HENRY JAMES AND THE ZEITGEIST

by

Gloria Elizabeth Onley

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Department of English
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada
Date May 12, 1966
It seems to be a case of "many-dimensional continuum."

--William James, April 10, 1898
(Perry, II, 369)
ABSTRACT

An analysis of the psychological and philosophical dimensions of two central symbols of Henry James's later work, the Maltese cross of *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and the golden bowl of *The Golden Bowl* (1904), reveals that by 1903 James had assimilated from the late nineteenth century *Zeitgeist* the essential features of Darwinism, psychic determinism, *fin de siècle* romanticism, Bergson's *élan vital*, Henry Adams' equation of spiritual with physical energy or force, and William James's pragmatism. The complex symbolism of the Maltese cross and the golden bowl mainly expresses the destructive potential of romantic idealism and ethical absolutism; hence I conclude that James unconsciously shared Ibsen's attitude toward ideals and idealism, as interpreted by Shaw in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891).

Two visions of man underlie these novels: (1) the Darwinism-inspired view of man as a being whose animal nature must be sternly repressed by that conscience T. H. Huxley termed "the watchman of society" before either psychic evolution or amelioration of man's general condition could be achieved; (2) the ancient doctrine of man as microcosm and the ethical goal of psychic harmony from which the animal nature is not excluded. The former is ultimately rejected in favor of the latter, as James dramatizes the problem of the ethically sensitive person who is involved in a struggle to fulfill his life-potential.

In *The Spoils of Poynton*, in his presentation of Fleda Vetch, James implicitly rejects renunciation of life for the sake of honor as a valid mode of conduct. In *The Golden Bowl*, in his presentation of Maggie Verver, he in effect offers a solution to the problem of how the individ-
ual should react to evil. James's treatment of the problem of self-fulfilment in these two novels implies his gradual, and to a large extent unconscious, conversion to an ethical pragmatism similar to that advocated by William James. The totally destructive practice of self-sacrifice on the part of the heroine of the first novel gives way in the second novel to a partial self-sacrifice that is not only compatible with self-fulfilment but necessary for psychic development. As static ideals are found to inhibit psychic evolution, the corresponding philosophical change is an implicit reorientation from belief in the validity of immutable ideals to a final intuition that ultimate reality lies in the dynamic archetypes of psychic life.
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INTRODUCTION

In his bibliographical guide to the study of Henry James, Robert E. Spiller states that although James has been the subject of perhaps more critical essays than any other American novelist, much work has yet to be done to relate James's fiction to its historical background. Despite the appearance, in 1961, of Oscar Cargill's synoptic study, *The Novels of Henry James*, which includes an examination of James's contemporary background, both personal and literary, for analogues and possible sources of plots, characters, and themes, this statement remains a valid generalization. The main reason for this must be the tendency by many of his critics to assume that James was no more than barely conversant with the scientific and philosophical thought of his age, and thus could not have been inspired by it. There are of course exceptions to this view: for example, Dorothy Van Ghent describes the main evil in James in philosophical terms as the violation of the second Categorical Imperative; Oscar Cargill argues that James was "a Freudian pioneer"; and Clinton F. Oliver contends that many aspects of James's work present him as "a singularly penetrating social critic." But the general assumption persists.

Edward Stone, surveying in 1964 the controversy that has raged over the value of James's work and that has recently been revived by Maxwell Geismar's *Henry James and His Cult*, perpetuates the assumption when he writes:

Corresponding to . . . [his] unawareness of or aloofness from the social history of his own day was James's even more grievous lack of interest in the study of the mind itself. His notebooks, for example, are as
barren of references to ideas—philosophically speaking—as they are full of suggestions gathered for their literary usefulness; and his letters add little. Science . . . , a force confronting his fellow novelists with increasing frequency, is a topic James almost never mentions.

James's most important biographer, Leon Edel, contends that James was "impervious on the whole to the great scientific strains of his century." In Edel's opinion, although James had both read and met Darwin, "the new science . . . , the challenge of evolution and the debates about determinism, . . . [took] on particular meaning for [him] . . . only in [its] literary manifestations, in the naturalisme of Zola." Thus these critics argue that because James left no explicit record of his preoccupation with such contemporary issues as determinism, Darwinism, psychology, and eugenics, he was "impervious" to the scientific strains of his age. It is my contention, nevertheless, that James's work, and particularly his late fiction, does embody many of the scientific and philosophical ideas of his time which he is generally assumed to have ignored.

The key to James's relationship to the Zeitgeist is provided by Northrop Frye's definition of the novel:

... Interest in ideas and theoretical statements is alien to the genius of the novel proper, where the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationships. In Jane Austen, to take a familiar instance, church, state, and culture are never examined except as social data, and Henry James has been described as having a mind so fine that no idea could violate it.

Frye goes on to remark that James digested his ideas.

That James was aware of contemporary scientific and philosophical issues is indisputable. Leo J. Henkin, the author of an extensive survey of the impact of Darwinism on the English novel, comments: "So large a number of Victorian writers were engaged in the task of exploiting the
theme of evolution, that it was inevitable that a doctrine originally confined to the attention of scholars should filter down to the general reading public." Not only was James a member of the reading public, but he had a strong personal contact with evolutionary thought as it affected the mind of the novelist in his close friendship with George Du Maurier. In *Trilby* (1894) Du Maurier wrote, "It was a good time in England . . . a time of evolution, revolution, change and development . . . a keen struggle for existence—a surviving of the fit—a preparation, let us hope, for the ultimate survival of the fittest." His Utopian romance *The Martian* (1897) expresses a hope that the race may achieve moral progress through eugenics and mental evolution. It is quite likely that Du Maurier spoke of such matters to James during the many long conversations they had together. Other connections with the scientific thought of his time were provided for James by his friendships with Henry Adams and H. G. Wells. It was from such literary friends as these, in my opinion, rather than from the scientists with whom he was acquainted, that James heard of the new scientific and philosophical ideas.

But Henry James's most obvious and most important contact with the thought of his time was through his brother, the psychologist and philosopher William James. Despite a striking difference in temperament, the brothers shared many assumptions about the ethical purpose of life, and about the values and problems of the expanding consciousness. A correspondence between the ideas of William James and the psychology and ethics embodied in his brother's fiction is particularly apparent in two novels, *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

The heroine of the earlier of these novels is presumably intended
to exemplify the attitude of ethical absolutism and the mode of conduct that may be described as renunciation of life for the sake of honor. But evidence exists which suggests that James's conscious admiration of Fleda Vetch, his "fine" heroine who renounces love for the sake of honor, is merely one side of an ambivalent attitude. The other side, remaining obscure to Henry James the critic, is nevertheless expressed in the novel by psychologically significant details of characterization and situation. Analysis of the text indicates that the decision Fleda makes during her moral crisis is actually not a free decision to enforce a moral principle, but a compulsive attempt to compensate for distressing feelings of inferiority inculcated in her by the English class system and by her friend and protector Mrs. Gereth. James's depiction of the causal forces determining her decision to reject Owen Gereth's proposal of marriage thus reveal that he had a sensitivity to the problem of determinism and free-will fully as intense as that of any scientist or philosopher, and an ability, at least as great as that of William James, to observe the operation of psychological causal factors. In fact the psychological dimension of The Spoils of Poynton, the implications of which the author seems to have been unaware, amounts to an examination of the psychological basis of ethical absolutism in a representative case of the romantic temperament.

William James believed that absolutism is a weakness in man's nature from which he must strive to free himself. If a person wishes to lead "the highest ethical life," he must be able to break "rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case." Henry James's heroine Fleda Vetch acts rather in accordance with "the policy of Idealism" as outlined by Shaw in 1891 during his discussion of Ibsen's plays. Fleda believes in
"... the policy of forcing individuals to act on the assumption that all ideals are real, and to recognize and accept such action as standard moral conduct, absolutely valid under all circumstances, contrary conduct or any advocacy of it being discountenanced and punished as immoral . . . ." 20

In her relationship with the Gereths, Fleda is an ethical absolutist. However, James's later heroine, Maggie Verver, who is potentially as great an Idealist as Fleda, becomes, instead, as Marius Bewley demonstrates, "the greatest pragmatist in literature." 21 For her, the highest ethical life means, not the rigorous enforcing of moral principles, but taking the unique circumstances into account.

In 1907, after reading Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking, Henry James wrote to his brother, "... I was lost in wonder of the extent to which all my life I have . . . unconsciously pragmatised." 22

A comparison of The Spoils of Poynton and The Golden Bowl and of their heroines, English and American, will elucidate what their author meant by declaring that all his life he had "unconsciously pragmatised," and will also be an efficient means of demonstrating that he had assimilated from the late nineteenth century Zeitgeist the essential features of determinism, Darwinism, fin de siècle romanticism, Ibsen's attitude toward ideals and idealism, Bergson's élan vital, and William James's pragmatism.

In retrospect, viewed in relation to James's work as a whole, the central symbols of these two novels, Fleda's Maltese cross (the "gem of the collection" at Poynton) and Maggie's golden bowl, express, first by their existence and then by their destruction, a pragmatic truth intuited by James about the relation of social, moral, or aesthetic 'form' to psychic 'content.' Both are symbols of a static, false perfection. 23 Both are destroyed, and the intensely dramatic manner of their destruction, one "lost"
in a conflagration, the other deliberately broken, enforces in each case a philosophical comment on the attitudes toward life which they focus and present.

Adeline Tintner perceives that in James's fiction "the work of art embodies and incorporates civilization as it was available to James." Art objects give out a "mystic meaning proper to themselves," to use James's own expression, because they are saturated with life. Thus in James's late work the art object becomes a talisman, so saturated with life that it is capable of representing that life, of radiating its moral tone.

Because of the correspondence between its historical and religious connotations and certain aspects of Fleda's character and situation, and because of Fleda's devotion to it as an epitome of Poynton's splendours, the Maltese cross becomes saturated with Fleda's moral life. By the end of the novel, it functions not only as a symbol of Fleda's painful self-sacrifice but also as a symbol of what Fleda herself considers to be a spiritual victory. Hence the burning of Poynton, in conjunction with Fleda's reaction to the disaster (through which it is presented), is not merely "a melodramatic stroke of irony," a "dramatically unnecessary and unsatisfying" epilogue, but a final development of the symbolism. When Fleda's character is fully understood, the conflagration becomes a powerful comment on the isolating and life-destroying tendencies of romantic idealism, tendencies which reached a climax in the fin de siècle symbolist literature of the 1890's, where one finds not only embodied but exalted the extreme consequences of subjectivism described by William James in 1884. The golden bowl of the later novel may also be related to fin de siècle attitudes because it also functions as a reference to the destructive aspect of romantic
idealism.

Three symbols of the late novels are, in fact, related: the ivory 28 "Maltese cross" of Poynton, Maggie Verver's "pagoda" or "ivory tower," 29 and the ivory tower of the unfinished final novel. 30 F. O. Matthiessen points out that "the ivory tower," the leading symbol of the final novel, bears the connotation of Sainte-Beuve's term for the romantics' escape from the world. 31 Maurice Beebe, author of *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce* (1964), 32 points out that it is the Romantic artist who is most likely to be alienated from the mundane world outside his ego. 33 The romantic temperament, with its natural tendency to live much of the time in a world of the imagination, is equally susceptible to this alienation. In the paradigm of the ivory tower, *ivory* implies the purity of the absolute, while *tower* implies height and open vistas, signifying isolation, detachment, and exaltation. 34

Beebe observes that James's protagonists usually have the sensibility and temperament of the artist:

Even when James's observers are not practising artists, they have most of the artist's characteristics—his detached curiosity, his faculty of observation and capacity for appreciation, and his devotion to an ideal—and lack only his "talent." Graham Fielder of *The Ivory Tower* is typical of what James called his "men of imagination." . . . Many of [James's] artists appear as gentleman amateurs, enchanted expatriates, "heiresses of all the ages," or victimized children. One can add to these indirect representatives of the artistic temperament the heroes or minor characters explicitly identified as artists in more than fifty of James's stories. 35

As direct or indirect representatives of the artistic temperament, James's protagonists feel the conflicting claims of detachment and experience.

Ralph Touchett says to his cousin Isabel Archer, the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), "'You want to drain the cup of experience,'" but Isabel replies, "'No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself.'" 36
Isabel Archer is generally recognized to be a protagonist whose romantic idealism leads her into great unhappiness by making it possible for others to exploit her, and a strong implication of determinism has been recognized in the relation of Isabel's fate to Isabel's character. In my opinion, this theme was taken up again in the 1890's, in a less obvious way, as James continued to be aware of romantic idealism as an attitude leading to various undesirable consequences for those who held it. Both Fleda Vetch and Maggie Verver are romantic by temperament; both are romantic idealists. Both are disillusioned about the nature of morality and the nature of life, but where Fleda is destroyed by the experience, Maggie is educated by it and achieves psychic maturity through it.

Complementing James's examination of the romantic temperament is his criticism of the society within which the romantic temperament attempts to find fulfilment. As Clinton F. Oliver points out, James was always aware of the abuses inherent in the structure of society, even while, like Hyacinth Robinson, the culture-deprived hero of The Princess Casamassima (1886), he admired "the fabric of beauty and power it had raised." James's later vision of the slums of New York as teeming with "smaller fry" destined to be gobbled up by the Ogres of American capitalism, persons whose only freedom is the "freedom to grow up to be blighted," is prefigured in his work by his earlier rendering of European civilization as a milieu where impoverished "supersubtle fry" like Hyacinth Robinson and Fleda Vetch are at a fatal disadvantage in their struggle for life. James's criticism of society was focussed sharply by his perception of how it discriminates against the person whose sensibility is more discriminating than his status in society requires, and whose consciousness thirsts for
a deeper experience of life and art than society would permit him to have.

Marius Bewley comments, "What James seeks is a state of civilization in
which the finest faculties of the individual shall be given the maximum
opportunity for development."

In the Prolegomena to his celebrated 1893 Romanes Lecture, *Evolution
and Ethics*, T. H. Huxley drew his readers' attention to the fact that what
is often called the struggle for existence in society is actually "a contest,
not for the means of existence, but for the means of enjoyment." For Fleda
Vetch, James's heroine of fine sensibility, as for most of James's other
centers of consciousness, the struggle for the means of developing and
exercising the sensibility is vital, since life, in James's view, consists
of the enrichment and expansion of consciousness. The starved or malnourish-
ed sensibility is in danger of psychic stagnation or death; hence the struggle
for the means of enjoyment is, in effect, the struggle for life in James's
world, and may be carried on in as deadly a way as the primitive battle for
food and shelter.

But the struggle is often complicated for James's protagonists by
a conscience which urges the renunciation of the means of enjoyment within
their grasp. Marius Bewley points out that Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors*
(1903) discovers life in Europe only to make sure that he keeps nothing for
himself. And Strether is not unique in this respect, for, as Bewley asks,
"Among the major characters in James's work, where is there one to whom we
can point as having realized 'life' in larger terms than those supplied by
a more deeply sensitized consciousness of the possibilities and values of
an experience from which he is usually excluded?" I would point to Maggie
Verver; otherwise I agree with Bewley that James's great theme is that of
the deprivation of life.

The struggle of the refined sensibility to survive is seen clearly in its archetypal form in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902). In the mythic dimension of the novel, as it is evoked by image patterns, Kate Croy senses herself to be a "trembling kid" about to be introduced into "the cage of the lioness." The lioness is her wealthy Aunt Maud, who would force Kate by economic sanctions to marry for prestige instead of for love. Kate's fiancé, Merton Densher is uncomfortably aware of Maud's power to coerce others; he imagines her saying to him, "'I can bite your head off, any day I really open my mouth . . . .'" Determined to marry Densher, but also convinced that the impoverished life is not worth living, Kate becomes a "panther" stalking a "dove," her friend, the dying American heiress Milly Theale. Kate wishes Densher to marry Milly so that he will inherit her fortune; the money will then make Kate's marriage to Densher possible. But Densher does not propose marriage to Milly; he is unable to do so because of his emotional commitment to Kate. However, Milly, informed of the conspiracy to exploit her, turns her face to the wall and dies, first bequeathing to Densher the money that to Kate is a means of life. But Densher is so changed by the experience that he cannot accept the money, although he offers to marry Kate without it. Kate refuses to marry him, sensing that he has fallen in love with his memory of the dead girl, the sacrificial "dove" whose last act was one of compassion and forgiveness. Kate's struggle to survive is only partially successful: if she wishes, she may have the money she finds indispensable for life (Densher offers it to her), but she has lost the man she loves.

Robert L. Gale, author of *The Caught Image: Figurative Language in*
the Fiction of Henry James (1964), discovers patterns of war, animal, water, and flower imagery, the nature of which indicates that James did not escape the influence of Darwinism. Noting how animal imagery becomes prominent in the 1890's, Gale suggests that "as James grew older and as his dream of conquering the London stage turned to a nightmare, he unconsciously thought of even his own fictional dramatis personae as increasingly bestial." Gale also relates James's increased use of animal imagery to the fact that naturalism came more to the fore in the 1890's with the effect of lowering man in the scale of creation. Gale observes that James generally used animal imagery with the effect of degrading character, and concludes that the main tendency of his water, flower, and animal imagery is "to institute comparisons downward." Comparing "James's view of combative mankind" to Henry Adams's, Gale remarks, "The same conclusion emerges from a consideration of . . . [the] war tropes as does from a study of the water, flower, and animal figures: too often the sensitive are engulfed and the defenseless seized and rent." According to Gale's analysis, the nobler aspects of human life are expressed in James by tropes involving art and religion. Gale quotes a verse of Tennyson to express the spirit in which, in his opinion, James implicitly conceived those images which show man rising above his own animal nature:

Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

In 1893 T. H. Huxley stated the ethical problem revealed by Darwin's theory of natural selection: the tendency of the ethically fine nature to be defeated in the struggle for survival. Because self-restraint, "the essence of the ethical process," when practiced in excess, handicaps the
ethically fine in their struggle with the unscrupulous, this unfortunate state of affairs tends to perpetuate itself. In *The Spoils of Poynton* Henry James dissolved this particular ethical problem into personal relationships, drawing intuitively on his knowledge of the mind and of society to dramatize the predicament of an ethically fine person and to expose (albeit unconsciously) the reasons for his failure to survive.

If James's statement of the problem is found in *The Spoils of Poynton*, his resolution of it is found in *The Golden Bowl*. The imagery which shapes the mythopoetic dimension of James's late fiction—the patterns of animal and battle imagery prominent in the earlier novel, and of animal, fairy-tale, and adventure imagery prominent in the later—presents the consciousness of the James protagonist as a Darwinian microcosm. Because this inner world has a tendency to become rigidly and fatally structured by received morality, often the ethically sensitive person can survive only if he is able to develop a pragmatic attitude toward the problem of what to do with 'the beast within.' His life depends on his capacity to re-create the structure of his inner world so that it becomes a relatively harmonious reflection of nature in which no part of his own human nature is denied. Unless he is able to accomplish this inner change, he will be defeated by persons whose animal vitality is at the service of their immoral purposes.

The capacity of the protagonist to change within in order to create for himself a personally fulfilling and yet morally viable relationship with others by balancing self-denial with self-assertion, may be determined by temperament and circumstances. In Fleda Vetch a romantic temperament proves fatal, but in the later heroine, Maggie Verver, there is a resurgence of the will to survive, marked by an intuitive readiness to assimilate and
control a potentially destructive knowledge of the self and of others as primitive. Through jealousy, Maggie's refined and romantically idealistic consciousness is forcibly returned to its primitive roots in all but uncontrollable instinct and emotion. However, she survives her baptism by fire. The sleeping princess wakes up to reality, and the voyaging heiress lives through the wreck of her father's big, safe boat.

The typical fate of a James protagonist is to be deprived, eventually, of whatever personal relationship, social milieu, or ambience of culture would nourish his sensibility and enrich and continuously expand his consciousness: typically, his life ends in renunciation, irrecoverable loss, or death. But Maggie Verver by the end of her story has gained a realistic knowledge of human nature and a husband who has forcefully represented it to her. She has been moved to pity and terror by this knowledge, but not demoralized by it: she has not relinquished her own claim to life, as so many of her predecessors in the struggle had been fatally moved to do. In winning Amerigo's love, she feels she has been "paid in full" for her suffering (p.548). Unlike Fleda Vetch, whose final condition is one of psychic devastation, Maggie Verver has successfully dealt with 'the beast in man' and has done so without jeopardizing her own right to psychic wholeness.

Her growth toward maturity and her survival of potentially destructive experience is made possible by her intuitive adoption of pragmatic ethics, and James's development of her character dramatizes William James's themes of moral risk, moral struggle, and the acceptance of loss.
NOTES


13. Henkin (pp. 240-242) gives a synopsis of the novel.


15 Leon Edel (Conquest of London, p. 334) records that James went frequently to T. H. Huxley's house and found Huxley "a delightful sympathetic man." "But," James remarks in a letter, "of course my talk with him is mere amiable generalities." Edel (ibid., pp. 61, 169, 283) also notes that James met Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin socially, but on rare occasions. Leslie Stephen was a friend who was aware of contemporary scientific thought, but one must not forget that James described him as "the silent Stephen, the almost speechless Leslie" (Edel, Middle Years, p. 380).

16 See F. O. Matthiessen's definition of the difference in temperament between the brothers (The James Family [New York: Knopf, 1947], pp. 673-684). Matthiessen (p. 680) also indicates a few of the similarities between their attitudes toward life.

17 The discrepancy between James's description of Fleda Vetch in his notebook entries and the Preface and his characterization of her in the novel will be discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

18 "The Will to Believe," in The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy and Human Immortality (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 14. This paperback edition is an unabridged and unaltered republication of the first edition of The Will to Believe and Other Essays... (Feb., 1897) and the second edition of Human Immortality. The pagination of The Will to Believe is the same as that of the December, 1910, Longmans, Green edition.


22 The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York: Scribner's, 1920), II, 83. Hereafter the abbreviation Letters will be used to indicate this work and references will be given in the text of the thesis.

23 This view will be justified below. Unlike the bowl, which is known to be flawed, the Maltese cross is likely to be taken at its face value as a symbol of aesthetic and spiritual perfection. But to interpret it only as this is to ignore its context, as I show in Chapter One. The point is that the art objects symbolize perfection subjectively, to the heroines of their respective novels, and that they attain their ultimate value as symbols of false perfection, their objective value, by the way in which they are developed.

24 Adeline Tintner ("The Spoils of Henry James," PMLA, LXI [March, 1946], 239) quotes James's statement in The American Scene that "objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it,
must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to
give out . . . ."

25Tbid., pp. 248, 251.


28The Aspern Papers and The Spoils of Poynton, with an Introduction by R. P. Blackmur, The Laurel Henry James (New York: Dell, 1954), Ch. VII, p. 178. All subsequent references are to this copy of the text of the original edition and are given within the text of the thesis as follows: (VII, 178). Chapter numbers are given to enable the reader to locate the quotations in other editions or in the New York Edition where, in spite of James's revisions, many of the passages quoted remain unchanged or almost unchanged.

29Evergreen Book Edition (New York: Grove Press, n.d.), pp. 289-291. All subsequent references are to this copy of the text of the 1904 Scribner's edition, the first American edition, and are given in the text of the thesis. Chapter numbers have been omitted because two systems of chapter numbering are in use.


32(New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964). Beebe (p. vi) considers the three main themes of the artist-novels to be "the concept of the artist as a divided self, the equation of art with experience [the Sacred Fount], and the conflicting ideal of detachment [the Ivory Tower]."

33Beebe (p. 13) finds this implication in Otto Rank's distinction between Classical and Romantic types of artists. He cites Rank's work Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality (New York: Knopf, 1932) pp. 48-49.


35Tbid., p. 198.


37E.g., see Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, pp. 97, 98, 105.

See The Spoils of Poynton, IV, 157; V, 158, and The Golden Bowl, pp. 6-7.


The Princess Casamassima, p. 321.

The American Scene (New York, 1946), pp. 136-137.

James uses this expression in his Preface to Vol. XV of the New York Edition. The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces by Henry James, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Scribner's, 1934), p. 221. Hereafter the abbreviation Prefaces will be used to indicate this work and references will be given in the text of the thesis as follows: (Prefaces, 221).


Ibid., p. 240.


(Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press), pp. 246-247.

Ibid., p. 60.

Ichibid., p. 61.

Ichibid., p. 81.

Ibid., p. 100.

Ichibid., p. 82.

See Evolution and Ethics, pp. 51-52. This statement is from the Prolegomena published with the Lecture in 1894.

The problem of the failure of the ethically fine to survive in their struggle with the unscrupulous is considered implicitly in many of James's novels and tales. But The Spoils of Poynton provides the most illuminating illustration of Huxley's point because it presents the psychological reasons for the self-destructive practice of self-restraint on the part of a representative underprivileged member of society.
CHAPTER ONE

THE SPOILS OF POYTON

AXEL: (Elevant sa coupe.) Vieille terre, je ne bâtirai pas les palais de mes rêves sur ton sol ingrat: je ne porterai pas de flambeau, je ne frapperai pas d'ennemis.

--Williers de l'Isle Adam, Axél (1890)

I

Moral Heroism or Psychic Determinism?

Fleda Vetch, the heroine of The Spoils of Poynton, is the young friend of Mrs. Gereth, a widow whose sustaining interest in life is the collection of fine furniture and objets d'art she and her late husband had established at their country house, Poynton. Mrs. Gereth's son, Owen, who is the legal owner of the great house, will take possession of it when he marries, at which time his mother will be expected to retire to another residence. Mrs. Gereth fears that Owen is about to become engaged to Mona Brigstock, a hearty Philistine of a girl whom she detests. In desperation she tries to force Fleda upon Owen, knowing that Fleda would make a suitable custodian of Poynton's splendours. The basis of Mrs. Gereth's friendship with Fleda is, in fact, their mutual appreciation of fine things and their mutual loathing of Waterbath, the residence of the Brigstocks. But despite Mrs. Gereth's efforts, Owen does become engaged to Mona, and subsequently enlists Fleda's help to persuade Mrs. Gereth to move from Poynton to Ricks, a small dower house. Mrs. Gereth is given to understand that she may take a few of Poynton's art objects with her. She hesitates over her choice, and eventually Fleda
goes temporarily to London to preside over her sister's marriage. During Fleda's absence, Mrs. Gereth strips Poynton of its treasures and installs herself and the "spoils" at Ricks. Joining Mrs. Gereth there, Fleda soon finds herself in the awkward position of a go-between, as both mother and son appeal to her for help, and only communicate with each other through her. Although she takes great care to conceal her feelings from Mrs. Gereth, Fleda is actually in love with Owen. Moreover, she is beginning to suspect that Owen is falling in love with her. Nevertheless she considers it her duty to help him regain the "spoils," and therefore assures him that she will not reveal to his mother the distressing fact that Mona refuses to marry him until Poynton's treasures are restored. But Mrs. Gereth guesses that Fleda loves Owen, and that Mona will probably not go through with the marriage unless she can have Poynton with its contents. She therefore instructs Fleda to inform Owen that if he will marry Fleda instead of Mona, she will return the collection to Poynton. Fleda cannot relay such a message; hard pressed by Mrs. Gereth, she returns to London, to the poverty and obscurity of her father's house.

Encountering Owen in London, Fleda realizes that he has fallen in love with her. Finally Owen comes to her and tells her that Mona has in effect released him by her prolonged silence. He assures her that he is "all right," by which he means "free" to propose marriage to Fleda. But, in the absence of a formal letter of release from Mona, Fleda insists that he is not "all right," he is "all wrong," and refuses to consider his proposal until he can come to her "on another footing." Although she breaks down and admits her love, she steadfastly repulses Owen in spite of his plea to be "saved," and sends him back to Waterbath to come to a definite
understanding with Mona. Some time after this, Mrs. Gereth, having mistak-
only inferred that Owen and Fleda are together against Mona, and that it is
only necessary to persuade Fleda to marry Owen, returns the "spoils" to
Poynton in a magnificent gesture intended to influence Fleda to accept Owen;
but Mona, on hearing of the restoration of Poynton, instantly reclaims her
fiancé and marries him at the Registrar's.

Fleda and Mrs. Gereth are deeply distressed at their double loss. Some
time later, after Owen and his bride have left for a trip to the continent,
Owen writes to Fleda that he wishes her to have one of Poynton's art objects
as a memento. He suggests a work of art Fleda had particularly admired, a
carved ivory cross known as the Maltese cross. Fleda goes by train to claim
the gift which has become to her a symbol of the essential rightness of her
conduct towards the Gereths. But when she alights at the station, she finds
to her horror that Poynton is on fire.

As Poynton burns to the ground and the air fills with ashes, the station-
master's reply to Fleda's question, "Poynton's gone!"—"What can you call
it, miss, if it ain't really saved?"—echoes at a painful distance in time
Owen's ecstatic murmur, on discovering that Fleda does love him, "I'm saved,
I'm saved,—I am!" (XXI, 263). Fleda's despairing cry, then, to Owen who
had wished to abandon his fiancée and cling to Fleda, "You're not all right—
you're all wrong," (XVI, 264), is flung back in her face at the climax of
the novel by the "far-off windy roar" that is Poynton burning, by the "smell
of cinders," the "riot of sound," the smoke that makes her cover her face
with her hands, and by the terrible irony of her own last words to the station-
master, "I'll go back" (XXII, 320). There is no going back, for Fleda,
except in the literal sense, to Mrs. Gereth, to bear the news that Poynton
has fallen, its treasures destroyed. Poynton is "lost" as Owen had been
"lost" to the ruthless Mona Brigstock, and Fleda is left finally with a sense of irreparable loss. At the end, Fleda feels herself "give everything up" (XXII, 320). Deprived of the symbol of her honor, she feels she has nothing left.

F. W. Dupee maintains that "to exercise the moral sense, as Fleda insists on doing, is frankly to risk natural happiness, which is shown to depend on just the kind of compromise she refuses to make . . . ." ¹ This view of Fleda as one who heroically exercises the moral sense is countered by F. O. Matthiessen's opinion that William James "could have indicated the psychological weaknesses in [Henry James's] free spirits, in so far, at least, as they were represented by the extreme case of Fleda, who was fastidious to the point of being neurotic, and almost embraced renunciation as a goal, instead of as an end to be accepted only if absolutely necessary." ² Fleda undoubtedly defeats Mrs. Gereth's attempt to use her. But, in the closing chapter of her story, her condition is rendered by James as that of psychic devastation.

In 1907 James wrote to his brother William, "... I was lost in wonder of the extent to which all my life I have ... unconsciously pragmatised" (Letters, II, 83). In showing the dreadful consequences for Fleda of her insistence on the empty form of honor, James was unconsciously pragmatising, contradicting, by his rendering of Fleda's psychology and of her final condition, his own conscious evaluation of Fleda's conduct as "fine" ³ and of Fleda's spirit as "free" (Prefaces, 130). But the presence in the novel of Mrs. Gereth, a figure who is almost a caricature of a pragmatist, has undoubtedly encouraged the critical view that Fleda Vetch is meant to exemplify the opposite mode of conduct, that inspired by ethical absolutism.

Eliseo Vivas contends that The Spoils of Poynton "embodies clearly and fully
He finds the conflict between Henry's moral vision and William's moral theory to be "sharp and shocking": "the theoretical difference between the two brothers in respect to morals is radical; as radical as is the difference between expedience instituted into principle and principle upheld against expedience." His description of Owen Gereth's behaviour betrays a basic contempt for pragmatic ethics, however, since what he terms "Owen's paltry felicific calculus, his Levantine haggling over what is the maximum of satisfied desires . . . ." cannot really be found in the novel. The idea of "the maximum of satisfied desires" as an ethical goal comes from William James's philosophy, but the expression "Levantine haggling" does not apply to either the philosopher or Owen Gereth, although it is not altogether inappropriate to describe Mrs. Gereth's thought processes as revealed in her conversations with Fleda.

Fleda is so revolted by Mrs. Gereth's attempts to use her, by her "brutality of good intentions" (XII, 220), that she cannot behave naturally with Owen without feeling herself to be, in action and in effect if not in intent, Mrs. Gereth's agent, working to accomplish Mrs. Gereth's purpose. Thus Mrs. Gereth becomes, by virtue of the reaction she provokes, a deterministic force acting on Fleda. In resisting Mrs. Gereth's "practical" attitude toward herself (XII, 220), Fleda resists Mrs. Gereth's purpose; in resisting her purpose, she resists Owen's love. But it is basically Mrs. Gereth's concept of herself as one who may be used that Fleda feels she cannot accept; she is distressed by the knowledge that "her own value in the house was just the value, as one might say, of a good agent," and that she is "cared for only as a priestess of the altar" (IV, 151-152). However, in spite of "a view of her bruised dignity which left no alternative to flight" (IX, 152), Fleda stays on at Poynton, lingering in the ambience that nourishes her
sensibility.

Identifying himself with the view of Mona Brigstock that prevails in the novel, the view that is Mrs. Gereth's, Fleda's, and even, at one crucial point, Owen's, James describes her as "the awful Mona Brigstock . . . all will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision" (Prefaces, 131). It is impossible to be aware of what James valued in character without realizing that Owen's appeal to be "saved" from Mona is not exclusively his subjective evaluation of his situation, but implicitly James's as well. A natural, amiable, and ingenuous man like Owen would presumably benefit by marriage to a cultivated, intelligent, and conscientious girl like Fleda, whereas marriage to a stubborn, insensitive, tasteless girl like Mona would do little for his character, and possibly might even degrade it. Fleda herself deplores everything Mona stands for (the vulgarity and tastelessness of Waterbath) and is aware, moreover, that her own nature would complement Owen's (I, 132). Therefore, after Mona makes it embarrassingly clear to Owen that she does not love him enough to marry him without the full measure of material value he is supposed to bring to his union, Fleda might conceivably have considered it her duty to "save" Owen from a marriage based too much on property and too little on affection (apart from physical attraction). No pragmatist would force, as Fleda in effect forces, an undesired and, objectively considered, unsuitable marriage on a man simply to save "his honor and his good name" (X, 209). But, herself hounded by a 'pragmatist,' Fleda is quite unable to pragmatise.

Because she feels strongly the need to resist Mrs. Gereth's concept of her as a person who can be used, Fleda later finds that she cannot admit her love for Owen without a sense of self-betrayal. Love to Fleda means exposure, shame, involuntary abasement, because she has never recovered
from the traumatic experience of being offered to Owen by Mrs. Gereth as a suitable bride, of feeling herself "passionately caught up and, as it seemed to her, thrust down the fine open mouth (it showed such perfect teeth) with which poor Owen's slow cerebration gaped" (III, 147-148). After Owen has finally insisted on confessing his love for her, and has embraced her, she is overwhelmed by a feeling of tenderness and sobs out her passion on his breast. But then she feels exposed, as if "she had not a shred of a secret left; it was as if a whirlwind had come and gone, laying low the great false front that she had built up stone by stone. The strangest thing of all was the momentary sense of desolation" (XVI, 262). Unable to bear the accompanying sense of shame and guilt, she moans her avowal of love "as defiantly as if confessing a misdeed" (XVI, 262), and then sends Owen away from her without the vital assurance which he craves that she is with him and against Mona (XVI, 267-268). Thus, in rejecting her opportunity to bind Owen to her in love, Fleda makes a final, definitive resistance to Mrs. Gereth's attempt to use her. But she does so at the expense of her passional self, the "something prisoned and pent [within her that] throbbed and gushed" (XVII, 262) when Owen held her in his arms. However, it is a question of the priority of demands, even within the mind of one person, as William James pointed out.

There are simple views of Fleda's morality, and there are complex ones. Perhaps the simplest is that of Charles G. Hoffman. In his brief study, *The Short Novels of Henry James* (1957), he maintains that Fleda's motivation is perhaps difficult to understand in modern times of hasty engagements quickly broken. Her motivation is purely a high regard for a promise made, Owen's promise to marry Mona. Unless Mona releases Owen from that promise, it remains binding, "forever." Fleda will not
allow herself or Owen to act dishonorably. She is willing to sacrifice her happiness in order to do "the right thing." This selfish act is an ethical choice based on a code of fine conduct . . . .

This critic's approach is defined by his reassuring remark, "Nor need we rely on a subjective analysis, for James thoroughly discusses the development of The Spoils of Poynton in his notebooks." Thus a simple interpretation follows from an uncomplicated method of analysis, or rather from the substitution of what James says about Fleda and what Fleda says most loudly about herself for any actual analysis of the text. The larger implications of this view of Fleda's morality are stated by Eliseo Vivas:

Loyalty to the pledged word, kindness as against cruelty, honor as against expedience—these are not the only specific values with which James concerns himself in his books; but they are basic to his vision of the world; and it is in his clear apprehension of what these values mean in a world in which intelligence is usually the tool of a self-assertive or sometimes merely meddlesome, but always immoral, will, that the quick of his interest lay.

Thus Vivas implies that Fleda is James's spokesman as far as ethical values are concerned.

But Patrick F. Quinn, writing in 1954, follows D. H. Lawrence's advice to trust the book, not the author, and his interpretation takes into consideration many factors ignored by Hoffman and Vivas. Quinn argues that the theme of the novel is not that Fleda's respect for principles is admirable and to be emulated, but that "a lofty moral idealism may be humanly disastrous." He maintains that Fleda's ideals are unrealistic: "they serve as her defense against life, and their extravagant sublimity is a measure of the paucity of her own self-knowledge." Contending that "the novel remains steadily focussed on the workings of the possessive instinct," he demonstrates that Fleda is perversely possessive in her attitude toward Owen, and shows how she
succeeds in controlling him, making him conform to her ideals of conduct, so that he becomes Mona's husband through first becoming "Fleda's creature." This critic places Fleda in James's gallery of characters who are a source of evil because they use others as if they were things, manipulating them, refashioning their lives. He finds Fleda "an agent of destruction," and the last scene of the novel, the burning of Poynton, "a conclusive symbol of the havoc that her deluded and intransigent idealism has brought about." Aware of the "sharp, baffling disparity" between Fleda's characterization as it exists in the novel and her characterization as it exists in James's mind, he concludes that "the novel makes a brilliant analysis of the destructive energies that may be brought into play when unconscious motives and needs are served by a stern devotion to high ideals." Walter F. Wright finds this critic's argument unconvincing, undoubtedly because the nature of the "unconscious motives and needs" which are served by Fleda's "stern devotion to high ideals" is never elucidated. Moreover, Quinn's tone of censure is somewhat inappropriate if "unconscious motives and needs" are in fact the motive force behind Fleda's "deluded and intransigent idealism."

Analysis of the text reveals, however, that James does provide a psychological justification of Fleda's ethical absolutism. Ford Madox Ford recalls that Conrad greeted the story with "rapturous and shouting enthusiasm" when they first read it together. One of the aesthetic principles of the impressionistic novel set forth by Ford in his book on Conrad is that any important action should be so completely "justified" by character and by circumstance that it seems to be the only possible action for the character to take. Thus, as it was developed by Conrad and Ford, the impressionistic novel reflected the emerging science of psychology in having a distinct bias
toward psychic determinism; at least, that is strongly implied by Ford's definition of the 'justification' of action. Fleda's act of rejecting Owen when she could have had his love is justified psychologically by her character and by her circumstances, and Conrad's enthusiasm suggests that he intuitively recognized James's achievement.

