The Concept of Villainy in Selected Works of Henry James

# THE CONCEPT OF VILLAINY IN SELECTED WORKS OF HENRY JAMES

Ву

CLAUDIA M. MARQUIS, B.A.

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AUTHOR:

Claudia M. Marquis, B.A. (Concordia University)

SUPERVISOR:

Dean Alwyn Berland

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## Note on References and Abbreviations

Quotations in the text from the novels of Henry James are followed by an abbreviation of the title and the page number within parentheses. I have used the following abbreviations throughout. Full bibliographical information is provided in the appropriate section.

Roderick Hudson: RH

The American: Am

The Portrait of a Lady: PL

"The Author of 'Beltraffio'": "AB"

The Bostonians: TB

The Princess Casamassima: PC

"The Pupil": "PL"

What Maisie Knew: WMK

The Awkward Age: AA

"The Turn of the Screw": "TS"

The Wings of the Dove: WD

#### Preface

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the artistic and intellectual maturation of Henry James as reflected in his portrayals of the "villainous" personality — the evil character. Attention is given to the major novels of each phase; the thesis follows a chronological outline. Such a study is not unduly unprecedented, nor is it unwarrantably repetitious. To date there has been no inclusive critical or systematic evaluation of James's villains per se. Syndy Conger's brief note on The Wings of the Dove (1971) is concerned exclusively with that novel, and J. A. Ward's perceptive study, The Imagination of Disaster (1961) focuses not on the concept of villainy, but on "the complex of forces, internal and external which prevents the individual from moving toward completion."

In a study of this scope both space and time inevitably exert some irresistible pressure. As such, my choice of novels has been necessarily selective. Those chosen to represent the early and middle phases do, I believe, speak for themseives. The conspicuous absence of <a href="#">The Ambassadors</a> and <a href="#">The Golden Bowl</a> in the late period, however, may require some words of explanation. It is my contention that the former novel does not have any villainous characters, and is therefore irrelevant to my present purposes. On the other hand, though, while <a href="#">The Golden Bowl</a> does possess the villainous

Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant, these characters nevertheless emerge as reworked or "recast" characters in the same mould as Kate Croy and Merton Densher. The little departure marked by The Golden Bowl from The Wings of the Dove lies in the living victory of its heroine, Maggie Verver, in contrast to the death-triumph of the earlier Milly Theale. The Golden Bowl, then, appears to be a similar study in terms of the villainous personality to that of The Wings of the Dove, and, as such, my discussion in Chapter III deals exclusively with the earlier novel.

One final note must be made in regard to the works dealt with in the following pages. "The Turn of the Screw" -- largely because of its train of critical controversy -- has been assigned to an appendix, a section detached in part from the rant and fustion of the critical heritage.

I should like to conclude these prefatory remarks with the necessary acknowledgements: I thank Dean Alwyn Berland for his assistance throughout the preparation of this thesis which is derived, in part, from a paper presented in his graduate seminar on the modern novel. I extend my gratitude to Dr Norman Shrive for having taken time to read the original manuscript. Finally I wish to thank Gary A. Boire for his invaluable help during the writing of this thesis.

## Chapter I -- The Gothic Villains

Although evil or villainy is ever present throughout the works of Henry James, his representation of that evil undergoes a definite metamorphosis which can be traced through a chronological reading of his fiction. As he states, concerning Zola in <a href="The Future">The Future</a>, of the Novel: "the weak sides in an artist are weakened with time, and the strong sides strengthened." So it is with James himself. His representation of human behaviour develops from a two-dimensional, black and white depiction of evil to a more sophisticated concept of the human psyche. In such early works as <a href="Roderick Hudson">Roderick</a> Hudson (1875) and <a href="The American">The American</a> (1877), James employs the traditional stereotype of the Gothic villain; he later, however, depicts his villains as possessing a more ambiguous and more complex consciousness. As Graham Greene writes of James's artistic development:

In his early work perhaps he rendered a little less than the highest kind of justice; the progress from The American to The Golden Bowl is a progress from rather a crude and inexperienced symbolization of truth to truth itself; a progress from evil represented rather obviously in terms of murder to evil in propria persona walking down Bond Street, charming, cultured, sensitive -- evil to be distinguished from good chiefly in the complete egotism of its outlook.

Indeed, the progression from Urbain de Bellegarde, the melo-

dramatic villain of <u>The American</u>, to the "admirable villains" of <u>The Wings of the Dove</u> (1902), to the charming Prince Amerigo of <u>The Golden Bowl</u> (1904) reflects a movement toward a more psychologically realistic-idea of evil.

It is the intention of this thesis, then, to provide a type of overview or general vision of James's progression from his "early phase" [Roderick Hudson (1875), The American (1877), The Portrait of a Lady (1881)], through the middle years [a brief mention of "The Author of Beltraffio" (1884), The Bostonians (1886), The Princess Casamassima (1885-1886), "The Pupil" (1891), What Maisie Knew (1897), and The Awkward Age (1899)], to the culminating achievement of The Wings of the Dove (1902). My argument is that James's intellectual maturation corresponds directly to a more mature handling of the villainous personality -- the evil character. intend to show that James progresses from a rather twodimensional image of the femme fatale figure, through the Gothic presentation of evil, to a final analysis of the inextricable fusion of evil and good within the individual human psyche.

In James's fiction evil is presented as an intrinsic part of the individual human consciousness. James is not concerned with natural, physical, or social evil; that is to say, he gives little attention to such phenomena as natural cataclysm or physical misfortume. For to James such "evil" is interesting only insofar as it exerts an influence upon, or inspires to activity, the inherent evil in man.

James admires both Hawthorne and Turgenev primarily because of their comprehensive representation of the complex forces which motivate man to good and evil. Of Turgenev he states:

No one has had a closer vision, or a hand at once more ironic and more tender, for the individual figure. He sees it with its minutest signs and tricks — all its heredity of idiosyncrasies, all its particulars of weakness and strength, or ugliness and beauty, or oddity and charm; and yet it is of his essence that he sees it in the general flood of life, steeped in its relations and contrasts, struggling or submerged, a hurried particle in the stream. This gives him, with his quiet method, his extraordinary breadth; dissociates his rare power to particularize from dryness or hardness, from any peril of caricature. 3

This successful portrayal of "ugliness and beauty" constitutes, for James, the highest form of artistic creation. As Graham Greene observes, "Evil [as well as beauty] was an overwhelming part of his visible universe." Consequently every Jamesian hero or heroine must confront the world of evil as an essential aspect of total experience.

Unlike Hawthorne's sometimes two-dimensional representations, however, neither James's villains nor his heroes function solely as forces or principles. In <a href="The Marbde">The Marbde</a> <a href="Faun">Faun</a> evil is something remote and vague -- a general atmosphere created -- more than a tangible reality. The exact nature of Miriam's former crime and the bond that unites her with her persecutor is never explained. Her tormentor, like Roger Chillingworth or Judge Pyncheon, is simply a demonic

force. As J. A. Ward comments: "they [simply] personify evil." Hilda, the American girl who tends to the virgin's lamp, is in many respects a St Theresa figure -- the embodiment of the virtuous principle. James's creations are usually more solid, concrete figures, "motivated by common human desires", desires that he does not hesitate to make explicit.

In keeping with the Jamesian vision his "innocents", as well as his villains, possess a natural inclination to evil -- an evil which is inherent in the human character. Isabel Archer's and Christopher Newman's moral triumphs occur only after their virtue has been tested and has proven itself the stronger force. It is of importance to note that James does allow his American innocents a definite moral victory over evil. From Euphemia Cleves to Milly Theale, James's "victims" are strengthened by their confrontations with evil and achieve a moral victory. It is this type of victory which, to James, is the ultimate triumph. Newman's renunciation of revenge is the act that defines his moral Similarly, Isabel's decision to return to her victory. chosen husband is not an act of resignation but her moral triumph. In his fiction, therefore, James centers mostly on the innocents' confrontation with villainous forces as a necessary step toward inner growth.

Intimately connected with the individual's freedom to experience, and as important to James, is the individual's

freedom to choose. What is suggested is that an individual must be allowed the right to choose his own path even if he makes the grossest errors. James's view is best expressed by Isabel Archer in conversation with Mrs Touchett:

"I always want to know the things one shouldn't do."
"So as to do them?"asked her aunt.
"So as to choose", said Isabel. (PL, p.67)

James's concept of evil manifests itself in the multitude of villains who make up his personal "Pandemonium". Beginning with Mrs Light's emotional vampirism in Roderick Hudson, to Mrs Brookenham's burning lust in The Awkward Age, to the adulterous Prince Amerigo in The Golden Bowl, we are presented with a complex array of the various forms which villainy can assume. Villainy, to James, is that individual force or activity which, for personal gain, violates another being's existence. The villainous act, then, is a conscious act of the will. It usually is manifested in unethical and immoral action; "immoral" in the sense of a manipulation or restriction of another being's free expression of self, or free allowance of experience and development; "unethical" as a trangression of an honourable code of behaviour. As Ward explains: "Improper intervention in the life of another is virtually the only sin that interested James." This use of another as a means to achieve a personal goal is, to James, the unpardonable sin.

It is not merely coincidental, then, that all James's villains hinder what he himself calls "the fluidity of self-

revelation."<sup>8</sup> What frequently defines James's villains is the inescapable fact that they restrict choice. This fact often accounts for the fine shading of difference between a Mme de Bellegarde and a Noemie. The latter is dismissable as more of a nuisance (as Newman is fond of remarking) than an evil character, one who suffers from basic human illusions arising out of weakness. Mme de Bellegarde, however, is much more than merely a sinister presence. Rather, she is that malignant and active force which conforms to what Greene defines as James's "sense of evil religious in its intensity."<sup>9</sup>

In any consideration of the early fiction, one cannot deny James's use of Gothic and neo-Gothic elements. Such a technique can be paralleled to the works of such authors as Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, where Gothic themes and imagery have been translated and incorporated into the experience of the New World. Although James's novels cannot be compared to those of Anne Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis, one can discuss them in the wider context of the American Gothic tradition.

Unlike his British predecessors, James never resorts to the mere exploitation of sheer sensationalism. The American Gothic does exploit, to the fullest, both the decayed ancestral mansions of the traditional Gothic novel and the symbolic implications of the "dark forest", as found in such superb allegories on the nature of good and evil as Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and "Young Goodman Brown". As Fiedler points out, nature is made to provide a strikingly visual

and textured terror, and a convenient mirror in which to reflect the inner turmoil of its characters. Of course, Poe uses not only the dark forest, but also the more conventional Gothic elements, such as the black cat, the living interment, gloomy castles, etc. -- not however, merely to induce an overwhelming terror in the reader, but rather, to probe the darker and more troubled recesses of the human soul. As such, Poe's Gothicism emerges as a tremendously powerful vehicle through which he may construct a penetrating and exacting exploration of the human psyche.

It is in the Jamesian Gothic that one may witness a similar exploitation of the Gothic mode. The "terrific" trappings found in "The Turn of the Screw" and "Daisy Miller" ("the decaying ruins striking down Daisy as she romantically stands at midnight in the Coliseum") ll function, on one hand, as a derivation of Gothic embellishment, but more implicitly, as the cornerstone upon which James constructs his psychological analysis of the individual human character in general -- and more specifically, his investigation of the villain.

In his study of the Gothic G. R. Thompson provides a quintessential, working definition of the concept: Gothicism "is not so much terror, as, more broadly, dread -- whether, physical, psychological, or metaphysical, whether body or mind, or spirit." He continues that the physical image of Gothic architecture reflects the duality or dialectic between "the

dark night of the soul" and man's angelic, or divinely aspiring, nature. Admittedly, such a dialectic between that aspect of the human spirit which aspires upward to the heavens, and the darker nature which pulls one down into the realm of evil, is a theme common in literature. From Chaucer's Troilus and Crésseyda, to Milton's Lady in Comus, to Donleavy's modern alazons, Sebastian Dangerfield and Balthazar B, one continually encounters this type of spiritual schizophrenia. However, it is in the Gothic genre that the theme is crystallized and becomes a central concern of the artist. The symbolism of the upward thrust of the Gothic tower which, in turn, is based on the multitudinous subterranean catacombs beneath, can be seen as a graphic illustration of the conflict between the battling polarities of man's soul. This central dialectic between the aspiring self and the victimized self, is the central theme in Roderick Hudson.

In this novel the protagonist recognizes both the divine and the demonic within him. We can compare Roderick's remarks to Madame Grandoni concerning his ambition to create sublime emblems of such things as "Wisdom", "Beauty", "the Ocean and the mountains; the Moon and the West Wind" (RH, p.95), to a later conversation with Rowland Mallet where he fully acknowledges the presence of his demon:

There are such things as merve and senses and imagination and a restless demon within that may sleep sometimes for a day, or for six months, but that sooner or later wakes up and thumps at your ribs till you listen to him. (RH, p.336)

Like the Gothic hero, Roderick is ultimately torn apart by this internal dichotomy. His lament to Rowland can be seen as the death-knell of his artistic potentiality.

Roderick's struggle between the two polarities of his nature typifies the melodramatic spirit of the American Gothic. In such works as "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Premature Burial" the concept of living interment is a metaphor for the human imagination or spirit being stifled or buried:

The unendurable oppression of the lungs -- the stifling fumes of the damp earth -- the clinging of the death garments -- the rigid embrace of the narrow house -- the blackness of the absolute night -- the silence like a sea that overwhelms -- the unseen but palpable presence of the Conqueror Worm -- these things, with the thoughts of the air and grass above, with memory of dear friends who would fly to save us if but informed of our fate, and with consciousness that of this fate they can never be informed -- that our hopeless portion is that of the really dead -- these considerations, I say, carry into the heart, which still palpitates, a degree of appalling and intolerable horror from which the most daring imagination must recoil.

Echoing this theme is the young artist's melodramatic outburst to Rowland. It is necessary to quote this outburst at length:

"Pity me my friend; pity me!" he presently cried. "Look at this lovely world and think what it must be to be dead to it!... Dead, dead; dead and buried! Buried in an open grave, where you lie staring up at the sailing clouds, smelling the waving flowers and hearing all nature live and grow above you! That's the way I feel!"

". . . For one hour of what I have been I would give up everything I may be! . . . I know what I have lost, and I think it horrible! Mind you, I know it, I feel it! Remember that hereafter. Don't say that he was stupefied and senseless; that his perception was dulled and his aspirations dead. Say that he trembled in every nerve with a sense of the beauty and sweetness of life; that he rebelled and protested and struggled; that he was buried alive, with his eyes open and his heart beating to madness; that he clung to every blade of grass and every wayside thorn as he passed; that it was the most pitiful spectacle you ever beheld; that it was a scandal, an outrage, a murder!" (RH, pp.310-311)

James's elaborate use of this death-in-life theme serves as a vivid contrast to Roderick's earlier desire to embrace life in its totality; a desire symbolized in an early work, "the young Water-drinker" (RH, p.39). The death of Roderick's imagination suggests the termination of his vital life forces. In effect, he has become a form without essence. Like Poe's living-dead Roderick is incapable of moving beyond his psychological paralysis. His frantic outburst is an expression of both the fatal violation of his creative spirit and his blighted hopes.

It is tempting to view Mrs Light as the central villain of the piece. Her emotional vampirism and ultimate manipulation of Christina can be seen as an image of James's "unpardonable sin" mentioned above. It is in the character of Christina, however, that James constructs a more subtle illustration of the villainous personality. For it is in his confrontation with Christina Light that Roderick's "demon[s] within" are

awakened. His moral decline can be seen as a result of a subjugation of his reason to overwhelming passion. Mesmerized by Christina's beauty, Roderick, like Mann's von Aschenbach, becomes "dumb with passion, his footsteps guided by the demonic power whose pastime it is to trample on human reason and dignity." 15

Despite Roderick's excessive preoccupation with sensual gratification, Christina is nonetheless the villainous force responsible for the destruction of the divine in Roderick. Her irresponsible whims result in a virtual death-in-life situation for the artist whose existence is his art -- his creativity. Her use of the young artist as a tool through which she can indulge her caprice, and simultaneously exact revenge on her mother, constitutes a manipulation of the darker, demonic forces in Roderick's nature. The irony implicit in her name is such that she is the darkness or evil shadow in Roderick's life. She virtually extinguishes that light in his eye which was once sufficient "to furnish an immortality" (RH, p.37).

