RENUNCIATION AND SELF-REALIZATION IN
SELECTED NOVELS OF HENRY JAMES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Henry James's novels explore the venerable theme of the individual's relation to society. His work describes and analyzes the problem from the perspective of characters who are not aware, at first, that a conflict exists. It is as a result of his concentration on his protagonists's developing awareness that James is designated a psychological novelist. His central characters's discovery of the relativity of social values and their subsequent recognition of the possible validity of purely personal conscience comprise the bulk of his novels. The psychological and environmental pressure which requires the protagonists to choose between their own newly recognized values and society's constitutes the remainder. James's characters, in deciding to abide by their personal ideals, renounce society's offered rewards, but they gain the intangible benefit of living up to their perceived vision.

Because it involves rejection of societal values, James's theme of renunciation is generally considered life-denying. Joseph Warren Beach, who perhaps originated the negative interpretation of renunciation, comments: "We are
gratified and appalled by the meekness with which these
caracters accept their dole of misery and deprivation."¹
Arnold Kettle describes renunciation as self-sacrifice,
stating that in James the "need to live is associated almost
invariably with the sense of death. Living involves
martyrdom."² By not recognizing the Jamesian substitution
of individual integrity for worldly success, Kettle links
rejection of popular values with death. R. P. Blackmur,
while acknowledging the heightened awareness of James's
protagonists, speaks of the "... living analogue of death,
sacrifice, and renunciation."³ He, like Kettle, declares
that repudiation of that which is generally accepted is
equivalent to death. J. A. Ward, in a similar vein, suggests
a masochistic origin for Kettle's and Blackmur's equation;
the protagonists, he writes, "... renounce escape, revenge,
mariage, or any other course of action which would relieve
pain or improve their situations."⁴ Ward apparently feels
that James's protagonists prefer to suffer.

¹Joseph Warren Beach, "The Figure in the Carpet," in
The Question of Henry James, edited by F. W. Dupee (New York,

²Arnold Kettle, "Introduction of the English Novel," in
Perspectives on James's The Portrait of a Lady: A
Collection of Critical Essays, edited by William T. Stafford

³R. P. Blackmur, The Lion and the Honeycomb (New York,

⁴Joseph A. Ward, Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the
Henry James, however, felt that renunciation was a positive assertion of individual integrity. It has been noted that his protagonists discover in the course of their experiences that society's absolute principles are not valid for the variety of human situations. In response to this recognition they seek a system of values which is applicable to the individual. Since they are uncommonly perceptive, James's central characters ultimately comprehend that the individual conscience, refined by experience, is the only possible criterion for man. Their awareness, however, is not transmittable to others; therefore, the motivation of their actions is not fully apprehended. Thus when James's protagonists make the choice amounting to renunciation, their rejection of societal success in favor of personal integrity can be easily misunderstood. Certainly, the benefits of renunciation are intangible, but James describes his protagonists as "... saved by the experience of certain advantages, by some achieved confidence, rather than coarsened, blurred, sterilised by ignorance and pain." That is, James's aware, or conscious, characters, by transcending the uncertainty and pain of the human condition, are sufficiently rewarded by self-knowledge and understanding.

Yet the decision to reject societal values is agonizing, for James states, "... the assertion of either [alternative] 5

... on any occasion directly involved the entire extinction of the other. The choice of either social or individual values in any situation is irrevocable. James also makes the point that such decisions must be made more than once; although his novels follow his protagonists's developing awareness only to the initial major renunciation, other smaller renunciations precede it, and still others are projected beyond the scope of the novels. Since the individual conscience is the paramount determinant of relative moral and aesthetic values, it is reasonable that each new circumstance require a separate, irrevocable assertion of conscience. The Jamesian definition of renunciation, that is, a choice for individual integrity, is the one used in this study. Self-realization, the active fulfillment of individual understanding, occurs with renunciation. James's protagonists affirm their awareness of the ideal moral and aesthetic relation in choosing their vision over society's reality. To perceive such an ideal and live up to it, of course, requires the complete self-knowledge that is derived from felt experience. Self-realization is, then, the result and reward of self-knowledge and renunciation.

Renunciation occurs at the climax of James's novels. It is, indeed, the outgrowth of two other major Jamesian themes: the international theme and the theme of human relations.

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6 Ibid., p. 250.
The international theme juxtaposes moral and aesthetic values, which James's protagonists later individualize and reconcile. In the beginning, however, the innocent, moralistic Americans are confronted, in Europe, with a sophisticated, aesthetically oriented society. After their initial aversion, the protagonists recognize the beauty of European social forms and see that a moral code based on presumption, not experience, is untenable. With this recognition, the perceptive, but naive, Americans accept the aesthetic criterion. Here, too, they are inevitably disappointed, for they become enmeshed in the evil of an amoral society. It is only after the protagonists comprehend the necessity of both moral and aesthetic considerations, based on understood experience, that they perceive their personal responsibility to act according to their ideal balance of values. At this point, the aware characters achieve the self-knowledge which prepares the way for renunciation.

The theme of human relations is intimately connected to the international and renunciation themes. James felt that complete empathy with others was a primary requirement for the ideal world he projected. T. S. Eliot notes that in creating sensitive, perceptive characters, capable of sustaining an ideal vision, James supported his romantic vision which derived

... from the imperative insistence of an ideal which tormented him. He was possessed by the vision
of an ideal society; he saw (not fancied) the relations between the members of such a society.\(^7\)

In that society, human relations would necessarily be based on the most comprehensive conscience.

This study of renunciation and self-realization examines four of Henry James's novels which have been selected for the centrality of this theme. Consequently, none of the works of James's early, relatively superficial phase, customarily dated from 1865 to 1880, are discussed. For, although such novels as The American (1877) and Washington Square (1880) incorporate this theme, it is secondary to plot. The Portrait of a Lady (1881) is the first of James's novels which depends on its protagonist's moral and aesthetic development for its interest. Though published only a year after Washington Square, The Portrait of a Lady is considered the first product of James's middle phase, extending from 1881 to 1890, which is characterized by psychological realism. Because The Portrait of a Lady clearly established the pattern for his later novels, and because it is well-known, it is included in this study, although its heroine fails to gain full self-knowledge. Following James's failure as a dramatist, in the novels of the major phase, from 1897 on, the theme of renunciation becomes primary as James's work achieves psychological and stylistic maturity. In The Ambassadors (written in 1901,

published in 1903), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904), the central characters progressively advance the implications of renunciation for self-realization.

Although James's themes, especially the theme of renunciation, have been frequently examined, several critical studies have been particularly useful. In *The Imagination of Disaster*, J. A. Ward analyzes James's view of man's inherently evil nature and concludes that complete awareness is the novelist's suggested means for overcoming it. Dorothea Krook, in *The Ordeal of Consciousness*, traces the evolution of the protagonists's awareness to the point of renunciation. In *The Imagination of Loving*, Naomi Lebowitz evaluates the qualities of the various existing human relations in James's fiction and projects the ideal relationship envisioned. In "Henry James's Reconciliation of Free Will and Fatalism," Leon Edel states that Jamesian renunciation results in peace of mind, but not happiness. A similar, although more restricted, conclusion is drawn by Quentin Kraft in "The Question of Freedom in Henry James's Fiction."9


Dizzying Crest: Strether as a Moral Man"10 Mildred Harstock acknowledges that, in The Ambassadors, renunciation is a positive choice. Several other critics have found a significant relation between James's theory of art and his themes. In The Lion and the Honeycomb, and the "Introduction" to The Art of the Novel (a collection of James's prefaces), R. P. Blackmur effectively discusses James's techniques. Joseph Warren Beach's The Method of Henry James relates the novelist's fiction and his concepts of art. And, in "Modern Writer in Search of a Moral Subject,"11 Stephen Spender finds a correlation between James's ideal world and his selection of characters.

As these critics suggest, James's themes are closely related to his theory of art. Lebowitz makes the connection succinctly: ". . . James's technique was inseparably intertwined with his moral vision and . . . the realism that emerges from the free play of moral exposure and judgment."12 A brief review of the novelist's theory of art will, then, help to clarify Jamesian renunciation.

Renunciation and self-realization, as has been noted, look beyond the real to an ideal world which exists only in

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the protagonist's conscious mind. A similar situation prevails for the artist, who projects the ideal through the created world of his work. The artist's ideal, his vision, is rooted in his imaginative transcendence of experience. Eliot states that, for James, "... art was the visible representation of moral value,"¹³ as perceived through the conscious mind. The "moral value" is dependent of the artist's awareness, the quality of his understood experience. James elaborates this point:

There is no more nutritive or suggestive truth . . . than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. . . . to the kind and degree of the capacity of that soil, its ability to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents . . . the projected morality.¹⁴

In his view, unless the artist's experience is "felt," that is, unless he clearly perceives the underlying principles of life, he cannot envision the ideal in his work. Thus, the artist's imagination, schooled in experience and observation, links the real and ideal. That James relied heavily on the veracity of his imaginative glimpses is apparent. As Blackmur notes, for James the imagination is the will of things, and, as the will was inescapably moral, so the imagination could not help creating.

¹⁴James, The Art of the Novel, p. 45.
... out of the artist's actual predicament the good of his possible invoked vision.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, if the artist obeys the dictates of his comprehensive imagination, his work inevitably reflects both actual reality and ideal reality.

The connection between James's concept of art and his use of a center of consciousness is stated by Dorothea Krook:

... art concerns itself to render the world of appearances, that appearances exist only in the consciousness; indeed, are the content of consciousness, of human observations; that the world of appearances present to a particular consciousness under particular conditions; and the artist's overriding task is accordingly to exhibit in the concrete ... the particular world of appearances accessible to a particular consciousness under the specific conditions created for it by the novelist ... .\textsuperscript{16}

The artist's problem, then, is larger than that of projecting an ideal society beyond the existent fictional one, for he must also create a character capable of comprehending the ideal vision. But, as James further explains, the center of consciousness contributes depth to the artist's created world: "We want it clear ... but we also want it thick, and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that


entertains and records, that applies and interprets it."\(^{17}\) The protagonist, by experiencing and apprehending the reality of his fictional world, at once clarifies, complicates, and verifies the artist's creation.

Since James is concerned with the development of self-knowledge, his protagonists are, at first, inexperienced in the art of living. They are innocent. In order to present clearly their later apprehension of experience, the artist must, as Krook notes,

\[\ldots\text{present exhaustively the limiting conditions of the protagonist centre of consciousness.} \ldots\]

what perceptions, judgments, responses--in the particular situation in which it is placed are and are not logically possible to it.\(^{18}\)

The protagonists, although clearly possessed of extraordinary sensitivity and perceptivity, are by no means supermen. Their ultimate self-knowledge is the result of a bitter, even painful, acquisition of experience in a beautiful, but evil, society. Both Lebowitz and Ward state that the accumulation of experience is the life of James's novels,\(^{19}\) while James himself describes comprehended experience as the subject of "any intelligent report of life."\(^{20}\) In order to best present a record of life, the artist must

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17 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 256.
18 Krook, "Principles and Methods," p. 266.
20 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 43.
find for them the centers of consciousness the right relations, those that will bring them out; to imagine, to invent, and select and piece together the situations most useful and favorable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications they would be most likely to produce and feel.  

Here, again, James emphasizes the necessity of the artist's intimate intellectual relation with his center of consciousness.

What is the purpose behind this insistence on experience? Beach and Mattheissen find that James does not adhere to any conventional moral code. Rather, the key to James's philosophy is the close connection between art and ethical integrity, the aesthetic and the moral, in which the focal point is the system of values determined by the aware individual. Since James excludes society as a whole from his system, the discrimination, the ability of the conscious mind to comprehend, is the axis of morality. Beach terms it James's "transcendental morality. It is all conceived in that spiritual realm where the bounds of taste and morality

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21Ibid.


run together and become indistinguishable." The criterion for judging an action is its beauty or ugliness as perceived by the aware mind, while sin is failure to accede to the dictates of the refined conscience.

Yet, by raising new standards for individual judgment, James indirectly attempts to establish a new system of morality for humanity in general. The tone of his theory is optimistic, in a transcendental sense, because he reconciles free-will and fatalism in awareness. He expresses the view that

... life is the most valuable thing we know anything about and it is therefore presumptively a great mistake to surrender it while there is any yet in the cup. In our consciousness is an illimitable power, and though at times it may seem to be all consciousness of misery, yet in the way it propagates itself from wave to wave, so that we can never cease to feel, ... there is something that holds one in one's place, makes it a standpoint in the universe which it is probably good not to forsake.

The individual "standpoint in the universe" is certainly not to be abandoned for the sake of society, for to do so is to sacrifice personal integrity. James accepts the idea of Emerson and Thoreau that the individual "... must find

26 Ibid., p. 10.
29 Lebowitz, Imagination of Loving, p. 44.
his salvation by retaining and exercising his natural moral faculty in an environment which emphasizes the unnatural social values." Relatively few individuals are capable of achieving James's ideal; it has therefore been suggested that the Puritan concept of the elect, perhaps unconsciously, influenced the formation of James's philosophy. Certainly James reflects the transcendental ideas of moral spontaneity and individual responsibility.

