrees Chad is "too decent" (or "too nice") to do harm consciously. But: "he meant no harm, though he might after all be capable of much. . . ." (Amb., II, 313.) In The Golden Bowl, Fanny Assingham insists from the beginning on her belief that Charlotte is not "bad." "'She does n't deliberately intend, she does n't consciously wish, the least complication.'" (GB, I, 70.) But the fact remains that Charlotte's presence is a danger, and that complications are bound to follow her wilful return. I would also hesitate to use Mr. Matthiessen's term, "bad character." It can too easily imply James's total condemnation of characters like Chad and Charlotte, and there is in fact a strong positive side to James's portrayal of them. Especially in his later work (2), James displays a

1. F.O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 146.

2. In an earlier work, such as The Portrait of A Lady, it is more possible to use the term "bad character" - James's portrait of Gilbert Osmond, for example, betrays no con-
donation whatever. He is a straight-forward villain.

certain duality in his attitude to such characters which makes it less of a condemnation than a love-hate relationship (though even the word hate is perhaps too strong). I have called the unfine consciences "livers" because it is a more neutral term than "bad characters" and carries no overt judgement. "Livers" emphasises rather the strong positive qualities which these characters offer: their strength of presence (1), their vitality, and their "knowing how to live." (Amb., II, 212.) There is an aesthetic beauty to which James - and his fine consciences - are strongly attracted. The livers are usually described in terms of a powerful animal beauty (2), or, since there is nothing small about them, in superlatives. Maggie, for example, describes Charlotte as "'great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life.'" (GB, I, 180.) The livers have brightness and beauty, an insolence of life and strength which makes them complete - and irreducible. (Chad is described as an "irreducible young Pagan." [Amb, I, 156.])

On the positive side, the livers can teach the fine consciences much about life. They are unafraid to be themselves and to live according to their desires, whereas the fine consciences tend to be self-effacing and to forget that living is also a thing of the senses. On one of his last visits to Chad's house, Strether feels as never before the beauty of Chad's life (cf. the highly sensual description quoted on p. 68 above). It brings home to Strether "the substance of his loss, . . . [making] it, to

1. Cf. the discussion of "presence" on pp. 40-42 above.

2. Gloriani is "the glossy male tiger, magnificently marked" (Amb., I, 219); Charlotte at her most powerful is "the splendid shining supple creature . . . out of the cage" (GB, II, 239); and, in The Wings of the Dove, both Kate Croy and Maud Lowder are constantly imaged in terms of animals and birds.

a degree it never had been, an affair of the senses."

(Amb., II, 211.) The livers are the ones who are most sensually alive, and theirs is a vitality which the fine consciences need to absorb. In The Golden Bowl, Maggie - who stands ever dazzled before Charlotte's "mastery of the greater style" (GR, II, 368) - has to rediscover for herself the beauty of sensuality (and sexuality) before she is truly united with the Prince.

Though the livers are the people against whom the fine consciences must struggle, the fine consciences are fully aware of their positive value. In their envious respect for this value, the fine consciences cannot find it within them to destroy the completeness of the livers. Because the livers are irreducible, having no finer gradations of character, to change them would be to destroy them completely. In The Sacred Fount the dilemma of the fine conscience in this respect is clearly expressed by the narrator, as he contemplates the destructive selfishness of Mrs. Brissenden and Gilbert Long. (Their brilliance is fed by the "sacred founts" of Mr. Brissenden and May Server respectively; and they are slowly bleeding their victims dry.) The narrator is suddenly aware that, by his interference, he may have awoken Mrs. Brissenden and Long to the truth of their situation.

My personal privilege, on the basis of a full consciousness, had become, in the turn of an eye, more than questionable, and I was really quite scared at the chance of having to face - of having to see them face - another recognition. What did this alarm imply but the complete reversal of my estimate of the value of perception? Mrs. Brissenden and Long had been hitherto magnificently without it, and I was responsible perhaps for having, in a mood practically much stupider than the stupidest of theirs, put them gratuitously and helplessly on it. To be without it was the most consistent, the most successful, because the most admirable, form of selfishness; and why should people admirably

equipped for remaining so, people bright and insolent in their prior state, people in whom this state was to have been respected as a surface without a scratch is respected, be made to vibrate, to crack and split, from within? (1)

The imagery in this passage is strikingly similar to the dominant imagery of The Golden Bowl. Knowing that the golden bowl of illusion and peace is broken only for her, Maggie is concerned with correcting the relationships about her without in any way reducing the Prince or, above all, Charlotte (since Charlotte is the person who least suspects Maggie's knowledge, and would be most destroyed by it). Maggie lives in fear of seeing Charlotte made to "crack and split from within."