The Mephistopheles allusion which Rowland employs in his initial evaluation of Christina is indeed apt. 16

It defines her as the demonic force which ultimately destroys the susceptible artist. Blinded by his passion for her, Roderick fails to detect the hidden caution in Gloriani's suggestion that Christina "would make a magnificent Herodias" (RH, p.139). The reference itself is to the second wife of

Herod who was instrumental in the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark, VI: 17-29). Figuratively speaking, Christina does perform a similar type of beheading. Her interference in Roderick's life is responsible not only for the death of reason, but also Roderick's spiritual, as well as physical death. In a similar manner, Rowland's allusion to "another case of Ulysses and the Sirens" (RH, p.203) underlines Christina's pernicious influence on Roderick, the questorartist.

Christina herself is aware of her own destructive potentiality. Her cry to Rowland: "I am corrupt, corruption, corrupting" (RH, p.273) can be seen as an explicit acknowledgement of her propensity to a destructive self-indulgence. Like the later Madame Merle, however, Christina's self-renunciation earns her a certain amount of the reader's sympathy.

Admittedly, <u>Roderick Hudson</u> is an embroynic novel, but one which is essential in terms of James's artistic development. In it the reader can detect the germ of such later characters as Mme de Bellegarde in <u>The American</u>, Ralph Touchett in <u>The Portrait of a Lady</u> and Mrs Newsome of <u>The Ambassadors</u>; and, of course, Christina Light is more fully treated in a later work, <u>The Princess Casamassima</u>.

But it is with <u>The American</u> that James fully masters the potential of the Gothic character. Whereas <u>Roderick</u>

<u>Hudson</u> contains but incidental trappings of the genre, <u>The</u>

American can be seen to be based almost -- but not completely --

on the Gothic technique. In order to understand the way in which villainy functions in <u>The American</u> it is necessary to consider the context within which it occurs.

Christopher Newman, as his name implies, is on a voyage of discovery. He can be seen as the spirit of the New World in confrontation with the Old; the innocent who encounters the decadence of the aged Europe. As an American, Newman possesses the child-like qualities and innocence which James associated with his subsequent American heroes. He is "as simple as a little child" (Am, p.22) in his attitudes concerning Europe. His previous concern had been the acquisition of a fortune and, having achieved his material goal, he now wishes to "cultivate society" (Am, p. 23). Initially, Newman's assertion of "everyone's right to lead an easy life" (Am, p.28) displays an ignorance and insensibility to the realities of evil. Typically American, in the Jamesian sense,

he had no perception of difficulties and consequently no curiosity about remedies . . . The complex Parisian world about him seemed a very simple affair; it was an immense, amazing spectacle, but it neither inflamed his imagination nor irritated his curiosity. (Am, p.29)

The naive illusion that he can extract culture from Europe and "pick . . . a magnificent woman . . . the best article in the market" ( $\underline{Am}$ , pp. 34-35) for a wife graphically illustrates Newman's ignorance of the world. The notion that life is "a simple affair" and that one can defeat adversity by

ignoring it (or by an assertion of good will), causes Newman to undervalue the evil of the elder Bellegardes. The belief that "Europe was made for him, and not he for Europe" (Am, p.58) reinforces this idea of the American's ignorance of European cultural and social complexities.

In his innocence Newman feels he can purchase European savoir faire:

It was a great bazaar, where one can stroll about and purchase handsome things; but he was no more conscious, individually, of social pressure than he admitted the existence of such a thing as an obligatory purchase . . . and it was both uncomfortable and slightly contemptible to feel obliged to square oneself with a standard. One's standard was the ideal of one's own good-humoured prosperity. (Am, p.58)

The folly of his illusions is the lesson that Newman must learn. His self-satisfaction and smug complacency will be shattered devastatingly when confronted with the depravity of the Bellegardes's traditional "standards". The European decadence from which the Reverend Benjamin Babcock recoils in terror seems to Newman a "capital farce", one which his "inelastic sense of humour forbade his taking . . . seriously" (Am, p. 65). The similarity between Babcock and Newman, as Americans, is seen in what may be termed their American ethnocentrism. Neither is willing to confront the possibility of a world in which values may differ from one's own. Babcock's terror at what he considers the unscrupulous and impure and his adherence to what he calls a "moral reaction" (Am, p.61)

leads to a mistrust of even the abstract, aesthetic beauty of art. Unlike the Reverend, however, Newman will not allow himself to recognize, or even consider, the possibility of a social structure upon which he cannot impose his materialistic values.

The inability or refusal to recognize evil is the direct cause of Newman's suffering. The idea that everyone is "a good fellow" blinds him to the villainous natures of Urbain de Bellegarde and his mother. The idea of propriety and societal form influencing behaviour is as foreign to Newman as "something in a play" (Am., p.73). Evil, the result of the Bellegardes's attempts to maintain an artifical propriety through decaying conventions, is a concept which does not occur to the American's business-like mind.

In his rendition of the villainous Bellegardes,

James uses elements of the traditional Gothic form. The sense
of menace is implicit in the description of the Bellegardes's

Gothic castle at Fleurières:

An immense façade of dark time-stained brick . . . capped with a fantastic roof. Two towers rose behind, and behind the towers was a mass of elms and beeches, now just faintly green. But the great feature was a wide river, which washed the foundations of the château. The building rose from an island in the circling stream, so that this formed a perfect moat, spanned by a two-arched bridge without a parapet. The dull brick walls, which here and there made a grand straight sweep, the ugly little cupolas of the wings, the deep-set windows, the long steep pinnacles of mossy slate, all mirrored themselves in the quiet (Am, p.245)water.

To Newman the house itself is both distasteful and mysterious; it seems to him "like a Chinese penitentiary" (Am, p.245).

Newman's simile is singularly appropriate in that it conjures up notions of both mystery and restriction. The use of "penitentiary" emphasizes the restricting limitations enforced by the famille Bellegarde. James, however, is not content to draw simple emblems, but in his portrayal of the Bellegardes's mansion, he constructs a potent and complex metaphor of the Bellegarde family itself. There can be little dispute that he here exploits to the fullest the Gothic fascination with dark towers, mossy forest, and the ever-recurring play on "façade" -- the ambiguity of reality and illusion.

But what is significant here is James's use of the physical mansion to expose the moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature of the Bellegardes. Appropriately the mansion is described in terms connotative of largeness and imposing stature: the "immense" façade, the "fantastic" roof, the "mass of elm", a "wide" river, the "grand" straight sweep, the "long steep." It is no coincidence that James is here utilizing the traditional notion of sublimity and its inherent power to excite awe -- but more importantly fear and a sense of the uncanny. Through a use of such terminology James might well be implying the very real potentiality for violence inherent in the Bellegarde ethos.

In a similar manner the description of the physical phenomenon of the "time stained brick" reflects the disfiguration

implicit in the outworn traditions and conventions held dear by the Bellegardes, while the emphasis on the "faintly green" flora intimates the lack of vitality, or life-force. The geographical isolation of the château, however, is used not merely to convey a sense of Gothic terror but can also be seen as symbolic of the spiritual separation of its occupants from the mainstream of normality.

Because of Newman's simplicity, the building suggests nothing to him but the fact of Claire's seclusion within.

Just as he cannot detect the difference between good and bad paintings, so he cannot detect the outward signs of sheer evil. His observation that Madame de Bellegarde "is a woman of conventions and proprieties [whose] world is a world of things immutably decreed" (Am, p. 117) likewise fails to impress upon him the full ramifications of his courtly aspirations.

Secret letters, family curses, a mysterious murder -the standard ingredients of Gothicism -- all come to play
within the novel. Although James does not, for some time,
inform the reader of the exact nature of the villainy perpetrated by Madame de Bellegarde, the use of a Gothic atmosphere evokes the foreboding sense of evil. The almost deathlike coldness, coupled with a recurring shadow imagery, of
Urbain and his mother, evokes this feeling of evil. As in
the Gothic tradition, one acquires an awareness of everpresent
menace almost through an osmotic process. This kind of
malignant anxiety is evident in one of the many confrontations

between Newman and the Bellegardes;

He felt, as soon as he entered the room, that he was in the presence of something evil; he was startled and pained, as he would have been by a threatening cry in the stillness of the night. (Am, p.219)

Evil however is not a part of Newman's narrow cosmology. It is significant, in this passage, that James's simile emphasizes the almost undefinable "evil" faced by the ingenuous American. His naive belief that a demonic energy might be rationalized out of existence is subtly implied by James's figuration of the Bellegarde's violence in terms of intangible feeling. And it is precisely the disregard of his initial, intuitive reaction which will effect Newman's eventual sufferings.

The use of the Gothic apparatus is also evident in James's description of the convent within which Claire takes refuge. Gothic embellishment is used here nor merely for the sake of the atmospheric terror it evokes, but to provide a graphic portrait of the final result of the Bellegardes's villainous actions. The convent of the Carmelites is described as

a dull, plain edifice, with a high-shouldered bland wall all round it. From without Newman could see its upper windows, its steep roof and its chimneys. But these things revealed no symptoms of human life; the place looked dumb, deaf, inanimate. The pale, dead, discoloured wall stretched beneath it far down the empty side street -- a vista without a human figure. (Am, p.321)

The above picture, together with James's earlier mention of

the "lugubrious chant" of the Carmelites, "more of a wail and a dirge" (Am, p.289) than a chant, suggests, as in Roderick Hudson, the common literary theme of death in life. Claire's voluntary confisement to the house of the dead suggests an entombment of vital life forces; a type of death, or "premature burial," of a positive life-force.

Newman's subsequent resignation or acceptance of suffering is, for James, the completion of the process of initiation and maturation. The protagonist returns to America having attained perhaps, some "Sisyphean or Promethean semblance of victory." 17

James's extensive reworking of numerous parts of <u>The American</u>, in preparation for The New York Edition, suggests a stringent self-criticism. As he explains in the "Preface" to the novel:

The thing is consistently, consummately . . . romantic; and all without intention, presumption, hesitation, contrition. . . . Yes all is romantic to my actual vision here, and not least so, I hasten to add, the fabulous felicity of my candour.

He continues that his concern in creating Newman as a character to be "ill-used" constitutes "the queer falsity -- of the Bellegardes." The idea of such melodramatic, black-cloaked villains as the Comte de Bellegarde and the elder Marquise de Bellegarde was, to James's more mature mind, "a performed outrage so much more showy, dramatically speaking, than sound." 20

The simple-minded approach to villainy which James depreciates in his "Preface" to The American is to some degree modified in The Portrait of a Lady. Although one can still detect traces of a certain Gothic stereotype in the portrayal of Gilbert Osmond, (echoes of the earlier Urbain), one can, nonetheless, see how James has progressed from the artificially contrived villains of The American. One can certainly detect a more polished art form than is evidenced in the earlier novels. In his "Preface" to The Portrait of a Lady James explains how Isabel and her retinue evolved. He states:

I seem to myself to have waked up one morning in possession of them -- of Ralph Touchett and his parents, of Madame Merle, of Gilbert Osmond and his daughter and his sister, of Lord Warburton, Caspar Goodwood and Miss Stackpole, the definite array of contributions to Isabel Archer's history. I recognized them, I knew them, they were the numbered pieces of my puzzle, the concrete terms of my "plot". It was as if they had simply, by an impulse of their own, floated into my ken, and all in response to my primary question: "Well, what will she do?" Their answer seemed to be that if I would trust them they would show me; on which, with an urgent appeal to them to make it at least as interesting as they could, I trusted them. were like a group of attendants and entertainers who come down by train when people in the country give a party; they represented the contract for carrying the party on. 21

It is evident that James is definitely moving to a much more realistic fiction, one in which the novelist strives for a

greater artistic detachment. The characters which constitute the world of The Portrait of a Lady convey a sense of vivid reality. Indeed, unlike The American, they emerge more as substantial personalities and less as emblematic types. And although James does make use of an omniscient narrator, the reader is made aware of salient facts largely through the medium of the characters themselves. Hence the villains of The Portrait of a Lady cannot be accused of the "queer falsity" attributed to the earlier and more contrived Bellegardes.

In The American and The Portrait of a Lady, Urbain and Gilbert Osmond are men to whom propriety and convention are the operative factors in life. Christopher Newman's observation that until meeting Urbain "he had never yet been confronted with such an incarnation of the art of taking oneself seriously" (Am, p. 120) might equally be applicable to Osmond himself. Whereas Urbain's evil is comprised primarily of manipulation, Osmond's villainy can be seen more as a psychological vampirism of both Pansy and Isabel. Despite his obvious attempts at controlling the latter, the most concrete example of Osmond's villainy is his successful perverting transformation of Pansy into a living artifact. Her "artifical" (PL, p.341) manner -- her unnaturalness -is a result of her father's careful formation of her mind into a work of art from which he derives a selfish pleasure. is not allowed the free development of consciousness, and

even to Isabel's mind, she is a china-piece "not entirely artless" (PL. p.215). It is this imposition on Pansy's potential freedom which brands Osmond as the target of James's (and the reader's), unerring contempt.

As Lyall Powers observes, Osmond is "James's most completely evil character." His villainous exploitations are nurtured by an overwhelming ego. This egotism carries Osmond along and is consistent with his view "that life was a matter of connoisseurship" (PL, p.220) wherein one could cultivate style and tasteful refinements. His desire that Isabel should publish his "style" to the world testifies to Osmond's obsessive wish to mould her into some preconceived concept which has basically nothing to do with Isabel herself.

#### J. A. Ward comments that

the James character who injures others does so through pursuit of good; James does not characterize pure egotism . . . rather he delineates characters whose perception is limited . . . Thus Osmond's devotion to aesthetics, in itself a good, brings misery to his wife.

Such a comment ignores Osmond's treatment of Pansy. She is a composition molded by her father -- a pure reflection of himself with little or no personality of her own. Her mind is "really a blank page, a pure white surface, successfully kept so" (PL, p.262), which Osmond is free to use at his leisure. Pansy's banishment to the convent by her father does not denote a limited perception but an active evil; an evil that breaks her spirit and, in a figurative sense, kills her.

For to James, the suppression of the spirit is analogous to death itself.

Isabel herself does not escape Osmond's egotistical manipulation. And it is with horror that she finally grasps the motive for his behaviour:

Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers. (PL, p.353)

To a certain degree Isabel's fear is based on the realization that Osmond hates her. He wishes, as Hamlet accuses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of doing, "to pluck out the heart of [her] mystery" (Hamlet, III. 2. 381-382), and replace it with something of his own choosing. As Isabel soliloquizes, "he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance" (PL, p.352). Isabel now understands that is is Osmond's egotism that is the principal factor in his quest for perfection both in life and in art. His contempt for all but a few, his rigid system and stultifying mind manifest themselves into an active evil that preys upon both his daughter and his wife.

Like Christopher Newman, Isabel has no intrinsic knowledge of evil. In her innocence she completely misunderstands the nature of Osmond's character. His warning that he worships propriety and is the most "fastidious young gentleman living" (PL, p.233) fails to move her, except that it allows her "active" imagination to supply what she was sure were

the missing details:

This would have been rather a dry account of Mr Osmond's career if Isabel had fully believed it; but her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting. (PL, p.223)

Lacking perception she mistook artificiality for taste and studied indifference for grandeur. It is only later she ultimately perceives that her husband's real talent is  $\mathbb{R}^{\frac{1}{4}}$  genius for upholstery" (PL, p.319).

In this novel, as in <u>Roderick Hudson</u>, James describes the constrained or stifled imagination in terms of a living-interment. In taking measure of her predicament, however, Isabel is neither as melodramatic nor as self-pitying as Roderick:

[Isabel] had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to 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, . . . . Her present dwelling was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. (PL, pp. 349, 353)

Whereas Roderick's passionate outburst stands as a herald to his eventual physical death, Isabel's musings are merely a summing up, one that eventually results in greater moral strength. Isabel's grand view, her exalted and noble imagination

now lies buried beneath Osmond's limited mind:

She saw [his] rigid system close about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation . . . took possession of her; she seemed shut up with an odour of mould and decay. (PL, pp.354-355)

The destruction of her illusions together with her admission of defeat allows this interior monologue to stand as the "direct appeal to [the reader's] charity" (PL, p.95) that the narrator earlier anticipates. The overall effect of her husband's perversions leads James's heroine to an acknowledgement of her previous selective perception. James's purpose is to allow the reader to enter into Isabel's mind and witness the beginnings of a clearer and more perceptive vision. As we share her internal reflections we share in the evolution of a previously limited, erring and fallible consciousness.

It is worth noting that James's topographical description of Osmond's dwelling stands as an indictment of its owner; "It was the mask, not the face of the house. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way . . . The windows seemed less to offer communication with the world than to defy the world to look in" (PL, p.192). Of course, one is aware that this is an accurate analysis of Osmond himself -- a deceptive appearance which masks reality. It would indeed be correct to say that Isabel's agreeable response to the house is as fallacious as her agreeable response to the master of propriety -- the "sterile dilettante" (PL, p.286).

