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THE AMBASSADORS

A Process of Vision

by

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B.A. Whitman College, 1955

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1958

Approved by:



Chairman, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School

AUG 21 1958

Date

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The Ambassadors

A Process of Vision

The Ambassadors may be, and has been regarded basically as a moral drama,¹ as a comedy of the provincial in contact with the sophisticated,² as a "Quintessential expression" of the author's personal attitudes,³ or as a limited examination of international social relations "set forth with what most readers deem wearisome elaboration."⁴ In the initial paragraph of the preface to The Ambassadors, James himself states that "the essence" of the novel is its main character's realization of the lost opportunities of his youth; James then rhetorically asks if there can be possible reparation of the loss, to which he replies at the close of the paragraph:

The answer to which is that he now at all events sees; so that the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything, is just my demonstration of this process of vision.⁵

¹Frederick C. Crews, The Tragedy of Manners-Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James (New Haven, 1957), pp.7-9.

²F. W. Dupee, Henry James-His Life and Writings (New York, 1956), pp. 208,214.

³Samuel C. Chew, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 1549.

⁴F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock, The Notebooks of Henry James (New York, 1957), p. x.

⁵Henry James, The Art of the Novel-Critical Prefaces by Henry James with an Introduction by Richard P. Blackmur (New York-London, 1934), p. 308.

"The demonstration of this process of vision" accordingly will be the purpose of the following interpretation of The Ambassadors. The organization of action and the treatment of characters alone should provide a conclusive block of evidence which will substantiate James' prefatory statement. James' governing intention was not to write a novel to be considered as a vehicle for an ethical system, or as a comedy of satire, or as an expression of his personality, or as a comment upon international social relations elaborated as a display of technique, but to reproduce minutely the process of a fine mind in a continual act of logical perception. This mind must have a given situation to work upon, from whence arise the issues and the action of the novel. That this mind perceives an ethical system, that it perceives cultural differences, that it perceives as the author might perceive, that it perceives in the tones of drama or of comedy, or even that it perceives--as James states--a wasted youth, is not the point of the novel. The point is that the mind "sees."

A brief statement of the action should initiate satisfactorily the novel's interpretation: An American, Lambert Strether, arrives in Europe to argue his fiancée's son, Chad Newsome, into a departure from a life of sexual sin and wasted effort. Soon he discovers that the life of Newsome not only is unwasted, but is refined remarkably by the efforts of a beautiful and cultured European lady,

Mme. de Vionnet; furthermore, the relationship between the two appears to Strether to be platonic. He recognizes that European culture is most beneficial to Chad, and reverses his argument by now attempting to save him from an American life of commercialism and cultural coarseness. A visit is paid by three Americans representing Chad's mother, which further re-enforces Strether's new argument and results in an overt schism between him and his fiancée. Upon the departure of the Americans, Strether discovers that sexuality is the basis of the relationship between Chad and Mme. de Vionnet. In the light of this new truth, he also discovers that Mme. de Vionnet is much more worthy of being saved from an ungrateful Chad, who wishes to leave her, than he from her. Strether does all that he is able to do for Mme. de Vionnet and then returns to America, closing the novel.

The plot actually is quite simple. Strether, during the course of his increasing awareness of the situation, attempts to save Chad Newsome successively from Europe and America, and finally attempts to save Mme. de Vionnet, a representative of Europe, from the callous Chad. The very brevity of this skeleton plot should indicate, if nothing else, that the author is not interested in literal action. James' complexity lies in another direction.

If the function of The Ambassadors is to present the process of perception, a set of circumstances to be perceived must exist. If these circumstances were perceived

totally in the introductory sections of the novel, it would be evident that James' central intentions were elsewhere. To prove that such is not the case, it would be valuable to list carefully the changing sets of conclusions at which Strether arrives in his progress toward the reality of the situation about him, and then to illustrate that his progress to each conclusion serves as the chief motive for the action as well as for the presence of each character in the novel.

The novel's true situation as ultimately perceived by Strether will offer a control by which the validity of the previous perceptions may be gauged. At the close of the novel, Strether realizes that Chad Newsome and Mme. de Vionnet are sexually involved when he discovers them in the country under embarrassing circumstances and perceives "the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed."⁶ Upon this realization the other facts of the true situation rapidly become clarified for him. Mme. de Vionnet is seen as a paradox: negatively, an "older" woman "vulgarly troubled," representing "passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful" in "weakness" and "dishonor," but, positively, "the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him in all his years, to meet" (p. 404). Chad is seen to be unworthy of both the quality of the

⁶Henry James, The Ambassadors (New York, 1948), p. 388. Henceforth, all quotations will be taken from this edition; the page numbers will be designated in the text of the thesis.

European culture and of Mme. de Vionnet because there ultimately is "no...illustration of his...knowing how to live" (p. 387) and because he regards his mistress centrally as an object of sensuality, somewhat as "roast mutton for dinner" (p. 423), whereas Mme. de Vionnet's true value lies in her extraordinary possession and control of abstract qualities. Thus Chad is revealed as a rather materialistic and amoral villain, who has thrown the heroine, Mme. de Vionnet, "down in the dust" (p. 414) and who will probably leave her there because of "satiety" (p. 422). Chad is doubly deplorable: his covertly threatened desertion could seriously injure Mme. de Vionnet's "life" (p. 403); and he owes her a heavy debt as she has "quintupled" his social "value" (p. 422).

Besides perceiving the external reality of the situation, during the course of the novel Strether gradually discovers an internal reality of self. When he perceives a given situation, he is impelled to act honestly upon it and thus must come to terms with himself in order to act. The internal reality seems the more central concern of James, for as Strether perceives situations and decides upon appropriate actions, he perceives his own reality in the process of carefully weighing the possibilities of modifying old standards as they are faced with new experience. At the close of the novel, he is forced to take two major actions: "he must see Chad, but he must

go" (p. 417). He must see Chad to tell him, "You'll be a brute, you know--you'll be guilty of the last infamy--if you ever forsake her" (p. 420), and he must leave, for his "only logic....[is] not, out of the whole affair to have got anything for [himself]" (p. 431). Both actions are significant. He defends the immoral relationship of the two lovers because it is the only just course of action; he, as will be seen, has made a major adjustment of his moral vision. And he leaves the culture he has come to love because he perceives an unalterable law in his scheme, the necessity of maintaining his identity, his personal integrity, by refusing to accept that which is obtained at another's expense.

As the situation and the self merge in the conclusion, Strether places justice above distaste for immorality and personal integrity above personal benefit. It is necessary that these actualities be kept in mind in order to realize the significance of the preliminary conclusions, which will now be discussed. It will be seen that James is subjecting his central character to a major conversion, placing him in almost diametrically opposed positions at the introduction and the conclusion of the novel, but stabilizing him throughout with an unchanging central attitude--a compulsive desire to comprehend that which is around him and to react honestly to that which is perceived. All of the aspects of the conclusion certainly have not been dwelt upon, but the preceding information

will serve the purpose of the present discussion.

In addition to the conclusion, the novel may be divided into three major groups on the basis of Strether's changing attitudes: those attitudes which he possesses upon his arrival; those attitudes which he formulates upon his full realization of the positive qualities of Europe, which culminate at the approximate center of the novel at the moment of his resolve to aid those whom he had formerly opposed: "Let them face the future together!" (p. 199); and those attitudes towards America which are crystallized by the arrival of the new set of American ambassadors and his subsequent release from his obligation to Mrs. Newsome.

As the novel opens, Strether believes Chad to have been sexually involved with several women, the last of whom was the most injurious: "Omnes vulnerant, ultima necat--they had all morally wounded, the last had morally killed" (p. 64). Thus Mme. de Vionnet, yet unseen, is believed to be she who has "brutalized" the young man, who was, as Strether remembers him, "after all...too vulgar for his privilege", the privilege of being in Europe (p. 65). Strether is present to save "whatever was left of the poor boy's finer mortality" (p. 64) from the debilitating European environment, which even Strether, armed by age, regards at least with "apprehension" (p. 4).

Strether's reaction to the situation as he perceives it is to save Chad, but his motives for doing so compromise

his personal integrity as is clearly seen in a conversation between him and Waymarsh as they discuss the reasons that it is "indispensable" for Chad to be returned to America and his mother:

"Indispensable to whom? To you?"
"Yes," Strether presently said.
"Because if you get him you also get
Mrs. Newsome?"
Strether faced it. "Yes." (p. 76)

Thus Strether's reaction is basically in terms of Mrs. Newsome's reaction. As he is told: "You assist her to expiate--which is rather hard when you've yourself not sinned" (p. 47). Although he reiterates that "he wasn't there for his own profit--not, that is, the direct" (p. 65), in the long run he most certainly does stand to gain at least emotionally. "He would have done anything for Mrs. Newsome" (p. 59), for she is one of the few people to have gained admittance to his wasteland of a life, a life devoid of success and pleasurable experience (p. 58).

There is a marked contrast between the introduction and the conclusion. Some things remain true: Chad is seen correctly as inadequate, and there is a sexual relationship. But the second major group of perceptions will reverse these conclusions. Otherwise, Strether ironically intends to save Chad from a woman whom he will ultimately have to save from Chad; needless to say, he also revises his whole attitude toward the unencountered Mme. de Vionnet. And he regards the European culture as injurious to Chad when he eventually will regard his own American

culture as injurious to the same person; moreover, he ultimately will believe Chad to be unworthy of Europe.

The reality of the action he must take is also quite different in that a person other than himself figures strongly in the motivation. In short, Strether actually does not possess an identity at the beginning of the novel other than his strong conviction that he must remain true to his fiancée's motives and his almost helpless subjection to every impression about him, a compulsion to perceive which forces upon him an almost uncontrollable objectivity.

The second major group of preliminary conclusions at which Strether arrives is the most important business of the novel, for it is here that Strether begins to perceive his inner reality, and to reconcile it with the situation about him. Strether's initial hypothesis is supplanted by a series of conclusions which virtually end in an antithesis. Within this set of conclusions, there are two divisions of perceptions, somewhat similar to the two divisions, the perceived situation and the perceived necessary action referred to above. The division of the perceived situation is unchanged. The second division changes in that, while Strether yet perceives his own reality under the impact of the situation, he is forced to restrain his desire to act out of respect for his obligation to Mrs. Newsome. The suspension of action in this section allows James to load the text richly with

passages of passive contemplation of perceived experience which develop the character of Strether and establish him as a man primarily concerned with "seeing."

In his perception of the situation, Strether comes to the following conclusions. First, he finds himself suddenly "captured" (p. 71) by the friends, home, and environment of the yet unseen Chad. Then he meets Chad, and in one of the passages most sharply underlining sudden perception, he realizes that "Chad had been made over" (p. 103). Furthermore, he perceives that Chad is refined from his original coarseness into a worthy, cultivated man, possessing "dignity...comparative austerity...quality" with "self-respect" and emanating a "sense of power", all of which is characterized by an ability to perform socially with the greatest grace and tact (pp. 103-07).

Strether immediately realizes that there must be a "prime producing cause", but he is unable to determine what it might be: "There were too many clues then that Strether still lacked, and these clues to clues were among them" (p. 110). And so, under the impact of the realization that the situation is to be quite different from the hypothesis, Strether rapidly begins to substitute new sets of hypotheses. It is significant that Europe and the refined Chad have made such an impression upon him that his first hypothesis is almost completely antithetical: "There's no woman" (p. 114). This statement is rather

quickly withdrawn, for Mrs. Newsome must have a woman; therefore Strether must find one. He is assured that there is one by an expatriate American friend, Maria Gostrey: "There must, behind every appearance to the contrary, still be somebody...a woman....It's one of the things that have to be. [And she is] excellent!" (p. 117). Maria adds a "warning, [of] considerable help": "[Chad is] not as good as you think!...He really does want to shake her off" (p. 118). Strether, however, is too influenced by the fact that the more he sees Chad, "the better he seems", and the awareness of this reality is neatly pushed to the end of the novel by Strether's emotional response to an unforeseen excellence.

Assuming now that there is a woman, Strether is led to believe by both Little Bilham, another American expatriate, and Maria Gostrey that "it's a virtuous attachment" (p. 124); this later will be revealed as a matter of definition, but Strether now accepts it as literally true, which places him at ease in terms of the conventional American morality he has come to support. He finds that two women are involved, "mother and daughter" (p. 124), and concludes that the daughter, Jeanne, was "the virtuous attachment" (p. 152); but upon finally questioning Chad, he is given the answer: "[Mme. de Vionnet's] my hitch.... She's too good a friend...to leave without...sacrifice.... I owe her so much" (p. 163). Strether assures himself that the only connection is that Chad "was indebted for

alterations, and she was thereby in a position to have sent in her bill for expenses incurred in reconstruction" (p. 163). Strether concludes that Mme. de Vionnet's "life [is] absolutely without reproach" (p. 165).

Strether now feels free to meet Mme. de Vionnet on a more personal basis, which he does and is immediately captivated by her as he realizes her to be:

...one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met, whose very presence, look, voice, the mere contemporaneous fact of whom, from the moment it was at all presented, made a relation of mere recognition. (p. 175)

He soon obligates himself to her as far as he might do so while restrained by fidelity to Mrs. Newsome; he agrees to "save [her] if [he] can" (p. 177) by keeping Chad's "mother patient" (p. 175).

Strether discovers Mme. de Vionnet is married and unable to be freed legally from her husband. It is brought to his attention that the virtuous attachment may be somewhat of an ordeal to Chad, but Strether attributes "a very high ideal of conduct" (p. 198) to the younger man, and arrives at this final conclusion: "Is it for her to have turned a man out so wonderfully...only for somebody else?...When it's for each other that people give things up they don't miss them....Let them face the future together!" (p. 199). He has resolved to "stick...[to the] unassailably innocent relation" (p. 208). Having finally made his stand, Strether is prepared to persuade Mrs.

