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THE PURITAN, THE GENTLEMAN, AND THE ARTIST: A STUDY OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES.

University of Michigan, Ph. D., 1964
Language and Literature, modern
University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

THE PURITAN, THE GENTLEMAN, AND THE ARTIST:

A STUDY OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

IN THE NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

by
Jan Kadetsky Solomon

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the
University of Michigan
1964

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Austin Warren, Chairman
Assistant Professor Frithjof H. Bergman
Professor H. V. S. Ogden
Associate Professor Lyall H. Powers

PREFACE

That the business of writing the doctoral dissertation has been for me a creative challenge rather than a pedantic chore is due to the insight, enthusiasm, and wisdom of my Chairman, Professor Austin Warren, to whom I acknowledge my grateful recognition of his open-minded criticism and helpful suggestions. My thanks go as well to Professor Lyall H. Powers for his encouragement, his commendations, and, perhaps most especially, for his disagreements.

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INTRODUCTION

> 'Art,' in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vague injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction.
>
> The Art of Fiction

The problematic relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Henry James's fiction has been treated now and again in the last fifty years of ever-increasing critical and scholarly work on James. Those critics who have seen this relationship as thematically central to the novels and stories have generally comprehended the ethic-aesthetic issue as an inter-relation or even a fusion of the two points of view. It is my contention that any such fusion occurred, if at all, only late in James's career and was achieved only after the basic conflicts between the two attitudes - each of great importance to James - had been worked out in the field of his art. Furthermore, the struggle between these extremely divergent views of life and of conduct represented a major concern to the novelist and figured pre-eminently in his writing. This study examines the ethic-aesthetic conflict in its development through James's career, from its source to its tenuous resolution.

The first major statement about the aesthetic problem in James's ethical vision was made in 1917 by Stuart P. Sherman in the well-known essay, "The Aesthetic Idealism of Henry James."[1] Sherman's thesis is summed up in his statement that James "is not an historian of manners; he is a trenchant idealistic critic of life from the

aesthetic point of view....He is not pitiless except in the exposure of the 'ugly,' which to his sense includes all forms of evil."[2] Thus, the contention is not that James lacks a moral sense, but that his moral sense is referred consistently to his sense of beauty. This essay makes a careful division between the different kinds of consciousness and their particular judgments.

> To the religious consciousness all things are ultimately holy or unholy; to the moral consciousness all things are ultimately good or evil; to the scientific consciousness all things are ultimately true or not true; to Henry James all things are ultimately beautiful or ugly.[3]

One cannot deny that James used an aesthetic vocabulary to define moral states; but this is not the same as saying that he judged moral states by aesthetic criteria. Perhaps nothing goes further to weaken Sherman's argument than his contention that, like James, Ruskin "handles all matters in the aesthetic chamber."[4] Ruskin indeed, like James, desired a meeting place for the good and the beautiful, but Ruskin could find such a place only in the realm of the good where the beautiful was admitted only if it was good. For James, as we shall see, the answer was more difficult.

In 1918 Joseph Warren Beach discussed James's ethics in The Method of Henry James.[5] After carefully developing the particular nature of James's moral attitude, his "detachment or neutrality,"[6] and his avoidance of "the morality of the decalogue and the police court" for the morality "that....is instinct or intuition,"[7] Beach goes on, after all, to state a position very like Sherman's. "The best reason [James] can find for condemning or approving a given course of action

is that it is ugly or beautiful as the case may be."[8] And again, "It is all conceived in that spiritual realm where the bounds of taste and morality run together and become indistinguishable."[9] James would, no doubt, have been happy to find the world to be such a spiritual realm, but the object-lesson of most of his fiction is that the world is no such realm and that those who are innocent enough to believe it to be so, to take taste for virtue, are those who suffer - the Isabel Archers and Milly Theales of his fiction. Beach is quite right, of course, when he goes on to express the ideal of James: "a combination, or rather a fusion, of good taste with spiritual discernment";[10] and the further qualification that "whenever the distinction appears, the moral sense is clearly preferred [to the aesthetic] as the higher and rarer."[11] But he sees the moral sense as added to the aesthetic, the sense of taste which he says "unites in one great shining company the otherwise so various Gilbert Osmond and Isabel Archer, Mrs. Brookenham and Nanda, Kate Croy and Milly Theale, Chad Newsome and Lambert Strether."[12] If the one word, "taste", may be used at all to describe the antithetically presented characters in this list, it must so be used with qualifying modifiers: aesthetic taste and moral taste. It is more reasonable, however, to conceive of Osmond, Mrs. Brookenham, Kate, and Chad as characters presented as aesthetic—under the aegis of taste, and their opposite numbers as personages in no way conceived of as marked or motivated by taste but by conscience, spontaneous goodness, intuitive morality.

In 1946 Adele Tintner considered the relationship of "the material aspect of civilization, art - with its spiritual aspect, life,"[13]

which, though expressed in different terms, represents an antithesis similar to the ethic-aesthetic. Speaking of the canon of James's novels, Miss Tintner defines her thesis: "Although [James] moves from art back again to behavior before he finally adjusts their relationship to each other, there is no moral value ever introduced which cannot be referred to either of them."[14] The danger in this essay appears to me to be a tendency to oversimplification - "As art dictated to behavior in the early fiction, and life dictated to art in the middle, the final adjustment is a reconciliation between them."[15] Consequently, some critical blunders result. While it is quite true, for example, that in The Portrait of a Lady James criticizes the aesthetic position through Gilbert Osmond, it is rather to miss the irony of James's tone in The Bostonians to see a rejection of aestheticism in his decision to marry "Verena...not to the Cambridge aesthete but a backwoods lawyer who 'had seen very few pictures; there were none in Mississippi.'"[16] She rightly sees the relation of the society that is pictured in the London novels to an art object in that this society is capable, as is a work of art, of self-consciously assuming form.[17] She notes further that in the late novels "works of art... function first not as items in private collections but as clues to the motives and drives of the people to whom they are addressed and for whose use they are disposed."[18] It seems, however, that this is true as well of the early and middle fiction where Gilbert Osmond and Mrs. Gereth, to name only two, are defined by their collections.

The argument for an aesthetic morality in James was furthered in 1951 by John Henry Raleigh who sees Lockeian empiricism as basic both

to the American character and to James's particular conception of character.[19] "Each person is his own arbiter and must arrive at moral distinctions by an appeal to his own experience, which, in this case, usually means sense impressions, and, finally, morality becomes purely esthetic."[20] The difficulty with this argument seems to be its implied circularity: if James was indeed a Lockeian empiricist, then his characters' experiences were made of of Lockeian emprirical sense impressions. No sensitive reader of James could accede to the proposition that "the individual who most appreciates the beauty of a Renaissance painting is also the most moral."[21]

In The Themes of Henry James, Edwin Bowden traces the aesthetic theme in James and its connection with James's ethics.[22] The aesthetic problem is carefully treated; the moral question less so since this is not the subject of Mr. Bowden's inquiry. Nevertheless, the failure to treat the two as of equal importance leads to a one-sidedness in the study. For example, in contrasting Europe and America, he fails, by omitting from his consideration the moral excellence of America and the concommitant moral weakness of Europe from his evaluation, to apprehend the true nature of James's dilemma. Europe, then, seems the obvious choice. "Europe is the land of the arts, and its historical or social consciousness is that of its arts. America is the land without art, and its lack of a sensitive historical or social consciousness is reflected in it [sic] lack of the arts."[23] But the aesthetic ground is covered with thoroughness and insight even insofar as it is used to reflect moral attitudes.

> If the value of art lies in its relationship to human life, one means of defining the moral position of an individual is to show his particular view of the arts; is he sensitive to the human values suggested there, and so indirectly to life itself, or does he ignore with a sort of moral blindness the true values in favor of a sterile estheticism?[24]

Recently Alwyn Berland has dealt with James and the aesthetic tradition.[25] Assuming that James, like Arnold and Pater, was searching "for a structure of value and belief to replace...religious sanction,"[26] Mr. Berland sees James as having "identified his morality with ideas of culture or art."[27] Since James sought to establish the relationship of beauty and morality, he recognized both the "aesthetic fallacy" and the "Puritan fallacy"[28] which denied any such relationship. Whether or not James attempted to replace religious sanctions with cultural, it is certainly true that his late work attempts the fusion of the aesthetic and the ethical attitudes toward life; however, this ideal appears to me to be a conception that James formed rather late in his career, and that in his earlier years beauty and goodness were often at odds, not only in his fictional conflicts but in the very structure of his thought and imagination.

The question of taste and of morality becomes most complex in a consideration of the relationships between James's international and London fiction and the stories of artists and writers. This is more than the obvious theme of conflict between the artist and society; it is the problem of the relation of the artist's moral being to the ethics of the lay characters about him. Relatively little has been done to investigate this point of thematic intersection between the two types of James's work. R. P. Blackmur, in his essay "In the

Country of the Blue,"[29] claimed the artist as "only a special case of man," whose "vision is only an emphatic image of the general human vision."[30] This point of view neglects to take into consideration James's own investigations of just how problematic the artist might find the application of the general human vision to his special artistic existence. In stories such as "The Real Thing" and "The Liar", as L. H. Powers has pointed out,[31] James considers the question of the artistic, aesthetic use of one human being by another as it relates not to cruel, egotistic creatures of society, but to artists themselves. Mr. Powers has also noted that the general problem of the international fiction - which he refers to as 'being' and 'doing' - is reiterated in "The Madonna of the Future" and in The Tragic Muse.[32] Not much more has been done in this interesting area except insofar as the recent deluge of material on The Sacred Fount has touched upon the problem of the ethics of the artist and the ethics of the man in society in relation to the narrator of that work.[33]

The focus of this study is the conflict between the ethical and the aesthetic as a major continuing theme in James's fiction, a conflict which, in its tension and in its resolution, particularly affects the tone and structure of the novels and stories. Both the international and the London novels and the stories of artists and writers will be considered in order to demonstrate James's developing and changing attitude toward this conflict in the successive periods of his career. Those novels and stories that seem particularly relevant and significant have been dealt with under the assumption that an insight into the ethic-aesthetic conflict in James's work represents a useful critical tool which the reader may then himself

apply to other of James's works.

Finally, I have chosen to use as my text the New York edition of The Novels and Tales of Henry James, 1907-1917. For those novels not included in the New York edition, The Bostonians and The Sacred Fount, I have used the first editions in book form. In the case of an early short story that was never revived I have used Leon Edel's edition of The Complete Tales of Henry James, 1961 - . Because this study is conceived of as developmental, the question of the revision of early novels had to be considered; but comparisons of early and late texts of novels and stories through The Portrait of a Lady showed very few variants that were significant for this study. (Variants of any interest whatever are provided in the notes.) General critical feeling about the revisions supports my own observations; the revisions are seen as improving the surface rather than as altering the structure of the novels.[34] James himself made this clear in a letter: "To attempt to retouch the substance of the thing would be as foolish as it would be (in a done and impenetrable structure) impracticable. What I have tried for is a mere revision of surface and expression."[35]

Notes to the Introduction

1 Stuart P. Sherman, Contemporary Literature (New York, 1917). This has been anthologized in F. W. Dupee, ed., The Question of Henry James (New York, 1945), pp. 70-91, to which pages the following footnotes refer.

2 Sherman, pp. 89-90.

3 Sherman, p. 76.

4 Sherman, p. 77.

5 Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (New York, 1954); this edition of Beach's pioneer study includes a lengthy introduction with an appraisal of Jamesian criticism.

6 Beach, p. 131.

7 Beach, pp. 134, 136.

8 Beach, p. 136.

9 Beach, p. 141.

10 Beach, p. 158.

11 Beach, p. 158.

12 Beach, p. 158.

13 Adele Tintner, "The Spoils of Henry James," PMLA, LXI (1946), 239-51; anthologized by Leon Edel, ed., Henry James: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood, N. J., 1963), pp. 137-55, to which pages the following footnotes refer.

14 Tintner, p. 140.

15 Tintner, p. 150.

16 Tintner, p. 146.

17 Tintner, p. 150.

18 Tintner, p. 151.

19 John Henry Raleigh, "Henry James: The Poetics of Empiricism," PMLA, XLVI (1951), pp. 107-23.

20 Raleigh, p. 111.

21 Raleigh, p. 111.

22 Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956).

23 Bowden, p. 114.

24 Bowden, pp. 114-15.

25 Alwyn Berland, "Henry James and the Aesthetic Tradition," Journal of Intellectual History, XXIII (1962), 407-19.

26 Berland, p. 408.

27 Berland, p. 409.

28 Berland, p. 411.

29 R. P. Blackmur, "In the Country of the Blue, Kenyon Review, IV (1943), 595-617.

30 Blackmur, p. 595.

31. L. H. Powers, "Henry James and the Ethics of the Artist: 'The Real Thing' and 'The Liar,' Texas Studies in Language and Literature, III (1961),360-68.

32 L. H. Powers, "Henry James's Antinomies," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXI (1962), 125-35; and "James's The Tragic Muse - Ave atque Vale," PMLA, LXXIII (1958), 270-74.

33 Among the recent writers on The Sacred Fount to touch upon this particular point of the human ethics of the artistic situation are Landon C. Burns, "Henry James's Mysterious Fount," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, II (1961), 520-28; Arnold Hinchcliffe, "Henry James's The Sacred Fount," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, II (1961), 88-94; Leo B. Levy, "What does The Sacred Fount Mean?" College English, XXIII (1962), 381-84; Robert Perlongo, "The Sacred Fount: Labyrinth or Parable?" Kenyon Review, XXII (1960), 635-47; Ralph A. Ranald, "The Sacred Fount: James's Portrait of the Artist Manqué," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XV (1960-61), 107-25.

34 See F. O. Matthiessen, "The Painter's Sponge and Varnish Bottle," in The Major Phase (New York, 1944): "[James] knew that it would be folly to try to recast the structure of any of his works. In the first preface that he wrote, that to Roderick Hudson, he developed an analogy for his aims in the way his fellow-craftsman on canvas went about to freshen his surfaces, to restore faded values, to bring out 'buried secrets;'" p. 152. Isadore Traschen deals with James's underlining of character traits and heightening

of the impact of the love affair in The American: "An American inParis," American Literature, XXVI (1954), 67-77; "James's Revision of the Love Affair in The American," New England Quarterly, XXIX (1956), 43-62; "Henry James and the Art of Revision," Philological Quarterly, XXXV (1956), 39-47. Royal A. Gettman, "Henry James's Revision of The American," American Literature, XLI (1945), 279-95, underlines James's distinction between revision and rewriting and insists that James kept himself to revision. Hélène Harvitt, who objects to the revisions in Roderick Hudson, still sees them as stylistic only: "How James Revised Roderick Hudson, PMLA, XXXIX (1924), 203-27.

35 The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), II, 55; q. in Gettman, p. 293.

CHAPTER ONE

THE OUTLINES OF THE CONFLICT

> "She's beauty's self - she's a revelation....If beauty's the wrong thing, as people think at Northampton...she's the incarnation of evil."
> Roderick Hudson

Throughout the novels and stories of Henry James character types reappear, ethical dilemmas recur, and the existence of evil persists. And yet, no careful reader could aver that there is in any way a lack of development, in the field of ethics as in the area of narrative technique. Although James was never a didactic novelist, never let the idea take over and inundate the narrative and dramatic interest of the fiction, he nevertheless worked deeply in the field of ideas, colored his writing with a moral imagination, and worked out, in the course of his fiction, some kind of answer to the questions he had posed over the several decades of his activity. In its most basic and rudimentary form the issue that Jamesian characters face is that of moral choice between a practical, self-gratifying action and an intangible, abstract principle. This is as true for Christopher Newman as it is for Maggie Verver, and each, as Jamesian hero, is capable of renouncing personal satisfaction. This basic issue becomes complicated, however, by two major factors. For one thing, it seems clear that James became increasingly reluctant to see people, issues, and situations in terms of simple good and bad; he

began to insist upon the complexity of the ethical dilemma depending, as he realized, upon the interplay of motivating cause and anticipated effect. Secondly, the moral singlemindedness of James's own faint Puritanism, with its mistrust, in the social milieu, of beauty, taste, manners, and forms found itself in direct conflict with James's attitude toward beauty and form in the artistic word: is beauty good or evil, or is it simply not a value to be measured morally? This question grows in importance in the London novels and reaches its peak in those of the major phase, both those works that consider specifically the role of the artist, such as The Tragic Muse, and those which are set in the world of society and affairs. It is this interplay between ethics and aesthetics in the two principal milieux of James's fiction that is the particular focus of this study, which attempts to assess the developing and changing moral attitudes of Henry James as they are reflected in the fiction and to judge the effect of these attitudes themselves upon the texture of the novels and stories.

Many of James's novels are built directly upon this opposition between ethical and aesthetic attitudes. It is basic to the early Roderick Hudson, which establishes - through the characters themselves and through the narrator's comments - a dichotomy between morality and beauty, between the world of society and the world of art. On the side of art and beauty are Christina Light and Roderick himself, who smashes the bust of the Philistine Mr. Striker "in the interest of art if not of morals."[1] Rowland Mallet and Mary Garland represent virtue and morals, a more pedestrian way of life. As it

becomes clear, further, that we are presented not only with two kinds of personages but with two sets of criteria for judging them, we find the following expression, in Hudson's words, of the necessity of ethical freedom for the development of the artistic imagination.

> I think that when you expect a man to produce beautiful and wonderful works of art you ought to allow him a certain freedom of action....an artist can't bring his visions to maturity unless he has a certain experience. You demand of us to be imaginative, and you deny us the things that feed the imagination. In labor we must be as passionate as the inspired sibyl; in life we must be as regular as the postman and as satisfactory as the cook....Shoot them, the poor devils, drown them, exterminate them, if you will, in the interest of public morality: it may be morality would gain....But if you suffer them to live, let them live on their own terms and according to their own inexorable needs.
>
> (I, 224)

This "certain freedom of action" is, in this novel, exemplified not in Hudson's artistic development but in his social behavior, specifically in his pursuit of Christina Light and his abandonment, to all practical purposes, of the devoted Miss Garland. Hudson's aesthetic superiority seems to grant him ethical license. Contrasted with this is the attitude of Rowland Mallet, who will not permit himself the luxury of expressing to Mary Garland his love for her. He sacrifices his personal desires to Roderick's career, to Mary's comfort after Roderick's death, and to an ideal of honor which prevents one's falling in love with one's friend's fiancée, even when the friend has himself clearly lost all intention of marrying the girl.

If Roderick Hudson is beyond the pale of normal moral judgments, Rowland Mallet is not. In Mallet we have neither the artist nor the

Philistine; rather we discover an early rendering of the sensitive and imaginative Jamesian hero, a man who, unprotected by talent and unexcused by genius, must make his moral way through the labyrinths of social experience. Mallet is not, however, without aesthetic interest; he is capable of renunciation and sacrifice in the interest of art, in the interest, as it turns out, of Roderick Hudson, "the typical, original, aboriginal American artist." (I, 33) Nevertheless, there are times when Mallet with his earnest moral code suffers from his awareness that Hudson lacks such a code, when he wonders about the ethical responsibility - as well as the artistic responsibility - of the artist, the genius: "I think it established that in the long run egotism (in too big a dose) makes a failure in conduct: is it also true that it makes a failure in the arts?" (I, 295)

This question is not answered in Roderick Hudson unless we accept the too facile solution of Hudson's accidental death as implying that there was no possibility of his retracing the steps that had led him earlier to inspiration. But the issue is none the less central to James, both in terms of the sense of a general coloring of artistic values by ethical considerations, and in terms of the specific evil of egotism. In the early novels egotism is the great moral crime. The major case in point is, obviously, the supreme Jamesian egotist, Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady. Osmond's egotism is imaged as "hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers." (IV, 196) And the terms in which James illuminates Osmond for the reader are terms which enforce his sense of self, his refusal to surrender personal gratification, his insistence upon taking himself seriously. Osmond

serves, with every action, his enormous awareness of self.

For the non-artistic person of the early novels there are two roads, the road to sacrifice or the road to self-gratification, the way of imaginative involvement with the spirit of other human beings or the way to egotistic self-involvement. The evil characters of The American and The Portrait of a Lady are evil almost precisely as they are incapable of sacrificing any of their personal satisfactions, as they are, then, ruthlessly egotistical. And the protagonists of these novels, clearly tied to an ethic which rejects such egotism, are faced with situations in which abstract conceptual virtues are tested. Tried by frustration, rebuff, cruelty, Newman and Isabel Archer renounce revenge, satisfaction, and personal gratification, renounce indeed the very concept that they are destined to secure any personal victories.

There is, actually, little ethical complexity to such novels as The American and The Portrait; their interest comes rather from the slow unveiling of the evil hidden behind the pleasant facades of the people with whom the virtuous innocents have become involved. And this discovery of evil occurs simultaneously for the hero and for the reader. Once the depths of duplicity, deceit, and cruelty have been revealed, the issue clearly becomes one of personal gratification vs. renunciation, and this issue exists at all for the Jamesian moral hero only because the rationale for personal gratification, the push toward revenge or escape, is very great.

About the heroes and heroines who accept the necessity for renunciation centers James's ethical insight in his novels. Their

sacrificial gestures are made out of a spontaneous good will. This is the case, for example, in Isabel's decision to return to Osmond; there is no complex causal nor motivational chain operating here, but rather the simple assertion of moral principle. Significantly, while Isabel's actions up to this point have been thoroughly motivated, this action, the moral decision made disinterestedly and with an eye only to the essential, ideal good of the action is not motivated, not explained, not examined. The same is true for Christopher Newman, who, tempted by the possibility of a personal revenge, turns away from this temptation to act out of a pure and good will. Later novels do not present us with this ethical picture; characters no longer act out of a spontaneous good will. The actions of later heroes and heroines are the fruit of careful evaluation of cause and anticipated effect; spontaneity gives way to deliberation, even to casuistry.

In part, this change in James's ethical direction may be attributed to his awareness that consideration of motive and effect was dramatically and psychologically more interesting then merely spontaneous actions of the good will. Much more significant, however, is James's increasing sense of the great complexity of ethical life. And with the increased concern in the motivation to intelligent ethical behavior was a greater interest in its corollary, the motivation to intelligent, rational, unethical behavior. If Maggie Verver chooses deliberately, so does Kate Croy; neither reveals the spontaneity in her good or her evil actions that did Isabel Archer or Serena Merle.

What creates to a great extent the new complexity of the world in which these ethical or unethical decisions are made is the

increased sense of the value of the aesthetic. If the ethical is seen as that which is measured in terms of good and evil, the aesthetic is seen as that which is measured in terms of beauty or ugliness, or more precisely in James, beauty or lack of it, taste or tastelessness. The early novels have two categories for a love of beauty, of appearances. One is the world of the artist, and by extension of the extraordinarily beautiful person. The other is the world of evil, egotistic people. The good lay character is simply not concerned with beauty, or taste, or the forms as standards for conduct. But as James's respect for beauty moves out of the world of art to invade the world of society, there is an increased respect for beauty in the social world, in the non-artistic world, and with this a sense that an appreciation for things and people and actions in terms of their beauty is not an appreciation to be condemned out of hand.

With two sets of values operating at once, beauty and goodness, aesthetics and ethics, new complexities arise and new judgments are made. Serena Merle becomes the graceful Marie de Vionnet, and Osmond reappears in Chad Newsome, in Adam Verver, and in Prince Amerigo. Evil people, that is, are now reincarnated as people who lack moral single-mindedness but have a distinct value nonetheless. To complicate the issue further, early characters who were marked by moral earnestness are transformed into people now touched with an aesthetic sophistication; thus, Christopher Newman becomes Chad Newsome and Adam Verver. Chad, then, represents a sort of fusion of Osmond and Newman, a fusion of the sophisticated aesthetic egotist and the naive

robust innocent. Viewed aesthetically, he is a splendidly handsome and polished fellow; viewed morally, while he lacks Osmond's exquisite cruelty, he is fairly close to being a cad.

The aesthetic coloration is applied not only to characters in the late novels who behave in patterns traditionally evil if not actually conceived as evil in James's work but to characters who are conceived as good. Maggie Verver moves from an innocence so complete as to be destructive of her own marriage and her father's to an experience that involves the knowledge of the manipulation of appearances and the aesthetic awareness of their importance. Maggie comes as a culmination in a slow development of the stature of the aesthetic. In the early novels this attitude was confined to villains - with the obvious exception of artists; later, in the London novels, the aesthetic attitude is attributed to characters whose ethics are virtually non-existent but who are not the cruel evil-doers of the early novels. In The Ambassadors an aesthetic attitude is given Strether, who adopts this viewpoint but does not act upon it. In The Golden Bowl the heroine not only learns to see aesthetically but to act aesthetically as well.

To act aesthetically. This phrase is precise and meaningful in a consideration of James's novels. To act aesthetically is to act in accordance with the world of appearances; to mold one's behavior along lines which conform to manners, tastes, forms; to be concerned with how attractive something may appear rather than with how good something may be. Osmond behaves gracefully, covering his deceit and

adultry and egotism with the cultivated genius of his manners. Madame de Vionnet likewise behaves with a determination to cover her actions with a veneer of gracefulness. Maggie Verver learns to use appearances to cover her manipulation of the reality. What changes in James is not the meaning of the aesthetic action but the judgment he makes ot if; aesthetic behavior is unethical, evil behavior in the early novels. In the late novels it is not evil. It may be immoral for Madame de Vionnet to be involved in an adulterous relationship with Chad, but it is neither moral nor immoral to cover this reality with a pleasant facade - it is simply more aesthetic, more tasteful. Further, in the late novels the creation of a facade may be as true an act, as honest an expression of character, as was the moral earnestness of Isabel Archer. There is also the suggestion that if there must be evil, if there must be adultery, it might well be tastefully expressed, aesthetically treated.

This, one notes, brings up a further difficulty. If it is best for Madame de Vionnet to treat her adultery aesthetically, is this not the same as saying that it is best - in an imperfect world - for deception to be practiced? As far as The Ambassadors goes, it would seem that James accepts this. But in The Golden Bowl we are presented with a heroine who is harmed by the deception; aesthetic behavior here is part of the complex network that causes Maggie's suffering. But even Maggie has no desire to eliminate the deceptive fiction that covers the two marriages with a cloak of respectibility; she uses the fiction herself, and under its folds works to remake a reality of her

own choosing. Maggie does not eliminate deception by eliminating the appearances which are deceiving; on the contrary she keeps the appearances and makes the reality fit them. And there can be no greater celebration of the aesthetic than this preservation of the beautiful while a good is being created to fit it. Further, at thie point in the fiction, reality seems to exist tangibly and perceptibly only in and through the appearances which express or realize it.

What Maggie Verver is doing is very like what the artist is seen as doing in James's fiction about artists. James's artists not only produce images that are like the phenomenal world which they see; they produce pictures as well that incorporate in some way a vision of the ideal, the idea, the concept of perfect beauty that they have perceived. The artist begins and ends with appearances, with the phenomenal world. Through this world he sees his vision of the idea, and in material terms - in pigments or words - he realizes this idea. The idea is intangible, invisible, realizable only in terms of appearances; and this is precisely the value of appearances to the artist: they are his media. If art represents the union of the idea and the medium, of concept and phenomenon, then the world of appearances has enormous value, representing one half of the artist endeavor. Maggie, in these terms, is creating a fusion of the real and the apparent, of the ethical and the aesthetic, and this cannot be done until the aesthetic is comprehended as of value.