Osmond's palace of art is nothing more than a facade fashioned by a deeply calculating mind.  $^{24}$ 

To further his own ends Osmand readily resorts to the base and common means of marrying for money. Subsequently his own egotism, (as well as his corrupt adherence to propriety, "art" and manners), forbids his acceptance of Isabel's conceptions of freedom. He attempts, therefore, to exercise the same sort of manipulation of Isabel that he had perpetrated upon Pansy. As Isabel finally understands:

The real offense . . . was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his -- attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deerpark. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. (PL, p.355)

The implication in the above passage is clear. Isabel's independent spirit must be subjugated to conform to Osmond's idea of refinement. She was to publish his virtues to the world without his having any of the trouble. She was to be an instrument he could use "as handled ivory to the palm" (PL, p.254). Ralph's accusation that "he is the incarnation of taste, who judges, measures, approves and condemns, altogether by that" (PL, p.268) suggests the religion Osmond has made of form. His "great dread of vulgarity" (PL, p.210) is merely a thin veneer made to disguise the absolute vulgarity of his own nature. Like a common adventurer, Osmond stoops to vulgar sycophancy in the pursuit of Lord Warburton for

Pansy. The superficiality of his cultivated air, his studied indifference, is made clear in the revelation of his affair with Madame Merle.

The villainous actions of Madame Merle are presented in a more sympathetic light than those of Osmond. One can argue that her actions may be attributed to certain mitigating circumstances. Her unethical betrayal of Isabel's trust can be viewed in terms of "motherly concern", in that her actions result in no personal gain per se. Her final sense of guilt partially excuses her from condemnation and elicits a more understanding response to her eventual fate. One can be no less charitable than Isabel herself, who on learning that Madame Merle is, in fact, Pansy's mother exclaims: "Ah, poor, poor, woman . . ., and Pansy who doesn't like her" (PL, pp.444-445). Madame Merle, to some degree, is corrupted as a result of her association with Osmond. Her evil deeds are due to the influence of a stronger, diabolical mind.

As her name implies, Madame Merle performs a function similar to those of Merlin in medieval romances. Like the latter's, hers is essentially a preparatory function. She is to prune, water and cultivate Isabel for Gilbert Osmond. She chooses Isabel's husband and with superb subtlety manipulates her into believeing she has chosen for herself. In the final analysis her manipulation and betrayal of Isabel is simply one other service she performs in Osmond's sinister service. As she wails, her soul is drained, dried up in his

service. In conversation with him she acknowledges what she has become:

"I believe [the soul] can perfectly be destroyed. That's what has happened to mine, which was a very good one to start with; and it's you I have to thank for it.

You're very bad, "she added with gravity in her emphasis.

"Is this the way we're to end?" Osmond asked with the same studied coldness.

"I don't know how we're to end. I wish I did! How do bad people end? -- especially as to their common crimes.
You make me as bad as yourself." (PL. p.427)

The epitome of propriety herself, a woman who "pushes the search for perfection too far" (PL, p. 212), Madame Merle, like Isabel, mistakes Osmond's polished surface for an illusory internal merit. A woman of enormous charm, "she was in a word too perfectly the social animal" (PL, p.165). Her choice was between the world and the self, and she chose the former. As Ralph comments to Isabel: "She's the great round world itself" (PL, p. 212). The adoption of a social value in place of a moral one constitutes for James the replacement of an ethical consciousness by a mere facade. Conformity to the idea of an aesthetic existence occasions the negation of a natural, moral sense. Unfortunately, Madame Merle recognizes her folly after the fact; she has already succumbed to Osmond's inhuman vampirism.

In the novels of his early phase, James is concerned primarily with the journey toward self-understanding. Such a quest, of course, necessarily culminates in the acquisition of a certain practical ability to confront outer reality. It

is therefore imperative that an individual confront evil in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the self.

Such a confrontation serves as a measure of one's own moral fortitude. Thus Isabel's temerarious marriage to Osmond is necessary so that she may arrive at a knowledge of the falsity of her own distorted and romanticized notions of reality. She acquires a certain perspicacity which enables her to embrace the middle path between her earlier belief that the self remains distinct from one's personal expression of it and Mme Merle's view that "one's self . . . is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps — these things are all expressive" (PL, p. 173).

It is not, however, until his "later phase" in such novels as <u>The Ambassadors</u>, <u>The Wings of the Dove</u>, and <u>The Golden Bowl</u>, that James presents what he would consider to be the complete canvas of human consciousness. In the novels of the middle years one is able to observe the slow but definite development.

## Chapter II -- Social Evil and its Influences

In the novels of his middle years James's focus shifts from the predominantly "American" centre of consciousness of the earlier period. Instead, he is now primarily concerned with the corruption and immorality of the Old World. His theme is still the innocent's acquisition of knowledge and experience; however, his heroes and heroines tend to be, more often than not, the very young. Through the developing consciousness of the child James explores the effects of an increasingly self-devouring society on the sensitive and maturing mind. Unlike his early works, corruption is no longer contained solely within the individual personality, but is expanded outward to include the core of Western society. The predatory instincts of that society are explored, probed, and seen, by James, to be ultimately the cause of moral deterioration. Society itself becomes the villain in its condoning of lust and greed and in its acceptance of the prevalent immorality.

James's lamentation for the loss of a past moral and ethical sensibility is suggested by the reduced stature of both his innocents and his villains. Christopher Newman's grand gesture of renunciation at the conclusion of <a href="#">The American</a>, and Isabel Archer's perseverance in <a href="#">The Portrait of a Lady</a>

give way to Hyacinth Robinson's suicide, Morgan Moreen's death and Nanda Brookenham's exile. Instead of Madame de Bellegarde and Gilbert Osmond we must now endure the more comic Moreens and the grotesque caricature-like figure of Maisie's parents -- the Faranges.

James's villains of the middle years err mostly through their own weakness. They possess neither the tremendous strength of his gothic-like villains nor the mettle for any prodigious and imaginative evil. Their villainy stems from a primary allegiance to their own selfish pleasure. In effect, they lead a purely physical existence justifiable to themselves by the necessary exclusion of any moral vision. The lack of moral reference, the illicit sexual relationships and the psychological brutalization of the young mind are representative of the general tone of society. James, of course, views such a society as being on the perimeter of a moral abyss.

It is clear that in the tales of his middle years

James intends to demonstrate the increasing insanity of
society and the almost complete collapse of any meaningful
human intercourse. Such intercourse is often frail at best.

It has now, however, wizened to little more than frantic and
meaningless conversation. The society of Mrs Brookenham is
a case in point. As H. K. Girling observes:

In <u>The Awkward Age</u> social figures often give the impression of enclosing themselves in desperate chatter because their societies are crumbling beneath them.

The insincerity and consistency of such meaningless chatter in that novel is unparalleled in any of James's other fiction. However, it is indicative of both the general tone and the dehumanizing effect of contemporary European society. The Duchess's remark in <a href="The Awkward Age">The Awkward Age</a> that "parties are given in London [so] that enemies may meet" (AA, pp.93-94), suggests the existing social atmosphere. What is most striking, however, is that amidst such arbitrary morality James's innocents are able, in most cases, to retain a sense of proper moral integrity.

It is significant to note, however, that the innocent is frequently forced to retreat in order to maintain any semblance of virtue. The distorted relationships and calculated hypocrisies are the realities that force Hyacinth Robinson to commit suicide. Similarily Maisie is forced to retreat with Mrs Wix, while the slowly suffocating Nanda is compelled to retire, with Mr Longdon, to the country. parasitical aspects of contemporary society are perhaps most concisely expressed by Mme Merle in the earlier The Portrait of a Lady: "'I don't pretend to know what people are meant for" she says to Osmond, "'I only know what I can do with them'" (PL, p.203). Such a remark is prophetic of the general tone and tales of the late eighties and nineties, wherein the individual is often reduced to no more than an inconsequential instrument. Hence, in any fundamental sense, people are isolated from each other. They manipulate, betray, exploit,

cheat and lie to each other. The good character is often ineffective and, like Mitchy in <u>The Awkward Age</u>, is forced on occasion to become part of a society he knows is corrupt —— "to borrow a little their vice" (<u>AA</u>, p.108). In effect, James's vision of "the realm of the physical and the elemental, of latent horror, of 'the thing hideously behind' "<sup>2</sup> is no longer embodied within one individual, but lies beneath the very foundation of Western society.

Also typical of this period is the evil done in the name of good. In "The Author of 'Beltraffic'", for example, Beatrice Ambient, James's "Medea", 3 as Edel calls her, murders her child and sacrifices her husband's happiness all in the name of moral righteousness and virtue. Fearful of the perverse effects of her husband's writings on their only son, she witholds his medicine during a serious illness, and he Mrs Ambient's limitations are perhaps effectively suggested by her condemnation of that with which she is unfamiliar. In conversation with her husband's American guest she coldly remarks: "I'm afraid you think I know a great deal more about my husband's work than I do. I haven't the least idea what he is doing" (AB, p.315). Her evil actions, then, are due primarily to her limited perception or fallible vision of reality. Dedicated to the moral teachings of her church, Mrs Ambient acts out of the desire to save her child from the "objectionable" (AB, p.327) influence of his literary father. Her righteousness is narrow, loathsome, and destructive. Her hideously distorted vision of reality

is more monstrous than any evil she hopes to avert. She becomes, in effect, the villain through some sense of perverted good. James's vision in this tale is enough to justify Graham Greene's statement that in human nature there was "an egotism so complete that you could believe that something inhuman, supernatural, was working there through the poor devils it had chosen."

In The Bostonians, published two years later, it is the American ethos together with the quality of personal union that is the focus of analysis. Like the London society of The Princess Casamassima, the social fabric of New England society is fundamentally corrupt. What characterizes this society is the pugnacious predilection for power wherein the innocent are immobilized and become the victims of oppressive and scheming charlatans. Almost every relationship in the novel functions in terms of oppressor and victim. The suggestion of emotional and spiritual vampirism negates any ultimate alliance in the novel. The egocentricity of the principal characters makes any viable union impossible and the only relationship that appears probable is one in which one party submits to the will and dominance of the other. There is no possibility for any intricate union between highly refined consciousnesses.

Also central to the novel is James's concern with the corruption and "masculinization of women . . ., the great modern collapse of all the forms . . ., the lost sense, the brutalized manner " of modern society. F. W. Dupee justifiably

claims that "types of human perversity now almost fill the picture, the chief sign of the prevalent evil being the corruption of the feminine principle." In The Bostonians, however, if the female principle is perverse, the male contingency also falls far short of any ideal. The glib mesmerist, Selah Tarrant, exploits first his wife and then his daughter Verena, while Basil Ransom desires to take possession of Verena's consciousness as fervently as does Olive Chancellor. It is the latter, however, who emerges as the Jamesian villain or corrupting centre of the novel.

The vampire-like Olive Chancellor is the creature who wishes to take possession of Verena Tarrant's soul. A highly energetic and egocentric woman, Olive sees in the selfless and submissive Verena the perfect consummation of her neurotic passion for an all-inclusive relationship:

Her emotion was all acute . . . and what kept it, above all, from subsiding was her sense that she found here what she had been looking for so long -- a friend of her own sex with whom she might have a union of soul.  $(\underline{TB}, p.80)$ 

Verena willingly submits to Olive's overwhelming magnetism. It is surely no coincidence that from their first association James's terminology stresses Olive's absorbing and parasitical desires. Before long "the girl was . . . completely under her influence" (TB, p.141), she was "so completely in Olive's hands now" (TB, p.160). The ultimate perversity of such a merger finds expression in Olive's wish to enfold completely the young girl: "she now perceived that when spirit meets

spirit, there must either be mutual absorption or a sharp concession" ( $\overline{1B}$ , p.165). Such an annihilation of the self would be analogous to the death-in-life existence previously discussed. And James is relentless in showing the evil of Olive's compulsions.

Implicit in his characterization of Olive is her over-whelming potentiality for destruction. Her consecration to the feminist cause has at its center the destruction of fundamental social traditions. Her inability to smile brands her as a rigid, aggressive and humourless creature with no potentiality for spontaneous action -- the complete inversion of the female principle. She is incapable of giving -- she can only devour or consume. This we can detect throughout by James's consistent emphasis on Olive's tenacious will:

there was a light in Miss Chancellor's magnified face which seemed to say that a sentiment, with her, might consume its object, might consume Miss Chancellor, but would never consume itself. (TB, p.83)

Verena, of course, is completely unaware that she is being consumed:

she had promised to stay with her friend as long as her friend should require it.
... There was no struggle about this, for the simple reason that by the time the question came to the front Verena was completely under the charm. .. The fine web of authority, of dependence, that her strenuous companion had woven about her, was now as dense as a suit of golden mail. (TB, p.170)

Verena's acceptance of Olive's domination partially reveals her own nature. She is helpless and passive almost to the point of inertia. She has no high level of perception as she lives too much through the agency of others -- first her father, then Olive and finally Ransom. And James is being deliberately ironic when he says she has the "gift of the artist" (TB, p.117), for Verena's main flaw is that she has no vision. It becomes increasingly apparent that she derives pleasure from being led forth into the world by Olive. Consequently the reader's sympathies are never completely with her. At every stage of her existence she has been led, surrendering to wills more forceful than her own. as the elder sister to Pansy Osmond. James is being perfectly consistent when he brings Olive and Ransom together in a final violent conflict for possession of Verena. Consistently passive, she manages to avoid any type of uncomfortable confrontation. And to the last it is Ransom who must forcefully rescue her in spite of herself. James describes her reaction thus: "she begged him to spare her, but that so long as he should protest she was submissive, helpless" (TB, p.454).

It is perhaps not too much to say that Verena's "rescue" by Basil Ransom is merely the exchange of one type of bondage for another. Throughout the novel James has taken pains to show that Basil is as narrow as Olive in his intention to uphold the masculine cause. The crowning irony of the last chapter of the novel is that Verena's white knight is a jobless lawyer with a narrow vision of reality. James's handling of Ransom throughout shows him to be both egotistical and arrogant. His intention is "to take possession"

of Verena Tarrant" ( $\underline{TB}$ , p.359). As he ominously shouts to Olive in their final battle, "she's mine or she isn't, and if she's mine, she's all mine" ( $\underline{TB}$ , p.457). And it is indeed a portentous warning when James writes:

It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last tears she was destined to shed. (TB, p.464)

Although Verena's alliance with Basil is less perverse than her former relationship with Olive, James has clearly demonstrated that Verena will not be allowed to fullfill even her limited potentiality -- she will never attain a high consciousness. Her rescue from the villainous Olive offers a dubious salvation at best.

As a villain, Olive Chancellor becomes pathetically inadequate as the novel progresses. And at the end of <u>The Bostonians</u>, helpless and alone, she evokes the reader's pity. This of course does not extricate her from her evil. Her manipulation of the young girl cannot be condoned. What is significant is that both James's villain and his heroine are inadequate. The dignity and stature of both have slowly dwindled as James's vision of the universe moves closer to / that of Hardy's in his later years: a vision clouded by an awareness of the abyss.

In James's only other overtly "political" novel,

The Princess Casamassima, he returns to the recurring theme
of the innocents' confrontation with villainous forces.

However, unlike James's earlier protagonist, Hyacinth Robinson appears to be violently ill-fated. The illegitimate son of a British aristocrat and a French prostitute Hyacinth is torn between two worlds; he has no real identity. He both embraces the sufferings of the poor and yet yearns for the aristocratic life. He is attracted simultaneously to both Millicent and Christina. Like Isabel Archer, Hyacinth is an idealist. From the first James informs us that

nothing in life had such an interest or such a price for him as his impressions and reflections. They came from everything he touched, they made him vibrate, kept him thrilled and throbbing, for most of his waking consciousness, and they constituted as yet the principal events and stages of his career. (PC, p.119)

On one level the above passage echoes Henrietta Stackpole's warning to Isabel: that she lives too much in her own dreams. Isabel, however, possesses the strength to endure distillusionment, a quality which differentiates her from Hyacinth Robinson. The destruction of her ideals  $\operatorname{do}_{\Lambda}^{\operatorname{es}}$  not destroy her as the destruction of the latter's ideals destroy him.