Fleda's strong reaction against Mrs. Gereth's attempt to use her has already been discussed. Her need to resist such treatment is obsessive; it is much deeper and more compelling than any normal dislike of being used. The fact is that Fleda's difficult and insecure position in life has left its mark on her character; it has conditioned her to behave toward others in certain ways. Consider, for example, Fleda's conduct during the scene with Owen at her father's house in London, after the arrival of Mrs. Brigstock. When there is some question as to whether Owen should leave with Mrs. Brigstock, Fleda's answering for Owen "as if she had been his wife" produces, as Fleda realizes, "a bad effect of intimacy" (XV, 251). This effect in conjunction with Owen's impassioned defense of Fleda to Mrs. Brigstock, who has not overtly accused Fleda of anything, and with his general exhibition of what Fleda thinks of as "the sheltering attitude" (XV, 252-253), gives Mrs. Brigstock the humiliating—to Fleda—but correct impression that Owen and Fleda are in love. Before Mrs. Brigstock leaves with her knowledge she says, "'I came, I believe, Fleda, just, you know, to plead with you.'"

Fleda, with a bright face, hesitated a moment. "As if I were one of those bad women in a play?"

The remark was disastrous. Mrs. Brigstock, on whom her brightness was lost, evidently thought it singularly free. She turned away, as if from a presence that had really defined itself as objectionable, and Fleda had a vain sense that her good humor, in which there was an idea, was taken for impertinence, or at least for levity. Her allusion was improper, even if she herself wasn't; Mrs. Brigstock's emotion simplified: it came to the same thing. (XV, 253)
Fleda's "improper" allusion is an obvious key to her deepest feelings. She is actually deeply distressed by what she feels must be the emerging public image of herself as "one of those bad women in a play." She can't 'let herself go' with Owen, in Mrs. Gereth's sense of surrendering to love (XII, 227), without seeming to fill out this threatening sinister concept.

In a word, Fleda's code of high conduct is a form of psychological compensation for painful feelings of inferiority: it is the means she compulsively takes to raise her value in her own eyes and to insist on her value to the world. Fleda's insecure financial position and ambiguous social status make her feel so inferior that at various times during her story she likens herself to, or reflects that she is considered by others to be, a parasite (IV, 154), a leech (VI, 168), a thief's accomplice (VII, 176; XIV, 237), a mouse, a "lonely fly" (XIII, 229), and a servant girl staring into shop windows on her afternoon off (XIII, 232). Her circumstances are indeed difficult: her father does not like her to live with him, but her sister has openly expressed disapproval of her prolonged association with Mrs. Gereth; her somewhat uncertainly felt vocation is that of an artist, but she realizes she has little hope of supporting herself by the exercise of her small talent. In short, her future is desperately in question: she has "neither a home nor an outlook--nothing in all the wide world but a feeling of suspense" (XIII, 230). She is one of the dispossessed, like Hyacinth Robinson of The Princess Casamassima, one of those deprived sensibilities whose level of culture is incompatible with his status in society. She endures Mrs. Gereth's patronage for the sake of associating with a cultivated woman, and lingers at Poynton because it provides her with a congenial environment, but her way of life causes her to feel
inferior and even guilty.

Her sister, perhaps motivated by envy, reports that people are saying that Fleda Vetch "fastened like a leech on other people—people who had houses where something was to be picked up" (VI, 168). Thus Fleda's resistance of Mrs. Gereth's attempt to use her becomes one with her hurt resistance of what seems to be the 'world's' impression of her—the unfair opinion she fears that Mrs. Brigstock and Mona also hold of her. Having decided she must help Owen to regain his rightful possession of the art objects of Poynton, she thinks with approval that she will, in this way, "justify her little pensioned presence by her use" (IX, 202)—justify it, not to Mrs. Gereth (who is the source of the pension), but to the 'world.' Given the 'world's' opinion of her motives, the pursuit of Owen urged on her by Mrs. Gereth becomes repugnant, a mode of conduct which, if carried out, would confirm the 'world's' low opinion of Fleda Vetch. Fleda's motive for resisting Mrs. Gereth and rejecting Owen can be seen, therefore, to be the result of a deep need to prove that the 'world' is wrong, that she really is, as she says protestingly to Owen, "a decent girl" (XVI, 259).

Throughout the scene leading up to Fleda's unfortunate attempt to be humorous about a difficult situation, the scenic context of Fleda's protestations and arguments provides an ironic counterpoint to what she says. Largely as a kind of diversionary tactic, Fleda is giving Owen tea, although she dislikes to expose anyone of Owen's background to the crude hospitality afforded by her father's sordid residence. Owen asks her why she has left Ricks, and to justify herself she explains, "'I didn't want to be, even to the extent of the mere look of it—what is it you call such people?—an accessory after the fact.'" And while she speaks she busies
herself "spreading out the coarse cups and saucers and the vulgar little plates," aware of producing "more confusion than symmetry" (XIV, 237).

The consideration of Fleda's moral problem continues interminably over the unused tea-things until Owen breaks out with, "'I say, you know, do give me some tea!'" Fleda serves him apologetically.

Her profuse preparations had all this time had no sequel, and, with a laugh that she felt to be awkward, she hastily complied with his request. "It's sure to be horrid," she said; "we don't have at all good things." (XIV, 241)

Owen partakes, and Fleda herself begins to eat a small stale biscuit. Some time later, after Owen has worked himself up to the point of declaring his love for Fleda, Mrs. Brigstock unexpectedly appears at the door. Her eyes instantly attach themselves to the slightly nibbled biscuit that has, during the interval and unnoticed by Fleda, fallen to the floor, and she obviously interprets it as a sign of high feeling, the visible evidence of Fleda's agitation.

For Mrs. Brigstock there was apparently more in it than met the eye. Owen at any rate picked it up, and Fleda felt as if he were removing the traces of some scene that the newspapers would have characterized as lively. (XV, 247)

Previously, on reaching the dubious refuge of her father's house, Fleda had thought, "her only plan was to be as quiet as a mouse" (XIII, 229,231). But even quite apart from that, the nibbled biscuit figures ironically, and comically as well, as the outward sign, not so much of a mouse's passion as of a mouse's preoccupation with fine moral points.

Fleda's painfully self-conscious attitude is entirely characteristic. During an earlier scene with Owen, when he had accompanied her to an Oxford
Street bazaar, she had refused to accept a present of any value from him. Then, she "found it easy to chaff him about his exaggeration of her deserts; she gave the just measure of them in consenting to accept a small pin-cushion, costing sixpence, in which the letter F was marked out with pins" (VI, 171). But Fleda's idea of her "just measure" in a present is the inverse of her inward sense of her real value. When Owen asks her to have lunch with him, she reflects, "She must have counted very little if she didn't count too much for a romp in a restaurant" (VI, 171). Of this scene Patrick F. Quinn comments, "It is typical of [Fleda] that instead of attempting to understand people as they are she imposes on them the complex pattern of her own attitudes." This is true, but Quinn does not suggest why Fleda should attribute the "devious logic" of her own thought processes to a comparatively simple person like Owen Gereth. The fact is that Fleda is projecting, as the psychologists say. She interprets everything, even a luncheon invitation, as evidence that she is considered to be an inferior or at least an insignificant person. Considering Owen's sincere wish to give her something, she makes up her mind that "his tribute would be, if analyzed, a tribute to her insignificance" (VI, 171).

Perry E. Gragg, author of a dissertation on the influence of William James's psychology on five representative novels of Henry James, observes that a frequently recurring image in *The Golden Bowl* is "a spring which, when pressed, incites some mental or physical reaction." This image, employed for all the characters in the novel, signifies, according to Gragg, Henry James's awareness of his brother's psychology of reaction, as expressed in the *Principles of Psychology* (1890). It expresses James's observation that the mind frequently reacts instantly and compulsively in response to
certain key stimulii. An example is Maggie Verver's feeling, when her husband returns from his day of "freedom" with Charlotte, that any question he might have asked "would have pressed in her the spring of recklessness" (299).

The mechanism of response is also expressed through imagery in the earlier novel *The Spoils of Poynton*. An image pattern subtly expresses the dynamic interplay of conflicting psychological needs in Fleda's consciousness and finally indicates the crucial moment when her love for Owen is overcome by her need to assert her personal worth. Fleda's initial awareness that Owen loves her is momentarily joyous and accompanied by a remarkable sense of release: "To know that she had become to him an object of desire gave her wings that she felt herself flutter in the air: it was like the rush of a flood into her own accumulations. These stored depths had been fathomless and still, but now, for half an hour, in the empty house, they spread till they overflowed" (IX, 201). But during her interview with Owen in her father's house before Mrs. Brigstock with her eye for high-water marks appears on the scene, when Owen ingenuously reports to her that Mona is fearfully displeased and has denounced her as dishonest, Fleda colors up to her eyes, "where, as with the effect of a blow in the face, she quickly felt, the tears gathering. It was a sudden drop to her great flight, a shock to her attempt to watch over what Mona was entitled to. While she had been straining her very soul in this attempt, the object of her magnanimity had been pronouncing her 'not honest'" (XIV, 243). The image of the sudden drop in the "great flight" expresses Fleda's instantaneous reaction to hearing of a harsh opinion of her character. Fleda's emotional distress, felt most acutely at this point and subsequently
augmented by her later reaction to Mrs. Brigstock's attitude toward her, becomes a powerful influence working to accentuate her need to justify herself morally. At the beginning of their final interview, Fleda says to Owen about Mrs. Brigstock, "'She thinks me awfully designing—that I've taken some sort of possession of you. . . . She doesn't know, you see, that I'm after all a decent girl. She simply made up her mind on the spot that I'm a very bad case.'" (XVI, 258-259).

Then, when Owen finally does take her in his arms, and she surrenders for a moment to her passion, sobbing out that she does love him, but moaning her secret "as defiantly as if she were confessing a misdeed," James expresses through imagery her sense of desolation. "It was as if a whirlwind had come and gone, laying low the great false front that she had built up stone by stone." The "great false front" is her persona of the disinterested "decent girl," the persona that is temporarily demolished by the emotional truth of her love for Owen. A sinister transformation of the image later indicates Fleda's apprehension of disaster just before Mrs. Gereth reveals that she has sent the "spoils" back to Poynton. Mrs. Gereth has been recounting her interview with Mrs. Brigstock, and

Fleda had listened in unbearable pain and growing terror, as if her interlocutress, stone by stone, were piling some fatal mass upon her breast. She had the sense of being buried alive, smothered in the mere expansion of another will; and now there was but one gap left to the air. A single word, she felt, might close it. . . . (XVII, 277)

The single word is ambiguously indicated. It might have been, but was not, Mrs. Gereth's admission to Mrs. Brigstock that she wishes her son to marry Fleda, a word that would spell Fleda's doom morally, in the eyes of "the 'world'" (in Fleda's view of her situation). But the word that comes instead, the word which spells Fleda's doom as a passional creature, is Mrs. Gereth's
magnificent declaration that she has sent everything back to Poynton—for Fleda, trusting that Fleda would not fail her. (XVII, 278-279) The image of immurement expresses Fleda's confused but acutely painful sense of repression, a repression she forces on herself in reaction to an opinion of herself she cannot live with. After Fleda is afraid that she has lost Owen, her consciousness of her hopeless state is expressed by another image of repression: "Her emotion occupied some quarter of her soul that had closed its doors for the day and shut out even her own sense of it; she might perhaps have heard something if she had pressed her ear to a partition" (XX, 297).

By bringing great pressure to bear on Fleda to allow herself to be manipulated, Mrs. Gereth has made her painfully, morbidly aware of the problem of personal integrity. To Fleda, in the state of mind induced by Mrs. Gereth's crude practicality, there is only one alternative to enforcing the principle of personal honor, and that is the disintegration of her personal integrity. Mrs. Gereth's ardent advice, "'Only let yourself go, darling—only let yourself go!'", to Fleda signifies not merely surrender to passion, but, more literally, the surrender of her ideal self: the defiance of her super-ego (in Freudian terminology), and the collapse of her persona (in Jungian terminology).

After Owen's marriage, when Mrs. Gereth cruelly points out to Fleda that Owen's failure to "impose his reason and his will on [her] incredible folly" might be interpreted as weakness, Fleda suddenly has "a blinding glimpse of lost alternatives" (XVIII, 285). Mrs. Gereth becomes angry enough with Fleda to allude vindictively to her young friend's inferior social status. Her resentment rises to "a strange insolence" as she asks, "'What are you, after all, my dear, I should like to know, that a gentleman
who offers you what Owen offers should have to meet such wonderful exactions, to take such extraordinary precautions about your sweet little scruples?"

(XVIII, 285) Fleda's subsequent comparison of Mrs. Gereth to one of the Fates (XVIII, 289) has a definite thematic significance in relation to Fleda's psychology. Mrs. Gereth's oversimplified approach to Fleda's situation in relation to Owen has, by reaction, made Fleda's attitude toward herself fatally over-complicated. By making it impossible for Fleda to behave naturally with Owen, or to admit her love for him without a crippling sense of shame and guilt, Mrs. Gereth has cut, as if she were Atropos, the thread of Fleda's psychic vitality. What Mrs. Gereth writes to Fleda after Owen is "lost" is quite true, but in a sense Mrs. Gereth does not intend and for reasons Mrs. Gereth cannot comprehend. "'For action . . . '," Mrs. Gereth proclaims, "'you're no good at all . . .'" (XXI, 305).

Fleda's conduct has been psychologically determined, although she has tried valiantly to remain free. William James's discussion of the psychology of volition in the Principles of Psychology (1890) may have helped Henry James to work out the psychology of Fleda's tortuous thought processes, for Fleda's mental behaviour exemplifies many of William James's observations and principles. The psychologist points out that what holds attention determines action, that the effort of forcing oneself to become aware of alternatives is the basic volitional act, and that freedom of the will may only be said to exist in so far as one is genuinely aware of all possible alternatives. An examination of Fleda's psychology shows that her rejection of Owen is determined by her inability to consider more than two possibilities, one of which, surrender to passion, the act of binding Owen
to her in love while supporting him against Mona, is repugnant to her. She is unable to take into account all the circumstances of Mona's 'brutal' nature (XX, 302), Owen's weakness (XVIII, 289), and her own feelings for Owen. Although she is aware of all these factors, she does not base her decision on them. What most compels her attention and thus determines her decision is the psychological necessity of disproving the humiliating concepts of her character held by Mrs. Gereth, Mrs. Brigstock, Mona, her sister, her erstwhile friends—by everyone she knows except Owen, who is too good-natured to be capable of questioning her motives (e.g. IV, 154).

When Fleda learns that Mona has married Owen at the Registrar's, as Mrs. Gereth remarks, "'like a pair of low atheists,'" she asks, "'What do people say of that? I mean the 'world!'" (XX, 302). Her question reveals again one of the deepest springs of her own conduct: fear of the 'world.' If Fleda did not suffer from painful feelings of inferiority, which is almost to say if she were not a person of fine sensibility sadly limited by "her small means and her deficiencies" (VI, 171), she might have been able to stake her life on love instead of on winning the moral approval of the 'world,' on the perfection of outward conformity to absolute ethical standards. The heroine of one of James's earliest tales, "My Friend Bingham," published in 1867, decides to defy convention by marrying the man who has accidentally killed her small son. The narrator of the story deeply approves her "solemn and intelligent choice." The man she is to marry asks the narrator to represent "the world" to her and tells her to make her appeal to him, if she fears the judgments of men. But she denies that the "world" has anything to do with the matter, turning from the narrator to her suitor and crying, "'You are the world, for me, . . . I know no other.'" 29 Fleda Vetch is incapable of this kind of independence of the judgments of others--
until it is too late.

Fleda's abject behaviour, after she learns that Mrs. Gereth has re-stored the "spoils" to Poynton and fears that Owen is, as Mrs. Gereth puts it, "lost" (XVIII, 287), shows that she suddenly becomes able to see her decision to send Owen away from her in another light, the light that gives her a "blinding glimpse of lost alternatives" (XVIII, 285). Previously she had thought, fairly consistently, that "she couldn't do anything at all . . . unless she could do it with a kind of pride, and there would be nothing to be proud of in having arranged for poor Owen to get off easily" (IX, 202). Now, however, she deliberately destroys what is left of her pride by sending a telegram to Waterbath, asking Owen to come to her.

Mrs. Gereth points out that Mona will probably see the message and will undoubtedly view it as proof of Fleda's "immodesty" (XIX, 291-292). But Fleda no longer cares what the 'world' thinks of her. Such penitential humility expresses her sudden realization that in refusing to have Owen except upon "another footing," she may have acted, as Mrs. Gereth angrily suggests, out of a perverse sense of pride (XVIII, 285).

At this time Fleda has a confused, blinding perception of "lost alternatives," she feels that she has betrayed Mrs. Gereth, and that what she did may have been a mistake, but she never becomes fully aware that her rejection of Owen was determined by the various forces brought to bear on her, primarily by her own obsessive desire to prove her worth to the 'world.' Eventually, when Owen has become reconciled to his bride, as any man who is "all nature in one pair of boots" (XIII, 233) and who is married to a sexually attractive woman would be likely to do, Fleda is again able to interpret her conduct as right, this time as justified by the course of events, and to reconcile herself to a life of lonely meditation on the
splendours of a restored Poynton. But her sense that "her love had gathered in the spoils" (XX, 298) is destroyed when Poynton burns and she feels herself "give everything up" (XXII, 320).

Arnold Goldsmith maintains that Fleda is the supreme exemplar of James's underlying belief that the life of the body may suffer, but the spirit can still emerge victorious. But it is not possible at the end of the novel to make this kind of distinction between Fleda and her spirit. Since the reconstituted Poynton has become a consoling symbol of wholeness to Fleda (XIX, 294; XX, 298), and the Maltese cross the epitome of its glory (the "gem of the collection," as Owen describes it in his letter to Fleda, offering it to her [XX, 315]), the burning of the great house is a devastating blow to Fleda's consciousness. Fleda's "hour of triumph" (XXII, 316) becomes her hour of supreme deprivation:

Fleda by this time knew in what way she was affected: she became limp and weak again; she felt herself give everything up. Mixed with the horror, with the kindness of the station-master, with the smell of cinders and the riot of sound, was the raw bitterness of a hope that she might never again in life have to give up so much at such short notice. She heard herself repeat mechanically, yet as if asking it for the first time: "Poynton's gone?"

The man hesitated. "What can you call it, miss, if it ain't really saved?"... She came out on the platform: everywhere she met the smoke. She covered her face with her hands. "I'll go back." (XX, 320)

Thus James creates impressionistically the final meaning expressed in his novel: Fleda's 'moral victory' is actually a psychic catastrophe; her moral effort has resulted in this.

Extreme forms of psychic determinism assume that there is no free will. A less pessimistic position was taken by William James when he asserted that "sometimes we are free and sometimes we are not." He insisted on the importance of self-knowledge and of what he called the
imagination of alternatives. Fleda Vetch, although capable of subtle thought processes, never attains self-knowledge, for she never goes beyond the rationalization of her compulsive desire to justify herself morally. Her vision of such present realities as her own love for Owen, Owen's need to be rescued from Mona, and the serious defects in Mona's character, is intense but strangely peripheral; it never becomes compelling enough to break the hold her need to assert her moral superiority has on her psyche. She even turns away from logic, as in the following passage:

Of a different way of loving [Owen] she was herself ready to give an instance, an instance of which the beauty indeed would not be generally known. It would not perhaps if revealed be generally understood, inasmuch as the effect of the particular pressure she proposed to exercise would be, should success attend it, to keep him tied to an affection that had died a sudden and violent death. Even in the ardor of her meditation Fleda remained in sight of the truth that it would be an odd result of her magnanimity to prevent her friend's shaking off a woman he disliked. If he didn't dislike Mona, what was the matter with him? And if he did, Fleda asked, what was the matter with her own silly self?" (IX, 202)

The only alternatives Fleda can imagine are alternative ways of satisfying "honor"; otherwise, she has what her creator called "the imagination of disaster." Her will and her imagination have been exerted to create an ultimately inadequate form of psychological compensation rather than to solve an ethical problem.

For Henry James the critic, Fleda's almost demonic intensity of perception provides the basis of whatever freedom she may be said to possess (Prefaces, 129-130). But James's created view of her 'freedom' (as opposed to his publicly expressed view in the Preface and his conscious evaluation of Fleda's situation in his notebooks) is deeply ironic and, when fully understood, considerably modifies the reader's appreciation of Fleda, and prepares him to accept Maggie Verver as a creative pragmatist. Unlike
Maggie, who slowly realizes that she must change her own concept of herself if she is to regain the love of her adored but immoral husband, Fleda puts the burden of change and moral responsibility entirely on the man she loves, and she does so because she has a deeper need than the demands of her passion-al nature. Maggie endures a painful modification of her ideal self (or super-ego) in the name of love. Fleda renounces Owen's love, and with it her hope of self-fulfilment (although she does not realize the full extent of her loss until Poynton is destroyed) in order to protect her ideal self. She does so because her compulsive need to assert her moral superiority prevents her, until it is too late, from adopting an alternative mode of conduct which might be described as pragmatic. Since this need is produced in her by environmentally induced feelings of inferiority circumstantially exacerbated by her reaction against Mrs. Gereth's attempt to use her to retain Poynton within the maternal grasp, Fleda is, not the supreme exponent of ethical absolutism or of stoical renunciation, but James's most subtly tormented--and most subtly portrayed--victim of deterministic forces. Psychologically her fate illustrates the principle of psychic determinism.
II
The Maltese Cross and Fin de Siècle Romanticism

Owen's gift, the symbol of Fleda's 'spiritual triumph,' is actually a carved ivory crucifix (VII, 178). Why, then, did James specify that it was known to the Gereths and to Fleda as "the Maltese cross"? Oscar Cargill insists that "it is important not to attach any of the symbolism of charity, the chief virtue of the Knights of Malta, nor of the beatitudes for which the eight points of the true Maltese Cross are said to stand, to the cross in this story. To call the cross Maltese, says James, was 'technically incorrect.' It was so called merely because Mrs. Gereth had heard of it in Malta . . . ." But the use of an emblem of the crusades in conjunction with a strong pattern of battle imagery employed to present a moral struggle, a struggle climaxed by the 'sacking' of Poynton and emphasized by the use of the word spoils in the title and throughout the story, cannot be glossed over so easily. The misnomer cannot be simply an idle gesture on James's part. The fact that the cross both is and is not Maltese, thus both is and is not an emblem of charity associated with the crusades, suggests that there is an ambiguity in James's use of the symbol. This possibility is borne out by analysis of the text in relation to its historical context.

Through its association with the Knights Hospitalers, who founded a hospital for pilgrims in Jerusalem in the eleventh century during the time of the first crusade, the emblem may be related to the Victorian image of the Middle Ages as one of heroic dedication to an ideal. Fleda's "sacrificial exaltation," as James describes her moral attitude in a notebook entry made on February 13, 1896 (Notebooks, 248), corresponds to this aspect of the symbol. She tells Mrs. Gereth that she cares only for Owen's
"honor and his good name" (X, 209). She "[bleeds] with the wounds to Poynton" (XVIII, 281). Brooding in her bedroom at Ricks, which has been furnished with some of the "spoils," "in the watches of the night she saw Poynton dishonored; she had cared for it as a happy whole, she reasoned, and the parts of it now around her seemed to suffer like chopped limbs" (VII, 182). She conceives her mission to be the preservation of Owen's honor; moreover, she wishes to 'heal' the 'dismembered' great house, to restore its radiant wholeness. Unfortunately, her efforts have the effect of destroying Poynton by giving it over, through marriage, to the Philistines through whose ineffectual guardianship it is lost.

It is perhaps significant that the summer of 1895, the period during which James began to work on The Spoils of Poynton, is also the time of Henry Adams's discovery of Chartres. By August 11, 1895, James had finished seventy pages of manuscript, and was into the third chapter of the book. Meanwhile, Henry Adams had gone almost directly from his interviews with the London bankers to view the cathedral at Chartres. Ernest Samuels, Adams's biographer, writes, "His revulsion from Lombard Street to the Middle Ages was violent, emetic." Samuels observes that the already existing cult of the Middle Ages afforded disenchanted idealists like Brooks and Henry Adams an antidote to everything they disliked about their own era, and that Brooks's Law of Civilization and Decay (1895) and Henry's Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres (1905) were the highest achievement of the medieval revival in American letters. By 1899 Henry Adams had become so immersed in medieval French literature and history that he could describe himself as "growing frightfully learned on French art of the Crusades."

Samuels points out that Matthew Arnold, whom Henry Adams had long
admired, had in *Culture and Anarchy*, attributed the source of the cult of
the Middle Ages to the influence of John Henry Newman and the Oxford Move-
ment, to "the keen desire for beauty and sweetness which it nourished, the
deep aversion it manifested to the hardness and vulgarity of middle-class
liberalism, the strong light it turned on the hideous and grotesque illusions
of middle-class Protestantism." In James's novel, Waterbath, the residence
of the Brigstocks, with its "ugliness fundamental and systematic" and its
"acres of varnish" (I, 129-130), is a visual manifestation of Philistinism,
for its horrors are but "the result of the abnormal nature of the Brigstocks,
from whose composition the principle of taste had been extravagantly omitted"
(I, 129), and the "awful Mona Brigstock," as James describes her, "all will,
without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision"
(*Prefaces*, 131), is a true daughter of the Philistines. Thus Waterbath
and the Brigstocks represent the vulgar materialism of late Victorian society
disliked intensely by such men of letters as Henry James and Brooks and Henry
Adams. In opposition to Waterbath stands Poynton, a treasure house of art
gathered from the ages, and dominating that radiant interior is the Maltese
cross, an emblem of medieval idealism. Thus the double antithesis of Fleda
and Mona, Poynton and Waterbath, expresses concretely the felt antithesis
within late Victorian culture of idealist and materialist.

In *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, Brooks Adams, who by that time
had come to believe that the progress of modern civilization was a delusion,
corroded at the core by spiritual decay, had advanced "the idea of the
'saving remnant,' of the moral elite who must begin the reform of civiliz-
ation by learning first to despise it." In spite of general necessity,
Brooks believed, there remained a degree, however small, of particular
and limited freedom in individual man. The "saving remnant" would be able to exercise this limited degree of freedom. James often speaks of Fleda in his notebook entries and in the Preface as if she were one of such a moral elite. He obviously approves of her high dedication to a moral principle and, of the outcome of her moral effort, he says finally, in the Preface, "the free spirit, always much tormented, and by no means always triumphant, is heroic, ironic, pathetic or whatever, and, as exemplified in the record of Fleda Vetch, ... 'successful,' only through having remained free" ([Prefaces], 129). But one of the great ironies of the novel is that the dedicated idealist is forced by her very idealism to allow what should have been her cultural heritage to fall into the hands of the Philistines. Her moral crusade ends in disaster as the 'brutal' Mona Brigstock prevails over Owen and (in effect) burns the great house. The Maltese cross may be intended, after all, to function as an ironic allusion to the beatitudes, for, in *The Spoils of Poynton*, the meek do not, in any sense, inherit the earth.

Another current of the *Zeitgeist* indicates a connotation of the emblem specifically fin de siècle yet consonant with its historical significance, and thus suggests a more complex reason James made the symbol of Fleda's renunciation of love for the sake of honor not merely a crucifix but a Maltese cross. Through the essays of Arthur Symons as well as through his knowledge of French literature, James must have been acquainted with the life-denying romanticism of Villiers de l'Isle Adam, the symbolist poet and dramatist whom Symons called "the Don Quixote of idealism" and whose play *Axel* was published in 1890. According to Symons, the basis of
Villiers' character, and of that of his typical protagonist, is spiritual and intellectual pride, the aristocratic "pride of being." Villiers' heroes "are incarnations of spiritual pride, and their tragedies are the shock of spirit against matter . . . ." Rejecting the religious ideal, the occult ideal, the worldly ideal, and the passionate ideal, Villiers' supreme idealist, Count Axel of Auersburg, disdainfully renounces life, persuading his beloved to commit suicide with him. Before they drain a jewel-encrusted goblet of poison, he utters an expression of contempt for life that has become immortal. Arthur Symons identifies Villiers' idealism with that of his hero: "'As for living,' [Villiers] cries, in that splendid phrase of Axel, 'our servants will do that for us!'" In her pursuit and embrace of renunciation almost as if it were a goal in itself (as Matthiessen observes), it is as if Fleda Vetch had been influenced by the appeal of this "pride of being" exemplified by the idealism of Villiers and of his supremely romantic heroes.

Whether James intended it or not, his designation of Fleda's cross as Maltese links the life-denying romanticism of Axel and the destructive idealism of Fleda Vetch. Symons tells how for Villiers the age of the crusades had not passed. Villiers took particular pride in his descent from Philippe de l'Isle Adam, whose valiant defense of Rhodes against the infidels obtained from Charles V the concession of the isle of Malta for his order, henceforth the Order of the Knights of Malta. Symons comments, "From a descendant of the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the nineteenth century demanded precisely the virtues which the sixteenth century had demanded of that ancestor." The symbolism of the cross had a particular fascination for Villiers, not only because of his connection with the Knights of Malta, but also because of his interest in the occult.
Axel and his beloved are both Rosicrucians. Moreover, the psychological connection which often exists between maladjustment to the reality of the environment and extreme forms of romantic idealism, and which exists in the case of Fleda Vetch, is illustrated by Villiers' personal history. The author's impoverished condition and spiritual isolation formed an ironic contrast with the life of his sixteenth century forbear; where his ancestor could translate ideals into action, Villiers could only pursue his ideals in art. There is an analogous discrepancy between Fleda Vetch's fine sensibility and her interest in art (both her own and that of the past) and the harsh reality of her social condition.

Edmund Wilson sees Villiers' Axel as a fin de siècle Faust. For Wilson, Villiers' Axel epitomizes the distinctive quality of Symbolist literature:

Symbolism corresponds to Romanticism, and is in fact an outgrowth from it. But whereas it was characteristic of the Romantics to seek experience for its own sake—love, travel, politics—to try the possibilities of life; the Symbolists . . . explore only the possibilities of imagination and thought . . . . TheSymbolist . . . will cultivate his unique personal sensibility even beyond the point to which the Romantics did, but he will not assert his individual will—he will end by shifting the field of literature altogether, as his spokesman Axel had done the arena of life, from an objective to a subjective world, from an experience shared with society to an experience savoured in solitude.

Henry James disliked "faint, pale, embarrassed, exquisite Pater" (Letters, I, 221-222), whose sensitive, contemplative, inactive young heroes are essentially of the type of Villiers' Axel. But his own heroine, Fleda Vetch, has the same brooding, endlessly complicating type of imagination that tends to become an end in itself rather than a means of exploring the possibilities of life. Throughout the novel stress is laid repeatedly on Fleda's fine imagination as contrasted with the others' lack of imagin-
ation, a psychological differentiation which means that, for Fleda, life becomes a tremendously complicated affair. In the last chapter, as Fleda approaches Poynton unaware that it is burning, James anticipates his later remark about his own mental life, "... I have the imagination of disaster, and see life indeed as ferocious and sinister." He says of his heroine, "Something, in a dire degree, at this last hour, had begun to press on her heart: it was the sudden imagination of a disaster, or at least of a check, before her errand was achieved" (XX, 318). The disaster which materializes is the destruction by fire of the symbol of Fleda's spiritual victory. The Symbolist temperament deprived of its cherished symbol then goes into a state of shock, as the effect of renunciation changes from that of an attenuated but still meaningful consciousness of life, a consciousness focussed on and irradiated by "the great interior" of Poynton, to a sense of utter deprivation and loss—to psychic death.

Villiers, Pater, and Huysmans shared a belief that renunciation is the way to spiritual fulfilment. James, who read Pater and Huysmans and who must have been aware of Villiers' play *Axel*, the work that became "the bible of the Symbolists" during the last decade of the nineteenth century, in my opinion unconsciously made use of some of the ideas and images of *fin de siècle* renunciation of the world in order to render the consciousness of Fleda Vetch, to present her as one whose mental life is dominated by the morbid *fin de siècle* romantic imagination. For Villiers, Symons observed, "Life ... was the dream, and the spiritual world the reality." And so, "he lived his faith, enduring what others called reality with contempt, whenever he became conscious of it." His belief was the belief common to all Eastern mystics: "'Man, if thou cease to limit in thyself a thing, that is, to desire it, if,
so doing, thou withdraw thyself from it, it will follow thee . . . , as the water fills the place that is offered to it in the hollow of the hand. For thou possessest the real being of all things, in thy pure will, and thou art the God that thou art able to become.®

There are ironic echoes of this mystical attitude in James's symbolism of the treasures of Poynton and their burning. Resisting the temptations of gold and sensual love (the worldly ideal and the passionate ideal 63), Axel tells his beloved that the external world is an old slave "who promises us the keys to a palace of enchantments when it clutches only a handful of ashes in its clenched black fist!" He urges her not to be made a dupe by that old slave. James's heroine refuses the lure of the external world, represented by Owen's love (the passionate ideal) and the chance to become the mistress of Poynton (the worldly ideal), only to become the dupe of her own romantic idealism. The burning of Poynton ironically echoes Axel's metaphor of life as a snare and a delusion: Poynton is a palace of enchantments unexpectedly transformed, at the very moment Fleda arrives to claim its principal treasure as her reward, into a heap of ashes and a cloud of smoke. Fleda's imperfect renunciation brings neither material nor spiritual reward, and the destruction of her Maltese cross is the death of her "pride of being." Basically, Fleda's values are centered in life, as her secret love for Owen and her secret hope that she may be able to marry him testifies. Therefore, that extreme idealism which leads to the rejection of life is wrong for her. It is as if she drinks from Axel's goblet without realizing what it contains.

Although he does not perceive the springs of Fleda's conduct, Patrick F. Quinn rightly terms James's characterization of Fleda "a study in the psychology of ethical absolutism." 65 Once Fleda's affinity with the type of imaginative, introverted hero created by fin de siècle authors
(heroes epitomized by Villiers': Axel, Huysmans' des Esseintes, and Pater's Sebastian von Storck) is recognized, it is also possible to interpret James's rendering of Fleda's psychology as an unconsciously-contrived comment on the nature of the fin de siècle romantic temperament. Fleda has the hypersensitive, morbidly introverted temperament of the fin de siècle protagonist, and her idealism is shown to be compulsive and to lead, not to spiritual victory (as Villiers intended in the case of Axel), but to psychic disaster. The connection between fin de siècle romanticism and destructive ethical absolutism is expressed in The Spoils of Poynton by the symbolism of the Maltese cross. The cross functions as an allusion to Villiers' "pride of being" and to the kind of renunciation of life prominent in fin de siècle literature and epitomized by the Rosicrucian, Axel, who scornfully rejects the world because of his belief that renunciation of mundane reality will bring fulfilment in the realm of the ideal. Arthur Symons, who drew the attention of the English literary public to the work of the French symbolists, listed as decadent qualities "an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity." Of Villiers' heroes, Symons wrote, "It was part of his curiosity in souls to prefer the complex to the simple, the perverse to the straightforward, the ambiguous to either." Fleda's intense self-consciousness, her strained arguments and over-subtle thought processes, her refinement upon refinement of the problem of personal honor, add up to a strong impression of spiritual and moral perversity. The whole of Chapter IX (pp. 200-203), of which part is quoted above (p. 39), displays her state of mind by demonstrating both her fantastic capacity for rationalization and her readiness to abandon logic when reason alone seems about to make her aware of the real issues at stake.
This brilliant study in morbid psychology is, in my opinion, an unconsciously produced imitation and (in effect) analysis of a psychological type recurring in fin de siècle literature. The reader who is not deceived by James's (and by Fleda's) protestations of moral 'sublimity' will recognize the significance of Owen's "dread . . . of some darksome process of [Fleda's] mind" (XVI, 263), and understand the truth of Mrs. Gereth's despiring cry, "'Your perversity's a thing to howl over!'" (XVIII, 289).

The implication of the relation of the psychological dimension of the novel to the symbolism of the Maltese cross is that by 1895-96 James was becoming increasingly aware of renunciation of life for the sake of honor as an unsatisfactory and perhaps unnecessary 'solution' to the problem of how the civilized person should behave when his own need for continued psychic development is among the ethical issues at stake. Moreover, he was becoming peripherally aware of renunciation as a mode of conduct proceeding in many instances from an unsound state of mind. By linking Fleda's failure to survive as a sensibility to the various other undesirable consequences of her insistence on honor (Mrs. Gereth's exile, Owen's forced marriage, and the destruction of Poynton), he in effect suggested that a social morality which conditions sensitive persons to believe that they ought to sacrifice themselves to uphold ideals regardless of the consequences and that such self-denial is an infallible sign of moral superiority, must be inherently vicious, for the persons most susceptible to such insidious conditioning are usually the very ones who ought to survive. As a romantic idealist suffering from strong feelings of inferiority, Fleda has a deep need to prove that she really is the fine person she presumes herself to be. Hence she compulsively and passionately asserts her integrity as an individual
by enforcing a moral principle which she has received unquestioningly from society. She has the artistic temperament, but because she lacks the kind of self-confidence necessary for continued psychic development, she is excluded forever, by her compulsive idealism, from a creative life.
III

The Contradiction and the Evidence of the Notebooks

Aware himself that "under a very strong light human nature will always appear complex and full of contradictions," Henry Adams remarked that it was Henry James who "taught the world to read a volume for the pleasure of seeing the lights of his burning-glass turned on alternate sides of the same figure." The word taught implies conscious intent. But the discrepancy between James's idea of Fleda in his notebook entries and in the Preface and what textual analysis reveals indicates that, on the contrary, James was not always fully aware of what "the lights of his burning-glass" illuminated.

In a letter to F. W. Myers, written on December 19, 1898, James admits that he doesn't understand the principal question Myers has put to him about "The Turn of the Screw," and reminds Myers that he has told him before that he "can't pretend to give any coherent account of [his] small inventions 'after the fact' . . . ." He says, "The one thing and another that are questionable and ambiguous in them I mostly take to be conditions of their having got themselves pushed through at all." (Letters, I, 300-301) His accompanying evaluation of the story under discussion as "really mechanical," and "a potboiler," gives the impression that, if he was not deliberately covering up a part of his meaning, then he was genuinely unaware of the psychological dimensions of the work explored by later critics. As psychologists, Myers and William James were, of course, aware of Freud's early work. One can only imagine Myers's question and James's bewilderment, and regret again the great bonfire at Rye, to which Myers's provocative
enquiry may have been consigned. James's reply to Myers does, in effect, 
disclaim full authorial responsibility for all the "questionable" and 
"ambiguous" details of the fiction he was writing during this period, and 
therefore supports my contention that James's unconscious mind was supplying 
his craftsman's consciousness with a steady stream of psychologically signif-
icant detail to be utilized for characterization.