In examining James's theory of art and morality as reflected in the theme of renunciation, the novels mentioned earlier will be used as examples. In addition Henry James's letters, notebooks, and prefaces will be used to indicate his attitudes concerning renunciation. Each of the following chapters will present the moral and aesthetic development of one of James's protagonists--from innocence, through experience, to self-knowledge. Chapter II will evaluate Isabel Archer in The Portrait of a Lady as the prototype of the later characters, for, although Isabel does not herself achieve self-knowledge, her experience paves the way for her successors. The process of self-discovery, fully shown by Lambert Strether's adventures in Paris, as described in The Ambassadors, is the subject of Chapter III. Milly Theale, the protagonist of The Wings of the Dove, is the spiritual

30 Ward, Imagination of Disaster, p. 55.

31 Phillip Rahv, "Heiress of All the Ages," Partisan Review, X (May-June, 1943), 246.
counterpart of Isabel. In Chapter IV although Milly's final self-awareness is concealed by her illness, she is considered the first of these characters to gain self-knowledge. And Chapter V examines Maggie Verver's self-discovery in *The Golden Bowl* and shows her successful use of the techniques of evil to achieve good.
CHAPTER II

ISABEL ARCHER

Henry James believed that life is a "pilgrimage"\(^1\) from ignorance to highly refined apprehension of life, and the novels in question—The Portrait of a Lady, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl—map the course of the development of his idea. Although Isabel Archer of The Portrait of a Lady fails to achieve self-knowledge, she becomes the prototype of this pilgrimage for her successors. Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors is the first protagonist to gain self-knowledge, but he withdraws from further participation in life. In The Wings of the Dove, Milly Theale's apparent self-knowledge, although masked by illness and death, and her final act of comprehensive understanding demonstrate the power of the self-realized character. Only in The Golden Bowl does Maggie Verver acquire full self-knowledge and continue to live actively. With this novel James made his fullest statement of an ideal comprehension of life.

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Whatever the degree of self-knowledge reached by these characters, each follows a similar pattern of development, which is related to James's international theme. In the sense that they are Americans who lack felt experience in the art of living, who live and judge by a preconceived moral code without regard for the numerous variables of the human situation, they are innocent. When exposed to the complexities of European society, these characters perceive that their ready-made simplistic moral code is not applicable. For Europeans maintenance of rigidly prescribed social form is the primary standard. The Americans learn that, so long as the forms are upheld, all else is overlooked. In such surroundings, the protagonists must enlarge their understanding of life, for they find the beauty of European society too overwhelming to condemn out of hand. Innocence thus gives way to experience as they explore the machinations of the European concept of civilization. These perceptive Americans, given the opportunity Europe affords, thus study "the nature of human morality" in an effort to reconcile the difference between American and European life styles.

With their immersion in European society, the protagonists discover the evil underlying Europe's aesthetic concern for social forms. That is, they find that, within

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the forms, Europeans are only too willing to use others. A further development of this discovery, however, is their realization that judging according to a moral code, which denies individuality by presumptively including all men, is also evil. The protagonists eventually understand that, different as these two kinds of evil seem, their common denominator is an inaccurate perception of life. Indeed, inaccurate perception, because it leads to man's objec-tification, is James's concept of Original Sin.\textsuperscript{3} To free themselves from participation in the Original Sin, these characters must expand and make accurate their perception of life, which they do in these novels, through the range of felt experience they encounter in Europe.

The essential tension in these novels is not, however, the contrasting life styles of America and Europe. Rather it is the protagonists's growing awareness that both are evil. This understanding is the result of the characters's developing moral and aesthetic sense. When they apprehend that self-righteous morality and aestheticism are evil, they learn to rely on their own sensitive understanding of what is moral and beautiful. Such comprehension is not easily gained, for these characters must first overcome their acceptance of a presumptive moral code, and their resultant distrust of the aesthetic, which they have been taught to

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}
regard as the devil's handiwork. They are, then, at first, far removed from their eventual understanding that real morality is inevitably associated with beauty. J. A. Ward notes:

If the highest morality requires a unified sensibility, the basest immorality often results from some kind of imbalance between the aesthetic and the moral understanding, or from a deficiency in both.\(^4\)

When the protagonists's moral and aesthetic senses are sufficiently sophisticated, they perceive the necessity of such a balance and, as a result of their felt experience, achieve self-knowledge. For the purposes of this study, moral or aesthetic sense and moral or aesthetic understanding are used to designate James's ideal; moral code, moral system, or moralism and aestheticism are used to indicate the common, and, for James, evil, understanding.

Of the protagonists under consideration, Isabel Archer of *The Portrait of a Lady* is the least experienced. Reared by a romantically impractical father, she lives in a world of untested ideas which she imagines to be the European way of life. In Albany Isabel is pleased to be considered intellectual—a distinction she enjoys as a result of having read more than a few books and developing more than a few ideals. Thus when Mrs. Touchett, her heretofore unknown aunt, offers Isabel an opportunity to travel in Europe, Isabel eagerly accepts. To be able to test her ideas in the

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 126.
rarified atmosphere of the Continent, she would "promise almost anything." Her greatest goal is full knowledge of life, for she has "a great fund for life, and her deepest enjoyment to feel the continuity between the movements of her own heart and the agitations of the world." The romanticism implicit in this attitude is noted by F. O. Mattheissen:

Isabel Archer, a daughter of transcendental enlightenment, was confident that all the world lay before her, that she could make whatever fine choice she liked. James knew how wrong she was in that belief, and demonstrated that her every act was determined by the innocence, the willful eagerness, the generous but romantic blindness to evil that she had derived from her nineteenth century American conditioning.

Indeed Isabel's major, if not tragic, assumption is the naively American idea of complete freedom. In accepting her aunt's invitation, Isabel catches at the chance to enlarge her experience. And, as her aunt quickly learns, Isabel intends to act, to experience life, entirely on her own terms and assumptions. James describes his heroine's innocently presumptuous idea of conquering life:

altogether with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and

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6 Ibid., p. 45.

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indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better; her determination to see, to try, to know; her combination of the delicate, desultory, flamelike spirit. . . an eager and personal young girl. . .

as remarkably naive and romantic. Because her idealism is greatly out of proportion to any realistic appraisal of experience, the internal conflict between Isabel's aspirations and her experiences provides the essential tension of the novel.

Isabel's search for experience is dominated by her presumptive moral pride, "her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better." She imagines that life in Europe will correspond to her personal moral and aesthetic ideals. In demanding that Europe fit itself to her romantic vision, she naively, but stubbornly, clings to her innocence. Her idea of the experience she will gather in Europe is consciously limited by her determination to see life but to feel only the experiences she chooses. Again Isabel believes she can make such choices because, as Richard Chase notes,

she subscribes to the American romance of the self. She believes that the self finds fulfillment either in its own isolated integrity or in the more or less transcendent ground where the contending forces of good or evil are symbolized abstractions.

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8 James, The Portrait of a Lady, III, 69.
9 Ibid.
Isabel is vulnerable to evil not only because she has never been victimized, but also because she refuses to acknowledge it on any but abstract terms. Her insistence on maintaining her idealized view of life is an aspect of her fastidiousness; she declines to recognize the practical implications of life. At the same time, Isabel disturbs the forms of the established European society by living as if she were independent.

Her idealism is noted by Lord Warburton, her second suitor, who remarks, "I never saw a person judge things on such theoretic grounds."\(^{11}\) Lord Warburton, a model of advanced English nobility, is so strikingly affected by Isabel's eagerness for life that he proposes to her. Isabel refuses him, fearing that, if she were to marry him, she would be lost in the morass of English tradition and lose her chance to live as she wishes. Isabel tells him that she cannot choose to escape "what most people know and suffer,"\(^{12}\) although her concept of knowledge and suffering is, as yet, only noble fantasy. Her uncle first notes Isabel's weakness; he sees that, in spite of her protestations to the contrary, Isabel actually imagines that she will live above the suffering of common humanity. When Ralph, Isabel's cousin, asks his dying father to leave her a sizeable part of the fortune that is to come to him, the older man wisely hesitates.

\(^{11}\)James, The Portrait of a Lady, III, 188.

\(^{12}\)Ibid.
He fears that Isabel will not be able to accept the responsibility of the complete freedom of wealth. Recognizing his niece's aversion to a realistic view of life, Mr. Touchett agrees to his son's request with great reluctance. For his part, Ralph has boundless confidence in his cousin. He is willing to give up half of his inheritance to observe what Isabel, with absolute freedom, will do.

As Oscar Cargill suggests, the clearest indication of Isabel's innocent idealism comes from the suitors she attracts:

Isabel's growth, or better, definition is rendered sharper by her successive suitors and admirers: less distinguished at first by her relation to Goodwood, a fellow American, her delineation becomes substantial through the attentions of Lord Warburton and is highlighted by her marriage to Osmond.13

Caspar Goodwood, a brash American manufacturer, has pestered Isabel with marriage proposals since before she left America. Her refusal of the stalwart Goodwood is based on her rejection of American practicality. He is the epitome of the self-assured ignorance and pragmatism which she seeks to escape. Though not named at this point, there is also her fear of his very masculinity—a factor not noticeably present in her other suitors. Lord Warburton, as has been noted, offers sheltered protection from life through the traditions of English aristocracy. But Isabel sees that such a marriage

"is getting . . . a great deal. But it is giving up other chances," primarily the opportunity to live in a world of ideas.

Isabel's acceptance of Osmond's proposal is the ultimate act of her misguided idealism. Isabel succumbs very easily to his charm because he appeals to her aesthetic idealism and to her desire to sacrifice for some noble cause. Osmond's appeal is his love for appearances. He is "convention itself," by his own description. A collector of art, he seems to Isabel a collector of the life she envisions. She marries Osmond for two reasons: first, her "desire to enlarge and enrich her experience of life, to grow in wisdom and virtue under the guidance of the most superior of men," and second, her desire to serve, especially with her money. As Mr. Touchett feared, Isabel has found that the responsibility of wealth is too much for her. Thus she surrenders her money and her freedom to Osmond, who with Madame Merle, represents her early concept of the ideally sophisticated. Her desire to experience life only in abstractions, to withdraw from it and live according to an ideal of beauty, determines her admiration for Osmond and Madame Merle and

14 James, The Portrait of a Lady, III, 186.


the cold world they represent. Isabel's pride and her unawareness of the evil of an unfeeling love of beauty are the sum of her innocence.

Because felt experience is necessary for the full development of James's protagonists, they must be aware of the meaning of what happens to them. Since they are endowed with an intense consciousness of themselves and their relations with others, the innocent Americans need only the opportunity for experience provided by Europe. Ward notes that "the American has an instinctive moral sense" when he can develop only in the "rich complexity of art, history and manners" of Europe.17

Yet, for all this, what happens is not of paramount importance. Experience serves the Jamesian characters as the means of refining perception so that what matters is the characters's impressions, their own perceptions, of their experiences. James states:

Any situation depends for its interest on the nature of the persons situated, and thereby on their way of taking it; depends, that is, on varying states of vision, of feeling, of consciousness; depends on the analyses of the situation by its different agents.18

Because the characters's understanding is primary, the amount of meaning derived from any occurrence is larger than the


experience itself. The number of actual events in James's novels is greatly limited in comparison to the impressions and understanding gained. The result of the American protagonists's experience is self-knowledge—awareness of themselves and their relations to others. Self-knowledge, however, cannot be achieved without the accurate perception which fully understood experience provides. Thus it is necessary to consider the protagonists's experience and their comprehensions in order to understand their developing moral and aesthetic sensibilities. As their perceptiveness refines and enlarges their understanding, they apprehend the evil of preconceived moral and aesthetic systems. From this apprehension their efforts are directed toward determining what is morally and aesthetically right for themselves and establishing an ideal flexible enough to meet individual situations.

Isabel Archer, whose innocence is marked by pride and romanticism, discovers after her marriage to Gilbert Osmond that her husband lacks the moral element so important in her vision of the intellectual life. Having desired to live in Osmond's protected, aesthetic world, Isabel learns too late that she is simply another object in her husband's collection, another tribute to his taste, and that he has only contempt for her moral understanding. The effect of this knowledge is readily apparent to her old friends when the story resumes in Rome some three years after her marriage. Ralph, who has
enjoyed only the most formal correspondence with Isabel since her marriage, recognizes clearly the extent of her transformation, in spite of the mask she wears for him. Her manner is "fixed and mechanical . . . an expression . . . a representation"\(^{19}\) of Gilbert Osmond. Isabel now moves more rapidly, more violently, than before, reflecting her husband's efforts to make her an ornament in dress and attitude.

Although Isabel wants to please her husband, in order to satisfy her moral standard, she finds, on the occasion of his asking her to help him marry his daughter, Pansy, to Lord Warburton, that "... the knowledge of his expecting a thing raised a presumption against it."\(^{20}\) She considers it a "striking example of his faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at."\(^{21}\) Reviewing her situation in the midnight vigil, Isabel reflects that Osmond considers himself as much deceived in his marriage as she: "She had effaced herself . . .; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was."\(^{22}\) Her admiration for his taste caused her to try to become what Osmond wanted her to be, but she could

\(^{19}\) James, The Portrait of a Lady, IV, 142.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 188.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 199.
not continue the deception. Now she has no complaint against him, except that he hates her for the moral sense that is her best quality. Thus, as for her marriage,

Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression, where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and served to deepen the feeling of failure.23

The source of Isabel's pain is her unresolved romantic idealism and pride. In this stubborn refusal to learn from experience, Isabel differs from the other protagonists; she still clings to her old ideals. Against her will she is now completely involved in life at its ugliest.

But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it forever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten, or convert, or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority.24

If she cannot convert the world to her vision, she can hope to force it to acknowledge her superiority. In this desire Isabel at once shows her aesthetic similarity to Osmond and the direction her life will take. Her pride and the moralism for which Osmond hates her require that she live within the limits of her marriage. Neither Ralph, who warned her against Osmond, nor anyone else may know of her unhappiness. Knowing that her husband disapproves of her visits to the invalid

23 Ibid., p. 189.
24 Ibid., p. 197.
Ralph, she wonders what she will do if he forbids her to continue seeing her cousin: "It was not that she loved Ralph less, but that almost anything seemed preferable to repudiating the most serious act—the single sacred act—of her life,"25 her marriage vow.