Newsome of Mme. de Vionnet's excellence. Having written her of this, he awaits his reply. Both he and Chad are "ready to go" (p. 215); Strether's intentions are that Chad return to America to "plead" with Mrs. Newsome for Mme. de Vionnet and the life which has refined him so much (p. 215).

Thus Strether has arrived at a set of conclusions antithetical to his original hypothesis. Strether has reversed his conception of Chad, "the other woman", and European immorality. He has been led up some blind alleys on his path to the antithesis, but he is now in possession of "the clues to clues" (p. 110), and, erroneously believing them to be the ultimate truth, is prepared to act.

The process has been made somewhat complex by James. It will be noted that Strether's perception of each successive hypothesis serves as the reason for his movement through the various scenes of Paris, attending parties, visiting homes, and conversing with others; at all moments he seems to be on an overt quest for the truth of the situation, or to be covertly receptive to relevant impressions. It becomes increasingly evident that the process of intellectual vision is the organizing factor of the novel and the primary motive for the creation of action, and as will be seen, characters.

The situation now has been partially perceived by Strether. It is now time to turn to the parallel of this

section, Strether's vision of himself. This will be, as James noted in the quoted preface, the "essence" of the novel--Strether's perception of surrounding excellence and his realization of personal loss. Although the discussion will treat this second group of perceptions as parallel for convenient organization, it will be necessary to unite perceptions of self with perceptions of the situation at the conclusion of the passage.

Strether's perceptions of self are related to, and even catalyzed by, the European atmosphere.⁷ Although he may have some apprehensions concerning Europe, particularly in reference to its effect upon Chad, Strether's first response is "a consciousness of personal freedom as he had not known for years", and he immediately opens his mind to "the immediate and the sensible" (p. 4). He feels himself "launched in something of which the sense would be quite disconnected from the sense of his past" as he realizes himself involved with a "civilization more subtle" than America (p. 7). He also is overwhelmed by memories of his youth "in the far-off time, at twenty-five" (p. 12) when he spent a vacation in Paris with his wife, and he

⁷The impact of Europe upon Strether was omitted from the discussion of the introduction, for Europe is an extremely active and positive stimulus upon him, which serves as a continual theme throughout at least these first two divisions of the novel; the European theme primarily serves as a foil to the Pockocks in the third division. To regard this topic in sections would deprive it of its significance.

feels he has "come back, after long years, in something already so like the evening of life, only to be exposed [again] to [life]" (p. 28). He finds himself, in this interlude before meeting Chad, "feeling the brush of the wing of the stray spirit of youth" (p. 35).

Strether, however, has initial scruples about enjoying Europe. He finds himself failing "to enjoy" (p. 12) because he is "always considering something else; something else...than the thing of the moment. The obsession of the other thing is the terror" (p. 14). He rebukes himself for wanting "things that he shouldn't know what to do with" (p. 28). Thus he must continually excuse his enjoyment by relating it to his task: "What carried him hither and yon was an admirable theory that nothing he would do would not be in some manner related to what he fundamentally had on hand" (p. 53).

Beneath the conflict of "escape...in finding himself so free" (p. 56) and of a sense of duty and restraint, Strether often turns to his past life in sadness and remorse:

...he had failed, as he considered, in everything, in each relation and in half a dozen trades which...made, might still make, for an empty present....It had not been, so much achievement missed, a light yoke nor a short road. It was at present as if the backward picture had hung there, the long crooked course, gray in the shadow of his solitude. It had been a dreadful, cheerful, sociable community; but though there had been people enough all round it, there had been but three or four persons

in it....there remained an ache sharp enough to make the spirit, at the sight, now and again, of some fair young man just growing up, wince with the thought of an opportunity lost. Had ever a man... lost so much and even done so much for so little?...acceptance of fate was all he had at fifty-five to show. (pp. 58-59)

His dominant personal insight at this point is: "If the playhouse was not closed, his seat at least had fallen to somebody else" (p. 61).

But Paris is beginning to act upon this acceptance: "Buried for long years in dark corners...these few germs had sprouted again under forty-eight hours of Paris", and he feels "the general stirred life of connections long since individually dropped" (p. 60). Among the elements of the city which affect Strether are complexity, antiquity, and its foreign quality, but he seems to find the dominant characteristic of the city to be in its order and harmony which have an overall effect of art: "Paris... the air had a taste as of something mixed with art, something that presented nature as a white-capped master-chef" (p. 55). One of his more vivid realizations of the synonymy of Paris and art occurs at the Luxembourg gardens. The scene involves crowds, frequent points of interest, foreign clothing and customs, antiquity in ruins and in the absence of remembered structures, and flashes of colors and forms punctuating the whole vista of Strether's vision. Yet this complex mass is ordered by the regular

and geometric paths of soldiers, and is seen in tableaux of women and children. All is "sunnily 'composed'". Europe is ordered by art; beauty, harmony, and skill are basic characteristics of the continent as seen through the city (supra, p. 55). It will be seen that its inhabitants possess the same characteristics.

It is during his first visit at Chad's home, at which he finds only Bilham, that Strether begins to undergo a distinct change. So far, he has encountered only the surface of Europe, visible to any tourist, although he has been more deeply affected than the normal person. Now he meets the inhabitants of the country and discovers a new mode of existence.

The incident has a profound effect upon Strether. He finds that "he had been captured" by the realization that "everything was there that he wanted, everything that could make the moment an occasion that would do beautifully" (pp. 71-72). He now considers Paris to be exhilarating and virtually gloats over the time before him that he may spend there: "Strether had not had for years so rich a consciousness of time--a bag of gold into which he constantly dipped for a handful" (p. 77). He is overwhelmed by the "softness, vagueness...positive sweetness" of the city.

This accelerated response to Paris owes a great deal to Strether's growing awareness of the difference between

its inhabitants and himself. He realizes that he is "in the presence of new measures, other standards, a different scale of relations" (p. 78); thus he finds himself "so often at sea that his sense of the range of reference was merely general and that he on several occasions guessed and interpreted only to doubt" (p. 80). He feels that he is in a trap, caught between obligation and enjoyment of this new way of life, a pleasure which seems in direct opposition to his duty for "the central fact of the place was neither more nor less, when analyzed--and a pressure superficial sufficed--than the fundamental impropriety of Chad's situation, round about which they thus seemed cynically clustered" (p. 80). Strether has had contact with the catalyst of Europe; the process of intense personal and external perceptions, which will change him so much, has begun. He has elected to choose a course which involves "the chance of the possibility, the danger, of being influenced in a sense counter to Mrs. Newsome's own feelings" (p. 76).

Thus Strether sees a chink in the concrete American attitudes he has possessed during his life. He realizes that there might be a valid obverse to the way of life he has always held as the universal existence. In his logical honesty, he resolves to examine thoroughly this new environment. The process of vision has fully begun. The next major incident is Strether's first meeting with Chad.

Although much of this moment has already been discussed, it will be worthwhile to note the heavy emphasis placed upon perception, for it is at this point that Strether undergoes one of the most highly pitched perceptive moments in the novel. The incident is characterized by excitement and anticipation, by shock and distress; each of these reactions rapidly displace the other in the whirl of Strether's chaotic realization that the present situation is in opposition to that which he originally held to be true.

However, the most important point of the incident is Strether's compulsion to extract every bit of fact and implication from any given occurrence by going "over it afterwards again and again" (p. 93). For Strether, mental and physical stimulation lie not in acting, but in the analysis of action. It seems strange, but Strether actually is physically stimulated by this incident: he "gasped" at the "sensation" (p. 93), was under "high pressure" and "tension...in the presence of a fact that occupied his whole mind, that occupied for the half-hour his senses themselves all together", was forced by circumstances into the restraint of "a mere strained smile and an uncomfortable flush" (p. 94), and felt "wild unrest" (p. 98) throughout the whole episode.

At this point, there exists in Strether's mind a strong disinclination to perceive and an equally strong

motivation to perceive. The basis of this problem is explicated in the following passage:

No one could explain better when needful, nor put more conscience into an account or a report; which burden of conscience is perhaps exactly the reason why his heart always sank when the clouds of explanation gathered. His highest ingenuity was in keeping the sky of life clear of them. Whether or no he had a grand idea of the lucid, he held that nothing ever was in fact--for any one else--explained. One went through the vain motions, but it was mostly a waste of life. A personal relation was a relation only so long as people either perfectly understood or, better still, didn't care if they didn't. From the moment they cared if they didn't it was living by the sweat of one's brow; and the sweat of one's brow was just what one might buy one's self off from keeping the ground free of the wild weed of delusion. (p. 97)

This passage clearly explains the previously noted physical distress Strether experiences in an incomprehensible situation, but the motivation must be explained further. Although an ethical motivation is suggested by "conscience", the emphasis seems to indicate a metaphysical motivation. The nature of Strether's mind forces him to apply it to reality in an effort to understand its nature, even though "nothing" could be "explained". The necessity is so great that "conscience" demands that he function thus or not function at all; thus the matter must be "perfectly understood" or the thinker must be one of those who "didn't care". This passage marks a central point in the novel. Prior to this, Strether has not functioned

adequately, for he has not actually applied his sensitive mind to reality; he "didn't care". Now he is beginning to practice his basic function--perception--in the face of the discomfort it involves. This way he will find himself.

Two important internal realizations occur at this time. Strether feels himself "young" (pp. 97-98) before Chad; accordingly, he realizes his comparative lack of experience and a necessity to mature, despite his "fifty" years (p. 98). Strether also finds his association with American attitudes to be "humiliating" as they are characterized by "social sightlessness" (p. 94), accompanied by "a certain smugness" and "browsing pride", which he finds "imputed to [Chad] a vulgarity which...Strether felt ...falling straight upon himself" (p. 110). When Strether questions Chad upon the morality of his relationship to the suspected woman, Chad defeats the whole of America in moral terms by accusing Strether of having "a low mind!" (p. 109). Contemplating this shocking accusation, Strether admits to himself that "he didn't know what was bad... [or] what was good", that he had never known the difference, and that he had never particularly cared as long "as others didn't know how little he knew it" (pp. 110-11). This moral confusion is a dominant characteristic of Strether, which further substantiates the statement that Strether's central motivation is not an ethical one.

The final major internal realization of this section forms the center of the novel and stands, as James himself states (v. supra, p. 1), as the essence of all which has occurred and will occur. This scene begins at the garden of the home of Gloriani, a famous European sculptor. Strether first marks the freedom and easiness of the Europeans about him:

...in whose liberty to be as they were he was aware that he absolutely rejoiced. His fellow guests were multiplying, and these things, their liberty, their intensity, their variety, their conditions at large, were in fusion in the admirable medium of the scene.
(p. 134)

The harmonized variety and the freedom to be intensely one's self strikes Strether as totally, unfortunately foreign to his American experience. Then with an almost mystical insight into the nature of the man, Strether meets Gloriani:

This assault of images became for a moment, in the address of the distinguished sculptor, almost formidable: Gloriani showed him... a face that was like an open letter in a foreign tongue. With his genius in his eyes, his manners on his lips, his long career behind him and his honors and rewards all round, the great artist...affected our friend as a dazzling prodigy of type...with the light, with the romance of glory. Strether, in contact with that element as he had never yet so intimately been, had the consciousness of opening to it, for the happy instant, all the windows of his mind, of letting this rather gray interior drink in, for once, the sun of a clime not marked in his old geography. He was to see again, repeatedly, in remembrance, the medal-like Italian face, in which every line was an artist's own, in which time told only as

tone and consecration; and he was to recall in especial, as the penetrating radiance, as the communication of the illustrious spirit itself, the manner in which, while they stood briefly...he was held by the sculptor's eyes. He was not soon to forget them, was to think of them, all unconscious, un-intending, preoccupied though they were, as the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed. He was in fact quite to cherish his vision of it, to play with it in idle hours; only speaking of it to no one and quite aware he couldn't have spoken without appearing to talk nonsense. Was what it had told him or what it had asked him the greater of the mysteries? Was it the most special flare, unequalled, supreme, of the aesthetic torch, lighting that wondrous world forever, or was it above all the long, straight shaft sunk by a personal acuteness that life had seasoned to steel? ...The deep human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile--oh, the terrible life behind it! (pp. 135-36)

Strether has encountered an absolute. Gloriani represents a pure perception, capable of sounding the depths of human experience and translating to perfection this experience into universal enlightenment. Strether is overwhelmed by the man. America, for the moment, has disappeared entirely in the face of this dominating European personality. He can only feel that "he had positively been on trial" by Europe--he had positively been on trial" by Europe--he, who had come to judge (p. 136).

Strether sees Chad moving easily through the foreign and absorbing gathering, and "this fell into its place... and made almost a new light, giving him, as a concatenation, something more he could enjoy....Chad...was a kind of link

for hopeless fancy, an implication of possibilities--oh, if everything had been different!" (p. 136). Strether begins to see Chad as his path to the new, desirable life. Another theme begins to solidify as Strether, who had been longing for youth, now begins to see this youth, perfected, in Chad. He has begun to identify himself with the younger man and to connect his life with the other's: "Chad...it was that rare youth he should have enjoyed being 'like'" (p. 152).

Yet, Strether, once the first impression has passed, manages to find some qualifications. He is struck by the fact that everyone possesses so much "visual sense", so much ability to recognize others for what they are, but he feels that there "are moments when it strikes one that [they] haven't any other...any moral [sense]" (p. 142). He is treated rather abruptly by friends of Mme. de Vionnet, whom he has just met for the first time, and feels their rudeness to be "false to the Woollett scale and the Woollett humanity" (p. 147). He sees that the gathering in Gloriani's garden could be "a great world covertly tigerish, which came to him, across the lawn, in the charming air, as a waft from the jungle" (p. 151). He sees that although Europe may be rich, it may have a lack and that although America may seem comparatively deficient, it may have positive qualities. It is a credit to the keenness of Strether's perception that he may so

quickly gain objectivity after meeting the overwhelming Gloriani in what could not have been more than fifteen minutes earlier.