Lionel Trilling sees Hyacinth's suicide as "an act of heroism." He argues that Hyacinth transcends the mediocrity of civilization by accepting the guilt of two worlds and becoming its sacrifical lamb. One could, I suppose, find some support for such an argument. What we learn about James through his works, however, suggests that Trilling's argument is little more than specious logic. Reinforcing James's recurring thesis that the enlargening of perception

occurs only when one's ideals are challenged by an encounter with reality, are James's own remarks concerning Hyacinth in his "Preface":

He collapses, poor Hyacinth, like a thief at night, overcharged with treasures of reflection and spoils of passion of which he can give, in his poverty and obscurity, no honest account. 9

Beginning with <u>The Princess Casamassima</u>, James's protagonists become increasingly ineffective and defenseless against evil. They are given less with which to survive. As mentioned above, retreat becomes the only workable alternative. Hence, having nowhere to run Hyacinth dies. J. M. Luecke comes closer to the truth than Trilling in his analysis of the novel. He comments:

Hyacinth's suicide is no resolution of his problems, and no decision — or at best a decision based on false assumptions . . . He needed to live long enough in order to learn about things as they are, and to cut off that life himself when the confrontation could have been most enlargening and ennobling was the choice of the weak. IO

Lucke's remarks are indeed an accurate assessment of Hyacinth's character. His flaw is his weakness, his inability to distinguish between truth and fantasy. He is destroyed precisely because he finds himself unable to make the trans-ition between his romantic theories and actual reality. The irony, of course, is that Hyacinth desires to know, to transcend his own limited vision: "It was not so much that he wanted to enjoy as that he wanted to know; his desire

wasn't to be pampered but to be initiated" (PC, p.125). But he is later bewildered and repulsed by what he learns. His weakness and lack of solid identity are exactly what make him an easy prey for both Paul Muniment and the Princess.

Paul is, of course, James's primary villain of the piece. As a new and representative type beginning to emerge in James's fiction, both he and his insidious sister Rosy appear to have been fostered by the ubiquitous evil hidden beneath contemporary London society. The grand polish and manner of Gilbert Osmond and the Bellegardes are replaced by a crude and common revolutionary from the London slums. The characterization of Muniment is not extensive. He is simply a destructive, passionless and power-seeking anarchist who is used as a vehicle to reveal both Hyacinth's idealistic notions and the destructive center of James's London.

It is uncommon for James to allow his villains to be observed in any state of subjective reflection. Therefore, although there are hints of the Jamesian villain about Paul, what we know about him is disclosed, for the most part, through the agency of the other characters in the novel. His sister Rosy comments to Hyacinth: "What my brother really cares for -- well, one of these days, when you know, you'll tell me" (PC, p.111). And later, Hyacinth, in one of his few perceptive moments in the novel, says to Paul:

Now what I really have never understood is this -- why you should desire to put forward a lot of people whom you regard almost without exception as

rather dismal donkeys. (PC, p.378)

What Paul cares for is, of course, himself. He pretends to be devoted to the revolutionary ideal when in fact his aspirations are for power and wealth. He aspires to exactly that which he professes to despise. It is Paul's authority, his leadership and his apparent sense of purpose that draw Hyacinth to him. But Paul has scant use for the "little book" binder." He tolerates Hyacinth's adoration only for as long as he can make use of him. Initially Hyacinth is regarded merely as a source of amusement for Rosy (a collector of both people and objects) and is later useful as an instrument with which to further the revolutionary cause -- as Paul himself puts it -- he is to become "the lamb of the sacrifice" (PC, p.245).

It is in this egotistically coarse character that Hyacinth places his highest affection. Paul, to Hyacinth's romantic vision, is worthy of no less than the sanctified "religion of friendship" ( $\underline{PC}$ , p. 161), and to "this rare man he could go on his knees to without a sense of humiliation" ( $\underline{PC}$ , p. 113). Shortly after his initial meeting with Paul we are told that

Our hero treated himself to a high unlimited faith in him; he had always dreamed of some grand friendship and this was the best opening he had yet encountered. (PC, p.161)

The pattern of the novel is such that Hyacinth's limited perception stupidly blinds him to the other dimensions of Paul's nature. Tony Tanner's comment concerning Isabel Archer's limitations may equally be applied to Hyacinth Robinson.

His mistake "is the result of a radical failure of vision: idealising too much, [he] has perceived too little." Isabel, however, subsequently perceives the truth behind Osmond's detached air. Paul's magnificence, on the other hand, continues to draw the deluded Hyacinth to him. He even goes so far as to dismiss the evidence of Paul's waning attention:

Hyacinth dismissed the sentimental problem that had worried him; he condoned, excused, admired -- he merged himself, resting happy for the time, in the consciousness that Paul was a grand person, that friendship was a purer feeling than love, and that there was an immense deal of affection between them. He didn't even observe at that moment that it was preponderantly on his own side. (PC, p.380)

It is easy to perceive that Hyacinth is one other Jamesian figure with a superior and exquisite senibility but too little perception. Nowhere is this more evident than in his realtionship with the Princess Casamassima.

Christina Light is capable of eliciting our sympathies and simultaneously repelling us by her actions. Hyacinth's introduction to her occurs in a theatre and indeed the situation has certain theatrical elements about it. To use James's own descriptive metaphor; it was like "a play within a play" (PC, p.148). On this occasion, as is often the case in his subsequent encounters with her, Hyacinth is transported. This sense of enthrallment or complete <u>raptus</u> is emphasized by the quality of transfiguration implicit in James's

description of Hyacinth's reaction. And his relationship with her is never to lose that quality of divine admiration. Mesmerized by her beauty, as was Roderick Hudson before him, Hyacinth remains the only character in the novel never entirely to see through her, never to come to a complete state of knowledge about her.

Christina is James's most exquisite monster. She is a woman of extreme vitality and refined sensibilities whose actions arise from an inability to find an outlet for her talents. Manipulated by her mother into marrying an Italian prince, Christina's desperate quest for independence, experience, and revenge results in a capricious nature based on a personal hardness. As Irving Howe comments: "The Princess Casamassima is James's'heroine of all ages' in her aspect of ugliness, as Isabel Archer from The Portrait is that heroine in her aspect of loveliness."

In his "Preface" to the novel James gives an important clue to an understanding of Christina. "Her prime note", he writes, "had been an aversion to the banal." Her singular quest, therefore, is to find some means of alleviating her boredom. She is proud of having "no sort of conventional morality" (PC, p.260), is characterized by Mr Vetch as being "fine but perverse"; Madame Grandoni, in conversation with the Prince, accuses her of strange perversities; and even Hyacinth eventually concludes that

the princess was an embodied passion -- she was not a system; and her behaviour, after all, was more addressed to

relieving herself than to relieving others. (PC, p.405)

Perhaps the most accurate and succinct analysis of Christina's character is voiced by Captain Sholto to Hyacinth:

So far as the head's concerned the Princess is all there. I told you when I presented you that she was the cleverest woman in Europe, and that's still my opinion. But there are some mysteries you can't see into unless you happen to have a little decent human feeling, what's commonly called a bit of heart. The Princess isn't troubled with that sort of thing, though doubtless just now you may think it her strong point. (PC, pp.289-290)

It is in her pursuit of the unusual, in her distorted estimation of self, that Christina loses a sense of basic human values. Her dismissal of Hyacinth in preference to the coarse and vulgar, but more exciting proletariak, Paul Muniment, stands as a testament to a basic imperception. Her interest is in the excitement of the revolution, not in the cause of the deprived poor. As she herself elucidates to Hyacinth: she would drown such "embarrassing types . . . in a barrel of beer" (PC, p. 355). She is grasping, manipulative, adulterous and unethical -- the recurring Jamesian villain. Her main flaw is that she lacks what James calls a "reflective consciousness." She ceases to feel, she has become hollow. She is as sterile and unsubstantial in her quest for excitement as is Gilbert Osmond in his embrace of aesthetics. Maurice Beebe concisely sums up the Jamesian position when he says that "vision or consciousness . . . is pure only when it is disinterested, when it is motivated by

the desire for knowing rather than getting. "14

No subtle shade of vision or range of emotion is missed in the brilliant scene in which Hyacinth finally realizes himself betrayed. Late at night he and the Prince watch from the shadows as Paul and the Princess arrive at her house together. The passage is worth quoting at length:

The hansom had slackened pace and pulled up; the house before which it stopped was clearly the house the two men had lately quitted. Hyacinth felt his arm seized by his strange confidant, who hastily, with a strong effort, drew him forward several yards. At this moment a part of the agitation that possessed the Princess's unhappy husband seemed to pass into his own blood; a wave of anxiety rushed through him -anxiety as to the relations of the two persons who had descended from the cab: he had in short for several instants a very exact revelation of the state of feeling of those who love in the rage of jealousy. If he had been told half an hour before that he was capable of surreptitious peepings in the interest of that passion he would have resented the insult; yet he allowed himself to be checked by his companion just at the nearest point at which they might safely consider the proceedings of the couple who alighted. It was in fact the Princess accompanied by Paul Muniment. (PC, p.445)

The unexpected arrival of Paul and Christina has many advantages; not least that James could have the full complexity of its illicit meaning understood by both Hyacinth and Prince Casamassima. The occasion is peculiarly reminiscent of Isabel's moment of perception as she watches Gilbert Osmond and Mme Merle standing quietly together in the drawing-room. It also anticipates Strether's moment of truth as he

watches Chad and Mme de Vionet in the famous boating scene in <u>The Ambassadors</u>. Such scenes, in James, frequently serve as moments of insight or clarity of vision. This scene serves as such a moment for Hyacinth. It is the crystalization of Paul's and Christina's duplicity. Betrayed by both his worlds Hyacinth's only act of violence is turned inward -- upon himself:

Hyacinth lay there as if asleep, but there was a horrible thing, a mess of blood, on the counterpane, in his side, in his heart. His arm hung limp beside him, downwards, off the narrow couch; his face was white and his eyes were closed. . . The Princess, bent over the body while a strange low cry came from her lips. (PC, p. 510)

Unlike Dickens, who allows the aspiring Pip some measure of success, James cannot allow his aspiring hero any durable accomplishment. It is indeed appropriate that Christina is made to witness the result of her caprice. Deserted by Paul, when she is no longer able to supply money to the cause, she is left alone -- a pathetic and pitiable woman.

The Princess Casamassima stands as James's most stark analysis of the deterioration of London society. Evil is both pervasive and ubiquitous. Black and white blend together to form an ambiguous grey. Good is frequently responsible for and tolerant of evil. No one in the novel is left untarnished. Miss Pynsent and Mr Vetch's charitable intentions are responsible for Hyacinth's precarious fluctuation between two worlds; Lady Aurora ultimately emerges as a grotesque

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figure with pathetic romantic designs on Paul Muniment;
Millicent and Captain Sholto belong to James's grey area;
and, of course, Christina and Paul are responsible for
Hyacinth's suicide. Such a society is conducive to little
else but the perpetuation of evil.

In his novels of the nineties it is this society which is scrutinized by James. A great deal of emphasis, however, is now placed on the child as victim. Despite the overwhelming and surrounding social corruption, James's children remain, relatively speaking, uncontaminated. In "The Pupil", What Maisie Knew, and The Awkward Age James's theme is the salvation of the innocent. Given the child's especially susceptible consciousness, James's concern is with the preservation of a moral perspective despite corrupting environmental pressures. Morgan Moreen of "The Pupil" obtains salvation at the cost of his own life. Only a child, Morgan is left to find his own moral values in a society that has none. Surrounded by the inanities of his amoral family he has little opportunity for expansion. It is therefore the duty of Pemberton, his tutor and moral mentor, to save Morgan. But Pemberton proves inadequate. He fails as the mediator between the limiting environment of the child and the moral life. He suffers abuse and misuse in the name of love but is ultimately unable to assume total responsibility for Morgan. The alternative is death. It is James's only possible option.

It would be unfair to classify Mrs Moreen as anything but a second-rate adventurer. Having no moral code of her own she accepts the amoral principles of her society. She is not a true villain for her evil is morecof a passive than active nature. Overall she emerges as the victim of a larger social evil. As an opportunist she is remarkably ineffective. Despite her machinations, the members of her family are decidedly social failures. Early in his acquaintance with the Moreens, Pemberton makes this observation: "He had never seen a family so brilliantly equipped for failure" ("Pl", p.415). In-spite of her consistent and careful manoeuvring Mrs Moreen is nonetheless a woman who lives in her dreams; dreams of economic prosperity and of social advancement. The failure to discriminate between fantasy and reality allows Mrs Moreen to make the assumption that Pemberton, in his state of dependent poverty, would assume sole responsibility for Morgan, both in a financial and moral sense:

They passed him over to Pemberton very much as if they wished to force a constructive adoption on the obliging bachelor and shirk altogether a responsibility . . . It was strange how they contrived to reconcile the appearance, and indeed the essential fact, of adoring the child with their eagerness to wash their hands of him. ("Pl", p.417)

It is Morgan's intelligence and sensitivity that differentiate and alienate him from the other members of his family. In contrast to their rather limited vision, Morgan "had noticed more things than you might suppose" ("Pl", p.419). In the

face of both their financial and moral disintegration Morgan remains intact, uncontaminated by them or their society.

To James, however, the child is too pure, too moral to live.

Pemberton is unequipped to save him and in such an environment the options are retreat or compromise.

It becomes increasingly clear that to James society is a destructive element in which only the morally adaptable prosper. The degree of skepticism with which he now views modern society can be seen in his shift of focus from such idealized and memorable individuals as Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett -- the moral touchstones of his earlier fiction -- to such lesser and unremarkable personalities as Verena Tarrant and Pemberton. Indeed, his heroes are less traditionally heroic and his villains less traditionally villainous.

A testament to James's changing vision is that he can no longer rigidly and narrowly define evil. In The Other House (1896) for example, the villain Rose Armiger elicits a certain amount of the reader's admiration. Despite her wilfull act of murder, her charm and vitality in combination with James's careful stress on the misguided but overwhelming psychological motivations of her deed, make her crime of violence seem less hideous to the reader. It would not be overstating the case to say that to James's more mature mind such labels as "good" and "bad" can no longer be arbitrarily imposed. The strong endure, while the weak survive as best they know how. More often than not they are more deserving

of our pity than our contempt. Such toleration of human frailty anticipates James's later and more ambiguous treatment of his villains in which he strives impartially to render to evil what Conrad calls "the highest sense of justice." 15

In both What Maisie Knew and The Awkward Age, the protagonists, exposed to the evil influences and temptations of a social circle, retain their innocence not through a lack of knowledge but through the ability to act out of unselfish motives. The vicious social set of both Maisie and Nanda provide a testing ground where purity survives despite overwhelming odds.

As is typical of James's middle years, What Maisie

Knew is a novel concerned with the victimization of the developing consciousness. The novel is concerned with the moral
deterioration of society and the resulting consequences on
the innocent child. The adulterous relationships in that
novel can be seen as reflections of a wider social corruption.
The decline of marriage in the novel suggests both the
subjugation of love to carnality and a fragmentation of social
cohesion. To James, a social acceptance of adultery intimates
a decline of responsible social consciousness.

Maisie's parents, Ida and Beale, recall, to some extent, the exaggerated Dickensian villain, a type of grotesque caricature. The novel is not concerned with character development per se, but rather with the presentation of static typological figures who are made to emblemize a particular social characteristic. In this sense, Mr Beale's ever

recurring "glitter of teeth" ( $\underline{WK}$ , p.20) and Ida's enormously long arms, suggest the grasping cupidity and destructive aggressiveness of a corrupt society.

To James, Maisie is "the ironic center" of the novel.

As he explains in his "Preface" to the New York edition,
the adults

become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art; she has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions with the 'universal!'— that they would scarce have hoped for. Ida Farange alone, so to speak, or Beale alone, that is either of them otherwise connected— what intensity, what 'objectivity'... would they have? How could they repay at all the favour of our attentions?

As the focal point around which the relationships revolve,
Maisie is the central observer of the sexual interplay between
the respective adults. What Maisie learns, as a result, is
a knowledge not of morality, but of social mores. Despite
her awareness of the variety of entanglements experienced by
her changeable circle, Maisie remains pure. She assimilates
none of the corruption, but only "an innocence . . .
saturated with knowledge and so directed to diplomacy" (WMK, p.194).