The value of the aesthetic is demonstrated by the metamorphosis of James's moral vision as it was pervaded by the aesthetic ideal in

the later novels. The new ethical-aesthetic morality altered, among other things, James's conception of character; this can be illustrated through a comparison of Gilbert Osmond and Prince Amerigo. The villainous husband of The Portrait and the graceful, valuable, if erring husband of The Golden Bowl are created along strikingly parallel lines. Both Osmond and Amerigo are conceived in terms of royalty; Amerigo is a Prince and a descendant of princes. Osmond is, of course, not royalty, but the terms of princeliness recur in descriptions of him. He is seen as "rather like a demoralized prince in exile." (III, 352) Madame Merle says of him, "For all I do know he may be a prince in disguise; he rather looks like one, by the way - like a prince who has abdicated in a fit of fastidiousness and has been in a state of disgust ever since." (III, 358) We are told of both that they are often bored. Their manners, however, are perfection; so much so that for Isabel it becomes enormously significant that she comes upon Madame Merle standing while Gilbert Osmond remains seated. Both measure human relationships through convention and taste. Osmond is "convention itself," and Amerigo tells Fanny Assingham that English morality is a mystery to him since his way of perceiving proper behavior is so much different, so much a matter of instinctive form. Amerigo, in the well-known passage from The Golden Bowl, finds that his "taste" is all at sea, and he has nothing to substitute for it except a vague and new reliance on Maggie's forms. For both men, furthermore, there are parallels in situation. Adultery is the major "crime" for each, adultery leading, moreover,

to deception. In both cases adultery is complicated by other ties; thus, for Osmond the child of his adulterous relationship becomes a reason for his marriage to Isabel, a marriage arranged by the child's mother. Amerigo commits adultery with his step-mother-in-law, an even more sordid bit of philandering than that of which Osmond was culpable. Further, Amerigo's adultery is made still uglier than Osmond's since it occurs not only in the past but in the course of the novel. There is perhaps no more obvious index of the changing moral condition of James's vision than the fact that the actions themselves of the Prince are more immoral than Osmond's, but that it is Osmond, not Amerigo, who emerges for the reader as consummately evil.

It is not only James's attitude toward his characters which changes, but his attitude as well toward significant actions. The lie, for example, runs through the course of the fiction as an index to character. James's heroes, for all the increasing casuistry or pragmatism of their ethical attidues, are essentially informed with a rigorous ethic; the good people do not lie, or feel that they should not. But in the later James, from The Spoils of Poynton on, lying becomes an act forced upon nearly every character because of the development of moral dilemmas in which the lie is the lesser of two evils. What becomes the point of discrimination for James in the evaluation of the lie is the motivation and the effect of the lie: is the liar self-interested or selfless? The complexities increase when we see that for James the lie can be more than a socially undesireable act that is sometimes necessary; it can be, as well, an

artistic act. In the short story "The Liar" we find the following description of Colonel Capadose: "He's the liar platonic...he's disinterested....It's art for art - he's prompted by some love of beauty." (XII, 350)

It is by such subtle possibilities of interrelation of the ethic and the artistic spheres that James reveals the complex relationship of his moral and aesthetic attitudes. A similar problem arises out of the act of collecting. Early collectors are either evil - like Osmond - or naive - like Christopher Newman, who announces, "Oh, I mean to buy a great many pictures - beaucoup, beaucoup." (II, 8) Collecting becomes an increasingly disturbing ethical problem in James as we find the collector often collecting people as well as things. This is true of later characters such as Mrs. Gereth and Adam Verver and is suggested as well in the early Christopher Newman who speaks of his search for a wife: "She must be as good as she's beautiful and as clever as she is good. I can give my wife many things, so I'm not afraid to ask certain others myself....I want, in a word, the best article in the market." (II, 49) How complicated the question becomes is apparent from the fact that we are speaking here of a hero, Christopher Newman; of a man who is at least as far from being evil as he is puzzling and enigmatic, Adam Verver; and of a villain, Gilbert Osmond. Collecting involves, or ought to, the recognition of beauty, which is in itself a worthy attribute. But it involves as well the desire for possession, which is at best an ambivalent quality. Collecting is a central issue just because in

the judging of a collector both the aesthetic and the ethical attitudes come into play, and if the collector is treated differently at different times in James's career, this is precisely a reflection of his changing attitude toward the relationship of the ethical and the aesthetic, and of the relative value of each.

Since the aesthetic attitude is found in people who are mannered and tasteful, it is found clearly in people who are, and again this pertains particularly to the earlier novels, evil. To a certain extent these characters are evil in their actions proportionately as they are aesthetic in their attitudes. Thus, taste is not only important, it is more important than honesty: the Bellegards lie to Newman and quietly subvert his plans rather than openly come into opposition with him and thus expose themselves in any "vulgar" way. Osmond, capable of adultery, deceit, cruelty, is not capable of a "scene." In addition, an aesthetic attitude is often attributed to characters in James who are particularly beautiful human beings. The honest heroines of James are not beautiful as a group, although at times they are granted a beauty not readily available to the vulgar perception. In The Portrait we hear that "nineteen persons out of twenty...pronounced Edith infinitely the prettier of the two; but the twentieth, besides reversing this judgment, had the entertainment of thinking all the others aesthetic vulgarians." (III, 44-45) Fleda Vetch of The Spoils of Poynton is another heroine whose beauty is not generally discerned. In the late novels as well beauty is attributed not to the noble heroines, not to "little" Maggie and "strange" Milly, but to the egotistic villain-figures, Charlotte and Kate.

The Jamesian heroine is not then associated with beauty. She is neither beautiful herself nor is she very much involved with beauty in art, which she enjoys but does not worship. Further, while she is certainly polite and mannerly, she is not a student of taste or manners. The heroine is a figure who sees the world through an ethical vision, a vision clouded no doubt by inexperience and innocence, but a vision that is not distorted by an aesthetic attitude. In this connection there is the particular suggestion - most notable in the early novels - of the Puritan attitude that sees beauty as the enemy of virtue, that places beauty and virtue on opposite ends of the moral spectrum. When Roderick Hudson first sees Christina Light, he notes that, "She's beauty's self - she's a revelation." and then adds, "If beauty's the wrong thing, as people think at Northampton...she's the incarnation of evil." (I, 95-96) Hudson is obviously being witty, as is James, who is certainly not to be considered as promulgating so baldly naive and Philistine a dictum. But for all James's escape in training and background from Puritan America, it seems that we find its mark on him; for there remains the fact that in these early novels, and to some extent in the later works, it is the beautiful people and the people who admire and collect and understand the value of beautiful objects who are evil.

Yet even in the early period we find in James a suggestion that this is not all so simple. It is not only the evil character who represents beauty and the aesthetic point of view, but the artist as well, and throughout James's career that studies of the artist carry

with them quite the opposite moral force from that of works such as The American and The Portrait. In those novels the good people perceived ethically and rejected an aesthetic attitude toward or perception of life. But in "The Madonna of the Future," an early story concerned with the artist, we find a point of view which suggests that for the artist there are criteria which in no way reflect the ethical. In Roderick Hudson, as well, there is manifested an inability to decide about the relative values of the two ways of life. Indeed James seems to say that Mary Garland and Rowland Mallet are ethical people who must be judged on moral grounds; while, on the other hand, Christina Light because of her beauty and Roderick Hudson because of his genius are to be judged aesthetically - at least, are not to be judged with the same criteria that we use for Mary and Rowland.

This direct confrontation of the aesthetic and the ethical recurs in The Tragic Muse, in which we find the world of society and government opposed to the world of the arts, both visual and dramatic. Here the conflict is more interesting than that in the earlier novel, because here the major characters are touched by both sets of standards and must choose between them. The Tragic Muse opposes the ethical and the aesthetic views in a situation directly involving the arts; in the rest of the London novels this opposition of views becomes possible for James within the social milieu alone. Once James has made his statement for art, for beauty, for the aesthetic standpoint, in fiction directly concerned with art - "The Madonna of the Future," Roderick Hudson, "The Real Thing," and The Tragic Muse - he

finds it increasingly difficult to isolate this standpoint, not to find it both operative and valuable in the world of society. This is the particular function of the London novels: the investigation of the value of the aesthetic attitude in a world which is practically devoid of pure ethical standards on the part of all but the most innocent characters, those who are, primarily, children and adolescents, or those who have for some reason remained untouched by society. The social-political question, investigated in The Princess Casamassima, becomes for James a conflict between the ethical value of helping the lot of suffering mankind and the aesthetic value of the beauty that would be destroyed in any successful revolution. The interplay between the two points of view is very evident here, for the aesthetic value of man's beautiful monuments takes on an ethical validity; it becomes ethically right, morally imperative for Robinson - and here one feels for James - to protect the beautiful at no matter what cost. In Paris Robinson sees that "what was supreme in his mind to-day was not the idea of how the society that surrounded him should be destroyed; it was much more the sense of the wonderful, precious things it had produced, of the fabric of beauty and power it had raised." (VI, 124-25) Hyacinth Robinson is confused in his early purpose and confirmed in his act of suicide not only because of an aesthetic appreciation of beauty but because of an awareness of the moral value of the beautiful.

In The Princess Casamassima, then, the aesthetic takes on ethical validity. In The Awkward Age ethical standards are virtually non-

existent; aesthetic standards have replaced them. An example of this is the kind of consideration Mrs. Brookenham and Vanderbank gave to the possibility of Carrie Donner's "bolting" with Captain Dent-Douglas. Mrs. Brook's "morality" is to prevent this: "We're all clutching her," but clutching her because "She's the delight of our life....the ornament of our circle....she will, she won't, she won't, she will! It's the excitement, every day, of plucking the daisy over." (IX, 178) The immoral behavior of one human being become the source of amusement and of vicarious excitement for other human beings, becomes, that is, an aesthetic interest for them. Finally, in The Sacred Fount the ethical disappears. Through the mind of the narrator suspected love affairs are dissected and examined with a detached, artistic pleasure, never judged with a moral intention.

The novels of the London period differ from the rest of the Jamesian canon in that they have no hero in the sense in which the hero exists in both earlier and later works;[2] that is, they have no character of mature consciousness who, faced with a moral conflict, chooses renunciation over personal satisfaction. When the hero returns in the late period he is not, despite the experimentation of the middle period, markedly different at the outset from the hero of the early period. Maggie Verver and Milly Theale are conceived initially as close to the ethical and as far from the aesthetic in their behavior as was Isabel Archer. What has changed in regard to the late heroes is their increased complexity of perception. In Lambert Strether, for example, we see the development in a man whose

morals were securely founded on traditional principles of a new ethic which operates pragmatically and which is moved by beauty and taste. Strether's enlarged perception of the beautiful informs his judgment of the good. In these novels ethical and aesthetic forces are opposed and, for the hero, fused; in this fusion James indicates that the aesthetic perception is a part of the total ethical experience.

The late hero in James differs from the early, then, not in the original conception of his character within the novel, but in his new ability to develop a complex ethic. Concommitantly, the antagonists and the situations of these novels reflect this complexity. The anti-hero, as has been suggested above, is seen in the late period in a more comprehensive and sympathetic light. Further, the very nature of the situation and its conflicts grows in complexity. The early novels presented the hero with choices that were difficult because they required moral courage, but the boundaries of good and evil were clearly delineated and the evil characters sufficiently identified. In the final novels there is a much more complex moral landscape in which the territories of good and evil have lost their clear and obvious distinctions.

This increasingly complex moral world is, in part at least, the product of the tension between the ethical and the aesthetic. The following chapters investigate the effect of the shifting roles of the ethical and the aesthetic on James's moral vision and, concommitantly, on the fabric of the novels and stories themselves.

The Jamesian canon as a whole reveals the conflict between the demands made on James by the Puritan ethic and those made by his own artistic commitment. Finally, a harmonious, if uneasy, resolution is achieved in which the perception of the beautiful becomes an aspect of the participation in the good.

Notes to Chapter One

1 Henry James, The Novels and Tales of Henry James, 26 vols. (New York, 1907-17), I, 38. Hereafter all references to works included in the New York edition will be referred to in the text by the appropriate volume and page number.

2 For a discussion of the hero of the London novels see J. A. Ward, "The Ineffectual Heroes of James's Middle Period," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, II (1960), 315-27.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ANTIPATHETIC WORLDS OF ART AND HISTORY

> London is on the whole the most possible form of life.
> I take it as an artist and as a bachelor.
> Notebooks, 1881

In 1881 James returned to America after a prolonged stay in Europe. From Boston and New York hotel rooms he wrote, in his notebooks, of the years he had just passed in London. His somewhat self-congratulatory reminiscences concern particularly his final success in establishing himself in London where he could work profitably and live socially. The world of London society was necessary to James as the spring from which he drew ideas of character and situation to be developed in his fiction. Society seemed necessary as well for satisfactions that were more personal than professional. Both the bachelor and the artist, then, turned to the London world, but the artist needed as well his private world with the seclusion in which he could successfully work.

In his early fiction James touches upon the antipathetic demands of the private, the artistic life and the world of society; not insofar as these worlds made specifically different demands upon him or any artist, but insofar as these worlds had different standards, different mores, different ethics. In the first period of James's writing there are then two types of works: better known are those which deal with the world of society; less popular are those which

study the problems and the ideals of the artist. In this duality of interest rests the basis for the conflict in James's writing between the two worlds in which he dwelt.

I

> These things of mine were pretty devilish good....
> But my idea was so much better!
> Roderick Hudson

Central to the early stories of artists is the pursuit for the idea and the artist's attempt to realize this idea in his art. In this early period the art in question is commonly sculpture or painting, often portraiture. The artistic idea in question may be an insight into the character of the model or it may be a glimpse of "perfect beauty;" in any case, it is this attempt to grasp and to realize the idea that separates the true artist of such works as "The Story of a Masterpiece" and Roderick Hudson from the poseur in The Four Meetings" who gazes at "a red cloth hung out of an old window," musing, "That's a very nice bit....Nice bit of color.... Composes well. Fine old tone. Make a nice thing." (XVI, 285)

In the very early "The Story of a Masterpiece," Baxter, a young artist is asked by Lennox to paint a portrait of his fiancée, Marian Everett. The complication arises from the fact that Marian had once jilted Baxter, but this fact is at first hidden from Lennox. Baxter, who is very talented, creates on canvas a statement of the

heartlessness of the model; but it is central to James's purpose that in painting so accurate a study Baxter is motivated not at all by personal malice but by artistic aims alone.[1] It is this insistence on the absence of malice in Baxter's work that makes the story significant; there is simply in Baxter more artistic than human nature. Sympathy for extra-artistic considerations is necessarily diminished. Baxter perceives aesthetically, and James finds, at this time, 1868, that singleminded aesthetic perception is the hallmark of a true artist: nothing must stand between him and the realization of his idea.

> It is very certain that [Baxter] had actually infused into his picture that force of characterization and that depth of reality which had arrested his friend's attention; but he had done so wholly without effort and without malice. The artistic half of Baxter's nature exerted lusty dominion over the human half - fed upon its disappointments and grew fat upon its joys and tribulations. This, indeed, is simply saying that the young man was a true artist.[2]

Neither Baxter's character nor his genius is the actual subject of this romantic and not very original tale which concentrates more on the melodramatic effect on Lennox of the revelation of his fiancée's character; nevertheless, the nature of Baxter as an artist is not passed over lightly. The reader is assured that the painter is both talented and sincere and that the work in question is a fine one. Baxter "had painted with something more than knowledge - with imagination, with feeling." (Tales, I, 285) So forceful and

accurate is the portrait that it has the capacity to bring Lennox to the point of emotional crisis. Thoroughly shaken, Lennox begins to equate the reality of the painting and the subject. The portrait disturbs, even haunts, him until it becomes clear that he can bear to live with the woman but not with the painting; for it is the painting that has become too real. He does indeed marry Marian but destroys the commissioned portrait with the words, "Come!...Marian may be what God has made her, but this detestable creature I can neither love nor respect." (Tales, I, 295)

Despite its rather clumsy melodrama, the story provides suggestions for issues that will be found again in James's later work. For one thing, the power of art to reveal the truth and to reflect human weaknesses is insisted upon. Secondly, the importance of the imagination is made clear, particularly in its ability to take the artist beyond the mere clever recording of the actual to some realization of his idea. There is as well the implication that for the artist there are other criteria, other standards of measurement than those used for people who are not creators. Baxter is not malicious in his portrait of Marian, but neither is he kind, careful to avoid portraying the baseness of her character. As an artist he feeds on life, indifferent to joy and suffering.

Baxter sees life aesthetically, with an eye to its beauty, not with a consideration of its ethical implications; life, in fact, has significance primarily as a source for art. When Lennox reads the moral of the portrait, he accuses Baxter of having made the painting

out of revenge for unrequited love; Baxter replies, "It's a very handsome revenge....I've painted for Miss Everett the best portrait that has yet been painted in America." (Tales, I, 288) And that, to Baxter, is the only significant point about his work. For Lennox, for the man who is not an artist, whose attitude is not aesthetic, the point is quite different; he considers that the human model should be more important than the painting, that the painting indeed should gain its importance from the model. James's sympathies are drawn toward the aesthetic attitude; he grants existence to the painting in his description of the final destruction of the portrait as Lennox drags his knife through the living canvas.[3]

"The Madonna of the Future" is a somewhat later and a great deal more subtle and complicated story involving the nature of art. The melodramatic function of "The Story of a Masterpiece" has been abandoned, and the interest is more "psychological." The aspects of art and of society - in the persons, respectively, of Theobald, the artist, and Mrs. Coventry - are placed in opposition by the narrator, who stands between them. A second opposition is established between the true and the false nature of art. Since this question is taken up again in Roderick Hudson, it was presumably a question of some concern to the young James. True art involves the conception of an ideal, and in "The Madonna of the Future" the ideal is celebrated even in its failure to be realized. Theobald is an artist with a vision but an artist who cannot produce this vision. Conversely, the facile producer of obscene monkeys and cats whose clever hands pervert

the purpose of art represents mechanical ability without a conception of the ideal. True art, in "The Madonna of the Future," is established as something exclusive of success, success, that is, as the world judges it.[4]

A central concern in the story is the artist's conception of the beautiful, particularly of his idea of beauty. Theobald, who has quite captivated the curiosity of the narrator, has lost the faith of Mrs. Coventry and her "artistic" circle. She had sat for him and he made of her a "horrible creature," or so she tells the narrator. "His strong point, he intimated, was his sentiment; but is it a consolation, when one has been painted a fright, to know it has been done with peculiar gusto?" Mrs. Coventry wants beauty - as she conceives it - and not "sentiment" or imagination. Now, she continues to the narrator, "he'll tell you I'm a horrible ugly old woman who has vowed his destruction." (XIII, 460) And Theobald does indeed tell the narrator that Mrs. Coventry is "a most vain woman" who "profanes sacred words." (XIII, 462)

At this point James allows us to meet Theobald's conception of "the most beautiful woman in Italy." "This woman's beauty...is a revelation, a lesson, a morality, a poem!" (XIII, 464) The narrator meets Serafina under Theobald's auspices and undergoes a series of changing reactions. He tells us first "that she was indeed a beautiful woman," although past her youth. A bit further on he adds that she "betrayed rather a vulgar stagnation of mind...And furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout." (XIII, 467) When the

narrator returns to Serafina's apartment and meets the purveyor of monkeys and cats, he goes further, "She was coarse." (XIII, 478) With the narrator's diminishing appreciation of Serafina's beauty comes his increasing admiration of Theobald's artistic genius. Theobald becomes "a poet," able, one supposes, to find beauty where, to the vulgar eye, there is none.

Theobald, indeed informs the narrator that physical, worldly beauty is not the source of artistic beauty, and cites as an example Raphael's Madonna of the Chair, for the narrator has tried to attribute its success to the beauty of the model.

> As pretty a young woman as you please! It doesn't diminish the miracle. He took his hint of course, and the young woman possibly sat smiling before his canvas. But meanwhile the painter's idea had taken wings. No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact....he rose to the vision without tremour, without effort of wing; he communed with it face to face.
>
> (XIII, 449)

The narrator, with a smile, asks if the idealistic artist says to nature, "Go to, you're all wrong!" Theobald replies, "No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination intensifies them."[5] (XIII, 450) The artist, then, like the non-artist, sees reality; but his imagination perceives something more, the ideal, the idea, something that is not accessible to the non-creative vision until it has been realized, made sensible, by the artist.

Theobald represents the first in a line of Jamesian artists who are conceived as genuine artists and yet considered failures by the world's standards; moreover, Theobald fails of artistic success insofar as he has not made his vision perceptible. Worldly success, ironically, is envisaged in the monkey-sculptor. He has invented, he tells the narrator, the style of his statues, the concept of statuary satire, and the chemical substance from which the statues are made. What has this to do with art? The narrator is forced to admit that the works are clever and expressive; yet all the cleverness of hand turned to such purpose is "revolting." And James makes the man himself revolting to the reader through the suave innuendoes of his dialogue.

> I likewise execute figures to command. You have perhaps some little motive - the fruit of your own philosophy of life, signore - which you would like to have interpreted. I can promise to work it up to your satisfaction; it shall have as many high lights and sharp accents as you please![6]
>
> (XIII, 483)

While the sculptor works with malice, Theobald tries to create the expression of perfect love - a madonna. And yet there is finally nothing but "a canvas that was a mere dead blank cracked and discoloured by time." (XIII, 485) The failure may seem complete; but there remains, nevertheless, the artistic success implicit in the value of the vision, the idea, even the unrealized idea. Theobald

chastises himself for never having begun, for having allowed all the "elements" to be stagnant in his brain. "We talents that can't act, that can't do or dare! We take it out in talk, in plans and promises, in study, in vision." But then he adds, "But our visions, let me tell you...have a way of being brilliant, and a man hasn't lived in vain who has seen the things I've seen!" (XIII, 486) This is the justification for Theobald's life and dream, and it is not a justification to be dismissed as negligible. That James concedes a kind of success to Theobald is evident through the contrast with the sculptor of monkeys and cats.

The story is not, however, without its irony. Theobald had the conception but not the power of realizing it. The sculptor, for all his coarse vulgarity, had the touch, the felicity of his hands. Theobald expresses this, "I'm the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning ready fingers of some dull copist or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch!" (XIII, 487) When Theobald cries, "I need only the hand of Raphael. His brain I already have," we remember Mrs. Coventry's similar remark, unpleasantly ironic though it is, "Hadn't he the very hair of Raphael flowing down on his shoulder? The hair, alas - it's his difficulty - appears to have to do duty for the head." (XIII, 486, 459)[7]

In Roderick Hudson James gives us the artist who is gifted both with a vision of the ideal and with the skill to execute his vision. In the course of the novel, however, Hudson gradually loses touch

with his genius until, just before his death, a morbid depression urges him to a flight from beauty. The artist in Hudson falters and fails in this novel as the man within him grows more and more worldly and corrupted.

This novel more than any other of James's' works is a study of the individual artist. James himself must have felt the terror of losing his genius at the mercy of an increasingly importunate social world, and yet he too enjoyed many of society's pleasures. In Boston he writes in his Notebooks for 1881 of the pleasures of London.

> When one starts in the London world (and one cares enough about it, as I did, to make one's self agreeable, as I did) cela va de soi; it goes with increasing velocity.
>
> At last, I forget exactly when, I was elected to the Reform....This was an excellent piece of good fortune, and the Club has ever since been, to me, a convenience of the first order.[8]

There follow enumerations of many happy country visits; and then:

> I wished to get away from the London crowd, the London hubbub, all the entanglements and interruptions of London life; and to bring my novel to a close.
>
> (Notebooks, p. 30)
>
> ...in London, and spent ten days...there, very pleasantly, at the end of August. Delightful to me is London at that time, after the horrors of the season have spent themselves.
>
> (Notebooks, p. 36)

Roderick Hudson, however, is no James; for one thing Roderick had "no manners, in strict parlance, at all." (I, 100) And for another, Roderick falls in love with a woman, and one who is certainly not very "good" for him. Nevertheless, in this novel we can see James examining the pull of society on an artist, a pull he had experienced himself, and Jame's verdict is that society holds mortal dangers for the artist.

The decline of Roderick Hudson as an artist goes hand in hand with his decline as a moral man, although James never insists outright upon a causal relationship between the two. But the honest, talented young man who left Northampton engaged to the virtuous Mary Garland is not the same young man who cries, at the close of the novel, of Christina Light, now the Princess Casammassima, "Do me good?...What do I want of 'good' - what should I do with 'good?' I want what she gives me, call it by what name you will." (I, 502) And who laments that "Everything's insolent, defiant, atrocious with beauty. Nothing's ugly but me - me and my poor dead brain!" (I, 457) Earlier Hudson had made a plea for the moral freedom of the artist;[9] and it seems that James concurs with him in principle, for you cannot constrain the artist to the codified morality of a Mr. Leavenworth who would hire an artist to produce a statue of "Intellectual Refinement." But Roderick has lost not only the codified morality, the inhibiting ethic of Northampton, he has - once he falls in love with Christina - lost all sense of his responsibility toward other human beings, toward Rowland who has brought him to Rome, toward his mother who

worships him, and toward Mary Garland who loves him. Even more important, however, is Roderick's loss of artistic commitment. Hudson, with his passion for Christina, has coincidently abandoned his virtuous Northampton friends and his genius; but the profound immorality, the great issue, is not so much, for Hudson's career as an artist, that Christina wins him from the noble Miss Garland, but that she wins him from his studio.

The novel portrays an artist tortured by failing talent and vision and frustrated by love. As he fails more and more of his artistic purpose, Roderick expresses to Rowland Mallet his unsuccessful search for his idea.

> Your friend Stendhal writes on his book-covers... that he has seen too early in life <u>la beauté parfaite</u>. I don't know how early he saw it; I saw it before I was born - in another state of being. I can't describe it positively; I can only say I don't find it anywhere now.
> (I, 273)

He goes on to catalogue the places where perfect beauty is not to be found, and he admits it is not in society, in champagne, in beautiful women with exposed shoulders, nor in "squalid black streets" or Roman ruins. Even in his art the ideal eludes him. "Nothing is good but one!" he continues, "Those things of mine were pretty devilish good....But my idea was so much better!" (I, 273) Roderick loses, before he ever fully develops, the power to realize his ideal.

The importance of single-mindedness for the artist is brought out in the discussions of art in the circle embracing Gloriani, Singleton, and Miss Blanchard. Gloriani is a "sculptor of the sophisticated school." He represents in part a refined descendent of the monkey-sculptor of "The Madonna of the Future" in his depreciation of any metaphysical search after beauty and purity: "It is a waste of wit to nurse metaphysical distinctions and a sadly meagre entertainment to caress imaginary lines;...the thing to aim at is the expressive and the way to reach it is by ingenuity." (I, 107) If Gloriani stands for "art with a mixed motive, skill unleavened by faith," Sam Singleton is quite another case. Loving art, he came to Rome where "he painted worthless daubs and gave no promise of talent. Improvement had come, however, hand in hand with patient industry, and his talent, though of a slender and delicate order, was now incontestable." (I, 123, 108) Roderick is in the fortunate position of sharing both Singleton's belief in art and Gloriani's manual talent. "Roderick...seemed the beautiful image of a genius which combined sincerity with power." (I, 123) What the novel stresses is that even this great a talent and this clear an ideal cannot withstand the impact of desertion; Roderick's immorality does not lie in his behavior toward Mary but in his attitude toward his work once he falls in love with Christina. James, then, is willing to go a long way for the ethical freedom of the artist, but the one ethic that cannot be forsworn is that owed to art itself.

The ethical man, as contrasted to the artistic man, is represented by Rowland Mallet, the wealthy amateur with an interest in the arts.