As with James's attitude to the livers, his attitude to society and its forms is ambiguous. James's fine consciences struggle against both - and for both. There is both attraction and repulsion. The great attraction of a high civilisation emerges most strongly, out of all James's novels, in The Ambassadors. Gloriani's garden exemplifies for Strether the beauty of the great world; it speaks of "survival, transmission, association, a strong indifferent persistent order." (Amb., I, 195.) Mme. de Vionnet and her house typify for Strether all that is fine and dignified in human life. Her house speaks of "the dignity of distances and approaches" (Amb., I, 243); her possessions are "hereditary cherished charming." (Amb., I, 244.)

After his epiphany in Notre Dame, Strether also understands the personal charm of Mme. de Vionnet herself: compounded

1. The Sacred Fount, p. 131.

of courage and clearness (1), of refined simplicity and private honour, and of "a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity." (Amb., II, 7.) She becomes the personification, for Strether, of a high civilisation. James emphasises this in his "project" for The Ambassadors:

Singularly, admirably Mme. de Vionnet comes after a little to stand, with Strether, for most of the things that make the charm of civilisation as he now revises and imaginatively reconstructs, morally reconsiders, so to speak, civilisation. (2)

The ambiguity becomes plain when one notes that Strether's view is an imaginative reconstruction of a high civilisation. James was in fact writing of what he termed "a supercivilised age." (3) There is another side to civilisation, as Strether is led to discover. For one thing, it is only - for all its refinements - "of the strict human order." (Amb., II, 284.) Beneath its surface, and beneath the social surface of the civilised being, the basic human passions and faults remain. Moreover, though designed for the good of its members, civilisation is a strong, persistent but indifferent order. It preserves the best of human ideals, but it can also shield the worst of human motives under its indifference. Strether has no sooner been admiring Mme. de Vionnet's delicacy and discretion, and basking in their shared sense of "high decencies" (Amb., II, 114), than he is chilled by her "exquisitely remorseless" (Amb., II, 128) disposal of her daughter. The arrangement is socially acceptable, but for

1. In Notre Dame Strether saw Mme. de Vionnet "renewing her courage, renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation." (Amb., II, 7.)

2. "The Ambassadors," The Notebooks of Henry James, p. 396.

3. The Wings of the Dove, II, 201.

Strether there is "something ancient and cold in it" (Amb., II, 129) - the note of indifference and of passions none the less powerful for being "refined disguised suppressed." (Amb., II, 131.) But, stifling his spontaneity, Strether bows to the indifferent order even though he commits "his biggest insincerity yet." (Amb., II, 130.) (Cf. p. 57 above.)

In much the same way, Maggie bows before the sense of a life tremendously ordered and fixed - a life which the Prince personifies for her. She had wished to disregard the external order of their lives:

They had taken too much for granted that their life together required, as people in London said, a special "form" - which was very well so long as the form was kept only for the outside world and was made no more of among themselves than the pretty mould of an ice pudding . . . into which, to help yourself, you did n't hesitate to break with the spoon. (GE, II, 27-28.)

But Maggie has to face the fact that the Prince does prize the outer form of their social lives, for it is his position, his station in life, which for him constitutes his "place," his identity and the main significance of his life. This is not to say that the Prince is totally blind to the ambiguities of his own standards. Watching him at Hatcham, we see that the Prince understands the dangers of "a society so placed that it had only its own sensibility to consider," a society which in self-preservation banishes "Judgement" to the attic like a poor relation. (GE, I, 330-331.) The Prince senses "the element of staleness in all the freshness and of freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and guilt in the innocence." (GE, I, 354.) But he is lacking, by his own admission, in the moral sense. Unable to sort out the flagrant mixture, he allows it to shield his infidelity to Maggie. Everything

blurs, for him, into a "glowing plea for the immediate" (GE, I, 332); a "vain appearance" (such as little Bilham commends to Strether [Amb., I, 203]) but one so attractive to the Prince's aesthetic sense that he cannot resist it.