The first few chapters of the novel are concerned with Maisie's initiation into the whirligig adult world. And it is her instinctive grasp and increasingly sensitive reaction to the game that begin her process of growth or her expansion of consciousness. Used by her parents as a filter through which insults may be exchanged, Maisie eventually

terminates the sport by being obstinately silent:

She had a new feeling, the feeling of danger; on which a new remedy rose to meet it, the idea of an inner self or, in other words, of concealment. She puzzled out with imperfect signs, but with a prodigious spirit, that she had been a centre of hatred and a messenger of insult, and that everything was bad because she had been employed to make it so. (WMK, p.25)

As the "centre" through which all the adult affairs merge Maisie is prompt in acquiring a knowledge of the operational rules of the game:

Everything had something behind it: life was like a long, long corridor with rows of closed doors. She had learnt that at these doors it was wise not to knock -- this seemed to produce from within such sounds of derision. (WMK, pp. 36-37)

But she must eventually confront the reality behind the closed doors of what James defines as "the gross immorality surrounding her." Her vision will not be complete until she acquires a proper perspective on Ida's and Beale's divorce; Beale's marriage to Miss Overmore and his later affair with the Contess; Ida's marriage to Sir Claude and her affairs with Mr Perriam, Lord Eric and the Captain; Sir Claude's affair with Mrs Beale, and Mrs Wix's "ugly honesty" (WMK, p.171). But Maisie's intelligence makes possible the acquisition of a high lucidity that enables her to escape morally unscathed. She has "that vivacity of intelligence by which she does vibrate in the infected air" (WMK, p.149). Maisie's initial function is to serve as the instrument that launches Sir

Claude's and Mrs Beale's affair. And it is with enthusiasm and delight that she performs that service. "I've brought you together" (WMK, p.56) is her constant refrain throughout the novel. The progress of her suffering as a result of that union, is intricately interwoven with the evolution of her enlightenment. Despite the complexity of thought and range of vision with which Maisie is endowed, James is careful to remind the reader that she is a mere child. And it is as such that she unwittingly and innocently perpetuates the adulterous affair. What she understands at present is that Sir Claude and Mrs Beale together will serve as substitute parents and provide the love she needs.

As Maisie matures, not only do her moral insights deepen but she simultaneously acquires a certain delicacy startling in such an environment. James provides an effective demonstration of her integrity in a park interview which Ida has mysteriously demanded:

Maisie wondered intensely what the reason could be, but she knew ever so much better than to ask. She was slightly surprised indeed to perceive that Sir Claude didn't and to hear him immediately inquire; 'What in the name of goodness can you have to say to her?' (WMK, p.150)

What the confrontation ultimately illustrates is Maisie's non-judging filial love and loyalty. In an effort to ensure her mother's future happiness Maisie pleads with her mother's present lover that he never desert her. What she has managed to grasp from the various coupling adults is that a relationship of two is the satisfactory norm. So it is with

surprise that Maisie reacts to Ida's crude and flagrant display of temper.

James's description of Ida in her fury is more emblematic of her role as villain than realistically descriptive. Indeed, his characterization is more of a monstrous grotesque than a human form: "Her ladyship towered again, and in the gathering dusk the whites of her eyes were huge" (WMK, p.159). Ida's eyes which had earlier been appraised as "overstepping the modesty of nature" (WMK, p.20) are in actuality bereft of any real perception. It is Maisie who now acquires insight in her first glimpse of "the pit":

There was literally an instant in which Maisie fully saw -- saw madness and desolation, saw ruin and darkness and death. (WMK, p.159)

It could be argued that Maisie's encouragement of her mother's illicit arrangement testifies to a certain moral corruption. Maisie, however, has thus far acquired suprisingly little sexual knowledge. Her mistake has no moral basis. The contributing factors are a certain apprehension for her mother, together with the fact that the Captain is aesthetically pleasing and would make an agreeable companion unlike "papa's" hideous countess whom no one "could possibly have liked" (WMK, p.141).

It is not until her near desertion by the adults that Maisie's true education is complete. What she finally knows is that Sir Claude is weak and unheroic, Mrs Beale is

false, and that Mrs Wix can be bought. In the final analysis Maisie's moral sense far surpasses that of the narrowly righteous Mrs Wix. Maisie's final withdrawal to London with the latter does not negate the fact that Mrs Wix falls short of any ideal and can in no way be regarded as James's moral touchstone. She is too often the butt of the author's wit. She emerges as both ludicrous and pathetic. In his Notebooks James makes this reference to her:

her going a little further and further, in the way of communication, of 'crudity,' with the child than her own old dingy decencies, her old-fashioned conscience quite warrants -- her helpless pathetic sighs at what she has, perforce to tell her, at what Maisie already has seen and learnt -- so that she doesn't make her any more initiated -- any 'worse': etc., etc., and thus serves as a sort of a dim, crooked little reflector of the conditions that I desire to present on the part of the others. 18

With her absurd "straighteners", her "little ugly snuffcoloured dress" and her "neighing" laugh, Mrs Wix is
"nobody" (WMK, p.218). And it is precisely for this reason
that she is "peculiarly and soothingly safe . . . as safe
as Clara Matilda . . . [in] her little huddled grave"

(WMK, p.32). From their initial acquaintance Maisie had
instinctively judged that Mrs Wix was infinitely dismissable.
But as J. W. Gargano points out, Mrs Wix does achieve a
certain "comic grandeur." Her eagerness to endow Maisie
with her version of a "moral sense" is both comic and ironic,
for the child's moral vision far exceeds Mrs Wix's narrow

conventionality. And it is Maisie who finally upholds the author's moral tone.

James's handling of Maisie's consciousness as a filter or controller of the narrative action ultimately equates what Maisie knows with what the reader knows. She serves as a mirror or reflector or events, for we perceive only what she does. Her observation of the disreputable adults instructs that "this was a society in which for the most part people were occupied only with chatter" (WMK, p.19); that people were generally "low sneaks" (WMK, p. 100) and more often than not it is the "baser elements [that] triumphed" (WMK, p.185).

Knew is that of "a light comedy of manners . . . it does not [however] lessen the gravity of the transgressions of [the] comic characters. "20 The descriptions of Ida and Beale are to some degree comic, though their total disregard of responsibility, their pursuit of sensual pleasure, and their vulgar behaviour, are essentially evil. To borrow James's gaming metaphor, Maisie is useful to her parents only insofar as she is the instrument which enables the game to continue. It would be accurate to say that in this novel everyone could be classified as villainous, for each, in his own way, manipulates the child for selfish reasons.

The villains of <u>What Maisie Knew</u> lack the stature or power of an Osmond or the Marquise de Bellegarde. Despite

the invincible and incomprehensible evil of the Marquise, Christopher Newman can exclaim of her: "Damn it, she is plucky!" (Am, p.291). In contrast, Ida's and Beale's villainy stems more from weakness than invincible strength, and elicits no similar grudging admiration. The mystery of the earlier novels is also conspicuously absent from What Maisie Knew. The Gothicism of Roderick Hudson and The American is now replaced by a comedy of manners. There are no secret tortures, letters, or family curses, but only an explicit moral decadence.

Like Morgan Moreen and Maisie Farange, Nanda Brookenham of The Awkward Age is yet another of James's children victimized by social evil who appear so frequently in his fiction of the nineties. And, as in "The Pupil" and What <u>Maisie Knew</u>, society itself is characterized by the extent to which its representative types are corrupt. James's focus is on a society in which morals have been replaced by artificial manners. Hence the substance of conversation becomes indicative of one's moral fabric. The London drawing-room emerges as "a huge 'squash' . . ., one elbowing, pushing, perspiring, chattering mob" (AA, p.39) which "has neither time, nor taste, nor sense for anything less discernible than the red flag in front of the steam-roller. It wants cash over the counter and letters ten feet high" (AA, p.43). James's tone is primarily satiric; a razor-sharp portrait of London wherein people are "cold and sarcastic and cynical, without the human spot" (AA, p.48). Conversation or verbal sparring is the fashionable game and wit is the instrument used for continuing the sport. The dexterity of one's wit becomes the measure of one's value. Such an attitude is crystallized in Van and Mrs Brookenham's demand of a five pound fine for Mitchy's use of "cheap paradox" (AA, p.227). Mrs Brookenham's salon becomes the microcosm of the London society of the nineties.

It is in this superficial and decadent society that Nanda is placed. She must divorce herself from the moral confusion, the lust and dehumanizing atmosphere of her mother's social circle. James catches admirably the pathetic attempts of Mrs Brookenham to keep her "vague slip of a daughter, 21 from coming to the forefront. As a serious contender and possible usurper of her mother's social position (or so Mrs Brookenham believes) Nanda's place in society is morally precarious. Through an unrestricted exposure to her depraved surroundings Nanda has already acquired some of its compromising social mores. In conversation with Mr Longdon she freely admits

We discuss everything and every one
-- we're always discussing each
other. I think we must be rather
celebrated for it, and it's a kind
of trick -- isn't it? -- that's catching. (AA, p.125).

It is precisely Nanda's strength and courage to see the truth and to admit to what she is that allows Mr Longdon to save her. The thrust of the novel negates her inaccurate assertion that she "shall always be just the same. The same

old-mannered, modern, slangy hack . . . [without] what's called a principle of growth" and is "about as good as [she] can be -- and about as bad" (AA. p.164). James's intention in The Awkward Age is to demonstrate that with her increased awareness, her expanded vision, Handa is no longer suited to the drawing-room world of London society. From the sterility of such a world Nanda must fully withdraw. In juxtaposition to Mr Longdon's "old-fashioned" morality the evil beneath the charming veneer of Mrs Brookenham's circle stands exposed.

Mrs Brookenham is the centre of the converging social set of Buckingham Crescent. It is she who arranges and positions the various players. Her charm and outrageous conversation is but a thin disguise that cloaks, an insidious and destructive nature. Her casual discussion of her daughter's intimate affairs together with her description of her being "bleak as a chimney-top when the fire is out" (AA, p.321) is a testament to a lack of maternal feeling. In her determination to hang onto Vanderbank she is unsubtly and indelicately vicious. When she says to him, concerning Nanda, "of course you know . . . that she'd jump at you" (AA, 216), the reader is as horrified as Vanderbank at perceiving the extent to which Mrs Brookenham is prepared to go to keep her social circle intact. Under the auspices of a natural candour Mrs Brookenham is vulgarly lacking in tact. Her claim to Mitchy that it would be a mistake "to see abysses of subtlety in my having been merely natural (AA, p.223) is an excuse for the delight with which she revels in malicious gossip. As she admits to Vanderbank: "good talk: you know -- no one, dear Van, should know better -- what part, for me, that plays" (AA, p.210). And it is Vanderbank who exposes the indiscretions of their verbal fencing:

"Only what stupefies me a little" he continued, "is the extraordinary critical freedom -- or we may call it if we like the high intellectual detachment -- with which we discuss a question touching you, dear Mrs Brook, so nearly and engaging so your most private and most sacred sentiments. What are we playing with, after all, but the idea of Nanda's happiness?" (AA, p. 225)

James's exposé of Mrs Brookenham's duplicity is reinforced by the suggestion that their seeming sincerity is "mere talk" without "the excuse of passion" ( $\underline{AA}$ , p.230) -- form without substance.

It is Mr Longdon's devotion to the memory of Lady
Julia that serves as a contrast to both the perversion of love
and loyalty in <u>The Awkward Age</u> and to Mrs Brookenham's
lustful persuit of Van. James is, of course, typically vague
in defining the precise nature of their relationship. Implicit
in their conversation is the suggestion of a sexual alliance.
Yet the circumlocutory nature of conversation makes it
impossible to interpret precisely such references as the
following:

"There was a time, in fact, wasn't there? when we rather enjoyed each other's dim depths. If I wanted to

fawn upon you," she went on, "I might say that, with such a comrade in obliquity to wind and double about with, I'd risk losing myself in the mine. But why retort or recriminate? Let us not, for God's sake, be vulgar." (AA, p.317)

The ambiguity here is both James's and the general tone of conversation. What is of prime importance, however, is not the precise quality of such a relationship but the knowledge that Mrs Brookenham has no moral sense. The degree of unconcern with which she accepts Harold's affair with Lady Fanny is indicative of such a deficiency. And it is with delight that the Duchess informs Mr Longdon of Mrs Brookenham's general notoriety:

'She's amusing--highly amusing. I do her perfect justice. As your women go she's rare . . . The young men hang about Mrs Brook and the clever ones ply her with uproarious appreciation that keeps her up to the mark. She's in a prodigious fix -- she must sacrifice either her daughter or what she once called to me her intellectual habits. Mr Vanderbank, you've seen for yourself, is one of the most cherished, the most confirmed, of these." (AA, p.192).

The comment, for all its malicious intent, is as much an elucidation of the commentator as it is of Mrs Brookenham. It is an indication of the Duchess's own involvement in the sordid game. Her involvement with Lord Petherton is as infamous as her rearing of little Aggie for the marriage market. Both she and Mrs Brookenham are the products of a system that thrives on manipulation, deceit, and greed.

James does more than condemn the salacious gossip of

Mrs Brookenham's circle. With unsparing irony he shows that Mrs Brookenham's entourage is bound together by more than "good conversation". Sexual promisculty is the norm with loyalty and friendship replaced by betrayal and hypocrisy. Little Aggie's extramarital indiscretions, with her aunt's lover, Lord Petherton, serve as her initiation into the group. And it is with witty malice that Mrs Brookenham discusses with Van her new "accessibility" (AA, p.315). Aggie's betrayal of Mitchy, shortly following their marriage, is one in a series of betrayals that abound in The Awkward Age. Mrs Brookenham betrays Nanda; Vanderbank betrays both Nanda and Mr Longdon; the Duchess betrays Mrs Brookenham to Mr Longdon and in turn is betrayed by Aggie and Lord Petherton; and in the end, at Tishy Grendon's party, Mrs Brookenham betrays everyone by exposing them all to Mr Longdon. It is her last desperate attempt to hold onto Vanderbank and make over her daughter to Mr Longdon.

Mrs Brookenham's world of manners further betrays itself by the degree of frequency with which social decorum is abandoned in the pursuit of money. James exposes the procuring motives underlying most of the social alliances. In conversation with Nanda, for example, Mrs Brookenham discloses her material greed:

Mrs Brook had a pause. "One would be quite ready to do that if one only knew a little more exactly what you're to get by them."
. . . The girl as her stare showed, was held

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a moment by her surprise, which presently broke out. "Why, I thought you wanted me so to be nice to him!"

"Well, I hope you won't think me very vulgar," said Mrs Brook, "if I tell you that I want you still more to have some idea of what you'll get by it." (AA, p.241)

In the above exchange there are no subtle innuendoes, no reticence or discretion in Mrs Brookenham's technique. She is uncharacteristically blunt. Her commercial tone is, to a large extent, crude and disparaging and is indicative of the parasites that makes up her circle. Harold Brookenham, who has inherited his mother's self-preserving instincts, is prepared to live off anyone who will allow him. Mr Petherton is guilty of exploiting both Mitchy and his sister; Vanderbank's consideration of Nanda, as a possible wife, is motivated partly by Mr Longdon's promise of a financial settlement; and the Duchess is conducting a campaign to secure Mitchy's fortune for her niece.

Despite Mrs Brookenham's lack of moral perspective she does gain in comparison to the Duchess. Like her acquaintances, the latter is totally devoted to her own self interest. We see her as she moves through London society sharpening her wits at the expense of whosoever she chooses to malign. It is she who defines conversation as "a quadrille in a sentry-box" (AA, p.192). Mrs Brookenham is her natural sparring partner. The two frequently indulge in sadistic exchanges, the butt of which are often Nanda and little Aggie. One is, nonetheless, partly swayed by Mrs Brookenham's

intelligence and charm, which are deserving of some admiration.

In certain respects she recalls James's earlier villain

Serena Merle.

The Duchess, however, is simply a hollow and nasty Her careful education of her niece and her claim that "there isn't any indecency . . . I won't commit for my child" (AA, p.179) are not motivated by love but by the expectation that Aggie will command a higher price on the marriage market. The child "has been deliberately prepared for consumption" (AA, p. 181). Mrs Brookenham openly admits her lack of interest in Nanda and although this could hardly be defined as virtuous, it does indicate a certain degree of honesty. The Duchess on the other hand is ruthlessly hypocritical. Mr Longdon finds her odious, with "a manner that, in its all-knowingness, rather humiliated then encouraged" (AA, p.187). In a revealing incident with him she exposes her calculating greed. She crudely requests that he secure Vanderbank for Nanda in order that she could "work Mitchy" (AA, p.191) for Aggie. Though spiteful in intent, Mrs Brookenham is accurate when she says to Van and Mitchy:

"Aggie, don't you see? is the Duchess's morality, her virtue; which, by having it, that way, outside of you, as one may say, you can make a much better thing of it. The child has been for Jane, I admit, a capital little subject, but Jane has kept her on hand and finished her like some wonderful piece of stitching. Oh, as work, it's of a soigné! There it is -- to show." (AA, p.228)

If Aggie is a reflection of the Duchess's virtue it is a distorted and mishapen image at best. Her innocent pose disintegrates before us as she shows her affinity to the corrupt social world of her aunt. She quickly acquires notoriety as an adulteress. In <a href="The Awkward Age">The Awkward Age</a> James affirms that seclusion is an inadequate preparation for the world and that knowledge should not be equated with corruption.