James goes to great lengths to explain what he considers an anomaly in Mallet's character: a Puritan morality and a love for art. "He had sprung from stiff Puritan stock and had been brought up to think much more intently of the duties of our earthly pilgrimage than of its privileges and pleasures." (I, 9) From his father's side Mallet inherited the moral predisposition that appears in his treatment of Mary Garland, whom he loves but to whom he will not reveal his love. On the other hand, there is in him a different strain; for his maternal grandfather, "a little bronzed and wizened man, with eccentric opinions...advocated the creation of a public promenade along the sea, with arbors and little green tables for the consumption of beer, and a platform, surrounded by Chinese lanterns, for dancing." (I, 11) This Captain Rowland married "a young person of mysterious origin who did her hair in fantastically elaborate plaits and in whose appearance 'figure' enjoyed...striking predominance." (I, 10) These combinations produced a man who thought "it would be the work of a good citizen to go abroad and with all expedition and secrecy purchase certain valuable specimens of the Dutch and Italian schools...and then present his treasures out of hand to an American city...in which at that time there prevailed a good deal of fruitless aspiration toward an art-museum." (I, 6) Art and philanthropy mix in Rowland Mallet in somewhat the same way they do in Adam Verver many years later. But Mallet is self-conscious about his love for art even in the consideration of so noble an undertaking; he lacked "the simple, sensuous, confident relish of pleasure." "He was an awkward mixture of moral and aesthetic

curiosity." (I, 15-16)[11] James, at least, conceives of the mixture as awkward.

It is significant that Mallet represented for James such an unlikely combination of types that James provided him with an explanatory genealogy.[12] There are passages which seem contradictory in their representation of Mallet. At times James thinks of him as a moral Puritan, without the Puritan dismissal of art. This is particularly evident in his relationship with Mary Garland. Elsewhere, however, there are suggestions of a kind of sophistication to be found in later characters who have no ancestry, spiritual or actual, in Puritan America. Typically, one such suggestion involves lying; in Northampton Rowland Mallet meets Mrs. Hudson and Mr. Striker and finds that the awkward scene is not eased by any pleasanteries: "No one evidently was used to offering hollow welcomes or telling polite fibs." (I, 51) Further on there is the interesting exchange between Hudson and Mallet on the former's new sophistication after he has lived a short while in Rome. Rowland says, "You're, in the literal sense of the word, more civilized. I dare say...that Miss Garland would think so." Roderick is not so naive, "That's not what she would call it; she would say I'm hideously corrupted....Why, she's a stern moralist, and she would infer from my appearance that I had become a gilded profligate." (I, 86)[13]

Rowland is James's consciousness in this novel, though not used as such with the skill that will develop later. As an early reflector, Mallet represents one fairly typical Jamesian interpretation of the

non-artist: sensitive, moral, intelligent, and - significantly - aware of himself as handicapped in some mysterious way by his lack of artistic genius. He becomes, as a sort of compromise, a person "with the habits of a collector." (I, 94) But this collecting does not become in any way the insidious manipulation of people it may become in later novels; he "works" Roderick only insofar as he continually persuades him to pursue his art.[14]

Standing midway between the aesthetic, artistic Hudson and the Philistine types such as Striker and Leavenworth, Rowland examines the problems of morality for him and for Roderick. For himself, he insists on the sternest of moralities; but for Roderick he can only wonder "gloomily...whether for men of his friend's large easy powers there was not an ampler moral law than for narrow mediocrities like himself, who, yielding Nature a meagre interest on her investment (such as it was), had no reason to expect from her this affectionate laxity as to their accounts." (I, 189)

Beyond Roderick and Rowland there are characters in the novel that suggest types we are to meet again later. One example is the viciously unimaginative collector Leavenworth, who failing with Roderick, turns to the female painter, Miss Blanchard, to whom he becomes engaged. Madame Grandoni speaks of this liaison in terms of collecting, in terms equating people with objects of furniture; this image recurs in later novels as indicative of an ethic the very opposite of the ethic of creative art.[15]

> It was a matter of course perhaps that Mr. Leavenworth, who seems to be going about Europe with the sole view of picking up furniture for his 'home,' as he calls it, should think Miss Blanchard a very handsome morceau: but it was not a matter of course - or it needn't have been - that she would be willing to become a sort of superior table-ornament. (I, 366)

When he visits Roderick's studio, Leavenworth speaks of art as a sort of illustration of morality. "Intoxication...is not a proper subject for sculpture....I myself touch liquor in no shape whatever." And, "Spotless marble seems to be false to itself when it represents anything less than Conscious Temperance." Leavenworth then turns to the statue Roderick has begun for him, "The cerebral development...strikes me as not sufficiently emphasized. Our subject being Intellectual Refinement, there should be no mistaking the intellect."[16] Roderick replies, "A sculptor isn't a tailor, and I didn't measure you for a pair of trousers. Did you ever hear of inspiration? Mine's dead!... You yourself killed it." (I, 299-304)

This issue sets up the most deadly opposition between art and morals, not personal behavior or social ethics, but morality that would dictate the subject and the execution of artistic works. This is even more dangerous than the Puritan mistrust of art as seen in the characters from Northampton. To these characters, beauty will remain a mystery; Mrs. Hudson, for one, can only exclaim of Rome, "To think of art being out there in the streets!" (I, 328) For Mary, on the other hand, a precursor of many sympathetic American female pilgrims in James, the artistic world of Europe half-opens new doors. In a

rather pathetic series of remarks to Rowland she tells him that the presence and influence of so much beauty, the concept that the world possesses so much pleasure, has weakened the strength of her moral fiber.

> I used to think...that if any trouble came to me I should bear it like a stoic. But that was at home, where things don't speak to us of enjoyment as they do here. Here it's such a mixture; one doesn't know what to choose, what to believe. Beauty stands there - beauty such as this night and this place and this sad strange summer have been so full of - and it penetrates to one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made, as we think at home, to struggle so much and miss so much, but to ask of life as a matter of course some beauty and some charm.[17]
>
> (I, 456-57)

This becomes the problem of Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman; softened by a life which tells them they are to be happy and seems not to demand arduous sacrifices, they find that the native air was correct. Mary Garland never emerges as a fully-realized character, but in her shadowy way does indicate problems that James is to deal with.

Christina Light is quite the opposite sort of Jamesian female figure. Endowed with great beauty and trained like a princess by her stupid and greedy mother, she recognizes Roderick's greatness, his "sacred fire." She tells Rowland that he would be "shocked at [her] knowledge of evil," and yet we find her a great deal more generous-minded than Mary Garland, whom Christina calls "handsome,"

and, if not generally thought so, "That's the vulgarity of the taste of the rabble." She does Mary justice, as she explains to Rowland, "because I've after all a lot of imagination. She has none. Never mind, it's her only fault. Besides imagination's not a virtue - it's a vice." (I, 379-80)[18] As an imaginative person and a beautiful one, Christina joins Roderick's ranks. Mary remains pedestrianly unimaginative, and this failing indeed causes her ungenerous remarks about Christina, whom she thinks false. Even Rowland sees Mary's error, "This young woman would never be anything but unjust to the other one...And he saw the attitude in Mary as immutable for ever, and Christina was interesting, and Mary would be wrong." (I, 384)[19] Rowland, with a mind more artistic than Mary's, is not so bound by prejudice; of Christina he finally says, "She's too beautiful.... Well, then...she's too good!" (I, 382)

Roderick Hudson deals with two ways of life, two moralities, two commitments. For neither is there fulfillment: the artist, destroyed by his own desertion of art for futile love, dies in despair; the social man, trapped by his own sense of moral responsibility, spends his days ministering to others: "During the awful journey back to America, [Mary] had used [Mallet] with the last rigour of consistency, as a character definitely appointed to her uses." (I, 526-27)[20] Mary Garland, untouched after all by the beauty of Europe, becomes as capable of using another human being as Leavenworth himself. Both the aesthetic and the ethical fail, but in the cousse of examining them James has had much to say that he will say again, and with

greater assurance, in his later writing. The opposition of aesthetic and ethical in this novel itself and in certain divided characters is expressed best, perhaps, by Hudson himself in terms of the imagination and the conscience or will.

> The will, it seems to me, is an abyss of abysses and a riddle of riddles. Who can answer for his properly having one? who can say beforehand that it's going in a given case to be worth anything at all? There are all kinds of uncanny underhand currents moving to and from between one's will and the rest of one - one's imagination in particular. People talk as if the two things were essentially distinct; on different sides of one's organism, like the heart and liver. Mine, I know - that is my imagination and my conscience - are much nearer together. It all depends upon circumstances.[21]
>
> (I, 141)

This opposition of will and imagination becomes a major theme in the early novels not only in terms of the artist's dilemma, but in the world of society as well.

II

> Don't you remember my telling you that one ought to make of one's life a work of art?
>
> <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u>

Roderick Hudson establishes certain basic Jamesian dualities: art and collecting, aesthetics and morality, beauty and goodness, imagination and conscience. These issues continue to be relevant

to early works that deal not with the world of the artist, but with the world of society, specifically with the international scene. Basically, there are two kinds of people in these novels and stories; Americans and Europeans, into which latter group fall expatriate, Europeanized Americans. And again, basically, this division of characters represents as well the division of good and evil. While there are obvious exceptions on both sides, we nevertheless find that the villains of the early works are Europeans such as the Bellegardes and the Count de Mauves and expatriates such as Gilbert Osmond and Serena Merle. The heroes are the Americans: Madame de Mauves, Christopher Newman, and Isabel Archer. What divides these people from one another is, of course, their behavior, but behavior that rests upon certain premises. The actions of the evil characters are informed by egotism, by a lack of imaginative sympathy, by a greater concern with form than with actuality and with manners than with morals.[22] It is in the opposition of manners to morals that the ethical-aesthetic conflict is rehearsed in these novels. Morals obviously reflect ethical considerations; manners are seen as an aesthetic principle by virtue of their concern with appearances, with the beauty of social behavior that rests on forms, taste, and convention.

"Madame de Mauves" is an early story that establishes this dichotomy clearly; further, it shows in small the problem that is magnified and developed in The Portrait of a Lady. A romantic American girl marries a French nobleman, because "she was romantic and

perverse - she thought the world she had been brought up in too vulgar or at least too prosaic." (XIII, 222) Further, "she had a romantic belief that the enjoyment of inherited and transmitted consideration, consideration attached to the fact of birth, would be the direct guarantee of an ideal delicacy of feeling." (XIII, 224)[23] DeMauves is identified for us several times as rich in manners and bankrupt in morals: "He had very good manners, but she was sure he had horrible morals." "The count's manners were perfect." "A manner rounded and polished by the habit of conversation and the friction of full experience, an urbanity exercised for his own sake, not for his neighbour's, which seemed the fruit of one of those strong temperaments that rule the inward scene better than the best conscience."[24] Yet he "had plainly no sense of morals." (XIII, 241, 253, 254) This is in fact almost all of what we know about him except for the additional information provided by Longmore's "moralising" that his taste in women was the same as "the taste for M. Gérôme and M. Baudry in painting, and for M. Gustave Flaubert and M. Charles Baudelaire in literature." (XIII, 255)[25] Madame de Mauves suffers from her husband's flagrant adulteries but refuses to be drawn into a romantic attachment with Longmore, the narrator of the story, although it becomes increasingly clear that her husband thinks such an attachment would be pleasant for his wife. Like Isabel Archer, Madame de Mauves maintains her moral code even though her illusions fall to pieces. Like Isabel she is to be pitied, not because she held and then lost such illusions, but because her illusions served her so ill: "Illusion of course is

illusion, and one must always pay for it; but there's something truly tragical in seeing an earthly penalty for such divine folly as this." (XIII, 268-69)

This is the core of the story of Isabel Archer's fate: an imaginative, romantic girl is convinced by her illusions of the excellence of a man who has beautiful manners and tastes and no morals at all; she suffers, is tempted to forswear her suffering, and chooses to live according to a rigorous code of ethics. The Portrait is of particular interest to this study in the suggestions of a moral-aesthetic dichotomy within the novel. This is certainly not to contend or even to imply that the novel is nothing but such a dichotomy, for it is indeed very multifaceted.

Like Rowland Mallet, Isabel Archer is absolutely commited to neither the moral nor the aesthetic but stands midway between. Thus she has more romance and imagination than her compatriots - Henrietta Stackpole, who accuses her of speaking like "the heroine of an immoral novel" (III, 235) and Caspar Goodwood - and she has more moral integrity than do the self-exiled Osmond and Madame Merle. Her morality is, however, the morality of innocence; and in the course of the novel, this morality becomes experienced and strengthened until Isabel is enabled to make an arduous ethical commitment.

The single most important feature of Isabel's character is her imagination. James sounds this note many times. "Her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality of its own and her imagination was strong." "Her imagination was by habit ridiculously active," but

her judgment less strong, for sometimes "she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging." "Her imagination was remarkably active," and she has, again, "a certain nobleness of imagination" (III, 27, 42, 66, 68)[26] Of almost equal importance is Isabel's innocence, an innocence issuing from her remarkably limited knowledge of evil. Ralph tells her she cannot see the Touchett ghost until she has suffered, has "gained some miserable knowledge," and James adds that "she had seen very little of the evil of the world." (III, 64, 69) Innocence and imagination combine in Isabel to attract her to Gilbert Osmond.

In the person of Osmond the aesthetic, amoral principle is realized most effectively. He is given to the reader in terms of rare objects of art, "a fine gold coin,"[27]"as fine as one of the drawings in the long gallery above the bridge of the Uffizi." (III, 329, 356) He shows Isabel "his pictures, his medallions and tapestries," which "seemed to overhang him." (III, 375) His attitude toward life is implied in terms of art, of aestheticism. He has an appearance" of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship," and he tells Isabel "that one ought to make one's life a work of art." (III, 379: IV, 15) Isabel "is impressed by Osmond's artistic, the plastic view, as it somehow appeared, of Pansy's innocence - her own appreciation of it being more anxiously moral."[28] (IV, 84) He regards "his daughter as a precious work of art." (IV, 349) Ralph Touchett speaks of Osmond as the incarnation of taste" and of Isabel's life with him as one of keeping "guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante." (IV, 71)

The innocent, uninformed imagination of Isabel Archer is quite thoroughly taken in by the exquisite veneer of Gilbert Osmond; James several times speaks of the part her deluded imagination has played in his drastic mésalliance. When Osmond relates his life to her, "her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting." (III, 383) Of her opinion of Osmond, Ralph says, "She was wrong but she believed; she was deluded, but she was dismally consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that, having invented a fine theory about Osmond, she loved him not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours." Ralph, further, considers that in providing Isabel with money, he has given her the power to "meet the requirements of her imagination....the girl had taken full advantage of the luxury." (IV, 74-75)

In marrying Osmond, Isabel does not surrender her moral ideals. She does not realize the incompatibility of a moral life with a life directed by Osmond's fine hand. Before accepting Osmond, Isabel traveled with Madame Merle, and she had recognized that Madame Merle was "the product of a different moral or social clime from her own... She considered, with the presumption of youth, that a morality differing from her own must be inferior to it." (IV, 39) But Isabel never really questions, until much later, the moral principles of her friend, and from Osmond she hears of Madame Merle as the epitome of moral rigor: "She's so almost unnaturally good! I'm glad she's not in Italy, it makes for relaxation - for a sort of moral détente." (IV, 199)[29] Ralph says of her that "her merits are immense," that

she is "a pathless desert of virtue" (III, 361),[30] but this remark, unlike that of the humorless Osmond, is tinged with irony.

From Osmond and from Madame Merle Isabel learns of the aesthetic principle of a life made gracious by things. Madame Merle tells her

> There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made of some cluster of appurtenances....I've a great respect for <u>things</u>! One's self - for other people - is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps - these things are all expressive.
> (III, 287)

It is certainly Osmond's "expression" of himself that quite takes Isabel in, and Osmond expresses himself through the numerous appurtenances of his collections. Osmond is a collector of things and of people, too, at least to the extent that, having added Isabel to his possessions, he goes about the job of remaking her. When he speaks to Madame Merle of Isabel's one fault - her superfluity of ideas - he says of them, "They must be sacrificed." (III, 412) Not only Isabel but Pansy as well represents a possession. In an exchange with Pansy's suitor, Rosier, Osmond makes statements that deal directly with his collector's pieces but suggest his daughter as well: "I'm not thinking of parting with anything at all....I've nothing I wish to match" (IV, 104) Later he adds, "I set a great price on my daughter." (IV, 121)

Isabel's suffering increases as does her realization of the true nature of her husband. His ideas "were hideously unclean;" his con-

ception of the aristocratic life "altogether a thing of forms, a conscious calculated attitude." (IV, 200, 198) But despite all provocation and humiliation she continues to follow a conceptual ideal of duty: "Almost anything seemed preferable to repudiating the single most serious act - the single sacred act - of her life. (IV, 246)

The extent of her ability to sacrifice personal desires for moral concepts continues to increase. She surrenders her chance to avenge herself on Madame Merle, surrenders even the pleasure of open accusation, "Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still." (IV, 379) It is only when Madame Merle tries to implicate Ralph - whom she says Isabel has, at bottom, to thank - that Isabel is roused sufficiently to declare, "I think I should like never to see you again." (IV,389)

Having abandoned revenge, Isabel is left only escape, which she surrenders in turn. She had believed in freedom, the human freedom to live one's life successfully. When Caspar Goodwood offers her his impassioned version of this motive she rejects it. "We can do absolutely as we please," he tells her, "To whom under the sun do we owe anything?...Were we born to rot in misery - were we born to be afraid?" (IV, 435) But Isabel has learned that she does owe something to someone under the sun, to some ideal concept of duty, to the sacred bond of marriage. In Isabel's chosen future there will be no beauty - only the beauty, if it can be called that, of ethical principle.

There are many strands in The Portrait of a Lady and many kinds of themes. There is the nascent consideration of appearances and

reality, a more fully developed consideration of innocence and experience, a comparison of European and American mores, and an examination of the idea of personal freedom. Among these is the consideration, not yet elevated to high importance, of the ethical and the aesthetic. Principally, the aesthetic is comprehended in Osmond, the lover of beautiful objects, the collector, the man who would make his life exquisite. This way of life is, in Osmond, combined with egotism, vanity, cruelty. He has behaved immorally in the traditional and in the Jamesian sense. Traditional morality suffers from Osmond's adultery, but in the Jamesian code evil exists in the egotistic attempt to create of a human being an object suited to one's pleasure.[31] Isabel stands for a moral principle but a moral principle uninformed and inexperienced. She is educated through her encounter with evil and her ethical being is strengthened.

There must also be a word about Ralph Touchett who looks forward to one aspect of the ethical ambiguity of the later novels. The role that Ralph plays represents a fusion of the ethical and the aesthetic, although this fusion is neither thorough nor altogether consistent. He is an early realization of the lay character in a quasi-artistic position within the structure of the novel. This sort of character is placed on the periphery of the action and serves as observer and, secondarily, as manipulator. Ralph, an invalid, is forced into his role as an observer of life, an observer who sees life aesthetically and imaginatively. This imaginative interest in life brings Ralph close to the artist's position. He is capable, for example, of

watching Isabel aesthetically, with detachment: "I shall have the thrill of seeing what a young lady does who won't marry Lord Warburton." (III, 212) So close is Ralph to artist here that he is given words very like those James was to use himself three years later in "The Art of Fiction." "For a Boston nymph to reject an English duke is an adventure only less stirring, I should say, than for an English duke to be rejected by a Boston nymph."[32] The aesthetic observation of life moves easily into the manipulation of people, another quasi-artistic function. Ralph wants Isabel to have money enough for freedom, a freedom he will watch her enjoy. Mr. Touchett is suspicious, however: "You speak as if it were for your mere amusement....I don't think I enter into your spirit. It seems to me immoral." (III, 262, 264) James himself, in the London novels, will color the role of observer-manipulator with his own uncertainty in regard to the aesthetic role in the ethical situation. As a result, characters like Longdon in The Awkward Age and the narrator of The Sacred Fount will remain ambivalent. Ralph Touchett, however, retains James's sympathy despite his foreshadowing of a later ethical dilemma.

The opposition of the ethical and the aesthetic is merely peripheral in The American, in which Christopher Newman, like Isabel Archer, gains experience and moral strength in his contact with the evil and mannered world of the Bellegards. In the case of this novel the revisions have an interesting effect on the ethic-aesthetic question. James was willing in the early version to make Newman as

innocent ethically as he was aesthetically. James implies, for example, that Newman's conduct of his life had been ethical but not strenuously so; curiously, he says this in aesthetic terms: "it struck [Newman] that if had never done anything very ugly, he had never, on the other hand, done anything particularly beautiful."[33] In the revision James confines Newman's innocence to the aesthetic sphere. The passage is rewritten: "It struck [Newman] that if he had never incurred any quite ineffaceable stain he had never on the other hand followed the line of beauty as a sought direction for a single mile of its course." (II, 102) Similarly, the ironic "Newman had a great contempt for immorality,"[34] becomes "Newman had a great esteem, after all, for refinement." (II, 99)

Both versions, however, contain suggestions, that if slight and ironic, are pertinent to a study of the ethical-aesthetic conflict. Of interest is Newman's naive enthusiasm for collecting, both in terms of pictures and in terms of a wife.[35] When Newman meets Claire de Cintŕe, he cannot understand her more than as a mysterious object of value.

> She gave him, the charming woman, the sense of an elaborate education, of her having passed through mysterious ceremonies and processes of culture in her youth, of her having been fashioned and made flexible to certain deep social needs. All this ...made her seem rare and precious - a very expensive article, as he would have said.
> (II, 165)

Newman's judgment of the rare and precious is a little uncertain. We see him, ignorant of art and artistic standards, eager to purchase at exorbitant prices the tasteless copies of Mademoiselle Noémie, for whom he feels interest and pity. Newman, then, chooses art by extra-aesthetic, by sentimental standards, but his sentiment, alas! leads him as far astray in evaluating people as in judging pictures.

The question of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics is parodied in the figure of the Reverend Mr. Babcock, obsessed with a sense of life's great ethical seriousness. Babcock fears that Newman lacks "moral reaction," while, for Babcock, there is little else. Admiring "culture" yet distrusting all things European, Babcock is caught in a "moral" dilemma.

> [Babcock] mistrusted the "European" temperament, he suffered from the "European" climate, he hated the "European" dinner-hour; "European" life seemed to him unscrupulous and impure. And yet he had what he called an intimate sense of the true beautiful in life, and as this element was often inextricably associated with above displeasing conditions, as he wished above all to be just and dispassionate and as he was furthermore extremely bent on putting his finger on the boundary line, in the life of a School, between the sincere time and the insincere, he could not bring himself to decide that the kingdoms of the earth were utterly rotten.[36]
>
> (II, 92)

In his farewell letter to Newman, Babcock, with all the earnest enthusiasm of italics and capitals, insists "<u>do</u> remember that Life and Art <u>are</u> extremely serious." (II, 98)

Finally, there is the character of Mrs. Tristram in whom the observer-manipulator is suggested. Mrs. Tristram is depicted as a woman whose manipulation of Newman is motivated altogether by detached aesthetic curiosity. At the end of the novel she admits to Newman that she would have been curious to watch such a marriage as his with Claire de Cintré; Newman asks, "Was it from curiosity that you urged me to try and marry her?" Mrs. Tristram admits that this was a little the case, and "Newman gave her the one angry look he had been destined ever to give her." Mrs. Tristram considers this curiosity "the highest flight ever taken by a tolerably bold imagination!" (II, 513) Mrs. Tristram, than, behaves rather like an artist: she has been manipulating, experimenting, imagining, but the material upon which she has been working has been human and not artistic. She has taken, that is, the aesthetic attitude toward a human being and a human relationship.

In even so slender a bit as this lies a suggestion of the kind of dichotomy that was operating in James's work at this time. For the artist the imagination is the highest faculty; through it he apprehends his idea, his vision, his sense of ideal beauty. For non-artistic people imagination may be a dangerous gift. Observers like Ralph and Mrs. Tristram are led by their imaginations, be they sympathetic or merely meddlesome, to attempt to arrange the lives of others, a dubious proposition even in these early novels. Furthermore, it is imagination that brings both Euphemia de Mauves and Isabel Archer to their disastrous marriages. The sympathetic

characters in James's early fiction are gifted with imagination - Mary Garland is a curious exception - but for the non-artist imagination may prove to be treacherous.

Just as imagination is valuable for the artist and dangerous for the lay character, so the aesthetic approach is proper for the painter and highly improper for the non-artist. Lay characters who see life aesthetically, in terms of taste and forms, and perhaps collecting, are mostly vicious people: Osmond and the Bellegardes. But the aesthetic vision of life is commended in the artist: in the painter of "The Story of a Masterpiece," who fed on life and made no moral or ethical judgments in relation to his painting; in the painter of "The Madonna of the Future," who saw a madonna-type and not the aging mistress of a vulgar sculptor in Serafina; and in Roderick Hudson, who turns from the goodness of Mary Garland to the beauty of Christina Light.

The early works of James's fiction deal in part with the opposing demands of two worlds, the conflict between the ethical and the aesthetic. For the artist, the aesthetic vision is the proper one; and and even when ethical considerations are relevant, as in Roderick Hudson, they are ethical considerations involving the single-minded commitment to one's art. For the novels of the international scene, the aesthetic point of view is attributed to the evil-doers; the heroes are committed to an aethical determination. What we find in the early period is the establishment of two worlds, with two different commitments - the world of the social man and the world of the

artist. In these early novels there is no evidence that James was disturbed by this implicit conflict of views. In the novels of the London period it is likely that the conflict became important to the novelist; for he begins to experiment with the superimposition of the views of one world upon the life of the other.

Notes to Chapter Two

1 James treated the opposite case in "The Liar" see below, pp. 88-92.

2 "The Story of a Masterpiece," in The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. Leon Edel, in process (New York, 1961 —), I, 287; hereafter referred to in the text as Tales with the appropriate volume and page number.

3 Compare again "The Liar" in which the slashing of a portrait is figured as a suicide; see below, pp. 91-92.

4 In later stories of artists and writers James often distinguishes between worldly and artistic success. Compare the well-known remark of the narrator of "The Next Time" about Ray Limbert, who cannot forfeit his artistic for a worldly suceess: "You can't make a sow's ear out of a silk purse!" (XV, 204)

5 The early version is less precise: "whose imagination caresses and flatters them;" Henry James, A Passionate Pilgrim and other Tales (Boston, 1875), p. 278.

6 The early version makes the point more obviously: "it shall be as malicious as you please!" Passionate Pilgrim, p. 315.

7 The early version has the force of its greater simplicity: "The hair, alas, but not the head!" Passionate Pilgrim, p. 287.

8 The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth Murdock (New York, 1955), p. 28; hereafter referred to in the text as Notebooks with the appropriate page number.

9 See above, p. 14.

10 James refers to Stendhal and la beauté parfaite in another instance, in discussing the donné of "Brooksmith": a servant girl who had "tasted of conversation and been spoiled for life; she had, in recall of Stendhal's inveterate motto, caught a glimpse, all untimely, of 'la beauté parfaite'." (XVIII, xix-xx) The early intensity of the use of the quotation by an artist turns into the later irony of its application to the aesthetic world of society.

11 Early: "mixture of strong moral impulse and restless aesthetic curiosity," Henry James, Roderick Hudson (Boston, 1876), p. 15.

12 Another genealogy for the similar purpose of making more believable a somewhat anomalous character appears for Hyacinth Robinson in The Princess Casamassima; see below, pp. 78-79.

13 Early: "a cynical sybarite," Roderick Hudson, p. 79.

14 Oscar Cargill sees Rowland as a manipulator "who commits the major offense of meddling with another's career," The Novels of Henry James (New York, 1961), p. 26. This seems to me an anticipation of James's attitude. In later novels Rowland would be so treated, but there seems to be no such suggestion in Roderick Hudson. The same distinction may be made with Ralph Touchett in The Portrait of a Lady, whose influence upon Isabel's life is not meddling but would no doubt be considered so in a later novel; see above pp. 60-61, and footnote 31 below. Another anticipatory evaluation of Mallet comes from Stephen Spender, who sees him as "a sort of art-critic of life," "The School of Experience in the Early Novels," Hound and Horn, VII (1934), 422. Again it seems that a later Rowland Mallet would view life aesthetically but there is in this novel only the suggestion that, failing talent himself, Mallet lives vicariously in Roderick Hudson.