However, the vivid impressions of the party have made a deep mark upon Strether. As he contemplates them, he gradually begins to perceive the most important truth of his life. In the following sentences, which James states are the center as well as the germ of the novel,⁸ he passes this judgment upon himself as he speaks to the young Bilham:

...don't forget that you're young--blessedly young; be glad of it, on the contrary, and live up to it. Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what have you had? This place and these impressions of Chad and of people I've seen at his place--well, have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped that into my mind. I see it now. I haven't done so enough before--and now I'm old; too old at any rate for what I see. Oh, I do see, at least; and more than you'd believe or I can express. It's too late. And it's as if the train had fairly waited at the station for me without my having had the gumption to know it was there. Now I hear its faint, receding whistle miles and miles down the line. What one loses one loses; make no mistake about that. The affair--I mean the affair of life--couldn't, no doubt, have been different for me; for it's, at the best, a tin mould, either fluted and embossed, with ornamental excrescences, or else smooth and dreadfully plain, in which,

⁸James, The Art of the Novel, p. 307.

a helpless jelly, one's consciousness is poured--so that one 'takes' the form, as the great cook says, and is more or less compactly held by it: one lives, in fine, as one can. Still, one has the illusion of freedom; therefore don't be, like me, without the memory of that illusion. I was either, at the right time, too stupid or too intelligent to have it; I don't quite know which. Of course, at present, I'm a case of reaction against the mistake; and the voice of reaction should, no doubt, always be taken with an allowance. But that doesn't affect the point that the right time is now yours. The right time is any time that one is still so lucky as to have. You've plenty; that's the great thing; you're, as I say, damn you, so happily and hatefully young. Don't, at any rate, miss things out of stupidity. Of course I don't take you for a fool, or I shouldn't be addressing you thus awfully. Do what you like so long as you don't make my mistake. For it was a mistake. Live!"
(pp. 149-50)

Strether has been deprived of the full experience of his youth. America has deprived him, the restricting attitudes of his neighbors have deprived him, and he has deprived himself through weakness and apathy. He is now old enough to realize the existence of the "mould", the futility of escaping a destiny prescribed by that which early forms a man. He realizes that only as a youth could he have had the "illusion" which would endow him with the freedom he now values so highly in the realization of its loss. He feels he did not live, did not experience, when he could do so without the burdens of reality facing him.

But a question must be considered by the reader at

this point. Has not Strether in reality in the past few weeks been in possession of the illusion of freedom from time to time? Does not the text indicate that he is capable of experiencing thoroughly, even more thoroughly than the normal man? Isn't he showing signs of developing the perceptive depths of a Gloriani, if not the "tigerish" amorality? These questions must be considered, but they cannot be conclusively answered. Strether, at the conclusion of the novel, returns to America, where he presumably cannot practice the developing ability to experience deeply in the varied rich terms of Europe. Furthermore, the statement that he is "always considering something else; something else...than the thing of the moment. This obsession is the terror" (p. 14) still holds true. Strether is restrained to the "mould"; this is the "terror". But these answers cannot be held to be final. Strether has developed and will develop. Could he not still escape? The novel does not permit the reader to answer this, for it closes before substantial information can be possessed. An answer, if there must be one at all, can be found only in terms of the only conclusive statement evident; Strether sees--he sees deeply and thoroughly his loss. As James says, this is "the business of my tale and the march of my action, not to say the precious moral of everything," (v. supra, p. 1). The value and the meaning of this sight must be determined. But more must be

extracted from the novel before attempting to do this.

The preceding realizations of personal loss serve as a motive, a subjective one, for Strether's partial alliance with the lovers. Strether has lost his own youth, but he has already made some identification with Chad. As he is impelled to some sort of action under the impact of his realization, he will aid that youth closest to him to attain his desires and to retain a life in the rich European environment. This decision is fully resolved when Strether receives a cable from Mrs. Newsome, stating that she is sending her daughter, her daughter's husband, and the husband's sister to Europe if Strether does not "immediately sail" (p. 222). He may only regard this as an "ultimatum" (p. 222). After an evening of contemplation, he meets Chad. His message to the younger man is--"stay" (p. 222). This is ironical, for Chad is completely prepared to return to America. But Strether has allied himself with his young European friends and wishes Chad to encounter his sister and her entourage in order that he may clearly weigh the advantages and disadvantages of returning to his home. Furthermore, Strether feels that he himself is yet "not ready" to return (p. 224). He has "immensely" felt "the charm of the life" and wishes to assure himself that his personal discoveries have reached the level of "a certitude that has been tested--that has passed through the fire" (p. 224). He does this in the

face of a fact bluntly stated by Chad: "Well, if she sends out the Pococks it will be that she doesn't trust you, that bears upon--well, you know what" (p. 226).

By his alliance, Strether has achieved a satisfactory identification with Chad and his situation, and thereby with youth:

I'm youth--youth for the trip to Europe. I began to be young, or at least to get the benefit of it, the moment I met Miss Gostrey... and that's what has been taking place ever since. I never had the benefit at the proper time--which comes to saying that I never had the thing itself. I'm having the benefit at this moment; I had it the other day when I said to Chad 'Wait'; I shall have it again when Sarah Pocock arrives. It's a benefit that would make a poor show for many people; and I don't know who else ...could begin to see in it what I feel. I don't get drunk; I don't pursue the ladies; I don't spend money; I don't even write sonnets. But nevertheless I'm making up for what I didn't have early. I cultivate my little benefit in my own little way. It amuses me more than anything that has happened to me in all my life. They may say what they like--it's my surrender, it's my tribute, to youth. One puts that in where one can--it has to come in somewhere, if only out of the lives, the conditions, the feelings of other persons. Chad gives me the sense of it, for all his gray hairs, which merely make it solid in him and safe and serene; and she Mme. de Vionnet does the same for all her being older than he, for all her marriageable daughter, her separated husband, her agitated history. Though they're young enough, my pair, I don't say they're, in the freshest way, their own absolutely prime adolescence; for that has nothing to do with it. The point is that they're mine. Yes, they're

my youth; since, somehow, at the right time, nothing else ever was. (pp. 235-36)

With these words Strether affirms his relationship with Chad, Mme. de Vionnet, and youth. Thus the situation and the internal realization of loss of youth finally merge, for Strether can now interpret the situation as his chance to regain the lost experience, rather than as an onerous duty which would serve as a stepping-stone to his successful marriage. It must be understood that the sacrifice of this marriage is the sacrifice of security. Strether has acted with the courage of unburdened youth and has tasted the freedom which is the staple of that youth. He might even be more free, for he has sacrificed so much--emotional security, financial security, his profession, his community--for the full freedom of a man who has eternally known only burdens. It can be anticipated that Strether will have a deep consciousness of every moment of that which he expects. But his labor is still before him. He must meet, and supervise Chad's meeting with, the Pococks. This will solidify his stand and, yet unknown to him, modify it.

With Strether's release as an ambassador of America, the third section before the conclusion begins. In this section, situation and internal perception are close enough so that they need not be dealt with separately, for, with Strether's conscious identification of self

with situation, he no longer must turn from thoughts of duty to others to be involved with thoughts of self.

When the Pococks arrive, Strether finds it no easy task to meet them. Sarah Pocock is such a dominating woman that Strether involuntarily thinks of her with "a blush of guilt", feeling that by her he may be "recommitted...to Woollett, as juvenile offenders are committed to reformatories" (p. 244). Although the overt reason for the meeting is the hope that Sarah Pocock, the major representative of Mrs. Newsome, will see the immense improvement in Chad, Strether has apprehensions that "she practically wouldn't see", and Chad very perceptively states that "they're children; they play at life", which, coming from his charge, was "significant and reassuring" to Strether (p. 247).

Strether's first solid contact with the new set of American ambassadors is with Sarah Pocock's husband, Jim, who was in Europe only for "recreation" (p. 257). "Small and fat and constantly facetious", Jim is virtually empty of intellectual, moral, or ethical quality; he is only conspicuous for "light-gray clothes, for white hats, for very big cigars and very little stories" (p. 258). This predecessor of Babbitt and the later generation of gray flannel suits only can slip out of social "shallowness" when he speaks "out of the experience of a husband" (p. 261), for if Jim knows nothing else, he certainly

knows he is married to the dominating and wealthy Sarah, to whom "he left almost everything" (p. 257). In the few initial moments of the renewal of their acquaintance, Strether "fairly grew to dislike him, to feel him extravagantly common" and completely "vulgar" (p. 262). It is a marked and fortifying shock for him to realize that it might "even become the same should he marry in a few months" (p. 258).

Strether then holds his first extended conversation with Sarah Pocock. Mme. de Vionnet is also at the meeting. Sarah's first words are "I know Paris", spoken "in a tone that breathed a certain chill on Strether's heart" (p. 264). All the while, Mme. de Vionnet is "giving him over to ruin" (p. 264), for she makes their alliance very obvious. After the initial jolt, however, Strether "was with" Mme. de Vionnet, "excitedly, inspiringly" waiting "in suspense for something from her that he might show her how he could take it" (p. 269). The upshot of the incident is that Strether "can't surprise them into the smallest sign of his not being the same old Chad they've been for the last three years glowering at across the sea", for the Pococks are playing the "deep game" (p. 279). Sarah Pocock refuses "patronage...and support, which were but other names for a false position" (p. 267). This allows Strether to see Mrs. Newsome more clearly through her daughter as an implacably adamant being, who requires

only that her will be satisfied.

Strether, shortly after this incident, has an insight into a phase of Europe which does not entirely please him. He discovers that Chad and Mme. de Vionnet are planning to wed her daughter to a young man who is a stranger to Jeanne; the plans are being made more or less without her permission. Strether feels:

...as if he had even himself been concerned in something deep and dim. He had allowed for depths, but these were greater: and it was if, oppressively...he was responsible for what they had now thrown up to the surface. It was--through something ancient and cold in it--what he would have called the real thing. In short his hostess's news, though he couldn't have explained why, was a sensible shock, and his oppression a weight he felt he must, somehow or other, immediately get rid of....He was prepared to suffer--before his own inner tribunal--for Chad; he was prepared to suffer even for Mme. de Vionnet. But he wasn't prepared to suffer for the little girl.
(pp. 291-92)

Strether has encountered an amorality in the expatriate Americans of Chad's coterie and in Gloriani and his followers, but this was only a momentary glimpse. Now he finds himself face to face with a new code of morality, which he cannot regard as truly moral; it is an "ancient and cold" system, which might have belonged to the barbarians who fathered Europe's civilization. Strether further realizes Chad is lacking as he concludes that "Chad will [not] tell [him] anything" about the situation (p. 293). This implies to Strether that Chad is overtly using him

for his own personal gain and does not wish to bring out any details which might dissuade the older man from condoning his actions. Strether feels "that he had been effectually bribed. The only difficulty was that he couldn't quite have said with what. It was if he had sold himself, but hadn't somehow got the cash" (p. 249). This scene places Strether slightly closer to Mme. de Vionnet than to Chad, in anticipation of his final alliance as he fully realizes that he "shall be used...to the last drop of [his] blood" (p. 299).

Mamie Pocock next figures strongly in Strether's widening perception of Europe and America. Although Sarah and Jim strike Strether unfavorably, he sees Mamie quite differently. From the first, he realizes that only Mamie sees her brother Jim as he really is; Mrs. Pocock and Mrs. Newsome are completely blind to his liabilities in achieving their purpose (p. 300). Strether's appreciation of the girl's insight expands appreciably when he encounters her alone in her room. Although he sees her drawbacks in that she dresses "less as a young lady than as an old one", is in dress somewhat "committed to vanity", has an air of "benevolent patronage--such a hint of the polysyllabic as might make her something of a bore toward middle age", all made incongruous by "her flat little voice, the voice, naturally, unaffectedly yet, of a girl of fifteen" (pp. 305-06), Strether realizes, with a shock,

that "she was, of all people,...on the side and of the party of Mrs. Newsome's original ambassador" (p. 306). Furthermore, he discovers from her that she has, during a visit with Jeanne de Vionnet, perceived a great deal more than he has (p. 309). During a subsequent conversation with Little Bilham, who has become interested in Mamie, he finds that she also completely perceived the perfection of Chad, the cause of that perfection, and has resolved to do nothing whatsoever in relation to Chad as she fully realizes that he has no need for her. As Strether sees the qualities of the girl--American qualities--dominating her imperfections, he feels "as under the breath of some vague western whiff, homesick and freshly restless" (p. 307). He decides to make a match between Mamie and Little Bilham for the following reason, which exhibits a distinctly modified attitude toward Europe, Chad, and Mme. de Vionnet:

I want...to have been at least to that extent constructive--even expiatory. I've been sacrificing so to strange gods that I feel I want to put on record, somehow, my fidelity--fundamentally unchanged, after all--to our own. I feel as if my hands were embrued with the blood of monstrous alien altars--of another faith altogether. (p. 319)

During this time, Strether, Mme. de Vionnet, and Chad have been laying the siege against Sarah Pocock, who still maintains the implacability of "the deep game" (p. 279). She finally gives her judgment upon the

situation in a scene which is extremely brutal in its tone. She flatly condemns Chad's development as "hideous" (p. 346), describes Mme. de Vionnet as not "even an apology for a decent woman" (p. 343), and banishes Strether as a man whose "conduct [is] an outrage to women like us" (p. 342). Strether realizes himself condemned by Mrs. Newsome herself and thus by American morality as "Mrs. Newsome was essentially all moral pressure" (p. 341). Yet, he staunchly defends Mme. de Vionnet to the last, feeling "he could always speak for the woman he had so definitely promised to 'save'", even though he realizes "that one might...perish with her" (p. 345).

Strether is given one more opportunity to redeem himself. If he arrives with Chad in "five or six weeks" to return with the Pococks to America, he may be forgiven (p. 354). He asks for this delay, for he wishes to find out for himself if he is "weak" or if he may "have the comfort, the little glory of thinking he's strong" (p. 355); furthermore, he believes that "he hadn't...yet 'come out'" (p. 354), that there is yet more for him to discover in Paris.