And then there is the evidence of the Notebooks. It is an over-
simplification to abstract James's preliminary notes for a novel from their 
context in the Notebooks and then to base an interpretation of the finished 
novel largely on these notes. The entries James made on other subjects 
while the "germ" of the Spoils of Poynton (noted on December 24, 1893) grew 
in his mind are also relevant to a consideration of the theme of the story 
because in these notes James consciously expressed some of the ideas he un-
consciously built into the structure of the novel. James worked on The Spoils 
during the late summer and autumn of 1895, through the winter, completing 
the novel in time for its serialization to commence in April of 1896, under 
the title The Old Things. The evolution of James's conscious conception 
of Fleda Vetch and her situation may be traced through notebook entries 
made in May, August, September, and October of 1895 and in February and 
March of 1896. In these notes James approves of Fleda's act of renunciation 
and sees it as proof of the fineness of her character and of her superiority 
to the other characters. But other notebook entries on different subjects 
reveal an unconscious ambivalence toward the 'sublimity' of her conduct.

On February 5, 1895, James considered the idea of "Too late," an idea 
he was to develop, the editors note, in "The Beast in the Jungle," a story 
published in 1903 (Notebooks, 182-184). He imagines a couple for whom
"the only other 'something else' than marriage must have been, doubtless, the wasting of life. And the wasting of life," he adds, "is the implication of death" (Notebooks, 183). Another entry made on the same date refers to "[the] most affectionate wisdoms, guiding devotions, which enter into the nature of the loved object for its good and to protect it sometimes against itself, its native dangers . . ." (Notebooks, 181-182). Here, juxtaposed with the idea of the failure to marry as the wasting of life and the implication of death (a good description of Fleda's final condition), is a statement of an alternative possibility of conduct, one Fleda was unable to adopt during her moment of crisis, although she had realized it before (I, 132). She does not enter into Owen's nature, to protect him against himself (which would be to respond to his plea to save him from Mona) because she feels that "there was as yet no valid right poor Owen could give" to her to help him (XVI, 267). And so, by intensely repudiating his "freedom," Fleda imposes upon him the external form of "honor," the mechanical form of "keep[ing] faith." What she might have done, but could not since she is compulsively idealistic, is indicated by Maggie Verver's behaviour. Confronted by Amerigo's immorality, Maggie does not expose or condemn him, but gets into his "labyrinth" with him (422) to help him recover his moral poise, and, in the process, to recover, herself, his love.

On February 6, 1895, James recorded the idea of an American woman acting as a beneficial intervening agent at a time of crisis. An English great house is to be sold or commercially exploited because of lack of funds to maintain it. The American woman rescues the house and marries its owner. Dramatized for Ellen Terry during the summer of 1895 (at the very time James was beginning to work on The Spoils of Poynton), the
situation eventually became the short story "Covering End," whose heroine, Mrs. Gracedew, argues the young owner of the house into a love for the house and the ancient tradition it represents. In doing so, she not only falls in love with him (as well as the house) but causes him to fall in love with her. Although her new friend is under pressure to become engaged to a girl who does not love him, she is able to arrange matters so that she both wins him and saves the house. Her bold action and her happy resolution of the crisis contrast vividly with Fleda Vetch's refusal to "save" Owen Gereth, with Fleda's failure to save Poynton from the Philistines, and with Fleda's final condition of psychic devastation. But Mrs. Gracedew, the "beneficial intervening agent" James describes as "saviour and redeemer," is rich, whereas poor Fleda has only the gift of nature, a "great" sensibility (III, 141). Moreover, Mrs. Gracedew, being a wealthy American, thinks of herself as at least the equal of everyone involved in the situation, whereas Fleda, being English, is burdened with class consciousness and fears that if she marries Owen people will think of her as a social climber, a view of herself from which she shrinks in every fiber of her being.

On October 31, 1895, while he was writing The Spoils of Poynton, James recorded the "germ" of The Ambassadors. He notes that his imagined figure of an elderly American has never "really enjoyed—he has lived only for Duty and conscience—his conception of them . . . for effort, for surrender, abstention, sacrifice." James's rendering in this passage of W. D. Howells' advice to Jonathan Sturges, "'Live all you can: it's a mistake not to..." (Notebooks, 226), shows that at the time James was delineating Fleda's tortuous idealism he was becoming increasingly aware of the opposite mode of being, that of the life-affirming consciousness which dominates the three novels of the major phase, The Ambassadors, The Wings of the Dove, and
The Golden Bowl. In fact the protagonists of these novels (in the order of their creation: Lambert Strether, Milly Theale, and Maggie Verver), may be said to form a progression away from ethical absolutism and towards a more flexible ethics, the change culminating in the pragmatism of Maggie Verver.

The notebook entries considered above may be read as indications of a gradual, and to some extent unconscious, modification in James's attitude toward the conflict of honor and self-realization, a conflict enacted repeatedly in earlier fictions, and usually resulting in the evil of psychic stasis. The Spoils of Poynton, when viewed against its historical background, is in effect, by virtue of the contrast between it and The Golden Bowl, an ironic comment, unconsciously conceived in the spirit of pragmatism, on the extreme forms of romantic idealism prominent in fin de siècle literature. Moreover, since James's rendering of the springs of Fleda's conduct is actually a brilliant study in psychic determinism, the novel is indeed, as William James suggested a novel might be, an informal but "luminous" ethical treatise.
IV

Pragmatic Ethics and 'Demonic' Vision

In conclusion, since pragmatism is strongly opposed to both romantic idealism and ethical absolutism, it is revealing to consider The Spoils of Poynton more explicitly in the light of pragmatic ethics. William James defined the essence of good as simply being to satisfy demand, and remarked that the demand itself may be for anything under the sun. The ethical problem then becomes how to decide between conflicting demands, how to settle the order of priority in which demands should be fulfilled. He finds the only escape from scepticism or hedonism to lie in the following principle:

Since everything which is demanded is by that fact a good, must not the guiding principle for ethical philosophy (since all demands conjointly cannot be satisfied in this poor world) be simply to satisfy at all times as many demands as we can? That act must be the best act, accordingly, which makes for the best whole, in the sense of awakening the least sum of dissatisfaction. In the casuistic scale, therefore, those ideals must be written highest which prevail at the least cost, or by whose realization the least possible number of other ideals are destroyed. Since victory and defeat there must be, the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side,—of the side which even in the hour of triumph will to some degree do justice to the ideals in which the vanquished party's interests lay. The course of history is nothing but the story of men's struggles from generation to generation to find the more and more inclusive order.

The exponent of "the highest ethical life" will obey but one unconditional commandment, which is "that we should seek incessantly, with fear and trembling, so to vote and to act as to bring about the very largest total universe of good which we can see." James emphasizes the uncertainty and risk involved in obeying this commandment, and admits that not everyone is capable of rising to the challenge presented by such a responsibility. Nevertheless this is the essential principle of pragmatic ethics.

Fleda Vetch, according to her creator, "almost demonically both sees
and feels, while the others but feel without seeing" (Prefaces, 129).

Unfortunately she is unable to see clearly enough to examine what William James would have called "[her] own spontaneous ideals." 82 In rejecting Owen's love, Fleda acts in effect to satisfy only one demand, Mona's demand to have both Owen and the "spoils." Thus she resists violently Mrs. Gereth's 'pragmatic' solution. Since Mrs. Gereth's primary intention is to preserve the collection of art objects at Poynton from desecration by the Philistines, and since she sees Fleda as a means to this end, her motives in urging Fleda to marry Owen cast a shadow over the solution she proposes. Early in the novel, Fleda is "scared and embarrassed" by the intensity of Mrs. Gereth's passion for the "living things" of Poynton, as with "glittering eyes" Mrs. Gereth proclaims, "'Rather than make them over to a woman ignorant and vulgar, I think I'd deface them with my own hands!'" (III, 147). But towards the end of the novel, after Mrs. Gereth has sent the things back to Poynton—for Fleda—Fleda feels that the "purity" of such a passion makes Mrs. Gereth "august and almost sublime," for "it was absolutely unselfish—she cared nothing for mere possession. She thought solely and incorruptibly of what was best for the things" (XVIII, 281).

Mrs. Gereth's motive is in fact mixed: it is a mixture of personal desire and unselfishness. But Fleda's early "scared" perception of the selfishness has prevented her from realizing that Mrs. Gereth's solution allows for the satisfaction of more human demands that does Fleda's, that Mrs. Gereth may not be right, but at least she is on the right track.

In William James's view, it is unnatural and ethically unnecessary for a person to decide a moral issue without taking his own demands into
consideration. In fact, since many demands are ideal rather than instinctual, as the psychologist pointed out, it is probably impossible for a person to do so. Fleda does not really 'rise above' self-interest by suppressing her love for Owen. She actually works compulsively to satisfy an ideal demand, her need to achieve psychological compensation for unbearable feelings of inferiority. Like Conrad's Lord Jim, she sacrifices her life to prove that her ideal self really exists. Thus, unless self-realization be redefined as the triumph, at all costs, of the super-ego, rather than as the attainment of a life-fulfilling state of psychic unity, Fleda's tragedy is not only that her idealism has had such disastrous consequences for herself and for the Gereths, but also that, through her idealism, she has been fatally determined. She has lost her opportunity for self-realization; she has mistakenly sacrificed it in an attempt to prove her superiority. Since development is impossible without change, and an inflexible ethics inhibits change, ethical pragmatism is obviously more conducive to self-realization than is ethical absolutism. A person who feels that he cannot possibly disobey the imperative voice of conscience, regardless of the circumstances and of what his reason tells him, is not free to pragmatise, as Fleda is not free to pragmatise. Fleda's vision is 'demonic' in this sense: she becomes aware, from time to time, of the demands of others and of the other demands of her own nature, but she is never free to satisfy any of these demands. Her compulsive idealism causes her to suppress the very human demands she would have taken a natural pleasure in fulfilling. Thus she is a case of fatal psychic determinism, destructive to herself and others.
Although James was "unconsciously pragmatising" in creating Fleda's psychology, nevertheless in the Notebooks and in the Preface he displays a conscious admiration of Fleda that amounts to an identification with her strained and destructive idealism. Tracing the growth of his concept of the novel, James says of his heroine, "She planted herself centrally, and the stroke, as I call it, the demonstration after which she couldn't be gainsaid, was the simple act of letting it be seen she had character" (Prefaces, 127). Applying this generalization to the novel, one soon discovers that the key words are "letting it be seen." Take, for example, the scene at Fleda's father's house, when Fleda gives Owen tea.

Fleda, with her hideous crockery and her father's collections, could conceive that these objects, to her visitor's perception even more strongly than to her own, measured the length of the swing from Poynton and Ricks; she was aware too that her high standards figured vividly enough even to Owen's simplicity to make him reflect that West Kensington was a tremendous fall. If she had fallen it was because she had acted for him. She was all the more content he should thus see she had acted, as the cost of it, in his eyes, was none of her own showing. (xiv, 238)

Fleda's intense concern to make a continuous display of her high moral and aesthetic standards to the world means that no intelligent reader who is willing to bring to the novel the careful attention that James considered his work deserved could possibly maintain that Fleda is, in any meaningful sense, heroic. And yet, this is the character of which James approved and the idealism with which he identified during the process of creation and afterward.

In the Preface, James describes Fleda's situation as if in terms of a strange kind of moral hierarchy. First of all, dominating the novel,
there are the "spoils," figuring in some mysterious way as a deterministic force: "The 'things' are radiant, shedding afar, with a merciless monotony, all their light, exerting their ravage without remorse . . . [italics, mine]."

Then there is Fleda, who "almost demonically both sees and feels, while the others but feel without seeing." Then there are the other characters, "the fools who minister, at a particular crisis, to the intensity of the free spirit engaged with them" (Prefaces, 129). Finally, there is the celebrated definition of Fleda's 'success':

The fools are interesting by contrast, by the salience they acquire, and by a hundred other of their advantages; and the free spirit, always much tormented, and by no means always triumphant, is heroic, ironic, pathetic, or whatever, and, as exemplified in the record of Fleda Vetch, for instance, 'successful,' only through having remained free (Prefaces, 129-130).

This statement implies that Fleda is "free" mainly in the sense of remaining free of the "fools" whose most significant function (as James sees his story) is to "minister" to her "intensity." If this is implied, and I think it is, then the further implication is that James shared Fleda's 'demonic' vision. He was aware of the human needs he delineated in the novel, but never considered them to be ethically of equal importance to Fleda's idealism; he never saw the other characters as anything more than "fools" ministering to "the intensity of the free spirit engaged with them." James concludes this remarkable passage about "fools" and "free spirits" by declaring himself to be, as a novelist, "foredoomed to a well-nigh extravagant insistance on the free spirit . . ." (Prefaces, 130). Both Fleda and her creator are, then, foredoomed to an "extravagant insistance on the free spirit."

In the literature of the Decadence, the late Victorian reaction of writers and intellectuals against the tyranny and vulgarity of Philistine
materialism often took the form of rejection of the natural, except in so far as nature could provide the raw material for art. The artificial modes of experience explored by fin de siècle writers are epitomized in the activities of des Esseintes in *A Rebours*. But Huysmans' aesthete finally discovers that he must return to life in the world or die. Common humanity, although felt to be an overwhelming "flood of mediocrity," is reluctantly equated through imagery in the final chapter with the life-giving element of water. Des Esseintes opens the "sluice-gates" himself by abandoning his aesthetic retreat and returning to the world. He feels much the same way about the "foul flood" of bourgeois mediocrity as Fleda does about Waterbath.

The ultimate corruption of fin de siècle romantic idealism, reached in Villiers' *Axel* and in Huysmans' *A Rebours*, is the complete denial of natural human life, the wilful casting loose from what Hawthorne called "the magnetic chain of humanity" (in "Ethan Brand"). The ego of the romantic idealist becomes inflated to such an extent that he is compelled to sacrifice everything for the sake of his ideal self, his sacred individuality. In his self-conscious egoism, he becomes deficient in empathy, and thus is led, often fatally, to deny the claims of human sympathy and, in denying that, to deny his own human nature.

Fleda Vetch remains "free" of the "fools" who surround her and who, as James says, "minister to her intensity." But in rejecting Owen, the man who is, she realizes, "all potent nature in one pair of boots," she rejects her own natural feelings and, in doing so, not only destroys her own potential for psychic development and unity, but also puts an end to the possibility that Owen might have reached a higher level of psychic development through marriage. John C. Broderick, in "Nature, Art, and Imagination in *The Spoils*
of Poynton," sees the novel as "a kind of aesthetic parable" in which moral and aesthetic themes are closely related. His interpretation bears out my contention that Fleda's psychology is related to the morbid romantic idealism that flourished in the literature of the Decadence. Broderick writes,

Assuming that the events in the novel have an aesthetic as well as a moral reference, we have in the insistence on Fleda's freedom at any cost something like a Neo-Platonic distinction between artistic inspiration and the baser matter in which inspiration is expressed. . . . The rationale of her inaction, despite its moral pretensions, is curiously inconsistent with the Jamesian aesthetic as expressed in the prefaces and elsewhere. Fleda has all the trappings of the Jamesian artist, but produces no work of art—a transfigured Owen. In traditional terminology, she is a seer, but not a maker. . . . The burning of Poynton . . . implies the destruction of Owen as he passes into the hands of Mona, the destruction of art when nature is subjected to a Philistine aesthetic. . . . Owen has been, potentially at least, Fleda's material, just as, potentially, Poynton had been her possession.

The year of the Preface, 1906-1907, was also the year of James's letter to his brother announcing his discovery that all his life he had "unconsciously pragmatised." The letter was almost certainly written after the Preface; nevertheless, in the Preface James shows such a strong conscious approval of Fleda's kind of "free spirit" that it seems reasonable to conclude that his pragmatism existed mainly as the ethical attitude of another self, an alter ego who played an important part in the act of literary creation, but who could be silenced during the self-conscious process of discussing the finished work. For this other self who criticized ethical absolutism and distrusted romantic idealism, the Maltese cross destroyed by fire is related to Maggie Verver's fragmented golden bowl. Each symbol of supposed perfection, the unburnt cross, the bowl "as it was to have been," asks by its sudden, unexpected disintegration, What is art without life, perfection without love, form without vitality? The terrible answer, realized by Fleda Vetch at the end of her long ordeal, is "nothing." In The Spoils of Poynton
immutable ideals are transformed, not positively into a rewarding inner life, but negatively, through the burning of their symbol, into the taste of ashes. By this concrete annihilation of static ethical values, Fleda comes at last to know her loss. That is the 'point of the tone' established by the burning of Poynton.
NOTES


3 The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth Murdock (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 216. Hereafter the abbreviation Notebooks will be used, and references will be made within parentheses as follows: (Notebooks, 216).


5 Ibid., pp. 586, 587.

6 Ibid., p. 585.

7 See p. 57 of this thesis and Note 79 below.


10 Ibid., p. 57.

11 Page 585.


13 Ibid., p. 567.

14 Ibid., p. 569.

15 Ibid., p. 577.

16 Ibid., p. 563.

17 Ibid., p. 564.

18 Ibid., p. 576.


22 Page 571.
The Freudian superego and the Jungian persona are not identical psychological principles, but each acts as a control over the purely instinctual self. Both function as civilizing factors of personality, potentially, at least, in a beneficial way. J. A. C. Brown (Freud and the Post-Freudians [London: Penguin Books, 1964], pp. 28-29) contends that "the 'superego' may be loosely equated with 'conscience' although both more and less than what this word implies." (An example of this usage is found in The Modern Writer and His World, where G. S. Fraser equates the terms in this way when he speaks of "... the punishing conscience, or Super-ego ..."

The Jungian persona is a facet of the personality which functions as a 'mask' signifying the 'role' a person has chosen to play in life. Freda Fordham (An Introduction to Jung's Psychology [London: Penguin Books, new ed., 1959], pp. 47-49) explains that all adults "adopt to some extent the characteristics expected of them in their chosen position; it is necessary to do so in order to succeed. ... The persona ... is a necessity; through it we relate to our world. ... There is always the danger, however, of identifying oneself with the role one fills ... the danger of living in a way that is not true to our real natures. Perhaps some crisis will occur which calls for flexibility or a completely new way of reacting, or a human situation may be reached where the lack of a genuinely individual emotional response spells tragedy. ... Another danger is that too rigid a persona means too complete a denial of the rest of the personality ..."

Psychologically, Fleda suffers from both a harshly punishing superego and a too rigid persona.

Margaret Knight (William James, ed. Margaret Knight [London: Penguin, 1950], p. 101) comments that in the chapter on The Self in the Principles of Psychology William James "performed a useful service in preliminary classification," The modern reader may turn to this chapter "to study in their early youth some of the Egos and Super-Egos, the Ego-Ideals, the 'Personas' and Personalities which are now to be seen in relative maturity in the theories of Freud, Jung and others." It is perhaps significant that William James specifically recommended to his brother "the earlier pages of the chapter on Consciousness of Self," i.e., the section to which Margaret Knight refers. ("Unpublished Letter," Sept. 28, 1890, quoted by Matthiessen in The James Family, p. 334.).

See I, 287-288 and II, 561-564. Most of Ch. XXVI, Vol. II, James's discussion of Will, is also relevant to his ethics.

Patrick F. Quinn (pp. 576-577) also notes Fleda's inability to consider possibilities. Quinn maintains that Fleda is not free because "freedom involves the recognition of probabilities, plus the power to choose and act after that recognition has been achieved. An essential condition of freedom is knowledge, self-knowledge especially. By this test, Fleda is
far from being a free spirit." He contends that Fleda is not heroic because she does not "contemplate the grim results of her stand and then take it anyway." Cf. A. J. Ward's opinion (The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James [Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961], p. 63) that Fleda "has really no alternative between a complete abandonement of scruples and a perverse, even incomprehensible, renunciation."

29 The Complete Tales of Henry James, ed. with an Introduction by Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962-1964), I, 189. Hereafter the abbreviation Tales will be used and references will be made within parentheses in the text of the thesis, by volume and page number, as follows: (Tales, I, 189).

30 A. J. Ward (p. 58) notes that pride is an element in Fleda's decision to renounce marriage to Owen and possession of the spoils, and comments that "Fleda's act of pride, especially from Mrs. Gereth's point of view, is extremely perverse, for Fleda betrays the kindness shown to her by directly counteracting her benefactress's plans."

31 Cf. A. J. Ward's definition (pp. 60-61) of Fleda's final position: "It is not farfetched to say that The Spoils of Poynton dramatizes the position of logos--or contemplation--in a world of ethos--or action. The characters who act do so blindly; thus the one person who thinks Fleda is prohibited from action. Through a series of almost maddening moral dilemmas, the novel leads Fleda to the point of moral anarchy, where the very terms of her principles have been obscured, converted, and rendered all but meaningless. Ward (p. 57) contends that "Fleda's virtue is so incongruous with the society in which she exercises it that the effect is to make her seem overscrupulous, perhaps even ridiculous."


33 The Will to Believe, p. 149.


38 Cargill, p. 221.

39 Ibid., p. 208.

40 Ibid., p. 218.


Samuels, p. 209.

Tbid. I quote Samuels' paraphrase.


Symons' collection of essays on the French Symbolists appeared in 1899. Two articles by Symons on Villiers were published in England much earlier than this, one in 1889 in the Woman's World, the other in 1891 in the Illustrated London News. A Life of Villiers written by his cousin appeared in France in 1893 and was translated into English by Lady Mary Lloyd in 1894. ("Bibliography and Notes," The Symbolist Movement, pp. 179-180.)


As defined by Symons, ibid., p. 45.

Ibid., p. 53.

Ibid., pp. 38-39

Ibid., pp. 54, 57.


Ibid., p. 211.


See The Spoils of Poynton, IV, 155; X, 209; XII, 233, 225.

See Note 34 above.


James's opinion of Pater (Letters, I, 221-222) indicates that he read Pater. From the fact that there is part of a set of Huysmans' works in
James's library at Lamb House, I infer that James read Huysmans. I could not examine the volumes, as they were in a locked cabinet for which the housekeeper had no key, but I was told they had belonged to James and had been returned to Lamb House by the British Council. (October, 1963.)

60Beebe, p. 139.

61The Symbolist Movement, p. 37.

62Ibid., p. 42.

63Ibid., p. 45.

64Quoted by Wilson, p. 209.


68The Symbolist Movement, p. 50.


71Whether Edmund Wilson's Freudian interpretation is valid or not, the work undoubtedly has a psychological complexity and depth. The variety of interpretations utilizing psychological analysis available in the Casebook cited in Note 70 above testifies to that.

72Freud's Studien Uber Hysterie was published in 1895. F. W. Myers showed his interest in it in an address, first given in March, 1897, which was ultimately included in his Human Personality (1903). But Myers had himself published a study of "The Mechanism of Hysteria" as part of a series of articles on the subliminal consciousness appearing in the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (London, IX, 3).

73William James was in close touch with his colleague in psychical research during most of the period between the founding of the Society and Myers's death.

74Cargill, The Novels of Henry James, pp. 220-222.
74 Cargill (ibid., pp. 220-223) traces the evolution of James's thought from notebook entry to notebook entry.

75 A. J. Ward (Imagination of Disaster, p. 63) comments that for Fleda "to allow Owen to break his pledge to Mona is tantamount to ignoring the dictates of conscience by which she knows the dishonor of such an act. Nor can she leave Owen free to do what he wishes, for she is part of his plans. She must interfere with him, tell him he must honor his pledge, in order to avoid complicity . . . . It is not she who consigns him to a life of misery with Mona Brigstock. Fleda simply cannot be a part of the violation herself." In my opinion, Ward's interpretation of Fleda's interference with Owen's attempt to escape from Mona rests on two invalid assumptions: (1) that the dictates of conscience always have an objective validity, and thus ought always to be obeyed; (2) that an engagement to marry is as binding and final as marriage itself.


78 Ibid., p. 201.

79 Ibid., p. 205.

80 Ibid., p. 209.

81 Ibid., pp. 206, 208-209.

82 Ibid., p. 199.

83 Ibid., pp. 1-31, passim.

84 Elliott B. Gose, Jr. ("Pure Exercise of Imagination: Archetypal Symbolism in Lord Jim," PMLA, LXXXIX [March, 1964], p. 147) writes: "By sacrificing his physical body to his concept of himself, Jim has finally freed himself for good from the mud and filth of the temporal world."

85 In 1903 Havelock Ellis wrote of Huysmans: "Huysmans very exquisitely represents one aspect of the complex modern soul, that aspect which shrinks from the grosser forces of Nature, from the bare simplicity of the naked sky or the naked body, the 'incessant deluge of human foolishness,' the eternal oppression of the commonplace, to find a sedative for its exasperated nerves in the contemplation of esoteric beauty and the difficult search for the mystic peace which passes all understanding." Observing that classic art corresponds on the spiritual side to "the love of natural things," and what we call decadent to "the research for the things which seem to lie beyond Nature," Ellis contends that because "the classic party of Nature . . . has not alone idealists on its side, but for the most part also the blind forces of robust vulgarity," the "most fine-strung spirits are sometimes driven to a reaction against Nature and rationalism, like that of which Huysmans . . . has been the consistent representative." In 1903 Ellis considered that such
a reaction had attained a certain ascendancy. ("Introduction," Against the Grain [A Rebours], [New York: Hartsdale House, 1931], pp. 45–46.)

86 Ibid., pp. 331, 338–339.

87 The first edition reads: "In the country, heated with the chase and splashed with the mire, he had always reminded her of a picturesque peasant in national costume. This costume, as Owen wore it, varied from day to day; ... but it never failed of suggestions of the earth and the weather, the hedges and the ditches, the beasts and the birds. There had been days when it struck her as all nature in one pair of boots. It didn't make him another person that he was delicately dressed, shining and splendid—that he had a higher hat and light gloves with black seams, and a spear-like umbrella; but it made him, she soon decided, really handsomer, and that in turn gave him—for she never could think of him, or indeed of some other things, without the aid of his vocabulary—a tremendous pull" (XIII, 233). When revising for the New York edition, James added the word potent to the third sentence quoted above, as if to emphasize that Fleda (however symbolically she puts it to herself) finds Owen sexually attractive. John C. Broderick ("Nature, Art, and Imagination in The Spoils of Poynton," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 13 [1958–1959], 299) sees Owen as the 'natural man,' "an adequate symbolic equivalent of the Jamesian view of nature or life itself at its simplest and most inclusive."

88 Pages 311–312.

89 Ibid., pp. 309, 310, 311.
CHAPTER TWO

THE GOLDEN BOWL

Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?

--William Blake, The Book of Thel

I

The Ambiguity of The Golden Bowl

Few novels in the history of literature have inspired as many conflicting interpretations as has the last novel of James's major phase.

Walter F. Wright summarizes two frequently occurring extreme critical views that have been taken toward James's American father and daughter:

Maggie Verver and her father Adam exemplify the evil which James identified with American puritanism and materialism; they use their wealth to buy a husband for Maggie and a wife for Adam, and they draw upon a ruthless moral code to hold the two victims, Charlotte and Americo, in subjection—such is one extreme interpretation of James's The Golden Bowl. Maggie is a virtual saint, who, in her love and wisdom, symbolizes a divine compassion that can even rescue such sinners as Amerigo and Charlotte—such is the opposite view. The two agree in accepting the novel as a symbolic, metaphorical vision of life.1

With regard to Maggie herself, the protagonist whose consciousness forms the compositional center of the second half of the novel, critical opinion is sharply divided as to whether her acquired sense of evil (acquired when she discovers her husband's adultery with her beautiful stepmother) makes her a complex, mature woman, worthy of the sustained interest and love of her Italian prince, or merely has the unfortunate effect of tarnishing her bright girlish innocence. Oscar Cargill describes the second half of the
novel as the story of Maggie's development into maturity. In his view, although "inexperienced and almost intolerably alone," James's American princess triumphs "through intuition, sensibility, and awakened empathy . . . ."\textsuperscript{2} But, in a note, Cargill admits to agreeing with another critic that, while applauding the victory of the Ververs, the reader simultaneously regrets the price of victory, for "with the addition of worldly wisdom and cunning, Maggie's brightness—the 'divine innocence' which Howells rightly admired—has been dimmed."\textsuperscript{3} The Ververs' most severe critic, Joseph L. Firebaugh, maintains that "in abandoning her innocence, Maggie [becomes] monstrous; coming to knowledge late, she uses it for purely selfish purposes—for ownership and for power, for the preservation of a preconceived idea. Thus she wins the love of a man who can understand these qualities . . . ."\textsuperscript{4} In contrast to, but scarcely mediating between, these extreme views, is that of R. P. Blackmur. Blackmur refers to the affair between Amerigo and Charlotte as "hideous intolerable adultery";\textsuperscript{5} but he finds Maggie's kind of love, although growing out of "moral beauty and high conscience," to be a love that requires "the sacrifice of life itself till nothing but the created shade [is] left."\textsuperscript{6} This "harsh and terrible" love\textsuperscript{7} causes the "breakdown" of three persons "under the presidency of Maggie's goodness, the sovereignty of her love, and the tyranny of her conscience."\textsuperscript{8} Blackmur's commentary implies that Maggie's triumph, however splendid, is essentially that of the idealism which destroys human vitality in the name of spiritual perfection. Thus at the end of the novel, when Maggie hides her eyes from Amerigo's "as for pity and dread of them" (p. 548), Blackmur sees "a shade embracing a shade, but in the shades of poetry."\textsuperscript{9} Inevitably the question arises, has Maggie reduced Amerigo to a shadow
of his former pagan vitality, or is she the almost totally beneficent agent of his moral regeneration—as Dorothea Krook argues in her recent study, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (1962). Miss Krook contends that the ambiguity of James's later work is perhaps best defined as a huge, elaborate metaphor for James's experience of the unavoidable, unalterable mixed motive of all human action, and the consequent dual ('ambiguous') character of all human endeavour. The selfless motive is inseparable in experience from the selfish, the beneficent action from the acquisitive. Nor are they merely conjoined but rather causally connected: the good is somehow the result of evil. If Maggie Verver had not wanted the Prince, passionately and possessively, she would have had no motive for undertaking her redemptive task with all its terrifying difficulties. If the Prince had not wanted the ease and freedom supplied by Adam Verver's money, he would have had no motive for acquiring the moral sense he lacked.

Miss Krook's interpretation helps to reconcile a long series of extreme views: the ambiguity of the novel cannot be disproved, and so it may as well be accepted as a symbol of the mixed nature of all human experience. Especially since ambiguity is, here, usually felt to be ambivalence: Adam Verver is both tyrannical and benevolent; Maggie Verver is both the victim of Charlotte and Amerigo and their manipulator; and Amerigo and Charlotte are both exploited and exploiting in their relationship with the Ververs.

The novel is a complex continuum of ambiguities, but there is one unfolding sustained opposition of values which is resolved in the final pages of the story (pp. 544-548). At the end of the novel one must be left with a final impression of either destruction or creation. It is indisputable that during the course of events Maggie is cruel to Amerigo and Charlotte, and that she does destroy their love affair, thereby causing Charlotte, at least, much suffering. But what is the final result of Maggie's attitude and of her actions? Destruction in the name of spiritual perfection (as Blackmur
contends), or re-creation after certain inevitable losses? It is, in my opinion, best to approach the question of ethical resolution by considering the psychology, structure, and symbolism of the novel in relation to the Zeitgeist from which it may be said to have emerged, much as, in William James's concept of the psychic life of man, the individual consciousness emerges, like an island or a tree, from "a continuum of cosmic consciousness."12
II
The Central Symbol

It was William James who first described human life as a stream of consciousness. As literary microcosm, The Golden Bowl expresses, by its psychology, structure, and symbolism, Henry James's intuitive awareness that any kind of externally imposed 'form,' social, moral, or aesthetic, is merely a regulatory channel for this irrepressibly dynamic stream. Elizabeth Stevenson, author of The Crooked Corridor: A Study of Henry James (1949), states that James's protagonists "are not just trying to get out of vexing limitations into pure freedom. They want fulfillment, they want completion, but they are looking for forms worthy of their vitality." Conversely, a static, inflexible 'form,' which represses the vitality it controls, is not a channel through which psychic energies may flow toward completion and in fulfillment, but a closed vessel within which, to allude to two of Henry James's favorite metaphors, the psychic 'waters' rise, as psychic forces are compressed to explosion point. Because of mounting pressure from within, such a form is inherently unstable. But while it operates, it is efficiently mechanical, for it compels the human life it controls to convert its vitality continuously into the profit or enjoyment of others—of those who have, consciously or unconsciously, fabricated and imposed the 'form.'

In The Golden Bowl it is the Ververs who invent and impose an unnatural form of life on their spouses in order to perpetuate their own close relationship. The unnatural form of life and its inherent instability is symbolized by the golden bowl and its invisible flaw. However pleasing and valuable to those who impose it, such a system will disintegrate at last, broken open by the exerted pressures and involuntary motions of the life it
contains. The Bloomsbury shopkeeper says of crystal, the invisible material of the bowl, "'It splits—if there is a split . . . . on lines and by laws of its own'" (p. x 83). The crystal of the bowl is analogous to the inner psychic life that stirs within the 'system' or 'equilibrium' of the Ververs' marriages, the human life of impulse and feeling whose outer shape and function is defined by Mr. Verver's wealth, as that of the bowl is by a firmly affixed layer of gold.16

The golden bowl as a static, repressive form that must and will disintegrate, is a unique development of James's other cup images. Frequently James expresses the relationship of his vessels of consciousness17 to what they momentarily contain by the use of a basic cup image. Robert Gale observes that "James has provided and filled figurative cups of considerable variety. Often these vessels are brimming with sweetness, sometimes with bitterness, even with a measure of poison. They overflow, are made to spill, may be strenuously drained, sometimes are dashed frustratingly from the mouth." Gale suggests that when he "repeatedly describes characters as holding cups too full for easy carrying," James may have intended to indicate "the brimming sensitivity of his 'supersubtle fry,' and their concomitant almost neurotic surface tension and desire not to jar shifting relationships."18 One of Gale's examples is Maggie Verver's painful awareness of "taking so much on her conscience" that "she was carrying in her weak stiffened hand a glass filled to the brim, as to which she had recorded a vow that no drop should overflow. She feared the very breath of a higher wisdom, the jostle of a higher light, of heavenly help itself . . . ." (p. 499). Although the basic image may be used in this way to express surface tension and the effort to control emotion, frequently a supreme depth and intensity of feeling is
imaged as an overflowing cup, as when Strether in the Luxembourg Gardens "passed an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow," or when Maggie Verver expresses her need for Amerigo in an imaginary speech to him, as she waits for him to return from Matcham where he has been staying in company with Charlotte: "... there comes a day when something snaps, when the full cup, filled to the very brim, begins to flow over. That's what has happened to my need of you--the cup, all day, has been too full to carry. So here I am with it, spilling it over you ... . I'm as much in love with you now as the first hour; except that there are some hours ... which almost frighten me--that show me I'm even more so. They come of themselves--and, ah, they've been coming!" (p. 300). The golden bowl as symbol also focuses these general connotations of brimming sensitivity and psychic tension, of the effort to control emotional life, and the inevitability of eventual release or 'overflowing.'

Several linked sets of coordinates apply to the central symbol, in which either Amerigo or Maggie's marriage, or both, figure as the flawed golden bowl. Most interpretations of the symbolism which identify Amerigo with the bowl--and it is really impossible not to make this identification, since James insists on it in his rendering of Adam Verver's consciousness of his son-in-law (p. 96-97)--focus on one point of correspondence: the flaw, Amerigo's inherited latent capacity for immorality. But a far more significant correspondence is found in the full thematic implications of James's development of this basic comparison through imagery which repeatedly presents the Ververs' attitude toward the Prince as one of ownership. As many critics have noted, Amerigo is not simply a flawed golden bowl: he is an objet d'art, a morceau de musée, a possession the Ververs have acquired to
make their lives richer and more interesting. But, since Maggie Verver experiences life through her marriage to the Prince, her relationship with him may be seen as a final development of James's theme of the thirsty American sensibility drinking the water of life from the cup of experience. In the paradigm of the Waterdrinker, Roderick Hudson's statue of the youth and the cup, Maggie has the role of drinker and Amerigo that of the cup of life.

Thus Amerigo, in the Ververs' use of him, is the golden bowl as cup of life; but Amerigo himself (as the presiding consciousness of the first half of the novel, and as a human being in his own right) is the golden bowl as vessel of consciousness. Therefore the flaw in the bowl is as much the Ververs' abuse of Amerigo as a means to the end of their own happiness as it is Amerigo's inherited propensity to vice. What is broken during the course of the novel, as the golden bowl is broken, is the Ververs' implicit concept of Amerigo as the golden bowl from which Maggie tastes of sexual passion and motherhood, but without giving up her emotional attachment to her father. This artificial 'form' of life is shattered by Maggie's reaction to her discovery of Amerigo's infidelity and is eventually replaced by a new, dynamic 'form'; the achieved marriage of the Prince and Princess. When Fanny Assingham deliberately breaks the bowl as an object lesson to Maggie, after proclaiming that, if the bowl has a crack, then Maggie's whole "'idea'" has a crack, she in effect says to her young friend, "Do break the 'form' of your life as it's presently constituted--the artificial form that prevents your having a deeper relationship with your husband. Do 'sacrifice' your precious 'idea' of making your father happy by your company, and leave him to his wife so that you may yourself realize the full 'value' of the Prince's love. But
don't, whatever you do, reduce life itself--your husband's or your father's or your own, or even Charlotte's--to ugly fragments; that's both unnecessary and shocking" (415-416; 418 ff.). Adeline Tintner comments, "The bowl . . . as the real symbol of an unnatural point of view, is broken by Mrs. Assingham, the Greek chorus who interprets the real meaning of experience to both the characters of the drama and to the reader."
At the beginning of *The Golden Bowl* Amerigo is aware of having a somewhat apprehensive admiration for the "science" to which he feels he is allying himself by his marriage to Maggie Verver (p. 11). As he strolls down Bond Street, he has a sense of machinery and plate glass as being expressive of money and power. Reflecting on his forthcoming marriage, he thinks that once he is associated with the Ververs, his life will be "full of machinery" (p. 11). From his point of view, American morality is somehow analogous to American machinery. He tells his friend Fanny Assingham, who has 'made' his marriage, that the American moral sense is like the steam-operated elevator in one of Mr. Verver's tall buildings: "'it sends you up like a rocket'" (p. 21). Then, in an image in which James perhaps alludes to Melville's description of the exploration of the human heart as a descent into a bottomless spiral stair in a black shaft, Amerigo contrasts his own moral sense with that of the Americans. The Roman moral sense is "'slow and steep and unlighted,'" like the tortuous, half-ruined stone staircase in some castle of the quattrocento, "'with so many of the steps missing that . . . it's as short, in almost any case, to turn round and come down again!'" (p. 21).

James's later rendering of Adam Verver's inner life confirms Amerigo's impression of his father-in-law. Describing the inner "shrine" of Adam's "special genius" as "a strange workshop of fortune," James comments, "The essential pulse of the flame, the very action of the cerebral temperature, brought to the highest point, yet extraordinarily contained--these facts themselves . . . were one with perfection of machinery, they had constituted the kind of
acquisitive power engendered and applied, the necessary triumph of all opera-
tions" (p. 89). A subsequent image of Adam's success echoes Amerigo's image of his own un-American moral sense:

[Adam's eyes] showed him what he had done, showed him where he had come out, quite at the top of his hill of difficulty, the tall sharp spiral round which he had begun to wind his ascent at the age of twenty, and the apex of which was a platform looking down, if one would, on the kingdoms of the earth and with standing-room for but half a dozen others. (p. 91).