15 Two obvious examples are Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady and Mrs. Gereth of The Spoils of Poynton, both of whom conceive of people as things.

16 In the early veriion the statue commissioned by Leavenworth is called Culture. Leavenworth's remarks are heightened in the revision; compare the early: "Spotless marble should represent virtue not vice." "The forehead...strikes me as not sufficiently intellectual. In a statue of Culture...that should be the great point," Roderick Hudson, pp. 272-76.

17 This is expanded in the revision; compare the early: "that man was not made to suffer but to enjoy," Roderick Hudson, p. 416.

18 The last sentence does not appear in the early version.

19 In the revision of Roderick Hudson, James made Mary Garland somewhat less attractive than in the early version; generally he did this by making her more inflexible. The speech of Rowland's that begins "this young woman..." was added to the revision in place of the following: "[Rowland] knew that [Mary] knew, by that infallible sixth sense of a woman who loves, that this strange, beautiful girl had the power to injur her." Roderick Hudson, p. 350.

20 Here again Mary Garland suffers in the revision; compare the early: "During the dreary journey back to America, made of course with [Rowland's] assistance, there was a great frankness in [Mary's] gratitude, and a great gratitude in her frankness," Roderick Hudson, p. 481.

21 The revision clarifies the vague rhetoric of the early version and adds the specific reference to the imagination. The early version: "The will, I believe, is the mystery of mysteries. Who can answer for the will? who can say before hand that it's strong? There are all kinds of indefineable currents moving to and from between one's will and one's inclinations. People talk as if the two things were essentially distinct; on different sides of one's organism, like the heart and the liver. Mine, I know, are much nearer together. It all depends upon circumstances," Roderick Hudson, p. 129.

22 The difference between manners and morals in Henry James's fiction has been treated at some length. One might note particularly F. C. Crews, The Tragedy of Manners (New Haven, 1957) and Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas, Texas, 1958). The relation of this dichotomy to that established between appearance and reality is thoroughly treated by Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness (London, 1962).

23 The early version is more pointed: "she thought Americans were vulgar;" and "she had a romantic belief that the best birth is the guaranty of an ideal delicacy of feeling," Passionate Pilgrim, pp. 373,375.

24 The early version reads: "a manner rounded and polished by the traditions of centuries," and adds that he is "unable to draw a moral inference," Passionate Pilgrim, p. 409.

25 Baudry and Baudelaire are added in the revision.

26 In the preface to The Princess Casamassima James again alludes to "the thickly-peopled imagination of Isabel Archer," which is "positively the deepest depth of her imbroglio." (V, xvi)

27 The coin image was added in the revision.

28 The early version had "Osmond's aesthetic relish of Pansy's innocence," Henry James, The Portrait of a Lady (Boston, 1882), pp. 309-10.

29 The early version had merely "it's a sort of rest," Portrait, p. 353.

30 The "pathless desert of virtue" appears only in the revision.

31 William H. Gass has pointed out the merging of the moral and the aesthetic problems in the "artistic" attempt of one human being to manipulate another. "Isabel Archer becomes the unworked medium through which, like benevolent Svengali, the shapers and admirers of beautifully brought out persons express their artistry and themselves," "The High Brutality of Good Intentions," Accent, XVIII (1958), p. 66. However, Mr. Gass finds this more brutal when informed with good than with evil intentions, which seems quite unlikely. As a result, he castigates Ralph Touchett who "benevolently" manipulates Isabel for his amusement. See above, pp. 60-61 and footnote 14 above.

32 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," Partial Portraits (London, 1888), p. 402.

33 Henry James, The American (Boston, 1877), p. 95.

34 The American, p. 92.

35 See above, p. 24.

36 The early version is balder; the last section, from "extremely bent..." reads: "extremely devoted to 'culture', and he could not bring himself to decide that Europe was utterly bad," The American, p. 86.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BLURRING OF THE ETHIC-AESTHETIC BOUNDARIES

> ...an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation. I like things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they were or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question.
>
> "The Real Thing"

In the works of the early period James had established a dichotomy between ethical and aesthetic values, a dichotomy which, however, produced no particular dilemma for the novelist. Either, as in the stories of artist, the ethical and the aesthetic were each confined to their own particular milieux, or, in the international novels, particular characters were aligned with one set of values of the other. As a result, the conflict between these opposing values remained external. Now, however, in the works of the middle period, the distinct values of the ethical and the aesthetic are, with increasing frequency, introduced into the same setting, the same situation, and the same problem with which a character may be faced. Thus, a character may now have to deal with a moral dilemma that becomes complicated by the fact of the antagonistic demands made upon him by the ethical and the aesthetic.

The confrontation of the opposing criteria takes several different forms. In some cases it represents the conflict between the artist

and society; the most notable example of this is The Tragic Muse in which the major figures try, each in his own way, to work out a compromise between the two ways of life. More subtly, "The Real Thing" treats the differences between the vision of the artist and the vision of the social man. In the case of "The Real Thing" the ethical-aesthetic dilemma moves into the areas of appearance and reality and of the ideal and the real. The difficulty of determining real values in the shifting social world of forms and appearances is dealt with in The Awkward Age in which society takes on an aesthetic organization of its own, an aesthetic value to be measured and dealt with. In the increasingly aesthetic world of society certain ethical problems assume new complexity. Collecting and lying, issues in which the moral and the artistic each have a stake, are now weighed with a new set of scales. The short story, "The Liar," looks at the lie ironically both for the social and for the artistic man. In The Spoils of Poynton collecting receives extensive consideration both as an aesthetic and as an ethical activity. Further, civilization itself is seen as a force for collecting and preserving monuments to beauty in The Princess Casamassima, whose hero, a young revolutionary, deserts his social and political allegiance for a new aesthetic principle which has been developed in him through contact with the beautiful in civilized society.

The novels of this period are quite distinct in plot and character from one another, but they share a common interest in the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. No longer are there Isabel Archers

with whom both reader and writer can become emotionally involved, nor, on the other hand, are there villains of the extremity of Osmond. The moral world is perceived in gradations of gray, and melodrama is replaced by cool social comedy. The detachment and irony are interesting not only in themselves but in relation as well to the increasing confusion of the standards of James's moral world. Ethics and aesthetics will come into even closer relationship in the novels of the final period and they will do so in novels that are not ironic and far from detached. It is significant that in this period James could conceive of a relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic as existing only in a world inhabited by people of whom few are either good or bad and most are merely more or less immoral, and that he could handle the consequences of this relationship only with the emotional distance provided by irony.

I

> The world will be beautiful enough when it becomes good enough.
> The Princess Casamassima

The conflict between the ethical and the aesthetic in The Bostonians is realized in the characters of Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant. Much as in the novels of the earlier period, the characters here are created along carefully demarcated lines, with the notable difference that figures are no longer portrayed who are

clearly good or evil but several types are established all of whom are more or less misled, and not one of whom escapes altogether the charge of being somewhat absurd.

In Olive Chancellor the New England conscience with its rigid morality is satirized. Olive does not lie - this is the first thing we are told about her - and she refuses to go through any of the "forms"; she dotes, furthermore, on the concepts of sacrifice and suffering: "The prospect of suffering was always, spiritually speaking, so much cash in her pocket."[1] Olive is an exaggerated and distorted version of earlier moral heroines. There is exaggeration, for example, in James's insistance on Olive's total inability to enjoy herself; when she finds herself pleasantly entertained by a young man, she is described as "shaking her conscience, like a watch that wouldn't go, to make it tell her some better reason why she shouldn't like him." (Bostonians, p. 154)

Despite Olive's insistant moral conscience, she, surprisingly, is characterized by qualities that were found in earlier villains. With Gilbert Osmond she shares a humorless view of life as well as a marked sense of taste, which her ethical, militantly anti-aesthetic conscience tries manfully to strangle: although Olive is engaged "in a career in which she was constantly exposing herself to offense and laceration, her most poignant suffering came from the injury of her taste." (Bostonians, p. 29) Taste, for this moral lady, causes only suffering, never joy, and on the subject, she is coldly sententious: "Taste and art were good when they enlarged the mind, not

when they narrowed it." (Bostonians, p. 149)[2] It is significant of his shifting moral intention that James, in characterizing this unattractive female figure, should do so through qualities taken from both the good and evil characters of his earlier works. In these ways are the artificial boundaries between ethics and aesthetics being broken down.

If Olive represents the ethical, albeit in parody, Verena Tarrant stands for the aesthetic insofar as she is beautiful, talented - compared numerous times to an actress - and of a "genial, graceful, ornamental cast." (Bostonians, p. 386) She calls Olive "her conscience," and Olive replies, "I should like to be able to say that you are my form - my envelope. But you are too beautiful for that." (Bostonians, p. 155) Here the relation of ethics to reality, inwardness, conscience and that of aesthetics to appearance, forms, beauty is neatly suggested. Verena, too, has certain qualities of the earlier heroine. She is spontaneous and imaginative; Olive tells her that "you are so young - so strangely young. I am a thousand years old; I have lived through generations - through centuries. I know what I know by experience; you know it by imagination." (Bostonians, p. 135) Further, she has the innate moral sense of the earlier heroine, and she has this despite the training and example of her dreadful parents. Nevertheless, Verena, unlike the earlier heroine, rejects sacrifice. At the crisis of the novel we see Verena in "a state of moral tension....An immense pity for Olive sat in her heart, and she asked herself how far it was necessary to go in the path of self-sacrifice." (Bostonians, p. 386) Verena Tarrant is the first of the major

heroines who can choose selfishly, who can ignore the disinterested dictates of the good heart. This is a major change in James's vision, but the significance of this change is vitiated in part by the heavily ironic treatment of the novel.

The aesthetic posture is delieneated as well in the figure of Basil Ransom. He is handsome, possesses elegant manners, and refuses to deal with life with any sort of moral earnestness. He stands, obviously in direct opposition to his cousin Olive Chancellor, an opposition made dramatic through their struggle over Verena Tarrant. Olive sees Verena as a force for reform; Verena's great talent may be molded into an organ for moral uplift. Ransom, whose "first principle of [reform] was to reform the reformers" (Bostonians, p. 19), sees Verena as an artist, "as a vocalist of exquisite faculty, condemned to sing bad music." (Bostonians, p. 61) Ransom is conceived as an aesthetic character, and his victory over Olive Chancellor reinforces the half-comic victory of the aesthetic.

The ascendancy of the aesthetic attitude is particularly apparent in James's handling of the issue of social and political reform. Irving Howe notes this but considers it an unfortunate lapse.

> At times this comes rather close to being an esthetic (perhaps even an esthete's) reaction to the life of politics, a judgment of one area of experience in terms of another, which is almost always a dangerous kind of judgment to make.... Throughout the book there are occasions in which James seems to be applying small measures to large matters, judging difficult social and moral issues by esthetic criteria a little too neat for the job.[3]

The accuracy of this observation is undercut by the predisposition to weigh ethical or political considerations as more important than aesthetic, and by this period in James's writing such a judgment can no longer be passed. The assumption that, in James's world, aesthetic considerations are "small measures" is an uncertain assumption at best, as is the assertion that social and political matters are "large." James does very little in The Bostonians to support the idea that he thought the issue of women's rights to be of any major significance. Certainly a polemical novelist militating for suffrage would never have chosen Olive Chancellor for his champion nor colored the entire enterprise with an irony far from kind. Furthermore, the aesthetic in James has now come to encompass more than mere appreciation of art, and to stand for a way of life involved with beauty, manners, taste, and grace. The importance of the aesthetic way of life is insisted upon in the struggle between Olive and Verena, especially in exchanges such as the following. When Verena notes that Olive has a "fearful power of suffering," Olive replies, "You were not made to suffer - you were made to enjoy." And James explains that Olive's tone "implied that the contrary would have been much more natural and perhaps rather higher." (Bostonians, p. 291) The aesthetic is no "small measure."

The conflict that was externalized in the opposition between Olive and Verena is recreated as an internal struggle in Hyacinth Robinson, the young hero of The Princess Casamassima. Hyacinth is a character for whom the ethical and the aesthetic make difficult and

opposing demands. Earlier novels had realized the conflict between these two sets of values in the conflict between two types of people, but in Robinson we see the beginning of the fusion of the two worlds within a single character. Only in Rowland Mallet has there been any similar dichotomy, but with Mallet this particular aspect of his conflict was never exploited; he was never forced to choose between the ethical and the aesthetic within him. Still, the similarities in James's conception of the two young men is indicated in the treatment of their lineage. Mallet's ancestry was seen as responsible for his two-sided view of life. Hyacinth Robinson's ancestry is comprehended in the same manner, but Robinson's dubious parentage is alluded to throughout the book, again as if James needed such pseudo-biological support for the creation of a character he seemed still to consider an anomaly. James's lack of assurance is signaled by passages such as the following, in which, near the crisis of the novel, the psychological torment of his hero is described in terms of his genealogy.

> There was no peace for him between the two currents that flowed in his nature, the blood of the passionate, plebian mother and that of his long-descended super-civiliced sire. They continued to toss him from one side to the other; they arrayed him in intolerable defiances and revenges against himself....The thought of his mother had filled him with the vague clumsy fermentation of his first impulses toward social criticism; but since the problem had become more complex by the fact that many things in the world as it was constituted were to grow intensely dear to him he had tried more and more to construct some conceivable and human countenance for his father.
>
> (VI, 264)

Having created a character with ethical sympathy sufficient to induce the promised sacrifice of his life, James devotes the more important part of the novel to the breakdown of Hyacinth's social ethic in the face of a new aesthetic view of society. This new view could indeed by called an ethic of aesthetics, replacing an ethic of social consciousness, and this is quite a significant step in the growing importance of the aesthetic in James's attitude. Hyacinth, with the native good form left him by his erring father, has in him the seeds of an aesthetic commitment.

> There were individuals whom he followed with his eyes, with his thoughts, sometimes even with his steps; they seemed to tell him what it was to be the flower of a high civilication. At moments he was aghast when he reflected that the cause he had secretly espoused...proposed to itself to bring about a state of things in which that particular scene would be impossible. It made him even rather faint to think that he must choose.
> (V, 170-71)

He becomes acquainted with people of fashion and taste, and this experience turns him away from a trust in revolution toward a belief in the value of art and beauty in the civilized world. From Italy he writes to the Princess of his changing commitments.

> Want and toil and suffering are the constant lot of the immense majority. I've found them everywhere but haven't minded them....What has struck me is the great achievements of which man has been capable in spite of them - the splendid accumulations of the happier few....The face of Europe

> appears to me covered with them and they've had much the greater part of my attention. They seem to me inestimably precious and beautiful and I've become conscious more than ever before of how little I understood what in the great rectification you and Poupin proposed to to with them....The monuments and treasures of art, the great palaces and properties, the conquests of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilization, as we know it, based if you will upon all the despotisms, the cruelties, the exclusions, the monopolies and the rapacities of the past, but thanks to which, all the same, the world is less of a "bloody sell" and life more of a lark. (VI, 144-45)

If this is, as it seems, James's own reply to the revolutionary cries of the 80's, it remains, both for him and for Hyacinth, an aesthetic answer to an ethical, social, political question. And because of this answer, aesthetics, in this novel, achieves the stature of ethics.

Opposed to Hyacinth's view of civilization is that of the beautiful Princess Casamassima, a character who never emerges with the clarity and force we might have wished. James seems to have said all he has to say when, with Hyacinth - and with Roderick Hudson earlier - he notes that "the woman at his right hand was simply too beautiful. She was too beautiful to question, to judge by common logic." (V, 212) The Princess shares certain qualities of wit and sophistication with the lady of fashion in the London novels. This is clear, for example, in her condemnation of the English people: she thinks "poorly of its wit and even worse of its morals. 'You know people oughtn't to be both corrupt and dreary.'" (VI, 23)

Yet she upholds, perhaps capriciously, the ethical attitude toward social evil. When Lady Aurora asks if we ought not try to make the world more beautiful, the Princess replies, "The world will be beautiful enough when it becomes good enough....Is there anything so ugly as unjust distinctions, as the privilege of the few contrasted with the degradation of the many? When we want to beautify we must begin at the right end." The Princess, then, sees the aesthetic in terms of the ethical; Hyacinth's reply reverses this. "I think there can't be too many pictures and statues and works of art....The more the better, whether people are hungry or not. In the way of ameliorating influences are not those the most definite?" (VI, 169-70) Significantly, the Princess rejects Hyacinth's gift of several beautifully bound books in the same terms: "What will you have? One can't serve God and Mammon." (VI, 259) Nor can Hyacinth, whose suicide represents a choice as well, the choice of the "high flower of civilization."

The Princess Casamassima goes still further in asserting the importance of those elements that make up an aesthetic attitude. Most deft and subtle is the new index to moral character provided by the measure of taste in homes and furnishings. In the cases of the Prince Casamassima and of Paul Muniment, early evaluations of character are reversed, and these reversals are foreshadowed in James's treatment of the taste of each character. Thus, the Prince cuts a rather shabby figure at first, but gains stature in his desperation. He is, after all, a man of taste, and when he appears in the Princess's ante-rooms, he considers that his wife "had always, wherever she

was, the most charming rooms in Europe." (V, 269) On the other hand, Muniment begins as a heroic type of reformer and grows steadily shabbier and more vulgar in his relationship with the Princess. When he visits the Princess in her middle-class lodgings, he announces, "You've got a lovely home." (VI, 230) Hyacinth, of course, has instinctively known better. Through his eyes we have seen the parlor.

> ...the stuffed birds in the window, the alabaster Cupid, the wax flowers on the chimney-piece, the florid antimacassars on the chairs, the sentimental engravings on the walls - the frames of papier-maché, and "composition" some of them enveloped in pink tissue paper - and the prismatic glass pendants attached to everything. (VI, 187)

Coming after such a catalogue, Muniment's appreciation of the "lovely home" serves to make him rudely comic and clearly tasteless, thereby operating as an introduction to the general deflation of his character. Taste, then, becomes an index for ethical judgment.

Collecting, too, serves as a measure of character in the novel although there are as yet no clearly stated criteria for judging collectors as a whole. Thus, the Princess can have the most charming room in Europe.

> Hyacinth had time to count over the innumerable bibelots...involved in the character of a woman of high fashion and to feel that their beauty and oddity revealed not only whole provinces of art, but refinements of choice on the part of the owner, complications of mind and - almost - terrible depths of temperament. (V, 285)

Ironic, certainly, but no condemnation of the Princess. Captain Sholto's room on the other hand is described in terms of rapacity.

> He had filled the high wainscoted rooms with the spoils of travel and the ingenuities of modern taste. There was not a country in the world he appeared not to have ransacked. (V, 264)

Finally, Rosy Muniment, despite the poverty and vulgarity of her collection, is no less a collector.

> The brown room seemed crowded with heterogeneous objects and presented moreover, thanks to a multitude of small prints, both plain and coloured, fastened all over the walls, a highly-decorated appearance. The little person in the corner had the air of having gone to bed in a picture gallery. (V, 122)

Rosy, like her brother, fails to live up to the fine first impression she has made upon Hyacinth; at last he and the Princess admit, "I don't like the sister." (VI, 402) Rosy Muniment, furthermore, comes dangerously close to being a collector of people, the most evil of collecting types.

In the near-Dickensian canvas of this work, James also creates minor figures who are characterized ironically in terms of their taste. Amanda Pynsent is handled in this manner; to her narrow vision the fiddler, Vetch, "represented art, literature...and philosophy." (V, 24) Further,her taste and her morals are humorously

counterpointed: "Miss Pynsent's 'cut,' as I have intimated, was not truly fashionable, and in the application of gimp and the matching of colours she was not absolutely to be trusted; but morally she had the best taste in the world." (V, 68) Even Lady Aurora, the sympathetic but ineffective do-gooder, suffers a bit on this account. Hyacinth goes to borrow some books of her and is "privately a little disappointed...[the books] denoted on Lady Aurora's part a limited acquaintance with French literature and even a certain puerility of taste." (V, 315)

The aesthetic has attained new dimensions in The Princess Casamassima. The very theme of the novel places artistic, aesthetic values in conflict with social, political, ethical values; and in the victory of the aesthetic we are presented with what truly seems to be an aesthetic ethics. In other words, the aesthetic is not only beautiful, but in so being is good as well. Whether the dénouement of the novel is convincing or not, the fact that the hero chooses suicide rather than the betrayal of his aesthetic commitment does concede to the aesthetic a new importance.

II

> I am fond of representation - the representation of life; I like it better, I think, than the real thing.
>
> The Tragic Muse

Several of James's works of fiction from the middle period deal directly with the problem of the artist, or, more precisely, with two aspects of the problem. One of these aspects, that of the artist in conflict with society serves as the subject for The Tragic Muse. This novel handles as well the second issue, the complex relationship between the real and the represented, the lay and the artistic visions, and this theme recurs in the short stories "The Real Thing" and "The Liar." In both cases the aesthetic commitment is measured, evaluated both as a way of life distinct from the social and as a type of vision which thrives on appearances and for which appearances reveal an inner reality.

The aesthetic problem comes here closer and closer to the problem of appearance and reality in James as well as to the problem of the real and the ideal. One of the difficulties inherent in a discussion of these questions is caused by the difference in meaning that reality has in each of these antitheses. As distinguished from the apparent, the real is that essence behind the phenomenal which has no perceptible or sensuous existence except that afforded by appearances. Appearances, conversely, become the outward manifestation of an invisible reality, but may belie, as well as reveal, the truth about reality. Distinguished from the ideal, the real comes to stand for the world as it exists, as the ideal represents the world as it might be, the world of the artist's vision, the world of Roderick Hudson's ideal beauty. Thus, the ideal is the world which the artist tries to apprehend through his imagination and to make concrete through the sensuous medium of his art.

"The Real Thing" considers these aspects of the world from the point of view of a painter who is given the opportunity to use as models Major and Mrs. Monarch, a copule who announce their advanges to him in terms of their being "the real thing; a gentleman, you know [and] a lady." (XVIII, 320) But the illustrator finds the Monarchs a hindrance to his work and prefers as models the Cockney and the Italian street-vendor who are assuredly not the real thing. The Monarchs, an aristocratic, if down-at-the heels, couple, are stiff, lacking in plasticity and in imitative genius. So perfect an example of type are the two that they interfere with the artist's ability to see. "A studio was a place to learn to see, and how could you see through a pair of feather-beds?" (XVIII, 340)

It is this "seeing" that defines the artist's role, and what is seen is of course the appearance; furthermore, it is the apparent that the artist produces, the represented subject. For the artist of "The Real Thing" the represented subject is a particularly valid kind of appearance, for, unlike the non-artistic appearance, it reveals rather than masks the real. The apparent and the real are frequently at odds in the world: "It was a truth of which I had for some time been conscious that a figure with a good deal of frontage was, as one might say, almost never a public institution." (XVIII, 307) In the art object, however, this disparity is corrected, and so the painter has "an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation." (XVIII, 317)

The importance of appearances is higher for the artist than the importance of the real, and the inherent value in appearances rests not at all upon the quantity of truth that they may or may not reflect. "I like things that appeared; then one was sure. Whether they were or not was a subordinate and almost always a profitless question." (XVIII, 317-18) Thus, the illustrator chooses his models, the Cockney and the Italian, who can unfailingly appear to be what the artist demands at the moment, and whose actual identity is of no interest and no consequence to him. Miss Churm, as a result, "was only a freckled cockney, but she could represent everything, from a fine lady to a shepherdess." (XVIII, 321) The Italian "was sallow but fair, and when I put him into some old clothes of my own he looked like an Englishman. He was as good as Miss Churm, who could look, when requested, like an Italian." (XVIII, 333)

What the Monarchs cannot understand is the role of art, what the painter calls "the alchemy of art." They ask him if he really thinks Miss Churm "looks like a Russian princess?" "When I make her, yes." Still Monarch sees his wife as superior, for she is a lady "who's already made!" (XVIII, 322) By Monarch's standards the artistic process is unnecessary and the artist becomes a mere copyist. This is further developed when Mrs. Monarch sees drawings for which the Italian has posed. She hints "that it never would have struck her he had sat for them," and she compares the drawings for which she and the Major have modeled and which "look exactly like us." The painter "recognized that this was indeed just their defect." (XVIII, 345)

The aesthetic vision, which is an essential element of artistic achievement, is something the Monarchs cannot comprehend.

There is yet another aspect to "The Real Thing" and that involves the issue of ethical responsibility on the part of the artist. The Monarchs are a pitiable couple who need the money modeling would provide. Nevertheless, the artist must, in the long run, refuse them because they are harmful to his work. His friend Hawley points out, "Why all this recent work of yours drops to pieces with them." (XVIII, 398) Artistic necessity is frequently brutal: the artist considers posing the Major "as the menial" (XVIII, 341), and at last permits the two of them, for a week, to become in fact his servants. The ethical overtones are undoubtedly unpleasant, but it is quite clear that James neither condemns the artist nor considers another alternative. Although an aesthetic coloration can be seen as altering the ethical structure of the social and political novels of this period, no ethical inroads have been make upon the aesthetic in the stories of artists. The painter of "The Real Thing" is as free from ethical imperatives as was Baxter in "The Story of a Masterpiece."[5]

The ethical freedom of the artist qua artist has its corollary in James's insistence upon the absence of ethical motivation in the creative act. The artist must be ethical as he is social man and aesthetic as he is artist, and the two must not become confused. This complex attitude is expressed in "The Liar," in which Oliver Lyon denies his aesthetic vision and tries to paint a portrait that is ethically motivated, that is designed to reveal the ethical weak-

ness of his subject. Unlike Baxter, who revealed character almost accidentally, by the very power of his genius, Lyon conceives of the ethical, and the personal, issue as the very basis of his portrait.[6] Lyon loses his artistic disinterestedness and turns his talent to non-artistic ends as he strives for a sort of subtle revenge through the medium of his art. The contrapuntal irony of the story arises from the contrast of the artist who has turned away from an aesthetic vision and rejected disinterestedness with the liar himself whose anti-ethical foible is always aesthetic, always disinterested - until the liar is pushed into a posture of self-defense by the manoeuvering of the artist.

The fabric of this story is shot through with allusions to deception and lying as a part of the social scene. Lyon's dinner partner at Stayes asks him if he implies that she likes "people only in proportion as they deceive." He replies, "I think we all do, so long as we don't find them out." (XII, 323) When old Sir David Ashmore sits to Lyon, he tells him about the liar, Colonel Capadose, who is "quite disinterested." Lyon, who had once loved Mrs. Capadose, finds it hard to believe she can submit to such an indelicacy in her husband, but Sir David takes a more sophisticated view. "Don't [women] mostly rather handle that instrument themselves? They're connoisseurs in the business....They've a sympathy for a fellow-performer." (XII, 345) It is significant to find in this speech that the metaphor of lying as an art-form is insisted upon.

The lying of Colonel Capadose is subtly equated with an art-form through much of the story. Capadose is "the liar platonic...he's disinterested....It's art for art — he's prompted by some love of beauty." (XII, 350) The artistic aspect of the lie is developed further in terms of the ideal, as even Lyon recognizes.