Mr Longdon serves as the moral centre of the work. Through him James affirms the old values and standards. though he maintains the old traditional structures, his morality is never rigid or narrow -- he is capable of growth. Unlike Vanderbank, who is unable to perceive beneath the surface, and therefore rejects Nanda, Mr Longdon is not overwhelmed by her modern manner and is able to see beyond mere appearance. He is distinguished by his capacity for selfless devotion. At one point Vanderbank remarks to Mrs Brookenham: "he cares for [Nanda] even more than we do" (AA, p.218). The superficiality of the circle suffers by contrast to Mr Longdon's determination to adhere to such archaic virtues as love, loyalty and sincerity. Ultimately he and Nanda are the sole proprietors of any moral sense. The drawing-room coterie are trapped within the sphere of their own words. They are static as a configuration in a glass menagerie.

James's portrait of Mrs Brookenham appears to be the paradigm for the later villains of his major phase. She

looks forward to the attractive and intelligent Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant. The villains in The Awkward Age, like the villains of the major phase, are endowed with beauty and charm. Mrs Brookenham's ease and social mask, "her natural, quavering tone" (AA, p.52) are deceptively disarming. Nanda, however, possesses none of her mother's wit and social elegance. She is grim and even Mitchy who loves her finds that she lacks "a sense of humour" (AA, p.119). Margaret Walters argues that: "Because of her awareness, because of the seriousness with which she nerves herself to confront the adult world, Nanda becomes, overnight, the oldest person in the book." Though Walter's comment is somewhat overstated, Nanda is indeed less alluring and less interesting than her mother.

It must be noted, however, that despite James's rendering to evil "the highest form of justice", he does not negate its pervasive corruption. F. W. Dupee sees Mrs Brookenham as the heroine of The Awkward Age -- an "unfortunate woman" wronged by a "prime", "Impertinent" and "graceless" daughter. What he fails to perceive is that, to James, it is strength and moral insight that defines heroism and not surface elegance. Charming though it may be, Mrs Brookenham's static universe could hardly represent James's own moral view. Nanda's withdrawal at the end of the novel is precisely because there is no place for her in the deprayed London salon. Her retreat is a demonstration of her strength. As

Lyon Richardson remarks: "only the strong have the full power to choose wisely between two goods, to discard things of price for the priceless things, to conquer the selfweakening force of blind hate and to show their strength by showing mercy."24 Nanda's grace and candour in the final scenes of the novel serve as an emphatic crystalization of such moral fortitude. Her final meeting with Vanderbank stands as conclusive proof of her superior vision. intelligence and sensitivity allows her to judge precisely his motives in rejecting her as a wife. Thus in allowing him to perserve his self-image and his dignity, in abandoning her own interest, and in giving him "this present chance to smooth his confusion and add as much as possible to that refined satisfaction with himself which would proceed from his having dealt with a difficult hour in a gallant and delicate way" (AA, pp. 352-353), she exhibits the type of moral strength alien to her mother's world.

The progression from Osmond to Ida Beale to Mrs
Brookenham suggests more than an intensification of James's
concern with an impaired moral perspective. The shift is
from a world wherein each individual possesses an intrinsic
spiritual or inner worth to one wherein the individual has
merely a physical and manipulative value. In <a href="The Portrait of of a Lady">The Portrait of of a Lady</a>, Osmond and Mme Merle emerge as anomalous to the
social world as respresented by Mr Touchett, Ralph Touchett,
Lord Warburton, Henrietta Stackpole, Lord Bantling, and to

a certain degree, Edward Rosier. In the fiction of the eighties and nineties, however, it is, more often than not, the good character who is the glaring incongruity. Indeed, both Ida Beale and Mrs Brookenham are emblematic of the sequacious London world, while Maisie and Nanda emerge as obvious aliens in their adherence to traditional moral values. In his middle years, therefore, James is ultimately suggesting that total adherence to the prevailing social code entails the death of the inner self — the negation of intrinsic human values.

Chapter III -- "A hotch-potch of the pure and the impure": The villains of The Wings of the Dove

In as early a novel as <u>Roderick Hudson</u> James suggests the interdependence and intertwining, in life, of apparent dualities. At this early stage James is intent to express the complexity of life as opposed to an elementary black and white simplification of supposed contrarieties. Gloriani, whose function in that novel is to expose the follies of Roderick's one-dimensional thinking, states his belief that

there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness; that they overlap and intermingle in a quite inextricable manner; that there is no saying where one begins and the other ends; that hideousness grimaces at you suddenly from out of the very bosom of loveliness, and beauty blooms before your eyes in the lap of vileness; that it is a waste of wit to nurse metaphysical distinctions and a sadly meagre entertainment to caress imaginary lines; that the thing to aim at is the expressive and the way to reach it is by ingenuity; that for this purpose everything may serve, and that a consummate work is a sort of hotch-potch of the pure and the impure, the graceful and the grotesque. (RH, p.89)

Gloriani's recognition that good and evil are not separate or exclusive categories is what constitutes for James the mature consciousness. The impossibility of distinguishing between pure good and pure evil is one that James recognizes. That the human consciousness is comprised of both forces,

that evil (as well as good) is inherent in every man, is the essential aspect of James's moral vision. He believes that it is the responsibility of an individual to choose. To James, evil is definitely a conscious act of will.

It is in his major phase that James succeeds most fully in dramatizing the complexity and ambiguity of evil. The Wings of the Dove, for example, he presents the complete landscape of the human psyche; he concentrates on what motivates an individual to good or evil. The novel is, in a sense, a fuller treatment of the theme found in The Portrait of a Lady. In place of Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond, we have Kate Croy and Merton Densher. The motive to villainy is still gread, the action still unethical. Within The Wings of the Dove, though, we are made to sympathize, paradoxically enough, with James's villainous characters. As Syndy Conger remarks, the figures of Kate and Merton can be viewed only as "the admirable villains of Henry James." In his late fiction James is cautious in his documentation of the ambiguous quality of evil. The villains of this period are endowed with intelligence and grace. They emerge as the "consummate work" or "hotch-potch of the pure and the impure, the graceful and the grotesque" of which Gloniani speaks.

The Wings of the Dove is in part a refined and profound analysis of how the moral shades into the immoral and how virtue fades into evil. James's intention in delineating such ambiguous villains as Kate Croy and Merton Densher is

to demonstrate that evil is often indefinable and, to the characters involved, barely perceptible. Hence, James's sinners frequently possess an aesthetic beauty that remains undiminished despite both the reader's and the characters' knowledge of their sin. It would be a rigid oversimplification to define the individual consciousness as either exclusively good or exclusively evil. He acknowledges that social pressures are often the overwhelming contributing factor in determining action, but that it is possible for the individual to repudiate past action and acquire salvation. Therefore, Milly's generosity and forgiveness, at the conclusion of The Wings of the Dove, become that force that enables Densher to extricate himself from evil and renounce the American girl's money.

The novel emerges as an examination of both the villain and the victim -- the "worker" and the "worked". The careful architecture of Kate's economic deprivation in the first two books of the novel, is both deliberate and essential to James's purpose. In his "Preface" to The Wings of the Dove the author speaks of laying the foundation for Milly's "predicament . . . so that it should have for us as much as possible its ominous air of awaiting her." But such deliberate structuring serves as more than a simple weaving of events in anticipation of "a castastrophe determined". What the first few chapters of the novel simultaneously achieve is to establish immediately those mitigating circumstances

which help to explain Kate's villainous activities. James's striving for a greater psychological realism is evidenced in the careful treatment he gives to Kate's background. The "powers [that conspire] to a sinister end," those "associate Fates" that have "determined" Kate's catastrophe are, as Sallie Sears points out, peculiarly reminiscent of Hardy. To be more precise, the universe of The Wings of the Dove recalls the universe of Tess of the D'Urbervilles. As the following passage implies, Kate, like Tess, is the unfortunate inheritor of an ancestral doom:

Her father's life, her sister's, her own, that of her two lost brothers -- the whole history of their house had the effect of some fine florid, voluminous phrase, say even a musical, that dropped first into words, into notes, without sense, and then, hanging unfinished, into no words, no notes at all. Why should a set of people have been put in motion, on such a scale and with such an air of being equipped for a profitable journey, only to break down without an accident, to stretch themselves in the wayside dust without a reason? (WD, p.10)

What is significant here is that Kate is indeed "equipped" for success. But her father has squandered the family fortune, disgraced the honour of its name, and, to use James's metaphor, has placed her and her sister in "the wayside dust". Kate, however, is not allowed to accept her plight, despite her willingness "to abandon her own interest" (WD, p.25). She wishes merely to preserve her only virtue -- "a narrow little family feeling . . . a small piety" (WD, p.57). In

contrast to Kate's familial ethos, both her father and sister insist on the exploitation of her social graces. They plan to use her as a means by which they might reap financial recompense from Aunt Maud. They had already decided that: "it was through Kate that Aunt Maud should be worked, and nothing mattered less than what might become of Kate in the process" (WD, p.31). Kate's beauty and social charms have been previously assessed by her aunt. To Mrs Lowder she is both a graceful asset to the drawing-room and someone who could, through the proper marriage, be the portal to the aristocratic life. Kate's choices are not multitudinous -- poverty with the man she loves or Aunt Maud's wealth. Kate, however, chooses to "try for everything" (WD, p.58).

To James, unlike Hardy, it is the exercise of individual human choice when faced with a series of alternatives that ultimately defines one's moral fortitude or lack there-of. His thematic focus in <a href="The Wings of the Dove">The Dove</a> is on the psychological or motivating forces that compel the will to either good or evil. He avows a self-determinism rather than any environmental or social determinism. That James illustrates Kate's acceptance of her Aunt Maud's materialistic society and that she freely chooses to act in accordance with that social code, explains, but does not excuse, her subsequent actions. Her choice of an unethical manner of survival remains a conscious, voluntary act of will.

It is in her attempt to have the best of all possible

worlds that Kate sacrifices her morality. Aware though she is of society's predatory nature, based on exploitation and manipulation, she deliberately mutes her conscience and places her lot with that society. It is a world to which she shows a remarkable affinity. Implicit in her acceptance of her family's right to exploit her is an acceptance of everyone else's lot to be exploited. "My position is a great value for them both" she says to Densher, "its the value — the only one they have" (WD, p.57). The clash between a life based on moral responsibility with one based on opportunism (as dictated by social and family pressures) is apparent in Kate's following remark:

"Of course, it holds me. It's a perpetual sound in my ears. It makes me ask myself if I've any right to personal happiness, any right to anything but to be as rich and overflowing, as smart and shining, as I can be made." ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.58)

Kate's world is a world of means, one in which people see each other in terms of their potential economic value, or as a means to satisfy some personal desire or appetite. It is a reduction of the individual personality to the impersonal standards of a quantitative, materialistic index. For example, Aunt Maud envisions Kate as a type of collateral or object of trade:

"... Kate's presence, by good fortune, I marked early; Kate's presence -- un-luckily for you -- is everything I could possibly wish; Kate's presence is, in short, as fine as you know, and I've been keeping it for the comfort of my declining

years. I've watched it long; I've been saving it up and letting it, as you say of investments, appreciate, and you may judge whether, now it has begun to pay so, I'm likely to consent to treat for it with any but a high bidder. I can do the best with her, and I've my idea of the best." (WD, p.65)

What is to be noted in the above passage is Aunt Maud's emphasis on Kate's negotiable value. Kate, however, is fully conscious of the avidly acquisitive and predatory rules of human intercourse. She knows that "the more one gave of oneself the less of one was left. There were always people to snatch at one, and it would never occur to them that they were eating one up. They did that without tasting" (ND, p.31). It is, therefore, with a conscious knowledge that Kate accepts the world of vulgar appropriation. In this world no one has any intrinsic worth. Any inherent human dignity is negated as human values are subverted in the pursuit of wealth. And it is apparent that James will not allow the reader to exonerate Kate's subsequent actions on the plea of a fallible vision.

James's intention in using Kate as his centre of consciousness in the first two chapters of the novel is to
demonstrate the remarkable range of her perception. She,
more than anyone else in <u>The Wings of the Dove</u>, is able to
interpret precisely her own and everyone else's actions. From
our first encounter with her we know that: she "saw herself
as handsome, no doubt, but as hard, and felt herself as

clever but cold; and as so much too imperfectly ambitious"  $(\underline{\text{WD}}, \text{ p.48})$ . It is she who, with her understanding of human motives, must consistently explain the reality of a situation to Densher: he "felt with this that his companion had indeed perceptive flights that he couldn't hope to match"  $(\underline{\text{WD}}, \text{ p.525})$ . Kate's talent is for seeing things as they are.

Her shrewd understanding of life extends to an understanding of her own nature. In conversation with Densher she reveals her knowledge of her own base instincts -instincts that she feels are a natural inheritance from her father. His mysterious crime, she tells him is "a part of me" ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.53). And, as the inheritor of his guilt -- as part of fallen man -- Kate senses her own precarious moral position. It is a position that she explicitly voices: "But of course, I do see my danger of doing something base" (WD, p.58). Kate's vision, however, is totally selective. The clarity of her perception is tempered by the fact that her vision is one-dimensional, based on an obsession with money. concern is with the world of objects -- things, appearances, appendages. As the novel progresses, it is the material world which increases in importance. Ultimately it is her acquisitive drive, derived from her familial obligations, that emerges as the most durable and restricting of cages. For it is precisely these familial ties that literally force Kate into a world where money is more important than love.

In allowing herself to be used by her family as a tool through which financial benefit may be reaped, Kate is thrust

into Aunt Maud's world and consequently adopts the values of that world. Her relationship with Densher is perverted largely because of her strong family sentiment. Ultimately he is sacrificed in favour of money, which to both Lionel Croy and Marian constitutes the only reality.

Following James's elaborately constructed prologue, Milly's entrance into London society has the required air of sinister expectation. Innocent, wealthy, and inexperienced, Milly Theale takes her place among James's other American innocents. Like Isabel Archer, she proves completely susceptible to the charming veneer of European society. like the former she "was forever seeing things afterward" (WD, p.114). Ironically it is Kate who initially adopts the role of social mentor. And it is particularily significant that it should be Kate who attempts to instruct Milly in the ways of society, where the "working and the worked were in London, as one might explain, the parties to every relation" and where "everyone who had anything to give . . . made the sharpest possible bargain for it, got at least its value in return" (WD, p.131). Kate's motives are distinctly apparent. She appears to have been moved by the same moral instincts that initiated her previous empty efforts to escape the temptations of Lancaster Gate. Her advice to Milly becomes her last unequivocal moral action in the novel -- her final attempt to save herself:

"We're of no use to you -- it's decent

to tell you. You'd be of use to us, but that's a different matter. My honest advice to you would be --" she went indeed all lengths -- "to drop us while you can" (WD, p.201).

The above statement itself reflects James's own ironic perversity. He allows Milly some measure of temporary perception only to have her promptly discard her instincts. Her determination to ignore Kate's advice emerges as almost too stupidly naive. Assuming that the latter's moral sense parallels her own, Milly disregards her warning:

Milly tried to be amused, so as not -- it was too absurd -- to be fairly frightened. Strange enough indeed -- if not natural enough -- that, late at night thus, in a mere mercenary house with Susie awaya want of confidence should possess She recalled, with all the rest of it, the next day, piecing things together in the dawn, that she had felt herself alone with a creature who paced like a panther. That was a violent image, but it made her a little less ashamed of having been scared. (WD, p.202)

The predatory image James uses to describe Kate is singularly appropriate. It demonstrates a movement from victim to hunter. Kate has "progressed" from the "trembling kid" (WD, p.28) in the lion's cage to the stalking panther. The image stands as a stark metaphor for the role Kate is to assume and simultaneously anticipates Milly's danger.

It is with remarkable insight that Kate has divined that Milly is terminally ill. And it is also a demonstration of her immense powers of perception that she intuits Milly's

motives for remaining in London. Kate's cleverness, however, diminishes rather than enhances her moral sense. As she rapidly admits to Densher: "my cleverness, I assure you, has grown infernal" (WD, p.227). In effect, it is Kate herself who is the controlling mind behind the plot to acquire Milly's fortune. Her plan to marry the dying girl to her lover and inherit her money is horrifying in its cannibalistic overtones. The image that emerges is one wherein the strong derives sustenance from the dying. James manages to convey this impression mainly through the juxtaposition of Kate's extreme vitality with Milly's ebbing strength.