Thus American morality, in Amerigo's view of it and as it appears in James's rendering of Adam, has affinities with machinery: it is sensed to be a driving force behind success, as in the images of the "'lightning elevator'" (p. 21), the chamber of Adam's brain as a "forge," and the "tall sharp spiral" of Adam's ascent in the world—an image which brings to mind both the mechanical principle of the screw and James's earlier image of his governess' final moral effort as requiring "only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue." 27

R. W. Short, one of the first critics to explore the thematic significance of imagery in James, demonstrates that there is an intensive use of mechanical imagery in The Golden Bowl. Maggie Verver is said by Amerigo to use in her conversation images of a mechanical sort, "images ... drawn from steamers and trains, from a familiarity with 'lines,' a command of 'own' cars, from an experience of continents and seas ... from vast modern machineries and facilities" (p. 10). Short points out that these images are actually distributed throughout the novel, and that they express the Versers' control over life, a control largely achieved through Adam Verver's command of money. He places the cage-beast series and travel-water series of images in this category of mechanical imagery, considering 'cages' and
'boats' to be machines for controlling and ordering life, machinery almost
entirely at the disposal of the Ververs. 28

As controlling agents, the Ververs are not insidious violators of the
human heart, in Hawthorne's sense. Initially, Maggie, at least, who can't
bear "wounds" and "shames" (p. 131), rather averts her eyes from the human
heart, unwilling to descend that dark spiral staircase until necessity forces
her to confront "the horror of the thing hideously behind . . ." (p. 455) and
she is obliged to come down from the 'sublimity' of her happiness with her
father (p. 469). After that Maggie does manipulate the others, although her
sympathy and compassion effectively prevent her from becoming another Roger
Chillingworth. But the Ververs certainly, and not altogether unconsciously,
violate the Second Categorical Imperative. They buy their marriage partners
as if they were objets d'art; they use their wealth to impose, for selfish
reasons, preconceived aesthetic and moral forms on the Prince and Charlotte.
Thus their control over life amounts for their sposi to a mechanically-
acting deterministic force, and Amerigo's sense of this control is expressed
early in the novel by his comparison of the American moral sense to powerful
and efficient machinery.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the contemporary vision of life
reflected most vividly by the images of machinery and power in the novel
is Henry Adams' determinism. The images of the American moral sense as
powerful and efficient ethical mechanisms29 may be related to Adams', revela-
tion, experienced in 1900 and described in The Education of Henry Adams,
that physical and spiritual energy may be equated. Contemplating the Virgin
and the Dynamo, Henry Adams decided that physical and spiritual forces alike
could be measured by their action on man.30 In The Golden Bowl, the power of
the Ververs may be measured by its effect on the lives of Amerigo and Charlotte, and it is in Amerigo's consciousness that the images of American morality as machinery and of America itself as vaguely signifying 'science' occur. The imagery which expresses Adam Verver's invisible control over Charlotte, toward the end of the novel, as it is perceived by Maggie, may also have been derived by James from this contemporary source. Maggie has a strong sense of her father "pulling wires and controlling currents" (p. 487); she hears "his small, perpetual hum of contemplation" (p. 491), as he moves about at Fawns, "vaguely circulating, . . . . weaving his spell" (p. 493), and she realizes that he controls Charlotte as if he held her by "a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck. He didn't twitch it, yet it was there; he didn't drag her, but she came . . . ." (p. 492). Adam's "wordless smile . . . . was the soft shake of the twisted silken rope, and Maggie's translation of it[was]. . . 'Yes, you see—I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn't so much as know what it is . . . .'" (p. 492). Thus the power of the Ververs, measured by its effect on human life, is shown to be deterministic, potentially fatal.

The controlling American life-style, compounded of lightning elevators, workshops of fortune, and sharp, spiral ascents, in short, of all the perfection of machinery and its engendered and applied acquisitive power, attains an astonishing efficiency by ignoring human complexity. Maggie promises Amerigo before their marriage that the "occupation of [her] future" is to be the discovery of his "unknown quantity, [his] particular self" (p. 6), but she fails to keep this promise. Even before his marriage, Amerigo feels that he is "to constitute a possession," yet is "to escape being reduced to his component parts"; like "some old embossed coin" in the hands of a collector,
he is never to be "'changed!'" (p. 15). The Ververs' "large, bland, blank assumption" of "merits almost beyond notation, of essential quality and value" is imagined by Amerigo as a mysterious white "curtain of light," as he sets forth on his polar voyage from Roman superstition and worldly wisdom towards the antithetical American condition of innocence and good faith. (pp. 14-15) But eventually the "mystery" bores him, as the Ververs in their self-maintained childlike simplicity consistently fail to appeal to his imagination. After some years of marriage, Amerigo comes to think that he uses his imagination "mainly for wondering how [Maggie and Adam] contrived so little to appeal to it" (p. 223). His marriage ceases to be an adventure, as it becomes increasingly a matter of keeping up the form of life established by the Ververs as if exclusively for their own benefit and interest. Although he follows conscientiously his own private "system" of returning value to Mr. Verver by subtly enhancing Mr. Verver's good opinion of himself (p. 145), Amerigo eventually begins to suffer from the 'thirst' for richness and complexity of experience that is elsewhere in James's fiction characteristic of deprived American sensibilities.32

As Amerigo remarks to Charlotte, on the rainy day she leaves her husband and his daughter together and comes to him, "'It's precisely boring oneself without relief ... that takes courage'" (p. 213). Amerigo has, as Bob Assingham says to Fanny, "'nothing in life to do'" (p. 195). Moreover, he is deprived of his wife by her father. Just before Charlotte's arrival he thinks bitterly, "'Mr. Verver ... took care of his relation to Maggie, as he took care, and apparently always would, of everything else. He relieved him of all anxiety about his married life in the same manner in which he relieved him on the score of his bank account ... '" [Furthermore] Maggie's relation
with him was also, on the perceived basis, taken care of" (pp. 206-207).

Amerigo feels at moments "as if there were never anything to do for them that was worthy--to call worthy--of the personal relation; never any charming charge to take of any confidence deeply reposed" (p. 223). Maggie is, in short, physically intimate with her archetypal Italian prince, but not psychologically intimate with him. She does not appeal to his "particular self"; she is not even aware of it.

Amerigo's 'thirst' for a richer and more exciting experience of life eventually leads to his liaison with Charlotte, Adam's equally neglected wife, who hangs about the periphery of her own fireside while Adam and Maggie spend their time together, often in adoration of Maggie's child, the Principino. Representing the Ververs at a country house weekend party, Amerigo and Charlotte finally consummate their affair by going for the afternoon to Gloucester, ostensibly to view the cathedral. Together in amorous adventure, the deprived marriage partners drain the great golden cup of the April day. They at last seize the peculiar form of the life the Ververs have forced upon them and use it for their own pleasure. The word Amerigo uses to express his changed condition on that day is "freedom." As Charlotte approaches him, the size and value of his freedom grows visibly:

He knew why, from the first of his marriage, he had tried with such patience for such conformity; he knew why he had given up so much and bored himself so much; he knew why he, at any rate, had gone in, on the basis of all forms, on the basis of his having, in a manner, sold himself, for a situation nette. It had all been just in order that his--well, what on earth should he call it but his freedom?--should at present be as perfect and rounded and lustrous as some huge precious pearl. He hadn't struggled nor snatched; he was taking but what had been given him; the pearl dropped itself, with its exquisite quality and rarity, straight into his hand. (p. 254).

As boredom and monotony gives way to pleasure and excitement, freedom from
the Ververs' control and the Ververs' concept of him becomes to Amerigo the pearl dropped into the golden cup of the April day to enrich the wine of amorous adventure.

John Bayley, considering Amerigo and Charlotte in his study, The Characters of Love (1960), comments: "'The forms,' says Fanny, 'are two-thirds of conduct'; and she proceeds with a zeal which is not quite casuistical and a point which is not quite specious to blame Maggie and her father for having enclosed the lovers in the wrong forms, thereby pushing them in the direction they have gone." Specifically, Fanny says that the Prince and Charlotte will be prevented from spending the night together by the 'forms' Maggie and her father 'impose on [them]' (p. 278). A. J. Ward points out that "when Maggie learns of the affair, she does not consider it a crime against herself. She sees it as a disarrangement of the perfect order she had visualized." Maggie mourns the loss of this perfect order when she says to Fanny, after the breaking of the bowl, that she wants "'a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger . . . . The golden bowl—as it was to have been . . . . The bowl with all happiness in it. The bowl without the crack!" (p. 440).

But the forms of tyranny are not only the Ververs' aesthetic and moral preconceptions and their wilfully formalized patterns of existence, in which Amerigo and Charlotte function as social representatives for their spouses, as if, Maggie later realizes, they were horses pulling "the [Verver] family coach" (p. 304). Adam and Maggie are themselves limited psychologically, Maggie by her unnaturally prolonged 'innocence,' which she herself describes to Adam as fear ("'I do, always, by nature, tremble for my life . . . . I've never had the least blow!'" [pp. 127-128, 131]), and Adam
by his monomania, his obsession with collecting, which so permeates his con-
sciousness that he sees Amerigo as a Palladian church and as "a pure and per-
fect crystal" (p. 96); Maggie's child as "a precious small piece" (p. 103); and Maggie herself as a nymph in bas relief on a "precious vase" (p. 132).

Amerigo is aware of Maggie's resemblance to Adam. She is her father's daughter far more than she is his wife, at times bristling "with little filial recalls of expression, movement, tone" (p. 229). Maggie's explanation to Amerigo, on the eve of their marriage, that as an Italian prince, Amerigo is a morceau de musée to the Ververs, a precious piece they have collected, is a playful imitation of her father's attitude (pp. 7-8). As imitation, it indicates the strength of her admiration for Adam. and of her sense of identity with him and with his chosen way of life. Whenever Adam expresses his sense of people and situations, he habitually sees and explains everything in aesthetic terms. As a "taster of life," he puts everything into "his one little glass" of connoisseurship (p. 139): thus he likens Amerigo to a Palladian church dropped suddenly down into the unpretentious but pleasant square of his own relationship with Maggie and marvels how that relationship, although "temporarily compromised," in the long run demanded no "violence of adjust-
ment" (p. 94). Adam's "little glass cut with a fineness of which the art had long since been lost, and kept in an old morocco case . . ." (p. 139) expres-
ses more or less the same principle as that expressed by the Bloomsbury bowl, gilded by the "lost art" of "a lost time" (p. 81). As Adam tastes of life and art from the one glass of connoisseurship, so Maggie is to taste of life and Italian culture at once from the golden bowl of her archetypal Prince.

Both Adam and Maggie are obsessed by their way of seeing. Initially, they can see in no other way than from the perspective of aestheticism and
romanticism. Therefore, they are, in a sense, humors, like the obsessed characters of classical comedy, although to say this about them is, of course, to refer to only one aspect of their total existence in the novel. Adam is *le connaisseur*. Maggie is equally obsessed, by her vision of Amerigo as archetypal Prince and by her devotion to her father. Both change during the course of the novel, as their 'charmed circle' is broken by the introduction of Charlotte and by subsequent events, but the emphasis is on Maggie's development, for it is Maggie's consciousness which James presents in the second, and naturally more significant, half of the novel.
Francis Fergusson finds that the basic scheme of *The Golden Bowl* is "parallel to that of French neoclassical tragedy, Racine's for example." But, beginning with a perception of Adam and Maggie as humors, it is equally possible to think of the novel as a comedy, in spite of the suffering it presents. *The Golden Bowl* exhibits most of the fundamental characteristics of comedy outlined by Northrop Frye in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. In Greek New Comedy, the dramatic formula which has provided the basis for most comedy down to the present day, "what normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will." Applying Frye's analysis of the structure of comedy to *The Golden Bowl*, one sees that Maggie Verver belongs both to the old society of the "blocking" character (that of the *senex*, the tyrannical parent who frustrates the young hero) and to the new society of her own marriage in which she figures as the heroine. Both she and Amerigo are imprisoned within a state of ritual bondage to the humor (the *senex*, *le connaisseur*) whose power (his wealth) means that he is able to force life into line with his obsession. As Maggie works to preserve her "old-time union" with her father, she acquiesces in her bondage. Frye comments, "the humor is intimately connected with the theme of the absurd or irrational law that the action of comedy moves toward breaking . . . [This absurd law] may take the form of a sham Utopia, a society of ritual bondage constructed by an act of humorous or pedantic will. . . ." The 'charmed circle' of "peculiarly paternal" and "passionately filial" love, as James describes the relationship
of father and daughter (Notebook, p. 131), the state represented metaphorically at the beginning of Book the Second by the "ivory tower" that figures to Maggie the arrangement by which she has been able to marry without breaking with her past (p. 290), is a sham Utopia, a false Golden Age, created by Mr. Verver's wealth, Maggie's childlike innocence, and the Ververs' concept of Amerigo as golden bowl. The absurd law is Maggie's 'idea' of making her father happy by her constant attention: it is the 'equilibrium' of the two marriages, within which Adam is kept in a state of tranquil happiness.

Waiting for Amerigo to return from Matcham, Maggie feels "more than ever conscious that any appearance she had would come round . . . to her father, whose life was now so quiet, on the basis accepted for it, that any alteration of his consciousness, even in the possible sense of enlivenment, would make their precious equilibrium waver. That was at the bottom of her mind, that their equilibrium was everything, and that it was practically precarious, a matter of a hair's breadth for the loss of the balance. It was the equilibrium, or at all events her conscious fear about it, that had brought her heart into her mouth . . ." (p. 299). It is this absurd and unnatural 'equilibrium' that the action of the novel moves towards breaking, although, as it so moves, the meaning of the word slowly changes, until it comes to mean, as several critics have noted, the preservation of a surface decency and dignity beneath which the necessary changes can take place (see, for example, p. 477).

Fairy tale and comedy are intimately related, structurally as well as by the fact that both have happy endings. Frye notes that the movement of comedy "from a society controlled by habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law and the older characters to a society controlled by youth and pragmatic
freedom is fundamentally . . . a movement from illusion to reality. In The Golden Bowl this theme is carried by the motif of the 'sleeping princess' whose sense has to "open," as Fanny Assingham says, "to what's called Evil!" (p. 273), if she is ever to 'wake up' to life. As heroine of comedy and as 'sleeping princess' Maggie moves from the world of ritual bondage towards the world of pragmatic freedom—a world in which truths are created rather than received. As she moves, the power of the first is dispelled, and the reality of the second is created. Frye comments that the happy endings of comedy "do not impress us as true, but as desirable, and they are brought about by manipulation." It is Maggie who manipulates her own situation, working out her own happy ending, working out, as much as possible, a happy ending for the others. Frye also observes, 'The manipulation of plot does not always involve metamorphosis of character, but there is no violation of comic decorum when it does. Unlikely conversions, miraculous transformation, and providential assistance are inseparable from comedy.' Even so, they are inseparable from fairy tale. Naomi Lebowitz argues that in The Golden Bowl "we witness the complete and happy cycle of metamorphosis from dream princess, through disillusionment, to real princess," which is also a metamorphosis from child to bride. Dorothea Krook contends that Amerigo is transformed morally by his wife. And the visit of the Bloomsbury shopkeeper to Maggie, as well as her accidental discovery of the bowl, is a form of providential assistance indigenous to fairy tale and comedy. And, finally, Frye notes that "the tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated. Thus, Amerigo turns away from his adulterous relationship with Charlotte and discovers a new interest in
his wife; Adam apparently attains a degree of self-awareness, warning Maggie against the "sloth" of their selfish preoccupation with each other, and eventually deciding to take Charlotte away to America; and even Charlotte is not 'wasted'--she 'dies' for Amerigo and Maggie, but has the possibility of creating a new life for herself in America. As Maggie says to her in the garden, "This is the beginning; you've got the wrong volume, and I've brought you out the right" (p. 508).

Naomi Lebowitz, in her essay on fairy-tale patterns in The Golden Bowl, emphasizes the theme of metamorphosis, as it is found, for instance, in the tale of The Frog Prince. As Maggie develops from child to bride, her golden bowl is the fairy-tale golden ball, lost and then restored. She faces "the necessity of taking moral and aesthetic risks in the metamorphic state, and she is aware that only by passing through such a state, by ordering it, can she become the real princess." In this critic's view, Fanny Assingham, the fairy godmother who made Maggie's marriage, "encourages the pernicious romanticism of static vision." In order to transform her world and herself, Maggie must become her own fairy godmother. She "does not abandon the romantic; she learns to use it, just as she does not abandon Eden or the fairy garden, but learns to open them to her greater needs . . . . Thus she makes passions of patterns, relationships of rituals."

Fairy tale and magic postulate that the universe is a vast reservoir of soul-force or spirit. Actual metamorphosis, as from prince to frog and back again, is possible only within the animistic world view expressed by fairy tale. But the psychological equivalent of this postulate is implicitly accepted by the conventions of comedy. No one questions the sudden conversions or psychic transformations displayed within the comic convention. As
Frye comments, "Whatever emerges is supposed to be there for good: if the curmudgeon becomes lovable, we understand that he will not immediately relapse again into his ritual habit."

At the end of *The Golden Bowl* it is assumed that Adam will remain with Charlotte in America, and not return to snare his daughter in the ritual bondage of filial love; that the self-awareness achieved by Maggie will endure; and that Maggie's new relationship with Amerigo offers hope for the future. A sinister note is struck just before the departure of Adam and Charlotte when Maggie and Adam look inward from the balcony at their spouses to see them as "high expressions of the kind of human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene . . ." sitting as still "to be thus appraised, as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud" (p. 542-543), but in context this reversion to a former way of seeing people as art objects to be possessed is no more than a fleeting retrospective dissonance before the closing cadence. Adam and Maggie are on the verge of separating, and the situation which caused them to 'use' Amerigo and Charlotte has really ceased to exist. Maggie's hope that Adam may spend his last evening in London with her is an idle one, for he and Charlotte depart together. The psychological transformation is complete: the Ververs' vision of Charlotte and Amerigo as "effigies" is, as Maggie says to Adam, a "'last look'" (p. 543).

Both comedy and fairy tale deal with the release of their heroes and heroines from bondage. At the end of *The Golden Bowl* Maggie has broken out of an unnaturally prolonged state of 'innocence' and Amerigo has become to her, not an archetypal Prince, a golden bowl from which to taste of life, but a human being to be viewed, at times, even with "pity and dread" (p. 548). Maggie has been released from a state of bondage to Adam, and Amerigo, in
turn, has been released from a state of bondage to Maggie's romantic preconception of him, as well as from Adam's 'ownership' which has enforced the romantic concept.
V

The Elan Vital, Comedy, and Pragmatic Ethics

James's use of fairy-tale patterns and the structure of comedy to create a form for the expansion of his heroine's consciousness may be related to the Zeitgeist through the aesthetic theory of Henri Bergson. The bondage under which the creative mind labored at the end of the nineteenth century was, to use Enid Starkie's phrase, a "passionate and intolerant cult of positive science," as exemplified by Taine's introduction to his history of English literature. William James had found determinism to be a black spell from which he could release himself only by a belief in free will. Discussing the influence of Bergson on literature, Enid Starkie describes "the wonder and the magic" of his lectures. Bergson's contribution to the Zeitgeist was that he "challenged the materialists, and made the vital force a spiritual impulse, a freeing of the mind from matter and insisting on its creative process." His metaphysics provided a formal basis for the current reaction against positivism, materialism, and mechanism. In his use of language, he was himself a poet, for "ideas did not seem to exist for him until they had crystallized in an image." He was read with delight "by all men of letters," including William James, who wrote to him after reading L'Evolution Créatrice (1907), "I feel that at bottom we are fighting the same fight [against determinism and intellectualism], you a commander, I in the ranks." Enid Starkie writes, "[Bergson] . . . did affect literary thought, and what writers call philosophy, with the result that the focus of personality was no longer intelligence, but intuition and feeling . . . ." Bergson, William James, Henry Adams, and Henry James, all considered intuition to be superior to intellect. For Henry James, the focus of personality
always had been intuition and feeling rather than intellect.

Bergson's concept of life as a dynamic \textit{élan vital} permeating matter and struggling to convert it into the substance of life has affinities with the animistic world-view of fairy tale. His vision of life as spirit provides a link between the Romantic discovery of fairy tale and folk tale, and the general reaction late in the century against the mechanistic world view fostered by scientific materialism. William James was perhaps unique in that he was, on the one hand, committed to scientific method with its deterministic bias, and, on the other, anti-deterministic and anti-intellectual, convinced that intuition rather than reason was a guide to understanding human life. In 1909 he wrote, "I believe that philosophy stands at present at the beginning of a new sort of activity . . . which will end by defining (in ways not dreamed of till quite recently) the limits of what the conceptual or logical method can accomplish, and the parts of reality which escape treatment by fixed logical categories or concepts." 62 By 1909, from his experience as a psychical researcher, he had arrived at "one fixed conclusion," that "there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir." 63 He stated that "not only psychical research, but metaphysical philosophy, and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such 'panpsychic' view of the universe as this." 64 The dramatic view which his mind spontaneously took after twenty-five years of psychical research had, as he remarked, "the advantage of falling into line with ancient human tradition." 65 His concept of a "common reservoir of consciousness" 66 has affinities with Bergson's \textit{élan vital}. Bergson wrote to him in 1909, "I could very well reconcile my conception of the \textit{élan vital}'
with the doctrine of the 'Earth-Soul'. . . " Both philosophical views have much in common with the animistic world-view of fairy tale and with the magician's hypothesis that the universe is a reservoir of soul-force or spirit. James thought psychic phenomena were "actuated by will of some sort" manifesting itself in consciousness, but what kind of will he did not know. Henry Adams held that the potential of vital energy should be taken as the will. "From Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* Adams derived his belief that all energy, latent or active, vital or physical, was identical with will." Schopenhauer's philosophy led Hardy to his pessimistic concept of human life as a tragic manifestation of the unconscious Immanent Will, divided and struggling against itself. But for Bergson, the *élan vital* was love.

Much as William James extrapolated psychical research to obtain metaphysics, Bergson transposed his theory of the *élan vital* into aesthetics, producing a philosophical definition of 'the comic.' In his essay on 'the comic' and the structure of comedy, *Le Rire* (1900), he sought to demonstrate that a situation is comic whenever it displays "something mechanical encrusted on the living." He maintained that "whenever we perceive anything inert or stereotyped or simply ready-made, on the surface of living society . . . . we have rigidity . . . clashing with the inner suppleness of life." The function of laughter, as Bergson saw it, is to destroy rigidity and release or restore the inner flexibility of life. As Eric Bentley comments, the primary subject of the essay is 'the comic' rather than comedy as such; hence, "its primary aim is the analysis of human nature, not the evaluation of works of art." The contemporary ethics most congenial to Bergson's view of human nature is that of William James, the philosopher who opposed ethical absolutism as an expression of "that dogmatic temper which, by absolute
distinctions and unconditional 'thou shalt nots,' changes a growing, elastic, and continuous life into a superstitious system of relics, and dead bones."

The opening situation of The Golden Bowl, the 'making' of Maggie's marriage, with its attendant patterns of mechanical imagery expressing the Ververs' control over life, fulfils Bergson's definition of a comic situation. With the help of Fanny Assingham, who arranged the marriage, "a human regulation of affairs [usurps] the place of the laws of nature," "a mechanical element [is] introduced into nature and an automatic regulation of society [begins]." The "inner flexibility of life" is not restored in the society of the novel only through the laughter which in classical comedy accompanies the perception of the clash between "rigidity" and "inner suppleness"; nevertheless, the opening situation is incipiently comic, there are comic types and comic images and comic reversals, and the resolution fits Bergson's definition of the resolution of comedy—the destruction of artificial forms, and the release or restoration of the life repressed by them.

William James's connection with Bergson, as well as Henry James's sustained interest in drama and his particular awareness of the French theatre, make it likely that the novelist read Le Rire before writing The Golden Bowl in 1903-1904, although there is no published external evidence to indicate that he did. But even if James did not read Bergson's definition of the comical as the encrustation of something mechanical on something living, the Zeitgeist, in interaction with his knowledge of French classical comedy, could easily have inspired in him a comparable sense of life as a resurgent vital spirit continually breaking through imposed mechanical 'form.' What Shaw described as "the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality" is enacted in the intimate theater of the refined consciousness
in the last novel of James's major phase.

In *The Golden Bowl* the controlling force is Adam Verver, whose wealth has bought the Prince for his daughter. In his role as collector, if not otherwise, he is clearly Bergson's modern comic type, the professional man or specialist who acts with rigidity, who speaks only the language of his own profession and thinks always with what Bergson calls "professional logic," certain ways of reasoning that are customary within certain circles and only valid therein, but are nevertheless applied by the specialist to any situation he encounters, thus revealing his obsession with his vocation. Bergson's example is the extension of business phraseology to the social relations of life, notably marriage, in the *Faux Bonhommes* and in the *Famille Benoiton*, where the author's intention is not only to produce a comic effect but to reveal a flaw in character. Adam Verver speaks and thinks with the jargon and logic of connoisseurship, habitually considering persons and social relations in aesthetic terms, and the significance the aesthetic-owning image habitually has in James indicates that there is an intention on James's part to suggest a flaw in Adam's character. Examples of this mental habit of Adam have already been noted. James reinforces the effect by having Amerigo express, by an ironic use of business terminology, his awareness of being controlled by Mr. Verver. At a dinner party at the Ververs' house, Amerigo feels that Mr. Verver is looking at him as if to make sure of the "amount" he represents; he feels that "he was being thus, in renewed instalments, perpetually paid in; he already reposed in the bank as a value, but subject, in this comfortable way, to repeated, to infinite endorsement" (p. 230). It is partly this sense of being owned and used, of being obligated to "return value" to Mr. Verver, that has built "a mystic golden bridge" (p. 231)
between Amerigo and Charlotte, and thus leads to their draining of the "great
gold cup" of the day at Gloucester later on (p. 255). In fact, aesthetic
and business terminology meet early in the novel in Amerigo's sense of Adam,
in Amerigo's image of himself as a gold coin in the hands of a collector, a
coin that the collector does not intend to "'change'" or "'test" in any way,
but simply to appreciate (p. 15).

In her role as 'sleeping princess,' Maggie Verver illustrates another
of the comic types described by Bergson—as does Adam in his role as "infant
king" (Amerigo's impression, p. 230). "How profound is the comic element in
the over-romantic, Utopian bent of mind!" Bergson exclaims. He maintains
that

life and society require of each of us . . . a constantly alert attention
that discerns the outlines of the present situation, together with a certain
elasticity of mind and body to enable us to adapt ourselves in consequence.
Tension and elasticity are two forces, mutually complementary, which life
brings into play. If these two forces are lacking . . . . in the character,
we have cases of the gravest inadaptibility to social life . . . .

The comic character lacks tension and elasticity; he is as if asleep, as if
dreaming. He is in a relaxed state because he lacks "the tension of being in
constant touch with reality." Thus, "when the comic character automatically
follows up his idea, he ultimately thinks, speaks, and acts as though he
were dreaming." He follows the line of least resistance; he is absent-
minded; "he abandons social convention as . . . he abandons logic." Withdrew from society, and even from their marriage partners, into the 'magic
circle' of their own company, and each dominated by his own obsession, Maggie
and Adam Verver display the characteristics of this comic type. First they
have Charlotte 'in' because they don't, as Fanny says, "'lead half the life
[they] might'"; in fact, as Maggie admits to Adam, they don't lead,"'as regards
other people, any life at all" (p. 123). But what they then do, instead of proceeding to live a fuller life, is to allow Amerigo and Charlotte to act as their representatives to society so that they may be even more to themselves than ever before (pp. 172-193, passim). Having achieved their Utopian 'system' of the complementary marriages, they sink deeper and deeper into their Golden Age of mutual affection, of "peculiarly paternal, . . . passionately filial" love (Notebooks, 131), until finally the perpetually excluded Charlotte goes to console the continually isolated Amerigo, and a course of events begins which eventually breaks the 'spell' of the 'magic circle'.

For Bergson, comic absurdity "consists in seeking to mould things on an idea of one's own, instead of moulding one's idea on things,—in seeing before us what we are thinking of, instead of thinking of what we see."89 Thus Adam puts everything into the tasting glass of aestheticism or connoisseurship and Maggie subordinates her love for her husband to her love for her father. At the beginning of Book the Second, Maggie's 'idea,' her 'system,' her 'equilibrium' which she struggles to preserve, is the illusion of a dreamer: with comic obstinacy she fights to adjust reality to her way of thinking, instead of accommodating herself to reality.90 The somewhat incongruous comparison of Maggie to "a silken-coated spaniel who has scrambled out of a pond and who rattles the water from his ears,"91 and her pretence that nothing has happened and that she hadn't got "wet" (pp. 291-292), expresses comically her initial resistance to knowledge and to self-knowledge. Bergson contends that the chief cause of rigidity is lack of self-knowledge,92 and that "a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself."93 As the heroine of a novel that has basically the structure of comedy, Maggie has moments when she appears comic, even ludicrous, as reality
persistently disagrees with her conception of it, and especially as her early illusion that she is manipulating Amerigo and Charlotte gives way to a realization that she is actually being manipulated by them (pp. 311-318). On the whole, however, the process of attaining self-knowledge is painful for the person undergoing it, and the emphasis of the second half of the novel, in which Maggie's consciousness is the center of attention, often falls on suffering. True comedy ignores the subjective dimension of experience which is fundamentally James's concern, for, as Bergson remarks, "the kind of observation from which comedy springs... is directed outwards." Nevertheless, the comic dimension of the novel is used to contain and control the potentially tragic suffering which the novel presents. By the end of the story Maggie is 'awake,' free of the dangerous, but always at least potentially comic, rigidity caused, as Bergson observes, by lack of self-knowledge.

Another of Bergson's comic types is "the Dancing Jack," the character who thinks he is speaking and acting with freedom, but who when seen from a certain point of view "appears as a mere toy in the hands of another, who is playing with him." After Maggie has decided to "humbug" her father, deliberately to deceive him into thinking that nothing has changed except that they have all been caught up, delightfully, into a social whirl, she sees him as a child and a toy. Leading him out for a walk in the park, she takes his arm "with much the same intimate pressure she had always used, when a little girl, to mark the inseparability of her doll" (pp. 346-347). Thus Adam is not only a humor—to use Bergson's term, the modern comic type of the professional man—and one, moreover, of an overly romantic, Utopian bent of mind, but a person who, in his daughter's view of him, becomes as well that
other comic figure, "the Dancing Jack." Whether Adam is actually deceived and manipulated by Maggie or whether he realizes what she is doing and finally decides to put an end to a difficult and dangerous situation by taking Charlotte away to America—that is part of James's ambiguity. To the extent that Adam becomes aware of what is going on, Maggie's sense of "humbugging" him is an illusion. But it is a valuable illusion (unlike her other romantic illusions) because it inevitably destroys her original perspective, her simple, childlike attitude of admiration for her father's way of life and respect for his authority. Her original sense of intimacy with Adam is slowly modified until she is surprised to find herself disagreeing with him about Lady Castledean (p. 357), and by the end of the novel, she feels herself almost begin to wonder "if it were reserved to them, for the last stage, to find their contact, like that of old friends reunited too much on the theory of the unchanged, subject to shy lapses" (p. 542). Adam's final quiet remark to Maggie, that it was a risk for him to marry Charlotte, but that he didn't see what Maggie would have done without his marriage (p. 545), implies that in the long run Adam has not been a "Dancing Jack" but a highly subtle puppet-master. In this novel, as in life, it is not always easy to differentiate between puppet-master and "Dancing Jack," especially since, as the situation changes, a character may find himself in, or be seen in, first one role and then the other.

However, to return to the philosophical significance of Bergson's theory of the comic, the narration of the second half of the book, in which Maggie Verver's consciousness is the register of experience, is the history of how "tension" and "elasticity" are added to Maggie's character. Jealousy imparts such a "tension of spirit" to Maggie, that, as she waits for Amerigo
and Charlotte to return from their day of "freedom," she conceives herself as a timidly crouching "tigress" waiting to spring, meaning "nothing recklessly ultimate, nothing clumsily fundamental," but nevertheless determined to administer to her husband "the first surprise to which she had ever treated him" (pp. 294-295). Elasticity is created as a result in Maggie when she realized eventually that not to forgive her husband for his immorality and not to recognize her own moral deficiencies would be to destroy them all.

Early in the novel, in Amerigo's consciousness of Adam and in Adam's consciousness of himself, American morality is linked through imagery with the mechanical application of principles of conduct. It is this mechanical morality that Maggie has to refute within herself or go down to psychic ruin. She refutes the validity of a rigid ethics by her decision that she can only save her father and the others, as well as herself, by deceit and manipulation. She works out the best possible solution of their common moral problem by, in effect, breaking the rules. She does not confess her difficulty to her priest, but takes the responsibility of dealing with it entirely upon herself. Thus she becomes a moral pioneer, occupying an "improvised 'post'--a post of the kind spoken of as advanced--with which she was to have found herself connected in the fashion of a settler or a trader in a new country . . . " (p. 516). Like Ibsen's Nora, as Oscar Cargill points out, she "discovers and establishes her own ethic." Bergson's example of the grim comedy inherent in a mechanical application of principles and a constant, unremitting attention to 'good form,' is Doctor Bahis, of L'Amour medecin, who proclaims, "It is better to die through following the rules than to recover through violating them." At Fawns, watching the guilty couple playing cards with her father and the Assinghams, Maggie experiences the
horror of finding evil seated at its ease where she had "only dreamed of good" (p. 455). But, rejecting the temptation to shatter all their lives by revealing the 'truth' of Amerigo's immorality, and even understanding this impulse to destroy others as a "deformity" in her own attitude, Maggie is able to accept the ambivalence of human nature, and to meet it with love and compassion. She realizes that "to feel about [Amerigo and Charlotte] in any of the immediate, inevitable, assuaging ways, the ways usually open to innocence outraged and generosity betrayed, would have been to give them up, and that giving them up was, marvellously, not to be thought of" (pp. 455-456). Not to adopt pragmatic ethics in this situation would be to become a "tyrant of virtue," like Melville's Ahab. Thus Maggie's intuitive wisdom refutes the vicious maxim of Moliere's Dr. Bahis and asserts that of William James, who supported by his psychology and ethics the aphorism, "Rules are made for man, not man for rules," and insisted that "the highest ethical life--however few may be called to bear its burdens--consists at all times in the breaking of rules which have grown too narrow for the actual case."
VI

The Breaking of the 'Vicious Circle'

The words *scheme*, *system*, *idea*, *form*, and *equilibrium* recur again and again in *The Golden Bowl*, establishing an omnipresent sense of the Ververs' artificial, formalized arrangement of life, and carrying the Bergsonian theme of rigidity in conflict with the inner suppleness of life. Since Bergson and William James developed their philosophies in reaction to prevailing views of life as mechanistic, it is interesting to note a contemporary scientific use of the word *equilibrium* which may have given it a connotation for William and Henry James that it no longer possesses. The positivist Herbert Spencer in his *First Principles* (1862) developed a version of mechanism in his approach to nature, founding the "theory of equilibrium." William James particularly disliked the mechanistic determinism of Spencer, and lost no opportunity to refute those concepts of Spencer he found repugnant. Maggie Verver thinks of her 'system' of making her father happy by her company while Charlotte and Amerigo represent them socially to the world as an "equilibrium" (p. 299)—but James describes the situation (as does Fanny Assingham, p. 280) as a "vicious circle" (*Notebooks*, 130).

The 'charmed circle' of paternal-filial love is broken by the formation of another 'circle.' Meeting on the ground of the "sweet simplicity" of the sposi, "placed face to face in a freedom that partook, extraordinarily, of ideal perfection, since the magic web had spun itself without their toil, almost without their touch" (p. 210), Amerigo and Charlotte affirm their responsibility never to hurt Maggie and Adam. To Amerigo, Charlotte breathes, "'It's sacred.'" "They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then, of a sudden, through this tightened
circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled" (p. 221). Thus the Ververs' 'charmed circle' of exclusion and repression, the situation described by James as "the rotary motion, the vicious circle" (Notebooks, 130-131), becomes the "tightened circle" of Amerigo's unnaturally intimate relationship with Charlotte, and through the "tightened circle" of the lovers' embrace the flood of passion pours, the passion that will eventually destroy the 'charmed circle' of the Ververs (pp. 220-221). This embrace, the kiss that 'wakes' the 'sleeping princess,' is echoed toward the end of the novel by Adam's farewell embrace of Maggie (p. 483). Thus the shape of the golden bowl epitomizes the circles of the novel: the circle formed by love, the circle broken by passion.

The causal factors which break the "vicious circle" are 'organic' because rooted in the past lives of the various characters. As 'organic' forces they oppose the surface mechanism of the Ververs' 'system' and break the 'magic circle,' just as the golden bowl, symbolizing the Ververs' concept of Amerigo as Maggie's cup of life, is broken by an 'inspired' Fanny Assingham (p. 416). Charlotte Stant is not only Maggie's former schoolmate; she is also, unknown to Maggie, a part of Amerigo's past, the woman he was unable to marry. Charlotte's marriage to Adam seems to happen almost spontaneously, despite Fanny's scheming, because everyone seems to be subject to a mysterious urge to incorporate Charlotte into the Ververs' system. Maggie insists she's "'great in life'" and mustn't be "'wasted'" (pp. 127, 130). Adam's decision to marry Charlotte to relieve Maggie of the responsibility of caring for him comes to him late at night, at Fawns, with the hallucinatory intensity of a vision: "It all met him during these instants as a vast
expanse of discovery, a world that looked, so lighted [as by "some strange midnight sun"], extraordinarily new . . . " (p. 146). When Adam needs to be alone with Charlotte to propose marriage to her, Amerigo suddenly announces that he has had an urge to revisit his beloved, long-neglected Italy, whom he personifies as a beautiful woman serenading him in the night (p. 140). Charlotte has an almost racial appeal to Amerigo (pp. 33, 39), unlike Maggie, and later the figure of the irresistible serenade is significantly reversed when Amerigo stands below Charlotte's window at Matcham, calling her down for the day of their "freedom" from the Ververs (pp. 252-253). Mr. Verver's own part in the unconsciously-operating conspiracy is his whimsical refusal to read Amerigo's telegram to Charlotte, a message which signifies the Prince's assent to her marriage to Adam but in such terms that Adam's suspicion would have been aroused if he had read it (pp. 170-171, 205). Adam's final remark to Maggie that his marriage to Charlotte was a "risk" but a necessary one (p. 545), suggests that Adam recognized intuitively the difficulty of separating himself more definitely from his daughter, and acted (perhaps unconsciously at first) in accordance with her unrealized psychic need.