> He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a shade. He lays on colour, as it were, and what less do I do myself? (XII, 350)

The "art" of Colonel Capadose depends upon his imagination, and like other works of the imagination produces an effect upon its audience. Capadose "made any charmed converser feel as much so by the very action of the charm - of a certain guilty submission." (XII, 352-53)

All this is more than Lyon can endure, for he remembers his love for Mrs. Capadose and remembers especially that she was the most honest of women. "She had no imagination," and was incapable of any but truthful speech; she "can't tell wicked lies." (XII, 330, 331) He cannot understand her relations with her husband, for "the lie was the last thing she would have endured or condoned - the particular thing she wouldn't have forgiven." (XII, 346) He wonders if her marriage has forced her into "fibs" and soon wants to construct a test for her. The opportunity for such a test for his own revenge on the Colonel is afforded through the idea he conceives of painting

a portrait of the Colonel. The portrait would be "a masterpiece of fine characterisation, of legitimate treachery." (XII, 355) The resulting portrait, like that in "The Story of a Masterpiece," is so terrible in its revelation of character that it is destroyed; but Lyon's motive has been different from Baxter's and it is the motive that is of consequence in this story. Lyon is so "charmed with his motive" that his artistic vision is perverted: "He saw nothing else in the Colonel today." (XII, 361)

It is Mrs. Capadose who penetrates the aesthetic veneer of the portrait to the ethical purpose beneath. Struck by his wife's horror, the Colonel slashes the painting; again, as in "The Story of a Masterpiece," the ruined painting is imaged as something alive, the act as something akin to murder. Capadose "dashed [the dagger] again several times into the face of the likeness, exactly as if he were stabbing a human victim: it had the most portentous effect - that of some act of prefigured or rehearsed suicide. In a few seconds more the Colonel had tossed the dagger away - he looked at it in this motion as for the sight of blood." (XII, 376) The artist has succeeded in creating a picture of a liar; indeed, Mrs. Capadose has seen both its thoroughness, its inclusion of "everything there oughtn't to be - everything he has seen," and its excellence - "It's so good." (XII, 374-75) Lyon has succeeded as well in his test; for he finds to his chagrin that Mrs. Capadose will lie for her husband. The extent to which the ethical man has overthrown the

artist in Lyon is measured by his failure to prevent the destruction of his painting.

> Oliver Lyon lifted neither voice nor hand to save his picture. The point is that he didn't feel as if he were losing it or didn't care if he were, so much more was he conscious of gaining a certitude. His old friend was ashamed of her husband, and he had made her so, and he had scored a great success even at the sacrifice of his precious labour. (XII, 376)

The painting has come to have, for the artist, none but a moral value.

In both "The Real Thing" and "The Liar" James insists on the aesthetic purity of the artistic vision; art has no business with any other vision. The Tragic Muse places the artistic vision and the artistic commitment in conflict with the ethical vision and the social-political commitment in the lives of several people: Nick Dormer, who must choose between a life devoted to politics and the lady he loves and a life devoted to portrait-painting; Peter Sherringham, who must choose between the life of an ambassador and that of the husband of an actress whom he loves; and Miriam Rooth, who alone never veers from her artistic ambition to be a great actress. Several minor figures express hostility to the world of art, particularly Lady Agnes Dormer, her elder daughter, and Julia Dallow, the political lady who loves Nick. At the opposite pole is the aesthete - which is not to say the artist - Gabriel Nash: "merely to be is such a metier; to live is such an art; to feel is such a career!" (VII, 33)

From the "genuine British mistrust" (VII, 355) of art arises the conflict of Nick Dormer, against whose love for painting and obvious talent are arrayed figures from the social-political world who would make Nick rich and famous and who see art as some form of moral depravity. The very opening of the novel strikes this note as Nick's mother tells her son, "You think too much of beautiful objects." (VII, 11) Her view of art is concentrated on the subject-matter, "What we've been through this morning in this place, and what you have paraded before our eyes - the murders, the tortures, all kinds of diseases and indecency!" (VII, 12) Julia Dallow, whose former husband had been a collector of some note, asks Nick what a gentleman can do, comparable to engaging in politics. When Nick suggest art, she recoils: "Don't be odious!" (VII, 107) And old Mr. Carteret, who has promised Nick a forture if he follows his father's career in the House, is horrified as well when he learns of Nick's artistic ambitions. "The pencil - the brush? They're not the weapons of a gentleman." (VIII, 171) Nick's dilemma is further complicated by the fact that a career in art will involve the sacrifice of money available both from Mrs. Dallow and from Mr. Carteret, money which means comfort and independence for Nich's mother and sisters. Ethical and aesthetic considerations are altogether incompatible.

For Nick a compromise - such as that available to his sister Biddy on the grounds that she remains a pretty amateur - is not possible. Nick's talent is too genuine for part-time amateur effort. He says to Julia that "one can produce nothing but rubbish on such

terms - without continuity or persistence, with just a few days here and there." (VIII, 12) Caught between two worlds, and forced to deny one of them, Nick is pictured by James as another of the internally divided heroes already seen in Rowland Mallet and Hyacinth Robinson. Here, however, there is no longer need for the supporting genealogy.

> He was conscious of a double nature; there were two men in him, quite separate, whose leading features had little in common and each of whom insisted on having an independent turn at life.... he was adequately aware that the bed of moral existence would need a good deal of making over if he was to lie upon it without unseemly tossing. (VIII, 260)

As Lady Agnes and Mrs. Dallow and Mr. Carteret try to draw Nick back into political life, Gabriel Nash acts as the opposite influence. He treats life aesthetically, watching it disinterestedly and seeking no success. His life, he says, has "the beauty of having been disinterested and independent; of having taken the world in the free, brave, personal way." (VII, 180) When Nash sees Nick's work, he comments on Nick's "grossness of immorality," and then defines this immorality.

> We must recognize our particular form, the instrument that each of us...carries in his being. Mastering this instrument, learning to play it in perfection, that's what I call duty, what I call conduct, what I call success....I called you just now grossly immoral, on account of the spectacle you present...that of a man neglecting his own fiddle to blunder away on that of one of his fellows....Therefore...don't say I'm unconscious of moral law. (VIII, 27-28)

Nick does surrender his seat in the House and turn to portrait painting; nevertheless, we cannot be altogether sure of his future. Nash had prophesied a return to Julia Dallow through the device that Julia would conceive of having Nick paint her portrait. Toward the close of the novel Biddy returns from a visit to Julia and tells Nick that "their beautiful kinswoman was dying to sit." (VIII, 421) Nick's face expresses, at this juncture, "a foreboding which was not exactly a dread, yet was not exclusively a joy." And upon distinguishing Nash's portrait in his studio, he is filled "with an unreasoning rancour" and turns the canvas to the wall. (VIII, 422) Against this we may weigh the statement of Miriam Rooth to Nick: "You're the real thing and the rare bird. I haven't lived with you this way without seeing that: you're the sincere artist so much more than I." (VIII, 393) James leaves us with a question in regard to Nick, a question as to whether an artist's great talent and sincerity be proof enough against the clamor of society, love, and fame, with which he will have to contend. The issue had been raised before in Roderick Hudson, where the outcome envisaged the failure and the death of the artist; The Tragic Muse, while far from sanguine, no longer admits defeat.

Peter Sherringham, unlike his cousin Nick, makes his choice plain. Infatuated with the stage and strongly attracted to Miriam Rooth, Sherringham yet lacks the passion necessary for a commitment to the life of art. In part Sherringham is incapable of such a commitment since he is not an artist but a spectator; nevertheless, his refusal

to sacrifice his career to art means more than this, for in his refusal he turns against art, which, even for the spectator, can be simply too demanding a mistress. It is Peter who, early in the novel, can bravely announce, "I am fond of representation - the representation of life: I like it better, I think, than the real thing." (VII, 78) But at the end of his experience with the theatre and Miriam, Peter denies art.

> What was the meaning of this sudden offensive importunity of "art," this senseless mocking catch, like some irritating chorus of conspirators in a bad opera, in which Miriam's voice was so incongrously conjoined with Nick's and in which Biddy's sweet little pipe had not scrupled to mingle? Art be damned: what commission, after all, had he ever given it to better him or bother him? (VIII, 355)

Peter Sherringham is yet another of those Jamesian figures conceived as self-divided. Throughout the novel his love for the theater is undercut by his prudish dislike for certain of its aspects. In regard to the work of critics who discuss facts of appearance and figure in actresses, Sherringham

> could not rid himself of a prejudice against these pronouncements; in the case of actresses especially they appeared to him brutal and indelicate....At the same time he was aware of the dilemma....If one was right in liking the actor's art one ought to have been interested in every candid criticism of it....he contented himself with saying that there was no reason a theatrical critic shouldn't be a gentleman, at the same time that he often remarked that it was an odious trade that no gentleman could possibly follow. (VII, 197)

For Sherringham the ethical, moral aspect of art keeps interfering with the aesthetic.

James is careful, however, not to let us see Sherringham as such an arch-type of ethical virtue that his attitude becomes validated on these grounds. He paints Sherringham as selfish and pompous. When, for example, Peter considers the sacrifice of his career, he finds that the idea of sacrifice is a familiar one, but "it had never occurred to Sherringham that he himself might be the sacrifice. You had to pay to get on; but at least you borrowed from others to do it." (VII, 314) That has been as well the particular virtue for him of his love for the theater, "a passion exercised on the easiest terms. This was not the region of responsibility....you could not be seriously entangled in it." (VII, 314) When he considers he has successfully smothered his passion for Miriam, he thinks that it is "a high example of conduct to have quenched a personal passion for the sake of public service." (VIII, 219) Miriam recognizes Peter's refusal to be committed, and she describes him to Nick in terms like those used by the Princess Casamassima: "He's trying to serve God and Mammon, and I don't know how God will come off." Nick, she continues, has "definitely let Mammon go." (VIII, 312)

Miriam notes, too, that Peter "wants every comfort and to save every appearance and all without making a sacrifice. He expects others...to make all the sacrifices." (VIII, 313) This statement is realized in the high scene between Peter and Miriam. One of them must renounce his career if they are to marry, and neither will do so.

Peter is incapable, as we have seen, of renunciation. But Miriam's passionate refusal to renounce is a victory for art, and as such it may be contrasted to Verena Tarrant's decision to give up her "art" for Basil; for Miriam, who is a real artist, such surrender is impossible. She says many of the same things that Verena has said to Basil, but her statements are informed with high seriousness. "You admire me as an artist and therefore you wish to put me in a box in which the artist will breath her last." (VIII, 338) Peter jeers at the idea that he should quit his career to become Miriam's "appendage," and Miriam strikes, in her reply, at the heart of his weakness, his inconsistency, his fear of commitment.

> [The theatre] has a deep fascination for you, and yet you're not strong enough to make the concession of taking up with it publicly, in my person....If an art is noble and benefient, one shouldn't be afraid to offer it one's arm. Your cousin isn't: he can make sacrifices.
> (VIII, 349-50)

Peter pleads his lack of talent; had he talent, he too would go on the stage. Echoing Gabriel Nash, Miriam insists that the lack of talent, thus, the disinterested love of the art, "would only make it the more respectable." (VIII, 351) But Peter is the British public at the bottom of his moral heart and the British public distrusts art. At the close of the novel James strikes at this point once again as Miss Tressilian, the British spinster, asks Nick about Peter's love for Miriam, "Is he so much in love with her as that?

What difference does it make, with an actress, if she is mar - ?" (VIII, 437) The worlds of ethics and aesthetics, of society and art remain mutually unintelligible.

As the social world cannot see the artistic world except in moral terms, so the artistic world denies the validity of ethical considerations in its own field. This contrast is neatly dramatized in the encounter between Miriam's mother and Madame Carŕe, the great old French actress to whom Miriam goes for an audition. Mrs. Rooth insists on their respectability and says she "shouldn't like to see [Miriam] represent a very bad woman - a really bad one." (VII, 123) Madame Carré attacks this concept: "Bad women?...'Really' bad? I tried to make them all real!" (VII, 124)

> You mix things up, chêre madame, and I have it in my heart to tell you so. I believe it's rather the case with you other English, and I have been unable to learn that either your morality or your talent is the gainer by it. To be too respectable to go where things are done best is, in my opinion, to be very vicious indeed: and to do them badly in order to preserve your virtue is to fall into a grossness more shocking than any other. To do them well is virtue enough, and not to make a mess of it the only respectability. (VII, 125)

Nick echoes this: "In other works, your daughter must find her safeguard in her artistic conscience." (VII, 125) There is no need in the inviolable world of art for an ethic foreign to itself; the aesthetic provides its own morality.

It is, appropriately, Nash who sees Miriam's future in terms of the artist's ability to realize the ideal. "She will have brightened up the world for a great many people; she will have brought the ideal nearer to them, held it fast for an hour, with its feet on earth and its great wings trembling." (VIII, 199) It is Nash as well who gives us Nick's chosen field of portraiture in its highest terms.

> He insisted, above all, on the interest, the importance of this great peculiarity of it, that unlike most other forms it was a revelation of two realities, the man whom it was the artist's conscious effort to reveal and the man - the interpreter - expressed in the very quality and temper of that effort. It offered a double vision, the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of life that life could give. (VIII, 52)

III

> ...a flower of maternal wisdom: "People talk about the conscience, but it seems to me one must just bring it up to a certain point and leave it there. You can let your conscience alone if you're nice to the second housemaid."
>
> The Awkward Age

There are two major differences between The Tragic Muse and later novels of the middle period such as The Spoils of Poynton and The Awkward Age. In the first place we have left behind the world of art and artists, which means that any consideration of the aesthetic point of view will have to take place within the social,

or non-artistic, milieu. In the second place, we now find a lack of emotional involvement on the part of the author. There are no relationships in these novels that are informed with the passionate interest of the writer; all of them are colored with a cold and ironic detachment. Thus, by 1899, the year of The Awkward Age, James can permit Mitchy, the best of a shabby lot of gentleman, to be talked into marriage with Little Aggie for no very good reason, and Nanda, the most sympathetic of the personages in the work, to find her "man," as her mother expresses it, in the aging Mr. Longdon, a former suitor of her grandmother's.

In the society of these novels there is no longer either great virtue nor great evil. Some of the characters are virtuous enough simply because they are innocent,[7] which means that they are usually young and uncorrupted. Nanda Brookenham is such an innocent. There is also the simplicity, and therefore the goodness, of an occasional mature character like Mr. Longdon, who has never been exposed to society. Significantly, it is not the moral crises of these characters that represent the greatest interest in the novels; on the contrary, the more dramatic conflicts are those involving characters for whom goodness, as such, is not a consideration. In The Awkward Age the conflict facing Vanderbank is perhaps the most engrossing, and Vanderbank, who is neither altogether good nor altogether evil, measures his behavior by aesthetic standards. For the majority of the characters in these novels, the standard of conduct is, like Gilbert Osmond's, one of taste and forms. They assiduously avoid

boorishness, stupidity, and vulgarity, and prefer to view life and human actors aesthetically, that is, without a moral predisposition and with an eye to the dramatic or pictorial interest inherent in a situation or a person. Society itself is seen as an aesthetic organization which is graced by charm, wit, taste, and manners. Within this organization, conduct depends on the choice between alternatives neither of which represents ideal good, and this choice reflects not the spontaneous dictates of the good heart, but the shrewd appraisal of the egotistic intelligence. What now affects many of these choices is the aesthetic consideration of how an act will look - of, that is, appearances. This interest in the aesthetics of conduct, in conjunction with the focus on the conflicts faced by the aesthetically-oriented characters, is responsible for the absence of an ethical tenor in these works. Aesthetics, in the London novels, enters the lay world, but it does not as yet do this world much good. The good effect of aesthetic behavior will not be realized until the works of the final period.

One exception to the type of character we have been describing exists in Fleda Vetch of The Spoils of Poynton. The last of the early renouncing heroine, Fleda is placed in the aesthetically-oriented society of the middle novels, where she serves as a commentary on the poverty of its values. The Spoils depicts a world particularly interesting for a consideration of the ethical-aesthetic conflict, for it is a world in which a thorough examination is made of collecting, an area in which aesthetics and ethics each has a stake.

In such a world, in the fabric of such a novel, what the reader finds is that the renunciation that had been so satisfying, if so pathetic, in Isabel Archer becomes in Fleda Vetch overdone, even irritating, certainly inessential; she is, in short, out of her element.

The aesthetic orientation of this novel is present in many elements. Most particularly there is a hierarchy of characters in the novel dependent on the interrelation of taste and morals. Thus, the Brigstocks represent Philistine tastelessness, and their home, which is exceedingly ugly, results from "the abnormal nature of the Brigstocks, from whose composition the principle of taste had been extravagantly omitted." (X, 6) Mona Brigstock and her mother are not only tasteless but greedy as well and eager to possess objects the beauty of which they cannot appreciate. Mrs. Brigstock "was in the style of a vulgar old woman who wore silver jewlry and tried to pass off a gross avidity as a sense of the beautiful." (X, 27) The Brigstocks are the worst of the characters in The Spoils since they have both the vices which are in aesthetic and ethical terms respectively, thematic in the novel: tastelessness and greed. Owen Gereth is without taste, but he is also without greed. He is, further, stupid, but accomodating and pleasant enough for the most part: "If he hadn't a sense of beauty he had after all a sense of justice." (X, 47) Mrs. Gereth is greedy but she has taste; thus, her desire for possession is informed with a knowledge of and appreciation for the beauty of the furnishings of Poynton. At the opposite end of the pole from the Brigstocks stands Fleda, who, while never greedy, has a well-developed

sense of taste. With greed as an ethical consideration and taste as an aesthetic, the novel becomes a picture of people who have neither an ethical nor an aesthetic virtue, who have one or the other, or, in the case of Fleda, who are blessed with both.

Mrs. Gereth represents the collector for whom collecting takes precedence over all other enterprises, but Mrs. Gereth is not marked with "gross avidity," She has a sense of beauty and this is in itself a virtue. Fleda perceives this sense in Mrs. Gereth.

> It was not the crude love of possession; it was the need to be faithful to a trust and loyal to an idea. The idea was surely noble; it was the beauty Mrs. Gereth had so patiently and consummately wrought. (X, 46)

This love of beauty becomes a vice in Mrs. Gereth as it becomes an obsession, colors her conduct and her social taste. Stripping Poynton, she stoops to bribing servants, and Fleda sees that "she massed herself more and more as an immoral woman." (X, 77) Her attitude toward people is perverted by her obsessive love for the spoils; she loses her son without a tear and begins to see Fleda as a superior sort of furniture. She writes to Fleda that "you'll at any rate be a piece of furniture. For that, you know, a little, I've always taken you - quite one of my best finds." (X, 245)

Fleda, on the other hand, while she has an intense sense of the beautiful and an appreciation of fine things, never lets her love of beauty grow out of hand. A major distinction between the two women

is seen in their reaction to Ricks. Mrs. Gereth finds it hideous; she can see things only as things, with no relation to the human element. Not so Fleda.

> The place was crowded with objects of which the aggregation somehow made a thinness and the futility a grace; things that told her they had been gathered as slowly and as lovingly as the golden flowers of Poynton....they made her fond of the old maiden-aunt. (X, 54)

Fleda has not forgotten that beauty, for all its value, is not the same as goodness, truth, or purity; Mrs. Gereth represents the vice of making one criterion, that of taste, a universal standard.

Beyond this thematic confrontation of the ethical and the aesthetic in the novel, is James's use of the aesthetic as a metaphoric commentary on the actions in the story. His refusal to allow any real emotional interest to be focussed on the affair between Fleda and Owen takes this form. In the scene between the two in the home of Fleda's father, the growing emotional tension is undercut by the recurrence of ironic descriptive notes: "the smutty maid," "the stunted slavey," the "hideous crockery," and "a small stale biscuit." (X, 155-62) The startling entrance of Mrs. Brigstock upon the little drama is similarly marked: "The door opened, and the smutty maid, edging in, announced 'Mrs. Brigstock!'" (X, 168) This lady enters and "her eyes attach themselves to a small object that had lain hitherto unnoticed on the carpet. This was the biscuit of which...

Fleda had taken a perfunctory nibble." (X, 169) This technique of undercutting works again to reduce the high drama of Owen's proposal. When Owen persists, Fleda takes "refuge between the old barometer and the old mackintosh." (X, 195) These ironic devices for the establishing of tone and attitude are similar to the insights into character which the aesthetic commentary on taste permitted in The Princess Casamassima. In The Spoils the devices operate as well to direct our attention and our sympathy away from the love affair and toward the issue of collecting, the confrontation of ethics and aesthetics which stands at the core of the novel. Finally, they work as well to insist on the detachment of the author and his lack of sympathetic interest in the human complications of the story.

A similar detachment operates in The Awkward Age in which the aesthetic society is portrayed in detail. Here, the problem of appearance and reality as well as the conflict between ethics and aesthetics comes into play in the thematic evaluation of innocence. The highly immoral Duchess has prepared her niece Aggie for society by keeping her hidden from it and thoroughly uneducated about it. Mrs. Brookenham - who is, if not moral, at least decidedly less apparently immoral than the Duchess - has allowed her daughter Nanda a great deal of freedom and exposure to society. Aggie is apparent innocence, and, when her marriage releases her from the restrictions of her earlier years, she begins to behave quite like the Duchess and to do so with Lord Petherton, the Duchess's lover. Nanda, whose innocence seems to be blasted by the company she keeps and the books

she has read, nevertheless has a true innocence of character which informs her behavior throughout the novel.

The central fact of the novel is Mrs. Brookenham and her circle, composed principally of the handsome Vanderbank and the ugly, lowborn, but exceedingly rich, Mr. Mitcham. As might be anticipated, the beauty of Vanderbank covers a hollow interior; he is weak and cowardly. Mitchy is far better, the most moral of the lot; but then this is not a moral lot. The conduct of this circle, their conversations and pleasures, is aesthetically oriented. The adultery of a friend is a topic for discussion, a source of pleasure and interest, so that the adulteress becomes "the delight of our life....the ornament of our cirlce." (IX, 178) Another friend is considered, with great ingenuity, as saved by "a mere wonderful face from boring one to death." (IX, 279) Their greatest pride is their talk, the goodness or badness of which is not a moral consideration but an aesthetic one, measuring its charm and wit. Mrs. Brook says to Van, "Good talk: you know - no one, dear Van, should know better - what part for me that plays. Therefore when one has deliberately to make one's talk bad - !" "Bad?" asks Van. "You know what I mean - stupid, flat, fourth-rate." (IX, 284)

No matter how intensely personal or delicate a situation may become, the distinterested artistic conversation and discussion continues. When Longdon offers Van money to marry Nanda, Van brings the matter to his friends for consultation. Mrs. Brook comments on their discussion of the matter: "What <u>is</u> splendid, as we call it, is this

extraordinary freedom and good humour of our intercourse and the fact that we do care - so independently of our personal interests, with so little selfishness or other vulgarity - to get at the idea of things." (IX, 301)

Altogether, attractive behavior replaces moral conduct. As Mrs. Brook has tried to teach Nanda, "You can let your conscience alone if you're nice to the second housemaid." (IX, 317) When the situation between the Duchess and Mrs. Brook reaches new proportions of enmity, Mrs. Brook smoothly reminds the Duchess not to succumb "to the delusive charm of a grievance....You haven't got one. The beauty of the life that so many of us have so long led together...is precisely that nobody has ever had one. Nobody has dreamed of it - it would have been such a rough false note, a note of violence out of all keeping." (IX, 429-30) And in her final scene with Van, Mrs. Brook strikes the same note, "Let us not, for God's sake, be vulgar - we haven't yet, bad as it is, come to that....And I like it much better...our speaking of it as delicacy than as duplicity." (IX, 446) With this veneer, Mrs. Brook has covered the graceful violence of her actions toward Nanda, who, having lost Vanderbank, is left only Mr. Longdon. Of her daughter's affiliation with Longdon, Mrs. Brook remarks, "She has got what every woman, young or old, wants....She has got a man of her own." (IX, 454) And so has Mrs. Brook, who has saved her precious Vanderbank for herself.

Far removed from the values of this society are Longdon and Nanda, each of whom is an innocent. Further, each of them has taken it into

his hands to try to shape the life of another. Sincerely fond of Mitchy and honestly interested in Aggie, Nanda persuades Mitchy to marry the Duchess's niece; the consequent marriage is a disaster. Longdon, who cares for Nanda and finds Van quite charming, offers Van money if he will marry the girl. But Van is alarmed at Nanda's apparent sophistication; she has been spoiled for his conventional taste. Longdon's offer, however, drives Van ever further from Nanda, for Van's self-conscious morality fears the appearance of marrying Nanda for the money. Appearances, often quite deceptive in The Awkward Age, are Van's primary concern. Thus, both Langdon and Nanda, who do not deal with the aesthetic and who disregard appearances, are ineffective, even harmful, match-makers; like Fleda they are out of their element in the world of forms and taste. Interestingly, Mrs. Brook, who cares only for the aesthetic, is a great deal more effective. In her parlor, rival wives and mistresses are forced to an apparent accord, and straying wives held back from an act of open immorality.

Both Longdon and Nanda are, furthermore, attracted by Vanderbank, whose appeal, beyond his great good looks, remains a mystery. His friends call it "the sacred terror," and Mitchy describes the people who have this "sacred terror" as "great cases of privilege....They can't help pleasing....They hold, they keep everyone." (IX, 484-85) This mysterious value and appeal attributed to Vanderbank is very like that granted Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl, and Nanda's attitude toward him is a foreshadowing of Maggie's treatment of the

Prince. In their final scene, the embarrassed and ill-at-ease Vanderbank is protected by Nanda. "To force upon him an awkwardness was like forcing a disfigurement or a hurt" (IX, 501); to prevent this, Nanda takes it all upon herself so that Van is "let down easily." In The Awkward Age it has become implicit that, ethical weaknesses notwithstanding, beauty of person and grace of manners are of great charm and value.

Except for Longdon and Nanda, the characters in the novel are people for whom real innocence is not a standard; apparent innocence does much better, for things are taken at their apparent value. Behavior is measured in terms of appearance, and in the novel the implication is made that if behavior is immoral, it is well if it is not also ugly. Consequently, the Brookenham circle considers Lord Petherton's behavior as both immoral and vulgar, but it is the vulgarity that offends them. The standards for value remain brillance and wit, the absence of stupidity and vulgarity. Van says to Nanda of Mrs. Brook, "No one who ever has liked her can afford ever again for any long period to do without her. There are too many stupid people - there's too much dull company....she's fine, fine, fine." (IX, 508) Mrs. Brook is an effective character who dominates the world in which she operates and the novel in which she appears. Nanda, although she is given the three final scenes of the novel with each of the three major male figures, never achieves, as a character, the force and brilliance of her mother. It is perhaps another measure of the ethic of this period that Nanda is good enough but, after all, dull company.

Notes to Chapter Three

1 Henry James, The Bostonians (London and New York, 1886), p. 110; hereafter referred to in text as Bostonians with the appropriate page number.

2 Edwin Bowden has noted a similar dichotomy in The Bostonians. Of Olive Chancellor he says that "ultimately this rejection [of the arts, of taste] is a matter of moral choice." He sees Verena as allied to the aesthetic in that she is "to be viewed herself as a work of art;" The Themes of Henry James (New Haven, 1956), pp. 44 and 46.

3 Irving Howe, "Introduction," The Bostonians (New York, 1956), p. xviii.

4 Compare the following passage from A Small Boy and Others: "My face was turned from the first to the idea of representation - that of the gain of charm, interest, mystery, dignity, distinction, gain of importance in fine, in the represented thing (over the thing of accident, or mere actuality, still unappropriated)...." Henry James, Autobiography (New York, 1956), pp. 149-50.

5 Lyall H. Powers discusses James's acceptance of the artist's license to use people for his art in "The Real Thing" and his condemnation of the artist's personal or social manipulation of others in "The Liar;" "Henry James and the Ethics of the Artist: 'The Real Thing' and 'The Liar,'" Texas Studies in Language and Literature, III (1961), 360-68.