Notwithstanding his request for delay, Strether has come face to face with Mrs. Newsome. He sees her as "all cold thought", as having "worked the whole thing out in advance...for [him] as well as for herself", leaving "no margin...for any alteration" (p. 358). Mrs. Newsome

"imagined...horrors", and Strether "by her vision--
extraordinarily intense...was to find them; and that
he didn't, that he couldn't, that, as she evidently
felt, he wouldn't--this evidently didn't at all...
'suit' her book. It was more than she could bear. That
was her disappointment" (p. 359). Moreover, Mrs. Newsome
wasn't imagining "stupidly", but "ignorantly" (p. 360),
and the ignorance had been dissipated in that Sarah, who
corresponds thoroughly with her, "isn't ignorant...yet
she keeps up the theory of the horrible" (p. 360).
The point is that it does not matter to Mrs. Newsome
whether or not there is evil as much as it matters that
Strether did not obey her. The obeisance, not the
actuality, counts with her. Strether realizes that "it
was...the woman herself...the whole moral and intellectual
being or block, that Sarah brought me over to take or to
leave". He realizes that "at home" he "had" taken it.
However, he now concludes that "what it comes to...is
that you've got morally and intellectually to get rid
of her" (supra, p. 358). As he cannot modify her without
nullifying her, and as he cannot subscribe to her beliefs
without submerging his own existence entirely in hers as
he had done in the past, he must irrevocably leave her.
Thus Strether comes to meet the realization that his
personal integrity must be retained. He must function
in his own right, the way of objective perception, or not

function at all in the death of his personality within that of Mrs. Newsome. For Strether, to perceive is to experience, and not to experience is not to exist.

This section is brought to a full conclusion during an evening spent at Chad's home a day or so after the Pococks' departure from Paris. The evening begins almost mystically with "an hour full of strange suggestions, persuasions, recognitions; one of those that he was to recall, at the end of his adventure, as the particular handful that most had counted" (p. 362). The hour is spent in solitude surrounded by the aesthetic atmosphere provided by the beautiful, harmonized furnishings and possessions of Chad's apartment, lit by "the great flare of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar" (p. 362).

Strether looks back upon the past three months, reflecting upon the changes within him, which had occurred during the spring in Paris:

He had heard, of old, only what he could then hear; what he could do now was to think of three months ago as a point in the far past. All voices had grown thicker and meant more things; they crowded on him as he moved about--it was the way they sounded together that wouldn't let him be still.
(p. 363)

Strether feels a dual emotion as he contemplates his progression: "He felt, strangely, as sad as if he had come for some wrong, and yet as excited as if he had come for

some freedom" (p. 363). It is, however, the latter emotion which dominates, since it was for freedom that Strether so recently had forsaken his ambassadorship and all it implied:

But the freedom was what was most in the place and the hour; it was the freedom that most brought him round again to the youth of his own that he had long ago missed. He could have explained little enough to-day either why he had missed it or why, after years and years, he should care that he had; the main truth of the actual appeal of everything was none the less that everything represented the substance of his loss, put it within reach, within touch, made it, to a degree it had never been, an affair of the senses. That was what it became for him at this singular time, the youth he had long ago missed--a queer concrete presence, full of mystery, yet full of reality, which he could handle, taste, smell, the deep breathing of which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well as within; it was in the summer night, of the wide late life of Paris, the unceasing soft, quick rumble, below of the little lighted carriages that, in the press, always suggested the gamblers he had seen of old at Monte-Carlo pushing up to the tables. (p. 363)

Strether in his freedom has returned as much as possible to his youth. In the atmosphere of the city, he has recaptured something of that which he had lost.

Yet Strether is in a certain bondage. Chad appears, and Strether marks that which is most significant about him: "the truth that everything came happily back with him to his knowing how to live" (p. 364). He realizes that "the meaning of the facility [was]...that others did

surrender themselves" (p. 364). He finally perceives that "it was in truth essentially by bringing down his personal life to a function all subsidiary to the young man's own that he held together" (p. 364). Strether's bondage, however, is dependent upon his belief that Chad does know "how to live." He is to discover that Chad is not capable of experiencing as deeply as he supposed. Thus, Strether, rather than being in bondage to a human being as he formerly was, is in bondage to an ideal, an ideal of youth. Chad represents this youth to him, and, accordingly, Strether functions as "subsidiary" to the younger man. Strether can claim freedom in a sense, for that to which he is bound is an ideal of freedom, but, at this time, he is restricted by the representing human personality of Chad.

Strether at this point, however, is beginning to see past the idealistic veil with which he has draped Chad. Despite the "deep identities between them" (p. 373), he has already had misgivings about Chad's participation in the planned wedding for Jeanne, and in this conversation, which is his first with Chad since the departure of the Pockocks, Strether begins to doubt the sincerity of Chad's attitude toward Mme. de Vionnet. Chad indicates that he'd "like" Mamie Pockock "if she'd like me. Really, really" (p. 371), which leads Strether to ask him if he doesn't "care about a certain other person"

(p. 371). Chad replies, "I try not to--that is I have tried. I've done my best." (p. 371). His reason for wishing to withdraw from Mme. de Vionnet is that Strether had "set him on it" although he was "already on it a little" (p. 371). Although Strether has reversed his position, his original arguments for Chad's return to family and business had made a marked impression upon the younger man. Now Strether is forced to remind Chad that "more has been done for you, I think, than I've ever seen done--attempted perhaps, but never so successfully done--by one human being for another" and that the "repudiation and ingratitude" which Chad's family demands of him would be a highly unworthy act (p. 372).

With the completion of the third section, which has presented Strether with a clarified view of his American background, stressed his need for freedom to experience, and provided hints that he may not have understood Europe, Chad, and the situation, Strether is now prepared for the final set of perceptions he must make to complete his experience. Although the conclusion was treated briefly at the beginning of this discussion in order to clarify some of James' directions, it is now expedient to give it a much fuller interpretation.

The concluding section begins with a long walk which Strether takes in the country. After the "inward exercise which had dominated him" ...for three months,...

[with] so little intermission" (p. 376), he finds himself very tired. Now that he has no need to fear "a lapse from good faith" and that his "right was...established" to enjoy the exhilarating company of Mme. de Vionnet (p. 377), he has spent with the lady a good deal of time, which has "slipped along so smoothly, mild but not slow, and melting, liquefying, into...[a] happy illusion of idleness" (p. 378). Rested by this interval with a woman whom he admires greatly, he now walks in the country with a "sense of success, of a finer harmony in things" (p. 376), finding "proof of his freedom" (p. 377). He has withdrawn momentarily from "the play and the characters [which] had, without his knowing it till now, peopled all his space for him" (p. 379). By doing this, he has gained perspective upon the three months which have passed. His mind has readjusted, has enclosed the details which have swarmed in upon it, and has attained new strength through the relaxation of the preceding days and this day in particular. The contemplative and unforced perception of this period have rested Strether's mind, which is now exactly in the right state of clarity to encounter the last exhausting, necessary perceptions it must face.

Almost immediately after his walk, Strether sees a boat floating down the river to the inn at which he is to dine. One of the two occupants, a woman, sees him,

speaks to her companion, and the course of the boat suddenly wavers (p. 382), standing momentarily off the shore. Strether recognizes the woman as Mme. de Vionnet and the man with her as Chad. As the boat halts, Strether realizes:

...they would show nothing if they could feel sure he hadn't made them out; so that he had before him for a few seconds his own hesitation. It was a sharp, fantastic crisis that had popped up as if in a dream, and it had had only to last the few seconds to make him feel it as quite horrible. They were, thus, on either side, trying the other side, and all for some reason that broke the stillness like some unprovoked harsh note.
(p. 383)

Strether takes the situation in his own hands, calls them, is answered with "amazement and pleasantry", and meets them with the "odd impression as of violence averted--the violence of their having 'cut' him, out there in the eye of nature, on the assumption that he wouldn't know it" (p. 383).

On the basis of this incident, which does not last more than a few seconds, and of two or three observations, such as Mme. de Vionnet's vagueness on the time of the intended departure of the couple and their lack of warm clothing for the cool evening, Strether perceives the truth of the entire situation. This small accumulation of facts allows him to interpret the whole atmosphere of their evening together as one of "fiction and fable" (p. 386). The occurrence is a marked example of how little

James relies upon action for the presentation of his story and how thoroughly he utilizes an almost pure perception validly interpreting the smallest items of its surroundings into entire truths.

Strether very carefully notes that Chad virtually ignores the situation, allowing Mme. de Vionnet to handle the burden of explanation, which she does with great tact and grace, saving all from the embarrassment of reference to the truth that she is Chad's mistress. Strether makes a major step in realizing the error he has made in idealizing Chad:

He habitually left things to others, as Strether was so well aware, and it in fact came over our friend in these meditations that there had been as yet no such vivid illustration of his famous knowing how to live. (p. 387)

With the base of the ideal shaken, Strether is now prepared for its destruction.

Alone in his apartment, Strether tries to face the actuality of the situation, "the deep, deep truth of the intimacy revealed" (p. 388); "he almost blushed...for the way he had dressed the possibility in vagueness, as a little girl might have dressed her doll" (p. 388-89). He sees:

...his theory...had bountifully been that the facts were, specifically, none of his business, and were, over and above, so far as one had to do with them, intrinsically beautiful;... this might have prepared him for anything, as well as rendered him proof against mystification...but he had

been, at bottom, neither prepared nor proof; (p. 386)

.....

...[for] he had really been trying, all along, to suppose nothing. (p. 389)

Besides the difficulty of accepting the "central fact", Strether is disgusted with "the quantity of make-believe involved" (p. 388) throughout the whole situation. Strether has been deceived by his willingness to be deceived even more than by these people who were so remarkably superior to anyone of his previous experience. He is not only a dupe by his own volition, he is virtually a pander. The realization makes Strether feel "lonely and cold" (p. 389) as truth destroys the ideal for which he had struggled so painfully against the ironically accurate conclusions of the Americans.

Strether feels fully debauched:

...it [was] rubbed into him that the couple thus fixing his attention were intimate, that his intervention had absolutely aided and intensified their intimacy, and that, in fine, he must accept the consequence of that. He had absolutely become, himself, with his perceptions and his mistakes, his concessions and his reserves, the funny mixture, as it must seem to them of his braveries and his fears, the general spectacle of his art and his innocence, almost an added link and certainly a common, priceless ground for them to meet upon. (p. 399)

He feels that there is no reason "to see anyone at all any more at all; he might make an end as well now as ever, leaving things as they were, since he was doubt-

less not to leave them better, and taking his way home so far as should appear that a home remained to him" (p. 394). He is shaken by his realization of "something more acute in manners, more sinister in morals, more fierce in the national life" (p. 394). But he waits. Strether's need to perceive fully, a need something more than mere curiosity, holds him in Paris. For one thing, he wishes to see where Chad "would, at such a juncture, break out" (p. 393).

Mme. de Vionnet asks Strether to visit her. As he waits in the city for the hour of the meeting, he begins to relax in his view of the "sinister" fact he must live with:

He reverted in thought to his old tradition, the one he had been brought up on and which even so many years of life had but little worn away; the notion that the state of the wrongdoer...presented some special difficulty. (p. 395)

Strether's mind renews its strife for objectivity in the face of moral objections. When he meets Mme. de Vionnet, the first thing he realizes is that, in her graceful bearing and polished tact, "he could trust her to make deception right", for "as she presented things the ugliness...went out of them" (p. 398). However, the thought of Chad is now fully distasteful to him: "Chad was always letting people have their way when he felt that it would somehow turn his wheel for him; it somehow always did turn his wheel" (p. 399).

Mme. de Vionnet begins by expressing a desire that Strether remain in Paris with Chad and her, and then recriminates herself because she has "upset everything in [his] mind...in [his] sense of...all the decencies and possibilities. It gives [her] a kind of detestation... of life" (p. 401). Meanwhile, Strether observes the woman and the nervousness of her delivery, and he suddenly realizes:

...what was at bottom the matter with her was simply Chad himself. It was of Chad she was, after all, renewedly afraid; the strange strength of her passion was the very strength of her fear; she clung to him, Lambert Strether, as to a source of safety she had tested, and, generous, graceful, truthful as she might try to be, exquisite as she was, she dreaded the term of his being within reach. With this sharpest perception yet, it was like a chill in the air to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces so exploited. (p. 403)

Mme. de Vionnet needs Strether badly, for he can provide Chad with the morality which he is lacking by being an external conscience which will hold the young man at her side. Strether now clearly perceives the reality of Chad:

...she had but made Chad what he was-- so why could she think she had made him infinite? She had made him better, she had made him best, she had made him anything one would; but it came to our friend with supreme queerness that he was none the less only Chad....The work, however admirable, was nevertheless of the strict human order, and in short, it was marvellous that the companion

of mere earthly joys, of comforts, aberrations--however one classed them--within the common experience, should be so transcendently prized....He was held there by something so hard that it was fairly grim...the real coercion was to see a man ineffably adored.
(p. 403)

Chad is the Chad Strether remembered him to be before he first saw him, "a Chad who had, after all, simply...been too vulgar for his privilege" (p. 65). Strether, even after he saw him, glimpsed him accurately, momentarily, as "an irreducible young pagan" (p. 107). As finished as Mme. de Vionnet might make him, Chad is only changed on the surface. Beneath the polished exterior, he remains vulgarly egoistic and opportunistic, utilizing his polish to obtain material benefits. Mme. de Vionnet, seeing Strether as the only person who could affect the internal Chad and realizing that Strether is about to leave, is "afraid for her life!" (p. 403).