On the same evening Isabel finds something else to consider. A momentary, but singular, impression she received in the afternoon repeatedly presents itself to her conscious mind. On the surface there is nothing unusual about Isabel's glimpsing her husband and Madame Merle engaged in conversation, but

What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood, there was an anomaly in this that arrested her . . . the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative position, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected.26

Although Isabel has long since realized that Madame Merle played a large part in arranging Osmond's marriage, this is her first hint of the intimacy of Osmond's and Madame Merle's relationship. Later, when she finds that she must contend with Madame Merle as well as Osmond in the matter of Lord Warburton's failure to propose to Pansy, Isabel is even more concerned to determine Madame Merle's real relation to Osmond. But though her "imagination applied itself actively

25Ibid., p. 246.
26Ibid., p. 164.
to this elusive point, . . . every now and then it was checked by a nameless dread."\textsuperscript{27} Later, when Madame Merle tells Isabel that Osmond is thoroughly displeased with her for her failure to persuade Lord Warburton to marry Pansy, Isabel is horrified: "What touched Isabel like a drop of corrosive acid upon an open wound was the knowledge that Osmond dishonoured her in his words as well as in his thoughts."\textsuperscript{28} Osmond is not bound by any sense of moral obligation to his wife, although she, as Madame Merle notes, feels that duty to him. When the older woman then insists that Isabel cooperate with Osmond's plan, Isabel demands "What have you to do with my husband? . . . What have you to do with me?"\textsuperscript{29} The answer "Everything!"\textsuperscript{30} reveals the extent of Isabel's victimization, although she does not know the reason.

That afternoon Isabel, taking a solitary drive, considers her position. Her greatest disappointment is still her failure to live in the ideal world she had envisioned:

She had desired a large acquaintance with human life, and in spite of her having flattered herself that she had cultivated it with some success; this elementary privilege had been denied her.\textsuperscript{31}

On a practical level she has been Madame Merle's pawn. The woman is not simply a match-maker; she had fostered this marriage for a purpose, which is not yet apparent to her

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 278.  \textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 326.  \textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 327.
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 329.
victim. Isabel recalls that Madame Merle's interest in her increased after her inheritance, but only Osmond has gained from his wife's money. Strangely, Isabel has never thought that Osmond married her for her wealth; it seemed too base. Now she wonders if he will give her her freedom for her money. She even pities Madame Merle, for the woman's gift to Osmond has not won his favor.

A week after Osmond banishes his daughter, Pansy, to a convent in revenge for Lord Warburton's failure to propose, Isabel receives a telegram from Mrs. Touchett notifying her that Ralph is dying and wishes to see her. Isabel immediately tells Osmond and announces her intention to go to Gardencourt. Osmond's reaction is predictable and ominous:

"I shall not like it if you do," Osmond remarked. "Why should I mind that? You won't like it if I don't. You like nothing I do or don't do. You pretend to think I lie."

Osmond turned slightly pale; he gave a cold smile. "That's why you must go then? Not to see your cousin but to take a revenge on me."

"I know nothing about revenge."

"I do, said Osmond. "Don't give me an occasion."

"You are only too eager to take one. You wish immensely that I would commit some folly."

"I shall be gratified then if you disobey me. . . . If you leave Rome to-day it will be a piece of the most deliberate, the most calculated, opposition."

Osmond then explains that he is concerned about the appearance of their marriage. He reminds her of this: "Because I think we should accept the consequences of our actions, and what I

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32Ibid., pp. 353-354.
value most is the honour of a thing!"33 His statement restrains Isabel momentarily, for Osmond for once seems sincere: "He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious—the observance of a magnificent form."34 But Isabel decides that this time she will at least be deserving of her punishment and tells her husband that she is leaving.

Returning to her room Isabel encounters the Countess Gemini, her sister-in-law, and tells her that Ralph is dying. The Countess, knowing her brother, realizes that Isabel has been intimidated. Isabel's high moral pride, called into play by her husband, threatens to prevent her going to Ralph. The Countess, pitying her and hating her brother, tells her of Osmond's and Madame Merle's affair, of which Pansy was born. Madame Merle's concern for Pansy had led her to arrange Isabel's marriage and to be interested now in finding a husband for her daughter. Although this information confirms Isabel's suppositions, her reaction is disappointing to the volatile Countess. Her disillusionment complete, Isabel simply prepares to go to Ralph.

The psychological effect of experience upon James's protagonists is self-knowledge. During the intellectual trial by ordeal that is experience, their understanding is expanded and sensitized by conscious examination of their reactions to events and by their awareness of the responses

33Ibid., p. 356.  
34Ibid.
of others. Such conscious self-examination enables his protagonists to comprehend the evil of over-emphasis of either moral or aesthetic considerations, for they perceive that morality without beauty is ugly and beauty without morality is immoral, and that either of these is evil. Further, they apprehend that a reconciliation of the two is necessary and that this balance must be fluid if it is to be applied to human relationships. As a result, conscious awareness becomes, for the major characters, conscience. As their sophistication matures, these characters steadily move toward a middle ground between the purely moral and the purely aesthetic. Their understanding of this reconciliation becomes the criterion for judgment of the relative values implicit in any situation. By sacrificing standardized codes of morality and aestheticism in order to "be right\(^{35}\) with themselves, the consciously aware protagonists live up to their concept of the ideal balance of values. Naomi Lebowitz notes:

\[\ldots\] it is James who assumed the task of freeing morality from societal or philosophical attachment and commitment and of allowing it to depend instead on the quality of the individual act of relating.\(^{36}\)

But although all decisions are for James's characters

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relative, their understanding of the ideal establishes a rigid criterion: beauty must exist in all moral choices, and morality must be present in all aesthetic considerations. Dorothy Van Ghent elaborates this point:

Moral and aesthetic experience have then in common their foundation and their distinction from the useful. The identity that James explores is their identity in the most capacious and most integrated—the most "civilized"—consciousness, whose sense relationships (aesthetic relationships) with the external world of scenes and objects have the same quality and the same spiritual determination as its relationships with people (moral relationships).

Over-emphasis of either moral or aesthetic considerations is always evil, but for the characters who perceive the ideal balance, failure to live up to their comprehension is especially evil.

Thus, when the crises of their experiences develop, these characters are readily jolted into full awareness of themselves—what they are—and of their relation to others. They achieve self-knowledge. The nature of the crises is such that the conscious characters are forced almost immediately to make a choice, grounded in the conditions of their self-discovery, which markedly and permanently affects their futures. Maintenance of their personal integrity is their primary concern. Indeed, all but one of these protagonists willingly renounce social success to "be right."

In leaving for Gardencourt in spite of Osmond's protests, Isabel is not motivated by a desire to offend her husband but, instead, is responding to her moral concept of a debt of friendship. Thus, she opposes Osmond on their old battleground of her moral ideas and, as she later acknowledges, finds a justifiable escape from her painful situation.

Hoping, perhaps, to gain some advantage over Osmond, Isabel goes first to the convent in which Pansy is imprisoned. Here she is amazed to encounter Madame Merle, who has already visited her daughter. As the two women perfunctorily observe the forms of their acquaintance, Isabel's inattentive manner is sufficient to cause Madame Merle's realization that Isabel knows everything. Keeping up the forms, a "sudden break in her voice"\(^{38}\) is Madame Merle's only concession to her fear. For Isabel

\[\ldots\text{ it might have been a moment of triumph. That Madame Merle had lost her pluck and saw before her the phantom of exposure--this in itself was a revenge, this in itself was almost a symptom of a brighter day.}\(^{39}\)

By refusing to press her advantage, by maintaining silence, Isabel at once demonstrates her social skill and denies Madame Merle an opportunity to defend herself. With this triumph, Isabel goes to see her step-daughter. Pansy, however, by refusing to leave the convent without her father's

\(^{38}\text{James, The Portrait of a Lady, IV, 378.}\)

\(^{39}\text{Ibid.}\)
permission, thwarts Isabel's intention. Pansy is so thoroughly cowed by Osmond's displeasure that she arouses Isabel's pity and gains her promise to return. On leaving Pansy, Isabel finds that Madame Merle has waited to play her last trump. To Madame Merle's assertion that Ralph Touchett is responsible for Isabel's inheritance and subsequent unhappiness, Isabel replies "I believed it was you I had to thank." By refusing to be drawn into open conflict, Isabel makes Madame Merle's situation impossible, and the older woman announces her intention to go to America—a fate worse than death for a James character.

The long train trip is, for Isabel, a haze of vaguely glimpsed impressions:

She had plenty to think about; but it was not conscious reflection, nor conscious purpose, that filled her mind. Disconnected visions passed through it, and sudden dull gleams of memory, of expectation. The past and the future alternated at their will, but she saw them only in fitful images, which came and went by a logic of their own. It was extraordinary the things she remembered. Now that she was in the secret, now that she knew something that so much concerned her, and the eclipse of which had made life resemble an attempt to play whist with an imperfect pack of cards, the truth of things their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part, their horror, rose before her with a kind of architectural vastness.

Gardencourt offers her a respite, but "she envied Ralph his dying." Numb and tired of life, Isabel nonetheless realizes

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40 Ibid., p. 389.
41 Ibid., pp. 390-391.
42 Ibid., p. 391.
that "life would be her business for a long time to come."\textsuperscript{43} Even as she hopes that this means that she will not always be unhappy, Isabel is obliged to acknowledge that such tenacity of life implies a "certain grossness."\textsuperscript{44} She is not so remarkable a person as she, in her innocence, once pictured herself.

At Gardencourt, Isabel finds that nothing has changed. The quietness in the house, so much like the time of the elder Mr. Touchett's death, completes an immense circle of experience for her. When Ralph is able to speak to her, Isabel finally admits her unhappiness. Since he is dying, there is no danger of her disclosure's affecting her ideal of moral duty. Ralph accepts full responsibility for Isabel's unhappy marriage, since his gift to Isabel made her Osmond's prey. Yet they recognize that Osmond was deceived too. As a result of her wealth and deception, Isabel has been "ground in the very mill of the conventional."\textsuperscript{45} Although she does not know at the moment whether or not she will return to Osmond, she does not feel that her life where her husband is concerned is finished. Now she simply wants to remain at Gardencourt "as long as seems right,"\textsuperscript{46} which is, as Ralph realizes, a measure of Isabel's adherence to convention.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 392.
\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 415.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 416.
Ralph's last words to Isabel confirm her own recognition on the train; he tells her "I don't believe that such a generous mistake as yours can hurt you for more than a little."

Isabel remains at Gardencourt after Ralph's death, ostensibly to comfort her aunt. Although she has delayed, her situation is precarious, for no matter what kind of husband Osmond is, "Certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage, and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it." When at the end of a week Lord Warburton calls, Isabel senses that in spite of his rumored engagement he still loves her. Even as she dismisses him, Isabel is concerned about telling Osmond that the nobleman is no longer a candidate for Pansy. More depressed than ever, she wanders about in the grounds until she recognizes the bench on which she sat, with Goodwood's letter in her pocket, and refused the nobleman's proposal.

Moments later, Isabel is startled by the appearance of the persistent Caspar Goodwood, who forces her to hear him out. On their return from Rome Ralph had told Goodwood what he guessed of Isabel's unhappiness, and now as Isabel sees, Goodwood has new hope and a new idea.

"Why should you go back--why should you go through that ghastly form?"

\(^{47}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. } 417.\)

\(^{48}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. } 421.\)
"To get away from you!" she answered. But this expressed only a little of what she felt. The rest was that she had never been loved before.

As she considers the implications of being loved, Goodwood promises her the American ideal of complete freedom: "We can do absolutely as we please." They can be free, he feels, because neither cares what others think. Isabel is caught up in his idea; it is her old ideal of life, an escape from responsibility, and "... the next best thing to her dying." In the next moment, however, she seemingly recalls her feeling that she must be involved in life for a long time to come. Her early aspirations for complete freedom enmeshed her in evil; she cannot now, for her present moral and aesthetic idealism, withdraw from life, that is, from her marriage. She, therefore, begs Goodwood to leave her alone. With this, Goodwood suddenly kisses her "like a flash of lightning." When he releases her, she runs to the house; "she had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path." Concommitant with her concern to finish the life she has begun is Isabel's old fear of, her distaste for, passion. She is not capable of any but intellectualized, idealized love, which is precisely her response to Ralph, Osmond, and, to an extent, Lord Warburton. Thus, when Goodwood calls on Henrietta Stackpole in London

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49 Ibid., p. 433.  
50 Ibid., p. 435.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Ibid., p. 436.  
53 Ibid.
two days later, she tells him that Isabel, predictably, has returned to Rome.

Isabel's reaction can be foreseen, not merely as a result of her fear of Goodwood's love, but as a result of her pride, her desire to extract recognition of her superiority. In returning she proves her moral superiority to Osmond; that is, she voluntarily accepts the consequences of keeping her marriage vows and, incidentally, her promise to Pansy. Isabel also acknowledges her acceptance of the conventional aesthetic. Like her husband's, her actions are conditioned by her love of form, which both associate with beauty. Because their marital relationship, like Osmond himself, is a shell of propriety, Isabel is, for her honor, obliged to maintain it. Isabel's pride and her continuing, if somewhat more sophisticated, idealism require that she continue her present course. That she is not acting from full self-knowledge is apparent by her fear of Goodwood and the pride which forbids her to admit a mistake. Henrietta Stackpole's final word to Goodwood "just you wait" strongly suggests that Isabel will eventually comprehend the reasons for her failure and overcome the pride that is her greatest limitation. At the end of the novel, however, Isabel's moral and aesthetic understanding is still colored by her early romanticism; to an extent, she even now feels only those experiences she chooses. In this sense

\[54\text{Ibid.},\ p.\ 437.\]
Isabel Archer is morally deficient, for by the standards of the later novels, she has failed to gain full self-knowledge. In spite of the fact that she now comprehends a great deal, she does not fully understand and accept what she is.
CHAPTER III

LAMBERT STREther

Lambert Strether of The Ambassadors is, in many respects, the most remarkable of James's innocent Americans. At fifty-five Strether is as inexperienced in the art of living as any of his younger female counterparts. His failure to have lived is not, however, the result of any personal limitation, for he is unusually perceptive; it is, rather, an illustration of the restricted life style in America. For his part, the long-widowed Strether has passively accepted the prevailing New England moral code, a system which presumes to judge the possibilities of life in advance. His apparent, but undeveloped, aesthetic sense has been stagnant in the prescriptive pragmatic environment of Woollett, Massachusetts. Strether's adherence to New England's concept of propriety has been rewarded by an unofficial engagement to Mrs. Newsome, the wealthy widow of Woollett's leading manufacture. He has even been allowed to sustain his taste by editing a small literary journal, which his fiancee supports in an attempt to bring culture, as she understands it, to Woollett. Before Strether's and Mrs. Newsome's engagement is formally announced, however, he must retrieve his benefactress's son, Chad, from the grasp
of an unknown Parisian woman, whom Mrs. Newsome sees as certainly evil. Strether has just arrived in England, preparatory to his journey to Paris, as The Ambassadors begins.