6 Compare James's stricture in the Preface to The Awkward Age: "With a relation not imaginative to his material the story teller has nothing whatever to do." (IX, xi)

7 J. A. Ward has noted that the innocent heroes of the London novels are good by virtue of their "immaturity rather than [their] incorruptibility;" "The Ineffectual Heroes of James's Middle Period," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, II (1960), 319. The point is discussed as well in his The Imagination of Disaster (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), passim.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ASCENDANCY OF THE AESTHETIC VISION

> A whole passage of intellectual history, if the term be not too pompous occupies in fact, to my present sense, the waiting, the so fondly speculative interval: in which I seem to see myself rather a high and dry, yet irrepressible hopeful artistic Micawber, cocking an ostensibly confident hat and practising an almost passionate system of "bluff"; insisting, in fine, that something (out of the just-named penetralia) would turn up if only the right imaginative hanging-about on the chance, of only the true intelligent attention, were piously persisted in.
>
> Preface, Daisy Miller

A significant aspect of the Jamesian dichotomy between the aesthetic and the ethical is its effect upon the general conception of the role of the imagination and in particular the treatment of imaginative and unimaginative characters in the novels. Primarily, the imagination is the artist's percipient faculty, and, as such, it plays an aesthetic role and maintains detachment from ethical question. In the context of the artistic imagination, the basic antagonism between ethical and aesthetic attitudes is revealed with particular force, as works such as "The Story of a Masterpiece" and "The Real Thing" demonstrate. The artists in these stories, like Nick Dormer in The Tragic Muse, insofar as they are acting as artists, dismiss ethical considerations for aesthetic.

This single-minded allegiance to the aesthetic at the expense of the ethical which James insists upon for the artist becomes problematic as it marks the early Jamesian villains, whose aesthetic allegiance, unlike the artist's, is in no way a function of the imagination. On the contrary, in the early fiction that is set not in the artistic but in the social milieu, imagination is a faculty specifically consigned to the ethical hero. Isabel Archer demonstrates a very active, but never an aesthetic imagination; her imagination is a specifically ethical function, an empathetic awareness of and participation in the sufferings of others. As such, Isabel's ethical imagination is the obverse of Osmond's aesthetic egotism, an egotism locking him within himself and incapacitating him for any sympathetic awareness of the experiences of others.

In the early fiction, then, James conceives of two very different sorts of imagination. For the early lay hero, unconcerned with appearances, the imagination is part of his ethical equipment. For the artist, on the other hand, the imagination perceives the ideal which the artist strives to realize in tangible form. The artistic imagination, unlike the ethical, works with appearances; for these are what can be seen. The particular value of the work of art lies in its own existence as an apparent form, and the special validity and uniqueness of this appearance is that it reveals rather than belies reality. "The represented subject," the art object, corrects the false relationship of appearance and reality that exists in the phenomenal world.[1]

The fusion within the lay character of the aesthetic attitude and the imaginative faculty does not occur until the novels of the middle period. The lay imagination is still conceived as the quality that permits one to comprehend other people, but this quality is attributed not to ethically but to aesthetically conceived characters. If the early villains lacked imagination, it is now their counterparts, the immoral, aesthetic figures of the London novels, who are specifically granted imagination. Imagination in this period becomes a part of the aesthetic social adventure in Mrs. Brookenham's drawing room, assigning motives to and assessing the behavior of people who are observed as if they were characters on a stage.

The one consistent factor in James's conception of the imagination is its role as a perceiving faculty, although obviously the perception may take different forms. For Isabel Archer the imaginative perception is ethical; for the artist it is aesthetic as it is for later lay characters. In short, the imaginative figure of the middle and the late fiction comes close to engaging in an artistic activity. The problem, in the early works, of the gulf between the hero as artist and the hero as lay figure is gradually being narrowed in the course of the London novels as the result of a changing view of the nature of the lay protagonist. The Jamesian artist remains committed to his aesthetic perception. But the lay hero loses his Puritan distrust for appearances and gradually assumes something of the graceful aesthetic posture of the early villain. The perception of the hero of the late novels will become a perception of the beautiful as well as of the good. If, unlike the artist, he may not dismiss ethical considerations, he will learn that their value is relative.

The growing proximity of the Jamesian lay hero to the Jamesian artist reflects, no doubt, James's own firmer belief in the aesthetic perception, perception marked by emotional detachment and moral indifference. The detached aesthetic attitude that James assumed as artist becomes increasingly the attitude attributed to his fictional characters; the encroachment in the non-artistic world of the aesthetic upon the ethical occurs simultaneously for James and for his lay protagonists. Thus, in the Preface to The Princess Casamassima we find the relation between James and his aesthetically-directed hero expressed when James speaks of his own fascination with the scene of the London streets and conceives of Hyacinth Robinson, caught by the same fascination, "as watching the same public show, the same innumerable appearances." (V, vi) For James and for his intelligent, imaginative characters the world becomes a show, a spectacle, an aesthetic organization.

The observation of the spectacle moves easily into the manipulation of the actors, and here as well the familiar dichotomy persists. In the early novels the attempts of one character to direct the life of another fall into two types. Manipulators may be sinister egotists like Gilbert Osmond or they may be characters who, like Ralph Touchett and Mrs. Tristram, are not participants in the main action but observers. Yet another division, with as yet no clear basis for discrimination, can be noted here between the sympathetic and the antipathetic observer-manipulator. In the novels of the middle period the distinctions between the actions of Ralph and Mrs.

Tristram are developed into opposing classes of manipulation reflecting the basic ethic-aesthetic dichotomy and depending upon the role of the imagination. Thus, later figures can manipulate imaginatively or non-imaginatively, that is to say, subtly and artistically or directly and ethically. In The Awkward Age Nanda and Mr. Longdon, having announced their good intentions to Mitchy and Vanderbank respectively, work openly and directly to achieve their intended results. Their intentions, motivated by an intense emotional concern, end in failure. The failure of their earnest, ethical manipulations is contrasted with the success achieved by the devious machinations of Mrs. Brook. Mrs. Brook practices quasi-artistic manipulations which, since they are the product of her aesthetic interest, maintain an ethical and an emotional detachment. The ethical faculty and the imaginative are altogether at odds.

The realization of a character who can at once operate with the ethical and the aesthetic attitudes, who can manipulate both imaginatively and ethically, is not accomplished until The Golden Bowl; for at the close of London period James is still experimenting with the problems of the aesthetic role in a lay milieu. The experiments reach a peak in The Sacred Fount, a novel remarkable for the thoroughness with which it demonstrates the aesthetic view. The narrator observes and manipulates without emotional or ethical commitment. His interest and his intensity are all for the artistic properties of the situation around him. With no personal interest in the people he plays upon, the narrator achieves moral disinterestedness and becomes an artist working in human material.

I

> I found, on my side, a rare intellectual joy, the oddest secret exultation, in feeling her begin instantly to play the part I had attributed to her in the irreducible drama.
>
> The Sacred Fount

It is in The Sacred Fount that all the manifestations of the aesthetic are fully realized. There is a complete detachment on James's part, apparent in the lack of any emotional involvement in the characters, and in the absence of any implicit ethical attitude toward the situation and the actors. Remarkably, no ethical questions are raised despite the fact that the pervasive issue is adultery, which becomes here a problem not to be considered ethically but to be comprehended aesthetically and to be found interesting after all by virtue of the appearances it creates. James's own detachment is echoed in that of the nameless narrator whose observations are consistently aesthetic and whose treatment of life is thoroughly artistic. The Sacred Fount represents the complete ascendancy of the aesthetic vision.

In The Sacred Fount the constant Jamesian interplay between appearance and reality continues,[2] but with the difference that in this novel it becomes the reader's problem to distinguish the shape of reality. What makes this problem especially difficult is that the novel is made up altogether of the narrator's construction of the real and the narrator himself is limited to appearances for his

information. Something of an outsider in the weekend group at Newmarch, he remains external to the situation. The paradox of the novel and the source of its difficulty for readers arises from the fact that, after all, the reality remains elusive, and it becomes futile to attempt to work out what is happening at Newmarch, for the actual events, whatever they may be, are of no importance to the novel.

The events at Newmarch function solely as the material upon which the narrator, watching, listening, and questioning, operates, and it is not the structure of events but the nature of the narrator that the reader must probe. Herein lies the novel's principal weakness, for the character of the narrator remains vague and elusive; we know of him only that he is clever and curious, and that he can easily become rude and prurient.

The narrator begins his train of investigations upon discovering that Gilbert Long, a dull fellow, has suddenly brightened, become rather clever. Further, Grace Brissendon, a woman who had married a man somewhat younger than herself and who had always looked her years, appears quite remarkably youthful. A bit later, the narrator meets Brissendon, whom he sees as perceptibly older, and he assumes forthwith that Mrs. Briss has sucked the youth out of her husband. Accepting this as fact, the narrator draws an analogy to Gilbert Long's case: Long must have his own sacred fount. The narrator, therefore, begins his search for the appropriate Egeria, a clever woman grown stupid. Once the situation is established in all its

ingenious complexity, it becomes rather too easily accepted at face value. James does not forget, although the reader may, that the whole structure rests upon the subtle and fanciful observation of the narrator.

Taking Mrs. Briss and Ford Obert, a painter, somewhat into his confidence, the narrator starts his search for Long's mistress, while he keeps as a constant principle the complicating factor that in the Newmarch society an adulterous relationship must create appearances that belie it. Further, it is probable that Long and his mistress will cultivate the still more confusing appearance of having other relationships more intense than the adulterous one in order to throw less subtle investigators than the narrator off the track. As Mrs. Briss puts it, "They cultivate, to cover their game, the appearance of other little friendships. It puts outsiders off the scent, and the real thing meanwhile goes on."[3] Difficulties notwithstanding, the narrator soon narrows the field to two women: Lady John and May Server. With Lady John, however, the narrator can simply make no headway: "Imagination, in her presence, was but the weak wing of the insect that bumps against the glass." (Fount, 17) It may be, after all, this very impenetrability of Lady John's defenses that leads the narrator to turn his unpleasant attentions to May Server.

Caught up in his little drama, the narrator grows ever more officiously curious and prying. It is not, however, that he lacks social scruples. As he takes Obert into the game, he points out that the business lacks honor. The two of them agree to the

flattering sophistry that their "honor" is fairer by virtue of their use of psychological clues rather than "material" evidence; nevertheless, the affair remains "none of one's business." (Fount, 68-69) Having spoken this fine bit of sentiment, the narrator continues delightedly to pry.

With the complex situation well underway, James now takes the reader to the portrait gallery where the major symbolic business of the novel is enacted. Here, Mrs. Server, Long, Obert, and the narrator, cluster about a painting of a young man in a black costume, "with a pale, lean, livid face...like that of some old world clown." He holds a mask, "a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, in enamelled metal, in some substance not human." (Fount, 55) The group discusses the two faces: which is life and which death? As the discussion grows personal and somewhat invidious, the narrator points out that the hard, enamelled, youthful, grimacing mask resembles Mrs. Server; the observation is the narrator's alone although he fancies, typically, that Obert shares it. The symbol does nicely, if not particularly subtly, for appearance and reality, but is never carried out in the course of the novel. Leon Edel comments on this passage of what he calls "such obvious and hackneyed symbolism," and he notes very astutely that it is the narrator and not James who creates a symbol out of the picture.[4] James can afford to let the narrator do a poor piece of creative interpretation, for James himself simply does not intrude upon the novel.

It is the narrator's particularly intense involvement in his investigation that has significance for a consideration of the ethic and the aesthetic conflict in James's fiction. For the narrator is not involved by virtue of any personal feeling he may have toward the particular persons in question but altogether because of the experience he enjoys of artistic creation. His attitude is totally aesthetic, completely detached. What is more, he not only observes, he manipulates as well, forcing people to remarks and acts that reveal anxieties and guilts; or so he supposes. In reference to Lady John he fairly gloats; "I found, on my side, a rare intellectual joy, the oddest secret exultation in feeling her begin to play the part I had attributed to her in the irreducible drama." (Fount, 102) He continues a few pages later in the same vein.

> To see all this was at the time, I remember, to be as inhumanly amused as if one had found one could create something. I had created nothing but a clue or two to the larger comprehension I still needed, yet I positively found myself overtaken by a mild artistic glow.
> (Fount, 104)

The narrator thoroughly commits himself to an aesthetic attitude and forswears any emotional attachment to the characters in the novel. When Mrs. Briss suggests that the narrator himself might be falling in love with May Server, he considers the possibility only in terms of his aesthetic adventure: "That was as good a name as another for an interest springing up in an hour, and was moreover a

decent working hypothesis." (Fount, 95) Whatever names others may use, the narrator's only pleasure, and it is an intense pleasure indeed, comes from the intellectual joy of his investigations and his supposed discoveries. The absence of human sympathy is heavily stressed when, toward the end of the novel, the narrator says of Mrs. Server, "The question of her happiness was essentially subordinate; what I stood or fell by was that of her faculty" (Fount,230), by which he means her intellectual equipment through which he judges her relations with Long.

With ever greater egotism, the narrator revels in his artistic delights.[5] In the long scene with Mrs. Briss at the close of the novel the narrator, apprehending that Mrs. Briss and her husband have decided to fight back, is struck by the enormous awareness that this means for him the sacrifice either of his intellectual, artistic joy or of feeling and sentiment. It is feeling, of course, that is sacrificed.

> I could only say to myself that this was the price - the price of the secret success, the lonely liberty and the intellectual joy. There were things that for so private and splendid a revel - that of the exclusive king with his Wagner opera - I could only let go, and the special torment of my case was that the condition of light, of the satisfaction of curiosity and of the attestation of triumph, was in this direct way the sacrifice of feeling. There was no point at which my assurance could, by the scientific method,judge itself complete enough not to regard feeling as an interference and in consequence, as a possible check. If it had to go I knew well who went with it, but I was there to save my precious pearl of an inquiry and to harden, to that end, my heart. (Fount, 295-96)

The narrator then behaves like the artist in his single-minded concentration upon his art[6] and in his full dismissal of extra-aesthetic considerations.

With the narrator of The Sacred Fount James has developed to its furthest potential the concept of the lay character as artist. The perversion of the artistic role here is emphasized in James's insistence upon the narrator's total aesthetic commitment and concommittant moral detachment. It is appropriate here to compare the artists in "The Story of a Masterpiece" and "The Real Thing" whom James had conceived as properly free from ethical responsibility. James had insisted upon the ethical freedom of the artist not only in the stories that demonstrated this freedom but conversely in those stories that demonstrated the perversion of a talent into which ethical consideration had been infused. When the artist in"The Liar" tries to paint a picture which reveals the moral weakness of his subject and to do so for reasons that have nothing to do with art, he fails as an artist. When the artist in "The Real Thing" continues out of sympathy to use the Monarchs as models, his work falters. The monkey-sculptor in "The Madonna of the Future" is contemptible in his use of his technical facility to create vulgar satires on man's immorality. In The Sacred Fount this axiom is inverted; the narrator becomes dangerous to the group at Newmarch as he insists upon dealing with them artistically, without moral sentiment, and finally becomes, among the adulterers and spiritual vampires of the novel, the most immoral and inhuman of the characters.

The narrator suffers, furthermore, from an excess of imagination. "I had positively encountered nothing to compare with this since the days of fairy-tales and of childish imagination of the impossible... It was the coming true that was the proof of the enchantment. (Fount, 128) He views people only as they realize his imaginative conception of them; thus, when he sees Mrs. Briss with Long, coupled, so he supposes, in their triumph over age and stupidity, he expresses his delight in terms of imagination.

> This was a possibility into which my imagination could dip even deeper than into the depths over which it had conceived the other pair as hovering. These opposed couples balanced like bronze groups at the ends of a chimney-piece.[5]
>
> (Fount, 182)

Catching sight later of Long on the terrace, the narrator notes, "It had for my imagination a value, for my theory a price. (Fount, 202) At the very close of the novel, Mrs. Briss attacks the narrator on the score of his imagination. "Of course you could always imagine - which is precisely what is the matter with you!" (Fount, 313) The dangerous imagination of the narrator is neither the artistic imagination of Roderick Hudson nor the sympathetic imagination of Isabel Archer, but the furthest extension of the clever social imagination typical of Mrs. Brookenham.

An extension of the dichotomy between the aesthetic-artistic and the sympathetic-emotional in this novel is expressed in terms, respectively, of the intellectual and the moral. Here intellectual

comprehends a cold investigatory attitude, very like the attitude of the aesthetic society in the London novels. Moral involves a personal sentiment, emotional and sympathetic. Thus, intellectual is often coupled with imaginative in the narrator's self-congratulatory passages; for example, he speaks of "a rare intellectual joy" in terms of forcing Lady John into his "drama." When he speaks with Ford Obert late at night, the narrator remarks, "I struck myself as knowing again the joy of determining, almost of creating results." (Fount, 214) He grows increasingly excited during this interview, noting that "for real excitement there are no such adventures as the intellectual ones." (Fount, 215) The narrator's intellectual adventures takes no precautions to preserve the privacy of other people's affairs. Significantly, the care for privacy is specifically labeled as moral: "moral" takes on the peculiar meaning of discreet. For example, when the narrator decides to watch May Server himself, not to share his ideas about her with Mrs. Briss (although he has already done so with Obert), he comments that "discretion... played an odd part when it simply left one more attached, morally, to one's prey." (Fount, 93) Later the narrator loses interest in protecting Mrs. Server; Mrs. Briss, he discovers, seems to know a great deal about this anyway, "The conviction had grown with me, in these few minutes, that there was now no rag of the queer truth that Mrs. Briss hadn't secretly - by which I meant morally - handled." (Fount, 249)[7]

In the London novels the major interest was focussed upon a society which behaved aesthetically; yet some characters of moral worth remained in the novels even if their interest was considerably diminished. Moral characters have altogether disappeared from The Sacred Fount, and no dichotomy, no conflict on a conceptual level exists in the novel. The society is of a piece, and the narrator, if not an intimate of the group, is perfectly attuned to it. He does not consider the Newmarch party from any moral or ethical vantage. For the narrator, as for the other characters, the aspect of the party is one of appearances, and how closely the narrator conforms is seen in a singularly revealing remark.

> 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 no discrediting by musty secrets and aggressive doubts our high privilege of harmony and taste.
> (Fount, 157)

The primacy of the apparent is insisted upon; the party at Newmarch would be what they appeared, not appear to be what they are. Yet being "really what we appeared," means no more than their complicit refusal to uncover the fact that they are "really" not at all what they, "handsome and happy," appear. In The Golden Bowl James will indeed choose to have his heroine create a reality than conforms to appearances, but in The Sacred Fount this is impossible - the reality is beyond redeeming. The reality is, in fact, never a consideration.

The Sacred Fount represents a significant turning point in the development of the aesthetic in James. In relation to the London novels, this work seems an apotheosis of the theme of society as an aesthetic organization. No moral considerations, no moral characters, no moral dilemmas exist. The world into which the reader is drawn is one of appearances alone, and these appearances, carefully deceptive, are impenetrable; we cannot go behind them to the reality they conceal. If James seems here to imply that there is no meeting ground for the ethical and the aesthetic, he has done no more in the novels that preceded this. In the novels to follow, however, such a meeting ground will be established and the union of the ethic and the aesthetic will be one that does damage to neither.

Notes to Chapter Four

1 The ability to adjust the relationship between appearance and reality is at last conceded to a lay figure in Maggie Verver of The Golden Bowl; see below, pp. 164-65.

2 The best discussion of appearance and reality in The Sacred Fount is Leon Edel's "Introductory Essay" to the Grove Press edition (New York, 1953).

3 Henry James, The Sacred Fount (New York, 1901), p. 10; hereafter referred to in text as Fount with the appropriate page reference.

4 Edel, p. xix. Edel insists throughout on the dependence of the entire structure of the novel's hypothesis upon the narrator's conception.

5 It may be that James gives the narrator some carefully overdrawn poetic diction as if to insist on the narrator's self-congratulatory and self-conscious sense of his own role as artist: "In this pause in her career it came over me that I should have liked to leave her; it would have prepared for me the plesant after-consciousness that I had seen her pass, as I might say, in music out of sight." (Fount, 168) The heavily stressed Iambs in the last phrases are extraordinary in James's prose.

6 For reference to those among recent critics who have dealt with the narrator of The Sacred Fount as an artist see note 33, p. 10.

7 The intellectual-moral opposition is found scattered through James's essays. For example, in the Preface to The Awkward Age he speaks of the English system of raising their daughters as "the so morally well-meant and so intellectually helpless compromise." (IX, x) Again in his essay "Gustave Flaubert," James speaks of the errors in L'Education sentimentale: "the two others are, so to speak, intellectual, while this is somehow moral;" Notes on Novelists (New York, 1914), p. 87.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT

> [Strether] continued to feel rather smothered in sensations, though he made in his other moments the almost angry inference that this was only because of his odious inbred suspicion of any form of beauty. He periodically assured himself ...that he should not reach the truth of anything till he had at least got rid of that.
>
> The Ambassadors

James's last three completed novels work toward the achievement of a resolution between the conflicting demands of the aesthetic and the ethical. In the novels of the preceding period, it is the aesthetic aspect of social behavior that James increasing accords depth and complexity and graces with a growing appreciation despite his awareness of its ethical limitation. At the same time, the ethical figures, while they are admirable for their virtue, are simply less interesting as characters than were their counterparts in the early novels. Virtue in the middle period, is often merely innocence, and as a result the ethical attitude has stagnated: Isabel Archer remains, in 1900, still the representative moral heroine. In the last novels the focus of attention returns to the moral dilemma of the ethical hero who is confronted with the aesthetic world, a world which has emerged from the London novels as uniquely valuable.

The Wings of the Dove, The Ambassadors, and The Golden Bowl have in common the problem of creating a mature, ethical hero, who develops an ethic that is neither naive and spontaneous virtue nor mere innocence, and who becomes aware of the complex difficulties of ethical decision and of the intense value of the beautiful in society. Thus, the American returns to the late novels. Initially, we find him very little changed from the earlier American hero except insofar as he has now the capacity to be significantly transformed - in the course of the novel - by the international scene rather than merely victimized by it. This transformation is the common subject of the final novels, and it is achieved specifically through the infusion into an ethical character of an aesthetic awareness. Lambert Strether and Maggie Verver do not sacrifice their ethical principles as a result of their experiences; rather their principles are strengthened and enlarged as they gradually encompass an appreciation of the beautiful.

Each of the three novels attacks a particular aspect of the problem. In The Wings of the Dove an evil situation engulfs Milly Theale, but the situation results from the intentions of both selfish and selfless people,[1] people both ethically and aesthetically conceived, each of whom desires, for very different reasons, the same end - Milly's marriage to Densher. All the actors are complicit in the network of evil, and the evil itself covered with carefully deceptive appearances. The sole character who chooses to reveal the truth is motivated by aggrieved egotism and becomes the immediate

cause of Milly's death; thus, one is left with the suspicion that appearances have their value, that "mankind cannot stand very much reality." The innocent heroine here remains morally committed, selfless, spontaneously good, but she is alone.

Milly is the last innocent. In The Ambassadors Lambert Strether loses his innocent conception of good and evil. Exposed to the beautiful and polished world of Paris, Strether learns to observe aesthetically, to grant to this beauty and polish the importance they must have to the mature vision. With Strether, James goes only as far as aesthetic observation; Strether's actions remain disinterested, as if an act that gratified himself must be by its very nature, immoral.

But with Maggie Verver the commitment is complete. In The Golden Bowl Maggie, an innocent American at the outset, learns to observe and to behave aesthetically. The world of forms and appearances becomes Maggie's world which she learns to manipulate for the sake of the great ethical good - the restoration of the marriages. And the ethical object Maggie desires is far from disinterested or selfless. She wants her husband because she loves him, not beacuse she would preserve the sanctity of marriage or keep up the social appearance, not then for purely ethical or for purely aesthetic reasons. In the figure of Maggie Verver, James most forcefully demonstrates the value of the aesthetic commitment for the moral hero.

I

> It wouldn't be the first time [Kate] had seen herself obliged to accept with smothered irony other people's interpretations of her conduct. She often ended by giving up to them - it seemed really the way to live - the version that met their convenience.
>
> The Wings of the Dove

In The Wings of the Dove the ethical-aesthetic conflict is expressed in the opposing figures of Milly Theale and Kate Croy. Milly is the innocent and wealthy American; Kate the clever and beautiful European. Kate operates as the devious manipulator and Milly as the naive creature to be manipulated, in which respect the conflict is parallel to that between Madame Merle and Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady. Nevertheless, there are differences, and the distance James has traveled becomes apparent when we examine his treatment of Kate Croy.

Most significant in James's treatment of Kate is simply the great amount of attention he gives to her character. It was enough for James to indicate the luster of Madame Merle's sleek surface and then to reveal the abysses of her deceit. But James abandons the element of surprise in his portrayal of Kate, permitting the reader to follow her thought-processes from the beginning, and thereby allowing Kate to make a case for herself. We know early that Kate is alone and that her few relations use her, treat her as a marketable commodity. Thus, Kate develops her philosophy - "to accept

with smothered irony other people's interpretations of her conduct." (XIX, 25) From this point, from what might be called Kate's passive deceit, it is easy enough to move to active deception, to the conscious purposive employment of apparent motives to explain one's conduct.

Kate is, practically, in control of her world; she has "the art of seeing things as they were," which means the art of absorbing appearances and comprehending them. She tells Densher, "Ah, leave appearances to me!" (XX, 49) and later promises him "the benefit of her righting every wrong appearance." (XX, 181) This successful manipulation of appearances has artistic aspects. When Densher suffers from the "awkwardness of his conscience," he knows that "this inward ache was not wholly dispelled by the style, charming as it was, of Kate's poetic versions." (XX, 182) Kate knows what she is about, and she carefully creates a world of appearances which are designed not only to deceive Milly but to make more palatable to Densher the role she has assigned him. The successful handling of appearances goes hand in hand with the careful manipulation of people; Kate is eminently capable of mastering both these aspects of the aesthetic role.

The network of deception that Kate weaves is not her doing alone. With the exception of Lord Mark, every character in the novel has reasons for wishing Densher to marry Milly. Maud Lowder wants Densher out of Kate's life. Susan Stringham wants Milly happy, and she likes Densher. Sir Luke Street wants Milly to "live." Densher,

who finds a visit with Milly "as simple as sitting with his sister... and not, if the point were urged, very much more thrilling" (XX, 173), does as Kate demands. Even Milly herself assumes some of the responsibility in her very willingness to be deceived.

Milly Theale is introduced to us in passages that are punctuated with the word "real;" thus, Susan sees Milly as "the real thing, the romantic life itself." (XIX, 107) Further, she is intense, spontaneous imaginative, and, as Kate says, "impossibly without sin." (XIX, 226) Milly's world is the antithesis of the aesthetic; James makes it clear that she has deliberately chosen people over pictures, life over art.

> [Milly had turned] her back on such opportunities for real improvement as had figured to her, from of old, in connection with the continental tour, under the general head of "pictures and things"; and now she knew for what she had done so. The plea had been explicit - she had done so for life as opposed to learning; the upshot of which had been that life was now beautifully provided for. (XIX, 287)

It is in the National Gallery, where Milly typically looks at the people, that she finds Densher and Kate together. The perception is "violent," since Milly had believed that Kate was not in love with Densher, and while some awkwardness follows, "perfect manners" see them through. Kate performs admirably and Milly is reassured.

> Little by little indeed, under the vividness of Kate's behaviour, the probabilities fell back into their order. Merton Densher was in love and Kate couldn't help it - could only be sorry and kind: wouldn't that, without wild flurries, cover everything? Milly at all events tried it as a cover, tried it hard, for the time.
> (XIX, 298)

Milly wants, after all, to be reassured.