By her fear, Mme. de Vionnet is finally completely revealed to Strether:

...he could think of nothing but the passion, mature, abysmal, pitiful, she represented, and the possibilities she betrayed. She was older for him tonight, visibly less exempt from the touch of time; but she was as much as ever the finest and subtlest creature, the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet: and yet he could see her there as vulgarly troubled, in very truth, as a maidservant crying for her young man. The only thing was that she judged herself as the maidservant wouldn't;

the weakness of which wisdom too, the dishonor of which judgment, seemed but to sink her lower. (p. 404)

Strether has fully matured in his vision of that which is about him in these few minutes with Mme. de Vionnet. The illusions which he had, illusions which he possessed through unconscious conviction despite his early conscious realization that "the affair of life--couldn't...have been different" (p. 150), have been dispersed, but they have been replaced by a finer, fuller vision of human reality. Strether basically seems to have believed up to this moment that a human being must be perfectly good or abominably evil. At the age of fifty-five, he finally realizes that human conformity to absolute concepts is impossible. He has tried to regard life as static, but now, under his realization of its dominating fluidity, he has the maturity and intelligence to see that life with its flaws and excellences is actually fine and subtle, "the happiest apparition, it had been given him, in all his years, to meet". That which would be paradox in the world of ethics or ugly in the aesthetic world about him is truly the fine, tragic, comic nature of humanity.

Even with this enlightened perception of humanity, Strether still has himself to respect. He may see life, but to participate in the life of another would but blind him, restrict him to that person's vision. He must remain "lucid and quiet, just the same for himself on all essential

points as he had ever been" (p. 410). Any attempt for him to be otherwise "bristled with fine points...that pricked and drew blood" (p. 409). In this manner, Strether attains a valid freedom, for he has become self-sustaining. The freedom has been obtained at a great cost, for he still must face a "reckoning" with Woollett, which will "practically amount to the wind-up of his career" (p. 409). But the "career" is one of materialism; he is embarking on a new one, that of being himself.

Being himself, however, demands being objective in both thought and actions. Thus, Strether makes a supreme effort to persuade Chad to remain with Mme. de Vionnet. The futility of the effort and the true nature of Chad have been treated sufficiently for the purpose of this section, and need not be discussed at this point. All that need be brought out is that though Strether felt "still practically committed" (p. 419) at the beginning of the interview, the meeting reduces Chad to the seducer of Mme. de Vionnet (p. 414), to a man motivated by selfish, not moral, motivation (p. 423), and to a materialistic businessman who, with poor taste, seems to hold advertising as superior to European art (p. 425), and allows Strether to depart with very little desire to see him once more (p. 426).

Finally, Strether faces his last "separation" (p. 427), that with Maria Gostrey, who has remained more

than a friend to him throughout the novel. She covertly offers him a life of "lightened care, for the rest of his days...[which] built him softly round...roofed him warmly over...rested...on selection...ruled...[by] beauty and knowledge" (p. 431). Although he realized "it was almost stupid, not to seem to prize such things" (p. 431), he realizes his "only logic [is] not, out of the whole affair to have got anything for [himself]" (p. 432), not to benefit at the expense of Mrs. Newsome, not to bind his life and to lose his freedom to material longings. Strether has gained, however. He has gained a "horrible sharp eye", he retains his "wonderful impressions" (p. 432), and through his comprehended experience he becomes superior to every personality in the novel. He rises much above Mrs. Newsome, who attempts to control life, and Mme. de Vionnet, who basically is controlled by life, for he has found that he can see, or experience intellectually, everything with the utmost freedom, and still be stabilized by the realization that to see one must be objective in thought and actions, which is simply the continual practice of justice, one of the most stabilizing of concepts. This Strether finally "sees" (v. supra, p. 1), and James has completed his novel.

An examination of the action has fairly well established that the majority of the novel's text is concerned with presenting the mind of the central character working

in a process of vision upon past and present experience. Not only is this the element which moves the action of the novel (for if Strether had believed at any given point in the novel that he had the absolute truth of the situation in his hands, the novel would have ended at that point; he only stays from day to day to "see."), but the final vision of the main character is the realization of his own necessity to see thoroughly. Although the action of the novel has gone far to establish the central contention of this paper, certain elements have been left untouched or partially developed for the sake of continuity. The undeveloped portions of the novel can be dealt with best by treating more fully the characters of the novel.

In the following discussion of characterization, the main concern will be to prove that as Strether fully realizes the makeup of the personalities of the people about him, as each character "comes out," that character departs from the novel. As each character is found to have a center based upon a concrete goal or set of goals, he ceases to perceive that which is about him. When Strether discovers such perceptive limitations, or blindnesses, he departs. The fact that James does not retain his characters much past the moment in which Strether realizes what they stand for should rather conclusively prove once more that his central concern is to illustrate the mind perceiving unknowns and, once they are perceived, turning to

new unknowns until the mind has acted upon all that it can act upon. At this point, the novel ends.

Including the unseen, but fully developed, Mrs. Newsome, there are thirteen named characters in the novel. They fall into five groups: symbolical characters, who are the most fully developed except for Strether himself; analogues of the symbolical characters; interlocutors; the plot character, Chad; and the perceiving character, Strether. The two symbolical characters, Mme. de Vionnet and Mrs. Newsome, respectively represent Europe and America. Their analogues align themselves thus: Miss Barrace, Gloriani, and Jeanne de Vionnet all represent some aspect of Mme. de Vionnet or of Europe; Waymarsh, Jim, Mamie, and Sarah Pocock all represent some aspect of Mrs. Newsome or of America. Chad, upon whom the whole situation of the plot rests, represents Europe upon his entrance and America upon his departure; thus he must participate in both communities, which he does most fully by representing some of the negative characteristics of each. Although Chad is a static character as are those above, he presents an overall impression of fluidity as he is moved from pole to pole by the increasing perception of Strether. Little Bilham serves as a partial analogue of both Chad and Strether, but he is primarily an interlocutor, a device used frequently by James to vary, objectify, and promote by conversation the movements of the central intelligence,

which so often expresses itself in internal monologues. Strether, the perceiving character, is a truly fluid character, moving in opposition to Chad from America to Europe and then further continuing back to the median where he can satisfactorily participate in both communities. Although almost every character serves at one time or another as an interlocutor, Maria Gostrey functions thus most thoroughly. To do so, she must participate in both communities in the manner of Strether and must have the keenest perception and objectivity of all save him. She, of course, is Strether's analogue.

The symbolical characters will be dealt with most thoroughly, for, together, they provide the whole background of the novel. Each will be dealt with in connection with her analogues listed above. Since the main character, Strether, has his origins in America, the discussion will deal with the American group of characters first. As Mrs. Newsome, the symbolical character, exists most forcefully in her analogues, rather than in Strether's changing memory of her, the American analogues will be presented before the symbol. The first to be dealt with is Waymarsh, a previously untouched but frequently present interlocutor and American analogue.

One of Waymarsh's primary functions is as a control by which Strether's change may be measured. At the beginning of the novel, Strether, with some reservations,

considers Waymarsh "a success" on the basis of "a large income" and a great fund of patience in the face of major distress because he "had held his tongue" upon his separation from a wife who continually derided him (pp. 19-20). Strether feels inferior to Waymarsh, at least in that "the figure of the income he had arrived at had never been high enough to look any one in the face" (p. 20). Thus, one dominant American characteristic, profound respect for the successful businessman, is brought out by Waymarsh's presence. While this is to be regarded as a negative characteristic, his strength under personal tribulation can be regarded as positive.

A third American characteristic is established by Waymarsh's attitude toward Europe, which is "extremely, ...almost wilfully, uncomfortable" (p. 17). As he expresses it:

...such a country as this ain't my kind of country, any way. There ain't a country I've seen over here that does seem my kind. Oh, I don't say but what there are plenty of pretty places and remarkable old things; but the trouble is that I don't seem to feel anywhere in tune. That's one of the reasons, I suppose, I've gained so little ...Look here--I want to go back. (p. 21).

The complexity of Europe is too much for the provincial Waymarsh, who prefers the more simplified and stable culture of America. He regards with profound distrust all instances of hierarchy and feudalism:

The Catholic church, for Waymarsh--that was to say the enemy, the monster of

bulging eyes and far-reaching, quivering, groping tentacles--was exactly society, exactly the multiplication of shibboleths, exactly the discrimination of types and tones, exactly the wicked old Rows of Chester, rank with feudalism; exactly, in short, Europe. (p. 29)

Waymarsh is hopelessly restricted by not only his provinciality, but by his overwhelming conscience, which persists in regarding these evidences of Europe as incarnate evil. This conscience of Waymarsh is also something Strether must fear, for he finds himself slipping with ease into his European surroundings. Strether feels with a pang of guilt that Waymarsh believes him and Maria Gostrey "sophisticated, he thinks us all sorts of queer things" (p. 30). Strether is to continue to feel this way in regard to Waymarsh through most of the novel until Waymarsh finally "comes out." It is the role of conscience which retains Waymarsh on the scene for three-quarters of the plot. Although this morality thoroughly restricts him, it will be vindicated, but not in Waymarsh.

Waymarsh characteristically attempts to defeat Europe with "the sacred rage" (p. 32), which is the lavish purchase of expensive items in an effort to establish his superiority over his surroundings. He, too, believes in his personal superiority because of his financial superiority. Money is almost a moral weapon to the American, which shall prove a paradox, for the money is

often obtained by unscrupulous means. The "sacred rage," however, is a basically valid characteristic, for it exhibits a certain violent indomitability.

Petulant, "like a large snubbed child" (p. 23) in his distress with this environment which does not recognize his superiority, Waymarsh is yet "one of the men who fully face you when they talk of themselves" (p. 21) and is tremendously acute about American personalities, which is much in evidence when he subjects Strether to an interrogation upon the desirability of his relation to Mrs. Newsome (pp. 75-77); he recognizes cannily that Strether is "a fine-tooth comb" (p. 75), which could easily be "spoiled" (p. 77) by the association with the domineering American lady. Nevertheless, Strether correctly realizes that Waymarsh would "like" Mrs. Newsome and the Pococks, "really particularly like them...and that they'd like him" (p. 76).

Waymarsh certainly doesn't like Chad's friends when he meets them with Strether: "the very air was...thick and hot with...Waymarsh's judgment of them" (p. 79). He condemns Little Bilham as not being a "good American" (p. 94) and Miss Barrace as the epitome of "laxity" (p. 79). As Waymarsh watches Strether's attachment grow for Chad and his friends, his attitude is that Strether is going to "lose his immortal soul" (p. 119). He simply does "not...understand" the subtleties of the

society about him; his relation to it is accurately described as "Moses, on the ceiling, brought down to the floor; overwhelming, colossal, but somehow portable" (p. 141) and as an "Indian chief...who, when he comes up to Washington to see the Great Father, stands wrapped in his blanket and gives no sign...a really majestic aboriginal" (p. 142). Yet, eventually, he relaxes enough to display his courtesy by buying bouquets for Miss Barrace, who has been guiding him through Paris (p. 186). This is, however, about his only concession to Europe. Otherwise, he maintains a deep silence and carefully watches Strether.

When Strether receives the cable from Mrs. Newsome, requesting him to "'Come back by the first ship.'" (p. 227), he realizes that Waymarsh "must have written to Woollett that [he was] in peril of perdition" (p. 228). Strether feels that "Waymarsh won't...deny or extenuate. He... acted from the deepest conviction, with the best conscience, and after wakeful nights. He'll recognize that he's fully responsible, and will consider that he has been highly successful" and evidently believe that "the consequences of his act...will bring [them] quite together again" in that they will finally have something they "can definitely talk about" (p. 228).

Waymarsh doesn't, however, bring the issue into the open, missing the chance to explain the "purity of his

motive" and evidently using "this privation of opportunity [as] his small penance" (p. 242) for the betrayal of the friendship--even if Strether had betrayed him first.

Strether's "instinct toward a spirit so strapped down as Waymarsh's was to walk round it on tiptoe for fear of waking it up to a sense of losses by this time irretrievable" (p. 241), which illustrates how far he has progressed from the moment he felt himself a failure in comparison to his wealthy friend.

Waymarsh promptly allies himself to the Pococks upon their arrival. Although, during the moments that he is being virtually crucified in a conversation between Sarah Pocock and Mme. de Vionnet, Strether "got the side-wind of a loyalty that stood behind all actual queer questions" (p. 271), he realizes that Waymarsh welcomes the destruction which will allow him to "pick up the pieces" (p. 272),

Waymarsh not only regards the Pococks as allies, but an actual love affair takes place between him and the married Sarah Pocock, who takes leave of her husband to embark on a series of shopping sprees, visits to restaurants and circuses with Strether's friend. The affair is:

...supreme innocence. The Parisian place, the feverish hour, the putting before her of a hundred francs' worth of food and drink, which they'll scarcely touch--all that's the...man's own romance; the expensive kind, expensive in francs and centimes, in which he abounds. And the circus afterwards--which is cheaper, but which he'll find some means of making as dear as possible--that's also his tribute

to the ideal. It does for him. He'll see her through. They won't talk of anything worse than /Strether and Maria Gostrey/. ...He thinks Sarah really is /in love/, .../and he/likes it, but he knows she can hold out. (p. 297)

It is virtually an affair between innocent children, but it's an affair, nevertheless, and has its effect upon Waymarsh. The "tribute to the ideal", a supremely American characteristic, seems to be at the bottom of the affair; Waymarsh, surrounded by the romance of Paris, has finally found a way to approach the cultural and romantic ideal, which he does, for it is his duty. He must feel he cannot return to America without having had some experience divorced from the routine of daily life.

In Waymarsh's final appearance, he comes to tell Strether of the ultimatum which Sarah Pocock holds for him. He appears "panting with the pulse of adventure... /having/ been with Mrs. Pocock" and dressed in "her taste" (p. 331); he is the picture of "blooming...health" (p. 332). But when he addresses Strether, he is "ambiguous" (p. 332). He has become a different man:

...a genial, new, pressing, coaxing Waymarsh; a Waymarsh conscious with a different consciousness from any he had yet betrayed, and actually rendered by it almost insinuating.