It is left to the finer consciences in James's work to decide which are the aspects of civilisation that are invaluable. It is a world of paradox. It has order and beauty and brilliance, but repeatedly there is in this "great world" something "covertly tigerish," a strong waft of the jungle. (Amb., I, 219.) The imagery of beasts and of the jungle is recurrent in James's works, forming a powerful undercurrent of suggestion. The latent destructiveness of the fundamental human passions, lurking beneath the surface of civilised society, is never forgotten by James. But somehow, though this submerged danger frequently threatens to overwhelm the good of civilisation, it never quite succeeds in outweighing it. Occasionally, like Strether, we sense "the smell of blood" (Amb., II, 274) or, with Magale, face "that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horribly possible." (GE, II, 233.) When the grace and ease of society appears entirely false, completely anti-life in its indifference to the suffering individual, and treacherous in its hollowness of manners and forms, there is the temptation to expose the truth beneath the surface. There is the temptation to shatter the illusion that civilised society is good and beautiful. Yet James's fine consciences are forced to realise their need for the shape and setting which civilised society gives their lives. Without it, they are nothing, for this is the environment which has shaped their consciousness. James would agree with D.H. Lawrence that

we have our very individuality in relationship.

.....
 Apart from our connexions with other people, we are barely individuals, we amount, all of us, to next to nothing. It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena that we move and have our being. (1)

Our social environment defines our attitude to life and to morality. In The Ambassadors, refusing to countenance Woollett's demand that Chad should repudiate Mme. de Vionnet, Strether says:

"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." (Amb., I, 283.)

"Experience, as I see it," James himself says, "is our apprehension of what happens to us as social creatures." (2)

To be divorced from society - in particular, from relationships with others - is to be divorced from experience.

Even James's social revolutionary, Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Casamassima, falls "in love with the beauty of the world, actual order and all." (3) Hyacinth had set out to destroy that order but, finally unable to take part in the destruction of so much beauty, he destroys himself instead. His action is however no solution to the problem of reconciling the importance of the individual with the necessity for order in human society.

The greatest obstacle to a challenging of that order is the nature of its organisation. Relationships within society are so involved, so entangled and interlocking, that

1. "We need one Another," Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: William Heinemann, 1961), p. 190.

2. "Preface to 'The Princess Casamassima,'" The Art of the Novel, pp. 64-65.

3. Ibid., p. 72.

any action by one person inevitably affects others. In The Sacred Fount, the country house of Newmarch becomes a microcosm of society and civilisation. The narrator recognises Newmarch's "high privilege of harmony and taste" (1) as the guests sit listening together to beautiful music. In this calm setting, the narrator watches May Server fight disintegration in a terrifyingly silent isolation. But he can only stand in awe of "the beauty and terror of conditions so highly organised" (2) that they are never seriously disturbed. May Server - and her position is strikingly similar to Maggie's in The Golden Bowl - could cry out and expose her hurt, to end her silent suffering,

but we were, alas! all too much there, too much tangled and involved for that; every actor in the play . . . sat forth with an intimation that they were not to be so easily disposed of. (3)

Newmarch is in fact a crystal cage in which all are imprisoned by their own needs, "no more free really to alight than if [they] had been dashing in a locked railway-train across a lovely land." (4)

James's fine consciences, in seeking the ideals of conduct in the midst of so many ambiguities, are faced with a formidable task. Suicide is Hyacinth Robinson's escape from the responsibilities of his fine awareness, in The Princess Casamassima. In The Wings of the Dove, Milly Theale's ordeal of consciousness is ended by her death. In The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl James returns to the pattern of choice-in-life which may be found in the

1. The Sacred Fount, p. 114.
2. Ibid., p. 121.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 142.

best of his earlier novels, The Portrait of a Lady. But Isabel Archer is very much a heroine of James's earlier style. She is not the fully developed vessel of consciousness which James perfected in his later work, by means of a growing understanding of his ideals of consciousness and conduct. Isabel Archer returns to face her responsibilities: to live with the man she married but whom she can no longer love. But her victory seems a very barren one because she remains isolated in her knowledge and ultimately unsure of anything but that virtue is its own reward. James's intenser presentation of his later heroes and heroines - of Strether and Maggie in particular - gives them deeper knowledge and experience than Isabel Archer, and understandably so, since Strether and Maggie are the products of James's maturest art.