Strether's first personal contact in England is with an expatriate, Maria Gostrey, who has an excellent understanding of both American and European values. Recognizing Strether's latent aesthetic appreciation, she quickly becomes his confidante and leads "him forth into the world." Strether, "burdened . . . with the oddity of a double consciousness," is, with Maria's encouragement, made suddenly aware of a new freedom and a possible new beginning in his life. Singularly impressed by his reaction to Europe, he is also painfully cognizant of his delight and of his feeling, as a citizen of Woollett, that delight is somehow evil. His friend and foil, Waymarsh, a "successful" New Engander, hates Europe, preferring the fixed moral system of America to the more demanding European freedom of conscience. As Strether forsakes his purely American point of view, Waymarsh stands in bold relief. Throughout the novel Waymarsh's "sacred rage," his evaluation of Europe by American standards,


2 Ibid., p. 5.

3 Ibid., p. 46.
measures Strether's increasing alienation from New England's strictly established concept of deportment.

Strether is, in fact, alienated from himself. He considers himself a "perfectly equipped failure." His first trip to Paris, taken with his bride, awakened in him the same desire for a more beautiful, more independent approach to life. Yet after, perhaps because of, his wife's early death, he had not and has not acted. Even the lemon-colored volumes, purchased then with an eye to Strether's youthful self-image, have not been bound; they were "the mere sallow paint on the door of the temple of taste that he had dreamed of raising up . . . ." Strether's life has been one of waiting. He is aware that he has done nothing, for the good reason that an unknown something has prevented him:

These were instants at which he could ask whether, since there had been, fundamentally, so little question of his keeping anything, the fate after all decreed for him hadn't been only to be kept. Kept for something, in that event, that he didn't pretend, didn't possibly dare, as yet to divine; something that made him hover and wonder and laugh and sigh, made him advance and retreat, feeling half ashamed of his impulse to plunge and more than half afraid of his impulse to wait.

Hampered by his acquiescence to New England's moral preoccupations, Strether has never built his "temple of taste." But, in Paris, his moral system is inadequate, and he finds that his, as yet, superficial appreciation of beauty is encouraged to develop.

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4Ibid., p. 44. 5Ibid., p. 37. 6Ibid., p. 86.
For several weeks Strether is entertained by Little Bilham, a close friend of Chad's. When Chad unexpectedly joins Strether, Maria, and Waymarsh at the opera, Strether is overwhelmed. For Chad is no longer the rough-hewn boy the older man had known in Woollett; he not only has distinguished streaks of grey hair, he also has a marked air of refinement which completely disarms Strether. Consequently, Strether's presentation of Woollett's case is simply blurted out. To Chad's first question, "Do I strike you as improved?" Strether finds that, to abide by his moral training, he must deny what he sees. In his so doing, however, "not only his moral, but also, as it were, his aesthetic sense had to pay a little for this." For, according to Woollett's understanding, Chad should be dissipated as a result of his association with evil. Since he is not, his refined, experienced quality gives the younger man the upper hand.

For all his fifty-five years, Lambert Strether is as unaware of the possibilities of life as Isabel Archer. There is, however, a major difference between the two; Strether does not use people to achieve his ends. His engagement to Mrs. Newsome is, in Woollett's view a business, and therefore moral, relationship. And Strether implies that, while his fiancee's money would be nice, it is not necessary, for

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7 Ibid., p. 148.
8 Ibid., p. 149.
Strether is attracted to her active life and, because he is profoundly aware of his own failure, simply wants to be associated with her life. He is also aware of his "double consciousness," his capacity to observe sensitively, which he has always employed according to Woollett's standards of judgment. In Paris, however, Strether's understanding of his exposure to the aesthetic, his experience, leads to his eventual apprehension that to judge is presumptuous, and therefore evil.

Following his initial meeting with Chad, Strether becomes more and more conscious of the aesthetic basis of European society. He is primarily aware that Woollett has oversimplified his mission. By accepting Woollett's definition of the possibilities of life, Strether has himself underestimated his task. It is his moral preoccupation which causes his early confusion, his "felt need to remodel somehow his plan."9 For, although he adjusts to Chad's improvement, he is faced with his inability to find the woman on whose presence his and Woollett's understanding depended. Maria Gostrey's suggestion that the woman in question is good, perhaps even excellent, is unacceptable to Strether on the moral grounds that such a relationship marks its participants as "not nice."10 His rigid moral system also causes him to reject

9Ibid., p. 165.
10Ibid., p. 170.
Maria's advice: "Don't consider her, don't judge her at all in herself. Consider her and judge her only in him."¹¹

Strether persists in discounting Maria's assertions until Little Bilham terms Chad's relation a "virtuous attachment."¹²

Then, because he accepts Chad's improvement without reservation, it is difficult for him to believe that, as Little Bilham claims, Chad, finding it hard to be as good as he presently is, is almost ready to return to Woollett.

Gloriani's party provides the occasion for Strether's fullest recognition of the beautiful possibilities for life in Paris. Indeed, Strether understands his invitation to this party as Chad's attempt to break down his moral defenses:

... he was not without the impression—now that his vision of his game, his plan, his deep diplomacy, did recurrently assert itself—of his taking refuge from the realities of their intercourse in the profusely dispersing ... panem et circenses. Our friend continued to feel rather smothered in flowers though he made in his other moments the almost angry inference that this was only because of his odious ascetic suspicion of any form of beauty. He periodically assured himself—for his reactions were sharp—that he should not reach the truth of anything till he had at least got rid of that.¹³

The offered bribe is strongly apparent to him at the party—in the place, in the people, and most of all in his host, Gloriani. Unable to sort out such a mass of contradictory

¹¹Ibid.
¹²Ibid., p. 180.
¹³Ibid., pp. 193-194.
impressions, Strether merely absorbs them into his heretofore rather empty consciousness. Without Chad as his mediator, he realizes that he would never have been involved in this brilliant, if, as he sees it, immoral world.

It is Marie de Vionnet who finally succeeds in convincing Strether to remain in Paris. On meeting her at Gloriani's party, Strether is deeply impressed by her youthful attitude, her kindness, and above all by his awareness that the other guests treat her with respect. Since she is as good as Maria Gostrey suggested, Strether cannot condemn her out of hand, for in good conscience, he cannot fit her into any niche his moral code provides. Therefore, as she leaves him, Strether admits his "quiet . . . surrender";\(^\text{14}\) since his moral system has proved inadequate, he is willing to base his understanding on this aesthetic sense. When Little Bilham rejoins him, Strether finds that his impressions have taken a form which he must express:

> Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? . . . all my impressions of Chad and of the people I've seen at his place--well have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped that into my mind. I haven't done so enough before--and now I'm old; too old at any rate for what I see. . . . It's too late.\(^\text{15}\)

Had he realized the limitations of his life style, he would, perhaps, have lived differently. Now he has no memory of

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., p. 215. \(^\text{15}\) Ibid., p. 217.
the "illusion of freedom." And he cautions Little Bilham: "Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!" The hold Paris now has on him is the opportunity to observe—to experience vicariously—the youth of his Parisian friends.

Strether's ability to gather "... an amount of experience out of any proportion to his adventures" is enhanced by his association with Maria Gostrey. In guiding his first tentative efforts to understand Parisian society, she insists that he accept Marie de Vionnet's invitation to call, on the grounds that he would have done so if she had been the kind of woman he had expected to find. At this, the confused Strether can only wish that Marie de Vionnet had been what he had expected: "It would be simpler." When Maria Gostrey leaves Paris to permit Strether to find his own way, he finds the complications of Europe's aesthetic concept of individual conscience even greater than he imagined.

Indeed, Strether soon finds himself in direct opposition to Mrs. Newsome, for, during his visit with Marie de Vionnet, he agrees to remain in Paris for a short time in order to help her. His situation with regard to Woollett's moral position is further strained with his realization that, if Chad abandons Marie after all she has done for him, he will

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16 Ibid., p. 218.  
17 Ibid.  
18 Ibid., p. 227.  
19 Ibid., p. 233.
prove himself unworthy of her. In this assessment of Chad's debt to Marie, the development of Strether's moral and aesthetic sense can be measured. Marie makes the connection:

You're not saving me I take it, for your interest in myself, but for your interest in our friend. The one, at any rate, is wholly dependent on the other. You can't in honour not see me through... because you can't in honour not see him.  

If Strether, who came to Paris to persuade Chad to do what, as Strether then understood, was best for the younger man, is to complete his mission honorably, he must now, with his heightened awareness, encourage Chad to remain in Paris. For Paris and Marie have been decidedly better for him than Woollett.

Strether's determination is soon tested, for Mrs. Newsome cables him to return immediately. If he does not, the Pococks, her daughter, son-in-law, and his sister, will be dispatched to retrieve him as well as Chad. To complicate Strether's dilemma, Chad announces that he has been waiting for the past month for Strether to give the word for their return. Now, however, in the face of his new understanding, it is Strether who wants to remain in Paris. He obtains Chad's promise to remain in return for what Strether has already done for the younger man. In agreeing, Chad has nothing to

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lose, whereas Strether will forfeit his engagement to Mrs. Newsome.

The extent of Strether's moral and aesthetic development is clarified by his changed relation to the recently returned Maria Gostrey. Now, as she says, he "can toddle alone." Strether comprehends that,

It marked for himself the flight of time, or at any rate what he was pleased to think of with irony and pity as the rush of experience . . . . It was the proportions that were changed, and the proportions were at all times, he philosophied, the very conditions of perception, the terms of thought. With his newly refined moral and aesthetic sense, Strether now clarifies and explains to Maria. He apprehends that Waymarsh, from a very real concern for Strether's moral state, is responsible for the Pocock's impending arrival.

But, Chad, who has not changed so much as Strether first thought, is his primary concern. He hopes to be able to demonstrate, through Chad and Marie, "the new facts . . . that have kept striking me as less and less met by our old reasons," the Woollett concept of morality. If he can do this, he is confident that he may still be able to bring Mrs. Newsome around. But, even if he fails, he feels that,

"I began to be young, or at least to get the benefit of it, the moment I met you at Chester, and that's what has been taking place ever since. I never had the benefit at the proper time—which comes to saying that I never had the thing itself."
His present desire to remain in Paris is his response, his tribute to youth. The only possibility he foresees for failure in his attempt to enlarge Woollett's understanding is that his Parisian friends may not assist him. And, before the Pococks arrive, Strether sees that, where Chad is concerned, he will not be helped.

Strether's hopes are dashed, however, for he realizes that Sarah Pocock will never, in her moral pride, admit her brother Chad's improvement. Indeed, she and, to some extent, the others even imagine that Strether is personally involved with Marie de Vionnet. Further, he learns that Chad, by way of making restitution to Marie, has arranged a marriage for Jeanne.

Although Strether realizes that Sarah Pocock is making a remarkable effort not to denounce him, he finds that, in return, she expects his complete submission. Since, however, Chad has made Strether responsible for their remaining in Paris, Strether refuses to give Sarah his decision until he talks to Chad. On this point, Sarah balks. And Strether, thoroughly irritated by her willful refusal to acknowledge Chad's improvement, releases his anger in a flood of recriminations about Woollett's moral and aesthetic ignorance:

"Your coming out belonged closely to my having come out before you, and my having come out was a result of our general state of mind. Our general state of mind had proceeded, on its side, from our queer ignorance, our queer misconceptions and confusions— from which, since then, an inexorable tide of light
Strether then asks Sarah directly if she does not think Chad is better than he was in Woollett. Instead of answering, she makes a thorough denunciation of Marie de Vionnet. For his part, she adds, he has insulted Mrs. Newsome. When pressed about Chad's development, she replies stubbornly, "I call it hideous." With that she gathers her ruffled dignity and stalks out, leaving Strether to reflect that his engagement to Mrs. Newsome is irretrievably at an end.

As Strether considers his experience, he realizes the essential difference between Woollett's restricted view of life and that of Paris:

But the freedom was what was most in the place and the hour; it was the freedom that most brought him round to the youth of his own that he had long ago missed. . . . That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed--a queer, concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear.

In return for his sacrificed marriage to Mrs. Newsome, Strether has gained the experience of a full life. When he talks to Chad, Strether finds that the younger man is quite ready to return to Woollett and that he is, in fact, tired of Marie de Vionnet. Strether sees that Chad does not understand what Marie has done for him, or what she can still do.

\[25\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 201.} \quad 26\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 205.} \quad 27\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 230.}\]
As he leaves, he tells Chad, "That's because you have, I verily believe, no imagination." Strether understands that, although Chad is now acting according to Woollett's moral view, the young man's return demonstrates the failure of his moral sense.