.....
The sombre glow /had left Waymarsh's/ eyes. Something straight and simple, something heavy and empty, had been eclipsed...something by which Strether had best known his friend. Waymarsh wouldn't be his friend, somehow, with-

out the occasional ornament of the sacred rage, and the right to the sacred rage--inestimably precious for Strether's charity--he also seemed in a manner, and at Mrs. Pocock's elbow, to have forfeited....Waymarsh was having a good time...and he was having it then and there, he was having it in Europe, he was having it under the very protection of circumstances of which he didn't in the least approve; all of which placed him in a false position, with no issue possible. (pp. 333-35)

Waymarsh has been separated from morality; he can no longer serve as conscience to Strether.

When Strether asks Waymarsh if he had knowledge of Mrs. Newsome's cable, Waymarsh actually lies: "I know nothing about Mrs. Newsome's cables." (p. 335). He lapses briefly into "directness and...sincerity" (p. 336), which allows Strether to momentarily reinstate him. However, when Strether wishes him a "lovely time" on the trip Waymarsh is to take with the Pockocks, he replies: "I don't know as I ought really to go." (p. 337); Strether sees "the conscience of Milrose in the very voice of Milrose, but, oh, it was feeble and flat! Strether suddenly felt quite ashamed for him" (p. 337), feeling that no "falser position--given the man--could the most vindictive mind impose" (p. 336). Waymarsh "lacked [his] old intensity; nothing of it remained; it went out of the room with him" (p. 338). And so Strether finally sees Waymarsh wholly, and sees him reduced. He holds no more significance for the central character. He

has long ceased to be a gauge of Strether's change, and he has now ceased to be representative of American morality. The process of vision has encompassed Waymarsh, and he disappears from the novel. The process will be repeated with other characters.

Besides representing initially the American deficiencies and attributes which already have been noted, Waymarsh is an example of what can happen to the woman-dominated American man. Jim Pocock is, however, the outstanding example of this type. This character has been dealt with sufficiently (v. pp. 27-28); it only need be re-emphasized that he has been reduced to an appendage of Sarah Pocock and has no internal existence other than apprehension of violating his wife's wishes; this attitude enables Mrs. Newsome and Mrs. Pocock to regard him as a perfect husband. The process of disappearance upon perception which was enacted with Waymarsh holds true with Jim Pocock. He is disposed of quickly, for he has little to offer other than a harsh warning to both Strether and Chad Newsome.

Mamie Pocock remains as a positive American experience for Strether. In her keen perception of the situation of Jeanne de Vionnet and as the only one of the Pococks who admits the refinement of Chad, she is someone to whom Strether turns as almost a kindred soul (v. pp. 29-30).

Although she is doomed to be "something of a bore" (p. 306) and will be "fat, too fat, at thirty", she "would always be the person to Strether who, at the present sharp hour, had been disinterestedly tender" (p. 309). Strether sees in Mamie limitations of environment which would never restrict the European women of his acquaintance, but he also sees a certain keenness, which Jeanne de Vionnet, the closest in age to Mamie, could not so early attain. Strether has an interesting insight into the nature of women when he realizes Mamie gave up Chad because he had been "flagrantly spoiled" in his perfection by another woman; he can see something of his own fate with Mrs. Newsome in that he, too, has changed. Strether matches Mamie with Little Bilham, and they both depart from the scene. Again, the consciousness has perceived all it may from these characters, and the novel has no further use for them.

Sarah Pocock is the most vivid representation of Mrs. Newsome and is instrumental in altering Strether's memory of his fiancée. Sarah, however, does fall short of her mother. While Mrs. Newsome could be described as "wonderful", "about Mrs. Pocock people may differ" (p. 40). She is, nevertheless, second only to Mrs. Newsome as a Woollett power; in the town's eyes, there could "scarcely be a greater" distinction for Jim Pocock than "being Sally's husband" (p. 50).

In relation to Strether, Sarah Pocock poses a distinct threat from the beginning. In imagining her response to an unfavorable cable:

"He says there's no woman," he could hear Mrs. Newsome report, in capitals almost of newspaper size, to Mrs. Pocock;...He could see in the younger lady's face the earnestness of her attention and catch the full scepticism of her but slightly delayed "What is there then?"...He had his fine sense of the conviction Mrs. Pocock would take occasion to reaffirm--a conviction bearing, as he had from the first deeply divined it to bear, on Mr. Strether's essential inaptitude. She had looked him in his conscious eye even before he sailed, and that she didn't believe he would find the woman had been written in her look. Hadn't she, at the best, but a scant faith in his ability to find women? It wasn't even as if he had found her mother--so much more, to her discrimination, had her mother performed the finding. Her mother had, in a case her private judgment of which remained educative of Mrs. Pocock's critical sense, found the man. The man owed his unchallenged state, in general, to the fact that Mrs. Newsome's discoveries were accepted at Woollett; but he knew in his bones... how almost irresistibly Mrs. Pocock would now be moved to show what she thought of his own. Give her a free hand, would be the moral, and the woman would soon be found. (pp. 114-15)

Vindictive, overtly domineering, contemptuous of men, and jealous of Strether's favorable position in the eyes of her mother, Sarah Pocock is an indication of some of the negative tendencies of Mrs. Newsome; and as she and her mother are in sympathy on some points, she stands as no mean antagonist for Strether. In all fairness to the

woman, however, she is absolutely correct in her basic judgments upon Strether's relationship with her mother, upon his incapability for finding the woman, and upon men as she has seen them. Sarah Pocock can perceive fundamentals; her difficulty lies in perceiving the subtleties which can sometimes alter the fundamentals entirely if taken thoroughly enough in account.

She does retain the sympathies of her mother long after Strether has lost them, and she becomes the succeeding ambassador. Strether is anxious to see what she will say when she comes "to speak for her mother", for the message is for him as well as for Chad. He expects her to bring "new reasons" for Chad's return, in view of the "new facts... less and less met by...old reasons" (p. 231). This Sarah Pocock definitely will not do. She and Mrs. Newsome perfectly agree that there are no new facts other than Strether's betrayal. He wishes her to see, for herself and her mother, Chad's improvement, which is his main "new fact," but when he asks himself if she "would...in the least make it out or take it in, the result, or if she would...in the least care for it if she did", he can only reply to himself that "she wanted so much to see, let her see then and welcome. She had come out in the pride of her competence, yet it hummed in Strether's inner sense that she practically wouldn't see" (p. 247).

Sarah arrives and from the beginning proves to be a

very difficult person to deal with. She is obviously intending to be "gracious [with] her marked, thin-lipped smile, intense without brightness and as prompt to act as the scrape of a safety-match", which she certainly can do if she wishes, for she does possess a certain air of "invitation and urbanity...[and] forms of affability that were in a high degree affirmative" (p. 252). She seems to be meeting the initial situation with a certain "brightness", but this brightness does not illuminate:

...her bridling brightness...was merely general and noticed nothing....Yes, they would bridle and be bright; they would make the best of what was before them, but their observation would fail; it would be beyond them; they simply wouldn't understand. (pp. 256-57)

Although Sarah "faltered" in her meeting with Mme. de Vionnet (p. 274) and seems often on the defensive during the course of the conversation, she is determined not to find herself in a "false position" (p. 267). She has a few concessions to make to Europe. Even her outstanding freedom, the small romance with Waymarsh, is on American terms: "she wonders if she hasn't [fallen in love] -- and it serves...her purpose" (p. 296). The affair also serves as her "tribute to the ideal" of the romantic Paris; she and Mrs. Newsome particularly feel they must bow down to an ideal of some sort.

Sarah fails in her effort to persuade Chad and Strether to return. Although "she's sounding the note of home--

which is the very best thing she can do" (p. 299), she is being defeated by the "extremely awful" Jim Pocock. Her blindness to his total lack of appeal is another indication to Strether of how difficult it would be to be an absolutely satisfactory husband like Jim.

Finally, Chad makes a supreme effort to convince Sarah of his improvement at the hands of Mme. de Vionnet and of the quality of his surroundings. He prepares an overwhelming party, which would be "violently pleasant and mercilessly full" (p. 314). Sarah realizes that she is being edged into the false position she wished to avoid. Feeling "the fixed eyes of her admirable absent mother fairly screw into the flat of her back" (p. 315), she knows that she must resist, contrary to all evidence, any frank expressions of approval, or else she will have to concede that which Chad and Strether wish her to. Sarah Pocock is not a fool. Although she "wouldn't see," there is no indication that she cannot see. She has determined to remain blind, for it would defeat her purposes and her mother's to be otherwise.

The only concession she makes is that "she's pleased ...with Chad's capacity to do this kind of thing--more than she has been pleased with anything for a long time. But she wants him to show it there in Woollett....She'd run the show herself" (p. 316). The amoral inclinations of America are evident in her attitude. She opportunisti-

cally is willing to grab Chad without feeling any moral obligation to Mme. de Vionnet for his improvement, and she would do it in the name of morality, as well. This is somewhat paradoxical, for she does have valid moral reasons as well as immoral reasons for wishing Chad to leave Europe; the hypocrisy lies in that they coincide.

The party, however, has been a little too much for Sarah. She feels that she must "jump" from the situation or be the loser (p. 315). When she would jump "she would alight from her headlong course more or less directly upon Strether"; it would be appointed to him, unquestionably, to receive her entire weight" (p. 315), for his adamant attitude has been responsible for the situation in which she finds herself.

When Sarah finally "jumps", she does so characteristically. The scene is marked by "immobility" and an "intense ...glare" (p. 340), two major characteristics of the "pure" Americans of the novel; immobility represents firmness of purpose, and intensity represents single-mindedness. She demands in the name of Mrs. Newsome complete "submission" (p. 341); Strether is hampered because, although Mrs. Newsome is "dealing straight with him", he is unable to appeal to her more charitable instincts as he sees only the unsympathetic Sarah (p. 341). Protesting "outrage" (p. 342), "humiliation" (p. 341), the "insulted" (p. 344), "inflamed" (p. 342) Sarah, "nobly and appointedly officious",

acting in assurance because of the "complete consciousness of her mother's moral pressure" (p. 341), condemns all that has been brought before her as "hideous" (p. 345), and departs from the scene, having fulfilled her purpose, that of making a "resolute rupture" (p. 345). This is the main purpose for which Sarah has been created; she is to be the unmerciful, avenging angel of American morality. She has exhibited elements of Mrs. Newsome and America, such as single-mindedness, dedication to the achievement of the task, an affinity for clearly-cut issues, a strong desire to punish him who takes the opposite side of the issue, a firm belief in personal rightness, and a constant strife for personal power and prestige, but her prime function is to make overt the schism between Strether and pure Americanism, represented by Mrs. Newsome. The function is achieved; Strether has recognized elements of his fiancée in his antagonist; and with nothing left in question Sarah Pocock leaves the novel. Strether's mind again has perceived the unknowns converted into facts. "Sarah... has served all the purpose" (p. 356).

Mrs. Newsome, the completest symbol of America, is more difficult to treat. She is not to be regarded so fully unsympathetically as is Sarah; she must be considered as an alternative to Europe on the basis of some equally desirable characteristics. From the beginning, Strether realizes there are distinct differences between Mrs. New-

some and European women; whereas the latter dress with a touch of frivolity and daring cushioned in aesthetic harmony, Mrs. Newsome's dress is the height of simple and moral decor, reminding Strether somewhat of "Queen Elizabeth" (p. 36). Her life is a life of "exaltation" (p. 41). She "puts so much of herself into everything" that "she's delicate, sensitive, high-strung" (p. 41). Opposing her exalted attitudes is the unfortunate fact her wealth is based upon the sale of a "vulgar" item (p. 43), which lends a bathetic undertone to her personality, that becomes almost ominous when it is realized that "shame" (p. 44) is connected with the original foundations of the fortune.

Mrs. Newsome feels some sense of guilt because of her ancestors: "her life [is] conceived and carried on with a large beneficence....[which is] a kind of expiation of wrongs" (p. 44) for which Strether has been the man selected to "assist her to expiate" (p. 46). One of her major expiations is "her tribute to the ideal" (p. 46), "The Review" (p. 45), a publication dedicated solely to "economics, politics, ethics" (p. 61). Mrs. Newsome is a "moral swell" (p. 47) and chooses Strether because she believes he's a "swell...the biggest she can get hold of" (p. 46). Strether, on the other hand, is "a little afraid of her" (p. 40).

Mrs. Newsome is "wonderfully able" (p. 45) in handling

the business, in writing "admirably" (p. 56), in "arranging" the affairs of The Review, yet these strike Strether as "vain things" (p. 57) early in the course of the novel. On the other hand, "not the least of this lady's high merits for him was that he could absolutely rest on her word. She was the only woman he had known, even at Woollett, as to whom his conviction was positive that to lie was beyond her art" (p. 66) to the extent of having, however, "want of tact" (p. 120); honesty is not a scruple possessed by her daughter Sarah (p. 66). Her morality, however, includes considering a number of topics "too bad to be talked about" (p. 80); "opinions" on subjects in the town of Woollett over which she presides amount to only "three or four", which were "deep,...few, [and]... quiet...almost as shy as if people had been ashamed of them" (p. 120).

Although Mrs. Newsome is "slow to establish herself" (p. 175), she presents herself so powerfully when she does that it is an "honor" to have "such a woman's esteem" (p. 234); a good deal of her power lies in "age, authority and attitude" (p. 304), and in the fact that she is "essentially all moral pressure" (p. 341). This moral pressure will not consider any "proposal" for modification (p. 340); it only requires "submission" to its dictates (p. 340). It is to be imagined that Strether's ultimate decision to oppose her affects her much as it does her

daughter: "the most distinguished woman...in this world sits...insulted, in her loneliness" (p. 344). Strether has "tremendously disappointed her" (p. 354). Therefore, although Strether has been "preoccupied with the impression everything might be making on her--quite oppressed, haunted, tormented by it [and has] gone much further to meet her, she...hasn't budged an inch (p. 357). Her whole meaning is finally realized and summed up by him:

...her difficulty [is] that she doesn't admit surprises. It's a fact that, I think, describes and represents her; ...she's all...find, cold thought. She had...worked the whole thing out in advance, and worked it out for me as well as for herself. Whenever she has done that...there's no room left; no margin...for any alteration. She's filled as full, packed as tight, as she'll hold, and if you wish to get anything more or different either out or in...you've got morally and intellectually to get rid of her."