In my outline above of the ordeals of consciousness of Maggie and Strether, I reached only the point where those ordeals are at their height. I have stressed the obstacles these fine consciences meet because the obstacles - the livers and the forms of society - are at once the cause of the fine consciences' torment and, ultimately, their aids to salvation. At the height of the ordeal of consciousness, when life seems constituted only of appearances, the fine consciences realise most intensely the need for harmony and order. To destroy the existing order, however false and treacherous, would be to invite total chaos and to destroy the very basis of their life. Somehow they must preserve their moral integrity without denying to others the right to live according to their ideals, and without tearing apart the aesthetically appealing framework of civilised manners and forms. Chaos and ugliness

are a violence which the fine consciences reject outright, by free choice. In the chosen conduct of the fine conscience - a conduct in which choice has been every inch earned - rests James's ideal.

The resolutions of the problems in The Ambassadors and The Golden Bowl are similar, but of course they are fitted to the set of circumstances peculiar to each novel. For Strether, with his duality of consciousness (his "detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference" [Amb., I, 5]), and with his obligations to his past, the choice he has to make is much easier than Maggie's. Maggie is both younger and more intimately involved in the drama about her, not merely projecting herself vicariously into it; she is one of the "immersed and . . . bleeding participants." (1) It makes The Golden Bowl a greater novel in that James finds for his vessel of consciousness the situation which expresses most fully his themes and ideals. In his preface to The Portrait of a Lady, James refers to Turgenev's conception of characters as disponibles.

He saw them . . . as disponibles, saw them subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves. . . . (2)

One might add that it is also necessary for the artist to find the characters and situation which will most bring out his artistic vision. The resolution of The Golden Bowl is, I believe, the consummation of James's art. But the re-

1. "Preface to 'The Golden Bowl,'" The Art of the Novel, p. 328.

2. The Art of the Novel, p. 43.

solution of The Ambassadors is a preparation for that consummation and is exquisite in its own right.

I have said that, after their ordeals of consciousness, James confers upon his heroes and heroines the power of art in their own lives. The Ambassadors traces Strether's ordeal, his search for the true significance of life. At the end, Strether chooses to weigh loss and gain and to shape his experience of life in a way that makes him the artist of his own vision of life. By leaving Paris and the relationships he has formed there, he loses the possibility of continuing to "live," vicariously but intensely, through the lives of M^{me}. de Vionnet and Chad. As he contemplates his choice of making an end to things, he feels he might "for all the world have been going to die" - but "die resignedly." (Amb., II, 293.) The choice he makes is a free one; his selection is based on "beauty and knowledge." (Amb., II, 326.) (Cf. pp. 92-93, above.) The beauty he has perceived is above all the beauty of M^{me}. de Vionnet, who embodies for him the beauty of a high civilisation. "'A basis seemed to me just what her beauty supplied,'" Strether says to Miss Gostrey. "'Her beauty of everything.'" (Amb., II, 300.) The "everything" covers a wide range of M^{me}. de Vionnet's qualities: her variety and yet harmony, her dignity and charm, the way that "as she presented things the ugliness . . . went out of them." (Amb., II, 277.) But Strether's knowledge covers also the revelation of M^{me}. de Vionnet's nature and abysmal passion. Her beauty is "all not a fixed quantity." (Amb., II, 300.) If it were, there would be no depth or resonance to Strether's appreciation of it. Miss Gostrey says to Strether: "'You're complete.'"

(Amb., II, 300.) But Strether does not feel he is complete until he goes. "I must go," he says. "To be right." (Amb., II, 326.) His sense of the right is, by this stage, no spurious thing. Though he has faced the revelation that Mme. de Vionnet's beauty is abysmal, and that her passion is in the process of destroying her beauty, he knows he can do nothing himself to save it. Only in himself can he preserve the beauty he has comprehended. (One remembers that Mme. de Vionnet stands for the charm of civilisation as Strether "imaginatively reconstructs, morally reconsiders" it.) In reality, as Strether realises, Mme. de Vionnet's beauty is all too human and vulnerable. Only he, in his mature appreciation of it, can stabilise her beauty, taking it out of the realm of "perishable activity" into "the light of imperishable consciousness." He can endow the "struggling forms" of life with the "permanence of memory." (1)

Strether therefore renounces worldly gain - especially the "exquisite service, . . . lightened care, for the rest of his days" (Amb., II, 325-326) which Maria Gostrey offers him - in favour of giving his experience and appreciation of life both shape and permanence. Conrad wrote that James's solutions "by rejection" or renunciation would "always present a certain lack of finality."