Abandoned temporarily by his Parisian friends and finished with Mrs. Newsome's, Strether takes a train out of Paris to see the countryside. He spends the day wandering around in the midst of a scene which strongly reminds him of a Lambinet picture he tried, in his youth, to buy. Late in the afternoon at a small inn as he waits for his dinner, he sees a couple in a rowboat approaching the dock below the inn. For a moment he reflects that the pair beautifully complete the scene, but, as the boat suddenly swings wide, he recognizes the woman as Marie de Vionnet. With this he also identifies Chad, and, obliged to let them know he has seen them, Strether waves and calls to them. Realizing at last his misconceptions about their affair, Strether can take comfort only in the fact that he had not asked for details. He had been "trying, all along to suppose nothing. Verily, verily his labor had been lost. He found himself supposing innumerable and wonderful things." Following his discovery that his primary assumption about Chad's and Marie's relationship is false, that is, 

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28 Ibid., p. 244.  
29 Ibid., p. 266.
that it is not platonic, Strether almost renounces his refined moral and aesthetic understanding in favor of his old, rigid Woollett moral code. That he does not is an indication of his desire for an explanation of his being deceived and of his continued sympathy for Marie de Vionnet. When, on the morning after their return to Paris, Strether receives Marie's invitation to call; he hurries to accept it, fearing that if he waits, he may not go. As he writes his answer, it occurs to him that, for all the good his visit will do, he may as well return to Woollett without seeing anyone. But, on observing the crowd around him, he comprehends that "they were no worse than he, in short, and he no worse than they--if, queerly enough, no better . . . "

He is, as he realizes, no more qualified than society at large to judge the moral and aesthetic validity of human relationships. But, this feeling is also transient, and temporarily simplifying his position in the best Woollett tradition, Strether spends the day with the thought that the wicked, if not punished, must be at least made unhappy. He even wonders, since he has spent the day loafing with his thoughts, if he does not "look demoralised and disreputable." 

Marie de Vionnet, by letting Strether see that his part is over, re-establishes the priority of his moral and aesthetic

30 Ibid., p. 271.
31 Ibid., p. 273.
understanding. As she casually refers to the previous day's excursions, Strether realizes that the "eminent 'lie'" of her and Chad's supposedly platonic relationship is simply an "inevitable tribute to good taste"—a gesture which he can now fully appreciate. As if she sees Strether reach this conclusion, Marie introduces her real subject. Why, with all that has happened, does he not stay in Paris? Since he has given so much, it will cost him little to remain. They have both freely sacrificed for Chad; now they can comfort each other. As Strether now sees, Chad is the root of her present trouble:

She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme queerness that he was none the less only Chad.

By overestimating the extent of Chad's transformation, Strether had, at first, heightened her feeling of success. Now he realizes that he does not judge her for what she has done, but for the excellent person she is. With this awareness, Strether suggests that he may yet be able to help her with Chad, but Marie brushes this off and acknowledges Strether's moral understanding: "It's only that you don't snub me, as you've had fifty chances to do . . . ." Strether cannot help her now because, as she explains:

32 Ibid., p. 277.
33 Ibid., p. 284.
34 Ibid., pp. 286-287.
"'I want everything. I've wanted you too.' 'Ah, but you've had me,' he declared at the door, with an emphasis that made an end.'"³⁵

When Chad still does not contact him after five days, Strether concerns himself with what is left for him:

It was really behind everything; it hadn't merged in what he had done; his final appreciation of what he had done—his appreciation on the spot—would provide it with its main sharpness. The spot, so focussed, was of course Woollett, and he was to see, at the best, what Woollett would be with everything there changed for him. Wouldn't that revelation practically amount to a wind-up of his career?³⁶

Strether remains in Paris now only to keep his promise to try to help Marie de Vionnet. His meeting with Chad will be his last test of them both, for he will learn finally the depth of Chad's transformation, and he will demonstrate to himself that he feels no vengefulness for all he has lost.

Although Strether succeeds, when he talks with Chad, in gaining the younger man's assurance that he will remain in Paris, Strether is well aware of Chad's eagerness to return to Woollett. But, in writing his final reply to the Pococks, Strether ends the possibility of his being able to resume his engagement with Mrs. Newsome.

A few days later he relates his conversation with Chad to Maria Gostrey. On the question of his possibly resuming

³⁵Ibid., p. 289.
³⁶Ibid., pp. 293-294.
his relation with Mrs. Newsome, Strether knows that he has changed too much, while she has not changed and, as he perceives, will not: "But I do what I didn't before—I see her."37 Because of his enlarged understanding, marriage to Mrs. Newsome is out of the question for Strether. Satisfied that she is not now interfering, Maria hints to Strether that, if he proposes, she will marry him. The prospect has, naturally, its appeal; she offers "exquisite service," "lightened care," and "beauty and knowledge."38 But, knowing that she will understand, Strether declines. "To be right... That you see, is my only logic. Not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself."39 As he has already seen, the "wind-up of his career" is possible only in Woollett. In refusing Maria's offer, Strether acts according to his highest understanding of himself and, thus, affirms his comprehension of the relation between morality and aestheticism.

Indeed, Strether's awareness of this balance of moral and aesthetic, the result of his sensitive awareness of his adventures, marks the most significant development of his understanding. When he is finally forced to recognize that Chad's and Marie's affair is not, after all, platonic, he

37 Ibid., p. 323.
38 Ibid., pp. 325-326.
39 Ibid., p. 326.
is capable of understanding that such an attachment can be as virtuous as those involved. In abandoning a strictly moral or strictly aesthetic point of view, Strether realizes that only Chad's and Marie's integrity, the combined moral and aesthetic comprehension, can be judged. The moral and aesthetic value of each determines the moral and aesthetic worth of their relationship. According to this standard, Strether is able to comprehend the reason that Marie's refusal to divorce her estranged husband added to the aesthetic value of the affair for her Parisian friends. But, beyond this purely aesthetic understanding, Strether is also aware that, since the duration of such a relationship is dependent, for its depth, on the quality of moral understanding, it is Chad's moral deficiency which destroys the beauty of the established form of the affair.

The growth of his conscious understanding has led him beyond the moral preoccupations of Woollett and the aesthetic considerations of Paris. When he declines to judge Marie de Vionnet as an adulteress, he transcends the inflexible moral code by which he was reared. He likewise overcomes the evil of Parisian aestheticism by refusing, for convenience, to become involved with Marie de Vionnet himself. Frederick Crews states,

Strether's refusal to marry and his return to Woollett is a renunciation of acceptance of either
European or American values—it is an affirmation of his expanded consciousness and awareness of Life. Strether's recognition that he cannot profit materially from his experience and "be right" with himself precludes any future involvement with those concerned in this venture. In Woollett, to which he returns, he will be able to observe the outcome of what began in Paris. The possibility of his being able to enlarge Woollett's moral and aesthetic understanding appears remote, however. For, without existing personal relations in Woollett, he is faced, according to the pattern of the later self-realized characters' influence on those closest to them, with the necessity of first establishing a personal basis with others from which to work. Thus, by implication, Strether's accomplishment is more limited than his successors's in the later novels.

CHAPTER IV

MILLY THEALE

Milly Theale of The Wings of the Dove is the spiritual counterpart of Isabel Archer. Whereas Isabel equates life with ideas and social form, Milly associates living with human relations. Throughout her brief search for life, Milly is primarily concerned to establish personal contact with others. Circumstances having denied her an active existence, even by American standards, Milly, because she wants to live fully, has developed her perceptions, which for her means sensitivity to others, imaginatively. Born into a wealthy New York family, she has been sheltered from, as Isabel Archer would phrase it, "what most people know and suffer." The deaths of all her immediate family and her own ill health have compounded her isolation. Now, however, Milly is a fabulously rich heiress and absolutely free to do as she wishes. Thus, with her older literary traveling companion, Susan Shepherd Stringham, Milly travels to Europe.

Milly's purpose in going to Europe is, like Isabel's, presumptuous, as Dorothea Krook indicates:

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She is tender, generous, gay, and full of zest for 'life'—for knowledge, that is, and friendship and love, which she passionately desires to have in abundance, and in the greatest possible intensity.\(^2\)

But, although Milly expects to enlarge her experience in Europe, her concept of what she will find there is defined by her concern for human relationship; unlike Isabel, she does not demand that Europe fit itself into her own intellectual construct. New York, Milly's America, has been a place of death; she seeks to test her ideal of life in Europe. Her situation is complicated, however, as James describes:

The idea, reduced to its essence, is that of a young person conscious of a great capacity for life, but early stricken and doomed, condemned to die under short respite, while also enamoured of the world; made moreover aware of the condemnation and passionately desiring to 'put in' before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible, and so achieve, however briefly and brokenly, the sense of having lived.\(^3\)

To achieve "a sense of having lived," Milly clearly has to live fast—to gather a full lifetime of experience in a few months. But Milly has to learn how to live first; thus far she knows only death. The Princess, as she is called, is aware of her lack of experience and her naïveté; she does not, as Isabel does, presume to judge the acts of others. But even this is not enough, for her flexibility, an apparent


virtue, leaves her vulnerable to exploitation because of her sympathy, inexperience, and necessary eagerness for life. Milly's awareness of her illness, her desire to live, and her ignorance of evil cause her to accept indiscriminately the first segment of society she meets, although she clearly recognizes the limitations of that nouveau riche group.

Both Milly and Susan Stringham have become aware of Milly's "great capacity for life." In Switzerland, Susan Stringham discovers Milly sitting on the edge of a precipice. Although the older woman fears at first that Milly, still in mourning for her family, will jump, she quickly realizes that Milly "was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth, and though that of itself might go to the brink, it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them."\(^4\) Susan Stringham

\[\ldots\] now saw that the great thing she had brought away was precisely a conviction that the future was not to exist for her princess in the form of any sharp or simple release from the human predicament. It wouldn't be for her a question of a flying leap and thereby of a quick escape. It would be a question of taking full in the face the whole assault of life.\(^5\)

This is just what Milly herself has realized and what she wants, although she understands no better than her friend the possibilities of "the whole assault of life." Aware that her health is failing, Milly is anxious to go to London

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\(^5\)Ibid., p. 125.
so that she can begin the business of living actively. Accordingly Susan Stringham writes an old school friend, Maud Manningham Louder, to renew her acquaintance and to provide Milly with an introduction to London society.

Milly's sophisticated imagination, developed in a lifetime of seclusion, enables her to perceive the reasons for her popularity in Maud Louder's circle. She is aware that Maud Louder attracts social climbers, and she knows that her youth, her immense fortune, and her status as a "cheap exotic" are responsible for her success. But she is pleased to participate in any society, and she is fascinated by Maud Louder's resident niece, Kate Croy. Above all, Milly is determined "to let things come as they would, since there was little enough doubt of how they would go." As she tells Susan Stringham, "since I've lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die, no doubt, as if I were alive . . . ." But, as long as possible, she will enjoy the opportunity to experience the workings of Lancaster Gate's rich but boorish society. She finds that "no little interest was going to be in the fresh reference and fresh effect both of people's cleverness and of their simplicity." The dinner at which Milly is introduced to Maud Louder's acquaintances is for the newly aware heiress a play of social form. As the dinner

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6Ibid., p. 168.  
7Ibid., p. 146.  
8Ibid., p. 199.  
9Ibid., p. 148.
progresses, Milly realizes that she has decided to stay in London and learn as much as she can about her hostess. Feeling that she has made an irrevocable decision for life, Milly is amazed at her own heightened perception:

Nothing was so odd that she should have to recognize so quickly in each of these glimpses of an instant the various signs of a relation, and the anomaly itself, had she more time to give to it, might well, might almost terribly have suggested to her that her doom was to live fast. It was queerly a question of the short run and the consciousness proportionately crowded.10

But Milly is aware only of her sensitive understanding and her pleasure in it.

More immediately important, Milly is fascinated by Kate. At twenty-five, Kate is only three years older than Milly, but she possesses the poise which Milly seeks for herself. In the week following Maud Louder's dinner, Kate and Milly explore London, and Kate, who admires Milly also, explains the willingness of Londoners to use others. Milly's acceptance of Kate and her aunt, in spite of Kate's warnings, is the result of the very qualities which later make the heiress Kate's victim: her American ignorance and innocence of dehumanizing aestheticism, her appreciation of others, her long solitude, and her pride in her easy social success. She is simply not ready to cope with the subtleties of Lancaster Gate.

10Ibid., p. 159.
Because Milly has been isolated by the deaths of her family, her wealth, and her poor health, she has very little knowledge of life in America. Consequently, she has not acquired the moral code that a larger association with American society would have given her. Instead Milly has lived through her imagination, and, because her orientation is personal, rather than intellectual as is Isabel's, Milly has developed a high moral sense. Her criterion is love of mankind, a point of view which inevitably affects her understanding of the aesthetic. The flaw in Milly's understanding, the error which the other protagonists also make, is her failure to consider evil as anything but an abstract quality. Having never encountered evil, she is totally unprepared for it. And, since each of the central characters finds evil in that part of life with which he is most concerned, the evil Milly discovers is the perversion society makes of human relations. By her inability to comprehend Kate's literal warnings, Milly actually encourages her exploiters. Painful as her initiation to life is, as a conscious character she must descend from the sublimity of innocence "looking down on the kingdoms of the earth" in order to test the validity of her ideals and enlarge her understanding. Milly's acquisition of experience, indeed, makes up the largest portion of the novel.

Milly's desire to live fully, as she understands it, seems at first a realistic goal. She is a complete success
in Mrs. Louder's circle, and, because of her value as a social find, she is quickly introduced to as many of Maud Louder's acquaintances as possible. At the large party at Matcham, Milly and Susan Stringham feel that "impressions . . . have been gathered for them into a splendid cluster, an offering."\(^{11}\) Before Milly can comprehend this gift, Lord Mark asks her to view a picture, a Bronzini, which she remarkably resembles. On seeing the portrait, Milly apprehends a similarity which the others do not. Her most striking sensation is that the woman in the picture "... unaccompanied by a joy. . . . is dead, dead, dead."\(^{12}\) Months later in Venice, she recalls that this portrait marked for her "the sign of her consciously rounding her protective promontory, quitting the blue gulf of comparative ignorance and reaching her view of the troubled sea."\(^{13}\) Now, however, Milly feels that "it was perhaps as good a moment as she should have with any one, have in any connection whatever."\(^{14}\) By his comparison of her to the woman in the portrait, Lord Mark has placed himself in relation to Milly. His recognition is evidence that she is involved with life.