In the total symbolic form of the novel, the correspondence between structure and psychology is expressed also by James's use of a large number of architectural metaphors and spatially-organized scenic images to indicate the shifting relations of characters and to suggest their changing psychic conditions. Interior images form a continuum with scenic description, as in the following pattern which imitates the fairy-tale motif of the short reign of the false princess. Two years after her marriage to Adam, appearing with Amerigo at "a great official party," standing half-way up "the 'monumental' staircase" (p. 172), Charlotte feels herself to be
in truth crowned, and it all hung together, melted together, in light and colour and sound: the unsurpassed diamonds that her head so happily carried, the other jewels, the other perfections of aspect and arrangement that made her personal scheme a success, ... to which might be added lastly, as the strong-scented flower of the total sweetness, and easy command, a high enjoyment of her crisis. ... When presently ... she saw the Prince come back she had an impression of all the place as higher and wider and more appointed for great moments; with its dome of lustres lifted, its ascents and descents more majestic, its marble tiers more vividly overhung ... and it was when he reached her and she could, taking his arm, show herself as placed in her relation, that she felt supremely justified. (pp. 173-174)

Shortly after this social triumph Charlotte goes with Amerigo to Matcham. There they drain together the "great gold cup" of the April day (pp. 246, 253, 255) and pay their visit to "the tomb of [the] old king" (p. 255). The apotheosis of the false princess is complete when Charlotte and Amerigo appear together on the balcony of Maggie's house, dazzling Maggie and Adam by their appearance as "truly superior beings," calling gaily down, as from the battlements of a castle (p. 358). Later, at Fawns, confronted by Charlotte, who demands to know if Maggie considers that she has been wronged by her, Maggie is terrified by the splendid, menacing presence of her regal stepmother. Charlotte marches straight in, "dragging her rich train." She rises there "beautiful and free, with her whole aspect and station attuned to the firmness of her speech," while Maggie huddles under a shawl, "covering herself with it as if for humility," like "some poor woman at somebody's proud door" (p. 462). But later, after Maggie has successfully resisted, by submission and deceit, Charlotte's attempt to triumph definitively over her, and after Adam has decided to take Charlotte to America, Maggie looks down from her window at Fawns to see Charlotte descending a flight of steps and then receding from sight along the terrace (presumably the same terrace across which Charlotte had recently pursued her). Then Maggie herself descends, as if from "some castle-tower," in merciful pursuit, motivated by compassion to
make the imminent change easier for her deposed rival (p. 505 ff.).

Accompanying this fairy-tale peripety, the further dramatic irony of comic reversal creates the typical comic situation of "the cheat cheated" or "the robber robbed." Bergson observes that "[the] inversion of roles, and a situation which recoils on the head of its author" is one of the root ideas of comedy.102 The sustained pattern of inversion which occurs early in Book Second may be described by reference to Bergson's analysis as the situation of the manipulator manipulated and the possessor possessed. After her suspicions of Amerigo's infidelity have been virtually confirmed, Maggie works hard to preserve the 'equilibrium' of the marriages. As she manipulates the domestic arrangements and social engagements of the two couples, she seems briefly to be in control, but she soon realizes that she is herself being "beautifully treated" by Charlotte and Amerigo (p. 311), that they are, in fact, using the 'system' to control her (Ch. XXVI).

The inverse of the image of the pagoda, which at the opening of Book Second had figured to Maggie the arrangement by which she had been able to marry without breaking with her past, the "unusual extension and . . . liberal form" she and Adam had given their lives (pp. 290-291), occurs at the end of Chapter XXVI when Maggie feels herself to be "built in with [the lovers'] purpose," as their mutual understanding arches over her head "like a vault of bold span." Beneath the heavily arching vault she sits "in the solid chamber of her helplessness" (pp. 317-318). As she had once, in Amerigo's view, immersed him in a bath of wealth, made fragrant by the exquisite colouring drops of her romantic imagination (p. 6), so now Maggie finds herself forcibly immersed in a "bath of benevolence," like a child or an invalid (p. 318). In short, she feels herself to be imprisoned and manipulated within the form
she has created herself, a form she had always implicitly assumed to be entirely within the grasp and control of the Ververs, father and daughter. What is imaged is, to use an expression of William James, "an overarching system of moral relations," the system created by the Ververs. The golden bowl as the "great gold cup" of the April day, seized, drained, and inverted by the marriage partners, becomes the "vault of bold span," the chamber of Maggie's helplessness.

But without her induced awareness of being confined and manipulated, it is unlikely that Maggie would have been able, later, to understand Charlotte's position. Realizing that Charlotte is cut off from Amerigo, kept by him in ignorance of what has passed between him and his wife, Maggie knows "the deluded condition" to be a "cage" (p. 449). Later, realizing that Adam has Charlotte under control, she imagines the beautiful cicerone as moving about at the end of a "silken halter," and hears her voice as "the shriek of a soul in pain" (pp. 492-495). Obliged to undergo herself the experience of being helpless, imprisoned and manipulated within a form she has helped to create, Maggie understands what it is to be used by others, and is later able to sympathize with Charlotte, to pity her (p. 495), and to help her (Ch. XXXIX). Induced empathy makes possible Maggie's compassion, forgiveness, and recreation; it leads her away from the inflexible morality of "dusting and polishing New England grandmothers" (p. 397) and toward a saving pragmatism in ethics.
The effect of incorporating Charlotte into the Ververs' 'system' is to animate the psychologically static world of father and daughter by forcing a dynamic "tension of spirit" upon Maggie (p. 295). Charlotte, the agent of Maggie's "agitation" (p. 299), is associated through imagery with water, a traditional symbol, especially in myth and in Romantic literature, of human vitality. She is herself associated with water imagery, but her effect on the Ververs is often expressed by metaphors involving fire. At her first vivid appearance she suggests ocean crossings; unlike Maggie, she has "the knowledge . . . and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid" (p. 32). Soon she walks with the Prince over rain-freshened grass in the park, on her way to discover with him the golden bowl in a Bloomsbury shop (p. 63). Charlotte has a deeper contact with life than the Ververs and a wider range of perception than the Prince; her vision "acts for every relation," penetrating the "night" of "meanness" to discern individuality and even beauty in the lower orders (p. 75). Called to Fawns from a bathing-place in Brittany, she reproduces there, as Adam later reflects, "the pulse of life" (p. 149). At Brighton, the "big booming medium" of the sea, "plump in the conscious centre" of everything, represents to Adam the "pulse of life" that Charlotte had so successfully reproduced at Fawns (p. 149). Charlotte promises to refresh and enliven his pursuit of art by "her greater gaiety, her livelier curiosity and intensity, her readier, happier irony" (p. 149) -- an additional reason for Adam to implement "his majestic scheme" (p. 148) of marrying her to make life freer for his daughter, to "put her at peace" about him (p. 157). And so he proposes on the sea-front with a strong awareness of
burning all his ships behind him, his sense of radical and irreversible change mirrored by the fiery sunset sky (pp. 151-156). Two years later, married to Adam, but deprived of her husband by Maggie, Charlotte jumps with Amerigo, as he tells Fanny, out of "'Mr. Verver's boat!'" (p. 188) for a refreshing splash in the water—a practice not dangerous, he insists, for those who know how to swim (p. 190). Mr. Verver's "boat" is "'a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored, if you like, out in the stream'"; hence Amerigo and Charlotte alleviate the boredom of a static and directionless existence by enjoying each other's company in society—especially as they are encouraged to do so by Maggie and Adam, who prefer to stay at home quietly together while their marriage partners function as their social representatives (p. 303). Amerigo's description of his felt need to "'stretch [his] legs'" and of Charlotte's corresponding urge to "'splash about in the water'" (p. 190) conveys delicately to Fanny Assingham (who has 'made' the marriages) a reminder that their human vitality has to find an outlet in activity, and that their marriages are unfortunately not vital relationships for them. But gradually the 'charmed circle' of "peculiarly paternal . . . passionately filial" love (Notebooks, 131) is invaded by the psychic energy and vitality it excludes, for once the circle is 'broken' by Charlotte's action of going, with Amerigo, to Gloucester, fire and water images express the aroused energy and passion of Maggie Verver.

Henry Adams believed that the historian must first follow the track of force or energy. Then, as a result of discovering "its complex source and shifting channels," he would be able to comprehend it. As an "historian of fine consciences," James follows the track of energy in Maggie Verver's psychic life. Adams believed that mind is subject to the laws of motion;
he believed that the physicists' analogy between vital energy and heat was. valid, and that vital energy was therefore subject to the general law of entropy rather than to the law of evolution which held "that vital energy could be added and raised indefinitely in potential, without the smallest evident compensation." As has already been noted, from Schopenhauer he derived his idea that energy was identical with will. In *The Golden Bowl*, from the day Fanny Assingham declares that Maggie is 'awake' to the moment when Maggie, having rejected along with the guidance of her priest the possibility of remaining "all insolently passive" (p. 501), successfully plays her final 'role' with Charlotte and then realizes she has "done all" (p. 513), James marks the eruption and the 'working' of psychic energy in Maggie's consciousness by employing images of tension, motion, heat, and energy. Henry Adams observed that equilibrium is manifested by the absence of change, and that is Maggie's understanding of the term when she thinks that "any alteration of Adam's consciousness, even in the possible sense of enlivenment, would make their precious equilibrium waver" (p. 299). But Maggie decides nevertheless to embark on a course of enlivenment, and the image patterns involving machinery, motion, and heat then used by James to express Maggie's awareness of movement and change, her determination to protect herself and save the others, and her sense of the effort involved in doing so, reflect Adams' theory that mind is subject to the laws of motion.

Excluded from the 'charmed circle,' Charlotte goes to Amerigo, mounting "as with the whizz and the red light of a rocket, from the form to the fact ..." (p. 208). The resulting psychic "explosion"--the irruption of passion leading to the adulterous kiss is one explosion, and the excursion to Gloucester is (as Fanny says [p. 385]) another--generates a driving force of
jealousy and anxiety which wakes Maggie up by imparting to her an unprecedented "tension of spirit" (pp. 294-295). Maggie attempts to save herself, "to bring about a difference, touch by touch, without letting either of the three, and least of all her father, so much as suspect her hand" (p. 311), by accelerating the pace of life, by embarking on a social whirl; and her activities then illustrate Adams' theory that after a change of phase a system is forced to accelerate its motion to establish a new equilibrium.

The social whirl initiated by Maggie is kept up by Charlotte and Amerigo until it fairly propels Maggie and Adam along, upsetting completely their natural tendency to be quiet and still, at rest in each other's company (what one might call their 'inertia'). Maggie's rueful awareness of being caught up in a motion she cannot control is expressed in the following passage:

"We're in the train [the train of social activity in which Amerigo and Charlotte "so constantly moved"]," Maggie mutely reflected . . .; "we've suddenly waked up in it and found ourselves rushing along, very much as if we had been put in during sleep—shoved, like a pair of labelled boxes, into the van. And since I wanted to 'go' I'm certainly going," she might have added; "I'm moving without trouble—they're doing it all for us: it's wonderful how they understand and how perfectly it succeeds." (pp. 336-337)

Maggie imagines Adam saying to her, "Everything is remarkably pleasant, isn't it?—but where, for it, after all, are we? up in a balloon and whirling through space, or down in the depths of the earth, in the glimmering passages of a gold-mine!'" (p. 339). Yet in spite of the frantic motion "the equilibrium, the precious condition, lasted . . .; there had been a fresh distribution of the different weights, but the balance persisted and triumphed . . ." (p. 339). Maggie feels that Charlotte and Amerigo are "working together" to maintain the balance, in their own interest, and that "[her] success in shifting [the] beautiful harmony to a new basis" is actually "their success . . . their power to hold out, their complete possession, in short, of [their"
spouses' lives]" (p. 340).

When Adam calls on Maggie at Portland Place, alone, Maggie suspects "fundamentals . . . to be rising, by a new movement, to the surface" (p. 343). It is then that Maggie first has her notion of "sacrificing" Adam (p. 346), an idea which recalls her earlier sense "that she was no longer playing with blunt and idle tools, with weapons that didn't cut. There passed across her vision ten times a day the gleam of a bare blade . . ." (p. 295).

"Humbugging Adam . . . by absolute necessity, as she had never, never done in her life . . ." (p. 344), Maggie comes to hear him, in her imagination, "bleating . . . at her, all conscious and all accommodating, like some precious, spotless, exceptionally intelligent lamb . . . . 'Sacrifice me, my own love; do sacrifice me, do sacrifice me!'" (p. 346) That Maggie's imagination should be capable of such a vision bears out Fanny's later contention that innocent persons, once agitated, are capable of "going much further, in their view of the lurid . . . than those who have been wider awake, all round, from the first" (pp. 379-380), that "lions . . . brought up, from the first, to prowling and mauling . . . are nothing to [lambs;""] (p. 380).

As Maggie's imagination is awakened to "the lurid," and as she begins to act in the sense of becoming an actress playing a role, "heroically improvising . . . her part" (p. 310), the motifs of 'going' and 'agitation' (e.g. pp. 310, 315, 323, 324, 362) are accompanied by visual imagery of high color, of feverishness, of earlier elements flushing into life, of red skies (e.g. pp. 313, 314, 323). At the dinner party at Eaton Square it is Lady Castledean, who presumably possesses information about Amerigo's behavior on the day he went to Gloucester with Charlotte, who makes Maggie 'go,' who "[is] determinant," who "kindles the light, or at all events the heat, and who acts on the nerves . . ." (p. 323). Feeling "the desire to possess and use" the
guests (who had also been at Matcham with Amerigo and Charlotte) in order to satisfy her curiosity, Maggie "translates 'her idea into action ... by engaging them all, unconventionally, almost violently, to dine with her in Portland Place . . . ." And Maggie realizes, with a perpetually renewed amazement, "Oh she was going, she was going--she could feel it afresh; it was a good deal as if she had sneezed ten times or had suddenly burst into a comic song . . . . she was dancing up and down, beneath her propriety, with the thought that she had at least begun something . . . " (p. 324). Thus Fanny's prediction that the right kind of "shaking" would make Maggie "sit up," would make her "decide to live" (p. 274), is fulfilled. It is as if the force generated by the "explosion" of Charlotte's long-repressed passion for Amerigo propels Maggie along until she 'catches fire' and develops a genuine psychic dynamism of her own.

After hearing the story of the Bloomsbury bowl, a revelation which she experiences as a "shock . . . suddenly and violently received" (p. 446), Maggie summons Fanny to her house. Fanny arrives to find her young friend of such a high color that bright red spots, "red as some monstrous ruby," burn in her cheeks (p. 397). Confronted with the evidence of the bowl, Fanny senses that Maggie, who "might have given the little flare, have made the little pounce, of asking . . . ," refuses "to take advantage of the opportunity for planting the stab of reproach . . . ." She sees her "look at her chance for straight denunciation, look at it and then pass it by . . . ." (p. 404). When Fanny breaks the bowl, Maggie flushes with wonder, immediately feeling the act of destruction to be "a violence calling up the hot blood as a blow across the mouth might have called it." But the blow is felt more visibly by Amerigo, who appears just as Fanny smashes the bowl, and who stands
on the threshold apparently in pain and distress, with "the red mark of his conviction flaming there in his beauty" (pp. 416-418). Then Fanny leaves Amerigo to Maggie, and Maggie tells him the story of her discovery, bringing the words out "in small waves of energy, each of which spent its force . . ." (p. 429).

Maggie in motion is seen as an actress (pp. 310, 434, 451, 454, 506, 512), a circus performer (pp. 338, 502), a dancer (pp. 324, 444), even as the "commander of a siege" (p. 438), and as "the rider of a plunging horse" trying to "stay on" (p. 405). Gradually her both painful and pleasurable animation creates in her the natural tension and elasticity lacking in the "dreamer," creates in her the "inner suppleness of life" which Bergson saw as beneficially destroying, in comedy, the mechanical 'encrustations' of obsession and routine. Her inner struggle as she exerts her will to save herself and the others and to regain Amerigo's love changes her from an inexperienced and morally inactive girl to a serious, morally active young woman. William James believed that "seriousness . . . means the willingness to live with energy, though energy bring pain." Maggie learns to live with and to control a painful and dangerous but essentially life-giving irruption of psychic energy.

As jealousy releases the springs of her instinctual life, making her aware of the depth of her passion for her husband and pushing her to the brink of aggression, Maggie, who had originally conceived her marriage as a voyage in a water-tight 'boat' made unsinkable by her faith in Amerigo's value (pp. 9-10), becomes intimately associated with water imagery. Waiting for Amerigo to return from Matcham, she feels "the full cup" of her need for him begin to overflow (p. 300), and later that evening, she struggles not to
drown in "the plenitude of his presence," under "a dizzying, smothering welter . . . in submarine depths where everything came to her through walls of emerald and mother-of-pearl . . ." (p. 317). As Dorothea Krock points out, Maggie has temporarily to resist her own sexual desire in order to let Amerigo know that she is aware of his misconduct with Charlotte.113 But by the end of the novel, just before Adam and Charlotte arrive for their last visit, Maggie feels that Amerigo is"with her as if he were hers, hers in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a new and a strange quantity, that were like the irruption of a tide loosening them where they had stuck and making them feel they floated" (p. 528). She is on the brink of attaining what her father had earlier sensed her to be capable of, "the maximum of immersion in the fact of being married" (p. 104)—a psychological as well as a physical "immersion." Adam's vision of her on the day he informs her he has decided to "ship back" to America with Charlotte suggests that her future with Amerigo will be one of total and successful commitment to life:

The mere fine pulse of passion in it, the suggestion as of a creature consciously floating and shining in a warm summer sea, some element of dazzling sapphire and silver, a creature cradled upon depths, buoyant among dangers, in which fear or folly, or sinking otherwise than in play, was impossible—something of all this might have been making once more present to him, with his discreet, his half shy assent to it, her probable enjoyment of a rapture that he, in his day, had presumably convinced no great number of persons either of his giving or of his receiving. . . . The beauty of her condition was keeping him, at any rate, as he might feel, in sight of the sea, where, though his personal dips were over, the whole thing could shine at him, and the air and the plash and the play become for him too a sensation . . . . If it wasn't personally floating . . . it could yet pass very well for breathing the bliss . . . for tasting the balm. It could pass, further, for knowing—for knowing that without him nothing might have been . . . . (p. 474)

Two literary images in the consciousness of the reader are finely echoed by this passage: Stein's advice to Jim, "'In the destructive element
immerse. . . . To the destructive element submit yourself and with the exer-
tions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you
up'"; and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality":

Though inland far we be
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.
VIII

The Mechanical and the Vital: Diagrammatic and Kinesthetic Images of Psychic States

F. R. Leavis finds most of the images of The Golden Bowl, including the elaborate figure of the pagoda which opens Book Second, to lack the concrete immediacy of true metaphor, to be in their effect more like "coloured diagram" than poetic imagery. The "synthetic" quality detected by Leavis in many of the images is, however, not a failure on James's part to achieve poetic immediacy, but a deliberate rendering of the synthetic, lifeless quality of the world created by the Ververs, a world in which social forms are used mechanically to control people and restrain natural impulses. "Coloured diagrams" are appropriate to explain mechanical systems of 'equilibrium,' and, although many of these "diagrams" are images spontaneously produced by Maggie's awakened imagination, since what they reveal is the mechanical nature of the Ververs' use of their marriage partners, in themselves they partake of the mechanical quality of what they express. These animated images are figures of "analysis, demonstration, and comment," as Leavis maintains. They express Maggie's painful progress towards knowledge of the world as a place where people are all too often owned and controlled by others. Waiting for Amerigo to return from Matcham, Maggie meditates on her "intelligently arranged" existence:

... it had been for all the world, as if Charlotte had been 'had in,' as the servants always said of extra help, because they had thus suffered it to be pointed out to them that if their family coach lumbered and stuck the fault was in its lacking its complement of wheels. Having but three, as they might say, it had wanted another, and what had Charlotte done from the first but begin to act, on the spot, and ever so smoothly and beautifully, as a fourth? Nothing had been, immediately, more manifest than the greater grace of the movement of the vehicle--as to which, for the completeness of her image, Maggie was now supremely to feel how every strain had been lightened
for herself. So far as she was one of the wheels she had but to keep in her place; since the work was done for her she felt no weight, and it wasn’t too much to acknowledge that she had scarce to turn round. She had a long pause before the fire, during which she might have been fixing with intensity her projected vision, have been conscious even of its taking an absurd, fantastic shape. She might have been watching the family coach pass and noting that, somehow, Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling it while she and her father were not so much as pushing. They were seated inside together, dandling the Principino and holding him up to the windows, to see and be seen, like an infant positively royal; so that the exertion was all with the others. Maggie found in this image a repeated challenge; again and yet again she paused before the fire; after which, each time, in the manner of one for whom a strong light has suddenly broken, she gave herself to livelier movement. She had seen herself at last, in the picture she was studying, suddenly jump from the coach; whereupon, frankly, with the wonder of the sight, her eyes opened wider and her heart stood still for a moment. She looked at the person so acting as if this person were somebody else, waiting with intensity to see what would follow. The person had taken a decision—which was evidently because an impulse long gathering had at last felt a sharpest pressure. . . . What . . . would the figure in the picture do? She looked about her, from the middle of the room, under the force of this question, as if there, exactly, were the field of action involved. (pp. 303-304)

This extended metaphor, which is also, in a sense, an argument by analogy, is a "coloured diagram" precisely because James is rendering Maggie’s perception and comprehension of an artificial system, the "system" of the two marriages.

The metaphors of the novel which do possess a poetic immediacy are those which express the sudden welling-up and overflowing of feeling. As an example of an image having the poetic immediacy and sensuous life of James’s earlier work, Leavis quotes Maggie’s sudden realization that Adam intends to "ship" himself and Charlotte back to American City:

Ah, then it was that the cup of her conviction, full to the brim, overflowed at a touch! There was his idea, the clearness of which for an instant almost dazzled her. It was a blur of light, in the midst of which she saw Charlotte like some object marked, by contrast, in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed. (p. 480)

But the novel contains many such descriptions of emotional life, passages
in which the rhythm, by imitating the surge and flow of intense feeling, builds up kinesthetically the overall pattern of the disintegration of repressive form, a pattern focused by the breaking of the golden bowl. James's rendering of the kiss with which Amerigo and Charlotte involuntarily "pledge" themselves to shield Maggie and Adam from any harmful knowledge expresses the resurgence of a long-repressed emotional vitality by showing it bursting to the surface within the very form intended to repress and exploit it:

"It's sacred," she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge. (p. 221)

And yet, in the rhythms of the emotional life shared by Amerigo and Charlotte there is a strong sense of controlled release, of deliberate indulgence in erotic moods. This passage, for instance, part of James's account of the lovers' sensual involvement with the "exquisite" (p. 252) but "lusty" (p. 236) April morning and with each other, suggests by its controlled rhetoric, its careful, deliberate cadence, that such eroticism has a strong ritual quality, an impression to which the other imagery earlier in the novel of Amerigo as sun god (p. 174) and Renaissance prince "diffusing the sense of a function" (p. 29), and of Charlotte as the female incarnation of Amerigo's race, as Florentine statue, "huntress," and "muse" (p. 33), contributes:

He had his hand there, to pluck it, on the open bloom of the day; but what did the bright minute mean but that her answering hand was already intelligently out? So, therefore, while the minute lasted, it passed between them
that their cup was full; which cup their very eyes, holding it fast, carried and steadied and began, as they tasted it, to praise. (p. 253)

James's description of "the sunny, gusty, lusty English April," kicking "like some infant Hercules" (p. 236), the day of the lovers' "freedom" from the tyranny of Adam Verver and his daughter (Chapter XXII), epitomizes the synthesis of aesthetic and sensual qualities which at once characterizes European life for deprived American sensibilities and stands in opposition to mechanical American 'systems.' Charlotte and Amerigo become pagan lovers and figures in a Renaissance landscape of intrigue, as James's imagery and rhythm suggest that their love has the significance of a pagan sacrament, a celebration of worldly perfection. It is as if Amerigo and Charlotte oppose to the 'form' of American morality and of their American marriages, to the mechanical oversimplification of human nature forced on them by the Ververs, another 'form'--that of the ritual eroticism of pagan antiquity. This 'form' is more natural in that it takes human nature into account instead of repressing it, but it is not the ideal 'form' of love because, as many critics have noted, it obviously lacks a spiritual dimension.

The ideal form of love, for James's Americans, would be a synthesis of aesthetic and sensuous perfection, as in Amerigo's relationship with Charlotte, but the whole informed by a uniquely American "moral spontaneity": a love at once erotic and spiritually fulfilling. Of all of James's protagonists, only Maggie Verver has the opportunity to realize such a love. She has but to allow the unnatural form of her "union" with her father to disintegrate and to fill the natural form of her true marriage with life. Maggie's emotional life, when it does break to the surface, has the intrinsic vitality of true spontaneity. James renders Maggie's imaginary speech to her
husband, in which she informs him of her great need of him, in a scarcely controlled, fluid, breathless rhythm:

... there comes a day when something snaps, when the full cup, filled to the very brim, begins to flow over. That's what has happened to my need of you--the cup, all day, has been too full to carry. So here I am with it, spilling it over you--and just for the reason that is the reason of my life. After all, I've scarcely to explain that I'm as much in love with you now as the first hour ... . (pp. 229-300)

Significantly, this image expressing the welling-up of marital passion occurs immediately after a lengthy development of Maggie's idea of her marriage and her father's marriage as an "equilibrium": This image and the earlier one of Amerigo and Charlotte draining together the golden cup of the April day are fused towards the end of the novel in James's rendering of Maggie's anguished sense of Charlotte's suffering. After Adam has Charlotte firmly attached to him by a "silken leash" and Maggie has successfully confined her beneath the smooth surface of social appearances, Maggie senses Charlotte was hiding neither pride nor joy--she was hiding humiliation; and here it was that the Princess's passion, so powerless for vindictive flights, most inveterately bruised its tenderness against the hard glass of her question.

Behind the glass lurked the whole history of the relation she had so fairly flattened her nose against it to penetrate--the glass Mrs. Verver might, at this stage, have been frantically tapping, from within, by way of supreme, irrepressible entreaty. . . . She could . . . have translated Mrs. Verver's tap against the glass . . . into fifty forms; could perhaps have translated it most into the form of a reminder that would pierce deep. 'You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in your relation what can there have been, worth speaking of, to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? Why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame--oh, the golden flame!--a mere handful of black ashes?' (pp. 519-510)

Thus Maggie's love is deepened by a sorrowful awareness of the human
condition; specifically, by compassion for Charlotte, whose doom it is "to arrange appearances" (p. 35). The "hard glass" behind which Mrs. Verver is confined is the "plate glass" of American wealth and power (p. 11) and the "glass" of Adam Verver's aestheticism (p. 139); moreover, it is the surface of appearances Charlotte had doomed herself to arrange when she renounced Amerigo in the first place, "giving [herself] . . . away" (p. 69) to give Amerigo his chance to marry Maggie Verver, suppressing the strength of her passion for him, and then attempting to channel her vitality into a marriage with Adam Verver (p. 154).

To recapitulate, the metaphors that convey a feeling of poetic immediacy because they are rhythmically alive, are used by James to express the 'awakening' of Maggie's imagination and emotional life in Book Second, whereas the type of image Leavis calls "coloured diagram" serves either to establish the synthetic, static quality of the world created by the Ververs (as in Adam's analysis of his relationship with his son-in-law in Chapter VII, pp. 94, 96-97), or to render Maggie's self-analysis, her progress in Book Second toward knowledge of the evil and the suffering which lie beneath the surface of life. But the two categories of imagery, the mechanical and the vital, are not mutually exclusive, for what James is expressing by the total structure of the novel is the penetration and eventual destruction of merely mechanical 'forms' of life by the disruptive vitality of the repressed psychic content. Thus the embrace of Amerigo and Charlotte is described with great irony as the sealing of a pledge of loyalty and devotion to the "innocent" Ververs, and, as if viewing a theatrically animated "coloured diagram," Maggie later sees herself jump impulsively from "the [Verver] family coach," a social vehicle pulled by Amerigo and Charlotte in which she can no
longer ride with Adam in ignorance of the motive power.

The flowing dialectic of the novel, expressed through rhythm and image, is always between inner psychic life and consciously contrived "form," between what Bergson called "the inner suppleness of life" and the "mechanical encrustations" that impede the vital flow of psychic energies. Maggie's experiential realization is that life may be controlled effectively and beneficially only if one is able to recognize and acknowledge the spontaneous life within. The Ververs' implicit concept of Amerigo as the golden bowl from which Maggie is to drink of life is an abuse not only of his humanity but of their own. Like all repressive ideals, aesthetic or ethical, it splits from within, broken open by the pressures and involuntary motions of the life it contains. But it splits before it has destroyed the particular psychic vitality it mechanically shapes and controls.
The Voyage of the Prince and Princess: The Themes of Moral Adventure, Moral Risk, and Unavoidable Loss

James once remarked that "an enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection." But Amerigo, who has undoubtedly progressed far beyond such a primitive stage—since he is the quintessence not only of Italian culture but of worldly wisdom—seems to share the enthusiasm of, say, the French symbolist writers for Poe's imagination. On the eve of his marriage to Maggie Verver, a marriage which eventually makes his life so boring that he finds himself using his own imagination to wonder how the Ververs contrive "so little to appeal to it" (p. 223), he finds in his recollection of an adventure tale by Poe proof of "what imagination Americans could have." Reflecting on the alarming obscurity of the Ververs' motives for acquiring him, Amerigo compares his condition to that of Poe's hero Arthur Gordon Pym. He remembers to have read, as a boy, a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman—which was a thing to show, by the way, what imagination Americans could have: the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole—or was it the South?—than anyone had ever done, had found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to a great white curtain. (p. 14-15)

The metaphor of American inscrutability as a "great white curtain" recurs for some time in Amerigo's thoughts. In the next chapter the analogy of Amerigo's marriage to a voyage of adventure is firmly established by his conversation with Fanny Assingham. Although Fanny assures him he's practically in port, "'the port . . . of the Golden Isles,'" Amerigo insists that he is
"starting on the great voyage--across the unknown sea" (pp. 18-19). Amerigo's sense of adventure and mystery foreshadows the difficult and dangerous passages in the future course of events, the perils unsuspected by Fanny's serene optimism or Maggie's romantic good faith.

Alexander Holder-Barell traces a complete cycle of boat-voyage images in *The Golden Bowl*, beginning with Maggie's concept of her marriage as a big, safe, unsinkable "'ship,'" made "'watertight'" by her faith in Amerigo (pp. 9-10), and continuing with Amerigo's comparison of his marriage to the voyage of Arthur Gordon Pym, and with his subsequent plea to Fanny to sail with him, to be his guide in "'the waste of waters' " (p. 18). Fanny declines the voyage, insisting that she has not conducted him to adventure, but to rest (pp. 18-19). But four years later, after he and Charlotte have become the social representatives of the Ververs, Amerigo returns to his voyage imagery. He tells Fanny that he and Charlotte are "'in Mr. Verver's' boat" and that without the boat they should sink and be lost (p. 188), but since the boat "'is a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored . . . out in the stream,'" they have to "'jump out from time to time to . . . splash about in the water,'" to take "'inevitable . . . harmless little plunges.'" However, "'We shan't drown, we shan't sink--at least I can answer for myself,'" Amerigo says. "'Mrs. Verver too moreover . . . visibly knows how to swim'" (p. 190). The threat of shipwreck is sounded when Fanny describes Maggie's reaction to Amerigo's excursion to Gloucester: "'she irresistibly knows that there's something between them. But . . . . she stands off and off, so as not to arrive; she keeps out to sea and away from the rocks, and what she most wants of me is to keep at safe distance with her--as I, for my own skin, only ask not to come nearer'" (p. 382). The cycle is completed with a return
to the early image of Amerigo's voyage, just before Adam and Charlotte leave for America. Asking her to "'Wait . . . till we're really alone,'" Amerigo promises to break, at last, his silence on what Maggie calls the "question of good faith." Maggie feels rising in her "a terror of her wordless power of surrender." Amerigo approaches, and "the warmth of his face--frowning, smiling, she mightn't know which; only beautiful and strange--was bent upon her with the largeness with which objects loom in dreams. . . . Then it was that, from behind her closed eyes, the right word came. 'Wait!' It was the word of his own distress and entreaty, the word for both of them, all they had left, their plank now on the great sea (pp. 535-537). Holder-Barell comments, "They are no longer in Mr. Verver's big, safe 'boat,' which has been wrecked and has left them with only a 'plank' as a hope for survival. Only through patience and mutual understanding can they be saved and reach their goal."122

Amerigo and Maggie are alone together at the end of their voyage. Free of Adam, they are on the brink of what Adam had earlier termed "the maximum of immersion in the fact of being married" (p. 104, cf. p. 528), and the word wait is indeed "their plank . . . on the great sea." The final embrace of the Prince and Princess recalls a shipwreck image employed by William James in 1891:

Were all other things, gods and men and starry heavens, blotted out from this universe, and were there left but one rock with two loving souls upon it, that rock would have as thoroughly moral a constitution as any possible world which the eternities and immensities could harbor. . . . [and] while they lived [the two souls], there would be . . . a moral life, whose active energy would have no limit but the intensity of interest in each other with which the hero and heroine might be endowed. 123

This is the life to which the Princess is committed at the end of the novel.

"'See'? I see nothing but you,'" Amerigo says, "his whole act enclosing
her." "And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast" (p. 548). The note of apprehension sounded by the phrase "pity and dread" indicates Maggie's awareness not only of the inescapable ambivalence of the human condition but also of her new status and responsibility as one of two isolated 'shipwrecked' souls whose moral life can be developed only through a mutual "intensity of interest."

John Patterson, who discusses "the language of 'adventure' in Henry James," shows that "in spite of his professional mistrust of the primitive novel of adventure, . . . James was as haunted as any Tom Sawyer by its crude and violent imagery." Patterson concludes that James uses the language of adventure not only "to explore the unknown landscapes of the mind," but also "to publish his stubborn conviction that the moral and social emergencies of the human experience are every bit as spectacular as its physical emergencies, [and] that the adventurer in the infinite realms of consciousness is just as heroic as the adventurer in the more palpable realms of the physical." 125

In 1907, in Pragmatism, William James declared that life in a pluralistic world in which being grows under all sorts of resistance is "a real adventure with real danger." 126 Earlier, the philosopher had asserted that the highest ethical life was only possible for those willing and able to take moral risks, 127 and had affirmed that man must be free to "indulge [his] own faith, at [his] own risks." William James's personal view of the moral struggle was that he was "willing that there should be real losses and real losers, and no total preservation of all that is." 129 A similar philosophical acceptance of moral adventure, risk, and loss informs The Golden Bowl. The sense of life as an adventure is carried by the boat-voyage-shipwreck imagery which emerges in Chapter I, first in Maggie's and then in Amerigo's
consciousness, and is carried throughout the novel to be resolved in the last two chapters by a statement about Charlotte which functions in context as an allusion to Poe’s tale of voyage and shipwreck, death and survival; by Adam’s assertion that his marriage was a worthwhile “risk”; and by Maggie’s final sense, as Amerigo rejoins her, that she will be “paid in full.”

Together for the last time, Adam and Maggie agree that Charlotte is “great.” “You see, I” Adam adds, “how right I was. Right, I mean, to do it for you.” “Ah, rather!” Maggie replies. “I don’t see what you would have done without her.” “The point was,” Adam returns quietly, “that I didn’t see what you were to do. Yet it was a risk!” (p. 545). When Adam proposed to Charlotte on the sea-front at Brighton his awareness of commitment and moral risk, his sense of ‘burning his ships’ was reflected in the lurid glare of the sunset sky (pp. 151-155). It is this daring speculation that has resulted in the necessary separation of father and daughter.

Maggie feels, gazing with Adam at Charlotte, that “they were parting, in the light of it, absolutely on Charlotte’s value . . .” (p. 546).

Then, after Adam and Charlotte have departed for the last time, and just before Amerigo reappears, Maggie experiences

an instance of the terror that, when there has been suspense, always precedes, on the part of the creature to be paid, the certification of the amount. Amerigo knew it, the amount; he still held it, and the delay in his return, making her heart beat too fast to go on, was like a sudden blinding light on a wild speculation. She had thrown the dice, but his hand was over her cast. [Italics, mine.] (p. 547)

But when Amerigo returns, his presence alone gives her a sense that she is to be “paid in full.” “So far as seeing she was ‘paid’ went, he might have been holding out the money-bag for her to come and take it” (p. 548). As the golden bowl has been broken, the coin in the collector’s hands has at last
been 'changed,' and Maggie begins to be "paid in full." She has herself 'paid' for Amerigo--paid by giving up her father; paid, not in money, as her father had paid, but in suffering; paid by abandoning her romantic dream, by 'awaking' to the reality of the human condition. The word is used here in Emerson's sense: we 'pay' for everything we receive in life. And, once again, the gambling motif echoes William James's belief that man must take moral risks, that he has the right "to indulge [his] own faith, at [his] own risks." The "risk" of Adam's marriage to Charlotte has 'paid off'; Maggie's sense that she is to be "paid in full" suggests that her future relationship with Amerigo will be one of psychological as well as physical intimacy, and hence a fulfilling one.

The one person of the four whose fate is really in question is Charlotte Stant. Much is made of the idea that she is not to be 'wasted,' that her 'greatness' is all for the new world that lies before her (America, and a career as cicerone of Adam's collection and possibly even, with Maggie out of the way, as Adam's wife). Nevertheless, just before Adam and Charlotte arrive, Maggie says to Amerigo,

"She's wonderful and beautiful, and I feel somehow as if she were dying. Not really, not physically, . . . she's so far, naturally, splendid as she is, from having done with life. But dying for us--for you and me; and making us feel it by the very fact of there being so much of her left . . . . And yet I think . . . that it isn't as if we had wholly done with her. How can we not always think of her? It's as if her unhappiness had been necessary to us--as if we had needed her, at her own cost, to build us up and start us." (p. 532)

The Prince simply replies, "Everything's terrible, cara--in the heart of man. She's making her life . . . . She'll make it" (p. 535).

In Poe's adventure story, which provides Amerigo with the image of his marriage as a "great voyage . . . across the unknown sea," one of the four
shipwrecked voyagers dies for the sake of the other three. Arthur Gordon Pym tells with horror of how the sailor Parker "proposed, in a few words, that one of us should die to preserve the existence of the others"; of how he contended fiercely that "it was unnecessary for all to perish, when, by the death of one, it was possible, and even probable, that the rest might be finally preserved." An "awful speculation," a "terrific lottery," took place, in which Parker himself drew the shortest straw. Pym swooned, recovering in time "to behold the consummation of the tragedy in the death of him who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing it about. He made no resistance whatever, and was stabbed in the back by Peters, when he fell instantly dead. . . . A fearful repast . . . immediately ensued." 131

In the mythic dimension of the novel, Charlotte's fate is analogous to Parker's in several respects. It is she who adopts a ruthless course of action to 'save' the Prince and herself, accepting the fact that she cannot marry the Prince because "he had to have money—it was a question of life and death.'" It is she who left him in Rome with Fanny Assingham to give him the opportunity to marry Maggie and thus to acquire the wealth necessary to 'float' him (Fanny's explanation: pp. 49-52). As she herself admits to Fanny, it is she who takes the initiative with Amerigo (pp. 182-183): she goes to him in Portland Place (Chapters XVII-XVIII); later, she arranges their excursion to Gloucester (pp. 256-57). It is she who threatens to destroy the others (in Maggie's view); she is the "shining supple creature . . . out of the cage" (p. 456) who comes after Maggie, who sends flashing across Maggie's widening vision "the gleam of a bare blade" (p. 294), who eventually gives Maggie the sense of "having been thrown over on her back, with her neck, from the first, half broken and her helpless face staring up" (p. 459).
In Poe's tale, the voyager who demands the inhuman sacrifice is motivated by self-interest rather than by concern for the others, and it is he who becomes the victim. His death, terrible as it is, is the result of his own decision, and it is the means of life for all the others. Having set the dreadful course of events in motion himself, Parker can do nothing but accept his fate. Confronting Charlotte in the garden, Maggie knows her to be doomed, "doomed to a separation that was like a knife in her heart" (p. 509), but her last sense of Charlotte is of one who has a dazzling "mastery of the greater style" (p. 548). This "greater style" is the acceptance of risk and loss, and even of cruelty, and the decision to live accordingly; it is Charlotte's capacity to become a magnificent victim of her own life-style, and to accept the unpleasant consequences of her chosen way of life in a 'great' and 'splendid' manner. Charlotte does become a victim who 'dies' for Maggie and Amerigo, but she is, in a more important sense, responsible for her own fate. What Maggie says is true: Charlotte 'dies' for them, and her unhappiness has been necessary to establish a more vital basis for their marriage. But what Amerigo says is also true: Charlotte makes her life. She made it by abandoning Amerigo to Maggie, by marrying Adam, and by arranging her day at Gloucester with Amerigo. And she will make something of her mission to bring culture to America.