Undoubtedly the author distinguishes between knowledge and a moral sense. Kate's decision to use Milly is a testament to the shallowness of her own moral vision.

Justifying her "panderous" victimization of the latter with the assertion that "plenty of others will" (MD, p.257), Kate makes that moral choice that will inevitably occasion her personal damnation. Her moral consciousness is now firmly rooted in the activity of villainy. For Kate is guilty not so much of sordid procuring, but of manipulating and controlling the free will of another human -- imposing her corruption in such a way that she limits the potential freedom of an individual. As is fully apparent, it is the imposition of her will upon Densher that allows Kate to work her scheme.

Ironically enough, Merton Densher is the channel by which James demonstrates his moral position. In spite of his

weakness Densher ultimately has the necessary moral fortitude to transcend the limitations of Kate's materialistic vision. He has to discover, painfully, that Kate's commitment to the world of objects negates any integrity of the self. Her acquisitive values emerge as a destructive force. And it is through her that James clearly challenges the notion that the world of appearance -- or form -- could ever be a valid substitute for virtue.

Unlike Kate, Densher is detached from the world of form. He views with some suspicion the society which gathers at Lancaster Gate, and recoils in horror from Mrs Lowder's "aggressively erect" (WD, p.61) possessions:

It was the language of the house itself that spoke to him . . . Never, he flattered himself, had he seen anything so gregariously ugly -- operatively, ominously so cruel . . . He could write about the heavy horrors that could still flourish, that lifted their undiminished heads, in an age so proud of its short way with false gods . . . He had never dreamed of anything so fringed, and scalloped, so buttoned and corded, drawn everywhere so tight, and curled everywhere so thick. He had never dreamed of so much gilt and glass, so much satin and plush, so much rosewood and marble and malachite . . . These things finally represented for him a portentous negation of his own world of thought . . . They revealed it to him by their merciless difference. (WD, p.63)

Kate's reaction to Mrs Lowder's house is strikingly different.

She is pleased with the charming quarters her aunt has assigned her. For "she saw as she had never seen before how

material things spoke to her" ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.27). There is no doubt that it is partly "her dire accessibility to pleasure" from "trimming and lace . . . ribbons and silk and velvet ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.27) that precipitates her actions to acquire Milly's wealth.

Initially Kate and Densher are drawn to each other by their differences. It is evident that to Merton Kate's self-reliance, her imagination and vitality, her extreme worldliness, are her chief strengths. And for her, "it was on the side of the mind that Densher was rich . . . mysterious and strong" (WD, p.42). It is soon apparent, however, that Densher's intellect is confined to an artificial knowledge, a knowledge divorced from the realities of life. He functions as Kate's unresisting marionette; and it is her force of character that controls their lives. Ultimately, the two are divided by the very differences which initially served to unite them. Their close intimacy is destroyed when Densher fully achieves his moral integrity. But he muffles his conscience just long enough to cause an immense amount of suffering. It is in his complicity to defraud Milly that he emerges as the completion of Kate Croy -- James's other "admirable" villain.

Whereas Kate acts out of strength, Densher acts out of weakness. Although he deliberately appeases his conscience with illogical rationalizations, he is nonetheless fully implicated in Kate's crime. As Sallie Sears remarks: "Merton has his own rather unpalatable way of drawing ethical lines

and splitting moral hairs." She continues that "his ethical position entails obedience to the law, not the spirit; action alone, and not intent or desire is, what is culpable." Indeed, Densher's rationalizations do involve a certain amount of moral gymnastics. He goes to incredible lengths to convince himself that he has as yet done nothing base, that his ethical position has not been compromised:

it didn't take him far to remember that he had himself as yet done nothing deceptive. It was Kate's description of him, his defeated state, it was none of his own; his responsibility would begin as he might say, only with acting it out. The sharp point was, however, in the difference between acting and not acting; this difference in fact it was that made the case of conscience. (WD, p.271)

In his passivity he is akin to Vanderbank of <a href="The Awkward Age">The Awkward Age</a>.

Like Van, Densher finds it imperative to retain his selfimage. He dodges the implications of his actions as his
conscience wilts under the pressure of Kate's desires. Despite
his renunciation of Kate and the money after Milly's death,
Densher cannot be exonerated from his crime. And one is
aware that this is not James's intention. While he allows
that Densher is motivated by his passion for Kate and that
she is the controlling force, he simultaneously allows the
reader to share in his moments of introspective honesty. Such
moments serve as dramatizations of Densher's deliberate
violation of his scruples, violations which allow the betrayal
of a dying girl. Such a consistent inundation of Densher's

excuses serves as a diminution of his integrity -- his superficial ethics.

It is with inescapable irony that James illustrates the pinnacle of Densher's self-deception, the obvious evasion of his guilt. On learning that Milly "has turned her face to the wall" ( $\underline{\text{WD}}$ , p.403) Densher once more convinces himself that he is blameless -- still ethically secure. To him, it is Lord Mark who emerges as the villain, for it is the latter who has maliciously told Milly of his secret engagement to Kate:

He gave the appearance before him all the benefit of being critical, so that if blame were to accrue he shouldn't feel he had dodged it. But it wasn't a bit he who, that day, had touched her, and if she was upset it wasn't a bit his act. The ability so to think about it amounted for Densher, during several hours, to a kind of exhilaration. (WD, p.400)

The ironic tone of the chapter is intensified when Densher is forced to deprecate Lord Mark to Susan Stringham for wanting the very same thing he does -- Milly's money. Merton's subjective view of himself proves to be a mere illusion. And it is surely a deliberate reinforcement of the ironic overtones that it is the Italian swindler, Eugenio, who accurately perceives Densher's acquisitive intentions and is made to judge him:

It had been, in other words, for the five weeks, far from occult to our young man that Eugenio took a vulgar view of him, which was at the same time a view he was definitely hindered from preventing. It was all in the air now . . . the vulgar view; the view that, clever and not rich, the young man from London was -- by the obvious way -- after Miss Theale's fortune. (WD, pp.394-395)

At this point in the novel James makes little distinction between the moral code of the two men. There can be no doubt that one is meant to infer by his unsubtle parallel the analogue between Eugenio's motives and Densher's: "[Their situation] produced a relation which required a name of its own, an intimacy of consciousness, in truth, for each — an intimacy of eye, or ear, of general sensibility, of everything but tongue" (WD, p.394). The statement itself is a conscious mockery of Densher's integrity. It is a crystalization of what he has become in the service of Kate.

On one level, Densher's loyalty to Kate is one of his most enduring qualities. Yet it is this constancy that determines his collusion in Kate's grand design. His deeds all stem from the acquiescence of his conscience to her. As he explicitly states: "I do nothing for anyone in the world. But for you I'll do anything" (WD, p.283). That Merton allows himself to be manipulated by Kate into what he knows is evil is an active choice. That he chooses to be a passive tool is in itself an active decision. And one is never allowed to lose sight of the complicity of their guilt.

James's facility in the handling of dialogue is most evident in Kate's articulation of her plan to Densher. Her

proposal that he "make up to a sick girl" (<u>WD</u>, p.256) is invested with such a rich cloak of charm that the performance is less of an expose of her morals than it is a testament to her ingenuity. James's technique is such that Kate loses none of her decorative grace or Densher's admiring devotion: "He was in a wonderous silken web, and it was amusing" (<u>WD</u>, p.262). James, of course, does not endorse Kate's design. Yet it is with a certain reluctant admiration that one applauds her creative energies -- misdirected though they may be. For, like Densher, we are seduced by her charismatic charm. Densher's lavish tribute is a continuing confirmation of her infectious and overwhelming qualities:

Densher stood before her . . . something suddenly, as if under a last determinant touch, welled up in him and overflowed -- the sense of his good fortune and her variety, of the future she promised, the interest she supplied. "All women but you are stupid. How can I look at another? . . . Even 'society' won't know how good for it you are; it's too stupid, and you're beyond it. You'd have to pull it uphill -- it's you yourself who are at the top. The women one meets -- what are they but books one has already read? You're a whole library of the unknown, the uncut." He almost moaned, he ached, from the depth of his content. "Upon my word, I've a subscription." (WD, p.261)

It is only later, and alone, that Densher's moral sensibilities are awakened and he is able to assess Kate's sophisticated immorality. He betrays his uneasiness but is once again able to suppress his conscience. He decides that disloyalty to Kate would be a more formidable complication, "a kind of betrayal", for "not to give away the woman one loved, but to back her

up in her mistakes" would simply be a gesture of devotion, one of "the inevitabilities of the abjection of love" ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.271).

James is careful, however, to elucidate the fact that Densher's and Kate's love is not free from the taint of "the well-oiled system" upon which social relationships flourish. In fact it is a system which Kate willingly accepts. She articulates this most clearly to Milly: it was a happy arrangement and "people could quite like each other in the midst of it" (WD, p. 131). Such an attitude is further discernible in the following remark she makes to Densher: "'I want,' said the girl, 'to make things pleasant for her. I use, for the purpose, what I have. You're what I have of most precious, and you're therefore what I use most" (WD, p.254). James makes clear that all relationships in the novel are reduced to a metaphor of worker and instrument. In a perverse atmosphere where human qualities are reduced to their quantitative basis it becomes relatively simple for human intercourse to be corrupted merely by existing within this atmosphere. And it is therefore no surprise that Densher eventually demands payment for his services.

Although he finds it morally distasteful to make love to a dying girl, Densher will nonetheless do so. His compliance with Kate's wishes, however, is contingent upon Kate's sexual surrender to him. To preserve his self-image, to reassert his will, he is reduced to sexual blackmail. Realizing that he has impugned his integrity and received no concrete

compensation he demands from Kate something of reciprocal value. It is important to note that Kate's and Densher's roles are momentarily reversed. Kate is now to be "worked". The note of assault, the quality of brutality with which Densher exercises control is evident in the following observation of their particular position:

He had in truth not expected of her that particular vulgarity but the absence of it only added the thrill of a deeper reason to his sense of possibilities. For the knowledge of what she was he had absolutely to see her now, incapable of refuge, stand there for him in all the light of the day of his admirable, mertiless meaning. (WD, pp.356-357)

What is most damning about Densher's demand is that he is willing to sell his integrity for what he knows is both dishonourable and immoral. It is also significant that he finds Kate's own lack of integrity partly abhorrent and has begun to question both the range of her perception as well as his own moral position:

He was walking, in short, on a high ridge, steep down on either side, where the proprieties -- once he could face at all remaining there -- reduced themselves to his keeping his head. It was Kate who had so perched him . . . There glowed for him in fact a kind of rage for what he was not having; an exasperation, a resentment, begotten truly by the very impatience of desire, in respect to his postponed and relegated, his so extremely manipulated state. It was beautifully done of her, but what was the real meaning of it unless that he was perpetually bent to her will? (WD, p.339)

Contributing to his disillusionment is the startling

image of Milly, clothed in white, presiding over her Venetian drawing-room. In comparison to Milly's radiant purity, Densher feels that Kate should have been appropriately attired in black (WD, p.367). James's visual metaphor has a wealth of meaning. It makes vivid to Densher the ruthlessness of Kate's plan; it anticipates the transcendent influence that Milly's death is eventually to achieve; it defines her role as sacrificial lamb and simultaneously recalls Milly's earlier image of Kate as the dark predator -- the terrifying panther. What is most pertinent, however, is that Kate and Densher are momentarily divided. Kate has been "practically superseded" (WD, p.367). The juxtaposition of Milly and Kate, the former in all her innocent sincerity, and the latter so apparently "the opposite pole" (WD, p.368) intensifies Milly's sublime qualities. To Densher, the full implication of Kate's image of her is crystalized:

Milly was indeed a dove . . . only so far as one remembered that doves have wings and wondrous flights, have them as well as tender tints and soft sounds. It even came to Densher dimly that such wings could in a given case -- had, in fact, in the case in which he was concerned -- spread themselves for protection. (WD, p.369)

But Densher's momentary concern is primarily with his own self-gratification. His temporary vision of truth is superseded by his desires. Putting aside his scruples, then, he trades his morality to satisfy his passions:

He was giving himself up -- that was quite enough -- to the general feeling of his renewed engagement to fidelity.

The force of the engagement, the quality of the article to be supplied, the special solidity of the contract, the way, above all, as a service for which the price named by him had been magnificantly paid, his equivalent office was to take effect -- such items might well fill his consciousness when there was nothing from outside to interfere. Never was a consciousness more rounded and fastened down over what filled it. (WD, p.381)

The idea of a commercial contract is the dominant metaphor in the passage. It is the language of Lancaster Gate. There is an ironic parallel between Densher's perception of Kate and Mrs Lowder's earlier assessment of her negotiability. To both, Kate's sexuality is seen in terms of its manipulative value.

To James a union based merely on sexual desire provides a framework for disaster. <sup>8</sup> It is therefore appropriate that Densher should request Kate's sexual surrender as assurance for his partnership in fraud. The episode, as James probably sees it, is just one more "turn of the screw". It serves to augment Densher's complicity in Milly's betrayal. Initially, the memory of Kate's presence in his rooms is Densher's liberating force, a release from the tyranny of his conscience. His rooms have acquired a certain ambience. And, for a short duration any external reality is secondary to the exquisite memory of their union. Densher felt, at the time, that any other presence would constitute the violation of a consecrated act. He is therefore reluctant to admit the external world and ungraciously procrastinates when Milly

proposes that she be asked to tea. It is Milly's spiritual love, however, which emerges as the superior force. Her forgiveness and transcendent act of love negate the potency of Kate's evil. The wings of the dove have quieted lustful passion. The magnanimity of her virtue shines radiantly despite her knowledge of Kate's and Densher's intentions.

James's position is immediately apparent. The Wings of the Dove is an affirmation of his belief that love retains its beauty only if it remains untainted by sinful desire. Of course, with Milly's death, Densher's love remains disengaged from the "violence" of carnality.

It is significant that Densher is redeemed at the end of the novel. His ultimate rejection of his long-sought goal intimates an existing remnant of moral good. What is important is that it is his love for Milly that effects a reassertion of his moral equilibrium. He has been "to his recovered sense, forgiven, dedicated, blessed" (WD, p.453). Significantly, in contrast to James's earlier treatments of the villainous mind, the possibility of redemption is here implied. To James, then, it becomes possible for a mind not totally committed to evil to extricate itself from imminent corruption. For in contrast to Kate, it is not appropriation but misguided love which inspires Densher's villainous activity; and in this sense, it is Kate Croy who is established as the focal point of villainy in the novel.

Unlike Densher's, Kate's mode of vision remains static.

The total divergence of their spirits is made clear in the last pages of the novel. In a revealing incident following Milly's death, James dramatizes the extent to which Kate remains obsessed with the world of means:

"You may think it hideous that I should now, that I should yet" -- she made a point of the word -- "pretend to draw conclusion. But we've not failed . . . We've succeeded." She spoke with her eyes deep in his own. "She won't have loved you for nothing." It made him wince, but she insisted. "And you won't have loved me." (WD, pp. 446-447)

To Densher, Kate's brutality has all the force of a physical assault. He sees a correspondence between Kate's lucid acknowledgement of victory and a lack of sensitivity and That she could conceive such a plan and yet not be overwhelmed by guilt reveals that she is as unscrupulous as she is unsympathetic. He recoils in horror from such a flagrant display of avarice. It is, of course, poetic justice that Milly's money has not ensured the freedom they had anticipated. To Densher's awakened spirit Milly's millions stand as the phantom between them. Ironically enough he believes that dispensation would be guaranteed through renunciation of the bequeathed money, and their love could once more be reestablished in an uncompromised light. is his final proposal to Kate -- a choice between him or the To the end Kate's wordly perception -- her gift of knowing -- prevails. It is left to her to unravel the complete ramifications of Milly's unearthly love. She knows

that Milly's memory and their knowledge of each other's sin cannot be forgotten. The final scene of The Wings of the Dove belongs to her. She is left with the tragic knowledge of what has been destroyed in her mercantile quest. And, it is with ironic pathos that she concedes to the sublime power of Milly's otherwordly touch:

"... she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you did." With which Kate slowly rose.
"And I do now. She did it for us...
I used to call her, in my stupidity
-- for want of anything better -- a dove. Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us... We shall never be again as we were!" (WD, pp. 496-497)

James's judgment of Kate is not nearly so sanctimonious as Densher's. In a world governed by personal interest James is concerned primarily with the psychological motivation which dictates action. This is precisely the reason he here concentrates on the developing consciousness or point of view of the villainous character. In contrast to the earlier novels, The Wings of the Dove is distinguished by an unparalled authorial attention to the villainous point of view. What emerges from the carefully constructed framework of The Wings of the Dove is James's concern with the problem of how environment forms character. This is related to the difficulty many critics find in Kate's characterization. motives are a curious mixture of charity and avidity. certainly cannot exonerate her inhuman treatment of Milly, and yet it is difficult to see her as the black angel that

Densher ultimately envisions. In her Darwinistic society
Kate survives as best she can. The novel emerges as much
a tragedy of Kate Croy as it is of Milly Theale. Such was
James's intention in schematizing to such an elaborate extent
Kate's tragic circumstances at the start of the novel. Both
family ties and social demands are the insurmountable
pressures which abet in the perversion of Kate's values. And
it turely denotes a tremendous insensitivity if one remains
untouched by Kate's predicament. Her determination to shape
her own destiny deserves some admination. Perhaps it is,
as Elmer Stoll suggests, that the conscious reader tends to
identify more strongly with the active rather than the passive
agent, whether or not one accepts that agent's moral view.