The antithetical positions of Milly and Kate are reflected in the older women, Susan Stringham and Maud Lowder, who represent the Puritan and the Briton, united for once in their purpose if not in their motives. Aunt Maud is "conclusively British;" a philistine force with ample money and insufficient taste. She is "unscrupulous and immoral" (XIX, 31), but her way of life pretends to conscience despite her obvious lack of ethical principle. Aunt Maud lacks, as well, imagination. Typically James objectifies this through the furnishings of her home, which are grotesquely overdone. Densher, who is gifted with taste, takes note of Mrs. Lowder's house.

> He had never dreamed of anything so fringed and scalloped, so buttoned and corded, drawn everywhere so tight and curled everywhere so thick. He had never dreamed of so much gilt and glass, so much satin and plush, so much rosewood and marble and malachite. But it was above all the solid forms, the wasted finish, the misguided cost, the general attestation of morality and money, a good conscience and a big balance.
> (XIX, 78-79)

On the other hand, poverty is by no means a virtue. If Mrs. Lowder's home is vulgar, Mrs. Condrip's is mean and ugly, filled with "greasy children" and "odious visitors." (XIX, 65) Moreover, Densher's lack of means is conceived as "really the great ugliness in his relationship with Kate. (XIX, 62) And while Kate wants money, she assuredly does not want to put it to the vulgar use that Mrs. Lowder has. Money is important enough to make Kate demand that Densher wait, but "such in fine was her art with him that she seemed to put the question of their still waiting into quite other terms than the terms of ugly blue, of florid Sèvres, of complicated brass, in which their boudoir expressed it." (XX, 21) Kate's anticipated use of wealth is symbolized not in Maud Lowder's vulgar accountrements, but in Milly Theale's pearls, which Kate envisions herself as wearing.

> As she saw herself, suddenly, he saw her - she would have been splendid; and with it he felt more what she was thinking of. Milly's royal ornament had - under pressure now not wholly occult - taken on the character of a symbol of differences, differences of which the vision was actually in Kate's face. It might have been in her face too that, well as she certainly would look in pearls, pearls were exactly what Merton Densher would never be able to give her. (XX, 218-19)

The distinction is reminiscent of that made between Mrs. Brigstock and Mrs. Gereth in The Spoils of Poynton.

Susan Stringham stands in quite another position; she is never conceived in terms of possessions or wealth. She is the honest Puritan who finds herself increasingly drawn into a world of duplicity, "the labyrinth" as James twice refers to it. (XIX, 104, 186) Like Strether in The Ambassadors, Susan suffers twinges of her Puritan conscience at so enjoying herself; "She had a bad conscience, indeed almost a sense of immorality, in having to recognize that she was, as she said, carried away." (XIX, 170) And she sees the life of her old friend Mrs. Lowder as "the world that, as a consequence of the cold shoulder turned to it by the Pilgrim Fathers, had never yet boldly crossed to Boston." (XIX, 170) The exigencies of the situation force Susan to learn to lie, but she continues to hope to do it badly. Mrs. Lowder asserts, "I lie well, thank God." (XX, 116) Mrs. Stringham's lies are always, unlike Aunt Maud's, selfless, are always a necessity to which she is forced. In the end she lies for Densher, signifying the new vision of which she is capable. Densher recognizes that she "did nothing but protect him - she had done nothing but keep it up....she had suppressed explanations and connections, and indeed, for all he knew, blessed Puritan soul, had invented commendable fictions." (XX, 338-39) In the sketch of Susan Stringham James previews his work with Lambert Strether and Maggie Verver. The ethical outlook of Mrs. Stringham is expanded; she cannot any longer act by precept, but breaks arbitrary moral codes, such as that condemning lying, to behave out of an informed ethical nature.

Caught between Milly and Kate is Merton Densher, whose dilemma is the only ethical one in the novel. Milly behaves with a nearly superhuman goodness and Kate with a single-minded self-interest, but Densher must choose. Merton Densher is intellectual and tasteful, a gentleman who behaves morally. But his moral nature is weak; he will not lie, but he will allow Kate to lie for him. He is, like Chad Newsome and Prince Amerigo, passive; he allows the woman to act, to deceive, to create appearances.

It is not until the second half of The Wings that Densher plays a significant part of the action. He starts to call on Milly, as Kate has directed, and is suddenly aware that he must positively commit himself to deception.

> It didn't take him far to remember that he had himself done nothing deceptive. It was Kate's description of him, his defeated state, it was none of his own; his responsibility would begin, as he might say, only with acting it out. The sharp point was, however, in the difference between acting and not acting; this difference in fact it was that made the case of conscience. He saw it with a certain alarm rise before him that everything was acting that was not speaking the particular word.
>
> (XX, 76)

As he continues in "his so extremely manipulated state" (XX, 176), he becomes increasingly aware that his conduct is shameful, but he attempts to preserve his aesthetic facade.

> There were things enough, goodness knew - for it was the moral of his plight - that he couldn't afford; but what had had a charm for him if not the notion of living handsomely, to make up for it, in another way? of not at all events reading the romance of his existence in a cheap edition. (XX, 176)

He must "behave as a gentleman" (XX, 183), despite the reality of his motive and purpose.

Densher continues to assert his spurious innocence, which has the effect of making Kate appear the more honest and courageous of the two. When Kate says, "We've told too many lies," Densher insists, "I, my dear, have told none!" (XX, 199) His passivity persists except in the one instance when he forces Kate to come to him in his rooms. Later he thinks, "It had simply worked, his idea, the idea he had made her accept." (XX, 236) Beyond this, Densher searches for escape-hatches from responsibility.

The complexity of the ethical dilemma in The Wings is densest at the point when Densher feels himself absolved. Lord Mark has returned to Venice, and, in revenge, has told Milly that Kate and Densher are engaged. This, the clearest single immoral act in the novel, is the "efficient cause" of Milly's death although obviously this too is the product of the duplicity that Kate and Densher have woven. Lord Mark would have married the dying Milly for her money, and Milly recognizes this. Frustrated of his purpose, he acts viciously. The same plans in Kate and Densher's hands are worked with great subtlety and seem apparently kinder. When Densher learns

of Lord Mark's visit to Milly, he eagerly thrusts his own guilt onto Lord Mark, whose act he calls "evil," "nasty," "brutal." "The only delicate and honourable way of treating a person in such a state was to treat her as he, Merton Densher, did. With time...this sense of the contrast, to the advantage of Merton Densher, became a sense of relief, and that in turn a sense of escape." (XX, 265)

Densher becomes more and more determined to effect what he terms his "purification." He stays in Venice as a sort of penance.

> ...[to] stay in spite of odium, stay in spite perhaps of some final experience that would be, for the pain of it, all but unbearable. That would be his one way, purified though he was, to mark his virtue beyond any mistake....a proof of his not having stayed for the thing - the agreeable, as it were - that Kate had named. (XX, 267)

For all the moral cowardice in Densher's escape, he does effect something of a change in his character, an exorcism of his demon - his passion for Kate. When Densher is visited by Susan, he feels that "Kate's presence affected him suddenly as having swooned or trembled away." (XX, 282) Even so, he is never really honest with Mrs. Stringham.

When Densher returns to London, he can no longer be so easily manipulated by Kate. He explains that he could not have lied to Milly by openly denying Lord Mark's assertion. Kate points out that the lie would have saved Milly's life, but Densher can only insist

that he would have had to stick to that lie. Kate sneers, "You would have 'chucked' me...to save your conscience?" (XX, 322-26) The moral issue refuses to be simply solved. Once the evil situation is underway, there is no clear means of extrication, and Densher is left with a guilt that he cannot erase, "the knowledge of each other that they couldn't undo." (XX, 392)

The ethical dilemma of The Wings of the Dove depends upon the antithesis of the ethical and the aesthetic insofar as these are reflected in the real and the apparent. Kate Croy manipulates appearances while she understands, as well, the reality. Densher cannot deal with reality; his morality is half-aesthetic demanding gentlemanly behavior to cover the most sinster of schemes, and grasping eagerly after illegitimate purifications. Milly Theale chooses to be blinded by appearances, by the fiction that Kate produces; yet Milly, too, unlike any previous American heroines, produces her own set of appearances. Densher understands this at last.

> He hadn't only, with all the world, hovered outside an impenetrable ring fence, within which there reigned a kind of expensive vagueness made up of smiles and silences and beautiful fictions and priceless arrangements, all strained to breaking; but he had also, with everyone else, as he now felt, actively fostered suppressions which were in the direct interest of everyone's good manners, everyone's pity, everyone's really quite generous ideal.
>
> (XX, 298)

Milly knew of at least one thing, "the great smudge of mortality across the picture" that was best disguised; and her world agreed. The "fictions" and the "pictures" represent, Densher comments "the mere aesthetic instinct of mankind - !" (XX, 299)

II

They're children; they play at life!
The Ambassadors

In the novels of the late period the American is occasionally conceived in images of childhood. No doubt, these images and references reinforce the concept of the American as innocent.[2] What is striking, however, is that this concept of the American as innocent is not particularly flattering. It may, for example, imply a lack of intelligent experience and sensitive perception of the world, as when Chad Newsome says of the Pococks, "They're children; they play at life!" (XXII, 66) In the same vein, Milly, deceived about Kate and Densher, is described as having "amusements of thought that were like the secrecies of a little girl playing with dolls when conventionally 'too big.'" (XIX, 212) As experience is gained, the American may look back and see his own earlier reactions as those of a child. Strether, after he has discovered Chad and Madame de Vionnet in the country, "almost blushed, in the dark, for the way he had dressed

the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll." (XXII, 266) This imagery persists in The Golden Bowl in respect to the relationship between Maggie and her father after their marriages; Charlotte says they indulge in "make-believe renewals of their old life. They were fairly, at time, the dear things, like children playing at paying visits." (XXIII, 252) Further, Maggie, like Milly, is referred to consistently as "little," "the dearest little creature in the world (XXIII, 316), who has "her own little character." (XXIII, 322) In both cases, the little Americans are contrasted to their "splendid," "handsome," or "magnificent" rivals.

The child image derives from the same irony that informs the central paradox of the last novels; childlike innocence, absolute moral codes, and a resistance to the lures of beauty and grace are attributes which may be dangerous. In The Golden Bowl we are permitted to see the very real dangers of this childlike innocence at work; in The Ambassadors we see its stifling effect. In each of these novels the hero works to undo the evil of excessive moral single-mindedness. In The Bowl the danger is greater; therefore, the remedy is more extreme, and aesthetic behavior becomes possible for an American innocent. In The Ambassadors the evil and, therefore, the remedy are less drastic; Strether learns of a larger moral world and begins to observe this world aesthetically.

The world to which Strether is exposed is, in contrast to Strether himself, conceived as old, particularly in the person,

paradoxically, of Chad Newsome. James gives Chad the striking physical characteristic of gray hair, a characteristic which continues to attract Strether's attention. When the two first meet in the theater, Strether notes "that the change in [Chad] was perhaps more than anything else, for the eye, a matter of the marked streaks of gray, extraordinary at his age, in his thick black hair." (XXI, 140) If, Strether thinks, he were forced to telegraph his impression of Chad, he would have to put it: Awfully old - gray hair." (XXI, 142) The concepts of youth and age are allied respectively with the ideas of innocence and sin; therefore, "if Strether was to feel young...it would be because Chad was to feel old; and an aged and hoary sinner had been no part of the scheme." (XXI, 142) Strether's first surprise is that his embassy has not led him to an innocent young man caught in the snares of an evil woman. When Strether considers his first interview with Chad, he is reminded afresh of his own "ignorance." He admits "he didn't know what was bad...he didn't know, in so important a particular, what was good..." (XXI, 161)

Strether gradually comes to the opinion that the change in Chad is a change for the better; Chad seems to like Strether and, by the courtesies he shows Strether, "charms" him: "it was in truth not to be blinked that Chad had a way." (XXI, 165) Nevertheless, this leaves Strether in the uncomfortable position of having to report to Woollett that the evil life they have suspected Chad of living has not produced a sink of ugly and vicious sin but something - quite the contrary - rather attractive. "He couldn't quite yet force it upon

Woollett that such a career, such a perverted young life, showed after all a certain plausible side, did in the case before them flaunt something like an impunity for the social man." (XXI, 165-66) The Puritan expectation that sin will reveal itself in its appearance is disappointed.

The problem grows, becomes one of causative factors. If Chad is better, what made him so? Could an evil woman and an unwholesome situation have effected the change? Maria Gostrey suggests that Strether judge Madame de Vionnet only in and through Chad and not in herself, and goes on to explain that Chad is trying to "sink" his mistress. Strether, shocked, finds his attitude quite the reverse of that with which he began his mission. "After all she has done for him?" (XXI, 171) Finally Maria notes that Chad is "not so good as you think!" (XXI, 171) and Strether is indeed all at sea. In terms of the ethical experience into which Strether is plunged, we see him extricate himself from the Puritan morality of Woollett, from the expectation that sin is ugly - even than sin is always and necessarily evil. If sin makes a man as attractive and good as Chad seems, sin must have its redeeming side. Strether becomes a victim, for the time, of the aesthetic conviction that what appears attractive must be good. Thus, when he meets Madame de Vionnet, he finds her as good as she is lovely and charming, and he assumes, further, that the relationship is as pure as it seems to be. He is almost eager to believe in the fiction that Chad is in fact a suitor to Madame de Vionnet's daughter. One may compare this willingness to

believe with Milly's credulity where Kate and Densher are concerned. When the American becomes sympathetic to the aesthetic, to the beautiful world of appearances, he becomes so with few, if any, reservations.

Before he meets Chad's mistress, Strether turns to Little Bilham for further information. Bilham agrees that Chad has improved, but seems to consider this an improvement in external features alone. "It's like the new edition of an old book that one has been fond of - revised and amended, brought up to date, but not quite the thing one knew and loved." (XXI, 177) Bilham insists, further, that the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet is "a virtuous attachment." (XXI, 180) The two men recur to this conversation when they meet again at Gloriani's party. At this time it becomes clear that "virtuous" for Little Bilham describes something different from "ethical." The virtuous, in fact, is that which appears virtuous; there is no other standard since there is no other source of information upon which to make a judgment. Strether asks again if the attachment is indeed virtuous, and Bilham replies, "I can only tell you that it's what they pass for. But isn't that enough? What more than a vain appearance does the wisest of us know? I commend you...the vain appearance." (XXI, 202-03) The world of appearances is more than aesthetically pleasing; the aesthetic experience of life is more than merely one approach to its complexities. Bilham insists that the aesthetic observation of appearances is an intelligent and even an ethical participation in life since appearances are all that we have to judge by. Strether, in relation to the lovers, is now in this position himself; later, he will learn that the interpretation of these

appearances demands more than mere aesthetic appreciation of them, that the simple acceptance of appearances is as false a position as is the moral distrust of them. The interpretation of action and motive demands an imaginative comprehension of appearances before one can pass beyond them, but this does not mean, as it meant in earlier of James's works, that the appearances are there simply to be penetrated. The particular point of the late novels as far as the ethical-aesthetic conflict is concerned is that the facade of appearances, in being beautiful, has a value in itself.

Strether, however, has not reached this point; the moral and the aesthetic continue to be confused. Because, for example, he finds, Madame de Vionnet praying in Notre Dame, he assumes her innocence as confirmed.

> Unassailably innocent was a relation that could make one of the parties to it so carry herself. If it wasn't innocent, why did she haunt the churches? - into which, given the woman he could believe he made out, she would never have come to flaunt an insolence of guilt.
>
> (XXII, 10)

Upon the arrival in Paris of the Pocock embassy, Strether weighs his new vision of the situation against the vision of it that the Pococks will have. A fusion of the two positions is not considered; it remains a question of conflicting absolute realities. Strether thinks first that the Pococks will fail to observe successfully, but then wonders if "he himself were utterly deluded and extravagant?" "Did he live in a false world, a rank world that he had grown simply to

suit him...? (XXII, 80-81) Although Strether's world is more sympathetically presented than is the Pococks', it is - as he will find out - a false world.

That the world of appearances may be false is in no way a condemnation or a dismissal of the aesthetic. Strether must learn to identify reality through appearances but to retain, at the same time, his new appreciation for the appearances in themselves. The Pococks, with their limited vision, threaten Strether's new perception of his world.

> Did he live in a false world, a rank world that he had grown simply to suit him, and was his present slight irritation - in the face, now, of Jim's silence in particular - 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 Pococks'? - had they come to make the world 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?
>
> (XXII, 81)

Strether finds support for his position in the people who share it with him: Maria Gostrey and Bilham and Madame de Vionnet. "Wouldn't it be found to have made more for reality to be silly with these persons than sane with Sarah and Jim?" (XXII, 81)[3] The ethical position which James takes here diverges significantly from that of the earlier novels. The protagonist now allies himself with the people of taste, the descendants in the fiction of Gilbert Osmond and Madame Merle. There are drawbacks in a vision which relies wholly on either ethical or aesthetic predispositions, but the ethical predisposition becomes identified here - as the aesthetic had

earlier - as the more dangerous and the less attractive of the two.

James does more to reduce the value of ethically oriented characters than merely to have Strether prefer their opposites as people. For one thing he establishes a series of flirtations involving the morally identified characters which parallel the adulterous relationship to Chad and Madame de Vionnet. If these flirtations are less intense, they are also less attractive. Certain pairs are simply ineffectual, such as Strether and Marie or Little Bilham and Mamie Pocock, but these are not ethically-driven people. Ludicrously, Jim Pocock becomes fascinated with Madame de Vionnet. Her charm for him is her wickedness, as he conceives it. Strether says that to Pocock, Madame de Vionnet is "a regular bad one - though of course of a tremendously superior kind. Dreadful, delightful, irresistible." (XXII, 118) Ludicruous, too, and somehow sinister, is the unlikely couple of Sarah Pocock and Waymarsh. These two are seen as acting out through their relationship their individual visions of the "ideal," their naive concept of high romance, "expensive in francs and centimes." Strether has no doubt here that it is "all of a supreme innocence." (XXII, 137)

Innocent it may be, but this relationship causes Waymarsh a great deal of uneasiness. Waymarsh is an exaggerated version of the Strether who appears briefly at the opening of the novel, the Strether who is uncomfortable when he is enjoying himself. (XXI, 16) When Strether meets the experience of Europe he is opened, expanded. But Waymarsh is made narrower; so much so that he loses "the sacred rage" -

his splendid moral anger and occasional, surprising sweep of gesture. Waymarsh has lost this "at Mrs. Pocock's elbow." (XXII, 190) Strether understands that "Waymarsh was having a good time - this was the truth that was embarrassing for him." (XXII, 190) Enlisted on the side of the Pococks, Waymarsh is forced into a false position with Strether, forced even to a lie. He has lost his moral strength and he never had an aesthetic potential. When Waymarsh, about to leave for the Alps with the Pococks, expresses his uncertainty as to whether he ought to go, Strether hears "the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose, but, oh, it was feeble and flat." (XXII, 194) The route that Waymarsh has taken, by its very poverty, makes Strether's way that much more attractive.

Less amusing than the clumsy flirtations of her children, is Mrs. Newsome herself. She is the antithesis of Madame de Vionnet. The two are conceived as the aesthetic and ethical poles: Madame de Vionnet as "the very poetry of good taste" (XXII, 92) and Mrs. Newsome as "a moral swell." (XXI, 67) The character of Mrs. Newsome, whose absence in the novel serves only to increase her felt presence, is described, further, as "all cold thought." (XXII, 220) Strether finally sees that one has "morally and intellectually, to get rid of her." (XXII, 222) Her lack of human reality grows increasingly clear; she is seen as "a whole moral and intellectual being or block." (XXII, 222) She refuses to understand what Strether in his letters has tried to tell her; for she is closed to the emotional and to the imaginative experience. The only imagination of which Mrs. Newsome

has been capable is that which envisions the horrors to which Chad was supposedly exposed: an imagination of "intensity with ignorance." (XXII, 225)[4] Mrs. Newsome lacks the sympathetic imagination that feels with others; Maria Gostrey says of her, "There's nothing so magnificent - for making others feel you - as to have no imagination." (XXII, 223)

Strether's increased liberation from the Lady of Woollett brings with it a greater joy in the act of observation, observation for its own sake. Like the people in the London novels, the people whose world was a spectacle to be observed aesthetically and never ethically, Strether begins to be amused at the scene that surrounds him. Increasing detachment, morally and emotionally, becomes the mark of a man whose greater aesthetic awareness is not, for all its intensity, so single-minded as to label him anti-ethical. The importance of the act of detached observation, however, is attested to by the pervasiveness of the theater image in the novel; Strether begins to watch life as if it were a play. Sometimes Strether is observer and actor at the same time, as in the scene between Madame de Vionnet and Sarah Pocock.

> It was ridiculous, but Mrs. Pocock and Waymarsh struck him as fairly waiting for his answer. It was indeed as if they were arranged, gathered, for a performance, the performance of "Europe" by his confederate and himself. Well, the performance could only go on.
>
> (XXII, 205)

Strether does not merely observe; he acts as well. Perhaps the most astounding of Strether's acts is his proposal to Little Bilham that he marry Mamie Pocock. Like Longdon in The Awkward Age, Strether is prepared to support his match-making scheme with the offer of money. Peculiarly, the act is an ethical one, because, at its heart, it is an attempt to legitimate the relationship between Chad and Madame de Vionnet. If Mamie marries Little Bilham, there will be no other woman for Chad to marry - or so Strether supposes - but Marie de Vionnet when she eventually becomes free. "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." (XXII, 167) For all the aestheticism which Strether has permitted himself, he insists that his allegiance is basically ethical.

With this ethical allegiance and with an aesthetic delight as well in the appearance that Chad and Madame de Vionnet have created for him, Strether meets the crisis of his Parisian experiences when he discovers the lovers together in the country. He can no longer allow himself to be blinded by the aesthetic facade but must observe the actual conditions of the adultery. He must evaluate the love affair honestly for himself. The thematic aspect of the issue is underlined by the preparatory scene in which James continually recurs to the image of the Lambinet landscape; Strether is observing the world as if it were a picture, thus parallelling the way in which he has observed Chad and Madame de Vionnet up to this time - as a drama. "For this had been all day at bottom the spell of the picture - that

it was essentially more than anything else a scene and a stage." (XXII, 253) The embarrassing scene of discovery is carried off with the finesse that only a woman like Madame de Vionnet can manage; but Strether is aware that all the finesse, all the charm, is nothing but a lie. "He kept making of it that there had been simply a lie in the charming affair - a lie on which one could now, detached and deliberate, perfectly put one's finger. It was the lie they had eaten and drunk and talked and laughed...." The theater-image recurs, but this time with a tone of moral condemnation. "It had been a performance, Madame de Vionnet's manner." (XXII, 262-63)

The first effect of the truth upon Strether's beautiful aesthetic version of the affair is a sense of despair and even of disgust. "It was the quality of make-believe involved, and so vividly exemplified that most disagreed with his spiritual stomach." (XXII, 265) The sweetness of the beautiful appearance turns sour for Strether when he is forced to know that the appearance belies the reality. Both deception and self-deception have failed, and the Puritan, formerly dazzled by beauty, finds he cannot prevent the access of moral knowledge. If Strether is indeed to adopt the aesthetic vision, he will be forced to do so with full knowledge.

The experience colors all of Paris for Strether. The next morning he sees the office of the Postes et Télégraphes as a sort of infernal vision.

> ...the influence of the types, the performers concocting their messages; the little prompt Paris women arranging, pretexting goodness knew what, driving the dreadful needle-pointed public pen at the dreadful sand-strewn public table: implements that symbolised for Strether's too interpretative innocence something more acute in manner, more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life.
>
> (XXII, 270-71)

When he reconsiders his own old tradition, he is surprised to find that evil-doing presents no "special difficulty" but seems indeed remarkably easy. But in his interview with Madame de Vionnet the issue shifts ground again. Madame de Vionnet "pressed upon him that their eminent 'lie,' Chad's and hers, was simply after all such an inevitable tribute to good taste as he couldn't have wished them not to render." (XXII, 277) And Strether feels that as Madame de Vionnet "presented things the ugliness - goodness knew why - went out of them." (XXII, 277) For the first time in the novel, Strether comes to understand Madame de Vionnet as a person rather than as a performer; he apprehends her with his emotions rather than with his intellect alone. He realizes the extent of her passion for Chad and the strength of her consequent fear, and finally, as the aesthetic and the ethical merge in Strether's vision of things, he sees both the apparent and the real Madame de Vionnet simultaneously.

> It was actually moreover as if he didn't think of her at all, as if he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abyssmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed. She was older for him tonight, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and sublimest 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.
>
> (XXII, 286)

It is with this fusion of both aesthetic and ethical insight that Strether can insist to Chad that he remain in Paris with Madame de Vionnet, that to leave her would be to "be guilty of the last infamy." (XXII, 308) But when Strether comes to a decision that affects his own life, he chooses ethically and leaves Maria Gostrey. Lest it could be said that any of his actions with Chad and Marie de Vionnet had been motivated by any but the most honest and selfless of reasons, Strether refuses to gain anything for himself. He insists to the end, for himself, upon being "right." (XXII, 327)[5]

III

> Everything's terrible, cara - in the heart of man.
>
> The Golden Bowl

In his last completed novel, Henry James attempts the resolution of the ethical-aesthetic conflict. As he did in The Wings of the Dove,

James presents in The Golden Bowl an evil situation which develops with the complicity, be it conscious or innocent, of all the characters. With particular clarity, however, James defines within this situation the moral stance of each of the actors. There is, for example, the practical aesthetics of Fanny Assingham's code of behavior: "What is morality but high intelligence?" (XXIII, 88) For Mrs. Assingham intelligence means specifically social intelligence, a regard for the forms and an appreciation of appearances.[6] Since James has several times contrasted the moral and the intellectual,[7] it is clear that Fanny's code is a perversion of morality; it typifies that British morality that substitutes caution for ethics. Her coldly aesthetic view of conduct is in contrast with the fine, instinctive aesthetics that marks Prince Amerigo, and the contrast is enforced by the Prince's disdain for upper-class British morality. At Matcham for the weekend, he watches the guests who sacrifice all to the forms and nothing to the reality of moral codes, and, who, as a result, commit themselves neither to ethical behavior nor to that freedom from moral codes which the Prince calls "la situation nette."

> They didn't like les situations nettes - that was all he was very sure of. They wouldn't have them at any price; it had been their national genius and their national success to avoid them at every point. They called it themselves, with complacency, their wonderful spirit of compromise.
>
> (XXIII, 354)

As a result, the English are left with "the element of staleness in all

the freshness and of freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and of guilt in the innocence." (XXIII, 354)

Fanny's intelligence is, despite its shortcomings, capable of a great deal. It tells her when to lie, when to evade, and when to retreat for her own safety. It permits her a great deal of insight into the motivations of others and a fair enough sense of what causes will produce what effects. These capacities clearly mark her faculty as intelligence and not as morality; for she never acts spontaneously, she marks no good in and for itself, and she dwells constantly on cause and effect. The point about Fanny Assingham is, however, that her intelligence does for the most part pass as a moral sense.