But Charlotte is not the only character seen as sacrificial victim. Maggie imagines Adam "bleating . . . , like some precious, spotless, exceptionally intelligent lamb . . . , 'Sacrifice me, my own love; do sacrifice me!'" (p. 346) Henceforth, "sacrifice" is one of the key words in Maggie's consciousness of the situation. Maggie's insistence to Adam that she sacrifices him brings her to the most delicate and dangerous moment of the scene during
which she 'makes' him decide to take his wife back to American City. Unwill-
ing to say to what she sacrifices Adam, Maggie proclaims, "'Why I sacrifice
you, simply, to everything and to everyone. I take the consequences of your
marriage as perfectly natural.'" After Adam acts on Maggie's hint by announc-
ing that if she says much more, he will "ship back" to America, he finally
says that only by ceasing to believe in him can Maggie begin to sacrifice
him. (pp. 476-481) Affirming her belief in Adam and able to "smile almost
without pain" in her "transmuted union" with her father, Maggie then imagines
that he had been "trying her, during these mute seconds, as the child of his
blood" (p. 482). But Maggie's 'sacrifice' of Adam is simply a sharp focussing
of the painful transition from childhood to maturity, a final relinquishing
of paternal for marital love. By Adam's responses to his daughter James
implies that Adam fully acquiesces in this inevitable and necessary loss,
and that, moreover, he rejoices that Maggie will henceforth be fully immersed
in the most significant relationship of adult life. The image of Maggie as
"a creature cradled upon depths, buoyant among dangers," which expresses
Adam's sense of "the beauty of her condition" and his vicarious pleasure in
her "rapture" (p. 474, quoted in full p. 120 above), and which could not
possibly be said to represent Maggie's perception of her father's feelings,
is a good indication of James's view of Adam's attitude toward the 'sacrifice.'

The other character seen by Maggie as a sacrificial victim is Maggie
herself. At Fawns, having resisted the temptation to use the truth to
destroy, Maggie bends "a vague mild face upon the card players, as if to
signify that ... she wished them well," and meets in turn the eyes of
each of the players.
They thus tacitly put it upon her to be disposed of, the whole complexity of their peril, and she promptly saw why: because she was there, and there just as she was, to lift it off them and take it; to charge herself with it as the scapegoat of old, of whom she had once seen a terrible picture, had been charged with the sins of the people and had gone forth into the desert to sink under his burden and die. That indeed wasn't their design and their interest, that she should sink under hers; it wouldn't be their feeling that she should do anything but live, live on somehow for their benefit... to keep proving to them that they had truly escaped and that she was still there to simplify. This idea of her simplifying, and of their combined struggle, dim as yet but steadily growing, toward the perception of her adopting it from them, clung to her while she hovered on the terrace... (pp. 453-454)

Here Maggie glimpses and rejects, both for herself and the others, the essentially primitive possibility of the ritual expiation, through the destruction of one individual, of a guilt that is in fact communal. Instead of making herself or another (Fanny, Charlotte, or Amerigo) a scapegoat, Maggie takes inwardly upon herself the task of ameliorating their mutual condition. As she had earlier, to Fanny's awareness, refused to plant "the stab of reproach" (p. 404), so now she submits to Charlotte, denying that Charlotte has wronged her in any way. Shortly after this, Maggie finally does 'simplify' for everyone, in the sense of bringing a difficult and dangerous situation to a successful conclusion, by 'sacrificing' Adam to preserve her marriage.

The motif of 'sacrifice' establishes that if the adventurous life of consciousness is full of risks and rewards, it is also full of unavoidable losses. But the most striking sacrifice in the novel, the sacrifice of Charlotte's love for Amerigo, is a sacrifice Charlotte has made herself for the sake of 'life'--the cultivated life of the high civilization. As a member of this high civilization, Maggie learns that she must not be overwhelmed by her primitive feelings. But neither must she repress them in herself so entirely that she quenches her own emotional vitality. Through experience she learns how to use constructively the primitive component of human nature, as when she 'does all' by sounding to Charlotte with a "sharp, successful, almost primitive wail, ... 'You want to take my father from me?'' (p. 512)
Daemonic Energy and Metamorphosis:  
The Significance of Charlotte Stant

The cosmic dualism which informs the structure of the romantic or symbolist novel is defined by Dorothy Van Ghent, in her essay on *Wuthering Heights*, as "the duality of human and nonhuman existence, and the cognate duality of the psyche." The external world of inhuman elemental forces and animal life is identified in the romantic novel with "the dark powers that exist within the soul," that is, with the unconscious part of the psyche. In *Wuthering Heights* Heathcliff represents "an anthropomorphized primitive energy, concentrated in activity, terrible in effect." He is a figure of "cannibal unregeneracy," and, like the woman he loves, he is "finally disintegrated from within by the very energies out of which he is made." Heathcliff's is "an archetypal figure, untraceably ancient in mythological thought—an imaged recognition of that part of nature which is 'other' than the human soul (the world of the elements and the animals) and of that part of the soul itself which is 'other' than the conscious part." This "daemonic archetype" is deeply ambivalent: "he is a fertilizing energy and profoundly attractive, and at the same time horribly destructive to civilized institutionalism". The earliest and most constant significance of this archetypal figure is "as the type of the instinctive part of the soul, a great and fertilizing power, but ethically unregenerate and therefore a great danger to ethical man." 

If, as Richard Chase suggests, in Emily Brontë's novel we have "myth domesticated," then in *The Golden Bowl* we have myth brought to the highest pitch of civilization and refinement. Charlotte Stant, the beautiful world traveller who appears to Amerigo as "huntress" and "muse" and who is reminiscent of both Renaissance intrigue and pagan antiquity, is a life principle,
at once dangerous and fertilizing. In her relationship to the Ververs and in her function in the structure of the novel in which she appears she is comparable to other archetypes of the daemonic. The Ververs, who 'have in' Charlotte to give them a 'greater life,' in effect use this fertilizing and dangerous daemonic energy. Their ownership and control and aesthetic appreciation of the threatening but vital energy—an ownership and control which at the level of realism may be seen only as an abuse of human life—actually becomes, in the mythic dimension of the novel, a symbolic representation of a viable relationship between conscious and unconscious psychic life. The unconscious forces, symbolized by the images of fire and water which represent the track of psychic energy and the welling up of vitality in Maggie Verver's consciousness, must be included in the human 'system'; to exclude them is not only to 'waste' them, but to attempt the impossible and the self-destructive.

The daemonic energy which lies at the basis of human vitality and which is, as Dorothy Van Ghent points out, the psychological equivalent of the inhuman world of pure energy, can be propitiated, and may "at times be canalized into humanly purposeful channels," but it "must be given religious recognition both for its enormous fertility and its enormous potential destructiveness." Thus, with great intuitive wisdom, Maggie Verver submits to and propitiates Charlotte, in two formally patterned set scenes, the second of which is the inversion of the first and shows Maggie definitely in control of the situation. If Maggie had attempted to destroy Charlotte or exclude her permanently from their lives, she would have destroyed herself and the others, which is to say, she would have destroyed civilization as it is represented in the novel. As Charlotte sits in Maggie's drawing room before departing for
America, she makes a "replendent . . . show of serenity." In appearance she momentarily suggests an icon, as "the shade of the official, in her beauty and security, never for a moment dropped; it was a cool, high refuge, like the deep, arched recess of some coloured and gilded image, in which she sat and smiled and waited, drank her tea, referred to her husband and remembered her mission . . . . of representing the arts and the graces to a people languishing, afar off, in ignorance" (p. 540). As Maggie's last conversation with her father draws to a close, a paean rises, as she "reiterated with a high ring, a ring that might, for all she cared, reach the pair inside: 'Father, father—Charlotte's great!'" Adam replies, "'She's beautiful, beautiful!'" (pp. 545-546) Thus Maggie offers what must be offered: a "religious recognition" of the beauty and power of the fertilizing, potentially destructive daemonic energy underlying consciousness, a force incarnate for the Ververs in the splendid figure of Charlotte Stant, who is, as Maggie intuitively realizes, "'Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life!'" (p. 127).

Maggie is moved to tears to see Charlotte's human suffering, to see her 'caged' and 'leashed,' performing as a priestess at the altar of art. But as she and Fanny are present at this canalization of daemonic energy into one of the higher forms of civilization, Maggie senses Fanny's "adventure, marvelously, on a mute appeal. 'You understand, don't you, that if she didn't do this there would be no knowing what she might do?'" (p. 494)

The recurrent "glass" imagery of The Golden Bowl (the bowl itself, Adam's "little glass" of aestheticism, the "plate glass" of American wealth and power) may be related to the image of the "window" in Wuthering Heights. The window opening out of Heathcliff's coffin-like bed directly onto the wildness of nature, the window through which Lockwood sees the dream-waif,
symbolizes, according to Dorothy Van Ghent, "a separation between the daemonic depths of the soul and the limited and limiting lucidities of consciousness, a separation between the soul's 'otherness' and its humanness." Mrs. Van Ghent contends that "the imagery of the windowpane is metamorphic, suggesting the possibility of a total change of mode of being by the breaking-through of a separating medium that exists between consciousness and the 'other.'" The figure of the "two children," one fair and the other dark (Heathcliff and Catherine; Cathy and Hareton) is a "metamorphic figure of break-through and transformation." With the "successful metamorphosis and mating [of Cathy and Hareton] the daemonic quality [which has destroyed Heathcliff and Catherine] has been completely suppressed, and, though humanity and civilization have been secured for the 'two children,' one feels that some magnificent bounty is now irrecoverable." But, she continues,

had the ideal and impossible eventuality taken place, had the "inside" and the "outside," the bright child and the dark one, become identified in such a way that they could freely assume each other's modes, then perhaps the world of the animals and the elements . . . would have offered itself completely to human understanding and creative intercourse. Perhaps the dark powers that exist within the soul, as well as in the outer elemental world, would have assumed the language of consciousness, or consciousness would have bravely entered into companionship with those dark powers and transliterated their language into its own.  

The first writer in the English language ever consciously to enter into companionship with the dark, daemonic powers and to attempt to transliterate their language into his own is William Blake, whose *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are the first clear soundings of psychic polarities later examined in detail in the turbulent depths of the Prophetic Books.

Henry James's most significant development of the Blakean Romantic theme of Innocence and Experience is found in *The Golden Bowl*. All of his
preliminary treatments of the theme of renunciation of life for the sake of honor, including *The Spoils of Poynton* which ends not only with psychic devastation but also with the symbolic destruction by fire of civilization, lead to this final statement, as if the author had to master through art the destruction of life before he could show its creation. The Americans' relationship to the Italians broadly figures, at a high pitch of civilization and refinement, the relationship of what Dorothy Van Ghent calls "the limited and limiting lucidities of consciousness"\(^{148}\) to the daemonic 'otherness' within the soul, an 'otherness' represented mainly in this novel by Charlotte, although partly also by Amerigo's racial and family background. The Ververs begin life inside a 'charmed circle' of 'innocence.' (If one considers their relationship to be covertly incestuous, an even stronger emphasis can be placed on how much the father and daughter have excluded from consciousness.\(^{149}\)) From this 'charmed circle' the potentially vitalizing energies of Charlotte are excluded; in fact, Amerigo and Charlotte are utilized by the father and daughter to form the 'charmed circle.' The breaking of the 'charmed' but "vicious" circle then takes place, as described in Part VI of this chapter, and Maggie Verver, as 'sleeping princess' is 'awakened,' animated, and transformed by the psychic energies aroused in her by her need to oppose and control Charlotte. The breaking of the "vicious circle" reflects the breaking of the golden bowl, symbol of the Ververs' romantic preconception of Amerigo, and is the inevitable consequence of the Ververs' exclusion of the dark side of their archetypal marriage partners from consciousness. Because she is able to assimilate and use the dark powers which menace her, instead of being demoralized and destroyed by them, the breaking of the bowl signifies a "break-through" for Maggie to another mode of being. Significantly the image
of Charlotte as a 'beast' in a 'cage,' behind 'bars,' is succeeded in Maggie's consciousness by a penultimate perception of her "behind the glass" (pp. 519-520, quoted p. 126 above).

James has created a fluid and ambivalent symbolic rendering of the development of psychic life, tracing in Maggie Verver's consciousness a paradigm of psychic evolution. The "glass" of social form which contains the daemonic forces must become transparent to Maggie's consciousness, for it is through the sudden manifestation of inner reality that the repressive, mechanical 'forms' of life are beneficially broken. But the daemonic energies resplendent within, "behind the glass," must not be allowed to shatter the basic form of civilized life or the result will range from insanity in the individual to moral anarchy in society. As civilized persons, the four characters, and especially Maggie, are committed, James insists, to the creative reshaping of life in order to control and utilize the primordial instinctual energy that 'lies ... beneath the surface.' Maggie sees in the depths of Amerigo's eyes a "tacitly offered ... working arrangement." "'Leave me my reserve,' she imagines him to say 'don't question it—it's all I have, just now .... If you'll make me the concession of letting me alone with it for as long a time as I require, I promise you something or other, grown under cover of it, even though I don't yet quite make out what, as a return for your patience'" (p. 443). These are the "unspoken words" Maggie "spiritually" hears (p. 444), the words she obeys. The importance of 'surfaces' is emphasized by Maggie's fear that Amerigo, as he waits with her for what she now thinks of as the "freedom" of their being alone together (p. 547), might suffer so much from the changes taking place within his consciousness that "he would suddenly commit some mistake or some violence, smash some window-pane for air,
fail even of one of his blest inveteracies of taste. In that way, fatally, he would have put himself in the wrong—blighting by a single false step the perfection of his outward show" (p. 500). As psychic development occurs, the forms of life are transformed from within. Thus Maggie comes to think of her 'sacrifice' of her father as her "transmuted union" with him (p. 482), and of her 'loss' of Adam as her "freedom" to be alone with Amerigo (p. 547). Life for Maggie becomes, not an opaque, gilded bowl, or a cage containing a beast, but a transparent surface through which the fertilizing and dangerous energies of the soul are recognized and worshipped, as primitive peoples recognized and worshipped daemonic supernatural forces. But because these energies may be utilized in the creation of life and art, the 'glass' of social form is not exclusively a containing, impervious surface; it is also a transparent membrane through which psychic vitality may flow into conscious life. Moreover, the irrefrangible principle of separation between conscious and unconscious, civilized and primitive, is a field of vision. In *The Golden Bowl* it becomes, like the perceiving eye, both window and mirror of the soul.
NOTES


6. Ibid., p. xx.

7. Ibid., p. xviii.

8. Ibid., pp. xx-xxi.

9. Ibid., p. xxi.


11. Ibid., p. 319


16. Cf. the view of A. J. Ward (The Imagination of Disaster: Evil in the Fiction of Henry James [Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961], p. 151). Ward writes, "The Golden Bowl stands for Maggie's marriage, but it is also a focal symbol of luxury and wealth. The gold of the bowl is the combined gold of the Ververs and of the Prince--new and old, American and European. The flashy exterior is, in both cases, misleading, for underneath is the cracked crystal, the evil center." (Italics, mine.)

17. The image of the vessel of consciousness is employed by both Henry and William James. See Prefaces, p. 50, and The Will to Believe (New York, Dover, 1956), p. 169, for typical examples.


22 Noting that "the thirst of the nineteenth-century American for life is admirably symbolized . . . by Roderick's statuette," Marius Bewley (The Eccentric Design: Form in the Classic American Novel New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959, p. 234) remarks, "one can't help wondering if, down the years, this gourd, from which the naked youth drinks, doesn't a little relate, in the subconscious depths of James's imagination, to the golden bowl." Of the golden bowl Lotus Snow ("'A Story of Cabinets and Chairs and Tables': Images of Morality in The Spoils of Poynton and The Golden Bowl," ELH, XXX (1963), p. 434), writes, "In this final comprehensive use James reverts to the cup image that is expressive of a prevailing theme across his long canon of novels: the journey from innocence to experience." Mentioning Roderick's statuette as a symbol of thirst for experience, she observes that Roderick is destroyed by drinking too deeply of the cup. "Alone among James's characters Maggie and the Prince drink the cup to their eventual self-fulfilment."

23 Adeline R. Tintner's interpretation of the symbolism of the golden bowl is very close, at one point, to that advanced by this thesis. Miss Tintner ("The Spoils of Poynton," PMLA, LXI March, 1946, p. 250) writes, "First a symbol of Amerigo's and Charlotte's adultery, it becomes a symbol of the Ververs' deformed attitude to their precious people. For when people are treated like works of art, certain human needs are ignored which will eventually assert themselves and turn the tables on those who possess them."

24 Quentin Anderson (The American Henry James [New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1957], pp. 332-333) contends that Fanny smashes the bowl to destroy evidence that the marriages she has 'made' are failures. Emblematically, "as a power in the service of a nature, Fanny is worldly wisdom. The bowl is an appearance which must be destroyed in order that other appearances may be preserved--to wit the marriages." But Walter F. Wright (p. 245) sees Fanny's act as pointing the way to a solution. He contends that, although there are things beyond her power to comprehend, it is she who rightly smashes the bowl as a warning to Maggie . . . ."

25 Page 250.

26 "Deep, Deep, and still deep and deeper must we go, if we would find out the heart of a man; descending into which is as descending a spiral stair in a shaft, without any end, and where the endlessness is only concealed by the spiralness of the stair and the blackness of the shaft" (from Pierre: Or, The Ambiguities, Vol IX in The Standard Edition [New York: Russell & Russell, 1963], p. 402).
The governess in "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) thinks, "I could only get on at all . . . by treating my monstrous ordeal as . . . demanding, after all, for a fair front, only another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue" (Tales, X, 127).


I take the expression "ethical mechanism" from Julian Huxley. The concept of conscience as an ethical mechanism is discussed in Part I, Chapter Three of this thesis.


Ernest Samuels (Henry Adams: The Major Phase [Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1964], p. 308) notes that James received a copy of Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres and wrote to Adams his appreciation of it. Samuels (p. 313) observes that during 1903 as Adams began to work on the Education the themes of that work appear in preliminary form in his letters. A letter to James commenting on James's biography of William Wetmore Story (quoted by Samuels, p. 318), dated Nov. 18, 1903, and answered immediately by James (Letters, I, 431), suggests, by its intimate tone and by its existence, that there may have been other letters between the friends during this period when James was beginning to work on The Golden Bowl. Samuels (p. 589) records that Adams's practice of spending approximately seven months of each year in France began in 1899 and continued until 1914, and that he commonly began and ended his annual journey to Europe with a visit to England. Samuels' log of Adams's travels shows that Adams was in England many times between 1895 and 1903.

Toward the end of Chapter Three of this thesis a typical sounding of this theme is quoted; see p. 197 below.


The Imagination of Disaster, p. 147.


Page 169.

Ibid.

E.g., see Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 276-278, quoted below, n. 150.

Page 169.
42 Page 170.
43 Ibid.
45 Pages 262, 273.
46 Page 165.
47 Page 64.
48 Ibid.
49 Page 72.
50 Ibid.
51 Pages 170-171.
53 William James discovered experientially that any man who considers himself to be completely determined has his life restricted and vitiated by this belief. Ralph Barton Perry (The Thought and Character of William James [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935], I, 321) describes how, towards the end of a prolonged psychic crisis, during which he fell into a desperate condition of physical illness and mental stagnation, he wrote in his diary, "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will." From that moment he began to regain bodily health and spiritual vigor.
54 Page 75.
55 Page 83.
56 Page 79.
57 Page 93.
58 Page 92.
60 Page 98.
61 Henry Wasser (The Scientific Thought of Henry Adams [n.p.: Thessaloniki, Greece, 1956], pp. 85-88) notes that Bergson and Adams thought intuition superior to intellect or reason.


Ibid., p. 204.


Ibid., pp. 204-205.

Quoted by Perry, II, 630.


Wasser, p. 85.


Ibid., p. 89.

Ibid., pp. 73-74.


Ibid., p. 90.

Edward Stone (*The Battle and the Books: Some Aspects of Henry James* [Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1964]), p. 10) contends that "if Henry James had ever heard about Henri Bergson from so fervent an admirer and friend as James's own brother, William, there is no record of the fact."


Pages 174-177.

Ibid., p. 144.

Dorothea Krook (The Ordeal of Consciousness, p. 391) finds this image unsuccessful: "the oddness of the image is felt to be in excess of the ori­
ginality of the experience, making it in this sense arbitrary . . . ." But once the image is seen to form part of a comic perspective on Maggie, its incongruity becomes meaningful.

James E. Miller, Jr. ("Redburn and White Jacket: Initiation and Baptism," NCF, 13 [1958-1959], pp. 273-293) discusses Melville's symbolism of 'staying aloft' and 'coming down' in Redburn and White Jacket. The white jacket is a symbol of isolation, a mask of innocence. White Jacket falls into the sea and nearly drowns, but saves himself by ripping open his jacket.

"Deprived of his jacket, he gains his humanity; jolted from his isolation he discovers comradeship; stripped of his innocence, he finds his soul . . . . He learns that man cannot live on earth in perfect innocence: he must throw in his lot with the guilt of mankind or perish—or, perhaps, commit the grossest of sins in the delusion of achieving an impossible moral perfection" (p. 292). White Jacket learns that "To be efficacious, Virtue must come down from aloft, even as our blessed Redeemer came down. . . ." By his choice to accept his share of the world's burden of guilt, the protagonist Redburn-White Jacket "saves himself from the terrible fate of those tyrants of virtue yet to be created by Melville, Ahab and Pierre, who cannot in their pride come down from aloft!" (p. 293). (Italics, mine.) In The Golden Bowl the symbolism of
'staying aloft' and 'coming down' has much the same moral significance for James as it has for Melville in Redburn and White Jacket. Maggie Verver faces and overcomes the danger of becoming a tyrant of virtue. She humbles herself to save four persons, and later 'goes down' from 'aloft' to save Charlotte.

99 The Will to Believe, p. 206.

100 Ibid., p. 209.

101 There are several scathing references to Spencer's theories in The Will to Believe. See pp. 168, 232-235, 252-253, 260.

102 Page 122.

103 The Will to Believe, p. 194.


106 Wasser, p. 30.

107 Ibid., p. 81.

108 Ibid., p. 85.


110 Ibid., p. 29.

111 The Will to Believe, p. 86.


113 Dorothea Krook (The Ordeal of Consciousness, p. 257) argues that Maggie redeems Amerigo partly by opposing "the power of the sexual element, in a man like Amerigo, to dominate and subdue."

A. J. Ward (The Imagination of Disaster, p. 147) comments, "The Prince and Charlotte ennoble by their dignity and integrity what James treats most often as mere lust, so that their sin shares somehow in the rich sensuousness of Renaissance Italy, to which both have ties."

See Dorothea Krook's discussion (pp. 287-289) of the love of Amerigo and Charlotte. Miss Krook notes the "heavily patterned prose and the violence of the sexual imagery" of the passage quoted above (p. 221 of the novel), and detects "an odour of decay," a staleness recognizable partly by the absence of "the prevailing note of discovery in The Wings—the perpetual freshness of surprise, wonder and excitement, shared in such abundance by Kate and Densher, by Kate and Milly, and even by Milly and Densher." By contrast, "Charlotte and the Prince give the impression of discovering only what they already knew from the beginning, and of being engaged for the most part in manipulating with superb competence their pre-existent knowledge." But the images of voyage and adventure in the mythic dimension of the novel suggest that Amerigo discovers Maggie, and that Maggie discovers Amerigo. Moreover, the images expressing Maggie's love for Amerigo have a spontaneous quality, largely because of their rhythm, a quality which is missing from the relationship of Amerigo and Charlotte.

"Moral spontaneity" is the unique quality of the American girl discovered by James in his cousin Minny Temple (Letters, I, 26).

F. O. Matthiessen (The James Family, p. 519) notes this remark of James (from French Poets and Novelists, 1878).


Ibid., p. 124.

The Will to Believe, p. 197.


Ibid., p. 295.


The Will to Believe, pp. 206, 208-210.

Ibid., p. 110.

Pragmatism, p. 296.


133 Ibid., p. 170.

134 Ibid., p. 154.

135 Ibid., p. 155.

136 Ibid., p. 157.

137 Ibid., p. 163.

138 Ibid., p. 164.

139 Ibid., p. 164. Other instances of this archetypal figure are Milton's Satan, Richardson's Lovelace, Byron's Manfred, and Mann's Doctor Faustus. See Van Ghent, pp. 163-164.


141 Page 165.

142 Ibid.

143 Marius Bewley (The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James and Some Other American Writers, with an Introduction and Two Interpolations by F. R. Leavis [London: Chatto & Windus, 1952], pp. 89-93) analyzes the pattern and discusses the ritual quality and philosophical significance of these parallel scenes.

144 Page 163.

145 Page 165.

146 Pages 165, 167-170.

147 Page 170.

148 Page 163.

149 Joseph L. Firebaugh ("The Ververs," p. 404), who takes an unsympathetic view of the Ververs, contends that Maggie marries her father to Charlotte as an act of "symbolic incest."

150 E.g., Dorothea Kroot (The Ordeal of Consciousness, pp. 276-278), who realizes the necessity for all of the characters of preserving 'surfaces,'
of maintaining a social poise, finds in the central situation of the Second Book of The Golden Bowl "a colossal symbol, as audacious as it is brilliant, for expressing (in the Prince's phrase) the fathomless depths of equivocation that a sophisticated society is by its nature committed to. . . . Though there is nothing to prevent the four characters from 'speaking out'—telling what they know, asking what they want to know, challenging those who will neither tell nor ask—this is in fact the last thing any of them would dream of doing. . . . For though to ask and to receive an answer would instantly clear the air, yet it would also (we are made to understand) tear the little society to pieces by exposing it to itself in a way that would somehow bring it to ruin." James's vision of modern sophisticated societies has three aspects: "his profound sense of the prevailing absence of candour, the prevailing presence of obliqueness, evasiveness, 'ambiguity'; his sense, equally profound, of its necessity—as, somehow, a means of corporate self-preservation; and his sense, finally, of its beauty. For there is a beauty (James here as elsewhere insists) in reticence, composure and civility inflexibly maintained, with every appearance of naturalness and ease, when the heart is being torn to pieces by anguish, terror and humiliation; and though the over-civilised—the Edwardian English, for instance—had perhaps too much of it, the under-civilised—James's simpler Americans—had too little; and James himself, we may suppose, would not have chosen to live among the more civilised rather than the less if he had not seen its beauty as well as its ugliness."
CHAPTER THREE

THE ZEITGEIST AND THE MYTHIC DIMENSION

Self restraint, the essence of the ethical process, ...
may, by excess, become ruinous to it.

---T. H. Huxley, Prolegomena
to Evolution and Ethics (1893-94)

I

The Darwinian Microcosm

Robert Gale, author of The Caught Image: Figurative Language in the Fiction of Henry James (1964), discovers six major categories of tropes in James's fictions: water, flower, and animal, comprising "the world of nature," and war, art, and religion, comprising "the world of men." He concludes that James's images in toto are mythopoetic. Men and women crossing vast oceans battle ceaseless waves, move on through forest and jungle, here taking a rose and admiring a graceful bird, there suffering a sting or a torn throat. Through it all they hear the clamor of arms, pause to shape a legend or a tale, draw a picture, carve an icon.

This world of images is "a mythically dualistic one".

We have the world of nature: Out of the land which surrounds and is surrounded by a constantly changing watery element flowers and beasts have sprung up. And we have the world of men: ever fighting, creating, and worshipping. This cosmic dualism is repeated within the individual major categories of tropes.

The James heroine, and often the hero, may be pictured as a flower in a jungle, while "life [itself] is . . . a fragile flower, fragrant but evanescent in an environment criss-crossed by all sorts of rigid sickles." Thus,
by his assertion that in the mythopoetic dimension of James's fiction, "eternal warfare is waged by the strong against the weak," Gale implies that James, like other Victorian novelists, was influenced by Darwinism.

In the work of Romantic poets and novelists, the correspondence between outer (objective) and inner (subjective) worlds is used to express emotions or states of being, as in *Wuthering Heights*, where the passion of Heathcliff and Catherine is identified with the storms that rage across the moors. In James's highly civilized vision, natural phenomena occur mostly as metaphors for experience; the central consciousness or 'reflector' becomes a mirror or microcosm of the natural states and processes which are, as externally existing realities in the world of the novel, usually absent from the field of vision. Even the most refined consciousness reflects and 'contains' the wildness of nature, the elemental, organic, and bestial life from which it is separated by its artificial environment. The James protagonist often experiences his own emotions or states of being as the momentary irruption of uncontrollable elemental forces. To Isabel Archer, for example, sexual passion is the hot wind of the desert, a flash of white lightning, the rising of flood waters. Moreover, as Robert Gale observes, in James's world, "... brute nature, outer and inner, stands ready at all times to dash to pieces, wither and devour the higher, more aesthetic, more spiritual aspects of man." The most threatening forces, which Gale describes as "the black powers of the jungle," usually emanate from the psyche of the antagonist or antagonists. Kate Croy, in her aspect as predator, is seen by her prey, Milly Theale, as a splendid creature that stalks like a panther, while Milly is seen by Kate as a tender dove. Thus the consciousness of the created character is at once window and mirror, for his mode of perception bodies forth his psychic life.
To the extent that James's microcosm of consciousness reflects Darwin's concept of life, it may be said to be a Darwinian microcosm. Freudian psychology and T. H. Huxley's concept of the function of conscience are therefore illuminating. J. A. C. Brown points out that Freud's view of human nature as interpreted by his critics is that of Hobbes and Darwin, which depicts society as a mass of isolated individuals, whose most natural emotion is hostility, pushing and jostling each other in the name of the survival of the fittest, but willing under certain circumstances to band together for self-protection. Their ivory towers conceal the inner stinking cave by the entrance of which they ruthlessly trade physical needs or personal relationships for private gain, returning to the innermost recesses to enjoy them without interference. More objectively expressed, Freud believed in the person as a social atom requiring community only as a means to the satisfaction of his needs; in a primary hostility so strong that only sheer necessity or common hatred directed elsewhere could join people in love; in a certain biological inevitability of hereditary constitution, anatomy, and development, which strictly limits human possibilities. Freud's biologism led him to a conviction that the source of man's trouble lies deep within himself and is not simply the result of adverse social or material conditions.

One of James's critics, A. J. Ward, demonstrates that James, like Hawthorne, located evil deep within the human consciousness. In this respect, as well as in others, James's view of man had affinities with that of Freud. The impact of Darwinism does much to explain Victorian social morality with its emphasis on conscience as a restraining force. In 1893, T. H. Huxley defined conscience as "an artificial personality . . . built up beside the natural personality" within the self and "charged to restrain the anti-social tendencies of the natural man within the limits required by social welfare." The prudish attitude thought of as characteristically Victorian developed partly in reaction to the scientific view of man, as the middle classes, perhaps inspired by Tennyson, endeavored to give the impression that they had 'worked out the beast.' Vulgarity came to be thought of as not only bad manners but bad morals, since it signaled the reappearance of 'the beast' in man, the
'surfacing' of 'the beast within.' Extremely sensitive persons were often conditioned by their milieu and by their moral training to feel deeply distressed at any open show of selfishness or hostility in themselves and others. Thus the discrepancy between the ethical standards formally upheld by society and private realities must have led, particularly in women, to many moral dilemmas and to many fatal renunciations of life for the sake of honor. From an objective, sociological viewpoint, this is what happens to Fleda Vetch, who cages her "prisoned and pent" feelings of sexual desire and even denies the affectional claims of friendship in order to satisfy her psychological need to be "sublime." In Fleda, private needs are thus, in effect, controlled by social morality to an unrealistic and detrimental extent. But James unconsciously indicated by his rendering of Fleda's reactions to her environment that Fleda has been made terribly vulnerable to the internalized demands of social morality by her inferior status and by the way Mrs. Gereth treats her, that Fleda is, in fact, a case of fatal psychic determinism. Thus in writing *The Spoils of Poynton*, James unknowingly worked in accordance with Freud's basic concept of psychic determinism, and also demonstrated the ethical problem revealed by Darwinism and stated by Huxley.

In James's world the evil prey on the good. A. J. Ward notes that what is probably Henry James's most explicit comment on evil occurs in his essay on Turgenev:

*Life is, in fact, a battle. On this point optimists and pessimists agree. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally, unhappy.*

Ward observes that society as James depicts it is in reality "composed of
aggressor and prey. In appearance, however, it consists in the forms of intercourse which suggest equabiliy and happiness." In Ward's view of James, the morally aware protagonists are "reduced to inactivity because of their knowledge . . . [of] the moral limitations of any sort of private action." Hence, "nearly all of the James characters who have achieved total moral awareness are markedly passive; their sole action is to accept their conditions. They renounce escape, revenge, marriage, or any other course of action which would relieve pain or improve their situations." Ward concludes, "In James's fiction it is nearly axiomatic that the good are reflective and passive, and the evil irreflective and active." But whereas to the early James "renunciation represents high morality," to the late James "it signifies a moral deficiency."

The problem for the reflective and passive good person is not only what to do, then, but also where to find the moral energy with which to act. James displays a general awareness of this problem in the Preface to The Spoils of Poynton when he writes,

The little drama confirms at all events excellently, I think, the contention of the old wisdom that the question of the personal will has more than all else to say to the verisimilitude of these exhibitions. The will that rides the crisis most triumphantly is that of the awful Mona Brigstock, who is all will, without the smallest leak of force into taste or tenderness or vision, into any sense of shades or relations or proportions. She loses no minute in that perception of incongruities in which half Fleda's passion is wasted and misled . . . . Everyone, every thing, in the story is accordingly sterile but the so thriftily constructed Mona, able at any moment to bear the whole of her dead weight at once on any given inch of a resisting surface. (Prefaces, 131-132)

Conscience, by muzzling the 'beast within,' lowers the general level of psychic vitality. The ethically aware person may be potentially capable of effective action, but in practice he is too often not only demoralized by his knowledge
of evil (as Ward suggests), but also devitalized by his attitude toward his own basic needs, for he feels it would be immoral of him to attempt too strenuously to satisfy them. Fleda Vetch is in exactly this position: she is thus both a unique case of fatal psychic determinism and representative of a type of sensibility prevalent in the Victorian era and not extinct today. The psychological condition of sensitive, ethically discriminating persons, like Fleda, usually causes them to fall victim to irreflective, active persons, like Mona, who have plenty of energy because they are convinced that they have a right to get what they want.

In Evolution and Ethics, T. H. Huxley pointed out that "... since law and morals are restraints upon the struggle for existence between men in society, the ethical process is in opposition to the principle of the cosmic process, and tends to the suppression of the qualities best fitted for success in that struggle." Huxley contended that "the ethical progress of society depends, not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combatting it." By the use of intelligence and will, man may "pit the microcosm against the macrocosm and ... subdue nature to his higher ends."

Three of James's novels illustrate the modes of conduct described by Huxley as general responses to the cosmic process of natural selection. Fleda Vetch's renunciation of Owen Gereth and submission to Mona's formal claim amounts to a flight from the battle-field: Fleda's name is significant, as are her many undignified moments when she literally runs away from Owen. Kate Croy of The Wings of the Dove opposes the cosmic process by imitating it. She fights her aunt's attempt to use her by herself exploiting her friend, the dying American heiress. Milly Theale, but her intelligent, bold, and even
in a sense compassionate, imitation of the cosmic process ends in disaster, for, although she gains the means of enjoyment of life, she hastens the death of her friend and loses the man for the sake of whose love she had risked everything. Although anyone who fights for his life inescapably imitates the cosmic process, the final heroine of the three wins her fight for survival not so much by imitating the cosmic process as by combatting it. Maggie Verver not only resists the temptation to take "the straight vindictive view" (which she figures to herself as "a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles" [p. 455]), to respond to "that provocation of opportunity which had assaulted her, within, on her sofa, as a beast might have leaped at her throat" (p. 454), but also manages to withstand the assault of "the splendid shining supple creature . . . out of the cage," her stepmother whom she must "by some art" "[her] in and [secure]" (p. 456). Maggie combats the cosmic process by her respect and compassion for her vanquished foe, and by her effort to help Charlotte move toward a new life in America. Most of all, she combats it by refusing to assist at her own defeat. This is the attitude toward life which most of James's highly sensitive protagonists never attain because of their reflective and passive natures.

The good person in James's world is usually defeated precisely because he will not or cannot fight to save himself. His conscience forbids him to take up the weapons of the enemy. Certainly the ethically aware person must practice self-restraint—as Maggie Verver discovers when she resists "that provocation of opportunity which had assaulted her, within . . . as a beast might have leaped at her throat" (p. 454). And Fleda Vetch also exemplifies
this obvious moral principle. When she moans to Owen, "'Where is a man if he doesn't [keep faith]? If he doesn't he may be so cruel!" (XVI, 268), one might say that she is attempting to preserve the fabric of civilization as she understands it by enforcing her concept of "honor." But Mona's character must be considered as well as her feelings, and Owen's feelings as well as his "honor," and although Fleda is hypersensitive, she fails to consider these and other vital factors. Huxley also speaks of conscience as an "organized and personified sympathy" for one's fellow man. 21 One of James's critics, Oscar Cargill, mentions, in connection with Maggie's development, "the empathy that is the basis of all ethical conduct." 22 James shows in The Golden Bowl that it is Maggie Verver's painful sense of Charlotte's suffering which prompts her to descend from her castle-tower to transform Charlotte's defeat into the appearance of triumph, and thus create for her the psychological basis of a new life with Adam in America. Fleda Vetch's momentary flashes of pity for Mona mainly reveal the intensity of her own feelings for Owen, as when she gasps to him, "'She must love you--how can she help it? I wouldn't give you up!" (XVI, 268). On the whole her faculty of empathy is not working in harmonious cooperation with her intellect and imagination. Her situation is actually an exception to the general rule she invokes, and yet she never comprehends it as such, for her natural sympathy for Owen labors under the tyranny of conscience, undergoing a sinister distortion, as when she thinks, with a kind of peripheral awareness of the real issues, "... it would be an odd result of her magnanimity to prevent her friend's shaking off a woman he disliked" (IX, 202). Mrs. Gereth herself makes a very telling distinction between Fleda and her "eloquence" (XI, 214). Fleda's "eloquence" is the voice of her compulsive idealism, and not at all the voice of sympathy for
others. Mrs. Gereth's perception of the 'cruelty' inevitably involved in the situation is more acute and realistic than Fleda's. Describing Mrs. Brigstock's visit to her, she tells Fleda,

"I understood that it was a plea for mere mercy, that you and he between you were killing her child. Of course I was delighted that Mona should be killed, but I was studiously kind to Mrs. Brigstock. At the same time I was honest, I didn't pretend to anything I couldn't feel. I asked her why the marriage hadn't taken place months ago, when Owen was perfectly ready; and I showed her how completely that fatuous mistake on Mona's part cleared his responsibility. It was she who had killed him—it was she who had destroyed his affection, his illusions. Did she want him now when he was estranged, when he was disgusted, when he had a sore grievance?" (XVII, 276)

William James affirmed, in 1891, that "the best course is often cruel; and many acts are reckoned good on the sole condition that they be exceptions, and serve not as examples of a universal law." Huxley's elucidation of the ethical problem revealed by Darwinism illuminates *The Spoils of Poynton*, for in this novel James in effect shows how ethical absolutists cut their own throats in the struggle for survival by enforcing universal laws in situations where such scruples not only lead to their own defeat in life but (to accept for a moment Huxley's premise that ethical progress is possible) accomplish nothing whatsoever for the ethical improvement of the species. If the ethically fine like Fleda are to prevail in the long run over the 'brutes' like Mona, they cannot always give the 'brutes' the advantage, for such a practice, were it universally followed, would rapidly lead to their extinction.