One is never set at rest by Henry James's novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on. . . . It is eminently satisfying, but it is not final. Mr. Henry James . . . never attempts the impossible. (2)

1. Cf. the quotations from Conrad, p.184 above.

2. Joseph Conrad, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

The artistic problem of combining the "sense of life still going on" with a strong sense of form and shape in the choice of a right ending, is much the same as the problem Strether faces personally in The Ambassadors. He desires to order his experience and give permanence to the beauty and the knowledge he has gained through his consciousness and his conduct. Yet the basis of his appreciation is ultimately that the beauty is not a fixed quantity. He must frame the scene without limiting its depth: frame it in such a way as to heighten, not fix and stultify, its significance. There are no final answers - nevertheless a selection must be made which will give some permanence to Strether's appreciation of life's beauty. Again, Strether's problem is the problem of the artist himself. In his preface to Roderick Hudson, James writes of the principle of continuity in art and the necessity for "developments" - "the painter's subject consisting ever . . . of the related state, to each other, of certain figures and things." The "felicity of form and composition" rests upon the direction which these relations and developments take, but

up to what point is such and such a development indispensable to the interest? What is the point beyond which it ceases to be rigorously so? Where, for complete expression of one's subject, does a particular relation stop - giving way to some other not concerned in that expression?

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy. . . . (1)

The prime difficulty of art is the choice of a stopping-

1. The Art of the Novel, pp. 4-5.

place. An end, says James, is only arrived at by "a difficult, dire process of selection and comparison, of surrender and sacrifice." (1) In The Ambassadors, Strether, James's artist of his own consciousness and conduct, undergoes this process of selection. He weighs "living" against responsibility to others and to his high ideals. He chooses the beauty of the latter and opts out of "living," to give his experience its complete expression.

In The Golden Bowl, however, the problem of a resolution is greater. (And the resolution itself is greater. There is something of an ivory-tower nature in Strether's choice, since it preserves the beauty of life only in his own consciousness.) Maggie is not in a position to detach herself in order to give her life form and significance. It is not too late for her to go on living once she has learned what living means - in fact everything rests upon her continued presence, in body as well as in mind:

It would n't be their feeling that she should do anything but live, live on somehow for their benefit, and even as much as possible in their company, to keep proving to them that they had truly escaped and that she was still there to simplify.
(GB, II, 235.)

Maggie must of necessity remain within the circle of her relationships and work from there for the preservation of harmony and order. This she realises at the very moment when she is reduced to utter isolation, by her nightmarish burst of perception on the night of the card-game at Fawns. Her life seems an abyss of unreality but, for her own sake and the sake of the others, she must rebuild from the void the harmonies - the "serenities and dignities and decencies" (GB, II, 236) - of their lives. Her

1. Ibid., p. 6.

only guides are her conscience and her consciousness, and they must somehow serve her. As Conrad points out, "a fine conscience is naturally a virtuous one." (1) Strangely enough Maggie's conscience urges her to lie, to be virtuous in an entirely new sense. She must preserve the illusions instead of destroying them: match deception with her own art of deception. When she lies to Charlotte on that terrifying night at Fawns ("I accuse you of nothing" [GE, II, 250]), Maggie is aware that she is nevertheless keeping "in tune with the right."

The right, the right - yes, it took this extraordinary form of humbugging to the end. It was only a question of not by a hair's breadth deflecting into the truth. (GE, II, 250-251.)

The "right" for Maggie is an avoidance of the truth because the exposure of the bare truth is a violence which would be a greater wrong than the deception practised by the Prince and Charlotte. The conventional factual truth is not the whole truth for those who perceive the mixture of good and evil in human life. It is in fact a violation of higher truths, as the fine conscience realises; a violence which causes suffering. Strether recognises the violence of truth in cases where it is not called for, and the theme of violence averted occurs in The Ambassadors (cf. p. 76 above) - though in a more minor way. It is magnified in The Golden Bowl, where "violence" is a key word.