Prince Amerigo, for one, erroneously accepts Fanny as a moral source; for he is as yet unequipped to distinguish between her intelligence and the instinctive morality of the Ververs. He admits early in the novel that he has no moral sense whatsoever, no moral sense, as he says to Mrs. Assingham, "as you others consider it." Amerigo operates in the world by what he calls his "instinct" and his "superstition," comparing these to a "tortuous stone staircase... in some castle of our quattrocento." The moral sense that he attributes to Mrs. Assingham and to the Ververs is, on the other hand, imaged as a "lightning elevator" or a "rocket". (XXIII, 31) The Prince operates aesthetically by his instinctive sense of taste, and he, even more than Mrs. Assingham, is remarkably successful in so doing. There is a point, however, beyond which taste cannot take even the Prince. The point comes, specifically, when he recognizes

that Maggie has acted neither through pure intelligence nor through pure taste, but through something very different indeed that he cannot understand. Maggie has "shuffled away every link between consequence and cause" and by her actions has so baffled the Prince that "taste in him as a touchstone was now all at sea." (XXIV, 345)

Amerigo's aesthetic behavior is subtle and even beautiful; if it relies on forms and tastes, it does so with a full understanding of the complexity and the richness of the forms. Such a full aesthetic comprehension of the nature of the forms is missing in the behavior of Charlotte Stant. She, too, behaves aesthetically rather than morally, creates forms and appearances that belie the reality they conceal, but for Charlotte the forms have no beauty and value in themselves, only a value as she can work them to her own ends.[8] In other words, Amerigo works with appearances, manners, and forms as a real artist with the media at his disposal. Charlotte works them in the manner of the false artist, distorting them for purposes of her own.

One of the major paradoxes of the novel is the way in which the aesthetically-oriented Prince and Charlotte weave a moral fabric to cover their adultery. James underlines this very heavily. In the moment at which Amerigo and Charlotte kiss, and thus renew their former relationship, they do so while pledging themselves to the care of the happiness of their respective sposi. With high irony James parallels each utterance of the pledge with closer physical contact. "It represents for us a conscious care - "for which we must

trust each other - !" "With which," James comments, "for the full assurance and the pledge it involved each hand instinctively found the other." They swear that their pledge is "beautiful" and "sacred," with which "their lips sought their lips" and they "passionately sealed their pledge." (XXIII, 312)

This is, of course, only one aspect of the paradox; for as the aesthetic pair deal morally, or so they insist, with the Ververs, so the Ververs deal aesthetically with their sposi. Throughout the novel Adam Verver, and in the earlier part Maggie as well, think of Charlotte and the Prince as acquisitions, as objets-d'art. At the very opening of the novel Maggie tells the Prince, "You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price." (XXIII, 12) And at the close of the novel, father and daughter look at the beautiful people they have married, while Adam notes, "Le compte y est. You've got some good things." (XXIV, 360)

The relationship of Adam Verver to the ethical and the aesthetic is as ambivalent as is his character as a whole. He patrols the periphery of the action with a cool lack of emotion while the actual quantity of his knowledge remains an unsolved mystery. Unquestionably, he treats people as items in his great collections; yet he escapes James's open condemnation. Conversely, he acts selflessly in his removal to American City, but whether his motive is love for his daughter or revenge upon his wife cannot be determined. Adam Verver contains elements of the ethical and the aesthetic: he exists both as the childlike naive American deceived by Charlotte and Amerigo

and as the inexhaustible creator of American City, the monument to his collector's instinct. That is to say, he illustrates one way in which the ethical and the aesthetic may co-exist, but a way which is far inferior to the manner in which they eventually and painfully fuse in the character of Maggie.

For Maggie, the arduous education that results in this fusion incorporates her particular responsibility to correct the paradoxes inherent in the perverted ethical considerations of the aesthetic pair and the shallow aesthetic attitude of the ethical pair. She learns that it is not enough to purchase a Prince; one has still to deserve, to earn him. In short, she must cease to treat him aesthetically. This is complicated, on the abstract level, by the fact that Maggie has, at the same time, to learn to become adept at aesthetic behavior; in order to repair the damage to the marriage, she must learn to lie, to deceive, to "humbug." The more that Maggie learns to adopt appearances to her own use, the more she learns to see, to penetrate appearances that others have thrown up to deceive her. From all of this, Maggie gains knowledge; in her loss of innocence she learns indeed that "everything's terrible...in the heart of man." (XXIV, 349)

The elevation of the aesthetic in The Golden Bowl depends in part upon this concept. The heart of man harbors great ugliness; the value of social forms is to prevent this ugliness from being apparent. Reality, then, needs appearances, in order for any sort of civilization to exist; beauty is not only pleasant but necessary.[9] Beyond

this, James seems to suggest in this novel the further difficult concept that layers of appearances may create their own reality; that an aesthetic reality, or an aesthetic morality is possible and valid. This complex idea is made concrete in the novel through the use of the figure of the bowl itself.

Ideally, appearance and reality are one; appearances being but the outward manifestation of a perfect reality, a natural surface rather than a veneer. This ideal state is represented in the golden bowl as it first seems to appear - as a golden bowl. It was "formed, to appearance...of fine old gold;" "as formed of solid gold it was impressive." (XXIII, 112) It is not, however, solid gold, and a second possibility is put forward, that the bowl might exist as a "perfect crystal" gilded over. In this instance we are presented with a perfect reality which the appearance simply enhances. The appearance, then, while different from the reality, is in no way a disguise or a deception. When we discover that the crystal is cracked, the gilding takes on a new intention - it covers a flawed reality. The gilded bowl is no less beautiful whether the crystal is flawed or not, but the gilding now has the function of disguise. The surface appearance may however be sufficient; the reality may be irrelevant. This approach is taken by the shop-keeper, who says to Charlotte of the flaw in the crystal, "But if it's something you can't find out, isn't that as good as if it were nothing?" (XXIII, 114)

It is through the different reactions of the characters to the golden bowl that we may evaluate different attitudes toward the conflict

between ethics and aesthetics. Charlotte's suspicions of the bowl are allayed by its beauty which is great enough to attract her even when she becomes aware of the flaw. She can only insist that "It's exquisite." (XXIII, 119) The fact of its crack is something she never really admits to. The Prince, on the other hand, needs no lecture on the bowl; one look is enough to warn him of the danger of the bowl. The Prince may operate aesthetically and may deal in a world of appearances, but to him appearances are always the index of an inner reality. In a parallel way, Amerigo is aware, throughout his affair with Charlotte, of the "falsity of position" through which "glowed the red spark of his inextinguishable sense of a higher and braver propriety." (XXIII, 334)

When Maggie comes upon the bowl, she is taken in by its appearance. Like Milly Theale and Lambert Strether, the half-emancipated Maggie, just learning to operate with even a limited success in the complex aesthetic world of forms and appearances, is deceived by beauty once she is exposed to it. When Maggie learns, through the shop-keeper, that the bowl had been admired by Charlotte and Amerigo, who had, therefore, been spending time together in the days just before Maggie's marriage, the golden bowl loses all aesthetic value for her. Again like Strether, Maggie temporarily turns away from the beauty that she finds has deceived her. Maggie shows Fanny the bowl, and she now labels it as "glass." Fanny doubts, with its weight, that the bowl can be glass; Maggie grudging concedes, "Well...it's crystal." (XXIV, 177)[10] There now develops in this scene the question

of the relationship between the bowl itself and the truth that it has revealed. For Fanny, the appearance, intelligently perceived, remains foremost; thus, appearances at first deceive her: "She had seldom handled so much massive gold." (XXIV, 177) When she learns that the bowl is cracked, she is quick to suggest that the crack symbolizes only the falseness of Maggie's idea: "Then your whole idea has a crack." (XXIV, 178) Most significant of her complete allegiance to the appearance is Fanny's feeling that to destroy the symbol is to destroy the referent; she smashes the bowl, saying, "Whatever you meant by it...has ceased to exist." (XXIV, 179)

Maggie's response is, as one would expect, quite different. For Maggie there remains only the evidential nature of the bowl. It is solely the outward appearance, the beauty of the bowl, that has ceased to exist for her by virtue of the story it has carried with it. When Amerigo enters the room and she presents him with her knowledge, she turns to the shattered bowl for evidence. Its value as appearance means nothing; its value is all as truth.

> 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 of its having given me so much of the truth about you.
> (XXIV, 188-89)

Maggie does, however, come more and more to an acceptance of the value of the surface, although for her the reality beneath it remains primary.

She speaks later to Mrs. Assingham of what she had wanted, "a happiness without a hole in it." Fanny suggests "a brilliant, perfect surface - to begin with at least." Maggie does not deny this, but she does turn instinctively to the reality beneath the appearance: "The golden bowl - as it was to have been...The bowl without the crack." (XXIV, 216)

If Maggie remains fundamentally an ethical personage in The Golden Bowl, this does not mean that there has been no change in her vision of the world. The novel stands as a history of an American girl's education in the aesthetic aspect of life. She learns as observer and as participant of the dangers and the advantages of the manipulation of appearances, and as she herself becomes an aesthetic actor, she becomes, concommitantly, more interesting both to her husband and to the reader. Maggie's progress from the innocent "little" victim to "the Princess [who] showed something of the glitter of consciously possessing the constructive, the creative hand" (XXIV, 145), is indeed a marked progress for the aesthetic in James. Maggie's artistic use of deceit is behavior that had been the province of villains in the early novels, of anti-ethical characters in the London novels, and of immoral - though not evil - people in the late fiction. In attributing this sort of action to an American heroine, James broadens the scope of the aesthetic and enlarges as well the conception of the ethical character in his fiction.

What must be understood is that Maggie, for all her careful manipulation of appearances, never loses her imaginative sympathy

for, her moral awareness of, the suffering of others. In the terms that we have seen James establish as antithetical, Maggie perceives and behaves intellectually and emotionally at once, as Strether had become capable of doing in relation to Madame de Vionnet. But for Maggie the dual vision is more than the perception of a moment; she lives with this conflict. It is in relation to Charlotte that Maggie most clearly manifests how far she has come. James makes clear to the reader both the extent of Maggie's passion for Amerigo and the depth of her impulse to revenge. Knowing these things about Maggie, the reader watches not only Maggie's great control of these passions but her sympathy for, her moral attitude toward, Charlotte's suffering and her unfailing admiration for, her aesthetic attitude toward, the beauty with which Charlotte keeps things up. Thus, Maggie imagines the agony of Charlotte's own passion - "the golden flame" that is now "a mere handful of black ashes." (XXIV, 330) Maggie's pity furthermore insistently demands that some service be paid Charlotte: "This imagined service to the woman who could no longer help herself was one of the traps set for Maggie's spirit at every turn of the road." (XXIV, 330)

James, then, is careful to make clear that Maggie's spirit is expanded and not merely blighted; her entrance into the world of experience is in no way a denial of her ethical code but an enrichment of it. James is, further, clear enough about the dangers than innocence can produce, that moral blindness can cause. The novel makes parallel the destructive forces at work in both marriages; the adultery

of Charlotte and the Prince is balanced by the spiritual incest between Maggie and her father. Like children, the Ververs have insisted upon keeping their old way of life intact, and in order to do so, they have permitted every freedom to Charlotte and the Prince. Thus, innocence abets evil and becomes a partial cause of the unwholesome situation.

This particular aspect of the problem is left to the Prince to elicit. We are asked to accept him as a rare and valuable person: "He is, profoundly, a Prince...and that's what makes so much of his value." (XXIII,400) He is, further, "a man who was sublimely a gentleman." (XXIV, 40) Tasteful, mannered, polished, and worldly, Amerigo has many of the qualities of Osmond, qualities here transformed into elegancies of character that are more than mere surface attributes.[11] When a man of this character views the innocence of his American wife and her placid assumption of his own innocence as well, he feels a "strong final irritation."

> He compared the lucid result with the extraordinary substitute for perception that presided, in the bosom of his wife, at so contented a view of his conduct and course - a state of mind that was positively like a vicarious good conscience cultivated ingeniously on his behalf.
>
> (XXIII, 333)

> What was supremely grotesque in fact was the essential opposition of theories - as if a galantuomo, as he at least constitutionally conceived galantuomini, could do anything but

> blush to "go about" at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verver in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall.
>
> (XXIII, 335)

That James felt it important to communicate to the reader this element of responsibility on the part of Maggie and her father is evidenced not only in the insistence upon it on the part of the Prince, but in the fact that Fanny Assingham makes the point again. Fanny understands that Maggie, wanting to compensate to the Prince and Charlotte for the time she and her father spend with one another, has forced the two of them together, out of "her unfortunate, even if quite heroic, little sense of justice." "Her feverish little sense of justice, as I say - had brought the two others together as her grossest misconduct couldn't have done." (XXIII, 395, 396)

Moral innocence is no longer simply the pathetic flaw in James's American characters which makes them easy victims; moral innocence becomes an operative factor in the creation of evil. In the complex world that James envisions, successful ethical behavior depends upon knowledge of appearances, depends, further, upon the knowledge that reality and appearances are inextricably bound together. This knowledge has always been available to the aesthetically-directed characters in James, but it was a knowledge that, in the early novels, such characters used for their own selfish ends. This position left James with two sorts of characters: the experienced, aesthetic, socially-adept persons who were egotistical and cruel, and the inexperienced,

moral, socially-naive persons who were destined to be victims.

In The Golden Bowl James permits experience with the forms and with appearances to become part of the repertory of an American heroine; a basically ethical character learns to absorb the aesthetic into her moral make-up. Maggie Verver, with this double-edged potential, can both see and feel, can observe both intellectually and emotionally, can act both ethically and aesthetically. There is no doubt that James felt this a consummate accomplishment; for Maggie is the only Jamesian heroine of the moral, American character who is permitted success. The success is not an easy one - Maggie suffers and causes suffering in others - but the success is significant.

In the ever-greater weight granted to the aesthetic in James's work lies the increasing moral ambiguity of his novels. When Maggie Verver learns to lie and to deceive, a compromise has been effected with the moral code that prohibits lying. When an adulterous husband is treated as intensely valuable, a compromise has been reached with the moral condemnation of adulterers. But James can no longer consider acts of moral consequence with a simplicity of vision. The question of cause and the question of effect are as important as the bald act itself. Further, with evil a ubiquitous force in human affairs, with ugliness everywhere, the role of appearances, the aesthetic function they fulfill of making life more beautiful, society more pleasant, and even civilization more successful, is a great role. With the aesthetic justification for appearances, there comes the aesthetic justification of characters whole lives are tissues

of the apparent. If Osmond was cruel in proportion as he deceived, so Amerigo, and Madame de Vionnet as well, are kind in proportion as they prevent the knowledge of their adulteries, as they, then, deceive.

In essence James says that if all the crystals are cracked, let all the crystals be gilded. And in The Golden Bowl the act of gilding becomes the act not only of Amerigo and Charlotte, but of Maggie herself, who learns that the reality of the marriages can only be preserved through the careful creation of a facade.

> The split determined by the latent crack was so sharp and so neat that if there had been anything to hold them the bowl might still quite beautifully, a few steps away, have passed for uninjured. As there was however nothing to hold them but Maggie's hands during the few moments the latter were so employed, she could only lay the almost equal parts of the vessel carefully beside their pedestal and leave them thus before her husband's eyes.
>
> (XXIV, 182-83)

The particular victory of Maggie Verver is that, through the rescue of her marriage, she has created a reality that matches the appearance.

Notes to Chapter Five

1 For a full discussion of the evil inherent in the situation of the final novels as distinguished from the evil arising from the native cruelty of character in the early novels, see J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961).

2 The image of the innocent American as child is comparable to the use, in the middle period, of children and adolescents as moral figures: Nanda Brookenham, Maisie Farange, and Morgan Moreen are examples.

3 Peculiarly, through a series of considerations about Jim Pocock - who has been removed from the society of women through his marriage and thereby made insensitive - Strether comes to the conclusion that marriage is a threat to the imagination (XXII, 82-83), a position which allies him with the Jamesian artist; see for example "The Lesson of the Master" (XV) and "The Author of 'Beltraffio'" (XVI).

4 Mrs. Newsome not only confounds the antithesis established between the moral and the intellectual (see p. 128, n. 7), she paradoxically, conceives with her very limited imagination precisely what the narrator of The Sacred Fount, with his intensely active imagination, conceives; they both imagine horrors. There is, however, the important difference that the horrors in the Fount are imagined for their artistic delight, while the horrors that Mrs. Newsome conceives are simply moral nightmares.

5 Austin Warren objects to Strether's insistence upon rejecting any benefits for himself. In refusing Maria Gostrey, Strether is still marked by "his pride in the supererogatory rigors of his own, his New England conscience;" "The New England Conscience, Henry James and Ambassador Strether," Minnesota Review, II (1962), 161.

6 This "intelligence" is not the intellectual quality attributed to Mrs. Newsome of The Ambassadors (see above, p. 150-51); it is suggestive of the "intelligence" of the narrator of The Sacred Fount, whom Mrs. Assingham resembles insofar as she reads appearances with confidence in her own expertise, despite the fact that she often reads them wrong.

7 See above, p. 128, n. 7.

8 Bowden, The Themes of Henry James, has made a similar distinction between Amerigo and Charlotte, but it is somewhat confused by his use of the term "the arts;" for example, "The Prince finds personal meaning in the arts, but makes no conscious use of them. Charlotte, on the other hand, uses them deliberately to disguise her feelings and her actions," p. 111.

9 This concept seems an outgrowth and extension of the attitude expressed by Hyacinth Robinson toward the function of beauty in the development of civilization; see above, pp. 79-80.

10 Significantly, the shop-keeper has distinguished crystal from "vile glass" (XXIII, 116); further, the Prince has been referred to by Adam Verver as a "crystal" (XXIII, 138). There are, then, thematic overtones, in Maggie's calling the bowl "glass."

11 James had not always conceived so flatteringly of the Prince. In a Notebook entry from 1892 James sets down the basic elements of The Golden Bowl. He thinks of the husband as a Frenchman who "is poor, but has some high social position or name - and is, after all, morally only the pleasant Francais moyen - clever, various, inconstant, amiable, cynical, unscrupulous - charming always to 'the other woman'," p. 131. The details have not been greatly altered but the attitude toward the Prince has been markedly changed, and this change reflects the greater appreciation now accorded the aesthetic.

CONCLUSION

> With Rosanna he isn't going to communicate 'intellectually,' aesthetically and all the rest, the least little bit; Rosanna has no more taste than an elephant; Rosanna is only morally elephantine, or whatever it is that is morally most massive and magnificent.
>
> Notes to The Ivory Tower

One element in James's mastery of the novel-form is apparent in the fact that the finished Jamesian novel handles thematic material only in terms appropriate to the characters and action of each particular novel. The theoretical opposition between concepts is translated into the dramatic conflict between characters, and the reader may apprehend underlying issues only through the polished surface of the work. For this reason it is particularly illuminating to consider very briefly the Notes for The Ivory Tower; for in the Notes James openly alludes to some of the basic thematic oppositions that we have observed in the form of character, conflict, or symbol. In this novel, while the conflict between aesthetics and ethics is not the central issue, recognizeable thematic patterns do emerge. The hero, Gray Fielding, has been expatriated; he returns to America to receive a large bequest from his uncle. Fielding has, not surprisingly, the polish and elegance of numerous Jamesian expatriates; but, like many American heroes, he has as well his area of innocence - in this case the area is financial. Rosanna Gaw is the American heiress, moral and honest, but without the taste and finish of her rival, Cissy Foy. Impoverished, beautiful, and at the mercy of wealthy hostesses, Cissy is reminsicent of Kate Croy. She is of necessity a fortune-hunter, but this does not carry with it any implications of grasping

vulgarity. In league with Cissy is Horton Vint, who eventually manages to appropriate a large part of Gray's fortune. He and Cissy are in love but unwilling to marry, even to consider marriage to one another, while neither has any means.

The novel promised to be rather like The Wings of the Dove, and perhaps even more successful a work, since in the place of a dying heroine we are given a perfectly healthy male victim who is blessed with true aesthetic observation, detached, ironic, even humorous. For example, James speaks in the Notes of Gray's suffering when he learns that Cissy Foy does not love him, but the suffering subsides and Gray's attitude passes rather rapidly from one of personal involvement to one of amused, detached observation.

> After the first chill of it, shock of it, pain of it...fades a little away from him, he emerging or shaking himself out of it, the beautiful way in which it falls into the general ironic apprehension, imagination, appropriation, of the Whole, becomes for him the fact about it.
>
> (XXV, 316)

In short, half actor and half observer, Gray Fielding presents us with the figure who observes with detachment, amusement, and intelligence, with, that is, the aesthetic attitude. In what he observes, moreover, he is not a tangential but a central character.

> The fascination of seeing what will come of it - that is of the situation, the state of vigilance, the wavering equilibrium, at work, or at play, in the young woman - this 'fascination' very 'amusing' to show, with everything that clusters about it. He really enjoys getting so detached from it as to be able to have it before him for observation and wonder as he does.
>
> (XXV, 317)

Gray, as aesthetic observer, is akin to the artist, and James considers giving him an artist's vocation.

> Heaven forbid he should 'paint' - but there glimmers before me the sense of the connection in which I can see him as more or less covertly and waitingly, fastidiously and often too sceptically, conscious of possibilities of 'writing.'
>
> (XXV, 339)

As James works out the problem of the novel, particularly the conflict between Gray and Horton, who has appropriated both the money and the girl, we note that the victim has become, astonishingly, the aesthetic character. The Ivory Tower represents the possibility of seeing James produce an aesthetically-oriented hero-victim who watches with detached amusement the machinations of those who are engaged in betraying him.

The Notes, further, oppose the aesthetic and the moral in terms of the characters of the two young women. Cissy Foy, we are told, "strikes [Gray] at once as the creature, in all this world, the most European and the most capable of, as it were, understanding him

intellectually, entering into his tastes etc." (XXV, 304) He compares Rosanna to Cissy, but "with Rosanna [Gray] isn't going to communicate 'intellectually,' aesthetically, and all the rest." (XXV, 304) In the following addition to that remark, James makes the opposition even clearer: "Rosanna has no more taste than an elephant; Rosanna is only morally elephantine." (XXV, 304) In the portion of the book that James did write, he made Rosanna physically elephantine as well.

The Ivory Tower, then, would have continued the Jamesian dialogue between the ethical and the aesthetic visions of life. The conflict between the two is as pervasive here as in the rest of James's novels and tales, suggesting that the resolution effected in The Golden Bowl did not reflect a permanent resolution of the conflict within James's own mind. Both the ethical and the aesthetic continued to demand allegiance from James. Although the Puritan ethic as it was expressed in so many later Jamesian figures may have had its unpleasant and its ludicrous aspects, it had for James, after all, the virtue of its spontaneous and generous goodness. But this ethic conflicted with the aesthetic in numerous ways.

Initially, there was the problem of the Puritan distrust of art, and concommitantly, of beauty, a distrust that James could not accept in his own role as artist. The dilemma grew more complex when James began to comprehend the aesthetic as dictating not only an approach to art but an approach as well to life. Gradually, the advantages of this approach were made apparent in the fiction; it became increasingly clear that the elegant society of beautiful and tasteful

people need not always be the vicious society made up of Bellegardes or Osmonds. In a world tainted by evil, the forms alone made society possible. No doubt, this growing appreciation of the aesthetic in society was necessitated by the increasing apprehension of the presence of evil. If the evil cannot be rooted out, let it then be concealed; obviously, such concealment is a function of beauty, and, as a result, the power of the aesthetic increases. By the novels of the middle period, James had ceased to grant goodness any effective force: moral people drift through an aesthetic society; unable to alter its conditions, they become its victims. The novels of the final period reveal a further change; now the moral character, at great expense, may affect the lives of the aesthetic characters and in so doing bring some goodness into an evil world. But this is accomplished only through sacrifice and with the willingness on the part of the ethical character to adopt some of the aesthetic attributes of the world about him.

The pervasiveness of the dichotomy between the ethical and the aesthetic is manifested in several ways within the novels themselves. Obviously, there is the frequent division of characters into the two types and the ensuing conflict which occurs in terms of their allegiance to the good or to the beautiful. The language itself of the novels, marked by increasingly frequent and complex imagery, is studded with allusions to the aesthetic. Description of details of furnishings or clothing, marked as either beautiful or vulgar, may serve as an index to taste, and thus, as a measure of character. The

aesthetic attitude carries with it a detachment toward the emotional aspect of human experience; James's characters in the middle period are marked by this detachment toward one another. Furthermore, the novels of this period show a similar attitude on James's own part; there is a cool, amused disinterestedness toward, a lack of active sympathy with, his characters. James's detachment is abetted technically by the device of the narrative which increases the distance between the author and his material. In a similar manner, the complex narrative method of The Ambassadors has aesthetic roots; for it insists upon the impenetrability of appearances: the reader can know only what Strether knows, and Strether himself knows only what he sees and, thereby, assumes.

Under the heading of the aesthetic and the ethical can be subsumed other major Jamesian thematic antitheses. The conflict between appearance and reality becomes a function of the conflict between the beautiful and the good, and this is true in novels of artists as well as in novels of society. Innocence and experience, as well, become, respectively, aspects of the ethical and the aesthetic, as does the dichotomy between America and Europe. Other common antitheses related to the ethical-aesthetic opposition are those between morals and manners, morals and intellect, and emotion and intellect.

Despite the importance of major themes in his novels, James's first concern was always for the form of the novel, always for his "blessed difficulties." And it would not be too much to say that in this as well James was insisting upon the duality of the ethical and

the aesthetic, and insisting upon the primacy - for here he is artist - of the aesthetic. Nevertheless, the conceptual aspect of the novels is a major element, the significance of which is indicated by the fact that James continually developed his concept of the ethical and the aesthetic and repeatedly worked out new relations between the two. The theme of the conflict between the ethical and the aesthetic may run through the entire canon of his fiction, but this theme continues to change and to develop. Euphemia Mauves, in her icy morality, permits her once erring but not distractedly repentant husband to shoot himself. Maggie Verver painfully and humbly wins hers back. Gilbert Osmond, imaged as a "fine old coin," is the coldest of villains; Prince Amerigo, "a perfect crystal," is a rare and valuable person. The only constant factor is the ethical freedom of the artist.

There seems to be sufficient evidence for the final evaluation that James was willing in the end to give more to the aesthetic than to the ethical, but this is not to say that his ethics became a mere substitution of the beautiful for the good. No doubt, it is the ethical figure who changes more in the course of the fiction. Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman achieved their ethical victories in rejecting the aesthetic, but Maggie Verver and Lambert Strether develop in the late novels in proportion as they come to accept the aesthetic. On the other hand, what changes most in regard to the aesthetic figure is not James's conception of his character, but the

sympathetic attention James increasingly accords him. Thus, while Osmond and Amerigo share many characteristics, they are simply treated differently by the author and by the other characters. Serena Merle is both a victim of her passion, like Marie de Vionnet and Charlotte Stant, and a cold manipulator like Kate Croy; and she differs from them very little in the facts of her character and career. But the careful investigation of motive that James lavishes on the later figures turns them from monsters into eminently interesting and, in the case of Marie de Vionnet most particularly, eminently sympathetic characters. Furthermore, in the early novels it was the excessively aesthetic person who was most severly judged; the overly ethical figure, like the Reverend Mr. Babcock, was at worst ludicrous. But in the final novels the most unpleasant and dangerous characters are those devoid of aesthetic awareness, those who, like Mrs. Newsome, are confined by their intensely moral vision.

Finally, the concession that James becomes ever more committed to, the concession, that, in an evil world, deception, lying, and false appearances may be not only necessary but preferable to the ugly reality, allies him increasingly with the aesthetic characters in his novels. But it is quite important to remember that in this concession James is merely choosing between two unpleasant alternatives. His preference is still for the ethical character able to operate in the aesthetic world and to adopt some of its devices for the ultimate purpose of changing that world. Maggie Verver is the great ethical heroine in James's fiction because, while she remains an ethical

being, she becomes proficient in the aesthetic world and effects a fusion of the two. What James's increasing allegiance to the aesthetic means, after all, is not that the aesthetic is at all successful or valid as a system divorced from the ethical, but rather as a valid aspect of a serious and mature moral vision. In his final novels James insists that no such moral vision can exist independent of the aesthetic commitment.

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