The significance of the names he gave his characters reveals that, like Du Maurier and H. G. Wells, whose work he knew and with whom he frequently talked and corresponded, James was, at least in this novel, eugenically minded. James was apparently unaware of the forces of psychic determinism he showed at work on Fleda's mind; nevertheless, in selecting the names of the characters
he may have consciously intended to emphasize that Fleda's fate illustrates Huxley's point about the ethically fine being at a disadvantage in the struggle for survival. Since she cannot accept Owen's implicit offer to marry her and live at Ricks (VIII, 197-198), Fleda is destined to become a maiden aunt like the previous owner of Ricks. Thus Fleda's ethical consciousness is, like her passion, "wasted and misled" (Prefaces, 131) as far as the species is concerned. Owen (<Celt. *Esu-ganyos; akin to Gr. Eugenios < eugenēs, well-born) Gereth (Fr. gér, spear, dart), the man who is "all nature in one pair of boots" in the country and who carries "a spear-like umbrella" in town, and whose "pull" is, to Fleda, "tremendous" (XIII, 233), once married to Mona Brigstock (connotations of prison, war, plundering, punitive devices, cattle, breeding stock), will undoubtedly produce children not only as "dense" as himself, but as wilful, insensitive, and materialistic as his wife. If (from the standpoint of Victorian social morality) Fleda's conscience has directed her to sacrifice herself in the interests of preserving the ethical fabric of society, her efforts have been misguided, since they will obviously, in the long run, have the opposite effect of weakening it.

It is Fleda's conscience, or super-ego, which kills her, the "artificial personality" society has built up in Fleda alongside of her natural personality. The distorting sense of inferiority from which Fleda suffers is there at least partly because it has been inculcated by the English class system. It is significant that as Fleda runs away from Owen for the last time, she seizes his hand and violently, passionately, and compulsively, kisses the back of it, while crying, "'Never, never, never!'" (XVI, 268) Because she feels inferior, she must act to assert her ideal self, to prove that she is, as she protests to Owen, "a decent girl," and not "a very bad case," as Mrs. Brigstock thinks
her to be (XVI, 259). Her attitude toward the world is, in fact, comparable to that of Gilbert Osmond. After her marriage Isabel Archer becomes aware that her husband's attitude toward the world is strangely ambiguous:

[Osmond] pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabiness of life, opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things, and of the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. But this base ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order not to enlighten or convert or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other, it afforded a standard.25

Fleda's conscious purpose is to behave well in a difficult situation, but her unconscious purpose is to extract from the vulgar world of Waterbath and the sordid world of West Kensington some recognition of her own superiority. Ironically, her psychological need of assurance as to her own worth has been exacerbated by Mrs. Gereth's enthusiastic appreciation of her. Fleda does not like being "kicked upstairs" (XII, 224-225); she will ascend with dignity or not at all. But the concluding action of her last interview with Owen provides a devastating comment on her motives: "'Never, never, never!'" cries Fleda, getting away from Owen by "scrambling up the stairs" (XVI, 268).26

Alexander Holder-Barell observes that in James "the primary functions of flying images are the expression of freedom (which contains at the same time an element of danger), superiority, and high moral behaviour ... "; thus in The Spoils of Poynton, "flying images show the beauty of Fleda's intentions," of her high moral and heroic behavior.27 But the staircase and flight images of the novel, which express Fleda's many physical and psychological rises and drops, are better understood in the context of a notebook entry made by James on October 18, 1895, immediately after the main entry on The Spoils of Poynton, which was made on October 15th.
The idea of the picture, fully satiric, in illustration of the 'Moloch-worship' of the social hierarchy in this country—the grades and shelves and stages of relative gentility—the image of some succession or ladder of examples, in which each stage, each 'party,' has something or someone below them, down to extreme depths, on which, on whom, the snubbed and despised from above, may wreak resentment by doing, below, as they are done by. [Italics, mine.]
(Notebooks, 220)

Fleda does not want to be thought guilty of social climbing; she reflects with distress on the "revelation . . . frankly made by her sister," that "people were saying that she fastened like a leech on other people--people who had houses where something was to be picked up" (VI, 168). This is one of Fleda's motives for becoming impatient with her situation at Poynton and for returning to her father's house in London, but it is also Fleda's motive for rejecting Owen, although she never realizes it.

Fleda feels "there was something in her that would make it a shame to her forever to have owed her happiness to an interference. It would seem intolerably vulgar to her to have 'ousted' the daughter of the Brigstocks . . ." (IX, 201-202). Her general sense of interference as vulgar has been produced in her at least partly by reaction against her own social origins. Her need to show the world that she has transcended a home environment she considers to be ugly and sordid is her greatest psychological need; it takes precedence over the demands of passion and affection, and thus ironically prevents her from escaping from the very milieu which is death to her fine sensibility. The struggle for survival may necessitate fighting with the enemy's weapons, as Mrs. Gereth repeatedly tells Fleda. "'I want you to cut in!'" is Mrs. Gereth's "familiar and comprehensive phrase for the course she prescribe[s]," and her parting advice as Fleda returns to London is "'Only let yourself go, darling--only let yourself go!'
" (XII, 227). But Fleda Vetch, being what she is, cannot "cut in," and so she is cut down. In
Darwinian terms, she flees from the struggle for survival, and is 'eaten up' by the 'brutish' daughter of the Brigstocks (vetch, any of a number of related short, leafy, climbing or trailing plants of the pea family, grown chiefly for fodder and as a soil restorer). Fleda cages her passion and her affection in the name of "honor," and so the "brute" (XXII, 302) prevails over the 'well-born spear-man.'

T. H. Huxley's grandson, Julian Huxley, in his 1943 Romanes Lecture, "Evolutionary Ethics," points out that since 1893 developmental analysis has provided a new basis for ethics by revealing the nature of conscience. Huxley defines ethics as "the name we assign to the results of the workings of a particular psychological mechanism."

This ethical mechanism is an agency for securing that certain of our actions and thoughts shall be consciously felt and judged to have the qualities of rightness or wrongness. It gives us what is popularly called our moral sense. This sense of rightness or wrongness is charged with the driving force of strong emotions, so that the ethical mechanism, once established, helps to determine both our action and those potential actions that are included under the head of sentiment, beliefs, and principles. On the other hand, it provides no guarantee that the feelings it engenders are correct, or its judgments objectively valid.

From the point of view of biology, Huxley states, this mechanism is in part "an adaptation for securing action instead of indecision in the face of conflict. But it is something more—it is an adaptation for weighting the scales between the conflicting impulses, by attaching a load of guilt to one of them, and thus securing the complete or partial ascendancy of the other."

Huxley's description of "the moral load of guilt or felt wrongness [and] the moral wings of felt rightness" not only has a Jamesian ring, but actually recalls the image patterns used by James to trace the development of
Fleda's attitude toward her love for Owen. At the hope that Mona might herself break her engagement to Owen, Fleda feels a "dumb exaltation . . . rising" (VIII, 191). Shortly after this, when Owen almost declares his love for Fleda in spite of her opposition to such an outburst, the knowledge that Owen loves her gives Fleda "wings that she felt herself flutter in the air" (IX, 201).

But her determination to help Owen by lying to Mrs. Gereth causes her to take "a flight into the cold air of denial" (XI, 213). Then, later, when Owen tells Fleda that Mona thinks she is not honest, Fleda experiences "a sudden drop in her great flight" (XIV, 243). After this, she flees to her sister's house where, on receiving Owen's note announcing his arrival, she realizes she has gained nothing by her "flight" but the interval of time (XVI, 257).

At first Fleda's sense of exaltation is ambiguously her response to Owen's love and her hope that Mona will make her "all right," but eventually the imagery expresses mainly her "flight" away from Owen and towards the morally 'sublime' state of the "decent girl." For a brief moment, when Owen kisses her after proposing to her, Fleda's "prisoned and pent" feelings of desire and affection surge up; but quickly the sense of "relief" gives way to a deeper sense of exposure, guilt, and "desolation" (XVI, 262). After that, images of repression express both Fleda's sense that she has been somehow crushed by Mrs. Gereth's willpower and the thematic significance that Fleda's sorely "prisoned and pent" passional self--the self that Mrs. Gereth had urged her to 'let go'--has been immured forever behind the facade of the "decent girl" that Fleda "had built up stone by stone" (XVI, 262). Just before their only kiss, Owen had said reproachfully to her, "'What good does it do me to be here when I find you only a stone?'" (XVI, 260)

Fleda's life has been fatally determined by the forces which have
produced in her a compulsion to enforce what Julian Huxley calls "the ethics of impossible perfection," a moral position Fleda herself realizes to be absurd (XVI, 265), but which she nevertheless compulsively enforces. Huxley describes the origin of this attitude as lying partly in the need of the individual "for what modern psychologies variously call an ego-ideal or a persona—an idealized ethical mask, strangely compounded of moral aspiration, spiritual conceit, and hypocrisy, in which man can disguise himself from himself, or which he can present to the world to enhance his self-respect and his apparent moral stature." Thus the psychology of Fleda Vetch provides an example of one of the types of distorted or unrealistic conscience recognized by modern psychology. The intellectual climate which helped to produce Freud also inspired James to create not only the case history of a "fine" but distorted conscience, but a delicate analysis of the forces of distortion.

Henry James, Sr. spoke repeatedly of the pernicious influence of the conscience which acts merely as a repressive force to maintain the outward appearance of decency. He despised moral righteousness or complacency as a state to be overcome by true spiritual awakening. Considering his own life he wrote,

[I formerly] sought to attract [God's] approbation to me by the unswerving pursuit of moral excellence, by studiously cultivating every method of personal purity. It was all in vain. The more I strove to indue myself in actual righteousness, the wider gaped the jaws of hell within me; the fouler grew its fetid breath. A conviction of inward defilement so sheer took possession of me, that death seemed better than life. I soon found my conscience, once launched in this insane career, acquiring so infernal an edge, that I could no longer indulge myself in the most momentary deviation from an absurd and pedantic literal rectitude . . . .

Elsewhere he remarked, "I have no doubt, indeed, that if it had not been for my excessive 'animal spirits' as we say, or the extreme good-will I felt
towards sensuous pleasure of every sort, which alternated with my morbid conscientiousness and foiled its corrosive force, I should have turned out a flagrant case of arrested intellectual development." The "infernal ... edge" of Henry James's father's conscience is basically the *agenbite of inwit* experienced by Joyce's Stephen Dedalus: an agonizing, paralyzing force operating within the consciousness to the detriment of the individual. Fleda Vetch flies from the pain inflicted by this force. Mona Brigstock prevails over Fleda because as a "brute" she has no more deadly weapon than the conscience of her ethically "fine" opponent.

Henry James displays in several tales and novels a sense of conscience as a destructive rather than a saving force, and psychic determinism is very often implied, although nowhere as clearly as in *The Spoils of Poynton*. The heroine of one of the early tales "Madame de Mauves" (1874), American by parentage, has married romantically, but unwisely, into the French aristocracy. A self-confessed disillusioned romantic idealist (* Tales, III*, 162, 169-171), she tells her American friend Longmore, who is in love with her, "'Visions are vain things; we must make the best of the reality.'" Longmore, having just seen her husband with another woman, replies that reality "'has very recently taken a shape that keenly tests [her] philosophy.'" Mme. de Mauves denies having a philosophy. "'Thank Heaven!' she cries, with vehemence, 'I have none. ... I have nothing on earth but a conscience, ... a dogged, clinging, inexpugnable conscience ... I don't say it in vanity, for I believe that if my conscience will prevent me from doing anything very base, it will effectually prevent me from doing anything very fine.'" (p. 171). Dogged by conscience, the disillusioned Euphemia clings to her dead ideal: she will not leave her once deeply loved husband, although she has broken with
him in spirit, realizing that he is unfaithful to her and would sanction similar behavior in her. The American imparts to her his belief that she deserves "a husband of [her] own faith and race and spiritual substance" (Tales, III, 171), but she insists that Longmore can save her from complete disillusionment with humanity only by renouncing his love for her and leaving her in peace. Longmore returns to America. Later he hears that after his departure the Baron de Mauves fell madly in love with his wife, but in vain, for "she was stone, she was ice, she was outraged virtue." Rejected by Euphemia, he shot himself. As Longmore contemplates the result of Euphemia's inflexible virtue, his initial impulse to return to Europe is inhibited by "a singular feeling . . . for which awe would be hardly too strong a name" (p. 209).

After Euphemia had urged him to renounce his love, Longmore had reflected, "She liked him, she must have liked him greatly, to wish so . . . to go to the trouble of conceiving an ideal of conduct for him" (p. 197). Fleda Vetch displays a similar transcendental passion in her relationship with Owen Gereth. She also is a romantic idealist, and she also enforces her ideals of conduct rigorously, even at the expense of her own happiness. Euphemia de Mauves is pictured as a sad and subdued person. Although she denies to Longmore that she is unhappy, nevertheless, she confesses to him that she is afraid of violent emotion and moral suffering, conveying the impression that she is unwilling, or unable by temperament, to take any risks to improve her condition, although she realizes her state is, in fact, as Longmore says, "a sort of compromise" (p. 170). Early in their relationship Longmore sees her as "a figure haunted by a shadow which was somehow her intenser, more authentic self." He realizes that she is not "striving to balance her sorrow with some strongly flavored joy," but rather "trying to live with it, peaceably,
reputably, and without scandal,—turning the key on it occasionally, as you would on a companion liable to attacks of insanity." (Tales, III, 145) In the end the disillusioned romantic idealist becomes a vindictive ethical absolutist.

Like Amerigo in The Golden Bowl, the Baron de Mauves is a "pagan" who becomes bored with his American wife (p. 152); like the Italian prince, he has an affair with another woman. The Sleeping Beauty fairy-tale motif is present in the tale as well as in the much later novel, but with totally negative implications. Both Euphemia and Maggie are seen as 'asleep' and in need of 'waking up' (Tales, III, 160, 162); in both women, the 'sleep' is produced by romantic idealism. But whereas Maggie outgrows her illusion, 'waking up' to life, for Euphemia, disillusionment does not mean waking, but withdrawing from the pain of emotional involvement with others. Both women are presided over by fairies. Maggie has a 'good fairy' in Fanny Assingham and a 'wicked fairy' in Charlotte; Euphemia has a deceptively kind but in effect wicked 'fairy godmother' in the Baron's grandmother (pp. 132-141), and is later interfered with by a 'magician' in the person of her sister-in-law who tries to help the Baron by arranging an affair between Euphemia and Longmore (p. 148). The fatal advice pricked into the young Euphemia's consciousness by the Baron's grandmother, during Euphemia's first visit to the Baron's castle, is "'Be yourself'" (p. 140). For Euphemia this means obeying her American conscience, the force of which transforms her eventually into "stone" and "ice," with deadly results for the Baron, and with most un-Emersonian results for the 'sleeping beauty' who suffers from the transcendental passion. Whereas Maggie Verver grows through suffering into compassion and forgiveness, Euphemia, unable to overcome her dread of moral suffering (p. 159), disappears
forever into her dead husband's castle, in bondage to the life-denying New England conscience which she mistakes for her true self.

The inhibiting force of conscience may be modified by the expansion of consciousness. In The Ambassadors, Lambert Strether's New England conscience is beneficially weakened by the expansion of his consciousness but it never forsakes him. After he has agreed to see Marie de Vionnet alone, having discovered that she is in fact Chad's mistress, "an instinct in him cast about for some form of discipline in which they might meet—some awkwardness, . . . danger, . . . or inconvenience" to provide "a sense—which the spirit required, rather ached and sighed in the absence of—that somebody was paying something somewhere and somehow, that they were at least not all floating together on the silver stream of impunity." And then, on his final visit to Maria Gostry, when he rejects the "perfect peace" of her house, he explains to her, "I'm not . . . in real harmony with what surrounds me. You are. I take it too hard. You don't." Strether feels that it is "too late" for him to partake fully of the life offered by Paris and by the companionship of such women as Marie de Vionnet and Maria Gostry. But, apart from that, he is kept out of "real harmony" with the vibrant and beautiful, if sinister, ambience of French culture by his New England conscience, the insidious force which had, on his very arrival in the "vast bright Babylon," "amused itself" for some time by forbidding him the purchase of one of the tempting lemon-colored volumes. However modified by his increased sensitivity to and understanding of values alien to his native ones, this force is still powerful enough to make him say to Maria Gostry that his "'only logic' is "'not, out of the whole affair, to have got anything for myself.'" All too often, this is the only moral 'logic' that James's protagonists are able
to apply to their situations. If, as Marius Bewley contends, James's great theme is the deprivation of life, then one of the most powerful agents of deprivation must be identified as conscience. As a weapon of "infernal . . . edge," held always at the throat of 'the beast within,' conscience is the tyrannical inhibiting force which, as Shakespeare said, makes cowards of us all. The person who has no conscience may kill others, but the person whose conscience is distorted or unrealistic may, in effect, kill himself by depriving himself of the life he deserves, as a human being, to have.
The Beast in the Jungle

Henry James's father, the philosopher whom Quentin Anderson aptly terms an "envoy...in spirit...from the age of cosmic analogy,"39 saw man as a microcosm. Through his speech and thought, as well as through Blake and other Romantic poets and novelists, a whole Renaissance tradition of symbolism was handed down to Henry James. The following passage, taken from Christianity the Logic of Creation (1857), might serve as a primer of Henry James's imagery of the life of consciousness, of those images discussed by Robert Gale in The Caught Image under the chapter titles, "The Great Wave," "Fiery-hearted Rose," and "The Universal Menagerie."

[Man] is not only devouring as the fire, and unstable as the water: he is fixed as the rock, hard as the iron, sensitive as the flower, graceful and flowing as the vine, majestic as the oak, lowly as the shrub. But especially does he reproduce in himself all the animal characteristics. He is indolent as the sloth, he is busy as the bee, he is stupid as the ox, he is provident as the beaver, he is blind as the bat, he is far-sighted as the eagle, he grovels like the mole, he soars like the lark, he is bold as the lion, timid as the fawn, cunning as the fox, artless as the sheep, venomous as the serpent, harmless as the dove: in short, all the irreconcilable antagonisms of animate nature meet and kiss one another in the unity of the human form. It perfectly melts and fuses the most obdurate contrarieties in the lap of its own universality. It is this universality of the human form which endows it with the supremacy of nature, and fits it to embosom the Divine infinitude. Because it adequately resumes in its own unity the universe of life; because it sops up, so to speak, and reproduces in its own individuality all mineral, all vegetable, and all animal forms, it claims the rightful lordship of nature, or coerces nature under its own subjection.40

F. O. Matthiessen comments, "In these terms of gnomic and proverbial wisdom James recaptured the ancient doctrine of the microcosm and the macrocosm, the doctrine of the harmonious correspondence between the inner and the outer worlds."41 Robert Gale feels that the effect of Henry James's use of images drawn from nature to describe his characters is "to institute
comparisons downwards." But, although the Darwinian view of man is present in James's work, as has been demonstrated in Part I of this chapter, it is only one dimension of a more complex whole, being a Zeitgeist-inspired modification of the ancient doctrine of man as microcosm, rather than a straightforward Darwinism. The ancient doctrine of man as the measure of all things, the system of correspondences which inspired William Blake and Henry James, Sr., served the poets and philosophers who believed in it to reaffirm the potentially heroic stature of man. Henry James, Sr. believed that man is capable of regeneration, not in spite of his lower nature, but because in his natural form he "resumes all [the] distinctive differences of the lower natures, and fuses them in the bosom of his own unity." The attainment of an inner harmony, from which the animal nature is not excluded, is thus an implicit ethical goal of this ancient philosophy.

In this inherited primer of symbolism, conscience, the paralyzing or destructive force which transforms the living person into 'stone' or 'ice' might well be represented, as Henry James, Sr. imaged it, as a weapon of "infernal . . . edge" that cuts the throat of 'the beast within,' dangerously lowering psychic vitality and subduing the natural will to survive. The ethical fallacy encouraged, however, by an implicit view of man as not only a microcosm, but a Darwinian microcosm, was the belief that for the general good man ought always to oppose his own animal or passional nature, 'the beast within.' As T. H. Huxley observed, the essence of the ethical process is self-restraint. Thus sexual desire or any kind of aggressive drive, especially when associated with self-interest in conflict with the interests or welfare of others, easily came to be thought of as the dangerous beast in the inner world, a vestige of man's primitive condition to be kept in chains in
the cellar of the Victorian Gothic mansion.¹⁴⁴

Interpreting Fleda Vetch's behavior in terms of the metaphor of the great house, which runs, as image or setting, through so much of James's fiction, and which Quentin Anderson considers to be derived both from Henry James's dream of the Galerie d'Apollon and from his father's concept of "the house of life" wherein man confronts his "other self,"¹⁴⁵ one might say that Fleda is unable to take possession of the house of life because she compulsively confines herself to the Gothic mansion of Victorian social morality. She is in full, if awkward, flight up the soaring staircase of Victorian moral idealism, as she rises to heights of 'sublimity' by spurning her own sexual desire and by forcing Owen to behave like a gentleman. But when she arrives at the top of her moral ladder, she finds flames and smoke instead of the expected ambience of aesthetic splendor and moral triumph.

Just before the train draws up at Poynton, Fleda sees shimmering straight across the "air of wild rain" a "brightness that was the colour of the great interior she had been haunting. That vision settled before her—in the house the house was all . . . . she ' rose; in her mean compartment, quite proudly erect with the thought that all for Fleda Vetch then the house was standing there" (XXII, 318). Then she encounters her shock: she discovers that the great house is lost, "for want of right help," (XXII, 320), because of the incompetence of the Brigstock-appointed servants who have no appreciation of what they are guarding, and she realizes that she did not so much restore the "spoils" to Poynton as give them into the hands of the Philistines. "In the house the house is all"—but what if the house no longer stands? What if the radiant brightness of "the great interior" is transformed by some vicious alchemy into fire and smoke. Does Poynton continue to exist
Is consciousness really that independent of the world on which it feeds\textsuperscript{46} and which it 'contains'? The tone of the end of the novel establishes that Fleda's triumphant subjectivism is as vulnerable to destruction as "the great interior" of Poynton.

Although he considered that the ethical process, the formation and operation of conscience, must be pitted against the cosmic process, T. H. Huxley was keenly aware of how the ethical process may operate to the detriment of the morally refined individual. Referring to Greek and Indian thought, Huxley, in 1893, noted how, under the influence of centuries of civilization, the descendants of the heroes of the Vedas and the Homeric epos became monks or Stoics. As the courage of the warrior was directed inward to subdue his animal nature, "the man of action [was] replaced by the quietist, whose highest aspiration [was] to be the passive instrument of the divine Reason. By the Tiber, as by the Ganges, ethical man [admitted] that the cosmos [was] too strong for him; and, destroying every bond which tied him to it by ascetic discipline, he [sought] salvation in absolute renunciation."

In Huxley's view, such an attempt to transcend evil by renunciation of life amounted to "flight from the battle-field." The result was "practical [i.e. virtual] annihilation."\textsuperscript{47}

Arnold L. Goldsmith, the critic who has attempted to define Henry James's reconciliation of free will and fatalism, contends that James created a series of protagonists who stoically renounce "the more material pleasures of life" in order to achieve "a deeper, more lasting spiritual decency." Goldsmith argues that "like Hemingway, James insists that in a hostile universe, human dignity, courage, manliness, and decency can be victorious. The necessary armor for this battle consists of two essentials: stoicism and
will power . . . . Though man's free will is limited in controlling external circumstances such as life and death, he can reign supreme as master of his soul. It is this moral nobleness and self-mastery which characterizes persons like Christopher Newman, Lambert Strether, Isabel Archer, and Fleda Vetch and make them victors, not victims. Goldsmith finds James's answer to the problem of free will in his essay on immortality, a late work, published in 1910, which F. O. Matthiessen calls James's one "explicit excursion into philosophy." Here James says that his own consciousness "contained the world, and could handle and criticize it, could play with it and deride it; it had that superiority: which meant, all the while, such successful living that the abode itself grew more and more interesting to me, and with this beautiful sign of its character that the more and the more one asked of it the more and the more it appeared to give." Goldsmith contends: "Here is the key to Henry James's philosophy. Only by withdrawing into their consciousness that contains the finite world in microcosm can James's heroes and heroines be superior to their destinies in times of great affliction. In this way they can achieve victory over Fate, which tries unsuccessfully to make them selfish or vulgar."

But, since James's view of consciousness as providing a basis for self-sufficiency was the result of impressionistic introspection, as a generalization it applies most validly to the productive artistic temperament, to the consciousness of the successful creative artist, and especially to the kind of artist who can function, as James did, with "one-fifth immersion" in life. To transform it into an ethical principle governing the conduct of his protagonists and then to interpret it as a philosophical reconciliation of free will and fatalism is a hazardous undertaking. Superficially James's idealism
resembles Emerson's, for Emerson stated in his 1842 lecture. "The Transcen-
dentalist" that "from [the] transfer of the world into the consciousness, 
[the] beholding of all things in the mind, follows easily man's whole ethics. 
It is simpler to be self-dependent. The height, the deity of man is, to be
self-sustained, to need no gift, no foreign force." But Emerson intended
his idealism to provide an ethical foundation for life. The self-reliant man,
in Emerson's view, does not care what 'the world' thinks of him; he is able to
act without servile deferen
to the opinion of others.

In the fiction of Henry James, both extremes are found: a noble indepen-
dence of the judgment of men on the part of the heroine of the early tale, "My
Friend Bingham" (1867), who flouts conventional opinion and taste to marry
the man who has accidentally killed her small son; and a morbid, compulsive
concern for 'the world' on the part of Fleda Vetch, the heroine created in
1895-1896 during an extremely dark period in the life of her author. In the
very early tale, romantic idealism (as transcendentalism) seems to provide a
basis for life through spiritual independence and Emersonian non-conformity.
But, in James's later work, romantic idealism usually leads to withdrawal
from life, to "flight from the battle-field," as Huxley put it.

The ethical principle perceived in James's novels by Arnold Goldsmith,
the moral 'technique' of withdrawing from the world into one's consciousness
and thereby achieving victory over whatever forces in the world try to make
one selfish or vulgar, may be related to the literary movement which, as I
have already indicated, forms a significant part of the background of The
Spoils of Poynton. During the 1880's the fin de siècle symbolist conscious-
ness emerged. Thus, during the 1880's and 1890's, Romantic individualism led,
as Edmund Wilson observes (see p. 46 above), to the idea of self-assertion by
withdrawal from the world into the individual consciousness, which had the potential of becoming (as in *A Rebours*) at once the palace of art and the pleasure-dome of the senses. It led also to the ethical attitude Arthur Symons called "pride of being," the scornful idealism which rejects self-fulfilment within society, the gift of life offered to the sensibility by the world. Psychologically this attitude, in its most extreme manifestations, may be interpreted as a morbid form of compensation for failure to adjust to existence within society. It is a form of alienation particularly characteristic of the artistic temperament, which often craves recognition by the very world it scornfully rejects. Noting "the strong hints that des Esseintes is an abnormal person compensating for his inadequacies," Maurice Beebe marks the prayer of Christian humility with which the novel ends, and concludes that Huysmans' *A Rebours* "may be a portrait of the most extreme kind of esthete, but hardly a defense of the type."\(^5^6\) At the end of the novel, des Esseintes prepares to return to life in the world, for his physician has insisted that if he does not abandon his solitary life of self-cultivation and aestheticism, he will become insane and die. As he reluctantly braces himself to receive the shock of mundane reality, he feels he is about to be overwhelmed by "the waves of human mediocrity." But he is opening "the sluice-gates" himself, in a desperate attempt to regain mental and physical health.\(^5^7\)

William James was aware of the psychological dangers of believing consciousness to be, in this extreme sense, superior to the world it 'contains.' He disliked subjectivism (or gnostical romanticism, as he called it), the philosophical position of romanticism, because its consequences were repugnant to him. In 1884 he wrote:
Let a subjectivism begin in never so severe and intellectual a way, it is forced by the law of its nature to develop another side of itself and end with the corruptest curiosity. Once consecrate the notion that our performances and our violations of duty are for a common purpose, the attainment of subjective knowledge and feeling, and that deepening of these is the chief end of our lives—and at what point on the downward slope are we to stop? Everywhere [subjectivism] fosters the fatalistic mood of mind. It makes those who are already too inert more passive still; it renders wholly reckless those whose energy is already in excess.

And so he turned to Carlyle and the "philosophy of objective conduct," which considers conduct, and not sensibility, to be the ultimate fact, avoiding the pitfall of ethical absolutism by working out a pragmatic ethics. In 1907 he echoed Huxley's opinion of Eastern mysticism and renunciation when he wrote, "Nirvana means safety from the everlasting round of adventures of which this world of sense consists. The hindoo and the buddhist, for this is essentially their attitude, are simply afraid, afraid of more experience, afraid of life." And, he continues, "there can be no doubt that when men are reduced to their last sick extremity absolutism is the only saving scheme." The fin de siècle symbolists Villiers and Huysmans were strongly influenced by Eastern mysticism. Maurice Beebe observes that during one phase of his career Huysmans' hero, "having imagined the fulfilment, ... realizes that there is no need to test the reality, and, like the lovers in Villiers' Axël, discovers in renunciation the principle that to desire nothing is to possess all." But des Esseintes also eventually realizes that a way of life based on withdrawal from the world into one's own consciousness is morbid and untenable.

For Henry James's protagonists, the moral struggle is difficult in proportion to their sensitivity. They are victimized not only by others, but by their own feelings; they seldom become more than half-aware of conscience as a deterministic force (e.g., Mme. de Mauves's remark about her conscience, quoted above, p. 171), and they never realize that conscience may be no more than the internalized voice of social or family morality. In 1896 William James pointed out that "feelings of duty ... are only expressions of
our passionable life," and noted, here and elsewhere, that it is for this reason that it is so difficult to ignore them or even to question them. Just before she informs her American suitor of her decision to enter a convent, Claire de Cintre cries, "I have things to reckon with that you don't know. I mean I have feelings. I must do as they force me--I must, I must. They would haunt me otherwise ... they would kill me!" Mme. de Mauves urges renunciation, Longmore is disturbed to see, with as much passion as if she were making a declaration of love (Tales, III, 195). Fleda Vetch imagines Owen's love for her, which she refers to as his "mistake," and her love for him, which she insists shall never be fulfilled unless Mona decides to release Owen from his promise, as "their protected error." This error is "like some dangerous, lovely living thing that she had caught and could keep--keep vivid and helpless in the cage of her own passion and look at and talk to all day long" (IX, 203). Unsanctioned passionate love is "locked up" (IX, 203), as if in a cage, within Fleda's more passionate desire to justify herself, to assert her personal integrity. In James's novels, women of romantic temperament are particularly susceptible to this form of psychic determinism.

Fleda thinks that it is because she has a fine sensibility and a fine sense of honor that she cannot bear vulgarity. The conscious basis of her refusal to help Owen is, as I have noted, her feeling that "there was something in her that would make it a shame to her forever to have owed her happiness to an interference. It would seem intolerably vulgar to her to have 'ousted' the daughter of the Brigstocks . . . " (IX, 201-202). Mona is vulgar--even Owen comes to see her as that (VIII, 196)--but Fleda will not fight vulgarity with vulgarity: her conscience prevents her from "[lifting a] finger against Mona" (IX, 201). Actually, as I have shown in my discussion of The
Spoils of Poynton, unbearable feelings of inferiority provide the psychological basis of Fleda's attitude toward life; because she feels a compelling need to prove that she is morally 'sublime' (if not socially or financially), Fleda shrinks from the 'vulgarity' of interfering in a situation in which her own future is at stake. But the later heroine Maggie Verver, in overcoming the threat to her life offered by Charlotte, which is, significantly, a threat to her sanctioned and established sexual relationship with Amerigo, overcomes her initial dislike and fear of vulgarity. Two years after her marriage, while suggesting to Adam that he invite Charlotte to Fawns, Maggie says, of her lack of precise knowledge of Charlotte's "wounds" and "shames" and in reply to Adam's question about whether young women tell of their disappointments in love, "'How do I know, father, what vulgar girls do?'" (p. 131) And before that, Fanny had said, on the eve of Maggie's marriage, that there were things her innocent young friend must never know, things that no one could even attempt to tell her, for "'She wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it!'" (p. 54). But four years later, after Charlotte and Amerigo have been to Matcham, Fanny defensively changes her attitude. Aware that Maggie is 'awake,' Fanny proclaims, "'Her sense will have to open . . . . to what's called Evil—with a very big E: for the first time in her life. To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it!'" (p. 273). To Maggie herself, after the adultery and after Maggie has confided in her, Fanny says, "'I've never thought of you but as outside of ugly things, so ignorant of any falsity or cruelty or vulgarity as never to have to be touched by them or to touch them'" (p. 368). But, after she has had her inspiration of 'sacrificing' Adam, and is shamelessly humbugging him, Maggie realizes that she "... had felt for fifty seconds, with her eyes, all so sweetly and falsely, in her companion's, horribly vulgar; yet without minding it either--
such luck should she have if to be nothing worse than vulgar would see her through" (p. 351). Later, at Fawns, Maggie rises to such a degree to the challenge offered by her need to control Charlotte and Amerigo that she feels her spirit boldly revel in "such merciless manipulation of their yielding beneficiaries" as she is able to accomplish (p. 365). But Maggie is inwardly bold and inwardly vulgar. It is immensely significant that her moral struggle takes place largely within her own consciousness as an effective preparation for the crucial confrontation scenes. These occur when she faces Fanny with the evidence of the bowl, when she faces Amerigo over its fragments, when she twice faces Charlotte, once to save herself and once to save Charlotte, in both instances by undergoing the degradation of lying, and when she delicately confronts with her father the question of his 'shipping back,' with Charlotte, to American City. Maggie is able to fight for her life because, unlike Fleda Vetch, she is not handicapped by feelings of inferiority; nor is she obliged to conduct her battle in public, as Fleda considers that she is. Fanny Assingham is the only person with whom Maggie discusses her problem, and she, whatever her motives, and whatever her actual wisdom, behaves toward Maggie only in ways pragmatically consonant with Maggie's own efforts. She helps Maggie by denying the reality of Amerigo's infidelity. By insisting that Amerigo loves his wife, she encourages Maggie to adopt a positive attitude. She lies to help Maggie, as well as the others and herself, thus showing Maggie (as it were) the way. Her very name provides a comic touchstone of the quality Maggie has to discover and stoop to use if she is to win "the battle of life." It is Maggie's "low taste" for looking into shop windows which leads her to the golden bowl, and through the breaking of the bowl into wisdom. This "low taste," her creator comments (or has Maggie ruefully admit
to herself) is "of the essence, it is to be supposed, of her nature" (p. 399).

The apparently inescapable necessity of resorting to vulgarity if one's life is threatened and behavior one normally considers to be vulgar is the only means of defense is illustrated not only by Maggie Verver's situation but again by one of James's last stories. A. J. Ward finds that Herbert Dodd, the protagonist of "The Bench of Desolation" (1910), who is threatened by a breach of promise suit, an action he conceives to be "the vulgarest process known to the law" (Tales, XII, 374), is guilty of pride in refusing to stoop to the vulgarity of defending himself. Because his "natural taste" (p. 374), makes him shrink from "the hideous public arena" of the law courts (p. 383), he gives his former fiancee, Kate Cookham, so much of the money that is his life's "blood" (p. 404), that his business fails, his wife and children die of hardship, and he becomes a lonely man, condemned to a life of futility and old before his time. In Ward's view, "the great sin is not what Kate Cookham has done to Dodd, but what Dodd, through pride, has done to [his wife]." But Ward sees no parallel between Dodd's "egotistical aloofness from the degrading" and Fleda's dread of vulgarity, or between Dodd's refusal to run the risk of being thought vulgar and Fleda's refusal to oppose her own most vital interests and Owen's change of heart to the vulgar materialism and the theoretic claim of Mona Brigstock. 68

The connection of vitality and vulgarity is understood by James in The Princess Casamassima (1886). The hero, Hyacinth Robinson, finds the "rich vitality" of his friend Millicent Henning extremely attractive; she is undeniably vulgar, but he realizes that if she is full of execrable taste she is also full of life. 69 Along with T. H. Huxley's insistence on the importance
of "the ethical process," one of many formal statements of a belief that it is possible to hasten the ethical progress of society by the collective cultivation of self-restraint, there was an awareness, on the part of other writers, that 'working out the beast' might lead to psychic deterioration through loss of animal vitality. In his novel *A Crystal Age* (1887), the naturalist W. H. Hudson depicted a pastoral civilization of the future. The Crystallites know "the passionless, everlasting calm of beings who [have] forever outlived [erotic love], and left [it] as immeasurably far behind as the instincts of the wolf and the ape . . . ." Only a chosen few participate in their carefully controlled system of reproduction. The narrator of the story, who is an intruder from the Victorian age, falls in love with one of the Crystallites and soon discovers that the "chill moonlight felicity" of her race has no charm for his "passion-torn heart." His life is pleasant in the tranquil pastoral world, but he is haunted by repressed sexual desire. He confesses,

I have only one trouble now—a wolf that follows me everywhere, always threatening to rend me to pieces with its black jaws . . . , a great, gaunt, man-eating metaphorical wolf, far more terrible than that beast of the ancients which came to the poor man's door. In the darkness its eyes, glowing like coals, are ever watching me, and even in the bright daylight its shadowy form is ever near me, stealing from bush to bush, or from room to room, always dogging my footsteps. Will it ever vanish, like a mere phantom—a wolf of the brain—or will it come nearer and more near, to spring upon and rend me at the last?