Milly's awareness of the successful beginning of her experiment in living increases when she first visits the office of Sir Luke Strett, a well-known physician. She feels

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 207-208.  
\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 221.  
\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 330.  
\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 221.
that in him she has found "another straight friend. . . . the most appointed, the most thoroughly adjusted of the whole collection."\textsuperscript{15} Milly is singularly impressed by the doctor's interest in her as a person rather than as a type. When she rejoins Kate, who has helped her make this secret visit, she finds that her friend is somewhat distant and disinterested. This is Milly's first encounter with the aesthetic distaste for illness or personal feelings, but as might be expected, Milly does not recognize the implications. Rather, feeling that she has proved her trust in Kate, she goes alone for her second appointment. To her great satisfaction, she sees that Sir Luke's attitude toward her has not changed. As for his diagnosis Milly has sensed what it is, but

She struck herself as aware, aware as she had never been, of really not having had from the beginning anything firm. It would be strange for the firmness to come, after all, from her learning in these agreeable conditions that she was in some way doomed; but above all it would prove how little she had hitherto had to hold her up.\textsuperscript{16}

In Milly's highly romantic understanding of her illness, she, by her impending death, is now in contact with reality. An important factor in Milly's concept of her illness is her expressed intention to keep her illness secret. Her decision is based on her determination to live fully, without the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 230.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 236.
protective—and isolating—pity of her friends. Sir Luke's prescription, in fact, is encouraging; he tells her that, if she will, she can live a full life. Milly innocently agrees, "I can do exactly what I like—anything in the whole wide world," naively echoing Isabel Archer.

For Milly the question of what "she might with futility do" is less important than how she will live: "Milly had her rent to pay, her rent for the future; everything but how to meet it fell away from her in tatters." Susan Stringham, Milly realizes, considers her young heiress a princess, according to her romantic view of such a personage. But it is Kate who provides Milly's answer. On this occasion Kate again explains the working of London society, concentrating on Milly's and her own monetary and social values for Maud Louder. As she does, Milly becomes aware of the essential difference between Kate and herself: Kate, with Milly's money, could conquer the world; Milly, by giving her money, could conquer the world nearest her. It is triumph on this basis that Kate describes. Finally Kate admonishes Milly "to drop us while you can," warning "you may loathe me yet." Unknowingly Kate then suggests Milly's manner of living:

"Because you're a dove." With which Milly felt herself ever so delicately, so considerately

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17 Ibid., p. 243.  
18 Ibid., p. 253.  
19 Ibid., pp. 253-254.  
20 Ibid., pp. 281-282.
embraced; not with familiarity or as a liberty taken, but almost ceremonially and in the manner of an accolade; partly as if, though a dove who could perch on a finger, one were also a princess with whom forms were to be observed. . . . It even came to her . . . that this form . . . fairly sealed the sense of what Kate had said. It was moreover, for the girl, like an inspiration: she found herself accepting it as the right one . . . . She met it on the instant as she would have met the revealed truth; it lighted up the strange dusk in which she lately had walked. That was what was the matter with her. She was a dove. 21

Completely accepting her role, Milly now "studies the dovelike . . . . She should have to be clear as to how a dove would act." 22 And Milly determines, her fulfillment of Sir Luke's prescription must be altered to suit a dove.

Milly's new role serves her well when she unexpectedly meets Kate and Merton Densher in the National Gallery. For, although Milly had met Densher in New York, she has not mentioned her acquaintance, even after she learned that Kate also knows him. The awkwardness now is Milly's feeling for him:

She couldn't tell if he were different or not, and she didn't know nor care if she were: these things had ceased to matter in the light of the only thing she did know. This was that she liked him, as she put it to herself, as much as ever; and if that were to amount to liking an new person the amusement would be but the greater. 23

To conceal her confusion, Milly assumes the animation of a New York girl and invites the couple to lunch. When she

21Ibid., p. 283.  
22Ibid., p. 284.  
23Ibid., pp. 298-299.
perceives that Densher, like everyone else, has determined to isolate her from consideration as a person, Milly reconciles herself to seeing him on this prosaic basis. And Kate, for her part, encourages her fiancé to visit Milly often so that Maud Louder will not object to his seeing Kate.

When Milly, following Sir Luke's advice, moves to Venice, she is accompanied not only by Susan Stringham but also by Maud Louder, Kate, and, later, Densher and Lord Mark. In her Venetian palace, however, Milly finds that she is more isolated than ever. Her pride, "her conception of her own validity"24 prevents her from admitting her illness, and, thereby, she cannot allow anyone "nearer than the far side of the moat she had dug around herself."25 The pity of her friends only compounds Milly's determination to conceal her illness. Kate apprehends that, "... for the girl to be explicit was to betray divinations, gratitudes, glimpses of the felt contrast between her and her fortune and her fear . . . . "26 Her friends have an unspoken agreement to protect her pride. Only when she is alone can Milly drop her guard. On such an occasion she realizes that

She was in it, as in the ark of her deluge and filled with such a tenderness for it that why


\[25\text{Ibid.}\]

\[26\text{Ibid., p. 140.}\]
shouldn't this, in common mercy, be warrant enough? She would never, never leave it—she would engage to that; would ask nothing more than to sit tight and float on and on.  

Milly makes her pledge good; once in the Palazzo Leporelli she literally does not leave it.

Shortly after her arrival in Venice, Milly receives a proposal from Lord Mark. Milly suddenly perceives that his interest is primarily her money; her illness is for him a positive asset. In refusing him, she kindly suggests that he try again with Kate, for Maud Louder will provide a handsome dowry if he is successful. Angered, the parasitic nobleman tells her that Kate loves Densher. Although Milly is temporarily stunned by his assertion, she refuses to accept it. She has too much sympathy for others to imagine such a plot.

After Milly's conversation with Lord Mark, the point of view shifts to Merton Densher. Milly's eventual awareness of Kate's plot, her apparent self-knowledge, and her death are presented indirectly, through the growing moral awareness of Kate's fiance. Densher's development is the direct result of Milly's loving forgiveness, which he accepts as evidence of her understanding that he had no part in planning Kate's deception. Indeed he learns the extent of Kate's idea only at Milly's party.

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27 Ibid., p. 143.
At this party, Milly, wearing white instead of her usual mourning black, is radiantly happy. Kate, however, tells Densher that the heiress's health is failing rapidly. Densely refusing to understand Kate's hints, Densher eventually makes her spell out her plan, until with no alternative left, he asks,

"Since she's to die, I'm to marry her? . . . So that when her death has taken place, I shall in the natural course have money?"

It was before him now, and he had nothing more to ask; he had only to turn, on the spot, considerably cold with the thought that all along—to his stupidity, to his timidity—it had been, it had only been what she meant. . . . "You shall in the natural course have money. We shall in the natural course be free."20

Kate further informs him that she and her aunt will return to London soon and that he, to continue her plan, will remain with Milly.

After Kate and Maud Louder leave, Densher finds that his task is easier than it seemed. He has only ". . . to go with her, so far as she herself could go. . . ."29 He finds Milly's freedom and determination to live appealing, and, by giving her her way, Densher tries to relieve himself of guilt. At the same time, however, he reluctantly assumes the responsibility of her deep dependence on him. Anything he should do, or shouldn't do, would have reference, directly,

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20 Ibid., p. 225.
29 Ibid., p. 239.
to her life, which was thus absolutely in his hands. . . . He was mixed up in her fate, or her fate, if that were better, was mixed up in him so that a single false motion might, either way, snap the coil. 30

With this realization of his moral responsibility, Densher begins to comprehend the necessity of the moral understanding. Well aware of his precarious role, he successfully entertains Milly, until on the twentieth day, he is refused entrance to the Palazzo Leporelli.

Although Milly Theale is not directly presented after Lord Mark's proposal, her effect on Merton Densher is evidence not only of her ultimate self-knowledge but also of the Christ-like power of Milly's undemanding love—the primary power of the aware individual. Densher's horror of Kate's scheme and his acceptance of moral responsibility for Milly's life indicate his growing moral sense and predict his subsequent rejection of the conventional aesthetic. Milly's understanding love of humanity makes Densher increasingly aware of the evil of Kate's and Maud Louder's social manipulations. When Kate and her aunt leave Venice, his moral development is quickened, for his solitude gives him an opportunity to seriously consider his position.

Shortly after Susan Stringham confirms that Lord Mark has told Milly of Kate's and Densher's secret engagement, Sir Luke Strett arrives in Venice. Densher meets the physician "... seeking a chance to feel again adequately

30Ibid., p. 252.
whatever it was he had missed . . . " That is, the younger man, hoping to rationalize his compliance with Kate's plan, looks to Sir Luke to provide the answer. In one sense the physician's arrival in itself helps Densher. Of Milly's illness before Sir Luke's return, Densher

. . . had 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 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.32

Milly, by proudly refusing to admit her illness, by trying to live fully in spite of it, has made it easier for others to deceive her. By conforming to an aesthetic convention, by substituting social form for this opportunity for human understanding, Milly has effectively isolated herself, and been isolated, from consideration as a person. When Milly permitted the others to view her as a dove, or as a princess, she unwittingly encouraged the others to objectify her and, thereby, to use her. Although sickness and death disturb the social ideal, Sir Luke, as a doctor, re-establishes the forms by placing himself between unaesthetic disease and aesthetic society. For Densher, Sir Luke is at once a servant of the aesthetic and a reminder of the moral.

31 Ibid., p. 296.
32 Ibid., p. 298.
Densher leaves Venice shortly after Sir Luke, as quickly, in fact, as he can after his last interview with Milly. And, although Densher reaches London after a week of travel, he does not visit Kate for another two weeks. Of Milly's condition during these three weeks, Densher knows nothing, and Kate has to tell him that Sir Luke has returned, for the last time, to Venice. During his three weeks of silence, Densher has evidently reached a new level of understanding, for he is concerned with absolving his guilt for participation in Kate's plan. He could not, in his last conversation with Milly, have denied the truth of Lord Mark's disclosure without permanently ending his engagement to Kate. When Kate asserts that he has fallen in love with Milly, he does not deny it. But Kate is not concerned about his loving a dying girl. With her goal finally in view, Kate asks about Densher's last meeting with Milly. He reports that, according to her ideal, Milly was the same as always--she did not "smell of drugs." Hearing this, Kate is satisfied, for Milly "having loved," "having been loved," and having "realised her passion," "has had all she wanted." Kate concludes: "We've succeeded. . . . She won't have loved you for nothing. . . . And you won't have loved me." Densher realizes, in the next few weeks, that Kate is right. But Milly's continued silence has an import that Kate

33 Ibid., p. 329. 34 Ibid., p. 332. 35 Ibid., p. 333.
would not understand: "The essence was that something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe. He had been, to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed . . . ."36 Now, to make Kate and himself right, he feels that they must acknowledge their failure and their love by marrying as they are, without Milly's money. When, however, he urges Kate to accept this, she holds out for his belief in her idea that Milly will leave him money. She refuses when he denies that he has such an idea.

On Christmas morning Densher learns of Milly's death. When he visits Kate, he reveals a letter he received from Milly the night before. Knowing that Milly could not have recently written it, he has not even broken the seal. Kate also refuses to open the letter, but, in this "season of gifts,"37 she guesses its contents: "... she announces to you that she has made you rich."38 Knowing that the details of Milly's bequest will come from New York, Kate burns the letter.

By the time the second letter arrives two months later, Kate's and Densher's relationship has undergone a subtle change toward a new civility and formality. Densher feels that Kate's destruction of the first letter has deprived him

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36Ibid., p. 343.
37Ibid., p. 384.
38Ibid., p. 385.
of the feeling of Milly's explicit forgiveness. Now when Kate, to whom he forwarded the second letter, brings it, opened, to him, he explains that he wanted her to leave it sealed so that he could return it gracefully. He did not tell Kate not to read the letter because "I wanted—in so good a case—to test you." Even now he does not want to be told the letter's contents. His second test for Kate is a measure of his moral understanding: she can have him or the money—not both. Although Kate accuses him of loving Milly's memory, he offers to marry his fiancee, with his one condition, as soon as possible. Kate asks:

"As we were?"
"As we were."
But she went to the door, and her headshake was now the end. "We shall never be again as we were."  

For Milly Theale, isolated by her illness, participation in life is limited to her brief, pathetic love for Merton Densher. That Milly still achieves self-knowledge is the measure of her recognition that, without her love, she would have missed everything. James notes that, having learned Kate's plan: "She rallies to it—to her passion, her yearning just to taste briefly, of life that way—and becomes capable of clinging still to her generosity." Milly's bequest to

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39 Ibid., p. 399.
40 Ibid., p. 405.
Densher is a gift of love. She renounces revenge because of her love and of what she is. By giving her money to those who are so able to live, if they have it, she furthers her ideal of life. That Densher cannot accept both her gift and Kate without doing violence to her memory is an indication of his new awareness of moral beauty. She, by her love, has established a spiritual and moral ideal that the recipients of her kindness cannot meet. Densher's and Kate's relationship, before Milly, was based on their "common participation in life," but the journalist now realizes that to continue they must prove their appreciation of moral, as well as of aesthetic, beauty. He adopts Milly's ideal of moral beauty, just as Lambert Strether realizes Marie de Vionnet's aesthetic values. Kate recognizes his love of Milly's memory and acknowledges the heiress's victory: "I used to call her, in my stupidity—for want of anything better—a dove. Well, she has stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us." Milly Theale, by James's standards, has lived a full life, for her achieved self-knowledge gives her complete spiritual mastery of Lancaster Gate. Even as she gains aesthetic understanding, she creates a moral force which her associates must recognize. In this respect she surpasses Lambert Strether, for she infects others with her ideal of life.

42 Krook, Ordeal of Consciousness, pp. 228-229.
43 James, The Wings of the Dove, XX, 404.
The history of Maggie Verver's moral and aesthetic growth differs from that of the other protagonists in several respects. In *The Golden Bowl* the quality of Maggie's moral innocence is colored by aestheticism. Consequently, she attempts to create order in her little world by balancing her exploitation of others with systematized kindness. Since she has traveled and lived in Europe for much of her life, Maggie's innocence is not so purely American as her predecessors'. And, imagining that her present life is ideal, she does not seek, indeed she appears to resist, enlarging her experience. But, when she must finally acknowledge the existence of evil in her world, she responds magnificently, using the methods of evil to achieve what she then perceives to be good.