Maggie's first act of assertion, on the night of the Prince's return from Hatcham, has "a kind of violence beyond what she had intended." (GE, II, 15-16.) Fanny Assingham dashes the golden bowl "boldly to the ground, where she had the thrill of seeing it lie shattered with the violence of the crash." (GE, II, 179.) The act, in

1. Joseph Conrad, op. cit., p. 21.

its effect upon the Prince, wounds Maggie as if it had been "a violence redoubled and acting beyond its intention, a violence calling up the hot blood as a blow across the mouth might have called it." (GE, II, 182.) As Maggie suffers the summer at Fawns, she vibrates with a knowledge "which was almost too violent either to recognise or to hide." (GE, II, 207.) She manages to hide her ordeal from the others but, on the night of the card-game, is forced to recognise her hurt to the full, and to recognise in herself the capability of doing violence to their whole world. It is then that she finally comprehends exactly how destructive violence would be. A passionate insistence on the truth - passionate because it is the response of her emotions of jealousy and pain - would be an act of selfishness and destruction.

Implicit in Maggie's recognition is an awareness of her own culpability. Maggie has been guilty of ignorance. Her first shock was to find that the Prince and Charlotte might be "sustained by an ideal distinguishably different from her own." (GE, II, 45.) Maggie was good - too good, and her assumption that others had the same ideal of conduct as she had, struck the Prince as a "vicarious good conscience cultivated ingeniously on his behalf." (GE, I, 333.) (1) It seemed to him a perversity of moral pressure and, his pride wounded, the Prince was only stimulated in his ideal of "a higher and braver propriety." (GE, I, 334.) He chose to live his life as a high and complicated game, to accept the freedom which Charlotte, the unafraid, offered him. Maggie was so humbly self-contained that she

1. Charlotte's view of Maggie's goodness is similar: cf. her discussion of it with the Prince in The Golden Bowl, I, 101-103.

lived in an unreal state of trust. She might well have paid attention to a warning such as is given to the heroine in "Madame de Mauves" (1874) by an old Frenchwoman:

"Not to lose at the game of life you must - I don't say cheat, but not be too sure your neighbour won't, and not be too shocked out of your self-possession if he does. Don't lose, my dear - I beseech you don't lose. Be neither suspicious nor credulous, and if you find your neighbour peeping don't cry out; only very politely wait your own chance. (1)

Despite the worldly tone of this warning, it could well apply to Maggie's case. (The "game of life" metaphor is one which recurs frequently in The Golden Bowl.) Maggie almost loses at the game of life because her innocence is no match for the subtlety of the other players, the Prince and Charlotte. However, once her innocent ignorance has been replaced by knowledge, Maggie rejects an exposure of the other players' deception. Her sense of the right warns her not to insist on the truth. (2) This is "chivalry in a new form." (GB, II, 123.)

From her father Maggie conceals the truth; to Charlotte she lies a second time; from the Prince, who knows of her knowledge, Maggie refuses explanations. The details of his deception are, by her own choice, a closed book

1. "Madame de Mauves," The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 13, p. 230.

2. The notion that one's responsibility is not necessarily to truth (in the strict factual sense) is the theme of a modern novel, Accident, by Nicholas Mosley. The narrator and his friend, both Oxford dons, have been deeply influential in the lives of a pair of their students. When the girl student, under the influence of liquor, crashes the young man's car and kills him, the narrator debates with his friend whether to tell the truth of the accident to the authorities.

"I said 'One has to get back to the truth sometime.'
 "Charlie said 'But not get out of the moral responsibility.'
 "I said 'And to run to the truth might be an evasion of responsibility.'
 "Charlie said 'Exactly.'"

(Nicholas Mosley, Accident [Hodder & Stoughton, 1965], p. 160.)

to her, since they would humiliate the Prince and reduce his stature and beauty. Maggie's art is of a higher order than Strether's in The Ambassadors. Strether preserves the beauty of Mme. de Viennet, and of the high civilisation for which she stands, only in his own mind. Beyond this, there seems no real chance of redirecting to a worthy end a beauty that is disintegrating. In The Golden Bowl, Maggie not only succeeds, through her art, in preserving the order and harmony of their lives, and preserving Charlotte's greatness and her father's peace - she also gains the deep love and respect of the Prince. It is this which is Maggie's real reward, but to achieve it she has first had to be not so much the artist of her own life as the artist of all their lives in common. (It is significant that, during the card-game at Fawns, Maggie realises herself to be in the powerful position of author of the play.) Refusing the violence of "artless passion" (GE, II, 141), Maggie becomes "a mistress of shades." (GE, II, 142.) Practising the art of a gentle deception, she succeeds in the end in uniting the four of them "by the firmest abstention from pressure" (GE, II, 361) in a harmony that is not "less sustained for being superficial." (GE, II, 358.) But this art alone is not enough for Maggie - for "the infirmity of art was the candour of affection." (GE, II, 156.) Maggie's real basis is the sustaining power of love. For this reward she struggles to preserve the harmony and order which shield the more lasting truth, the more powerful reality of her personal relationship with the Prince: something which transcends the ideal of order and harmony because it does not destroy that ideal.