...she hangs together with a perfection of her own...that does suggest a kind of wrong in any change in her composition.

.....
...[She seems as if she is] some particularly large iceberg in a cool blue northern sea...magnificent!"

...[Yet] there's nothing so magnificent--for making others feel you--as to have no imagination."

.....
..."And yet Mrs. Newsome--it's a thing to remember--has imagined, did, that is, imagine, and apparently still does, horrors about what I should have found. I was booked, by her vision--extraordinarily intense, after all--to find them; and that I didn't, that I couldn't, that, as she evidently felt,

I wouldn't--this evidently didn't at all, as they say, 'suit' her book. It was more than she could bear. That was her disappointment."

.....
...But they're consistent, of course, inasmuch as they've their clear view of what's good... (pp. 358-60)

Strether finally sees Mrs. Newsome as something absolute, immutable. She is totally, unrelentingly static. She is virtually a symbol of Woollett, and therefore a symbol of America to him. She is honest, efficient, industrious, serious, capable of great generousities and humanity at times, dedicated, and scrupulously moral, allowing no one to remain in doubt where she stands; but she is authoritarian, demands conformity, is single-minded and unimaginative, possesses no depth other than in her firmly-grounded principles and her perception of that which violates them, is merciless to challengers, and is somewhat materialistic in her evaluation of anything outside her ethical system. More than anything else, Mrs. Newsome represents a pure ethical logic which has answered for itself all questions of right and wrong. Strether has found that he cannot answer questions by absolute condemnation or vindication. He wishes, first, to find the truth of the situation and act honestly upon it; furthermore, he sees paradoxes, shades of truths, and medians in his search for truth. If he were ever to determine the color of the given truth he had found, he would not see the blacks and whites of Mrs. Newsome (or

the pastels of Mme. de Vionnet). He would see the color with which he is so often associated in the novel--gray. Realizing he must "morally and intellectually...get rid of her", Strether almost immediately does so. After this scene Strether deals with her briefly in a summary conversation with Chad. The woman who has dominated Strether's consciousness and conversation so frequently throughout the course of the novel is then disposed of in these sentences, which compose one of the few remaining references to her after her reality is determined: "It's over.... She's the same. She's more than ever the same. But I do what I didn't before--I see her" (p. 430). Even the most dominating of personalities must succumb to the disinterest of the consciousness once its truths have been completely perceived.

If Mrs. Newsome might be defined best on the basis of her immutability, Mme. de Vionnet may best be regarded as fluid.⁹ If Mrs. Newsome may be regarded as solidly intact, Mme. de Vionnet may be considered harmonized in her variety. If Mrs. Newsome builds her foundation with cold

⁹For the purpose of a satisfactory European-American contrast, it is now best to treat Mme. de Vionnet and to utilize her analogues in a following section to emphasize the Europe she represents. Mme. de Vionnet, by virtue of her physical presence in the novel, does not rely so heavily upon analogues for her full existence, which justifies the reversed organization.

reason, Mme. de Vionnet exists in a center of human emotion. If Mrs. Newsome resides in the house of ethics, Mme. de Vionnet moves in the community of aesthetics. Yet, they coincide. For, if Mrs. Newsome is blinded by the light of moral reason to the dark human complexities beyond her, Mme. de Vionnet is blinded by that same darkness to the light in which Mrs. Newsome stands. Blindness and sight are the criteria of this novel. The fact that both women cannot perceive past a certain point, even though it be for opposite reasons, demands that they each be condemned to rejection by Strether.

Although Strether, speaking by rote the mind of America, initially must describe the yet unseen Mme. de Vionnet as "base, venal--out of the streets" (p. 39)--an opinion he conceivably could have held had he been faced immediately with the truth--his first contact with the "femme du monde" is jarring because he realizes that if she were such a woman, "Mrs. Newsome herself was as much of one" (p. 147). Strether's initial opinion of Mme. de Vionnet testifies to the variety of countenances she can assume with the skill of an accomplished artist. For his benefit, she has naturally and perfectly assumed the role of a Woollett citizen. She is modestly attired in "black" with a "hat not extravagant", bearing her self with a "smile...natural and dim" (p. 145), and appears to be definitely not a person about whom "any freedom [may be]

used" (p. 144). It is unsurprising that Strether is not only deceived upon the extent of her relationship with Chad, but believes that he must be connected with some other woman. Yet, he is not totally blinded. His yet undeveloped eye "had only perhaps a sense of the clink, beneath her fine black sleeves, of more gold bracelets and bangles than he had ever seen a lady wear" (p. 145). His overall initial impression is, however, disappointing: "his expectation had had a drop. There was somehow not a wealth in her; and a wealth was all that, in his simplicity, he had definitely prefigured" (p. 145); this is his first judgment of the woman in whom he is to find more "wealth" than he had ever seen.

In a conversation with Maria Gostrey, who had known Mme. de Vionnet as a schoolmate, he finds that in her youth she was:

...charming...amiable...[and again] an isolated, interesting, attaching creature, both sensitive, then, and violent, audacious but always forgiven...with oddities and disparities [which made one] ...wonder what [she] really quite rhymed to...dazzlingly, though quite booklessly, clever...polygot...chattering French, English, German, Italian...[possessing a mind] with doors as numerous as the many-tongued cluster of confessionals at St. Peter's. (pp. 157-59)

Mme. de Vionnet participates to perfection in almost every European human endeavor, and, in her polygot aptitudes and attitudes, assumes the full stature of a European symbol.

Maria even goes on to warn Strether subtly of Mme. de Vionnet's potential immorality: "You might confess to her with confidence in Roumelian, and even Roumelian sins. Therefore--! But Strether's narrator covered her implication with a laugh; a laugh by which his betrayal of a sense of the lurid in the picture was also perhaps sufficiently protected"; still in the Woollett stage, Strether merely wonders "what sins might be especially Roumelian" (p. 159). He does take note, however, of one item of the biography; he deplores the fact that she was married "out of hand, by a mother...full of dark personal motive...[who,] interested and prone to adventure, had been without conscience, had only thought of ridding herself most quickly of a possible, an actual encumbrance" (p. 158). This, of course, assumes its proportion when he later realizes she plans her own daughter's marriage without that daughter's full freedom in the selection of a husband, on which occasion Strether first detects a distinctly negative quality in her personality.

In his second meeting with Mme. de Vionnet, Strether undergoes a series of reactions to this woman who manipulates human characteristics with the grace, beauty and harmony of an artistic skill. First, he notes her "privacy [and]...peace..." in the "hereditary, cherished" furnishings of her home (p. 169), which exhibit "special dignity...private order" (p. 170). The overall impression

is a strong sense of the "transmission" of distinguished ancestors accumulating into an "air of supreme respectability" and "private honor" (p. 171). Thus he encounters her first as an aristocrat.

One of the first statements she makes to him is: "I don't think you seriously believe in what you're doing, ...but all the same, you know, I'm going to treat you quite as if I did." Upon which she urgently asks him to listen to her problem, and becomes "suppliant" (p. 172). Following the change from the acute perceiver to the woman in need, "she was the poor lady for Strether now because, clearly, she had some trouble, and her appeal to him could only mean that her trouble was deep. He couldn't help it; it was not his fault; he had done nothing; but by a turn of the hand she had somehow made their encounter a relation." (p. 173). She is suddenly "wonderful" to him (p. 173). A little later, this impression evolves into a romantic image of her as "one of the rare women he had so often heard of, read of, thought of, but never met" (p. 175). Later still, she becomes simply the mother of Jeanne; at this point, Strether receives a slight jolt when he asks if Jeanne is in love with Chad and she "rather startlingly answered, 'I wish you'd find out!'" (p. 177); although Mme. de Vionnet obviously thinks a great deal of her daughter in this conversation, there is not a full exchange of confidence between them. Strether leaves this kaleido-

scopic display of personalities, but before he does so he is won, committed by this late stranger to aid her if he can do so without violating his trust to Mrs. Newsome.

Upon Strether's third encounter with Mme. de Vionnet, he sees her more deeply. Upon this occasion she presents quite clearly the impression of "the femme du monde in her habit as she lived...although she was the finest development of the type" (p. 188). After comparing this appearance with the others, Strether draws the valid conclusion that Mme. de Vionnet:

...was, like Cleopatra in the play, indeed various and multifold. She had aspects, characters, days, nights--or had them at least, showed them by a mysterious law of her own, when in addition to everything she happened also to be a woman of genius. She was an obscure person, a muffled person one day; and a showy person, an uncovered person the next. (pp. 188-89)

He realizes the infinite variety which the woman is capable of demonstrating and the "genius" which can control and achieve the multifold changes with aesthetic harmony, as capably as it controlled and achieved the surface perfection of the once-rough Chad, attaining in him as well as in her daughter, Jeanne, "an exquisite case of education" (p. 181). Mme. de Vionnet is an artist in the strictest sense, skilled in the moulding of human personalities for the purpose of pleasing with their beauty, variety, and harmony.

Strether's fourth encounter with Mme. de Vionnet

occurs at Notre Dame. Although he is unable to participate in the foreign atmosphere of the Catholic Church, he carefully observes those who come to worship, regarding them as "figures of mystery and anxiety,...fleeing from justice. Justice was outside, in the hard light, and injustice, too; but one was as absent as the other from the air of the long aisles and the brightness of the many altars" (p. 205). He focuses his attention upon one woman:

... [She] reminded [him]...of some fine, firm, concentrated heroine of an old story, something he had heard, read,...renewing her clearness, in splendidly-protected meditation....His impression required that she should be young and interesting, and she carried her head, moreover, even in the sacred shade, with a discernible faith in herself, a kind of implied conviction of consistency, security, impunity. But what had such a woman come for if she hadn't come to pray?...he wondered if her attitude were some congruous fruit of absolution, of "indulgence." He knew but dimly what indulgence, in such a place, might mean; yet he had, as with a soft sweep, a vision of how it might indeed add to the zest of active rites. (pp. 205-06)

The woman is Mme. de Vionnet. Again her dress and bearing have completely changed, and she reminds Strether of nothing less than a Victor Hugo heroine (p. 206). Strether has had an unexpected, complex insight into the nature of the nature of the woman. He has seen her based upon herself, meeting God face to face to allow Him to forgive her guilt by her presence, or merely withdrawing from the world of action to the rest of abstract contemplation, a further instance of contrast between the active Americans

and the more leisurely, contemplative Europeans. His insight, however, is obliterated as he reverts to the terms of American attitudes and asks himself: "If [she] wasn't innocent why did she haunt the churches?--into which, given the woman he could believe he made out, she would never have come to flaunt an insolence of guilt" (p. 208). He is correct; she would not "flaunt" her guilt, but she could be coming to be freed from it. Strether, of the Puritan New England, cannot quite realize that a sinful person would dare to face God.

Another attitude of Mme. de Vionnet is revealed during this incident. She holds Strether, in what seems to be a sincere regard, as important to her in other respects than her situation with Chad:

Help, strength, peace, a sublime support-- she had not found so much of these things as that the amount wouldn't be sensibly greater for any scrap his appearance of faith in her might enable her to feel in her hand....He happened to affect her as a firm object she could hold on by....He was perhaps, after all, not further off than sources of comfort more abstract.
(p. 208)

Mme. de Vionnet seems to have begun to equate Strether in terms of his stability with that which the Church offers. His aid, however, is fuller to this woman, who has her base upon her relations with humanity, for he is tangible. His approving answers and his admiration of her can give her the immediate solace which a voiceless God cannot provide. It could be possible that she be-

believes his favorable judgment of her could almost be her salvation.

The relationship of Strether to Mme. de Vionnet as judge to defendant becomes clearer when she faces him with her decision to marry her daughter in the manner she had been married. She realizes that he is suffering a "sensible shock" (p. 291) and, for the moment, thinks her "awful" (p. 292). The conversation leads to a statement by her that he "must judge". When he asks her what he must judge, she replies, "'Everything,'...with...refined, disguised, suppressed passion [in] her face" (supra, p. 293).

When Mme. de Vionnet meets Sarah Pocock, she manages to keep even this formidable woman off balance by being "simple and humble" and yet charming, by seeming "prepared infinitely to conciliate", by making it subtly known she is a "Comtesse" (supra, p. 264), by offering herself as a guide and hostess (p. 268), by playing the role of a mother (pp. 268-69), and by making obvious her alliance with Strether. The last tactic seems a mistake, for this merely angers Sarah, and condemns Strether, which, after all, could still be in line with her purposes although this point is never made explicit. If she believes that she can defeat America in Chad's eyes--which, by the way, seems to be her motive in inviting Mamie to her home for purpose of comparison to her daughter and herself (p. 274)--is she not to profit by retaining Strether as an anchor for

Chad, as well as the friend and supporter she has come to regard highly? Maria Gostrey certainly condemns her for "what she has [done]" to Strether for the sake of personal interests (p. 361). In any event, the American stolidity of Sarah is shaken, although not by any means destroyed, by the European shifts, subtleties, and personal insights which place it at such a disadvantage.

Mme. de Vionnet's final position has already been thoroughly discussed (v. pp. 35-40). It only need be restated that Strether is able to categorize even this diffuse woman and thus rise above her. He does so, of course, on the basis of her basic immorality, her lack of connection with a stabilizing ethical system, her willingness to sacrifice all for self, or for Chad who is the sublimation of her self. She becomes a woman again for Strether, though, in her weakness and her commonness blended so humanly with her excellence, "the finest and subtlest" woman he had ever met (p. 404). It only need be added that she in truth does fear that Strether will "judge her" (p. 415). She distinctly fears age from which Strether's belief that she was "sublime" kept her (p. 405). He renewed her faith in herself as well as stabilized her relationship with Chad. She is honest, however. She reveals her limitations and sins to Strether as she might to a confessor, deplores her conduct, and begs him to stay. This is all to no avail.