Maggie's innocence reflects the idyllic conditions of her life. After her mother's death when Maggie was ten, she and her wealthy father have developed a relationship so close that all others are excluded. It is the selfish quality of Maggie's tie with her father that defines their mutual inexperience in the art of living. To emphasize Maggie's sheltered,
luxurious innocence, James has her more talked about than heard in the first book of the novel. She is filtered through the perceptions and imaginations of Prince Amerigo, her husband; Fanny Assingham, a comic social-climber; Charlotte Stant, her friend; and Adam Verver, her father.

Maggie's life has been so secluded that, in spite of her wide travel in Europe with her father, she retains a rigid, untested, American moral code. As Prince Amerigo discovers before their marriage, she is totally unable to participate in any "discussion of veracity, of loyalty, or rather the want of them."\(^1\) Never confronted with the absence of these qualities, Maggie does not even realize the possibility of their not being present in every human relationship. And, unlike the protagonists of the other novels, Maggie wants to maintain the status quo; she has no interest in enlarging her experience. Fanny Assingham declares, and the others believe, "She wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it,"\(^2\) and they do their best to protect her from it. Her moral sense, consequently, is wholly theoretical, idealistic, and romantic. She lives by her many "little rules, considerations, provisions"\(^3\) for pleasing others.

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\(^2\)Ibid., p. 78.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 166.
Prince Amerigo notes her "extraordinary American good faith. . . . the colour of her innocence, and yet at the same time of her imagination."⁴ In time the sophisticated prince, who admittedly lacks a moral sense although he has admirable aesthetic taste, falls under the Ververs's spell of "innocent pleasures, pleasures without penalties."⁵

Within her little world, Maggie is even more generous than she can be expected to be. Charlotte defines Maggie's overwhelming kindness:

"She's not selfish enough. There's nothing, absolutely, that one need do for her. She's so modest . . . she doesn't miss things, I mean if you love her--or, rather, I should say, if she loves you. She lets it go. . . . She lets everything go but her disposition to be kind to you."⁶

While putting immense pressure on those who cannot live up to it--the prince and Charlotte, this characteristic generosity also evokes pity in its recipients. Because she is so naively unselfish, her husband and her friend feel obliged to maintain her innocence. In so far as they can, they help Maggie continue to believe that her arrangements are working so that her "feverish little sense of justice"⁷ remains quiet.

Maggie's untested moral system is the result of her protected life. Her aestheticism is highly developed, as would be expected in the daughter of a collector of rare objects. For, although Adam Verver's aestheticism has not destroyed

⁴Ibid., p. 10. 
⁵Ibid., p. 11. 
⁶Ibid., pp. 101-102. 
⁷Ibid., p. 396.
his romanticized moral understanding, he is capable of viewing his daughter as "some slight, slim draped 'antique' of Vatican or Capitoline halls."\(^8\) That he has not completely lost feeling for others "came from his caring for precious vases only less than for precious daughters."\(^9\) Because Maggie also puts her father first, and because she is even less experienced than he, she tends to view and to use others as objects with which to decorate her small world. The prince, in fact, represents a gift by Adam Verver to his daughter. She accepts Amerigo as a present, which is a measure of her aestheticism, and, because she cannot imagine that he might be offended, confides to him,

"You're at any rate a part of his collection . . . one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price."\(^10\)

Blandly continuing, Maggie describes him as one of the smaller objects which she and her father carry with them in their travels. Indeed, after their marriage, Maggie delights in her husband's attractiveness to other women, just as she might take pleasure in the envy a precious object might bring her.

Maggie is perfectly willing to use others, since she rarely thinks of them as people. Having become aware that

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 187.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 188.
\(^10\)Ibid., p. 12.
her own marriage has made Adam vulnerable to marriage-minded women, she notes: "What has really happened is that the proportions, for us, are altered."\(^\text{11}\) In order to re-establish her aesthetic concept of form and balance, she encourages her father to remarry. She even suggests her friend Charlotte Stant as a suitable choice because she, by her exquisite taste, will "make us grander."\(^\text{12}\) Although Adam points out that "If we get her to improve us, don't we too then make use of her?"\(^\text{13}\) Maggie discounts it because of the good they do Charlotte. As Harold McCarthy notes:

> Not possessing the remotest suspicion that reality cannot be made over to meet her sense of the ideal, she assumes that the quadrangular marriage has solved every difficulty in her life.\(^\text{14}\)

Maggie's casual arrangement of her father's marriage demonstrates her acceptance of the worst aspect of aestheticism, which she naively balances with her moral system.

After Adam restores the marital balance by marrying Charlotte, he and Maggie feel free to resume their old relationship. The prince and Charlotte serve as their social proxies so that Adam and Maggie no longer need to feel selfish about not going into society. But for their

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\(^{11}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 167-168.}\)

\(^{12}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 180.}\)

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 181.}\)

respective spouses the situation is supremely ironic and too
great an opportunity to overlook. Unknown to the Ververs,
Charlotte and Amerigo had once considered marriage for them-
selves. At any rate the prince regards their present situation
as the full measure of Maggie's innocence:

What was supremely grotesque in fact was the essential
opposition of moral and aesthetic 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.\textsuperscript{15}

Fanny Assingham concurs in this; she too feels that Maggie
is responsible for Charlotte's and the prince's present
affair. For Maggie "began the vicious circle"\textsuperscript{16} when she
slighted her marital obligations to the prince to be with
her father. As Fanny sees it,

"Maggie had in the first place to make up to her
father for her having suffered herself to become
... so intensely married. Then she had to make
up to her husband for taking so much of the time
they might otherwise have spent together to make
this reparation to Mr. Verver perfect. And her
way to do this, precisely, was by allowing the
Prince the use, the enjoyment, whatever you may
call it, of Charlotte to cheer his path—by
instalments, as it were—in proportion as she
herself, making sure her father was all right,
might be missed from his side.\textsuperscript{17}

Maggie's innocence, her immaturity, is the most pervasive
evil in the novel. She is more responsible for the evil that
victimizes her than are the prince and Charlotte.

\textsuperscript{15}James, The Golden Bowl, XXIII, 335.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 394. \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., pp. 394-395.
Since continuing innocence is not a tenable position for James's protagonists, they are obliged, after becoming aware of the beauty of European society, to recognize the underlying ugliness—the aesthetic disposition to use others within the social forms. These perceptive characters, once involved in Europe, cannot do otherwise, for they themselves are being used. In extricating themselves from the complexity of European social forms, they retain their appreciation for the freedom of individual choice which aestheticism allows, but they also perceive the need for the moral considerations that European values ignore. Having recognized that the absence of moral values is evil, they also see that the absence of aesthetic considerations and adherence to presumptive moral codes are also evil. In reconciling moral and aesthetic ideals, the protagonists develop a fine awareness of themselves and of their relations to others. In so doing, they achieve self-knowledge.

Of the protagonists under consideration, only Maggie Verver resists enlarging her moral and aesthetic understanding. Unlike her predecessors, she is actively concerned to maintain a relationship possible only for isolated innocence, that is, her child-like dependence on her father. Thus, although Fanny Assingham makes it clear at the end of Book I that Maggie has sensed Amerigo's and Charlotte's affair, Maggie does not immediately admit her realization to herself. To confess, even to herself, that her husband's and stepmother's
relationship has changed, Maggie would also have to acknowledge the threatened disruption of her tie to her father. Such a "lapse from that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort . . . depended" means for her that she must either discount her suspicions or accept full responsibility for what has happened. Without clearly understanding these alternatives, at first, Maggie naively attempts to restore her concept of balance by spending as much time with Charlotte and Amerigo as with her father. By acting within the limits of social form, she uses the same techniques of aestheticism on which Charlotte and Amerigo rely. The result of her first implementation of her plan—simply being at Portland Place when Amerigo and Charlotte tardily return from Matcham—so impresses Maggie that she continues and, from this point, enlarges her duplicity. Thus she assumes an active role in society in an attempt to interpose herself between Charlotte and Amerigo. Her efforts are, at first, directed toward separating Charlotte and Amerigo without ending her close relation to her father. She is concerned, that is, with the appearance, the form of the marriages, and not with her own moral failure to maintain their validity.

The immediate result of Maggie's social maneuvers is not the hoped-for realignment of the two couples. Aware that

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Charlotte's and Amerigo's guiding idea is the protection of the Ververs and the maintenance of their own affair, Maggie soon realizes that the pair have simply adjusted their plans to incorporate hers. Maggie's efforts thus far have separated her from her father, while Amerigo and Charlotte have continued their relationship:

The equilibrium, the precious equilibrium, lasted in spite of rearrangement; there had been a fresh distribution of the different weights, but the balance persisted and triumphed; all of which was just the reason why she was forbidden, face to face with the companion of her adventure, the experiment of a test. 19

A "test" would involve openly forcing Amerigo and Charlotte to part, the one thing they will not themselves do for Adam and Maggie. For, so long as Charlotte and Amerigo uphold appearance, Maggie, as they know, cannot separate them without giving up her father and, perhaps, destroying both marriages. And, having unsuccessfully suggested that Adam and Amerigo travel together, Maggie cannot, without arousing her father's curiosity, initiate another plan.

The reason for the whole dilemma occurs to Maggie on the morning of one of her rare days with Adam. She recalls that her own marriage had never interfered with the relationship between her and her father. But Adam's, made to ease her concern for his well-being, suddenly involved them with the combination of Amerigo and Charlotte. Maggie herself is morally responsible for her present torment:

19 Ibid., p. 73.
Thus she felt the whole weight of their case drop afresh upon her shoulders, was confronted unmis-takably with the prime source of her haunted state. It came from her not having been able to mind . . . what became of him. . . . without anxiety, to let him go his way and take his risk and lead his life. 20

Maggie's apparently innocent desire to protect her father, according to her own naive moral ideas, and her subsequent aesthetic use of Charlotte to effect his protection created the conditions leading to the affair. Now, as she joins her father, she considers whether or not she can "simply sacrifice him," 21 which, if she is to separate their spouses and save the marriages, she must do without his knowing why. Maggie's aestheticism is obvious in this idea; her concern is not the value of the marriages, but their form.

As Maggie becomes more deeply aware of Charlotte's and Amerigo's arrangements, her own course of action becomes increasingly precarious. Since they watch her as closely as she observes them, the situation reaches a stalemate. For, in spite of their mutual awareness, the social forms have been scrupulously maintained. Maggie's role is clearly the most difficult, for she is especially concerned to preserve Adam's ignorance of the affair. That she is, at least temporarily, successful in deceiving her father is an indication of Maggie's skill in using the techniques of aestheticism to establish the proper relations. As J. A. Ward notes,

20 Ibid., p. 81.  
21 Ibid., p. 82.
Maggie's intervention augments the suffering for all. When a social situation is grounded in evil, all further behavior, even though motivated by high ideals and executed with intelligence, must intensify and partake of that evil. Maggie becomes deceiver, aggressor, and mistress of intrigue to gain her victory.  

Thus she, by assuming the role of her old innocence, maintains the forms of her relation to her father without the substance, for she must simultaneously search his conversation for any indication of his awareness of her game.

In preparation for both couples's summer residence at Fawns, Maggie enlists Fanny Assingham's help in order to protect herself from being "suspected of suspicion." Since Charlotte and Amerigo will be together more than ever, Maggie must ally herself with Fanny, who she is sure knows more about Charlotte and Amerigo than she will tell. For, although Maggie cannot define her fears, she graphically describes her present ordeal:

"If I'm jealous, don't you see, I'm tormented," she went on, "and all the more I'm helpless. And if I'm both helpless and tormented . . . . I am fairly screaming at you . . . . I live in the midst of miracles of arrangement, half of which I admit, are my own; I go about on tiptoe, I watch for every sound, I feel every breath, and yet I try all the while to seem as smooth as old satin dyed rose colour. Have you ever thought of me," she asked, "as really feeling as I do?"  

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23James, The Golden Bowl, XXIV, 100.

24Ibid., p. 110.
Fanny's answer assures Maggie of her success: "I've never thought of you but as outside of ugly things . . . ."\textsuperscript{25} Relieved, Maggie explains her present control of Charlotte and Amerigo. Because they are aware that Maggie is watching them for any change in their behavior, and because inconsistency would cause them to violate their mutual pledge not to hurt their spouses, she can and does make them do as she pleases. Her torment is simply that she cannot separate them.

Shortly afterward, Maggie's suspicions are justified and her moral growth assured by the events following her purchase of the golden bowl. As she tells Fanny, "Amerigo knew Charlotte--more than I ever dreamed."\textsuperscript{26} Now her concern is to make Amerigo recognize that she knows the truth, while protecting Adam from it. Fanny, however, reminds Maggie that "What he \textsuperscript{Adam} undertook for you, he'll do to the end."\textsuperscript{27} If Maggie is to succeed in separating Charlotte and Amerigo, she must admit her father's ability to take care of his own marriage. Fanny emphasizes the flaw in Maggie's attempt to have both the marriages and her father when she smashes the cracked bowl.

Indeed, Maggie's moral development begins when she realizes that, while she wants Amerigo to recognize her knowledge of the affair, she does not want his suffering.

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 111. \textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 160. \textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 175.
As he silently waits, she becomes aware of a "sudden split between conviction and action,"\textsuperscript{28} for she realizes that acting on her rigid moral code would only destroy the quality of her marriage. In addition, Maggie sees that from his new need of her, Amerigo may also help her. Thus she establishes a new level of understanding for their marriage by explaining that she has been aware of the change in his and Charlotte's relationship since the Matcham weekend. Maggie's explanation, in fact, increases her power over Amerigo, for he sees that she is more sophisticated than he imagined, and he is faced with the question of how much of this Adam knows. Now Maggie, with the advantage of knowledge, finds the prospect of Charlotte's ignorance pleasing.