Thrown into despair by his unrequited love, he drinks a liquid which he believes will free him of sexual passion. But it is poison, and death comes to release him of the torment of repression. In the preface to the 1906 edition, Hudson wrote, "now I remember another thing which Nature said—that earthly excellence can come in no way but one, and the ending of passion and strife is the beginning of decay." Hudson's biographer, Morley Roberts,
comments on the naturalist's attitude:

His was a healthy, happy hedonism which took into due regard all human instincts. He believed that when they worked together in harmony they produced the strong type of man he desired to inherit the earth. He did not imagine that self-sacrifice must always be essential to the happiness of others, or that self-torture was a recommendation of heaven. He saw that the ascetic had an absurd pleasure in dominating himself, and that the Puritan extended his vision to the mutilation of others. Such desired to save their souls, that is, to secure their own approval and misname it a god's.74

Henry James's parable about 'the beast within' is the story "The Beast in the Jungle," published in 1903 but written some time earlier. The protagonist, John Marcher, holds himself in reserve for some tremendous fate he believes is in store for him, an experience which will one day leap upon him as a stalking tiger leaps upon its victim. His obsession with this hypothetical future event afflicts him with an emotional deadness in the present, so that he rejects the love of his confidante, May Bartram, without even knowing that she has offered it. Eventually she dies, wasting away with the waste of her love. Visiting her grave, Marcher glimpses the face of a man who is ravaged by grief at the loss of a deeply-loved woman. Suddenly he realizes that in losing May Bartram, he has lost his chance to live. "The escape would have been to love; then, then he would have lived ... ." But he had never thought of her, he sees now, except in "the chill of his egotism and the light of her use" (Tales, XI, 401-402). He experiences "the horror of waking," and at last he 'sees':

He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself face down on the tomb (Tales, XI, 402).

Of the central, controlling image of this story Maxwell Geismar observes,
Even the Darwinian imagery of "The Beast in the Jungle," deriving from the late nineteenth century world-view of man's animal origins, was used here in an altogether special Jamesian sense. For the lurking, savage "beast" in the jungle of Marcher's failure was employed by James to symbolize his hero's "destiny" or lack of destiny. But wasn't it also a curiously suggestive (if again utterly transformed) symbol of the animal passions in man which Marcher had avoided—and of those human motives, needs, desires, both savage perhaps and affectional, which James himself always consciously rose "above"; and quite unconsciously repressed in his fiction?^75

Geismar views the story as an unconscious exercise in self-revelation, a projection "straight from the depths, tormented and insatiable, of the Jamesian temperament."^76 The tale may also be seen in the context of history, as Morton Zabel suggests,^77 when it becomes a parable or allegory of broader significance. Denial of 'the beast within'--the animal passions--causes 'the beast' to be projected outside the self; and back from the projected 'jungle' of the unconscious it leaps one fatal day, to rend and kill the master of self-restraint. The fallacy of establishing the principle of self-restraint as an ethical absolute is exposed: John Marcher's encounter with the 'beast' in the 'jungle' is an allegory of the Victorian ethos and World War I.

Considering the fairy-tale patterns which structure The Golden Bowl, the reader may wonder what relevance the fairy tale has for the Darwinian microcosm and the question of what to do with 'the beast within.' The lesson of most fairy tales, which are comedies in that they have happy endings for their princes and princesses, is that the good person most effectively opposes the 'beast' by submitting to it, in some sense, rather than by denying it or rejecting it or openly defying it.^78 In fairy tale the real princess is humble: she takes the Frog Prince into her bed or she goes to live with the ugly Beast, and she is rewarded, in the end, by the love of the prince whom she releases, by her humility and her compassion, from the spell which had
turned him into a lower form of life. Or, if threatened by evil forces, she may preserve herself from destruction by intuitively doing the right thing, or by following some guidance which she is wise enough and humble enough to accept. She may even resort to a form of deceit by using the appearance of ingenuousness and of submission to conceal her actual resistance to the forces that would keep her in a state of bondage.

If Maggie had attempted to assert her superiority at the time of her encounter with 'the beast,' she would have played into the hands of her enemy. But the American princess behaves like the real princess in the presence of the false princess:

Charlotte had marched straight in, dragging her rich train; she rose there beautiful and free, with her whole aspect and action attuned to the firmness of her speech. Maggie had kept the shawl she had taken out with her, and, clutching it tight in her nervousness, drew it round her as if huddling in it for shelter, covering herself with it for humility. She looked out as from under an improvised hood—the sole headgear of some poor woman at somebody's proud door; she waited even like the poor woman; she met her friend's eyes with recognitions she couldn't suppress. (XXXVI, 462)

Charlotte knows that Maggie is lying, but she cannot herself break the surface of appearance without losing the advantage she has over her stepdaughter. As Marius Bewley observes, it is quite impossible that Charlotte should name the specific grounds of Maggie's displeasure with her. Her intention is primarily to confine Maggie helplessly in a false position, although she also counts on being able to handle a 'scene,' if Maggie chooses to accuse her openly. She always has the possibility of making the others think that Maggie is unnaturally jealous of her. But Maggie's submission has a result unexpected by Charlotte.

Maggie is at first terrified: she approaches Charlotte with "her heart in her hands;" she feels that "her head is "on the block" and that she has
been "thrown over on her back, with her neck . . . half broken and her help­less face staring up" (p. 459). But after she has begun to lie to Charlotte, while at the same time involuntarily communicating to Charlotte that she knows (". . . everything in her, from head to foot, crowded it upon Charlotte that she knew" [p. 462]), she gathers strength, until she realizes that for her "the right, the right--yes, it took this extraordinary form of her hum­bucking, as she had called it, to the end. It was only a question of not, by a hair's breadth, deflecting into the truth" (p. 465). Moreover, aware that she is emulating Amerigo's conduct in lying to Charlotte, Maggie feels that "they were together thus, he and she, close, close together--whereas Char­lotte, though rising there radiantly before her, was really off in some dark­ness of space that would steep her in solitude and harass her with care. The heart of the Princess swelled, accordingly, even in her abasement; she had kept in tune with the right, and something, certainly . . . would, and pos­sibly soon, come of it for her" (p. 465). The threatened heroine in the Darwinian microcosm intuitively adopts the folk-wisdom of concealment and submission, while understanding experientially the antinomial nature of being.

The fairy-tale motif of submission to 'the beast' actually occurs, with increasing significance, in each of the three novels of the major phase. In Gloriani's garden, where he is to see his host as "the glossy male tiger, magnificently marked," Strether freely submits himself to "the penetrating radiance" of the sculptor's eyes. He senses that "the deep human expertness in Gloriani's charming smile--oh, the terrible life behind it!--[is] flashed upon him as a test of his stuff." Although she feels herself to be in the presence of "a creature who pace[s] like a panther," Milly Theale accepts as
an "inspiration" Kate Croy's insistence that she is "a dove." By "[studying] the dovelike," Milly achieves her aim of involvement with life.
The capacity of a complex symbol to present and reconcile opposites has been recognized by the psychologist C. G. Jung. The golden bowl as symbol has this kind of complexity, for the memory of the bowl and its breaking, as a vivid image of both the beauty of a well-ordered whole and the ugliness resulting from the wanton destruction of that whole, lingers on in Maggie's consciousness and helps her at a crucial moment to retain control over her own destructive impulses. Watching her companions through the window at Fawns, having a moment earlier resisted the temptation of "sound out their doom in a single sentence" (p. 453), Maggie realizes that she is contemplating "a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins, things as ugly as those formless fragments of her golden bowl she was trying so hard to pick up" (pp. 454-455). But in the larger picture of her life, as opposed to the "scene" Maggie views through the window, the bowl functions as a concrete image of the Ververs' romantic preconception of Amerigo as the archetypal Italian Prince who is Maggie's 'cup of life.' This static concept, which denies both Amerigo's individuality and the dark side of his type (the Borgia side), must be broken if the life of consciousness is to become dynamic for Maggie and Amerigo. When the golden bowl is broken by the 'inspired' Fanny Assingham, the Prince suddenly appears, as if he had been instantly released from a spell or as if he were a genie emerging from a broken bottle. Having just smashed the bowl, Fanny announces to Maggie, "Whatever you meant by it ... has ceased to exist."
"And what in the world, my dear, did you mean by it?"—that sound, as at the
touch of a spring, rang out as the first effect of Fanny's speech. It broke
upon the two women's absorption with a sharpness almost equal to the smash of
crystal, for the door of the room had been opened by the Prince without their
taking heed. (p. 416)

Maggie's love for Amerigo sustains her during the ordeal of psychic transfor-
mation and enables her to release him from the mechanical form of his bondage
to the Ververs, without destroying him in the process or without destroying
their marriage.

Both Amerigo and Charlotte may be related to the pervasive image of the
cup of experience, the cup which Isabel Archer, that other romantic idealist,
fears is a poisoned drink (see above, p. 7). First Amerigo becomes the Prin-
cess' cup of life, and then Charlotte becomes useful at Fawns as a 'Borgia
cup' (Fanny's explanation of her effect, pp. 137-138), inasmuch as her pres-
ence acts to drive undesired female company away from Adam Verver. After her
marriage to Adam and her involvement with Amerigo, Charlotte exudes for Maggie
the poison of betrayal, but this evil, like the elixir of the alchemists, has
the paradoxical property of being a deadly substance that rejuvenates. It
cures psychic stagnation, the moral condition Adam describes to Maggie as
"selfishness" and "sloth" (p. 355). Thus Charlotte operates as a transform-
ing agent in Maggie's psyche. Her presence works to break the 'spell,' to
animate the 'sleeping princess' and hence release the Prince from the bondage
of the 'charmed circle.' At the beginning of the fairy tale, the Ververs
implicitly say, with Villiers' Count Axel, "As for living, our servants will
do that for us." And so, Amerigo and Charlotte become, as Maggie later
realizes, horses pulling the enchanted coach, the "family coach" of the Ver-
vers (p. 304). Thus the same poison lies in Axel's goblet, Fleda's Maltese
cross, and Maggie's golden bowl. It is essentially the "pride of being"
which scorns the dynamic life of becoming; in Maggie's case, it is the unnaturally prolonged sleep of 'innocence,' her implicit refusal to leave the sublimely peaceful golden age of paternal filial love and descend into the world of 'experience.' But Maggie does not drink the poison of self-destruction from her golden bowl, as Axel and Sara do from their goblet, because she overcomes, through self-knowledge and awakened empathy, her potentially fatal romantic attitude toward life.

The golden bowl is a symbol of romantic idealism, the subjectivism rejected by William James because he could see that it led eventually to the corruption or destruction of life. It is also, in my opinion, the golden bowl mentioned in Thel's motto, a cryptic series of questions introducing Blake's poem *The Book of Thel*:

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Does the Eagle know what is in the pit?
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in the golden bowl?
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The significance of the first pair of questions is that man learns only from personal experience. The meaning of the poem is that without knowledge of the dark side of life man is incomplete. Like the virginal and timid Thel, Maggie descends from the lower paradise of innocence into the harsh world of experience. But unlike Thel, she is able to endure and assimilate to consciousness the evil she discovers. She learns that man cannot by his nature remain in a condition of static perfection, and that those who try to remain there are actually refusing, like Thel, to be born. The breaking of the bowl, the form of life based on romantic idealism, is for Maggie a break-through into a new mode of being. By the end of the novel she has taken the state of innocence into the state of experience, as Thel fails to do, and only the
reader who rejects Blake's concept of "fearful symmetry" will lament her 'loss of innocence.' Unlike Fleda Vetch, Maggie Verver has gained far more than she has lost. She has learned that love can't be kept in a golden bowl. 

The ivory Maltese cross in The Spoils of Poynton also functions as a symbol of static perfection, linking romantic idealism with ethical absolutism. As I have shown, Fleda Vetch's destructive ethical absolutism is a form of compensation for feelings of inferiority and is thus the result of environmental and developmental factors. But it is Fleda's romantic temperament which renders her vulnerable to this form of psychic determinism. The romantic idealist has a strong temperamental bias towards ethical absolutism. He finds principles, systems, absolutes, and origins fascinating, and he is distressed whenever reality disagrees with his expectations of it. He then passionately affirms his ideals by insisting that the reality of his life conform to them. If reality remain intractable, he may retreat from it altogether, withdrawing from the world.

The narrator of James's early tale "Four Meetings" (1877) vividly describes "'the great American disease . . . the appetite, morbid and monstrous, for colour and form, for the picturesque and romantic at any price.'" He explains, 

"I don't know whether we come into the world with it--with the germs implanted and antecedent to experience; rather perhaps we catch it early, almost before developed consciousness--we feel, as we look about, that we're going (to save our souls, or at least our senses) to be thrown back on it hard. We're like travellers in the desert--deprived of water and subject to the terrible mirage, the torment of illusion, of the thirst-fever. They hear the plash of fountains, they see green gardens and orchards that are hundreds of miles away. So we with our thirst--except that with us it's more wonderful: we have before us the beautiful old things we've never seen at all, and when we do at last see them--if we're lucky!--we simply recognize them. What experience does is merely to confirm and consecrate our confident dream."
For the late nineteenth century American, as James saw him, raised in a mental climate of, as Marius Bewley puts it, "democratic abstraction and Puritan deprivation," a curious development of idealism took place. The true reality of which the thirsty American sensibility was deprived and for which it craved was, not the spiritual realm of the abstract ideal, but the world of "colour and form," of "the picturesque and [the] romantic"—the almost inaccessible realm of a deeply sensuous, richly textured European society and culture, making, from afar, its powerful appeal to the American imagination.

For the thirsty American sensibility, aspiring to colour and form, Europe became the higher realm of the aesthetic-sensuous ideal, the "oasis" toward which the soul made its pilgrimage through the desert of American civilization, ascending towards beauty, in the Platonic tradition, but not always towards virtue, since, in Europe, beauty and virtue could not always be felt to be identical. The Platonic bias of the American attitude is unmistakable, but the circumstances of American life established a tormenting polarity of beauty and virtue, a dichotomous idealism which is embodied in various subtle ways in nearly everything James wrote. The typical James protagonist ardently desires a life in which sensuous beauty is married to virtue. What confronts him instead, if he wins through to any kind of vision, as Strether and Maggie Verver do, is something not at all virtuous in the New England sense of excluding evil. It is something akin to Blake's vision of beauty as energy and vitality: a "fearful symmetry," a burning brightness set against an omnipresent darkness, a chiaroscuro of dynamic psychic forces.

Fleda Vetch may be English (certainly her class consciousness is an important feature of her psychology), but her sleepless night in the bedroom at Ricks "embellished for her pleasure" by Mrs. Gereth with "the sweetest
Louis Seize," establishes her affinity with the tormented American romantic idealist. James describes her misery: "She couldn't care for such things when they came to her in such ways; there was a wrong about them all that turned them to ugliness" (VII, 181-182). Because she cannot see the 'darkness' within herself, Fleda is unable to live creatively within what William James termed "the Rembrandtesque moral chiaroscuro" of life. Unlike Strether and Maggie Verver, she is incapable of the higher vision.

The final words of the narrator of "Four Meetings" are deeply ironic to the reader with a knowledge of what usually happens to James's romantic idealists who thirst for a richer experience of life, but who look to experience merely to "confirm and consecrate the confident dream." An important psychological principle is emphasized in this speech: deprivation encourages romantic idealism. Three other principles are implied by the interaction of speech and context. First, that experience which fails to confirm the "confident dream" is, at best, a disappointment, at worst, a shattering blow. Second, that experience, although it may partly confirm the dream, also contradicts it, being broader and deeper and more complex, and inevitably full of unrecognizable features, which tend to be rejected because they are incongruous with the dream. Third, that the dreamer, expecting confirmation of the dream, is ill-equipped to deal with reality. Three of these principles are illustrated by the story from which this speech is taken, by the fate of the American spinster Caroline Spencer, and all of the principles are to be found, in one form or another, almost everywhere in James's work.

In Pragmatism William James declared, "A pragmatist . . . turns away . . . from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy,
towards facts, towards action and towards power." Nevertheless, he some-
times failed to realize that in many instances the pragmatist could only avoid
being victimized by outworn principles, systems, and absolutes, hypocritically
preserved as social morality or religious dogma, if he dared take, not simply
the moral risk that his course of action would have beneficial results, but
the additional risk of being thought vulgar. In "The Moral Philosopher and
Moral Life" (1891), in which James insisted that "the philosopher must allow
that it is at all times open to any one to . . . [break] away from established
rules and [strive] to realize a larger ideal whole than they permit, . . .
provided he fear not to stake his life and character upon the throw," he also
asked, "'Experience' of consequences may truly teach us what things are wicked,
but what have consequences to do with what is mean and vulgar?"

In general the romantic idealist in Henry James's novels cannot pragma-
tize because he cannot bear to be thought vulgar. Because she is a romantic
idealist afflicted by a sense of inferiority, Fleda Vetch is unable to prag-
matize. She cannot, even for the sake of life and love, endure what she
". . . considers to be a personal degradation. Maggie Verver is
unlike the other major protagonists in this respect. As a 'sleeping princess,'
a dreamer who awakes, she discovers that she can act effectively to create
"the largest total universe of good" possible under the circumstances only
by stooping to the vulgar forms of hypocrisy and deceit. Hence the despised
quality becomes a touchstone of moral courage.

Henry James, Sr. did not share the disdain of genteel Victorians for
'the vulgar.' He accepted vulgarity as an inescapable feature of life, and
used it in his writing to express his philosophy more forcefully. He was
once obliged to instruct an editor to delete the word stink from one of his
articles and substitute the less vulgar, but "less honest," word scourge."
His theology expresses essentially the same wisdom as that transmitted by fairy tale. He believed that "the creative love . . . must frankly submit to all the degradation the created nature imposes upon it . . . ." Even so, Maggie Verver, who is, unlike Fleda Vetch, capable of creative love, discovers how to submit to degradation for the sake of life: thus her mode of conduct banishes the moral fallacy of the Darwinian microcosm by combining the pragmatic ethics of William James with Henry James's, Sr.'s concept of creative love.
NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 247.

3 Ibid., p. 246.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.


8 Page 237. Gale also remarks that "nature imagery can suggest the evanescent quality of natural human pleasure and beauty," and he adds the qualification that "the most basic message of such imagery [animal, water, and flower figures] is two-fold: that joy, attractiveness, and simple innocence must pass; but further, that conscious heroism, intellectual and creative endeavour, and spiritual values have a chance of abiding, in spite of the whelming wave, the careless gardener, and the fanged beast."

9 Ibid., p. 246.


14 J. A. C. Brown (pp. 11-12) points out that psychic determinism is one of four Freudian postulates which have been accepted in one form or another by all the analytic schools and probably by most of those psychologists who concern themselves with the study of personality.


16 Page 155.
Ward (p. 104) writes, "Up to The Golden Bowl, James's Americans are critically handicapped by their ignorance of the conditions of life." However, "once [Maggie Verver] gains her vision of evil, she uses her new insight to restore good, or at least to keep her marriage from collapsing." The three protagonists of the novels of the major phase, Lambert Strether, Milly Theale, and Maggie Verver, acquire knowledge which "enables, rather compels, them to act, and with considerable effectiveness. This is a new role for the Jamesian protagonist, whose characteristic tragic position has in the past been passivity." Ward (p. 103) sees The Golden Bowl as informed by a pragmatic conception of morality. He contends, however (p. 153), that "James does not modify the ugliness of [Maggie's] intrigue, even though, in his ethical relativism, he reveals that moral motives may transcend and convert objectively immoral means." He argues that "Maggie's lie represents the compromise of good with evil . . . . Further evil and suffering must follow; and complete goodness and happiness can never be achieved."

Sometime between May 13 and August 11, 1895, James changed the names of his characters from Muriel Veetch and Albert Gereth to Fleda Vetch and Owen Gereth, and the name of the great house from Umberleigh to Poynton (Notebooks, 198-199, 207-209).

Patrick F. Quinn ("Morals and Motives in The Spoils of Poynton," Sewanee Review, LXII, [1954], p. 575) writes, "What the scene on the stairs reveals is that when faced with a brutally real problem Fleda responds with a form of hysteria and the need to escape."

Quoted by Matthiessen, The James Family, p. 159.
33Ibid., p. 169.

34A. J. Ward (p. 8) writes, "In The Ambassadors Strether carries with him the evil of the New England conscience." Ward (p. 21) asserts that "the New England conscience, even though James frequently exposes it comically, is a source of evil in James's fiction." See Ward's discussion (pp. 110-126) of the expansion of Strether's consciousness, of his gradual abandonment of New England a priori moral judgments as he assimilates the experience of Europe.


36Ibid., XXXVI, 371.

37Ibid., V, 56.

38Ibid., XXXVI, 375. A. J. Ward (p. 125) writes, "Strether] has his facts and he has his impressions, but his logic and his ethics are powerless to reconcile them in any intelligible way. He can do nothing but accept his vision as truth." (Italics, mine.)


40Quoted. by Matthiessen, The James Family, p. 9.

41Ibid.

42Matthiessen's observation, ibid.

43Henry James, Sr., quoted by Matthiessen, ibid., pp. 8-9.

44T. H. Huxley (Evolution and Ethics, pp. 63-64) writes, "For his successful progress, throughout the savage state, man has been largely indebted to those qualities which he shares with the ape and the tiger . . . . But, in proportion as men have passed from anarchy to social organization, and in proportion as civilization has grown in worth, these deeply ingrained servicable qualities have become defects. After the manner of civilized persons, civilized man would gladly kick down the ladder by which he has climbed. He would be only too pleased to see 'the ape and tiger die.' But they decline to suit his convenience . . . ."

45Pages 168-169.

46In his essay "Is There a Life After Death?" (1910) Henry James writes, "Living, or feeling one's exquisite curiosity about the universe fed and fed, rewarded and rewarded . . . becomes . . . the highest good I can conceive of . . . ." (quoted by Matthiessen, p. 610).

47Page 79.

48Pages 84, 72.
205


50 The James Family, p. 592. Other writings which might be considered excursions into philosophy include the tale "The Great Good Place" and James's letter to Grace Norton asserting the value of consciousness as "an illimitable power" (Letters, I, 100-101).

51 Quoted by Matthiessen, p. 609.

52 Page 125.

53 Maurice Beebe (Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts [New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964], p. 204) quotes James's statement in A Small Boy and Others that from his earliest years he was "aware that one way of taking life was to go in for everything and everyone, which kept you abundantly occupied, and the other way was to be as occupied, quite as occupied, just with the sense and the image of it all, and on only a fifth of the actual immersion" (New York: Scribners, 1913, p. 290). Beebe comments, "One-fifth immersion [in life] may be what James meant by 'the form of my saturation.'"


55 "The American Scholar" (1837), Part III, and "Self-Reliance" (1842).

56 Page 146.


58 The Will to Believe, pp. 170-171.


60 Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (New York: Longmans, Green, 1928), pp. 292, 293.

61 Page 146.

62 Julian Huxley (Evolution and Ethics, pp. 106, 109-110) points out that conscience or the "ethical mechanism . . . provides no guarantee that the feelings it engenders are correct, or its judgments objectively valid. . . . Thus the absoluteness of moral obligation turns out on analysis to be no true absolute, but a result of the nature of our infantile mental machinery, combined with later rationalization and wish-fulfilment."

63 According to Freudian theory, "sometimes . . . the external comes to be incorporated as part of the self, as in the case of the parental prohibitions and demands which by introjection become the superego" (J. A. C. Brown, Freud and the Post-Freudians, p. 71).
The Will to Believe, p. 18.


James uses this expression in connection with Fleda Vetch (The Spoils of Poynton, II, 134).

The Imagination of Disaster, pp. 161-162.


Ibid., p. 303.

Ibid., pp. 296-297.

Ibid., pp. vii-viii.


Ibid.


In "The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales" (Psyche & Symbol, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo [New York: Doubleday, 1958], p. 110), the psychologist C. G. Jung writes, "The fairy-tale makes it clear that it is possible for a man to reach wholeness, to become the total man, only with the co-operation of the spirit of darkness, indeed that the latter is actually a causa instrumentalis of redemption and individuation . . . . The fairy-tale tells us how to proceed if we want to overcome the power of darkness: we must turn his own weapons against him . . . ." In The Golden Bowl Charlotte is the causa instrumentalis of Maggie's psychological development, and Maggie overcomes her by turning her own weapons against her.

The Complex Fate: Hawthorne, Henry James and some other American Writers, with an Introduction and two Interpolations by F. R. Leavis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), pp. 91-92. Bewley analyzes the scene to show how Maggie "makes truth out of lies"; he notes the ritual quality of the action, and examines the philosophical significance of what occurs. I comment on his view of Maggie's pragmatism in my Conclusion.
See Dorothy Van Ghent's essay "On Tess of the D'Urbervilles" in The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Harpers, 1961), pp. 205-207. Mrs. Van Ghent (p. 206) argues that "Tess's tragedy turns on . . . the substitution in Tess of an individualizing morality for the folk instinct of concealment and anonymity . . . . The communal and ritual fatalism of the folk is "a subjective economy by which emotion is subdued to the falling out of events and the destructiveness of resistance is avoided. In folk fatalism lies . . . . survival wisdom, as against the death direction of all moral deliberation." The many differences between Maggie Verver's nature and the folk character as depicted by Hardy are too obvious to need comment. Nevertheless, during Ch. XXXVI, the wisdom of submission transmitted by folk fatalism, folk tale, and fairy tale is realized by Maggie Verver. At this point, she could not have spoken the truth to Charlotte without destroying herself; hence the wisdom of her submission is evident. She submits by telling a lie; the lie is her degradation. But the results of her action are creative, not only for herself but for the others. Here James uses fairy-tale patterns to express pragmatic ethics.

The Ambassadors, X, 121-122; XI, 135.

The Ambassadors, X, 121-122; XI, 135.

The Wings of the Dove, XV, 214-216.


Walter F. Wright (The Madness of Art: A Study of Henry James, Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1962, p. 252) contends that the "evil which most matters is [Maggie's] temptation to smash a world to bits because it is strange and not to her liking."

Cargill (The Novels of Henry James, p. 406) notes the importance of "awakened empathy" in Maggie's development.

Peter F. Fisher (The Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary, ed. Northrop Frye [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1961], p. 206) writes, "In Thel . . . . [Blake] is writing a commentary on the failure to unite the two contrary states of the soul which he has described in the Songs of Innocence and Experience. Thel is unable to take the state of innocence into that of experience . . . . [She] make[s] the mistake of regarding the two states of innocence and experience as mutually exclusive."

S. Foster Damon (William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols, Boston & [New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1924], p. 310) interprets lines 3-4 to mean "Can wisdom be put in the symbol of love (the phallos) or love in the symbol of wisdom (the brain)?"

The Short; Stories of Henry James, Mod." ed. (New York; 1945), pp.8-9.


A. J. Ward (pp. 122, 123, 125) writes, "Eventually Strether realizes the inseparability of the sensuous and the sensual in Paris . . . . He chooses
the complexity of beauty and ugliness in Europe for the sake of beauty. . . . He can do nothing but accept his vision as truth." Quentin Anderson (The American Henry James, pp. 219-221) contends, in opposition to Ward's view, that Strether's pleasure in the magnificent tiger in Gloriani's garden stems from his ignorance of the source [i.e., of the duality]. Unable to recognize his own duality, Strether cannot recognize it in others. At the end, Strether is "firmly held in his tin mould . . . He falls back on the formula of righteousness: not to take anything for himself. He has denied life, not affirmed it." My view of Strether is that he does attain a vision of beauty as "fearful symmetry" but that, as he says himself, it is too late for him to live in accordance with this vision.

91 The Will to Believe, p. 168.
92 Page 51.
93 The Will to Believe, pp. 206, 187-188.
94 William James's expression for the goal of pragmatic ethics (The Will to Believe, p. 209).
95 Matthiessen, The James Family, p. 15.
96 Quoted ibid., p. 150.
CONCLUSION

Of the 1890's Holbrook Jackson writes, "The idea of self-realization, as old as Emerson, and older, was at the root of the modern attitude." Ibsen's attack on what Shaw called the domestic, moral, religious, and political idols, the "ideals that, like the gods of old, are constantly demanding human sacrifices," dealt in turn, as Shaw pointed out, with egocentric romantic idealism (Peer Gynt, Hedda Gabler), hypocritical social morality (Ghosts), and ethical absolutism (The Wild Duck), steadily making clear the pragmatic principle expounded by Shaw in The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891) that "conduct must justify itself by its effect upon life and not by its conformity to any rule or ideal." Considering Henry James's two novels in relation to the Zeitgeist, I conclude that the burning of Poynton, as presented through its impact on the consciousness of Fleda Vetch, signifies James's unconscious repudiation of immutable ideals, and that the breaking of the golden bowl has a similar function in the later novel.

A. O. Lovejoy reminds us that the Plato of the doctrine of Ideas is the main historic source of the indigenous strain of otherworldliness in Western thought. It is through Plato, as Dean Inge has said, "that the conception of an unseen eternal world, of which the visible world is but a pale copy, gains a permanent foothold in the West . . . ." And, Lovejoy continues, it is from Plato's philosophy "that the belief that the highest good for man lies in somehow translocating himself into such a world has been perennially nourished." Because of the influence of this strain of Platonic thought, the bias of Western man in favor of immutable ideals is
deeply ingrained. In 1907, after reading *Pragmatism*, Henri Bergson wrote to William James, "When you say that '... for pragmatism [reality] is still in the making,' you provide the very formula for the metaphysics to which I am convinced we shall come, to which we should have come long ago if we had not remained under the spell of Platonic idealism. Shall I go so far as to affirm with you that 'truth is mutable'? I believe in the mutability of reality rather than of truth." In 1909, in a letter in which he asserts that pragmatism is "one of the most subtle and nuances doctrines that have ever appeared in philosophy," a doctrine often misunderstood "just because [it] reinstates truth in the flux of experience," Bergson also says, "It is not to be wondered at that people should have so much trouble understanding [why the pragmatist should be at the same time a realist]; all our habits of mind, and our habits of speech as well, work in the opposite direction, no doubt because they are both formed in the Platonic mould." Even so, Henry James's conscious admiration of Fleda Vetch's idealism may have been shaped in "the Platonic mould" of Western thought, the 'mould' that his 'other self' who "unconsciously pragmatised" worked toward breaking.

William James agreed with Bergson that life must be understood as vital process. Both philosophers opposed materialism and determinism and abhorred the mechanical whenever it threatened to encroach upon human life; hence both repudiated a static or absolute idealism. William James insisted that "the ideal and the real are dynamically continuous," and optimistically asserted the importance of belief in realizing human potential. This psychological principle was intuitively grasped by Henry James who in effect showed how static ideals of life and conduct could operate mechanically, through the process of psychic determinism, as fatal deterministic
forces. It is precisely because the ideal and the real are dynamically continuous, that static absolutes, especially when they are consciously felt to be meaningful and inspiring, may destroy life. William James asked, "When you come down to the facts, what do your harmonious and integral ideal systems prove to be? in the concrete? Always things burst by the growing content of experience." Burst by the growing content of collective human experience, yes; but, as Henry James unconsciously demonstrated by his depiction of Fleda Vetch's psychology, burst only at the cost of much individual human suffering on the part of those destroyed by the dynamic continuity of immutable ideals with the reality of their individual lives.

In The Spoils of Poynton James had unconsciously linked a static idealism with fatal psychic determinism. Then, in The Golden Bowl, his use of mechanical imagery to describe the workings and the effects of American control over life reflected Henry Adams' startling equation of mental with physical energy or force. At the same time the central emblematic image functioned as a symbol of romantic idealism, presenting this attitude as a deterministic force. But, implicit in the structure and psychology of the novel, opposing, as it were, the extreme pessimism of Henry Adams' scientific determinism, there were thematic patterns reflecting Bergson's concept of life as élan vital breaking through mechanically-imposed form and embodying William James's pragmatic belief that free-will is a creative principle. In Pragmatism William James declared, "Although the stubborn fact remains that there is a sensible flux, what is true of it seems from first to last to be largely a matter of our own creation. We build the flux out inevitably . . . . The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands."
Marius Bewley, who has brilliantly analysed Maggie Verver's pragmatic method of working with reality, finds a sinister implication in the pragmatic view of the world. In Bewley's opinion, in some of his later works James was on the point of writing novels which, "in spite of their realistic pretensions, give us a world of instable and displaced values: for in the world as we live in it, values are known through appearances, and it is impossible to question the one without casting suspicion on the other." He finds "The Turn of the Screw" "metaphysically appalling" because in this work "the dissolution of the ties between appearance and reality which threatens in many of James's stories [is] . . . realized with peculiar violence and intensity." The ethical implication of this for Bewley is a "lack of faith in the grounds of creation and hence a denial of the possibility of strict moral action." Thus Bewley finds the scene in which Maggie "makes truth out of lies" to have a "sinister quality," an "air of pervasive unlocalized evil," due largely to "an inversion of ordinary human values, and even of appearance and reality itself." He expresses his sense of violation through an allusion to the cracked golden bowl: "It is as if the old traditional moral vessels that had long held our sense of evil had been cracked, and evil itself seeped through on to the whole fabric. One is almost shocked," he continues, "by James's unrivalled ability to elevate this inversion to a level of sublimity." Maggie Verver may be "the greatest pragmatist in literature," but, Bewley concludes, the behaviour of the governess in "The Turn of the Screw" reveals the dangers of "'extreme freedom of improvisation' in the world of human behaviour" and thus suggests that pragmatism, which "is said to be the most amiable of all philosophies, . . . is also capable of proving a
very nasty spoonful of bitters indeed, a veritable 'excursion into chaos'."

Undoubtedly what Bewley says about the dangers of "freedom of improvisation" in the world of human behaviour is true: if the world is "pragmatically plastic," it is so "both for good and for evil." But, as William James insisted, pragmatism is a method only; it does not stand for any special results. When Fleda Vetch cries to Owen Gereth, "I don't know what you mean by your freedom; I don't see it, I don't feel it. Where is it yet, where, your freedom?!" (XVI, 263), she repudiates his right to choose one potential of being rather than another. Determined, herself, she has no understanding of free will as a creative principle. But when Maggie Verver, the American princess, descends from her "castle-tower" into the "brilliant void" of the summer afternoon, to find her stepmother and create for her the psychological basis of a new life (p. 505), she accepts the terrifying responsibility and the moral risk of human creativity. Her pragmatic intention is simply to create the best moral universe possible under the circumstances, and to this end, she becomes an artist beneficially using her creative imagination on life. Unlike Fleda Vetch, she does not suffer herself to be crucified on the cross of a static idealism.

James's creative imagination worked in reaction against prevalent mechanistic views of human life, implicitly acknowledging the power of deterministic forces, but ultimately refusing to believe that intelligence and imagination are never more than channels through which these forces detrimentally work. At a time when psychic evolution was popularly thought to be a matter of 'working out the beast' James implicitly understood that such an ethical attitude if carried too far could result in
psychic stagnation or death. As psychic energies are raised to a higher level of intensity in Maggie Verver and then controlled and used creatively, one sees the elan vital grappling with and overcoming potentially fatal deterministic forces. The predominant symbolic pattern of the novel is that of the breaking of a static ideal and the release of psychic energy which is then used for creative purposes. Philosophically, then, one can read *The Golden Bowl* as James's personal expression of a felt need of his time, given formal expression in the works of Bergson and William James and dramatized in the plays of Henrik Ibsen, to destroy static idealism and to reinstate truth in the flux of life. From the point of view of anyone whose thinking is totally influenced by the Platonic bias of Western thought, James was, as Marius Bewley says, on the verge of giving us "a world of instable and displaced values." But from another point of view, James may be said to have achieved, as did Bergson and William James, a transformation of idealism. *The Golden Bowl* was written some thirteen years after Frazer's *The Golden Bough* had begun to provide the artist with another key to the underworld of subliminal reality. As the ritual quality of many scenes and the omnipresent motifs of voyage and sacrifice in *The Golden Bowl* in themselves perhaps suggest, James finally discovered ultimate reality to reside, not in immutable moral or aesthetic ideals, but in the dynamic archetypes of psychic life.
NOTES


3. It is illuminating to compare James's essays "On the Occasion of Hedda Gabler" (1891) and "On the Occasion of The Master-Builder" (1893), reprinted in Essays in London and Elsewhere (New York: Harpers, 1893), with Shaw's The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891). Where Shaw sees "Anti-Idealist Plays," James sees character studies. Of Hedda Gabler James writes (pp. 240-242), "[Ibsen's] drama is essentially that supposedly undramatic thing, the picture not of an action but of a condition. It is the portrait of a nature, the story of what Paul Bourget would call an état d'âme, and of a state of nerves as well as of soul, a state of temper, of health, of chagrin, of despair. . . . We receive Hedda ripe for her catastrophe, and if we ask for antecedents and explanations we must simply find them in her character. Her motives are just her passions. What the four acts show us is these motives and that character--complicated, strange, irreconcilable, infernal--playing themselves out. We know too little why she married Tesman, we see too little why she ruins Lovborg; but we recognize that she is infinitely perverse . . . . The 'use' of Hedda Gabler is that she acts on others and that even her most disagreeable qualities have the privilege, thoroughly undeserved doubtless, but equally irresistible, of becoming a part of the history of others. And then one isn't so sure she is wicked, and by no means sure (especially when she is represented by an actress who makes the point ambiguous) that she is disagreeable. She is various and sinuous and graceful, complicated and natural; she suffers, she struggles, she is human, and by that fact exposed to a dozen interpretations . . . ." Nowhere in these essays does James depart from the impressionistic method of criticism; nowhere in them does he display an awareness of the sociological or philosophical implications of Ibsen's dramas. He is aware of the presence of an idea in The Master-Builder, but is unable or unwilling to analyze the play in terms of ideas. He writes (p. 251), "The mingled reality and symbolism of it all give us an Ibsen within an Ibsen. His subject is always, like the subjects of all first-rate men, primarily an idea; but in this case the idea is as difficult to catch as its presence is impossible to overlook. The whole thing throbs and flushes with it, and yet smiles and mocks at us through it as if in conscious supersubtlety."


6. Quoted by Perry, ibid., 631-632.
Perry (II, 599-603) compares and contrasts the two philosophies of experience.

See James's 1900 letter to a colleague, quoted by Perry, II, 320.

The Will to Believe (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 59-60.

Quoted by Perry, II, 320.


Ibid., pp. 255, 257.

The Complex Fate (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), p. 95.

Ibid., pp. 133-134.

Ibid., p. 94.

Ibid., p. 149. (Bewley takes the expressions "extreme freedom of improvisation" and "excursion into chaos" from the Preface to Vol. XII in the New York Edition.)

Ibid., p. 146.

Pragmatism, pp. 51-53.

Lotus Snow ("'A Story of Cabinets and Chairs and Tables': Images of Morality in The Spoils of Poynton and The Golden Bowl," ELH, XXX[1963], 425-426) writes, "The imagery characterizing Maggie Verver . . . in the second volume . . . spells experience as Maggie thinks of herself in recurrent imagery of the theatre befitting the highly dramatic situation of her winning her husband. The imagery of the theatre in which Maggie thinks of her plight shows her histrionic ascent from a mere spectator in the stalls to the author of the play." Miss Snow traces Maggie's progress from improvising actress to circus rider to dancer to author to trapezist girl, as Maggie works like a performing artist and like a creative artist to control and direct her situation.
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