Strether finally has a clear view of Mme. de Vionnet. No matter how much she has dominated his thoughts in the past, at the end of this incident--save for the attempt to make Chad remain with her--Strether seems to think of her in no serious terms, as is apparent in the tone of these few final sentences regarding her position in his life:

"Oh, she has been quite good enough!"
Strether laughed. (p. 415)
.....
Miss Gostrey added: "Poor dear thing!"
Her friend wondered; then with raised
eyebrows: "Me?"
"Oh, no. Marie de Vionnet."
He accepted the correction, but he
wondered still. "Are you so sorry for her
as that?" (p. 416)

This is Strether's rather casual attitude toward Mme. de Vionnet, to whom a major tragedy seems to have occurred because of his departure. Once more, the consciousness, having perceived, moves on. Again it is seen that James is only concerned with the constant act of perceiving; memory, idle conjecture, random associations are all rejected by him insofar as they do not provide necessary information for the reader or for Strether.

Jeanne de Vionnet satisfactorily serves as the European parallel to Mamie Pocock. As Mamie is to be considered as America's typical young woman, Jeanne represents Europe's typical "jeune fille" (p. 178). Strether is given his look at her for the specific purpose of carrying an impression of the type to America "where

[he'll] find again so much to compare it with" (p. 178). His first impression is of her obedience when she speaks "as if in some small learnt prayer"; his second is that she "was indeed too soft, too unknown for direct dealing; so that one could only gaze at [what was in the girl] as at a picture, quite staying one's own hand" (p. 153). To Strether, in the "ten minutes" of the second and last occasion he actually speaks with the girl:

She was fairly beautiful...a faint pastel in an oval frame: he thought of her already as of some lurking image in a long gallery, the portrait of a small old-time princess of whom nothing was known but that she had died young. Little Jeanne wasn't, doubtless, to die young, but one couldn't, all the same, bear on her lightly enough....She was fluttered, fairly fevered--to the point of a little glitter that came and went in her eyes and a pair of pink spots that stayed in her cheeks--with the great adventure of dining out and with the greater one still...of finding a gentleman whom she must think of as very, very old, a gentleman with eyeglasses, wrinkles, a long, grizzled mustache.... She was delightfully quaint about herself, but the vision of what she had imbibed was what most held him. It...consisted ...in just one great little matter, the fact that, whatever her nature, she was thoroughly...bred. Little Jeanne was a case, an exquisite case of education. (pp. 180-81)

Jeanne's three primary characteristics are her obedience, her inexperience, and her breeding. All three directly stem from her mother, who has firmly disciplined the young girl, has sheltered her from direct contacts with the world, and has so carefully brought her up that she

is, as is almost everything Mme. de Vionnet touches, only to be described accurately as a work of art.

It is Mamie Pocock who has the deepest insight into Jeanne de Vionnet. After meeting the young French girl, who after all is not much younger than herself, she praises her "after the manner of Woollett--which made the manner of Woollett a lovable thing again to Strether" as "perfectly ideal, a real little monster of charm" (p. 308). Mamie considers the girl perfected and believes her selected fiancée to be appropriate in that "he's in love". But she also perceives that Jeanne "doesn't know if she is or not", "probably" because she is "in love with Chad". She feels that Jeanne's main difficulty "is that she wants only too much to do right. To do right for her, naturally,...is to please". She wants to please "her mother first", "'then'...Mr. Newsome", and finally her fiancée, who are about the only three people who have broken the surface of her sheltered life (supra pp. 308-09).

Mme. de Vionnet takes too much from her daughter in her efforts to perfect her surface. Without the gentlest of husbands, she may experience the unhappy life of her mother, who could have been very much like her at this age; the daughter's secluded life could result in similar moral underdevelopment. This makes Mme. de Vionnet's matrimonial methods even more deplorable since she realizes

what might occur. Furthermore, the whole marriage seems to have been staged by Chad as an "answer to Mrs. Newsome's demonstration", and as a "concession to Mme. de Vionnet's jealousy" of his possible desire to return to America. Thus Jeanne's life has been sacrificed, though very carefully and in the best of taste, to indicate a "definite and final acknowledgment to Mme. de Vionnet that Chad... has ceased squirming" (supra, pp. 298-99).

Jeanne has made her brief entrance to provide Strether with some preliminary information upon European deficiencies as well as secondarily to present a short, but finished, comment upon European proficiencies. There are many things unanswered about her future, even her near future, for Mamie Pocock intends to speak to her about her fault of wishing "to please" too much, but does not do so, for which no reason is given. James maintains the straight line of providing only necessary information for the growth of Strether's perception. He gives Mamie her intention only to shed more light on her nature for Strether; he does not wish to establish another situation by further developing these strictly secondary characters, who exist only for the sake of variety of approach or of the necessity to finish the large picture more thoroughly.

A neat counterpoint is made by allowing Gloriani to appear in the same scenes as does Jeanne de Vionnet. His magnificent, superbly polished abilities and his amoral,

"tigerish" core compare and contrast well with the finished young girl, whose core is yet undeveloped and pliable. As Jeanne seems to be a friend of both the great sculptor and Mme. Gloriani (pp. 180, 182), their affinities as well as the striking contrast between their levels of experience imply a great deal of that which could possibly occur to Jeanne in her future. Together, despite their wide differences, they form a small community from which Strether is exempt (p. 182). Little more need be said of Gloriani in view of the full treatment already given him (v. pp. 19-21), other than to re-emphasize that he fully represents the dominantly aesthetic nature of Europe.

Miss Barrace is another variation upon the moral deficiency of the European culture. Although she serves most often as an interlocutor upon Chad's and Mme. de Vionnet's relationship and as a foil to Waymarsh, in her capacity as such she brings two significant points to Strether: Europeans have an acute "visual sense", but it "strikes [him] that [they] haven't any other", specifically, "moral" sense (p. 142). Miss Barrace is a thoroughly modern woman for her era. She smokes, possesses a wide and voluble knowledge of contemporary subjects, speaks very easily upon subjects unspoken of in Woollett, and deals, as do Mme. de Vionnet and Maria Gostrey, in the "collecting" of new personalities. Although perceptive when dealing with the surface of a human being, as she

fully proves in her treatment of Waymarsh (pp. 140-42), Strether, who likes her, is forced to deal with her thus:

He envied Miss Barrace, at any rate, her power of not being. She seemed, with little cries and protests and quick recognitions, movements like the darts of some fine high-feathered, free-pecking bird, to stand before life as before some full shop-window. You could fairly hear, as she selected and pointed, the tap of her tortoise-shell against the glass. (pp. 140-41)

There is little more to say of this unconventional lady. Perceptive but shallow, humorously insinuating, even licentious, in her pronouncements, she serves a full term as interlocutor and foil, and then slips from the scene of the novel without display.

Little Bilham serves much the same function as does Miss Barrace, yet without so much freedom of tongue. He has his reservations, for his background is solidly American although much of it has been converted upon his conversion into an artist: "[he] came over to convert the savages...and the savages simply [converted him]....[he is] but the bleached bones of a Christian" (p. 141). Nevertheless, the bones remain, and Strether is immediately drawn to him on the basis of his pleasantness (p. 74), his constantly displayed keen perception, and his youth and talent, which promise so much (p. 149). It is youth and Strether's affection which allow him to deliver the long, important monologue upon the necessity of living to the

fullest extent. Little Bilham serves the purpose of listener excellently, and almost fulfills his function at this point. However, he is kept on as interlocutor, as a conveyer of information which is often misleading through his delicacy (which excellently serves James' desire to draw red herrings across Strether's path in order not to reveal too much to him too quickly for a thorough development) upon Chad's relation to Mme. de Vionnet, and finally as someone to whom Mamie Pocock might be conveniently matched, thus disposing neatly of two characters who are no longer necessary. James' economy displays itself most obviously in this character.

Chad has been treated fully. He had to be dealt with in almost every phase of the discussion upon the action, for he is the character upon whom the plot fully rests. However, he is not very complex; he is merely "an irreducible young pagan" (p. 107) with "spirit,... youth,...practice,...felicity,...assurance,...and impudence" at his command. Above all, he is basically "vulgar" (p. 65). His intentions are reasonably good, but he is too superficial to pursue them rigorously in the name of abstract goals, no matter how well he would do in a material strife. Chad's only complexity lies in Strether's constantly expanding or diminishing illusions about him, which continue until almost the end of the novel. Strether's final discovery is rather simple:

Chad is morally insufficient.

However, there remains one thing to be said about Chad's moral deficiency. It forms a connection between Europe and America upon a negative basis in opposition to Strether's connection formed upon a positive basis. Chad is definitely European in his amorality; he participates fully in the European sense in the marriage of Jeanne, and he works with the same selfish purposes and subtle methods as does Mme. de Vionnet to delude Strether. Chad is, however, amoral on an American basis, too. As his forebears were unscrupulous and as his sister doesn't hesitate to feel she can reclaim him without debt to the agent of his perfection, so Chad seems capable of acting with the same blindness to certain moral obligations and the same lack of conscience in regard to the practices being used to obtain a given goal. Thus, although separated from Europe by vulgarly materialistic inclinations toward business and separated from America by virtue of his higher cultural veneer, Chad does participate in each community by seizing the opportunities each provides for the possession of personal gain without the observance of stringent moral behavior.

Maria Gostrey is the final character to be dealt with. It would be a mistake to regard Maria centrally as other than an interlocutor; her other functions are convenient embellishments of this necessary one. They

should, however, be touched upon, for although she is not as fully complex as Mme. de Vionnet or Mrs. Newsome, Maria does exist as forcefully as Waymarsh in the novel, perhaps even more so by virtue of the extended time she spends on the scene; Maria is present from the second page to the last page of the novel, and whole chapters are devoted to conversation with her. Maria, as does Waymarsh, serves as a control by which Strether's progress may be gauged. In her initial appearance, however, due to her overwhelming superiority to Strether, she acts as the first European foil to Waymarsh, placing the gentleman into perspective for Strether. To be continually a satisfactory interlocutor to him until the close of the novel, she must be closer to Strether in inclinations than the other characters. Thus she virtually becomes an alter ego in her predilection for full perception of the human situation about her; indeed, "they might have been brother and sister" (p. 8).

Although Maria moves easily in the European scene, she is, as is Strether at the conclusion, thoroughly stabilized by American principles, the only violation of which she makes when she temporarily withholds information from Strether on the theory that it will impede his development:

It came out for him more than ever yet that she had had from the first a knowledge she believed him not to have had, a knowledge the sharp acquisition of

which might be destined to make a difference for him....She had really prefigured the possibility of a shock that would send him swinging back to Mrs. Newsome. (p. 411)

To do even this, however, her morality is strong enough that she left Paris in order that she wouldn't "have to lie" to keep him from the truth of the situation (p. 413). Her efforts are repayed by Strether's success. From naivete in regarding a play as "grand" which to her is "vulgar(er)" (p. 43) and his pat, memorized American morality, he fully expands to the point where he "can toddle alone" without her aid, shortly before the arrival of the Pococks (p. 230). At this point, Maria slips from the role of instructor to interlocutor.

She is retained as interlocutor on the basis of a developed love for Strether, which leads to her final, covert offer "of exquisite service, of lightened care, for the rest of his days" (p. 431). Throughout the novel she had rejected any opportunities to "interfere to her profit":

She had turned her back on the dream that Mrs. Newsome's rupture, their friend's forfeiture--the engagement, the relation itself, broken beyond all mending--might furnish forth her advantage; and to stay her hand from promoting these things, she had, on private, difficult, but rigid, lines, played strictly fair. (p. 412)

But Strether rejects her offer. "To be right", he must return to America with the Pococks (p. 432). To be right,

he must not gain; he may only see, or experience. The experience, the "wonderful impressions", are the only gains he may return with, for he is the ambassador of another and is bound to perform in his faction's interests or to return, empty-handed, in failure. Thus, Maria Gostrey joins the other characters to exist only in the memory of Strether.

As each character reveals to Strether the set of desires by which his existence is motivated, that character disappears from the mind of Strether. The person who has been blinded by a definite goal, or has passed a judgment which he considers to be absolute upon the universe, has no place in Strether's scheme. Strether cannot remain with the man with an absolute, for that person would demand conformity, which would restrict, and thereby negate, Strether's own function, which is to perceive fully. Be the center Mrs. Newsome's Puritanism, Mme. de Vionnet's passion, Chad's materialism, or even Maria Gostrey's undemanding love, Strether, to function, must refuse their offers to retain his own center--the need to feed his inquiring mind with experience.

A close examination of the action of the novel, its issues, its characterization, and its implications, establishes the fact that James' central intent in The Ambassadors is to portray the process of vision acting upon an unknown situation. To accomplish this end, he

has selected as his central character a man whose primary motivation must be "to see," a man who thirsts for the experience which he is so well suited to appreciate but which he has had no opportunity to confront. The contrasted scenes of a simplified America and a complex Europe serve the author's purposes perfectly, creating a situation in which the man will be compelled, by his nature, to experience.

The perceptive experience is a human experience, and being human, it participates in the abstract worlds of ethics and of aesthetics, and is involved objectively with the complex, contradictory world of personal relations. If James brings into his book issues of morality and of culture, of money and of manners, it is in order to provide Strether with the widest range of experience in a given social group and place him in relation to it all on a basis of perception.

If a moral meaning is implicit in the novel, it is because morality and immorality must exist in any human scene subjected to the full process of vision. If the novel is tragic to some and comic to others, it is because the full process of vision must encounter both tragedy and comedy on its path. If the novel may seem overly elaborate, it is because the full process of vision must evaluate infinite subtleties as well as basic issues. The ultimate meaning of the novel is that the main value

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in life is the fullest possible experience of life and that the most fortunate man is one who possesses the sharpest vision, the largest capacity to experience.

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