One's judgment of Kate is further tempered by James's depiction of her social environment. He does more than merely catalogue the disintegration of society's moral code; he also deliberatley dramatizes the values which are deeply embedded in each individual personality. Lionel Croy partially recalls the earlier Gilbert Osmond -- a man of surface charm without depth: he "dealt out lies as he might the cards from the greasy old pack for the game of diplomacy to which you were to sit down with him . . he was really too inhuman" (WD, p.12); his daughter Marian: Ano longer pretty but "bereaved, disappointed, demoralised, querulous" (WD, p.31) and whose "desire to profit was quite oblivious of . . . dignity" (WD, p.31). Of the two Kate found it difficult "to

say which had most shown how little they liked her" (WD, p.37). In addition, we have Aunt Maud, the "Brittannia of the market place" (WD, p.31): a "colossally vulgar" (WD, p.61) woman, who "was unscrupulous and immoral" and could "bite your head off any day . . . [she] really open[ed her] mouth" (WD, p.66); the unimaginative but charming representative of the aristocracy, Lord Mark: he "was working Lancaster Gate for all it was worth" (WD, p.131); Sir Luke Street, great master of the knife" (WD, p.363), whose pity "held up its tell-tale face like a head on a pike, in a French revolution, bobbing before a window": he knows that Milly's payment for his attentions will be "something better at least than the brawny Victorian bronzes" (WD, p.170) in his office; Milly's Italian overseer Eugenio: "a swindler finished to the finger-tips; he was forever carrying one well-kept Italian hand to his heart and plunging the other straight into Milly's pocket, which as she instantly observed him to recognize, fitted it like a glove" (WD, p.310); and English society itself is characterized as "a strange and dreadful monster, calculated to devour the unwary, to abuse the proud. to scandalize the good; but if one had to live with it one must not be for ever sitting up, learn how" ( $\underline{WD}$ , p.198). 10

If Kate is to survive in this dehumanized environment to which she has committed herself, she must adopt the rules of the game. The acquisitive orientation of her environment emerges as a partial cause of her spiritual disfigurement. Ultimately, however, as J. A. Ward comments: James is "neither

a determinist nor a fatalist." Therefore, despite the sympathy he elicits for the "brilliant" Kate Croy, he nonetheless holds her morally responsible for her actions. He remains firm in his insistence that the will is ultimately the determining force for human action.

One is, of course, left to consider why James depicts such sympathetic and charming villains. Perhaps the answer lies in his own recognition of the complexity of the human personality, and the difficulty in distinguishing between the appearance of virtue and virtue itself. Indeed, the moral scheme of the novel supports an earlier belief that good and evil, beauty and ugliness "overlap and intermingle in a quite inextricable manner" (RH, p.89). James further acknowledges that no one is an isolated individual. But, the danger arises when, like Gilbert Osmond, one lives too "exclusively for the world" (PL, p.325). One's moral duty is to arrive at some workable relationship between the self and society.

then, it is evident that aesthetic (and intellectual)
maturation correspond directly to a more acute analysis of
both evil and its intrinsic position in the human experience.
For in his progression from the physical Gothic terror of
The American, through the social evils of The Princess Casamassima,
to the moral ambiguity of The Wings of the Dove, James
explores such fundamental, problematic topoi as the exercise

of will, choice, sexuality, the role of the self, the makeup of consciousness itself. James's transmutation of the Gothic hobgoblin to the sophisticated moral criminals of the "later phase" reflects an awareness not only of the complexity of evil, but of the complexity, confusion and contrarieties of life itself. And, as an artist committed to the portrayal of the flow of life in its completeness, James fulfills "the prime duty of art", which to Gloriani, the vatic sculptor of Roderick Hudson, is "to amuse, to puzzle, to fascinate, to savour of a complex imagination" (RH, p.88).

## A Note on "The Turn of the Screw"

Together with little Aggie of <u>The Awkward Age</u>, Miles and Flora of "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) have the distinction of belonging to the modest list of Jamesian children who are corrupted by outside evil. "The Turn of the Screw", the most debated of his works, is an anomaly in the Jamesian canon. The ambiguity of the true nature of evil in the tale is one that seems to have delighted the author. In his "Preface" to the piece James states:

There is for such a case no eligible absolute of the wrong; it remains relative to fifty other elements, a matter of appreciation, speculation, imagination . . . Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough, I said to myself -- and that already is a charming job -- and his own experience, his own imagination, his own sympathy (with the children) will supply him sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.

Not only is the nature of evil ambiguous, but one is faced with the niggling question: who, in fact, is the villain and who, in fact, is the saint? As the above quotation indicates, the tale reflects James's intensification in his portrayal of evil or malignant characterization. Intensification is used in the sense that no one character is explicitly and definitely indentified as villain. As such, the tale

elicits a more imaginative reaction and evaluation from the reader himself. Told through the consciousness of the governess, the story raises the ambiguity concerning what is real and what is illusion. Are there in fact ghostly villains? Or does the evil occur as a result of the overactive imagination of the governess?

Support for the reality of the ghostly villains appear in the author's own "Preface". Of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel he writes:

They would be agents in fact; there would be laid on them the dire duty of causing the situation to reek with the air of evil . . . so that, briefly, I cast my lot with pure romance.2

It is therefore apparent that the author intended his demons to be actual manifestations. This discussion will be based, then, on the premise that the villains in "The Turn of the Screw" are "actual apparitions".

It would appear that James's intention is to illustrate the ubiquitous quality of evil. The atmosphere at Bly is sinister and laden with corruption. It emerges as a microcosm wherein villainous activity may flourish undetected and where good is mere illusion. Having placed the centre of evil in intangible villains James places the tale in the realm of the metaphysical -- a struggle between good and evil forces. With such villains, "The Turn of the Screw" does indeed become "an excursion into chaos." In not elucidating the exact nature of the corrupting force, in creating such

"loosely constructed" demons, James deliberately caters to the imagination of chaos -- the nightmare world of surreal distortion.

Miles and Flora, the intended victims of Peter Ouint and Miss Jessel, are as sinister as the demons themselves. James is fully aware that evil embodied in wide-eyed innocence is disarming and terrifying. Their physical appearance and innocent manner are an illusory mask used to disguise their alliance with the former servants. Their charm is merely a pose which conceals a corrupt core. The governess, in fact, emerges as the innocent -- the most naive character in the tale. She is frequently manipulated. "Rather easily carried away" ("TS", p.301), she falls prey to Miles's manoeuvers and allows Flora to escape in order to meet with Miss Jessel. With her romanticized dreams and egotistical vision of herself as saviour, the governess proves an inadequate match for Ouint and Miss Jessel. Despite her good intentions, she is too "young, untried, nervous" (TS, p.297) to fight such overpowering villains. Together with her illusions about her employer and her deluded imaginative dreams, the governess is an easy opponent:

I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind; but I was in these days literally abde to find a joy in the extraordinary flight of heroism the occasion demanded of me. I now saw that I had been asked for a service admirable and difficult; and there would be a greatness in letting it be seen -- oh in the right quarter! (TS, p.325)

Like Pemberton in "The Pupil" she proves to be an inept saviour. And like James's other well-intentioned characters, her good intentions are paradoxically the cause of evil. She becomes ultimately responsible for Miles's death.

Because of the unspecified purpose of the demons' visitations, the evil in "The Turn of the Screw" gains in intensity. That they desire to possess Miles and Flora we both deliberately and But James is maddeningly elusive as to their reasons, nor does he elucidate why they are villainous. He alludes to some former sexual liaison but fails to specify any evil action. Hence the atmosphere at Bly is contaminated by an unspecified malignancy. The author also gives few clues as to the nature of Miles's and Flora's corruption. told that Miles has been expelled from school for some unknown crime and that Flora has been corrupted by Miss Jessel. The only other reason given is the governess's intuitive sense that the children are corrupt:

> I was there to protect and defend the little creatures in the world the most bereaved and the most lovable, the appeal of whose helpessness had suddenly become only too explicit, a deep, constant ache of one's own committed heart. (TS, p.326)

The tale finally emerges as an ironic devaluation of the "pure romance" to which James alludes in his "Preface". It is precisely the governess's propensity for romanticizing her actions which makes her an inadequate saviour. Her lack of judgement is due to an idealized notion of herself as the

heroine of a romance tale. Consequently, her misguided actions serve only as a test for the children's ingenuity. Her attempts to save them appear to augment their alliance to the villains. Flora finally flees from her in terror, while with Miles the implication is that Quint takes possession of those in the Villains stand undefeated.

"The Turn of the Screw" crystallizes James's departure from the earlier black-cloaked lagoes of the Gothic novel.

And by dramatizing villains who are spirits, unconfined by physical barriers, James defines evil as all pervasive and indistinct.

#### Footnotes

Preface

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Ward, <u>The Imagination of Disaster</u>, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. viii.

Chapter I

Henry James, The Future of the Novel, edited with an introduction by Leon Edel, (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Graham Greene, "The Private Universe", in Leon Edel, ed., <u>Henry James</u>, Twentieth Century Views, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1963), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> James, <u>The Future of the Novel</u>, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup>Greene, "The Private Universe", p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Ward, <u>The Imagination of Disaster</u>, p. 12.

6 Ibid.

7 Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, p. 13.

Henry James, <u>The Art of the Novel</u>, (New York: Scribners, 1937), p. 321.

Greene, "The Private Universe", p. 111.

10 Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York: Deli Publishing, 1969), see Chapter 6.

- 11 Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 118.
- 12<sub>G</sub>. R. Thompson, "Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition", in his <u>The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism</u>, (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1974), p. 7.
- 13 Thompson, "Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition", p. 3.
- 14 Edgar Allen Poe, "The Premature Burial" in Vincent Price and Chandler Brossard, eds., 18 Best Stories by Edgar Allen Poe, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), p. 65.
- Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice", (1912), in <u>Death</u> in <u>Venice and Seven Other Stories</u>, trans. from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 55.
- $^{16}$ Roderick Hudson's and Rowland Mallet's first glimpse of Christina Light prompts the following exchange between the two:

'Beautiful? She's beauty itself -- she's a revelation. I don't believe she is living -she's a phantasm, a vapour, an illusion!'
'The poodle,' said Rowland, is certainly alive.

'No, he too may be a grotesque phantom, like

the black dog in <u>Faust</u>.'
'I hope at least that the young lady has nothing in common with Mephistopheles. She looked dangerous.' (<u>RH</u>, p. 82)

- 17 Thompson, "Romanticism and the Gothic Tradition", p. 6.
  - 18 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 24, 35.
  - <sup>19</sup> James, The Art of the Novel, p. 35.
  - 20<sub>Ibid</sub>.
  - <sup>21</sup> James, The Art of the Novel, p. 53.
- 22Lyall Powers, "The Portrait of a Lady: 'The Eternal Mystery of Things'", in his <u>Henry James's Major Novels</u>, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973), p. 76.

23 Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, p. 10.

24 In James's fiction houses are frequently used symbolically as indicators of life styles and reflectors of character. Peter Buitenhuis in his The Grasping Imagination, (Toronto: University of Tronto Press, 1970), points out that "so dominant is the house imagery [in James's writings] that it seems to reflect patterns and associations in James's own experience." (p.86).

### Chapter II

H. K. Girling, "'Wonder' and 'Beauty' in The Awkward Age" in Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements, (Bristol: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 237-238.

<sup>2</sup>F. W. Dupee, <u>Henry James</u>, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1965), p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>Leon Edel, "Introduction" to <u>The Complete Tales</u> of <u>Henry James</u>, volume V, (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), p. ii.

<sup>4</sup>It is worth noting that in James's fiction the church, as an institution, is subject to severe condemnation. It is a negative force -- part of a festering society. James, the inheritor of a strong Puritan tradition, its deficiencies are obvious. The church stands as a barren and restrictive institution responsible for perversities which are morally repressive. Although he does not write excessively about the church per se he frequently illustrates it as both an instrument of evil and as an organization responsible for the stifling of free development. The villainous Urbain de Bellegarde is ironically seen by Newman as "a priest around the altar"  $(\underline{Am}, p. 138)$ ; Claire's decision to enter the convent "struck Newman as too dark and horrible for belief, and made him feel as he would have done if she had told him that she was going to mutilate her beautiful face, or drink some potion that would make her mad" (Am, p. 252); Pansy Osmond's banishment to the convent is meant as an intimation of the retributive power of her father; Euphemia Cleves's naive romantic notions stem from her convent upbringing; and Beatrice Ambient's narrow virtue originates from her devotion to church teachings. Such documentation attests to James's loathing of the subtle violence of an institution that he considers predominatly suffecating.

- <sup>5</sup>Greene, "The Private Universe", p. 120.
- Henry James, <u>The Notebooks of Henry James</u>, F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 196.
  - <sup>7</sup>Dupee, <u>Henry James</u>, p. 128.
- 8Lionel Trilling, "The Bostonians", in Lyall Powers, ed., <u>Henry James's Major Novels</u>, p. 125.
  - <sup>9</sup>James, <u>The Art of the Novel</u>, p. 156.
- 10 J. M. Luecke, "The Princess Casamassima: Hyacinth's Fallible Consciousness", in Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 192.
- The Portrait of a Lady," in his Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 147.
- 12 Trying Howe, "The Political Vocation", in Leon Edel, ed., Henry James, Twentieth Century Views, p. 159.
  - 13 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 74.
- Maurice Beebe, "The Turned Back of Henry James" in Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 75.
- 15 Joseph Conrad, quoted by Graham Greene in "The Private Universe," p. 114.
  - 16 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 147.
  - 17 James, The Art of the Novel, p. 149.
  - 18 James, The Notebooks of Henry James, pp. 257-258.
- <sup>19</sup>J. W. Gargano, "<u>What Maisie Knew</u>: The Evolution of a 'Moral Sense'", in Tony Tanner, ed., <u>Henry James: Modern Judgements</u>, p. 231.
  - 20 Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, pp. 82-83.

- 21 Margaret Walters, "Keeping the place tidy for the young female mind: The Awkward Age", in John Goode, ed., The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James, (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 215.
  - 22 Dupee, Henry James, pp. 174-175.
- 23 Lyon Richardson, Henry James in Representative Selections with Introduction, (New York, 1941), p. lxxxviii, cited in J. M. Luecke, "The Princess Casamassima: Hyacinth's Fallible Consciousness", in Tony Tanner, ed., Henry James: Modern Judgements, p. 192.

# Chapter III

- Syndy Conger, "The Admirable Villains in Henry James's The Wings of the Dove", Arizona Quarterly, XXVII, (1971), pp. 151-160.
  - <sup>2</sup>James, <u>The Art of the Novel</u>, p. 294.
  - <sup>3</sup>James, <u>The Art of the Novel</u>, p. 290.
  - 4 Ibid.
- Sallie Sears, <u>The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James</u>, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 56.
- 6Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James, p. 85.
- 7 Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James, p. 91.
- At this point it is worth noting that James is consistent in his use of the illicit sexual union. Without exception such a union inevitably produces evil consequences. One need only examine the experiences of Mme Merle and Gilbert Osmond of The Portrait of a Lady, the various coupling adults in What Maisie Knew, Chad and Mme de Vionnet of The Ambassadors and Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant of The Golden Bowl. To James, such unions are not merley distasteful but are indicative of corrupt moral values.

<sup>9</sup>Elmer E. Stoll, "Give the Devil His Due", <u>Review of English Studies</u>, XX, (April, 1944), p. 124. Cited in Sears, <u>The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James</u>, p. 95.

10Cf. Sears, The Negative Imagination: Form and Perspective in the Novels of Henry James, pp. 75-76.

Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, p. 130.

# Appendix

James, The Art of the Novel, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>James, <u>The Art of the Novel</u>, p. 175.

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