Like Strether, who realised that "what ruled selection was beauty and knowledge" (Amb., II, 326), Maggie maintains these standards in her preservation of harmony. Like Strether, she takes perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness, by her right conduct - but the consciousness she consecrates is not hers alone. Maggie is like the poor little Post Office girl in James's outstanding story, "In the Cage" (1898). The girl expands her consciousness beyond the confining cage of selfhood, entering the lives and consciousnesses of other people and suffering for and with them. At the height of her experience, she meets one of these people in the outside world (that is, beyond the cage of selfhood); she sacrifices her own interests for his and reaches, by her act, an equilibrium in which she sees

the things of the past year fall together and connect themselves, undergo the happy relegation that transforms melancholy and misery, passion and effort, into experience and knowledge. (1)

The girl's gain is not worldly, but she has won something greater by her sacrifice.

It had all at last even put on the air of their not needing now clumsily to manoeuvre to converse: their former little postal make-believes, the intense implications of questions and answers and change, had become in the light of the personal fact, of their having had their moment, a possibility comparatively poor. It was as if they had met for all time. . . .

.
Had n't she precisely established on the part of each a consciousness that could only end with death? (2)

This expresses what Maggie, in The Golden Bowl, has succeeded in doing with the Prince. Her gain is more positive than Strether's in The Ambassadors, since she shares the fruits of her knowledge. She has earned the right to

1. "In the Cage," The New York Edition of Henry James, vol. 11, p. 452.

2. Ibid., p. 462.

that knowledge, a mature wisdom such as is expressed by the Prince himself: "Everything's terrible, cara - in the heart of man." (GB, II, 349.)

Maggie is James's maturest and fullest expression of his ideals of consciousness and conduct. She achieves these ideals in life and by an art which, though it is imperfect because it is human, is made whole by the power of her shared love. Love enables Maggie to face the beauty and the terror of life - that "awful mixture in things" (GB, II, 292) which demands such a heavy price for any ideal, any attempted perfection. The Golden Bowl is the culmination of James's vision:

No themes are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connexion of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling before us forever that bright hard medal of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong. (1)

No other work of James's reveals quite so perfectly his profound vision of the complexity of life, that "strange scheme of things" in which "the years of darkness are needed to render possible the years of light." (GB, II, 144.) The Golden Bowl expresses his vision of civilisation as the poem, "Meru," expresses Yeats's:

Civilisation is hooped together, brought
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
By manifold illusion. . . .

Man's ideals are the "manifold illusion." Nevertheless they are also his greatest salvation and the things which give man's life its significance. Life is so much mingled beauty and terror that the only possible path open to one is to accept - to accept with a compassion born of a mature

1. "Preface to 'What Maisie Knew,'" The Art of the Novel,
p. 143.

and abysmal knowledge that is only won by suffering.
Dorothea Krook expresses James's maturity better than I
can:

"Resignation" in the sense of "disillusionment"
is not the right word. "Acceptance" would do
better, and "reconciliation" perhaps best of all -
in the positive affirmative spirit of the famous
lines in King Lear,

"Men must endure
Their going hence even as their coming hither;
Ripeness is all. . . ." (1)

James set the following ideals for the young novelist:

Do not think too much about optimism and pessimism;
try and catch the colour of life itself.

.
If you must indulge in conclusions, let them have
the taste of a wide knowledge. Remember that
your first duty is to be as complete as possible
- to make as perfect a work. Be generous and
delicate and pursue the prize. (2)

These are ideals which James himself fulfills, in The
Ambassadors and - even more perfectly - in The Golden Bowl.

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1. Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 3.
 2. "The Art of Fiction," The House of Fiction, p. 45.

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All references to the novels and tales of Henry James are to the standard collection of his works:

The New York Edition of Henry James. 26 vols.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907-1909
(renewal copyright 1937).
The edition includes the posthumously-issued unfinished novels, The Ivory Tower and The Sense of the Past.

The exceptions to the above are The Other House and The Sacred Fount, which were excluded from the collected edition:

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