Charlotte, for herself, knew as little as he had known. The vision loomed . . . of the two others alone together at Fawns, and Charlotte, as one of them, having graspingly to go on, always not knowing and not knowing.\textsuperscript{29}

At Fawns, Maggie enjoys the benefits of her power, for she realizes that Amerigo is helping her, as best he can, by not telling Charlotte that Maggie has found them out, while simultaneously avoiding her. Having learned that his wife is capable of maintaining and using the forms for social beauty, the prince has thrown his lot with her. By mutual consent, they put on a successful show of perfect harmony.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 186.
As Maggie explains to Fanny, "He'll simply, he'll insistently have lied" to Charlotte. As a result, Maggie realizes, Charlotte intends to approach her directly at the first opportunity, but, for the moment, Maggie visualizes her stepmother in a "spacious but suspended cage." As she fears, Charlotte soon escapes from her cage. As Maggie watches the others play bridge, she feels that "if she were but different--oh, ever so different!--all this high decorum would but hang by a hair." From the first she has not given away to anger and revenge because

... the ways usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed, would have been to give them up and that giving them up was, marvellously, not to be thought of.

Maggie's acceptance of her own moral responsibility and her understanding of her experience have prevented such a rupture. Now, aware that "the splendid shining supple creature was out of the cage," Maggie is faced with Charlotte. Knowing that if she fails to mislead her stepmother, all her efforts have been wasted, Maggie finds that Charlotte intends to insist upon an open break if necessary. Assuming herself in the right and counting on Maggie's devotion to Adam, Charlotte challenges Maggie's recent behavior. Realizing now what Amerigo has faced in lying to Charlotte, Maggie succeeds

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30 Ibid., p. 218.  
31 Ibid., p. 229.  
32 Ibid., p. 233.  
33 Ibid., p. 327.  
34 Ibid., p. 329.
with perfect humility in denying that she has any complaint against her stepmother. And Charlotte, again in a prison of ignorance, can only ask for a kiss to test Maggie's good faith—a kiss that is witnessed by the rest of the party as they enter the drawing room. For Amerigo and Fanny, at least, Maggie has proved herself, for, by apparently submitting to Charlotte, Maggie upholds the aesthetic form.

The largest part of James's novels is, obviously, devoted to the gathering and refining of impressions by the protagonists. As has been seen, the central characters do not actively seek their particular experiences, only because they are immensely endowed with sensitive awareness of underlying principle do they make so much of what happens to them. Primarily, the major characters perceive in the mass of their impressions an ideal relationship between their moral and aesthetic understanding. That is, they realize that real morality is determined by the beauty of every separate action—not be a preconceived code of ethics. Moral and aesthetic values become relevant only in relation to the individual and his situation. With this awareness, all that remains for the conscious protagonists is to accept what they are and their relations to others.

In successfully rebuffing Charlotte's challenge, Maggie demonstrates her aesthetic understanding by her social skill. But her triumph preserves only the prevailing form of the
two marriages. She, like Isabel Archer, has only maintained the status quo. In order to establish moral substance as well as aesthetic shape as a basis for her marriage, Maggie must also act upon her moral understanding.

As Maggie finally realizes, a lasting solution to her dilemma involves the separation not only of Charlotte and Amerigo but necessarily of Adam and herself. Adam Verver, however, assumes this burden when it is apparent to him that Maggie understands the necessity of their sacrificing each other for their marriages. Thus he and his daughter, without acknowledging the affair as their reason, determine that he and Charlotte will move to American City to supervise Adam's pet project. That he fully comprehends Maggie's efforts becomes clear when he tells her that they cannot be separated until they cease to believe in one another. For the first time in her life, Maggie sees that Adam, above all, takes care of himself; at this time especially, he is judging her ability to do the same.

Maggie lives up to his expectations and proves her moral understanding some three weeks after her initial confrontation with Charlotte. During the interval, in which Adam effects full control of his wife, Maggie sees that "poor Charlotte"\textsuperscript{35} is utterly isolated. For her part, Maggie is aware of her own heightened understanding, for, as Fanny assures her,

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 282.
"... you are all but 'through.' You've done it."\(^{36}\) After Charlotte learns of her imminent exile to America, Maggie gives a last demonstration of her moral growth; by submitting to Charlotte's pride, she establishes a new balance for the two couples. Such a gesture is necessary, because as Maggie sees, without any protecting truth, Charlotte is completely damned.

It is for this, and for her sense that Adam is waiting for her to finish the matter, that Maggie, in the same way Charlotte stalked her, follows her stepmother into the garden. There, although she will not and cannot tell Charlotte the truth, she allows Charlotte to claim that American City is her idea—not Adam's. When Maggie does not contest this assertion, Charlotte further states that Maggie has been the greatest difficulty in her marriage. As Maggie comprehends her part in Charlotte's proposal, she assumes it and protests: "You want to take my father from me?"\(^{37}\) Then she waits: "She was ready to lie again if her companion would but give her the opening. Then she should know she had done all."\(^{38}\) Charlotte gives her the chance by accusing Maggie of having worked against Adam's marriage from the first. When Maggie abjectly admits that she has done this

\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 303.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 316.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
and failed, she knows that she, by restoring Charlotte's pride, has done all.

In the interval between their return to Portland Place and the Ververs's departure for American City, Maggie finds that she must continue to allow Amerigo to resolve his distress alone. Her discovery and subsequent victory have completely baffled him. But, at the same time, Maggie sees that she has measured up to his aesthetic standards. Consequently, when she informs him of the Ververs's approaching visit, the last before their departure, she perceives that "he was with her as if he were hers."\(^{39}\) Knowing that Amerigo's torment will end only when Adam leaves, Maggie compliments Charlotte's excellent personal qualities, including her unshakable poise. But, as Amerigo apprehends, Maggie speaks of Charlotte to avoid mentioning her father.

Maggie's final recognition is that Adam, by allowing her to act, has assured her present moral and aesthetic understanding. In Amerigo's view, however, Maggie is as great as her father, for she has responded to Adam's test admirably. In his view, Charlotte is "stupid,"\(^{40}\) since she failed to recognize Maggie's game. He did not tell Charlotte what Maggie knew because of his own moral growth: "If ever a man, since the beginning of time acted in good faith—!"\(^{41}\)

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 339. 
\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 348. 
\(^{41}\)Ibid., p. 350.
he intends to explain his silence to Charlotte, so that his wife will not always seem a fool. But Maggie refuses to allow it. As far as she is concerned, Charlotte may think whatever she likes. And, as Maggie points out, he should not presume to correct his mother-in-law.

When the Ververs arrive, Maggie can measure the extent of her success. For Charlotte has adapted to her new role, and, having changed her course without admitting defeat, she will not waste herself in American City. As such, Maggie and her father agree that "Charlotte's great." She is evidence, as is Amerigo, of Maggie's success. When the Ververs depart, Prince Amerigo joins Maggie on the balcony from which he and Charlotte had once looked down on Maggie and Adam. By referring again to Charlotte's greatness, Maggie indicates that Amerigo has paid his debt. He, however, ignores her reference and, in testimony to his wife's success, says "'See?' I see nothing but you."^3

Maggie Verver's moral and aesthetic growth is James's most completely developed treatment of renunciation and self-realization. She achieves not only the capacity to see but also the ability to act according to her understanding. Her understanding that her own moral fault precipitated Charlotte's and Amerigo's affair forces her to accept the

\[^2\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 364.}\]
\[^3\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 369.}\]
close relation between good and evil. Her rigid concern for order and justice are then abandoned to her understanding that people and relations are primary. As Frederick Crews notes, "... to destroy evil one must also destroy good. ... She has learned to accommodate evil. ... She has learned how to live." By using the methods of evil to achieve her goal of social harmony and beauty, Maggie demonstrates her appreciation of relative values. When, in her second encounter with Charlotte, she accepts her rival's scorn, she manifests the extent of her moral development.

F. O. Matthiessen summarizes Maggie's achievements:

Its /The Golden Bowl's/ dynamics are provided entirely by Maggie, who combines Milly Theale's capacity for devotion with Kate Croy's strength of will. James's values of the heart, in contrast to those of mere intelligence, are realized in her to the full.

Like Milly Theale, Maggie affects others. Prince Amerigo, who admitted his moral deficiency before his marriage, has, by his wife's efforts, gained moral understanding. But Maggie's achievement is greater than Milly's, for Maggie establishes her ideal concept of life in reality.


CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Henry James's interest in the theme of renunciation and self-realization first becomes apparent in the late 1870's and extends throughout his productive years. A look at certain relative points in his life and his concept of art may serve to further clarify James's understanding of renunciation and self-realization, for James's concept of art is intimately connected with his life style. Introverted and a hesitant speaker in a family of extroverted talkers, the younger Henry James's participation in the lively family philosophical conversations was primarily vicarious. It was as an outsider that he was exposed to exchanges of philosophical ideas. From these family discussions, which frequently were arguments, came the novelist's intellectual preoccupation. This orientation, combined with his shyness, set the stage for his life-long aloofness from close personal relationships and goes far to explain James's major themes and his theory of art.

James focuses his novels on centers of consciousness, on characters who live most intensely on the intellectual
level, and through these consciously aware characters James explores the moral and aesthetic possibilities of situations. As Naomi Lebowitz explains of his protagonists, "The burden of bearing the greatest consciousness on the scene isolates the subject . . . as surely as formal tragedy." But, if James's conscious characters are supremely alone, the "quality of mind of the producer," which determines the "deepest quality of a work of art," must be even finer and, as a result, more detached. The comprehension of the artist is the primary subject of James's theory of art. Setting, plot, and characters, as he notes,

... are singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is and I will tell you of what he has been conscious. Thereby I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his "moral" reference.

James's ideals are presented in his novels, which Harold McCarthy has termed "dramatized philosophy." The conscious characters, tested by experience in the existing society, visualize a kind of intellectual utopia in which truth and

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beauty are the only reality. Although only an imaginary society, the centers of consciousness live as if the imaginary were real. And, for James's characters, as in life, what is imagined as real and acted upon as real is real.

The source of James's concept of the ideal seems to be grounded in the often contradictory American Puritan and Transcendental traditions. In his concern for individual self-mastery, he concentrates on a select group, free of economic concerns, with intellectual capacities far above the average. Phillip Rahv comments:

Thus one might venture the speculation that his worldly-esthetic idea of an elite is in some way associated, however remotely and unconsciously, with the ancestral-puritan idea of the elect . . . . So with the ancestral ideas of sin and grace. Is it not possible to claim that the famous Jamesian refinement is a trait in which the ideal state is preserved—the state of grace to be achieved here and now through mundane and esthetic means?6

In creating characters whose primary goal is a "transcendental morality"7 of the intellect, James records the perceptive individual's moral confrontation with evil, which they both redefine and transcend. His debt to Transcendentalism may be seen in his characters's free will, moral responsibility, self-reliance, and determination to live ideally in this

6Phillip Rahv, "Heiress of All the Ages," Partisan Review, X (May-June, 1943), 246.

world. James's idea of the evil of accepting social values above imaginatively glimpsed ideal values is also transcendental in origin. Stephen Spender notes that, while James strongly felt the evil of his contemporary society,

... because he is an individualist, because he has worked out in his books his own private system of ethics, which makes it possible for the individual to live aesthetically and morally, in spite of the world around him, he becomes finally a snob, a supporter of the system, which still makes this existence possible in spite of circumstances.9

Henry James's theme of renunciation and self-realization is, as has been seen, the positive result of comprehensive moral and aesthetic understanding. His protagonists's development from morally biased innocence to aesthetically oriented experience is, for him, clearly a necessary test of his characters's capacity for self-knowledge. That Isabel Archer fails within the scope of The Portrait of a Lady to achieve full understanding indicates her moral deficiency, and, as a result, her decision to return to Osmond, her renunciation of escape, is negative since she sacrifices herself to a false understanding of morality and aestheticism. For the other protagonists, however, renunciation is an indication of self-knowledge, for these characters have reconciled moral and aesthetic values and, thus, have


established for themselves a new criterion for life. Further, James’s self-realized characters strive to affect positively their surroundings. The extent of their success depends on their personal situations, what they finally are. In attempting to create order and harmony, they work with what they have and with a broad comprehension of their environments. As J. A. Ward asserts,

The later protagonists either possess or acquire an imagination which can penetrate surface facts and which can gain a transcendent understanding of things. Such an imagination rises above personal indignation and insistence on justice.  

It is their refined imaginations which set these characters apart, for they create order from chaos by perceiving an ideal society. Morton Zabel elaborates this point:

For James the salvation from such confusion lay precisely in that conquest of identity which he made the adventure of his focal heroes and heroines—Milly Theale, Maggie Verver, Lambert Strether. . . . When that "self-hood" is attained, in triumph or tragedy, the truth of life is at last disclosed.  

From the discovered identity, the self-realized protagonists live the roles, the functions, which they have determined are right for them. Thus Lambert Strether returns to Woollett to observe and, if he can, to bring its narrow-minded citizens to a fuller appreciation of beauty. Milly Theale, having lived like a dove, dies like one, and leaving her money to

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her betrayers, helps one of them to see moral as well as aesthetic beauty. Maggie Verver, who actively demonstrates the power of the self-realized individual, saves her and her father's marriages and infuses them both with her ideal. In acting according to their perceived ideal, these characters actualize their comprehension and their integrity. Having transcended the societal view of morality and aestheticism—that is, of life—they have also transcended their need of society's approval and reward. Indeed, the difficulty in comprehending these protagonists's motivation arises from their disregard for commonly accepted values.

James's novels climax the study of the perceptive individual's ideal world, for the society in which he lived was already an anachronism. The complete success of the Industrial Revolution and the trauma of World War I obliter-erated the principles of the Victorian Age. Novelists turned from the superior hero to the average, or even inferior, protagonist as society readjusted its values. As a result James's theory of art and his techniques as a psychological novelist are now more widely accepted than his often misunderstood idealism.
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